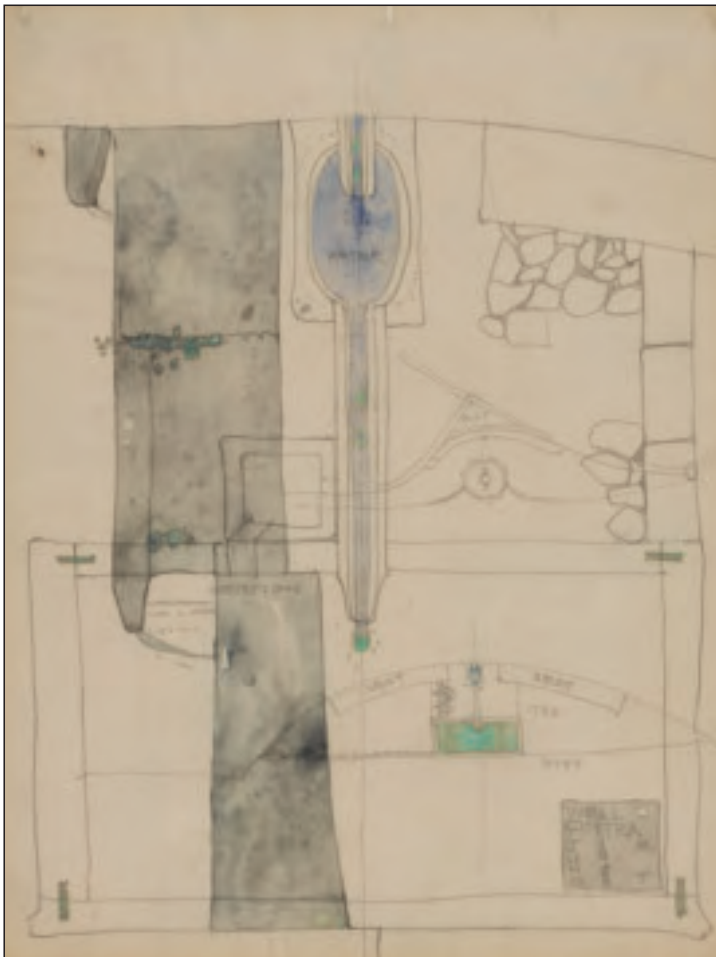


When Mackintosh arrived in Sintra (Portugal) in May 1908, Raul Lino – one of the most controversial and influential twentieth century Portuguese architects, whose major works were built in this town – was twenty-nine years of age. Over time, Lino would become one of the main exponents of traditional Portuguese naturalist architecture, acclaimed for his synthesis of the vernacular tradition with the Iberian landscape. His description of Sintra could serve as an advertisement for this little Portuguese town where he built his own house (*Casa do Cipreste*) five years after Mackintosh's visit: *"Sintra em tudo é excepcional – no clima, na paisagem, na história, nos monumentos. Portanto, a ambiência daquelas serras e daqueles vales é muito particular; a luz ali é doce, cor de cidra, cintilante de suaves górgeos de claridade, desde que o sol se levanta até ao desmaiar as Avés-Marias; a finura da sua atmosfera, nascida – como Afrodite-das ondas do mar, coa-se pelos bosques de ericácias e sai perfumada com aromas do mato que floresce nas encostas; sabe a murtinhas e ao medronho capitoso. E os frequentes nevoeiros, tão caluniados e detestados, são como dobras de renda branca a roçar pelo colo dos montes, a enredar-se nas fidalgas cameleiras de jardins decadentes"*.<sup>1</sup>

