

# Restoration and adaptation of a twentieth century residential multi-family two-storey house for use as headquarters of a community movement.

## The Case of Avenida Modelo

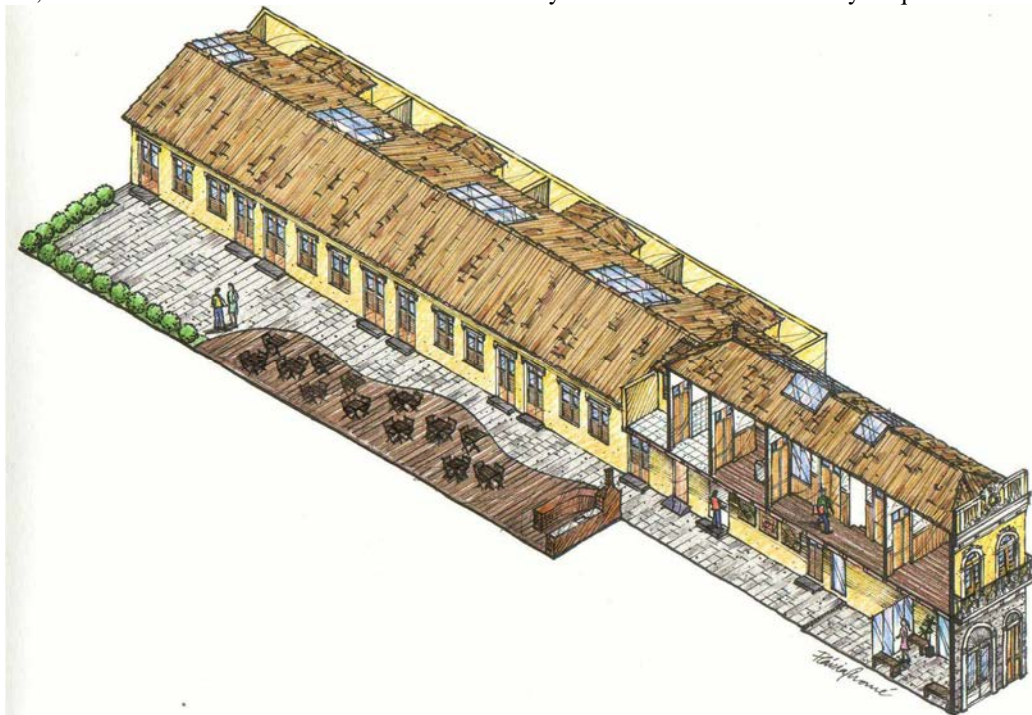
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### 1. Introduction

This study serves as example of technical interventions for the recovery and protection of Historical Heritage. Stressing the cultural memory of the building, it was theoretically possible to recover the original volume as well as the barely identifiable social cultural dignity. Consequently, the building was rendered fit for a new purpose whilst respecting its history and original use.

Today, there is an evident tendency to valorize the past of cities, reflecting a significant change in prevailing values and social attitudes. This transformation arose from the anxious search for identity references on the part of societies that have changed their view of the world and led to the valorization of cultural heritage. For this reason, attention tends to focus on the collective memory of the inhabitants of the city in question.



Explanatory  
perspective  
of the  
project

In cities that have suffered a devastating destruction of urban heritage, like in the case of Rio de Janeiro, much effort has been put into the safeguarding and valorization of what remained. As the building will be destined for a new purpose, the intervention project of a property with architectural characteristics that bestow the title of Cultural Heritage is more complex and delicate. Moreover, the new use is sometimes completely different to the original use and the modernization of the facilities must fit the new demand. When considering the aspects that must be preserved, historical and theoretical factors must also be considered, respecting the collective memory of the local inhabitants as well as assuring the requested modernization and authenticity of the property.

