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INTERIORS EXPLORATIONS IN SPACE

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Within the shell of an abandoned bank building,
Ricardo Carvalho + Joana Vilhena creates
a raw but sophisticated home for Lisbon's
Museum of Design and Fashion

The museum's collection is installed in an old bank where finishes had been removed as part of an earlier renovation. The architects left much of the building in the rough state they found it, but wrapped elements such as the core in a glowing membrane.





Lisbon's Museum of Design and Fashion (MUDE) occupies the scene of a crime, the ruins of a protected historic bank interior. In 2003, new owners of the 1950s building in the heart of the old city began an illegal demolition that was interrupted only by a tardy court order. In their temporary installation of the museum in the bank, bought by the city last year as MUDE's home, local architects Joana Vilhena and Ricardo Carvalho have left the interior in the rough state they found it, with walls, columns, and ceilings stripped of finishes. After spending much of the \$1.4 million budget on unseen repairs to the reinforced-concrete structure and on mechanical services, they relied on a handful of simple gestures to create a striking setting amid the ruins for 170 objects from the museum's 20th-century holdings, ranging from classics by Charlotte Perriand and Givenchy to the irreverent designs of Ettore Sottsass. But under the edgy glamour of these juxtapositions, the scheme challenges curatorial conventions and takes a stand on the importance of preservation in historic urban centers.

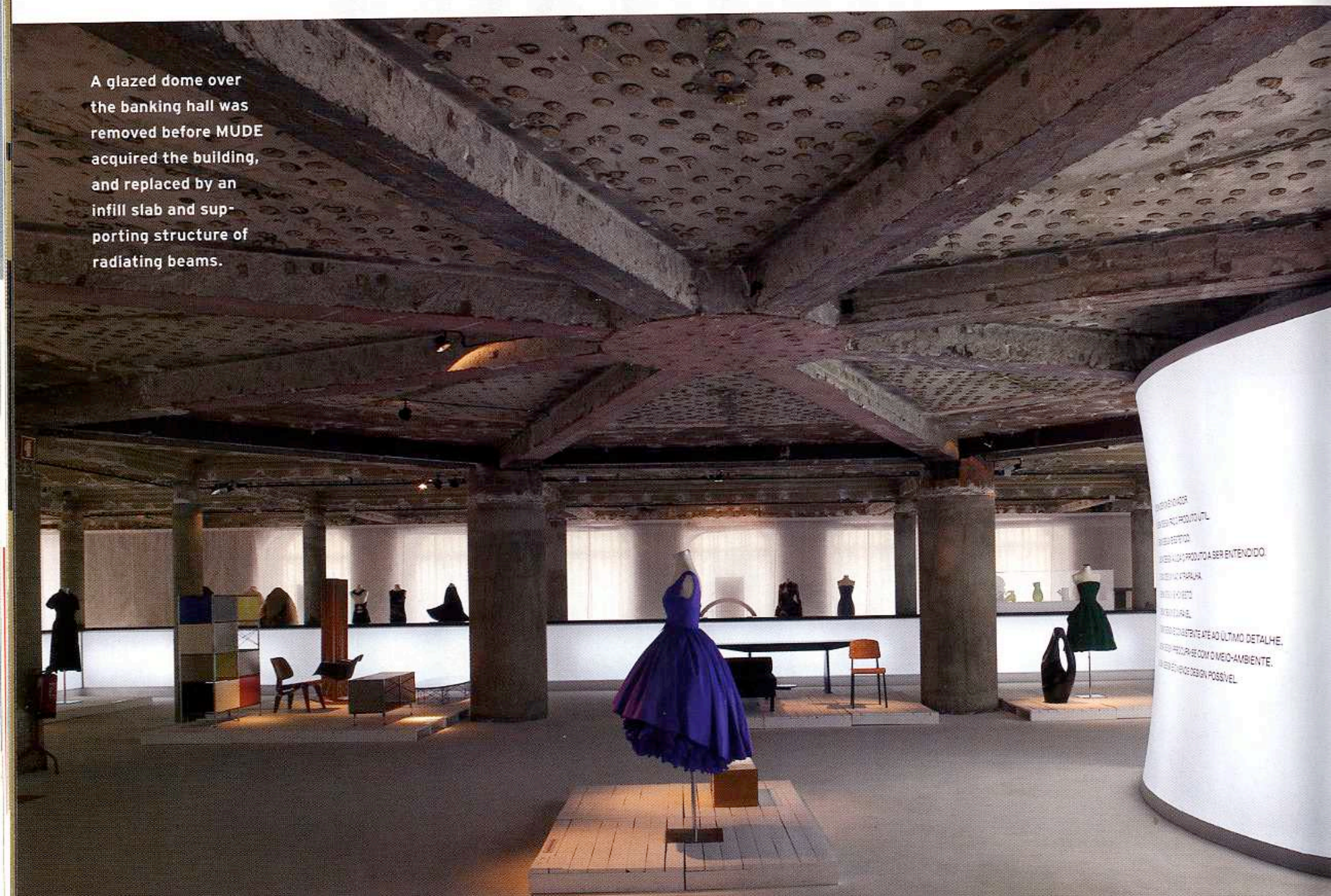
MUDE is the creation of the retired Portuguese businessman Francisco Capelo, who gathered the collection's 3,000 pieces, sold it to the city for a small part of its value, and currently presides over the board of directors. The museum first opened in Vittorio Gregotti's Belém Cultural Center in 1999, but it lost this home in 2006, when the

