

“BRAZIL LOOKS AT BRAZIL”? “FRENCH-STYLE LIVING” AMONG CONTEMPORARY ARBITERS OF TASTE (2000-2015)^{1,2}

Contemporary sociological studies exploring the unequal exchanges between different countries have revealed the extent to which national origin still comprises a powerful determinant factor, often downplayed, in the international fate of cultural productions (Duval, 2020). Centred on the world of cinema or literature, some of these works have shown that what comes from France, for instance, is frequently perceived as “universal” and “denationalized” in the sense of benefitting and pertaining to all the world’s peoples (Casanova, 2008). Still in the area of sociology, studies based on tourism management reports also emphasize that the cultural triumphs of the “French brand” are highlighted to impose its pre-eminence over southern hemisphere countries – reputed in the world of marketing to have “nothing to offer but sea and sun” (Boltanski & Esquerre, 2017: 44) – and over southern European countries that can also draw on their own cultural legacies and climate as attractions. These analyses are consistent with those produced in the management area, which note that while Japan, for example, is valorised for its performance in electronics and Germany for its technological productivity, France’s legendary power resides in the richness of its historical heritage: “It is this historical legacy that spontaneously comes to mind and which is the aspect most emphasized by the French themselves and most sought out by foreigners: Versailles, the little Parisian bistro, the Provençal market...” (Bonnal, 2011: 33).

No wonder then that, even today, those working for the bodies regulating Brazil’s field of interior design can be heard making observations

like "France was always a reference for the world and always will be," to echo the words of the President of the Brazilian Association of Interior Designers³. In the trajectory of the ways of living of Brazil's elite, the disdain for houses lacking 'Europeanism' (Freyre, 2003) is indeed a theme that traverses the history of the country's architecture (Lemos, 1989; Reis Filho, 1987). Despite the considerable influence of the Portuguese (Machado, 2011), English (Carvalho, V., 2008) and Italian (Marins, 1998) repertoires, the precepts originating from France (Campos, 2005) have most consistently occupied a dominant position in the residential predilections of diverse segments of the Brazilian elites (Dantas, 2015).

As we know, this French presence was inaugurated by the artistic mission through which the Portuguese court introduced the cultured image of neoclassical architecture to Rio de Janeiro, valorising the house set amid its gardens, a typology that would be further strengthened in the eclectic palatial homes of the twentieth century (Homem, 1996) and in the exhaustive copying of French style furniture (Lemos, 2003). In an era when erasing the Luso-Brazilian tradition was perceived as a matter of civilizational progress (Carvalho, V., 2008), the French and Italian models designed in São Paulo by Ramos de Azevedo – himself a resident of a "French-style palace" (Miceli, 2003: 36) – echoed, in the districts of Higienópolis and Campos Elíseos, the neoclassical style imported from France through the work of Grandjean de Montigny (Carvalho, M., 1996).

The French model would remain among the reference points for good practice in the second half of the twentieth century, despite the fact that, since the 1920s, the enduring prevalence of this canon was relentlessly contested by leading advocates of neo-colonial architecture that sought "to recover a dimension lost when, in the nineteenth century, a French-style academic training was introduced into Brazil by the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts" (Atique, 2016: 219; Mello, 2006; Pinheiro, 2011) – not to mention the "redemptive" role subsequently claimed by a modernism that supposedly expunged these and other foreignisms, even though this modernism itself had originated from a Parisian architectural studio (Bill, 2003; Ficher, 2007).

Between 1960 and 1980, the reproduction of this taste was effectively linked to the Maison Jansen, founded in 1880 in Paris to produce furniture in the styles of the eighteenth century, with a Brazilian branch in São Paulo since 1956 (Lima, 2020)⁴. It was also associated with constructors like Adolfo Lindenberg, the leading name in the construction of São Paulo's "neoclassical" buildings, and with the architects of palatial houses in the exclusive neighbourhoods of Jardim Europa and Jardim América (Jorge..., 2008). At the turn of the twenty-first century, the French frame of reference was apparent, in new guise, in the proliferation of 'neoclassical' buildings in the elite districts of the São Paulo capital, whose landscaping excludes typical Brazilian flora in favour of lavender, for example, while justifying the choice of the

(overly tropical) palm trees on the basis that “they are found in the south of France too. In Saint-Tropez, in Provence; French gardens [are] full of palm trees” (Pulici, 2015: 243).

