

It is very hard to separate personal and professional facts when writing someone's biography, especially in a rich life such as Alda Rosa's. Is it necessary for understanding the work of this woman to know that she lived in London as a young design student, during the period of Estado Novo? That she lived in Macau for two years? That she never married or had any children? That she enjoys chatting with friends and meeting new people? Or is it more important to establish the clients she worked with, what were her major works, that she was one of the founding members of the Portuguese Designers Association? Probably, a good balance of both.

Alda Rosa has lived most of her life in Lisbon, but she was born in Braga, in 1936, into a privileged family and lived her early years in Viana do Castelo. A personal essay she shared with us describes her childhood in Viana as a magical time, in a large house, surrounded by important women in her life, from her mother and grandmother, to the cook, seamstress and cleaner that populated the house.

Burdened with asthma since childhood, her early life was somewhat sheltered until her mother convinced her to go to Vienna to attend the World Congress of Catholic Students and Intellectuals chaired by Maria de Lourdes Pintassilgo ('she spoke to my friends and at some point, said, "Alda is going"'). Alda Rosa recalls this as a significant moment, 'giving me the first push for my emancipation'. This first trip abroad was very important for the 22-year-old Alda and gave her confidence—after graduating in Painting from the Fine Arts University in Lisbon—to later move to London. With a bursary from Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, she lived in London from 1967 to 1970, studying art and graphic design in the Ravensbourne College of Art and Design. Her interest in fashion design was always present, in an earlier trip to London she attended some classes in the fashion design course at Saint Martins School of Arts, and as early as 1963 she had taken on the role of costume designer in the production of the iconic film *Os Verdes Anos*.

In 1965, Alda Rosa started working at INII (Instituto Nacional de Investigação Industrial), where she was part of the organising committee of the Exhibitions of Portuguese Design of 1971 and 1973. According to Alda Rosa, her interest in joining INII was, on one hand the great responsibility of being part of public service and of a department with clear educational responsibilities that reached a large audience, and on the other hand being part of an institute that gave her access to research and lectures in design by renowned international figures. Already a member of INII, she took advantage of her stay in London to absorb information and knowledge from the Design Center, exhibitions and other

design events, which she then was able to adapt and develop further in Portugal. The didactic and practical texts she wrote, in 1984, for *Design Industrial*, published by Direcção da Qualidade, are testament to her interest in educating and sharing knowledge.

As an in-house designer of INII her daily accomplishments were often prosaic. Alda Rosa takes great pride in having created graphic materials for a lot of the other sectors of INII, such as Economy, Education and Productivity Services, for which she was able to explain to her colleagues the significance of a coordinated communication strategy and the impact that the visual identity had in the events.

Throughout her time at INII, Alda Rosa also worked as an independent designer, creating book covers for publishers such as Estampa, Cosmos, Moraes, Plátano, amongst others; and many catalogues and exhibition graphics for cultural clients, a practice she embraced fully when she became a full-time freelance designer, in 1993. From 1987 and 1989, Alda Rosa lived in Macau where she created and then directed the graphic sector of the Cultural Institute of Macau (ICM) and was also a founding partner of the Portuguese Designers Association (APD), which she directed between 1990 and 1993.

For a designer with such notable contributions to design, present at many key moments and playing such a significant role in the institutionalisation of design in Portugal, it is remarkable that she has been so little considered in the current design history in Portugal. It is perhaps in part due to the difficulty of defining Alda Rosa's work as any one thing in particular. Walking into her house, with its walls filled with bookcases, it becomes clear that Alda Rosa is an avid reader, and on meeting her, one of the interesting things is to find that she isn't interested in talking about the formal qualities of the objects she has designed. She isn't preoccupied with explaining why she used a particular font, or chose a certain format or colour, nor is she particularly moved by a nostalgic feeling when remembering how the process of design was so different then than it is now. It becomes clear that what she remembers most from each project was how she organised the information, how she used her design to help editorial decisions. This blurring of the line between designer and author, a constant throughout Alda Rosa's career as she considered shaping words as a parallel and intrinsic part of the design process, rather than a pre-existing set of parts for her to 'design', can lead to difficulty in recording or attributing a designer's contributions, but this should not mean a difficulty in valuing them.

*Isabel Duarte, 2021*