space was ceded by the Portuguese government to another of Capelo's ventures, a collection of contemporary art amassed by businessman Jo Berardo with Capelo's curatorial help. Negotiations for quarters in a Lisbon palace fell through, and by the time the city acquired the bank building for the museum, it was under considerable political pressure to reopen, but without funds to carry out the work. The museum's director, Bárbara Coutinho, decided to open temporarily in the shell of the five-story bank's lower two floors, while Vilhena and Carvalho draw up plans for the gradual rehabilitation of the building as funds become available. Due to the press of time, Coutinho was able to bypass the design competition typically required for public projects, and recruited the architects after seeing one of their exhibition installations.

Designed in 1952 by Cristino da Silva, the National Overseas Bank matches the scale and detailing of the surrounding Neoclassical facades, which date primarily from the Marquis de Pombal's reconstruction efforts following the earthquake of 1755. But Silva's main banking floor, finished in exotic marbles, stainless-steel columns, and stucco ceilings with a glazed central dome, recalled late-19th and early-20th-century Viennese interiors. "Think of Otto Wagner, of Josef Hoffmann," says Carvalho. All that survives of this splendor is a continuous, green-marble counter that rings the former banking floor. It originally separated staff from customers, but now provides the organizing element for the new installation.

David Cohn is ARCHITECTURAL RECORD's Madrid-based correspondent.

A glazed dome over the banking hall was removed before MUDE acquired the building, and replaced by an infill slab and supporting structure of radiating beams.





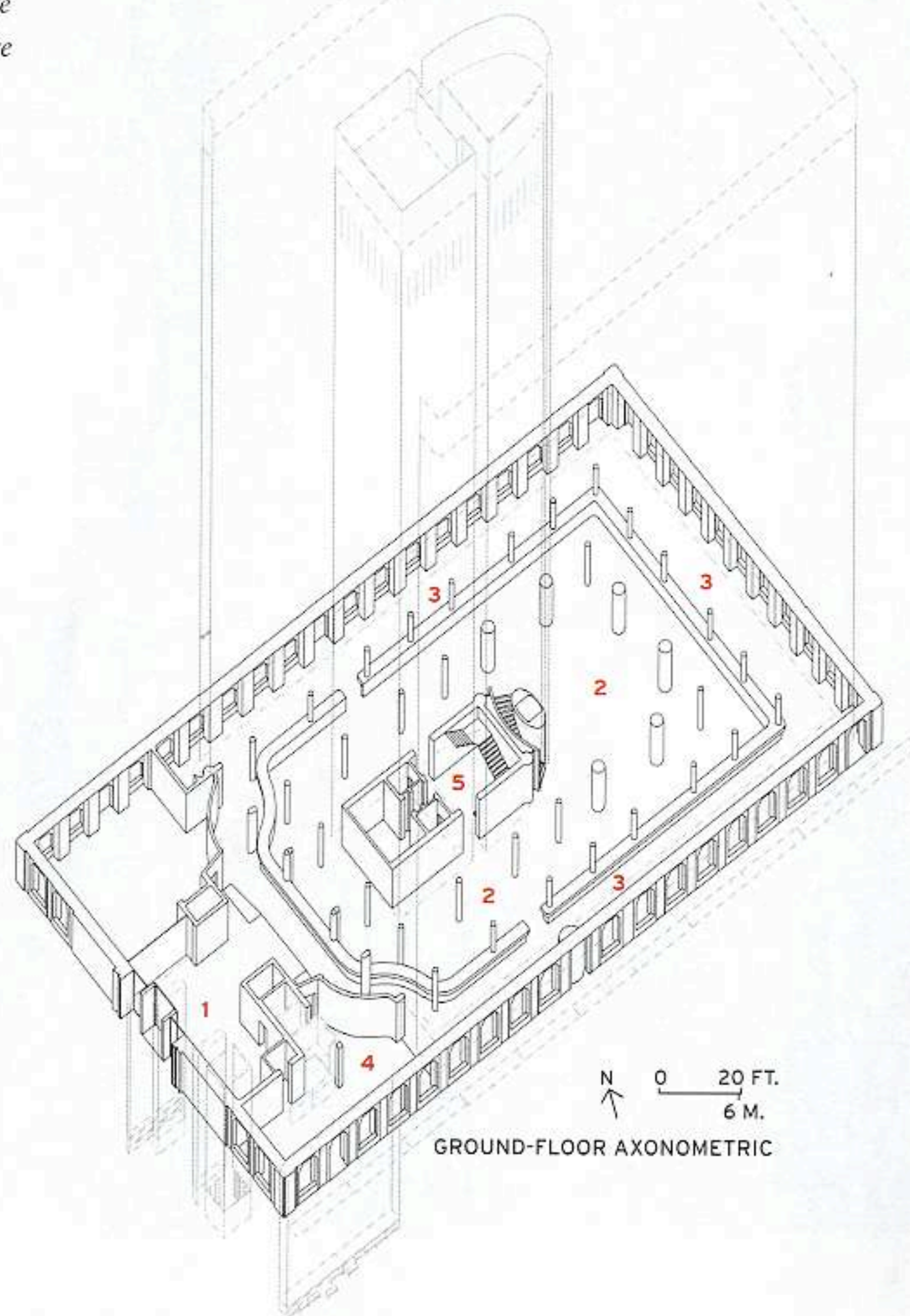
In its scale and most of its detailing, the exterior of MUDE's new home matches the surrounding Neoclassical struc-