But despite the many works exploring the influence of ‘French-style living’ on the residential (and civilizational) aspirations of the Brazilian elites since at least the second half of the nineteenth century (Camargos, 2001), little is known about the place occupied by this recurrent model among the arbiters of domestic tastes in contemporary Brazil. This is the challenge taken up here: I explore the hypothesis that although transformations occurred in the 1950s when French architects were “stunned by images of Brazilian modernism” (Saint-Pierre, 2015: 187) and the architecture produced in Brazil successfully became internationalized (Braschi, 2016), “French good taste” – whether real or imagined – still prevails in the legitimized ways of speaking about the home in the Brazilian context.

This does not exclude the revalorizing of vernacular elements. Much the opposite: as we shall see, it was from Europe that the idea was learnt to appreciate “authentic” ancestral heritage and “real houses⁵.” Numerous prescribers of taste, therefore, have celebrated the professionals identified as pioneers in the design of domestic spaces that exalt Brazilian themes, where “everything that is European is imbued with tropical airs” and even “the *toiles de jouy* [are] so Brazilian” (Barbosa & Reinés, 2009: 60). It becomes clear, then, that what pertains to Brazil and Europe in the “good manners of living” constitutes a structuring opposition within the world of Brazilian domestic architecture, just as much as the opposition separating the advocates of modernism from those promoting neoclassicism (Pulici, 2014).

Dedicated to the first of these oppositions, this article discusses the exchanges between Brazil and France with respect to the dominant definitions of residential excellence. Forming part of a broader comparative research project on the prescription of architectural preferences in these two national contexts, the text presents some contemporary configurations of the lengthy cultural dependence marking the productions originating from Brazilian society, based on the analysis of the imagery of the “beautiful home” circulating between Brazil and the European country that provided the former with its most enduring examples of elite homes. Moreover, although French styles have been prevalent in diverse spheres of Brazilian social life, the so-called “French Touch” competes today with references coming from other countries equally committed to “turning the nation into a brand” (Aronczyk, 2013), which prompts me to try to measure the current particularities of this long-lasting “centre-periphery” (Castelnuovo & Ginzburg, 1981) type of relationship.

While France was the “arbiter of good taste” in both the promotion of historical eclecticism and in the gradual cementing of Le Corbusier’s modernism from the 1930s (Durand, 1991), the research – partial results of

which are presented here – seeks to discern the similarities and peculiarities observable today in the two countries, as befalls any international comparison, but also the current specificities of this role of cultural demonstration assumed by France in Brazilian society. Setting out from the assumption that these evaluative criteria express the relations between central countries and their respective peripheries, a survey of the French presence in the definitions of ‘good living’ in vogue in Brazil today reveals indications of the place occupied by the different nations in the publications in question, identifying some of the geopolitical representations mobilized in these vehicles consecrating “good taste.”

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The analysis mobilizes “modern versions of the classical treatises on *savoir-vivre*” (Fabiani, 2005) and, in the case in question, three magazines dedicated to the home. An exhaustive and quantified examination of the perceptual schemas validated in the issues of *Architectures à Vivre* (n = 87), *Art et Décoration* (n = 139) and *Casa e Jardim* (n = 192) published between 2000 and 2015 is complemented by the observation and collection of materials at fairs for interior design and domestic architecture (*Salon Art et Décoration*, *Salon Maison & Objet*, *Journées d’Architectures à Vivre*, *CASACOR São Paulo*, *CASACOR Rio de Janeiro*, *Modernos Eternos* and *Morar Mais*) held in Paris, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (n = 9), and by interviews (n = 24) with architecture and interior design critics, representatives of class associations, academics and professionals in the area of domestic architecture in Brazil and France. Also consulted were books featuring homes identified as exemplary – which appeared as sources during the sequential analysis of the periodicals – published during the period covered by the research (n = 26). Consequently, while no magazine analogous to the French *Architectures à Vivre* exists in the Brazilian context – although *Casa e Jardim* functions as a Brazilian equivalent to *Art et Décoration* – the analysis took advantage of publications non-existent in the same period in France, like the supplement *Casa*, published on Sundays by the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* between 2004 and 2020, when the number of copies sold reached 264,430 according to the IVC⁶. The study thus analysed 60 of the 144 reviews published in this supplement between 2004 and 2010 by the interior design critic and former Brazilian ambassador Maria Ignez Barbosa, collated in the book *Histórias de Estilo e Décor*. This was released in 2011 by Metalivros, the same publishing house that had issued her book *Casas de São Paulo* in 2009, also analysed here. Other ‘good dwelling’ guides that were released during the research period and complement the corpus of sources in the Brazilian context are: *Casas Paulistas* (2000), *Residências do Rio de Janeiro* (2003), *Casas Brasileiras* (2006), *Interiores no Brasil* (2011), *Coleção Folha Decoração e Design* (2011), *Coleção Folha Design de Interiores* (2012), *Monolito* -