In this study, we present the Project for the Restoration and Adaptation for Use of the property located in Rua Regente Feijó, 55 – Center, Rio de Janeiro. This two-storey construction was donated by Rio de Janeiro's City Hall to serve as headquarters of the MNU - *Movimento Negro Unificado* (Unified Black Movement). Since 1978, this movement awaits a place for its administrative and cultural sectors with a center for documentation and research, workshops and ateliers to teach afro-brazilian culture and history. MNU is a democratic, autonomous national non-profit institution with the objective of fighting racism, racial bias and racial discrimination practices, acting daily in the defense of human rights, education, healthcare and culture.

This building, also known as *Avenida Modelo* (meaning 'model avenue'), is located in the heart of the historical center of the City of Rio de Janeiro in a region that served as platform for important political and cultural events: the *Praça Tiradentes* (Tiradentes Square)

The house and Avenida Modelo are currently in a high level of deterioration and will be totally restored, following the characteristic architectural guidelines of the façades, interiors and roofs that somehow justified the Federal Register as Heritage. The modernization required for new use will be subtly included so as to maintain the physical and cultural integrity of the property.

## **2. Brief History**

### **2.1 Of the region and the street**

In the past, Praça Tiradentes was in fact an estate in the city where salesmen and farmers met to trade. In 1721, it was set apart from the Campo de São Domingos and named Rocío Grande, then Terreiro da Polé and Campo dos Ciganos ('*ciganos*', meaning gypsies), as gypsies camped there when they arrived to the city. The square was also named Praça da Constituição because in 1821, Joao VI swore-in the basis of the future Constitution to be voted by the Courts of Lisbon. Finally in 1889, it was named Praça Tiradentes: a place of renowned importance for the theater and the gathering of celebrities and bohemians since the end of the nineteenth century.

In the mid-nineteenth century, a church was built in the former Campo de São Domingos to shelter the Brotherhood of black folk of Nossa Senhora de Alampadosa, opening a lane that would later become an avenue: Avenida Passos (Passos Avenue). Burials and other festivities of the black nations were held in this church, always accompanied by music and African regional song. The colorful and animated evocation of King Baltazar was also held in the lane.

The "Devoção do Rei Baltazar" (Devotion to King Balthazar) was exclusively constituted by the African blacks from Mozambique, the Congo and other nations, that chose an emperor and empress. On Sundays and festivity days, mainly Three Kings Day, the Devotion went into the streets, singing and dancing with instruments and typical costumes. This great show slowly lost prestige with the growth of the city and the costumes were transferred to what is known today as Carnival.

The church is presently on the corner of Avenida Passos and Rua (Street) Luis de Camões that leads to Rua Regente Feijó and bares the same name since 1835. Initially called Travessa (alley) de S. Joaquim and later, Do Bandeira, it became popularly known as Rua do Oratório because on the corner of Rua da Alfândega there was a house with one of the most popular stone oratories of the surroundings, demolished in 1906.

In November of 1835, father Diogo de Feijó established his private residence in this street, a huge two-storey house at the corner with Rua Visconde do Rio Branco, giving origin to the name Rua do Regente Feijó.

### **2.2 Of the two-storey house and Avenida Modelo**

In 1888, the two-storey house and Avenida Modelo were erected in Rua Regente Feijó, number 55. The house at the front of the lot and the Avenida with eight houses at the rear formed one of the main examples of collective social housing in end-of-century Rio de Janeiro. Three examples of this type of construction still exist in the central region of the city.

With the abolition of slavery in 1888, the Proclamation of the Republic in 1889 and the growing process of industrialization in the central area of the city, this address became the meeting point for workers and the location for all commercial activities and production workshops.

This change increased the demographic concentration in the area, resulting in relevant modifications in housing that was of an increasingly collective nature. In time, the already precarious conditions of housing became critical.

With the housing crisis established in the center of the city, Rio de Janeiro, full of two-storey and first floor houses bearing traces of the colonial period, would have to adapt to the new form of working and living by adapting to modernization. Collective social housing was a viable solution and many houses had to adjust to this new tendency.