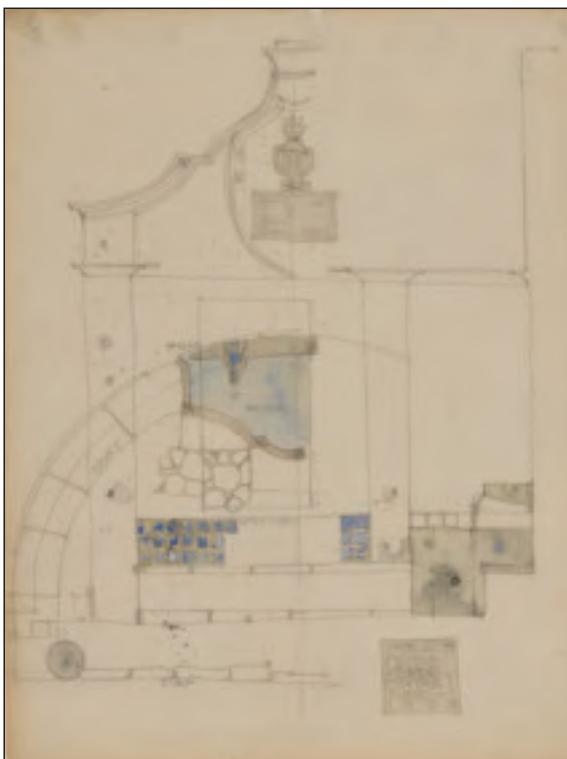
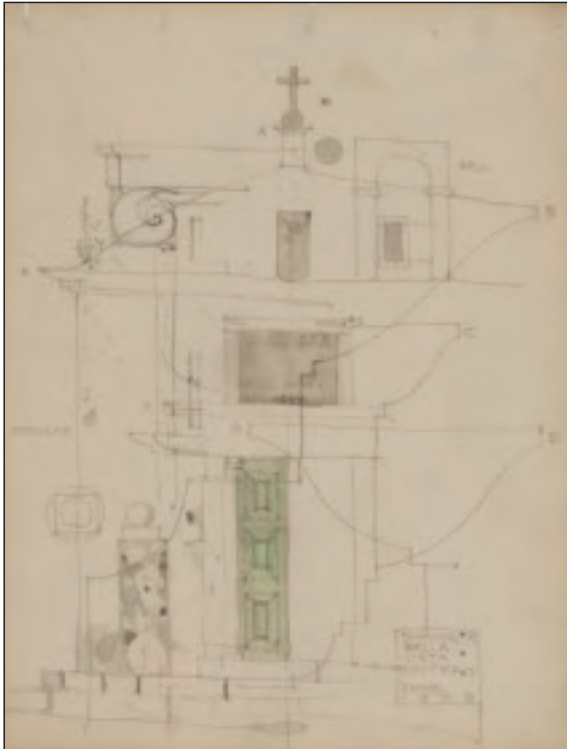
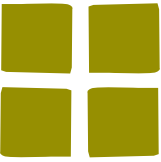


Charles Rennie Mackintosh  
Well, Cintra, Portugal June 1908, (Pencil and watercolour on paper)  
© Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, University of Glasgow

In all the literature on Mackintosh, practically nothing has been written about his journey to Portugal with Margaret, and this is a conspicuous gap in his biography. When they arrived in Sintra, Mackintosh was forty years of age, and Margaret forty-four. The journeys he had made outside Britain as an internationally prestigious architect were now several years distant. The first of these had been to Italy, in March 1891, when he was studying architecture at the Glasgow School of Art and had won the Alexander Thomson Travelling Studentship. His other journeys all took place after and his marriage to Margaret in 1900. At this time he was a member of "The Four", and *Art Nouveau* was spreading across Europe. In 1900 he travelled to Vienna to take part in the eighth Vienna Secessionist Exhibition, where he was acclaimed as the most original of the Scottish designers. Two years later, he exhibited in Turin at the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative Art. As a result of this international recognition, Mackintosh received invitations to exhibit in Dresden, Moscow and Budapest.