Casas de Arquiteto (2013), *Prédios de São Paulo* (2015), *Monolito - Prédios de Apartamentos* (2015) and *Brasil porta adentro* (2015). In the French context, the study consulted: *Le musée de la maison* (2001), *25 maisons individuelles* (2002), *Maisons du monde* (2003), *Petites maisons* (2003), *Les plus belles maisons rénovées* (2005), *25 maisons écologiques* (2005), *Maisons contemporaines deux* (2005), *Maisons de plage du monde entier* (2006), *25 maisons en bord de mer* (2007), *Maisons + 40 idées d'extensions* (2008), *L'Habitat contemporain* (2008), *La maison de l'architecte* (2013), *Détails de maisons contemporaines* (2014) and *Nouveaux détails de maisons contemporaines* (2014).

“GENUINELY BRAZILIAN” DOMESTIC SPACES?

An initial survey of the 192 issues of *Casa e Jardim* published between 2000 and 2015, the oldest (founded 1953) and best-selling periodical from the sector in Brazil⁷, revealed prescriptions that are socially distinctive but do not openly admit to being so. In a climate of public opinion unfavourable to explicit snobbery (Johnston & Baumann, 2007), a rather exclusive way of dwelling is exalted, but where this exclusion is obscured by the regular praising of homes taken to be “simple” and “unpretentious”, which thus manage to combine the virtues of being politically progressive and culturally avant-garde (Pulici, 2022).

This initial content analysis also called attention to the fact that the influence of foreign references was obscured by the successive waves of strident valorisation of “Brazilianness” contained in the magazine’s pages (and also beyond them)⁸. Just as much as explicit snobbery, therefore, the enthusiasm for the ways of living of dominant countries has gradually become expressed in a more covert way, as though “Brazilianness” were some kind of proof of immunity from foreignisms.

In this context, the valorisation of Brazilian things became a front cover article of the magazine *Casa e Jardim* in 2003, a “national rediscovery” linked by the text to the election of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva as president. Entitled “The best of Brazil”, the issue’s contents are announced in the editorial (“The face of Brazil”) which states that “Brazil looks to Brazil. The effect of the new political phase now beginning” (Rangel, 2003: 3). The issue contains reports on a farmstead in the São Paulo interior, a fisherman’s house in Trancoso and a São Paulo modernist mansion. This issue, which overtly propagates the “pride of being Brazilian” and encourages readers to “extol the country,” expands on the column *Feito no Brasil* (Made in Brazil), dedicated to valorising Brazilian art and craftwork, launched in the October 2002 issue. In 2009, in the wave of cultural populism (Ferrari, 2015) discernible in various sections of the magazine, the column *Casas do Brasil* (Houses of Brazil) was created with the aim of showing humble dwellings from different Brazilian regions whose “simplicity” becomes a synonym for “authenticity.”

The condescending glorification of the homes of the poor implicitly contains the notion that these homes are just as good and worthy as "architect houses," a premise made explicit in the book *Casas do Brasil* (2013), which unites all the columns in question, composed of photographs and texts by renowned Brazilian photographers. In 2013, the contents pages of issues 704 and 705 laud the Brazilian designers "on the up" internationally. The celebration of the "genuinely national" reaches a peak in the editorial, which swells into a "Manifesto" for "Brazil in *Casa e Jardim*," announcing the magazine's expectation of becoming "the publication with the most Brazilianness in the sector," as well as its unrivalled valorisation of "genuinely Brazilian" craft, design and architecture (Quintas, 2013b: 10). This "Manifesto" extends to all the issues published in 2014. In a new section called *Feito à mão* (Handmade, issue 708), for example, the topic is Brazilian lace and a furniture empresario who is an enthusiastic advocate of the designs produced in the country. Issue 709, meanwhile, contains a feature on women from Paraná who weave straw to make bags, baskets and hats. Running the cover article "Brazilian ways," the June issue is entirely devoted to this "love for everything that is ours" and the different creations that become a motive for "national pride," as found in the article "What our houses have."

