

industrial

heritage

INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS AT THE SERVICE
OF MODERN DAY REQUIREMENTS



Lisbon's LX Factory

Industrial buildings are often in areas now being renovated thanks to high land values or urban decay. When their primary use has evaporated they are ready to be torn down unless they have a striking appearance, are of historical or cultural interest, and have a sponsor who is willing to put the effort into retaining the building. The last is particularly important in cases where the buildings will have a completely different use and local developers are only profit-oriented. One problem with many industrial buildings is that while the building was still in its primary use and the company was in decline, repair of the building was minimized, later increasing renovation costs.

The industries that have provided buildings for renovation include textile, glass, metallurgy, chemical, paper, food, transportation, harbor, as well as workers' residences and offices.

Builders will simply say that from a cost and time point of view it is best to remove the building completely before putting up a new one. Therefore, the criteria for deciding whether a building is worth industrial heritage status and which elements of it should be kept and which can be removed or modified need to be clear. IPPAR, the Portuguese conservation body, uses architectural, artistic, historical and technological criteria, and receives reports from a range of specialists in different areas before they put the building forward for protected status. (The process is long and arduous because each building has its own act of law applied to it.)

The Cordoaria Nacional—the national rope factory in Lisbon—is regarded as one of the longest buildings in the world, and made ropes, sails and flags for the ships that left Lisbon to trade with the rest of the world. The present building was built at the end of the 18th century. After renovation it has become a place for exhibitions and events for various government departments.

LXFactory in Alcântara began in 1846 as a cloth manufacturing factory, and was designed according to the production logic of textile engineering—in 1873 the owners were the first Portuguese industrialists to build workers' houses in the nearby streets. The buildings finished their industrial life a few years ago as a print works, and before the Lisbon city council had decided on how to renovate the Alcântara area, they were bought by property investors MainSide and converted into a 23,000m² island of creativity with minimum changes to the buildings. Thirty companies in fashion, advertising, communications, multimedia, art, design, architecture, music, photography, a dance school and a café have generated a dynamic which has attracted many visitors. The buildings have been used as a backdrop to a TV commercial, and to host concerts and plays. MainSide see the project as a temporary situation. The owners want to give the companies time to grow and have suggested that the buildings will remain as they are for five years, subject to the decisions of the authorities. Due to lack of clarity about the Lisbon city council's plans for the future of the area, MainSide can give no guarantees to the tenants.

MainSide have ideas for the whole of the Alcântara area to create more life for a decaying area, while reusing as many of the buildings as possible. In many cases, their ideas for the area reflect the way they have designed the LXFactory. The design inside LXFactory reuses doors and constructive elements of the building, yet the space is sufficiently flexible so that different clients can use it in whatever way they want. Inherited characteristics are retained as much as possible, so that the memory of the past infuses today's activities.

Portugal has a collection of industrial buildings that were built in an era of stability, when buildings were expected to last for generations. How to sympathetically convert such good quality construction with the design features of the past, poses interesting challenges for today's architects.