Today we can travel long distances with very little effort and we would not consider Mackintosh a particularly active or intrepid traveller. He did not have the adventurous temperament of Matisse or Picasso, to mention a few contemporaries. Above all, he was a Scotsman who loved nature and the local British landscapes, particularly those of his home land around Glasgow and the north of Scotland. His first trips around Britain had been of use in helping to develop his great powers of observation and analytical drawing skills, taking as his subjects Scottish flowers, plants and architecture. Subsequently travel and drawing had become two inseparable activities for Mackintosh. As Pamela Robertson rightly points out, for Mackintosh the technique of drawing developed parallel to his personal evolution. His marriage to Margaret Macdonald in 1900 marked an important change in his life. In keeping with the social mores of his time, Margaret could now accompany him on all his travels as his wife. Drawing, therefore, became a hobby and an activity he enjoyed in his private life closely linked to the travelling he did with Margaret, after the consolidation of his brilliance as an architect, designer and painter<sup>2</sup>. The drawings he produced in Sintra should be interpreted from this perspective, as should all those he created on his previous travels to Orkney (1903), the Scilly Isles (1903), Norfolk and Sussex (1905), and his drawings of Holy Island (1906), which he may have been thinking of publishing in a book.<sup>3</sup>

We know very little about his journey to Portugal in 1908. This was a difficult year for Mackintosh. His only professional commissions had been supervising



Charles Rennie Mackintosh

Fig 1. Shrine, Bella Vista, Cintra, Portugal June 1908

Fig 2. Well, Penha Verde, Cintra, Portugal June 1908

(Pencil and watercolour on paper)

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the extension work on the Glasgow School of Art with the Library wing and the entrance to the Lady Artists' Club in Blythswood Square. On the 10 February his father had died. Four months later, the Mackintoshes set off for Sintra. There is no information on whether they visited any other places in Portugal and we do not know the exact reasons why Mackintosh chose to spend time in this particular small town, just 24 km from Lisbon. All we have from the time he spent in Sintra are a few sketches and drawings, a botanic watercolour (*Tacsonia*), signed with the couple's joint initials CRM/MMM in June, and two postcards sent on the 22 May, one of them to Fra H. Newbery (*Janelas do Real Palacio de Cintra*) and the other to Miss May Newbery (*Atrio do Convento dos Capuchos*)<sup>4</sup> in which he stated his intention to draw the tree appearing on the front of the card. .

Sintra is a kind of fairytale village in one of central/southern Portugal's main centres for tourism, on the coast of the Iberian Peninsula, a very small place if one takes into account the large number of visitors it receives. Magical, nostalgic, cosmopolitan and novelesque, the town has a certain Atlantic air to it. Since the eighteenth century it had been the place of residence of the Portuguese royal family, and the wealthy nineteenth century bourgeoisie spent their summer holidays here, which is the reason for the large number of "quintas" or mansions built in the town. Sintra was also acclaimed among the traveller poets and romantic artists of the nineteenth century, with Robert Southey, one of the English "Lake poets", and Lord Byron among its most illustrious visitors. In 1809, a hundred years before the Mackintoshes' visit, Lord Byron – an Englishman by birth, a Scot by origin brought up in Aberdeen – had travelled to Sintra as part of a two-year journey taking in Spain, Greece and Turkey. In Sintra Lord Byron stayed at Lawrence's Hotel – which fortunately does not appear on the package tourist maps – the oldest hotel in the Iberian Peninsula and the second oldest in the world.<sup>5</sup> It was there that he wrote part of his book *The Journey of Childe Harold*, in which he tells of his experiences when travelling through Europe and where Sintra is described as paradise. It was there that he wrote a letter to his mother, Catherine Gordon, describing the town to her as a "glorious Eden", perhaps the most charming place in Europe: "it contains delights of all kinds, natural and artificial: There are palaces and gardens towering among rocks, waterfalls and precipices; convents on formidable summits; a view of the sea and the Tagus in the distance... it brings together all of Scotland's wild nature and the verdure of the South of France". Mackintosh is sure to have found this landscape described by Lord Byron striking, exotic and impossible to classify, totally different from the British countryside he was used to.