It so happens that during the same period in which it regularly exalts 'Brazilianness,' the periodical has run the column *Decoração pelo mundo* (Interior design around the world) in each monthly issue since January 2010. Indeed, even in the decade prior to the launch of this monthly column, the relation with foreign countries permeates different dimensions of the magazine's life. There are features on topics abroad covered by *Casa e Jardim*, generally on international fairs visited (*Salone del Mobile* in Milan and *Salon Maison & Objet* in Paris, for example), as well as articles bought off-the-shelf from large international agencies, as in the case of *Decoração pelo mundo*. While the purchase of these kinds of reports from abroad evokes the first Brazilian magazines that merely translated the original French publications (Luca, 2018; Martins, 2008), the effect of cultural demonstration exerted by the central countries (represented here by France) is expressed reluctantly today. In a context that architecture historians call 'populist' (Cohen, 2004), in which Europeanism rhymes with elitism, the reference to the Old World is revealed only grudgingly; it is very often denied, even when it is acknowledged, as we shall see, that the most significant editorial reorientation from the period under study was inspired by European interiors.

In this way, Europe and France assume the role of cultural seals of quality in the Brazilian sources, a status not mirrored by Brazil's position in French publications. While Brazil does not appear even once in the magazine *Art et Décoration* between 2000 and 2015 – though Brazilian modernist architecture is lauded in *Architectures à Vivre*⁹ – France is the foreign country

most often discussed in *Casa e Jardim*. The *Salon Maison & Objet* fair, for example, which I visited in Paris in September 2016 and January 2017, figures as a stamp of approval of home design in *Casa e Jardim* and also in *Casa* (the weekly supplement of *Estadão* cited above), while the Brazilian fair CASACOR does not appear in the publications that function as arbiters of French interior design tastes. Along these lines, the book containing 60 critical reviews published in the *Ícones* column of the *Casa* Sunday supplement continues to take French dwellings as its primary point of reference: although the bibliography on which these reviews are based includes 150 titles in English, 17 in French, 14 in Portuguese, 1 in Italian and 1 in German – reflecting the fact that the author was formerly Brazilian ambassador in London (1994-1999) and Washington (1999-2004) – the ranking of the nationalities of the decorated residences and/or the designers discussed still expresses France’s primacy¹⁰, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 – Most frequent nationalities in *Histórias de Estilo e Décor*

Position	Locations	Occurrences ¹¹
1	France	24
2	United States	20
3	United Kingdom	9
4	Brazil	5
5	Italy	4

Source: Barbosa (2011).

In a study on inequalities between nations in the cinema world, Julien Duval emphasizes that the hegemony of cultural products from central countries is reinforced by the tendency of the peripheries to mutually ignore one another (Duval, 2020). Echoing this logic, the frequencies presented below reveal that France is the most common model of ‘good living’ in the Brazilian sources, surpassing Argentina and Uruguay, for example. “Provence,” to use the native category, is the only “style” evoking a country among the ten most frequently mentioned in *Casa e Jardim*. With repeated allusions to the perfume of lavender and the tones of the Mediterranean regions of France, the advice given is to bring “the spirit of France inside the home,” extolling the virtues of the “eternal bergère,” the eighteenth century, the “romanticism” of *toile de jouy* textiles, Louis XV chairs and sofas, and other ambients that evoke “styles reminiscent of the aesthetic hegemony of the aristocracy, like the Baroque and the Rococo” (Miceli, 2003: 68), as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1 – Collage of 17 pages promoting ‘French-style living’ in *Casa e Jardim*¹²

Source: Author’s collection.

By contrast, the “ethnic style” – which refers to countries perceived as “exotic” in Europe and, indirectly, in Brazil, purchaser of European design articles (although the country is itself taken as “exotic” in Europe) – occupies last place in the ranking of the ten “styles” most frequently mentioned between 2000 and 2015, as we can see in Table 2.

Table 2 – The 10 “styles” most mentioned in the 192 contents pages and editorials of *Casa e Jardim*

Position	“Styles”	Occurrences (weighted) ¹³	%
1	modernist/modern	36.06	30.3%
2	loft/industrial	16.91	14.2%
3	rustic/natural/rural	14.01	11.8%
4	Provençal/romantic	9.72	8.2%
5	ecological/sustainable	9.57	8%
6	oriental	9.07	7.6%
7	contemporary	5.86	4.9%
8	classic	5.41	4.5%
9	retro/vintage	4.88	4.1%
10	ethnic	2.6	2.2%

Source: Casa e Jardim (2000-2015).

Another classification revealing the geopolitics of “good living” resides in the probable over-representation of the “Oriental style”: while, for example, “From the East blows a new wind in design” provides the tagline for the Bangkok Gift Fair, it is never said that “From the West blows a new wind in design” when covering the Milan *Salone del Mobile*.