In the city of Rio de Janeiro, collective housing was known from examples like: *cortiço*, *avenida*, *estalagem*, *casa de cômodos*, *vila operária* or *vila* (tenement house, *avenida*, *estalagem*, boarding house, working-class neighborhood or vila). In the twentieth century, these terms were replaced in the urban legislation by the term 'multifamily housing'. These units were generally groups of houses with a door and window, side by side, forming a corridor for access to bathrooms and the collective washing areas.

The land currently occupied by the Avenida Modelo belonged to Domingos Viera D'Almeida. With the increasing valorization of the land in this area, it was divided into four smaller lots facing the Rua Regente Feijó, one

of which was residential; number 55. The top floor was his private residence and the first floor gave access to the center of the lot where he later built houses to rent.

At the end of the nineteenth century, this type of construction was severely restricted by the government because of the serious insalubrity problems. Furthermore, new laws were created that imposed politics of hygiene and, at this time, Avenida Modelo represented a moment of transition in the history of collective housing.

However, Avenida Modelo meets many of the demands of the period like adequate spacing between each unit in the front and rear allowing for skylights and natural ventilation in the internal corridors. They also have independent rooms that nonetheless lack lighting and ventilation.

The house is presently abandoned and the floor and roof are partly in ruins. After serving as home of the the D'Almeida family, in 1967 the property was passed over to the State of Guanabara by Administrative Dispossession to serve as housing for the state professionals. Approximately ten years ago, the property was passed over to Rio-Previdência (state pension fund) and, today, it is interdicted and closed by the state due to danger of collapsing after years of neglect.

The residents of the house have rent contracts with Rio-Previdência and half the units have eviction lawsuits because of irregular contracts, lack of payment, sub-letting and irregular commercial activities. The panorama is of complete neglect and disregard to the Cultural Heritage of Rio, putting the buildings at risk by allowing for the accumulation of garbage and lack of maintenance. For this reason, sustenance work and treatment of structures is urgent.

### **3. Diagnosis**

The subject of this study is a two-storey building at the front and eight houses in the rear of a lot.

#### **1. The building**

The building has a first floor and an upper storey. The façade on the first floor has two openings in round-headed arch, the largest on the left for access to the rear houses and the smallest on the right for access to the upper storey.

The facade is composed of base, body and crown. The base is all stonework with segmented grooves. As for the access openings, they have stone doorposts with impost, stone lintels in the full arch frame with metallic parapets. The right openings have a lovely cast iron gate with the inscriptions "Avenida Modelo" and the left opening has a door with wooden paneled frame.

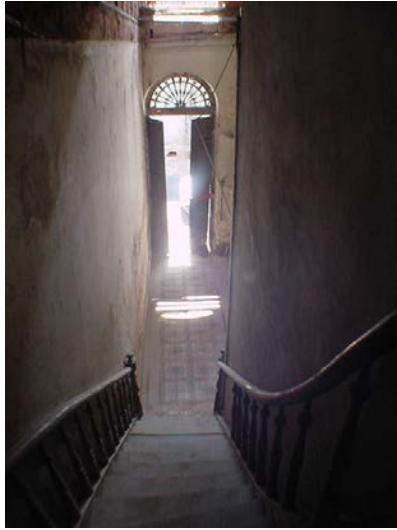
The face of the building has a balcony in stone with stone consoles in the form of corbels, also in stone. The metal parapets that make the balustrade are in richly decorated wrought iron with animal and plant figures, forming three identical horizontal panels. We found two openings with doors and stone doorposts with impost, stone lintels and full arch frame in glass and wood with details as well as overhead lintels in plaster with a garland, characteristic of the Romance architecture. The entire finishing coat is in mortar.

On the crown, there is a frieze in straight, smooth mortar with the inscription "1888", the year of construction. A corbel in tracery of mortar holds the transom and cornice with French style tiles. Over the cornice, is a verge in plaster bored with pilasters and adornments, and French style tiles. In the middle, there is medallion with the initials "DVA", from the name of the former owner (Domingos Vieira D'Almeida) and two decorated fruit dishes on each extremity, mostly characteristic of Classic architecture.