*The Real Palácio de Cintra*, also called the *Palácio Nacional da Pena* (1842-54) and which is depicted on one of the postcards Mackintosh wrote to the Newberys, was one of the Portuguese royal family's main residences during the nineteenth century and an outstanding example of Romantic architecture in Portugal. Commissioned by Prince Fernando II of Portugal, the husband of Queen María II of Portugal, it is located in the Sintra parish of São Pedro de Penaferrim and is built at a height of almost 1,700 feet above sea level. . The Prince, a Catholic of German origin, was fascinated by Sintra on a trip he made there with the Queen. On this visit the royal couple



Photographs courtesy of Sotheby's

admired the ruins of an old Hieronymite monastery devastated by the earthquake of 1755. Lisbon and all its surrounding area, including the Sintra district and this monastery, were very seriously affected by the 1755 earthquake. Ferdinand of Saxony (Fernando II) acquired the monastery ruins in 1838, together with the huge property of the mountain of Sintra, within which were several villas and the so-called *Castle of the Moors* (*Castelo dos Mouros*). The reconstruction of the monastery was a slow, expensive process, but it was finally transformed into an exuberant, exotic place containing buildings of different architectural styles, from neo-Gothic to neo-Moorish, neo-Renaissance and pseudo-Manueline. A magnificent English-style park was built on the mountainside, and this, together with the palace, has become a genuine symbol of Portuguese architecture.

The other postcard sent by Mackintosh was of the *Convento dos Capuchos* or *Convent of Santa Cruz* or *da Cortiça*. Half-hidden on a hillside, it was built in the sixteenth century in accordance with Franciscan principles of extreme austerity and direct contact with nature. Legend has it that the nobleman João de Castro lost his way in the mountains when he was hunting a deer, and fell asleep in the shelter of some rocks. It was revealed to him in a dream that he should build a monastery. João died before his dream could be realised, but his son honoured his father's will and commissioned the building. It was occupied by successive communities of Franciscan friars who led a life of meditation and contemplation there; today the convent is in ruins, although a reconstruction project is underway.

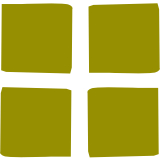
Another of the most famous and most visited buildings in Sintra is the *Palácio Nacional de Sintra* or *Palácio da Vila*, whose construction began in the sixteenth century. Its 110-foot tall twin conical chimneys dominate the landscape and are a symbol of the town. The palace

was originally an old *alcazaba* or fort of the Moorish *walis* (governors). It is the only royal palace within a town dating back to the Middle Ages that still exists in Portugal, and it is the country's finest example of Mudejar architecture.

While the Mackintoshes were in Sintra, the Italian architect and stage designer Luigi Manini was building the *Quinta da Regaleira* (1904-1910), another of the major buildings in this Portuguese town. It is not known whether Mackintosh was in contact with Manini. This mansion, which can be considered an example of organic architecture, is also known as the *Palácio do Monteiro dos Milhões* (*Palace of Monteiro, the Man with the Millions*), referring to its first owner, António Augusto Carvalho Monteiro. The palace is surrounded by luxuriant gardens, lakes, caves and enigmatic buildings, places concealing secret meanings relating to alchemy, freemasonry, the Knights Templar and the Rosicrucians. While Mackintosh was staying in Sintra and Manini was supervising the building of the *Quinta da Regaleira*, Antoni Gaudí was planning the construction of the *Parc Güell* (1900-1914), commissioned by Eusebi Güell, a Catalan entrepreneur and patron of the arts, as a kind of refuge from the industrialised heart of Barcelona.