Although the editorial introducing the column *Decoração pelo mundo* promises that the new section “will report on projects from every and any corner of the planet” (Quintas, 2010: 8), a count of the nations actually discussed shows that this internationalism was extremely relative: France remains the most cited country; those nations mentioned outside the Western Europe – North America axis are among the wealthiest on their respective continents (Australia, South Africa, Argentina and Uruguay); and the countries associated with “ethnic” taste (Thailand, Indonesia and Jamaica) appear just once, as can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3 – Countries appearing in the columns *Decoração pelo mundo* and *Pelo mundo*¹⁴

Position	Countries	Appearances	Percentage
1	France	13	19.12%
2	South Africa	10	14.71%
3	Italy; United Kingdom	7	10.29%
4	Portugal; Spain	5	7.35%
5	United States	4	5.88%
6	Argentina; Denmark	3	4.41%
7	Uruguay; Holland; Sweden	2	2.94%
8	Thailand; Indonesia; Belgium; Australia; Jamaica	1	1.47%
	Total	68	100.00%

Source: Casa e Jardim (2000-2015).

Consequently, although the issues published in the first fifteen years of the twenty-first century advocate "a plural interior design¹⁵," *Casa e Jardim* struggles to subvert the old cultural hierarchies, promulgating instead a "discourse on diversity [that] conceals questions like inequality" (Ortiz, 2007: 14). This is revealed not just in the higher occurrence of countries historically able to impose their symbolic dominance, but also in the very classification made of each nation. Thus a contents page (n. 661) describing a "rustic cottage" on the Portuguese coast attributes "ethnic colour and perfume" to the furniture brought from Morocco but not to the objects coming from Portugal itself. The same taxonomy appears in the contents page of n. 679, which in its description of a summer house 140 km from Lisbon mentions the straight lines and neutral tones of the external architecture and the "vibrant colours and ethnic elements à la India and Morocco inside." Thailand, for its part, appears in the guise of a house that is "almost a Thai palace," while European homes appear as 'authentic' and 'unpretentious' spaces. In the numerous reports on South Africa, not uncommon in the circuit of global wine exports, we discover houses whose residents are white and live in spaces "inspired by Provence," seek to create "an aged appearance like the houses that entranced Holger and Garth in their travels through Italy" (Toffoli, 2014: 104) and apply on the furniture "pastel-coloured paint with an aged look, just as the French do" (Chaloner, 2011: 80). As we can see, the end result is more a European enclave than an attempt to promote the dwelling styles of black South Africa. In the same way, African flowers have no right to their own name, in contrast to the European varieties – "Lavender and roses were planted without success until opting for the native vegetation" (Villiers, 2013: 134).

A count of the places mentioned in the magazine as a whole – here represented by the covers, contents pages and editorials – also exposes the geopolitical limits set on "good manners of living". The Table 4 shows that the city of São Paulo was by far the locality most often reported in the articles, followed by Milan, due to the international design fair held in the city annually, and then the interior of São Paulo state¹⁶. The concentration of reports in the city and state of São Paulo (including the articles on the São Paulo coast and mountains) is consistent with the fact that 59% of readers live in the south-eastern region of Brazil and 19% in the southern region – where Florianópolis is located, the third Brazilian state capital, after São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, to host the highest number of reports¹⁷.

When it comes to the countries hosting the most reports from abroad, France occupies first place, followed by Italy in second – in this case excluding the regular appearance of Milan, treated separately since it always figures due to the *Salone del Mobile*, one of the largest cultural benchmarks in the

world of interior design and architecture. Discussing the international circulation of luxury objects associated with brands known for their national or regional roots – and exported to distant countries where the demand stems precisely from the prestige of the countries of origin – Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre call attention to the work of valorisation involved, “which emphasizes their traditional character and their home in countries highly appreciated for their ‘art of living’ and for their authority in matters of ‘taste,’ like France or Italy” (Boltanski & Esquerre, 2017: 389)¹⁸.

Table 4 – Places mentioned in the 192 contents pages, editorials and covers of *Casa e Jardim*

Position	Places	Occurrences (weighted)
1	São Paulo	35.18
2	Milan	9.67
3	São Paulo interior	9,12
4	Rio de Janeiro	7.77
5	France	7.32
6	Italy	6.24
7	São Paulo coast	4.99
8	São Paulo mountains	4.65
9	South Africa	4.31
10	Florianopolis; UK	3.74

Source: Casa e Jardim (2000-2015).