The roof has three slopes, half-round tiles (Spanish tiles), two skylights in iron and glass and a small slope at the rear of the upper storey protecting what was once a bathroom. The ridge is perpendicular to the street with two triangular slopes that reach the verge. The original finishing is missing and the bricks are exposed.

The structure of the building is basically wooden braces with solid brick closure for the structural walls. There are stud walls in the interior with no structural or dividing function.

On the first floor, with access through the largest gateway, there are two rooms facing the internal corridor, with cement floors and mid-height dividing walls. The internal corridor leads to the rear house with paved stone floors, plastered walls and wooden paneled ceiling. The door on the right of the ground floor façade leads to a hall and stairs with hydraulic-press brick.



Overhead view of entrance hall



View of the main room



View of the room in the upper storey



Front façade

In the upper storey, at the end of the wooden stairs with a banister of balusters on each step, there is a corridor that leads to the main room at the front of the lot and a room with a window, facing the stairs. This storey has a wooden floor and finely decorated frames with pendants and internal framing in paneled wood with gold leaves. The wooden paneled ceiling has frames contouring the compartments.

The walls of the corridor have delicate marble-effect artistic paintwork, imitating a wall finished in light marble with a white-grey tone in segmented slates. In the lower middle part of the wall the paintwork imitates wooden paneling.

At the top of the stairs, moving towards the rear of the top floor, there is a room with a window facing the stairs and prisms for ventilation and light. After the prisms, we find a dining room, a kitchen and a covered area at the rear. Facing the covered area, there is a small wing that is covered and has a hydraulic press brick finishing where there is a bathroom with cement floor and a small single-sloped independent roof.

### 3.2 The houses

The eight houses of Avenida Modelo are very simple when compared to the main house. They are all first floor houses, side by side, with a door and window each.

The window frames are wood with shutters and glass panes. The panels are plaster and have a lintel with a frieze in plaster. Two small corbels hold the lintel.

The roof has two slopes, one facing the patio and the other facing the rear of the houses; a ridge parallel to the internal patio; in ceramic half-round tiles and metallic skylight with glass for ventilation and light. This roof has a small cornice facing the internal patio with a copper roof gutter and a wooden cropped lambrequin.

The houses occupy 2/3 of the lot and have two small rooms, a large room, bathroom and a covered rear area. The floor is cemented and the ceiling is the same as the top floor of the main house.

The patio at the front of the houses has a collective bathroom on the left.



Cistern and the remains of the tiles in the old bathroom, Coverage of Avenida Modelo, located in the open patio in front of the houses.



Photos of Avenida Modelo

#### **4. State of Conservation**

The entire complex is in a terrible state of conservation with a very high level of deterioration and an increasing level of ineligibility. Pieces were stolen or vandalized and garbage is accumulating in the interiors. Today, it is an irregular deposit for street vendors.

##### **4.1 The two-storey house**

The house is empty, partly in ruins and sustained by wooden beams in some areas.

The first floor façade is full of wires, plates and unlawful signs. The upper unit favors the appearance of fungi and lichen in the stone skirting boards.

The iron gate has missing pieces and the wooden frame is loose through lack of treatment with missing hinges and rust.

Apart from a little black crust on the stone balcony, it is well preserved and the metal parapet is complete although there is some rust. The upper banister is missing that could well be wooden.

The two doorframes were recently stolen, according to the local residents, and the remaining parts are deteriorated by time and lack of protective treatment.

The adornment of the façade is mostly complete and the missing parts could easily be fitted with prosthesis made from moulds of existing pieces.

The roof has no ceramic covering and there is a plastic sheet protecting the woodwork. The skylights are very deteriorated and have no glass panes.

The structure is very damaged. Some of the brick and stud walls have blackened mortar. Without this mortar finishing, the lime protects the walls.