tures (below). Vestiges of the interior's former grandeur are visible in the marble-and-stainless-steel finishes of the entry lobby (left),

and in the continuous counter that provides the organizing element for the main exhibition area (center and bottom right).



1. Entry lobby
2. Central display area
3. Perimeter display area
4. Café
5. Core



Starting with this base, the architects' interventions were guided by two goals: to dematerialize the mutilated walls with new surfaces of light, and to accomplish this with a limited palette of materials deployed in unexpected ways. In their first move, they covered the building's central core and the inside of the banking counter with a seamless, elastic-copolymer film produced for commercial suspended ceilings. "You can find it in big Las Vegas casinos, but it gets lost with everything else going on," says Carvalho. Backed by banks of fluorescent lamps, the glowing membrane is the space's primary light source.

Other materials come from the realm of the construction site, underlining the temporary nature of the project. The architects hid the exterior window walls behind a curtain made of five layers of the textiles usually used as safety fencing on European construction sites, but here colored white instead of bright orange. Also backed by fluorescent lighting, the curtains reduce the windows to faint glowing blurs amid the shadows, and double as screens for the projected images that form part of the exhibitions. Following the construction motif, Carvalho and Vilhena set the objects on display on white-painted-wood pallets, and finished the floor inside the banking counter with luminous highway paint. They grouped wiring for spotlights in metal-mesh trays under the pockmarked stucco ceilings, and placed freestanding mechanical units along the perimeter for temperature and humidity control.

The installation includes part of the second floor, with a rather

cramped space for visiting exhibitions and a round auditorium area, which the architects defined with a curtain of the fabric fencing and unupholstered foam cubes for seating. Presiding over the ground-floor cafeteria is a single continuous table of solid cork, designed by the architects to promote Portugal's troubled cork industry.

Vilhena and Carvalho see their design as a challenge to the typical "white cube" exhibition space, citing the P.S.1 museum in New York, and Donald Judd's center in Marfa, Texas, as precedents for MUDE. In fact, they surpass these examples in provocatively embracing the dilapidated state of the original banking floor. As members of a generation that has returned from the suburbs to live in the long-neglected historic city center, their project can be read as both a denunciation of Lisbon's abandonment by their elders and a celebration of its ongoing revival. ■

Project: *Museum of Design and Fashion (MUDE), Lisbon*

Architect: *Ricardo Carvalho + Joana Vilhena Arquitectos—Joana Vilhena, Ricardo Carvalho, José Maria Rhodes Sérgio, José Roque, Francisco Costa, Sebastião Taquenho, project team*