This unequal authority in terms of residential taste also figures in the “market of nationalities” described by estate agents catering for foreigners looking for apartments to buy in Paris. Among this group, the Italians and French are said to have the most refined architectural taste: “I sold a couple from San Francisco, on Rue Charles V, a picturesque street with beautiful buildings, a monstrosity from the 1960s, an ugly thing: they bought it. An Italian would never have done so, nor a French person” (Chevalier; Lallement & Corbillé, 2013: 97).

Corroborating the recurrence of France and Italy as countries historically valorised for their “art of living,” the collection *Design de Interiores*, launched in 2013 by the *Folha de São Paulo* newspaper, contains among its 20 books just two referring to specific national regions: “Tuscany” and “Provence¹⁹.” In the collection *Decoração & Design*, published by the same newspaper in 2010, France is the only country to name a type of rural house²⁰, as we can see in Figure 2.

Figure 2 – Nationalized definitions of residential excellence



Source: Author's collection.

We can see, then, that even these collections published all over the world explicitly valorise the living style linked to (real or invented) national specificities. Notwithstanding the insistent celebration of “Brazilianness” in different arbiters of taste in contemporary Brazil, therefore, these collections attest to the continuing strength of the “effect of cultural demonstration of the dominant centres on Brazilian cultural production” (Durand, 1989: 160). The French pre-eminence also adds some nuance to the equally recurrent supposition that from the 1950s “European references in the training and inspiration of artists and the elite were replaced by North America” (Janjullo, 2015: 59).

EUROPEANISM STILL

The appeal to national style discernible in the Brazilian publications had already been detected in *Art et Décoration* – the French magazine corresponding to the Brazilian *Casa e Jardim* and the oldest and highest-selling publication in the sector in France – whose articles extolling the French historical heritage (Pulici, 2020) exude a strong nationalist-pastist stance²¹. The difference is that the French publication speaks little about other countries, which in any eventually are never a guiding parameter of the magazine, which boasts about being “Franco-centric²².”

But even though the Brazilian magazine gives considerable space to the kind of living taken as characteristic of the central countries, every borrowing from the nations of the Western Europe – North America axis is assumed only with some reluctance by the contemporary arbiters of cultural consecration. So, for example, the former editorial director of *Casa e Jardim* claimed in an interview that during the eight years when she was at the head of the magazine the objective was not to copy what was being done in Europe. However, in her survey of the period covered by the research, she ends up recognizing, by default, that the idea of ‘living truthfully’ was learnt through

the appreciation of European interiors. When she discusses the introduction of changes that led to the publication overtaking the magazine *Casa Cláudia*, its direct rival for decades, the turning point was when the magazine began to depict “real houses, because the houses were all the same; they were perfect, all beige, nothing was out of place²³.” In this context, the column *Decoração pelo mundo* was created to sustain this reorientation in patterns of taste, given the belief that Europe is home to houses more ‘authentic’ than those found in Brazil (including, as she recognizes, because they are located in already well-preserved cities, towns and neighbourhoods): “The idea was precisely to show what they do there, “look at what we can do” [...]. It was a way of validating this identity, not of imitating what they are doing. A way of helping people to really liberate themselves from rules,” given that European homes, she believes, have “much more relaxed decorations,” linked less to trends and more to the homeowners. So much so that little mention was made of stores, “in part because most came from family inheritance.” Concerning the origin of the articles, her assessment was that “really there did end up being a preference for Europe because I thought it was an experience closer to our own; American interior design was always more, you know, I found it tackier, it really had no similarity to the Brazilian design. None at all, but I think the latter had a greater identity with the European design.” So much so that the frequent articles on South Africa were included “to mix things up” – and thus, we could add, to offer the magazine some protection from being criticized as Eurocentric, given that 66.2% of its reports were based in Western European countries²⁴.

Consequently, while the interior projects that Felipe Dinucci designed for São Paulo’s elites between 1930 and 1955 were marked by the “spirit of the Louis XVI era” (Marques, 2018: 31), the analysis of the repertoires legitimized nowadays indicates the persistence of a French-European frame of reference, even if this influence is only reluctantly acknowledged.

