

Palácio Fronteira Gardens

Lisbon, Portugal

Photographs by Alan Ward 2025

Notes on the Making of the Photographs

The gardens at the *Palácio Fronteira* are awash with the colors of Portugal with blue and white ceramic tiles, along with deep, vivid blue walls; the palace is a crimson red, adjacent to the bright green parterres in the garden. This abundance of color was an inseparable part of Portugal's history and culture, when the first phase of the palace and gardens were built from 1665 to 1673, by the same family who still occupy the palace. The hand-painted tiles with simple, geometric designs were introduced in the thirteenth century during the Moorish occupation. By the fifteenth century, Portuguese artisans depicted narrative scenes with figures and details of historical and religious events, influenced by Dutch Delft blue tiles. The color of blue on the *azulejos* (painted glazed tiles), and on painted walls, symbolizes power and wealth at a time when Portugal was at the forefront of maritime exploration securing colonies, while red was associated with kings, nobility, and church dignitaries.

The sloping terrain on the site of the *Palácio Fronteira* was made into a series of distinctly different terraced gardens, connected by stairs (10,18,24,25,28,30). The Arts Terrace extends south from the house leading to the *Jardim de Venus* (1) with a grove of trees that is framed on the south by the *Casa do Fresco* (6) and a north-facing gallery with sculptural figures at each end (10-12). The Grand Terrace is a garden with parterres, fountains, and figurative sculpture, directly east of the house (10,21,25,27). The topography of the site required a

retaining wall on the south side, in order to make level parterres in the Grand Terrace. The wall was designed to be an elaborate and colorful work of garden art and architecture, that is the dominant feature in the landscape at *Palácio Fronteira*. It is almost 60m long and about 10m high with monumental stairs at each end, that lead to an elevated gallery with niches occupied by busts of the kings of Portugal (17,20,21). At each end of the wall, at the top of stairs are pavilions with shaded spaces (22,23,25). At the base of the wall is an elongated rectangular basin of water adjacent to the parterres of the Grand Terrace (10,18,24). The walled structure has surfaces embellished with *azulejos*, with images that depict Portuguese history, classical mythology, as well as scenes of daily life (26). The Grand Terrace leads to a modern garden that that was added in the late twentieth century. Runnels and channels of water are lined with incongruously colored yellow and orange tiles, that are centered along paths leading to a central, star-shaped fountain (30-36).

The perception of a designed landscape, such as the gardens at the *Palácio Fronteira*, can be divided into two types, or ways of seeing the world. First, is the visual and spatial domain defined by the walls, terraces, plants, and other garden features. This is the world of colors, textures, surfaces, edges, shapes, and the spaces between. This a literal type of perception of the fundamental aspects of spatial awareness. The second way of seeing the garden is

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reading the meaning of the design, which is a world of objects, places, and symbols. We may shift rather seamlessly between these modes, however the first type of perception is our basic way of moving through the world, the background for our experience of symbolic meanings. The second mode, that of significant things with meaning, is more schematic, and is so complex to be engaged with all at once, that perception needs to be selective, with certain features emerging, while others are shifted to the background.*

The photographer aiming to portray the landscape at *Palácio Fronteira* interprets impressions of both the literal perception of the design with its change of levels, the spatial configurations, and the colors of the surfaces, as well as the more elusive connotations of the design. When the significance of a garden is based on its spatial characteristics, along with the rhythms and patterns of its elements, as seen for example in the Miller Garden, a depiction in black and white photography seems appropriate. The reduction from habitual everyday vision that occurs in black and white photography emphasizes how light reveals landscape spaces and their defining elements. However, when the meaning of a design is so dependent on color, as in the landscape at the *Palácio Fronteira*, color is the answer. Color is essential, even if it tends to lessen, or flatten, the depiction of the landscape's spatial characteristics.

For the photographer, black and white images are more difficult to visualize, because we obviously see the world in color, however the editing and processing of photographs is more easily controllable in black and white than color, with fewer variables in play. I find the challenge in color photography to be the almost unlimited choices of color variations in processing that affect the feelings and emotions associated with the final image. One's own perception may change day to day, in terms of emotional responses to subtly different colors, as the human eye can see over one million different shades. Slight changes in hues, saturation and luminosity levels, all adjustable during processing and interdependent, can have a significant impact on how colors are experienced in the photograph. The images shown here were digitally captured in different light conditions, with corresponding variable color temperatures, processed and ultimately converted to pdfs, with slight changes occurring in each step. The colors are thus not precise renditions of the original experience. In addition, during processing the saturation of selective colors were slightly enhanced, to amplify the significance of those colors that are invested with symbolic meanings. The aim is to make an expressive interpretation of the landscape, that has distinct affinities to the place, but also takes on a life of its own, to be a set of photographs that is emblematic of the design and its meanings.