The two upper ground floor rooms are in a wretched state, with uneven floors and a dividing wall that has almost collapsed. The paved-stone floor in the corridor has missing parts and the wooden ceiling no longer exists, there are only a few panels. Much of the telephone and light wiring that lines the ceiling is messy and poses a threat to the building.

The stairway in the upper storey has received numerous inadequate additions and the banister has missing balusters.

The wooden floor in the house is in ruins with a large gap in the front room. The frames of this room are no longer there and the internal frames seem to have been replaced. The wooden framework of the ceiling has missing boards and inadequate paintwork. The artistic paintwork in the corridor is covered with a coat of paint and needs urgent restoration, as it is completely unprotected.

The wing at the back of the house has uneven frames and the finishing is in a terrible state of conservation.

##### **4.2 The houses**

The houses are occupied but in a very bad state of conservation. Only house 8 seems to have received some maintenance, the minimal and insufficient for architectural preservation. We were unable to see the inside of house number 1.

Most of the frames in the houses we saw were replaced by new ones of a contemporary standard. The skirting is in a terrible state with inadequate paintwork.

The roof is in a bad state of conservation and is mostly covered by undulated fiber cement tiles. Also, inadequate tiles have replaced the skylights. The lambrequin detail is complete but the protection and gutter have many weak points with dents, splits and dirt.

In half the units, a mezzanine was built with concrete slabs to provide space between the ceiling and roof. This detail compromises the original structure, which is now dust-covered mortar.

Many of the internal openings were closed with new bricks. Moreover, the uncovered area at the rear was closed to fit the bathroom and a small kitchen. Most of the coverage in this area is concrete slabs. The cement floor and the wooden framework on the ceiling is in a bad state of conservation or has been completely replaced by inadequate building material.

The patio at the front of the houses is totally taken up by back yards. They are delimited by brick masonry, some with coverage, and function as small businesses. From the collective bathroom only a small hydraulic press brick wall could be recovered, similar to that of the bathroom in the house. There is a concrete cistern in front of the collective bathroom.

Mainly, the total lack of maintenance and the high level of deterioration of the building material have caused the bad state of conservation of these houses.

## **5. The Project of Restoration and Adaptation to use**

The restoration project intends to fully achieve all the relevant specifications for this property. The house will be fully restored by closely following the orientation of the Restoration Architect and the Restoration Project. Replicas of the inexistent framework will be made and that which is present will be restored. The floors and ceilings will be recovered as well as the constructive systems and the special paintwork of all the rooms, according to standards found in artistic prospecting.

The roof will be redone with moulds used in the past, via an outflow system, using ceramic half-round tiles, copper gutters and skylights in glass and metal. The structure will be checked completely to assure the stability of the building using the methodology and constructive system that are characteristic of this property.

All the installations will be modernized, respecting the building in which they will be installed. Wiring will be embedded when possible or will line the floors or ceilings.

The entire façades will be restored and the adornment will be checked and completed using silicone moulds and plaster that is compatible with the original. The colors for paintwork of the façades will be ochre; a decision made together with the auditors and under orientation of the Restoration Architect after confirmation from the artistic prospecting carried out in the location.

However, to adapt this complex to the program provided by the MNU, the following alterations will be made:

### On the first floor of the house

On the side of the house, where there is a solid brick wall, a side-door will be opened leading to the reception area of the MNU in the hall with the stairs. For the opening, the recommended structural reinforcement will be carried out.

The two rooms on the ground floor will be interconnected for the installation of the Document Center. This room will be for storing documents, photographs, written work files, theses, monographs and other material of interest to and about the MNU. Two extra bathrooms and a small coffee room will be built for the Document Center. One of these bathrooms will be adapted for the physically handicapped.

### On the upper floor of the house

The space where the kitchen is now will be recovered and modernized for afro-Brazilian cooking classes. In this area, the walls will have a plain, white tile finishing to mid-wall and resistant floors that are adequate for this specific use. We suggest the application of new, plain, hydraulic press bricks in one color only.