However, gauging the French presence would be incomplete without describing the choices made today in France – as we have seen, the country with the highest number of occurrences in the sources under study. Firstly, France and Europe bring the beauty of the buildings and artifacts of the past, the ‘charm’ of the ‘old’ (*le charme de l’ancien*) that Brazil supposedly lacks. Since what exists in Brazil is, to a significant extent, a “modernist pastism” (allowing for the oxymoron) in the sense that, in terms of the country’s architecture, the heritage is modernism (Tavares, 2014), the resource is to European countries whenever the wish is to valorise truly old buildings. This is because pastism is today an inescapable preference in diverse countries, honouring labels popular in contemporary interior design like the “authentic,” the “vintage” and the “rustic” (Johnston & Baumann, 2007). In this context, the tendency is to select reports based in Europe to revere vernacular buildings rooted in an ancestral heritage, save when

modernism is not just associated with what is most revered in Brazil's production – as indicated by the category "modernist" being ranked first among the ten "styles" most frequently cited in *Casa e Jardim* between 2000 and 2015 (see Table 2) – but also as a movement that, like bossa-nova, expresses the "Brazilian essence" (Uliana, 2013).

The co-called Provençal style, for instance, is described as "a search for the fascination of other times," in spaces "that emphasize the romantic character of other periods, inherent to the Provençal universe." Originally published in Milan and released in São Paulo the same year (2013), the Italian book notes from the outset that "never perhaps has a region as small as Provence exerted such a strong influence on the universe of interior design," describing the dwellings of the south of France as being "cadenced by the rhythm of the past." The text highlights that "typical of the Provençal houses are the furniture relating to the world of antiquities of the nineteenth century," where the ironwork of the beds "maintains the ancient touch of the French tradition" (Capitanucci, 2013: 4, 6-7 and 12). The volume dedicated to the "Tuscan style" in the same collection sustains much the same tone. Indeed, the presentation of "old farmhouses and mansions, buildings with roots in the Renaissance" stresses that "the recuperation of these ancient buildings seeks to preserve the original elements of the building, its structures and claddings." The author goes on to note that "the interiors of Tuscan-style houses cannot lack old furnishings and objects, frequently encountered in the antiques markets" and that the reforms maintained "unaltered the authenticity of the house" (Savino, 2013: 4, 6, 12 and 36). While, as mentioned, the Italian collection includes the Tuscan and Provençal "styles," the collection originally published by the French newspaper *Le Figaro* (2008), for its part, attributes exclusively to France a type of rural home, discussing, in the same form, old rural properties whose renovation projects preserved or even restored the original elements – "the house conserved all its authenticity" (Druesne, 2010: 70).

But there is something else also sought in Europe, as can be discerned in the interview with the former editorial director of *Casa e Jardim* cited above. The sequential analysis of the reports based in France – the country with by far the highest number of towns and cities featured – shows that what is looked for are supposedly more 'authentic' houses whose distinctive elegance is perceived to reside not in perfect environments but in domestic arrangements impregnated with history.

Reporting from Paris, the first article published in the *Pelo mundo* column, forerunner of *Decoração pelo mundo*, features a penthouse in the 16th arrondissement of Paris whose "rolled steel floor is inserted with brass circles to imitate the stone and marble floor designs of French castles" (Phillips, 2005: 82). A one-storeyed terraced house facing the mountains of Marseille and full of "family items" figures, in the second report in France, as a space

that does not strive to be sophisticated at any price: “We see houses with impeccable style but no personality” (Hom, 2010a: 65). Another report from Marseille, featuring a nineteenth century house that once belonged to an illegitimate daughter of Napoleon, announces in its header that ‘living well’ means “taking the past into account without ignoring the future” (Hom, 2010b: 80). While some modernist precepts are almost 100% assimilated in the majority of the reports, such as the integration of previously separated rooms, the fact is that what is valorised most in these reviews from abroad are dwellings ‘with history,’ ‘unpretentious’ domestic spaces that, unlike the extremely expensive modernist homes celebrated in Brazil (Rosatti, 2018), have the particularity of displaying ‘family’ furniture and items and of attesting to pedigree by rooting the building in an ancestral past. Hence this second report from Marseille stresses that renovations should not “violate the origins” of the property.