List of Photographs

1. Arts terrace, south of the *Palácio*
2. Lower terrace of *Palácio*, Arts Terrace beyond
3. Lower terrace of *Palácio*
4. Lower terrace fountain
5. West side of *Casa do Fresco*
6. *Casa do Fresco*
7. Interior of *Casa do Fresco*
8. *Jardim do Venus* and Arts Terrace beyond
9. View east in *Jardim do Venus*
10. View southeast from *Jardim do Venus* to King's Gallery
11. Path in *Jardim do Venus* to South Gallery
12. Entrance to South Gallery
13. View east in South Gallery
14. View west of South Gallery entry from *Jardim do Venus*
15. View east to entrance tower of Upper Gallery (King's Gallery)
16. View west of tower in Upper Gallery (King's Gallery)
17. View west of tower in Upper Gallery and niches with busts
18. West stairs of Upper Gallery, *Palácio* and Grand Terrace
19. Center niche in Upper Gallery (King's Gallery)
20. Niche with bust of a king
21. Overview of Upper Gallery, *Palácio* and Grand Terrace
22. Entrance to west tower on Upper Gallery
23. Interior of west tower
24. East stairs to Grand Terrace
25. View southwest of Upper Gallery, basin, and stairs
26. *Azulejos* (painted glazed tiles) and grotto at base of Upper Gallery
27. Upper Gallery, parterres in Grand Terrace
28. West stairs to Upper Gallery
29. View from arbor to *Palácio* on east side of Grand Terrace
30. Stairs from Grand Terrace to modern garden
31. View east at entrance to modern garden
32. Central fountain in modern garden
33. Central fountain in modern garden and orchard beyond
34. Stairs and runnel in modern garden
35. Seating area over channel in modern garden
36. View west in modern garden
37. Grand Terrace and *Palácio*
38. Seating in retaining wall of *Jardim do Venus*
39. View of Upper Gallery from *Palácio* east terrace



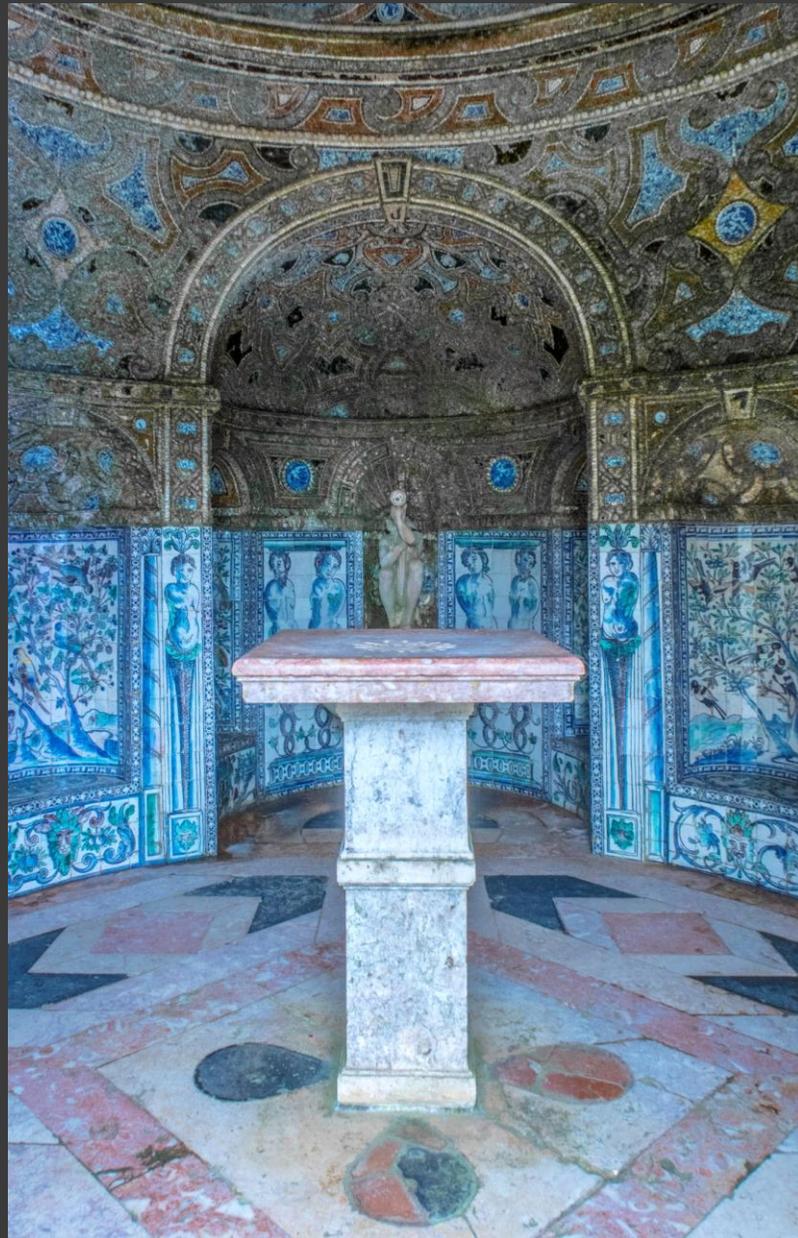












































































Notes

* See *The Perception of the Visual World* by James J. Gibson

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