

## *Casa da Ínsua – Hotel de Charme*



### ***Roteiro da Capela da Ínsua [Chapel of Ínsua Tour]***

Construction of the chapel was prior to that of the *Casa da Ínsua*, which was built around 1780. The terrace and the walls surrounding the Casa are also from previous centuries and were part of the old manor house on which the current Casa da Ínsua was built. (16th-17th centuries).

The large terrace spanning at the level of the main floor of the Palace, and overlooking the magnificent *Tanque do Cisne* [Swan Tank] dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. You can see how the stonework and tiles were made to blend into it. From the same time there are some tables related to agriculture production, carefully worked out, illustrating the importance of the estate and of the first Casa da Ínsua, which the current Chapel was part of.

Originally dedicated to Our Lady “Madre de Deus”, the Chapel of Ínsua later was dedicated to “Nossa Senhora da Conceição” (Our Lady of the Conception), after Pope Pius XI’s dogma in the bull “Ineffabilis Deus”, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 1854.

Outside, it is important to mention the impressive family coat of arms of the family and the distinctive bell tower with overlapping bells and clock.

At the base of the clock’s face, the inscription “PRECI, LABORI, OTIOQVE EST, HOMO, MVNVS MEVM” reminds that its mission is to invite the churchgoers “to pray, work and rest”.

In the Bell Tower, you can clearly see the unusual pattern of four overlapping bells, topped by a separate upper bell, which was the original chapel bell. The tower was built later, in one of the different artistic works which the *Casa da Ínsua* has undergone over the last two centuries.

The interior of the chapel is top off by the impressive dome, a characteristic more commonly found in the great cathedrals, which here is very important due to the magnificent effect produced in such a small area. The word dome, of Greek origin, evokes the Place of the Gods, which here acquires that special meaning, besides giving this place architectural grandeur.

The central painting of the altar, depicting the image of Our Lady, accentuates the strong religious nature of the entire carved altar, which is crowned at the top by a radiant golden star, with a triangle and an eye in the centre, of great significance.

The side walls of the altar of the Chapel of Ínsua, display the ancient statues of Saint Francis Xavier, patron of discoveries, and Saint Teutónio, patron of Viseu. They represent the main religious links with the Portuguese imagination.

Saint Teutónio was born in 1082, in Ganfei, Valença, and studied theology in Coimbra and Viseu. He was appointed to Prior of the Cathedral of Viseu in 1112 and, after a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, he was offered the position Bishop of Viseu, which he refused. He was an ally of Afonso Henriques against his mother, Teresa de Leão - legend has it that he even excommunicated her - and later became his advisor, when he was already King Afonso I of Portugal. After returning from another trip to the Holy Land, he, along with eleven other religious men, founded in the monastery of Santa Cruz in Coimbra following the rule of the Canons of Saint Augustine, of which he became Prior. In 1152, he resigned from the priory of Santa Cruz and in 1153, Pope Alexander IV wished to appoint him bishop of Coimbra, a position he did not accept either. He died on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February 1162. He was buried in a chapel of the monastery church that he helped found, right next to the place where the first king of Portugal lies. A year after his death, the Pope canonized him, making him the first Portuguese saint. He is the patron saint of the city and the diocese of Viseu.

Saint Francis Xavier, who was born Francisco de Jaso y Azpilicueta, was a Christian missionary of the Portuguese patron and apostle from Navarra. He was born on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April 1506 in the family castle, in Javier, and died on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 1552 on the island of Shangchuan, near Macau, although he is buried in Goa. A pioneer and co-founder of the Society of Jesus. The Church states that he would have converted more people to Christianity than any other missionary since the Apostle Paul, which earned him the nickname of the Apostle of the East. He is patron of the missionaries as well as one of the patrons of the Diocese of Macao.

In two more recent renovation works, two blue tile panels by Leopoldo Luigi Batistini, dating from 1895 and placed there in 1901, were added to the side walls of the altar.

On the right panel the Crucifixion is represented and in the upper part, you can read JESVS NAZARE REX JVDAEORVM. Next to it is another small tile panel with a quote from Leviticus:

OMNIS QVI HABVERIT MACVLAM DE  
SEMINE AARON SACERDOTIS \* NON ACCEDET OFFERRE HOSTIAS  
DOMINO \* NECPANES DEO SVO *LEVIT \* CAP \* 21 V \* 21 (None of the  
descendants of the priest Aaron who has a defect shall offer sacrifices to the Lord nor present  
himself to offer the bread of his God)*

On the left panel, the motif is the birth of Christ and its inscription states GLORIA IN EXCELSIS DEO. It also has another small panel next to it where a quote from Ecclesiastes is read:

ESTO MAVSVETS AD AUDIENDVM VERBUM \* VT INTELLIGAS \* ET CVM  
SAPIENTIA PROFERAS RESPONSVM VERUM *ECCL \* CAP \* 5 V \* 13 (Listen calmly  
in order to understand and with wisdom you will give a wise and appropriate answer)*

The two-level sacristy, which is accessed through the right-side door of the altar, has a plinth made of blue tiles similar to those in the Chapel, suggesting that it was built at the same time as the Chapel. Records were kept there which confirm that religious ceremonies were already held here during the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

On the opposite side to the entrance of the sacristy there is the confessional, which has a particular originality: it is part of a false door. Likely this is because from the time of prior construction work there had been an entry there. Additionally the false opening above the confessional, which is symmetrically placed in front of the window on the opposite wall, and the false door with a balcony, located at the same level as the upper floor, on the left side of the Chapel, supports the thesis that they are not mere ornamental elements but traces of previous features. On this false door, we find today a large image of Jesus crucified.

The altar, which after the Second Vatican Council, was cut and removed from the original position so that Mass could be celebrated facing churchgoers, has now returned to its original location.

The *Via Crucis* is symbolically and elegantly represented on the walls of the Chapel with 14 small crosses symmetrically distributed, which are worthy of note due to their small size and the delicacy of the rounded detail at the ends, subliminally evoking the fleur-de-lis. On the walls, you can even admire an important collection of religious art paintings.

The Chancel and the window with a cross in stained glass, are another important element of the set. This chancel has a balcony placed on a slightly lower level and symmetrical to the false balcony on the opposite side, under which is the false door, giving the whole set an aesthetic symmetry which embellishes the Chapel's exit.

House employees could attend religious ceremonies from this middle balcony, while the Chancel was reserved for family members. In the Chancel it is important to note a built-in heating system along the kneeler and under the chairs that made mass more pleasant during winter.

The overall effect achieved employs stone and decorative elements which is harmoniously worked in between coats of arms and floral elements, distributed symmetrically throughout the dome and ceiling of the altar area. A striking symbolic fact of the environment of the chapel is that the structure and the edges of the entire chapel are made in granite. And curiously enough, the paint that conceals the granite, which is hidden from us, is carefully painted to imitate this stone.

