

LUBANGO CENTRE

LUBANGO, ANGOLA

2016–2010

After 20 devastating years of conflict, Angola's national reconciliation and the economic stability that followed have paved the way for the beginning of urban reconstruction. At first exclusively focused in Luanda, rebuilding has gradually extended to hinterland cities such as Lubango, capital of the province of Huíla. Founded in the early 20th-century, the city is one of the main references of Portuguese colonial urbanism in Africa. Located on a plateau surrounded by mountains, the city plan is based on an orthogonal grid of infra-structured blocks, where the different public and private facilities (city hall, post office, market, school, church, bank, etc.) were strategically set to give the plan a Camillo Sitte-like hierarchy.

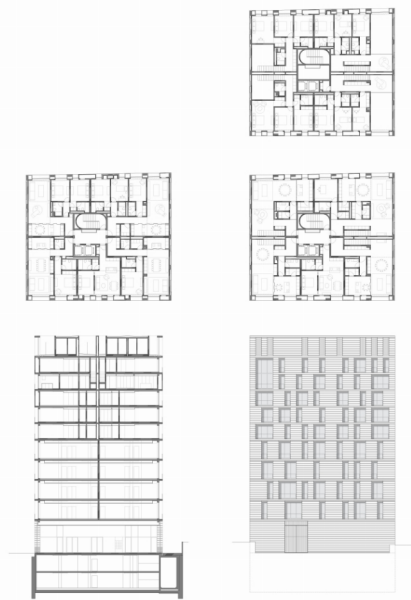
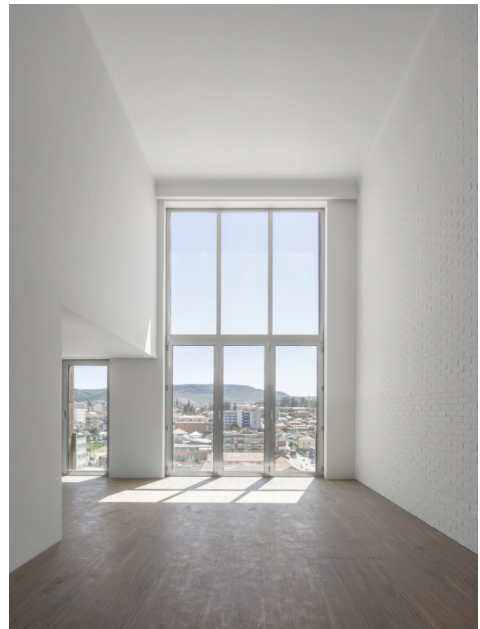
This mixed-use building is set in the heart of the consolidated urban fabric, next to the main town square and surrounded by some remarkable examples (albeit much dilapidated) of the modernist colonial legacy. The new Provincial Plan specifically calls for the densification of the city as a way to concentrate the centre and simultaneously contain indiscriminate urban sprawl. The nine-storey building comprises residential, office and retail, served by shared underground parking. From a sustainable development perspective, a mixed-use programme allows the financial risk to be spread, while simultaneously preventing the concentration of mono-functional systems in what is an inevitably fragile urban layout. Accordingly, the single building incorporates the three main functional spheres of urban life — housing, offices and commerce — allowing its continuous inhabitation throughout the day.

On the ground floor, a covered and naturally ventilated retail gallery generates a refreshing space, allowing direct access to the shopfronts, to the apartment and office lobbies, and to a small backyard coffee shop terrace. Above ground level there are, in sequence, four floors of offices and three floors of single-storey apartments, with duplex units on the last two floors, ranging from double-height studios to three-bedroom units. The roof terrace accommodates resident storage rooms, laundry services and technical areas.

The construction concept is based on a principle of robustness, giving a solid and simple building designed to guarantee comfort, durability and low maintenance. The depth of the recessed balcony modules provides natural shading, in addition to an accessible and ventilated technical façade compartment. The resulting thickness of the solid masonry walls is interrupted by concrete slabs, which function as a continuous lintel. This tectonic expression is reinforced by the materiality of the brickwork laid in soldier-and-stretcher courses, evocative of the rich textures and colours of African rammed earth and pottery.

It is particularly gratifying to see the quality and ease with which it was possible to develop a fine middle-class building in the African hinterland. Built by a local contractor, despite only short site-surveying visits the substance of the intended design was fully respected. No less important is the idea of a return to an unmediated and civic relationship with 'the street' in latitudes otherwise accustomed to extremes —between private safeguarded enclaves of high-luxury compounds, on the one hand, and the extreme poverty of humanitarian projects, on the other.





Location: Rua 14 de Abril, Lubango, Angola

Client: Gestimóvel

Scope of services: Architecture

Project brief: Mixed-use housing (1- to 3-bedroom units), offices and retail

Plot area: 568 sq. m

Gross floor area: 7,320 sq. m (2,650 sq. m residential units, 2,200 sq. m offices, 950 sq. m retail, 1,520 sq. m basement parking)

Construction cost: EUR 9.6m

Project status: 2010 (competition, 1st prize) – 2016 (built)

Photography: Fernando Guerra