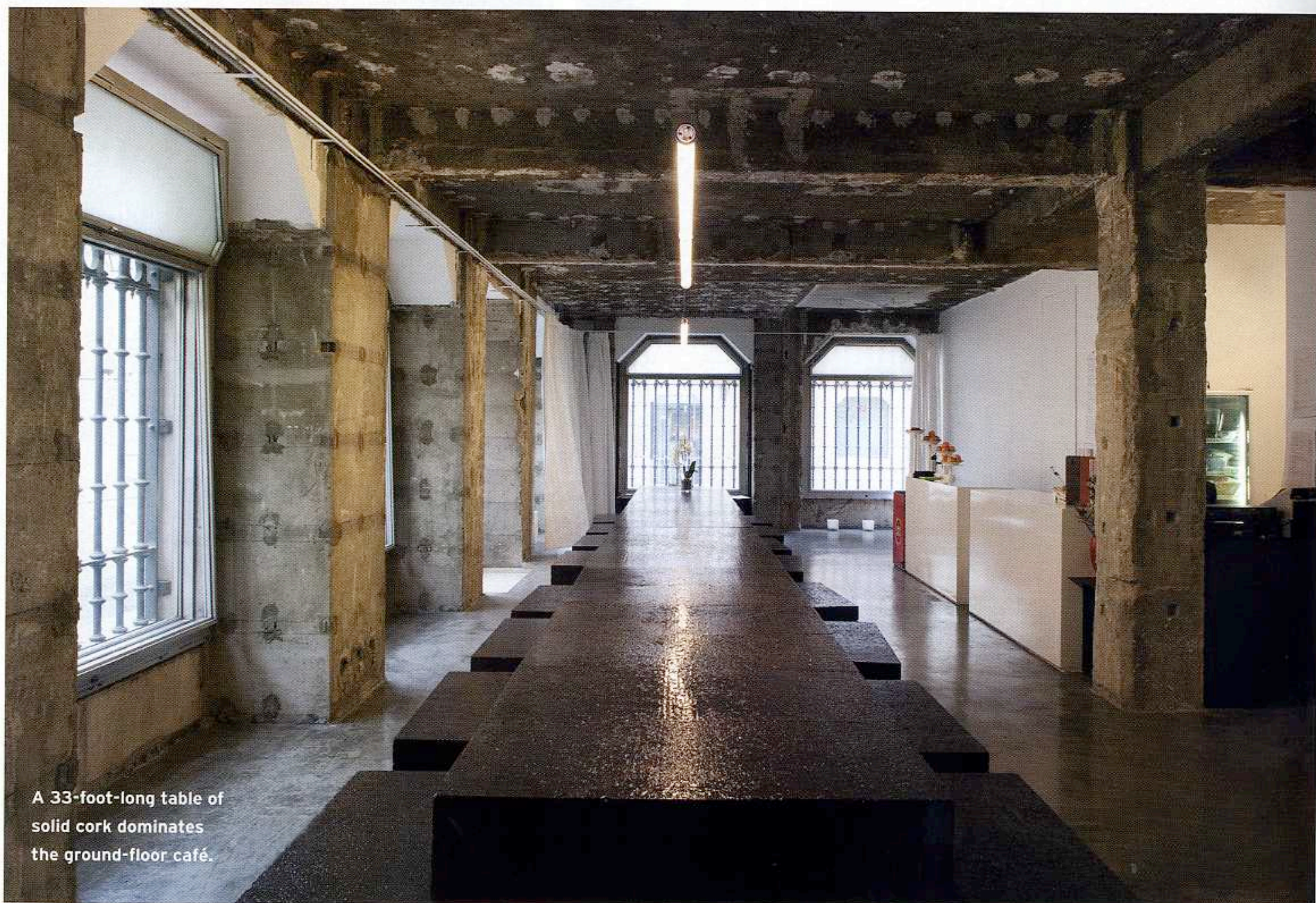
Consultants: *ARA (structure); AFA Consult (electrical, plumbing, lighting); Atelier Pedro Falcão (graphic design)*

SOURCES

Copolymer film: *Barrisol-Normalu*

Floor coating: *Hempel*

To comment on this interior and rate it, go to architecturalrecord.com/projects/interiors.



A 33-foot-long table of solid cork dominates the ground-floor café.



The installation occupies part of the second floor, with an area for visiting exhibitions (left) and an auditorium area (below). The circular auditorium is defined by a curtain of the same fabric that lines the lower level's perimeter walls.

