

THE ISMAILI CENTRE LISBON



A view into the Centre from the outside.

Photo: Gary Otte



Cool water courses through the courtyard at dusk.

Photo: Gary Otte

FOUNDATION CEREMONY
DECEMBER 18, 1996

OPENING CEREMONY
JULY 11, 1998

ARCHITECTS
RAJ REWAL AND FREDERICO VALSASSINA

"By its very concept and design, this Centre will bear witness to the re-encountered of two heritages that moulded the Peninsular civilization, that of the East and that of the West, that of Islam and that of Judaic-Christian tradition. By its inherent vocation the Centre will be a place of diversity, of plurality and tolerance, which constitute the richness of our condition."

President Jorge Sampaio at the Opening Ceremony



Mawlana Hazar Imam and President Sampaio applaud following the unveiling of the commemorative plaque.

Photo: Gary Otte



A bird's eye view of the Ismaili Centre, Lisbon.

Photo: Gary Otte

ISMAILIS IN PORTUGAL

Beginning in the 1970s, Portuguese Ismailis created places of gathering for cultural and social purposes in major cities and towns where they settled. They also found office space for the establishment of philanthropic organisations that they sponsored. As they developed and expanded, these organisations involved increasing numbers of institutional partners and the wider Portuguese public.

In order to meet the growing needs of institutions and the Ismaili community itself, a permanent and comprehensive facility was acquired in 1986. The site, in the prime location of Palma de Baixo, in close proximity to prominent universities and principal hospitals in Lisbon, is easily accessible to all parts of the city.



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LISBON, PORTUGAL

“The space that the Centre will create in the midst of this historic city will, I hope, serve as a bridge linking and enriching various cultures of Europe with others of Africa and Asia, as it draws upon associations both from within and outside the Portuguese-speaking world”

His Highness the Aga Khan at the Foundation Ceremony



Textures and patterns.

Photo: Gary Otte

ARCHITECTURAL PHILOSOPHY

For Indian architect Raj Rewal, himself from a non-Muslim tradition, the diversity of architecture across the Muslim world and the building traditions of the Iberian Peninsula contributed to his understanding of composing space.

The design brief called for a centre which would draw upon traditional design approaches from Muslim civilizations yet avoid transplanting any idiom particular to a specific locale in its entirety. Significant emphasis was placed upon technological innovation and on construction that would be appropriate to the area. The architects' response was influenced by the morphology of traditional spatial arrangements, by the notion of Islamic gardens and by the patterns in architecture that have served different Muslim societies.



The intricacy of the façade glimpsed in the motif detail.

Photo: Gary Otte



All together, One: The walls recite the 99 attributes of Allah.

Photo: Gary Otte

MATERIALS + FEATURES

The objective was the creation of a complex of spaces and buildings whose cultural and social dimensions would complement each other as well as functional, educational facilities and institutional offices, whilst also providing reflective space for the Ismaili community's own use.

A geometric fusion of gardens and courtyards as well as buildings embodying in hewn stone surfaces, polished tile and delicately balanced cupolas, an unusual multi-cultural and multi-functional complex, constitutes the architectural concept of the Ismaili Centre.