A year after Mackintosh's visit to Sintra, in 1909, his architectural career/reputation began to go into decline. His fame as an *Art Nouveau* artist had dwindled as contemporary European architecture developed along more classical lines and as public taste changed. Mackintosh was no longer receiving commissions. At a certain point in his life, for very complex reasons, he cut himself off from the artistic circles in which the European art of the moment was opening up new directions. In 1907 Picasso had painted the *Señoritas de Aviñó*, (*Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*) inaugurating Cubism. In 1908 Adolf Loos published *Ornament and Crime* rejecting the decorativism of *Art Nouveau* and preparing the way for Le Corbusier. In 1910 the first major exhibition in Britain of Impressionism (*Manet and the Post-Impressionists*, organised by Roger Fry at the Goupil Gallery) opened in London, Matisse started up Fauvism in Collioure, and Kandinsky painted his first abstract watercolour. Mies Van der Rohe, the architect of glass and steel, was studying at the studio of Peter Behrens, the pioneer of industrial architecture, and in 1912 he opened his own studio in Berlin. In 1913 Mackintosh had left the firm Honeyman & Keppie and moved to England. His last major commission, for W. J. Bassett-Lowke, was to renovate the early 19th-century terraced house at 78 Derngate (1916-1919) in Northampton. A few years later, Peter Behrens designed the *New Ways* house (1922-1925) for Bassett-Lowke, a commission





which the latter had initially intended for Mackintosh. The house that Mackintosh never built went on to be acclaimed as the first modern-style domestic building in England. While Behrens was working on the house Mackintosh should have built, Mackintosh, between 1923 and 1927, was spending the final years of his life in Collioure and Port Vendres, in the French region of Roussillon, painting his watercolours. His intention was to show them at the Leicester Galleries in London, where Matisse (1919) and Picasso (1921) had already exhibited by this time.

Today, Sintra has become recognised as a primary site of Iberian Romantic architecture in Europe. In 1995 it was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its natural and architectural legacy, with over two hundred types of trees, two thousand different plant species and its exuberant Romantic-style buildings. 18 kilometres from the town, on the banks of the Atlantic, is the 140-metre high cliff known as the Cabo da Roca, the westernmost point both of the Iberian Peninsula and of continental Europe, even surpassing Ireland and Iceland. Close to this natural balcony is the wild *Praia da Ursa* (*Beach of the Bear*), a striking rock formation emerging from the sea. Legend has it that long ago, when the ice covering the Sintra mountain range began to melt, a mother bear disobeyed the orders of the gods and refused to migrate north with her cubs. In their anger, the gods transformed the disobedient bear into a huge rock and her cubs into other smaller rocks, standing around her for eternity in the waters of the ocean.

### **Marisa Herrero Membrado**

*Marisa Herrero Membrado is an art historian and Member of the Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society*

marisaherrero39@yahoo.es

1 "Sintra is exceptional in every way - in its climate, landscape, history, and monuments. The atmosphere in those mountains and valleys is so special, the light there is sweet, the colour of cider, sparkling with soft waves of light, from the rising of the sun until the fading of the Avés-Marias; the fineness of its atmosphere, born-like Aphrodite- from the waves of the sea, filtered through woods of ericaceous plants and leaves perfumed with the aromas of the undergrowth that flourishes on the hillsides; the smell of myrtle and the heady arbutus berries. And the frequent heavy mists, so slandered and detested, like folds of white lace lightly touching the mountain pass and mingling with the noble camellias of romantic gardens", Raul Lino. *Um olhar Sobre Sintra /A look over Sintra. Catalog Exhibition. Sintra, 2005.*

2 Pamela Robertson, "The making of a painter", in Wendy Kaplan (ed), Charles Rennie Mackintosh. *Glasgow Museums & Abbeville Press, New York, 1996, p. 294.*

3 David Brett, C. R. Mackintosh. *The Poetics of Workmanship, Reaktion Books, London, 1992*

4 "I wish I could send you a 'sample' of the beautiful and wonderful tree shown on the other side...". *Postcard from Mackintosh to Miss Mary Newbery. Journal, no. 84, Spring 2003, p. 24.*

5 Rua Consiglieri Pedroso, 38-40, Sintra. *Instead of having numbers, many of the rooms and suites in the new Lawrence's Hotel have the name of illustrious former guests like Eça de Queirós, Lord Byron, Alexandre Herculano, Camilo Castelo Branco and William Beckford.*

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