In the former wing at the rear, two new bathrooms will be built for the administration. The finishing will be the same as in the kitchen.

### In the internal patio

A smaller house or construction will be built in the area occupied by the collective bathroom for barbeques on celebration days. This building will have a removable wooden deck to hide the cistern and to place tables and chairs, characterizing a living area. There could be a sunshade type roof in case coverage is needed.

There will also be a small flower box along the dividing wall to plant sacred herbs for afro-Brazilian rites, with an explanatory panel with information on the use and type of each species.

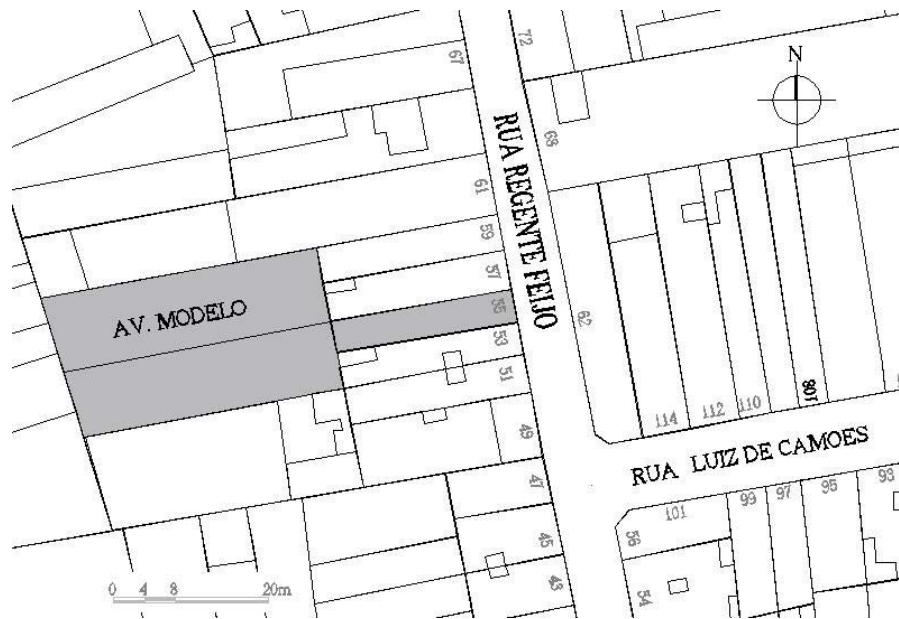
### In the houses

The interiors will recover the original format of one large room, two small rooms and kitchen. In the covered area, a small bathroom will be built for each unit with coverage that is compatible to the style of the complex. This coverage will consist of smaller half-round ceramic tiles and the finishing will be the same as for the kitchen.

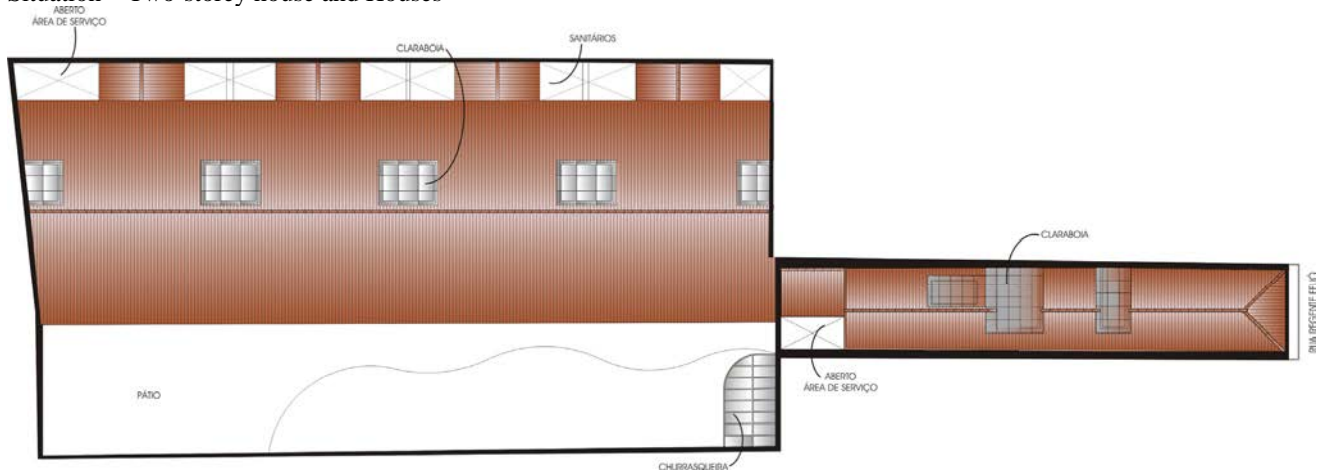
Residential use will be momentarily replaced by institutional use. Presently, the original internal format is being resumed but the residential use can also be resumed when necessary.

The use of these units will momentarily be for NGOs linked to the MNU, virtual offices of partner companies and workshops for the propaganda of afro-Brazilian culture.

All not related items above will be completely restored except for electrical wiring, hydro-sanitary installations, logistics and telephone, which will be modernized and embedded into the floor and ceiling framework.



Situation – Two-storey house and Houses



Coverage Plan – Two-storey house and Houses



Schematic cut – Two-storey house and Houses





First floor - Houses



First floor - Two-storey house



Upper floor - Two-storey House

## 6. Conclusion

The restoration architect specializing in historical monuments must clearly have historical, technical and methodological knowledge. Moreover, the professional must also have the humility and respect to ensure the preservation of all the characteristics acquired by the building during the years

An intervention project must be initiated in an existing property by verifying its importance to the community. If it is pulled down, one must ask why this was the case and which were the characteristics that granted the cultural value so as to maintain the essence of the property and the memory of a community.

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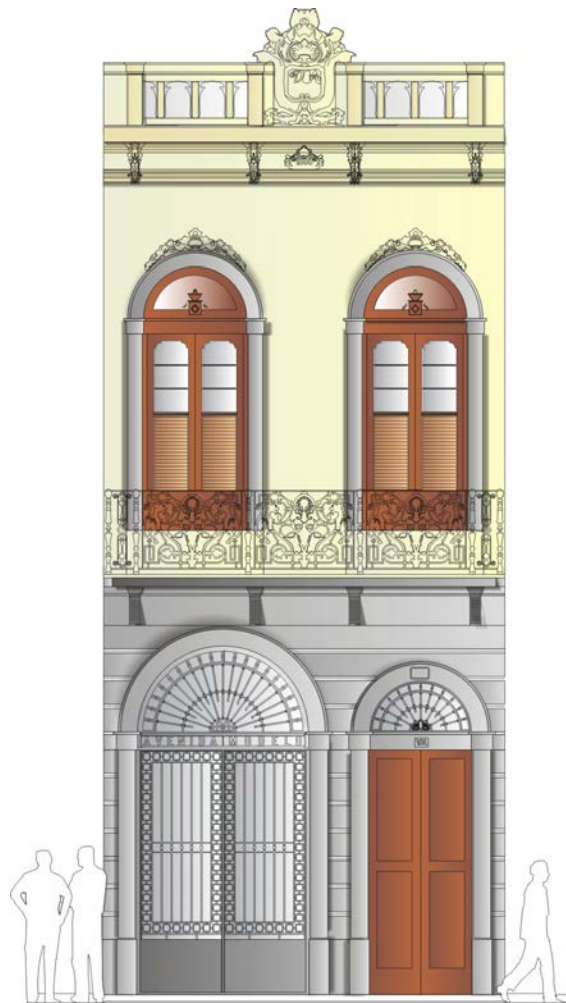
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Proposed façade