In the Brazilian case, this fixation on ‘origins’ primarily occurs when discussing the achievements of its modernist architects, as indicated by the fact that the back cover to the commemorative 60th anniversary issue of *Casa e Jardim* shows a reproduction of the first issue of the title, whose texts and houses were authored by Oscar Niemeyer, Vilanova Artigas and Paulo Mendes da Rocha. Such a “return to origins” (Quintas, 2013a: 14) is not alien to the observation that in Brazil the institutions for conserving the nation’s built heritage are guided by modernist principles of hierarchization rather than historicist constructions²⁵. By contrast, the houses and apartments shown in France frequently have fireplaces framed by Rococo decorations, not to mention the frames themselves in wood or plaster, neoclassical *boiserie* panelling on the walls, skirting boards and ceilings of the Hausmannian interiors, signs of a reconciliation with a pastist decor. In the French case, therefore, we have a society that deals better with its past, as Annateresa Fabris (1993) stressed. Based in Occitania in the south of France, the fourth report valorises the huge spaces (with a ceiling height of 11m) of an old distillery transformed into a home and art gallery of a Danish family who conserved the “decorative elements of the past” (Hunglinger, 2011: 75). Entitled “A 400-year-old French place,” the fifth report from France discusses a residence that originally functioned as the servants’ quarters of a four-hundred-year-old castle located on the outskirts of Paris (Scoffoni, 2012a). In the same year, 2012, a sixth report on France describes a Parisian warehouse from the nineteenth century, a former stable-warehouse converted into a three-storey house that maintained the original structure, emphasizing that “nothing is shiny or brand new” in the residence “filled with objects containing histories, proudly time-worn” (Wullschleger, 2012: 120). Also in 2012, the seventh report depicts a house that had originally been a nineteenth-century industrial mill on the west coast of France, reformed “without erasing its identity.” The residence is described as “miles away from the conventional”

with furniture obtained from family, antiques markets and trips abroad: "There is no neat and standardized aesthetic in the house-mill" (Hom, 2012a: 104). In October 2012, the eighth report celebrates a 400m² house (with a 500 m² garden) in Bordeaux, the result of the reform of a former nineteenth-century hospital, which successfully contrasts the "industrial style of metallic items" and the "restored period furniture" (Scoffoni, 2012b). In the December 2012 issue, the ninth French report features a house from the end of the nineteenth century (full of "rare antiquities" and "vintage finds") situated in a medieval village (a listed heritage site) close to the city of Nantes (Hom, 2012b: 97). In the first issue of 2013, the tenth French house presented to readers was born from a century-old mill in Nîmes, in the south of the country, in which "despite the large-scale reform, everything was designed in the likeness of the original building" (Pissarra, 2013: 98). Marked by the "rustic" aspect of the structural wooden beams left exposed, the eleventh French home was once a nineteenth-century storehouse in a historical district of Bordeaux, whose walls were stripped back to reveal the original stonework (Degas, 2013). The twelfth report from France is a photo essay on the house of a designer in Paris, the city also providing the venue for the thirteenth and final report: featuring a residence once functioning as the servant quarters of a castle whose present-day owner is an entrepreneur in the furniture restoration sector, the property is praised for its "simple" and "natural" ornamentation, which ensures its "rustic beauty" (Scoffoni, 2014).

All the dwellings in France – some more, some less – contain items unusual in the context of the modernist houses revered in Brazil, such as crystal chandeliers and antique style furniture, which fit seamlessly into exposed metal structures. Mentioning the French castles recurrently, they also evoke the "neoclassical" buildings of contemporary São Paulo, which takes this universe as its source of inspiration.

CONCLUSION

My attempt to empirically describe the current particularities of the unequal exchanges between Brazil and France when it comes to ideas of 'good living' shows that the country continues to be oriented by European taste when celebrating historical mansions and furniture, in the same way that modernist mansions continue to be hailed as an expression of the "Brazilian essence" and, therefore, of independence from foreign influence. This perspective structuring the critical review and history of the architecture made in Brazil should not make us forget, though, the vital role of France in the validation of Brazilian modernism internationally (Grossman & Povureau, 2021). It could be said, therefore, that the "modernist pastism" so enduringly fomented by the Brazilian arbiters of good taste is also a way of canonizing the national architectural productions recognised and valorised by the

central countries (Chazaud, 2020). In this way, the effects of the symbolic domination of French taste are updated not only in relation to historicism but also in terms of the “avant-garde” principles of hierarchization.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, Brazilian modernism is celebrated in French architectural magazines like *Architectures à Vivre* even today, while in pastist publications, such as *Art et Décoration*, Brazilian dwellings completely vanish. This is one of the reasons why, as we have seen, the effect of cultural demonstration of the central countries remains strong in *Casa e Jardim*: while the distinctive trait of French “good manners of living” involves making the contemporary and the vernacular compatible, the Brazilian publications in which pastism is above all modernism inevitably seek abroad those homes that represent this *juste milieu* taste (Froissart, 2008) balancing modernity and tradition. It can be concluded, therefore, that if in the past “French-style living” revealed one of the most tenacious civilizational aspirations of the Brazilian elites, today Europe continues to teach Brazil to “live better,” promoting “truthful houses” whose progressivism consists of exorcising the “home decoration guidebook” and exalting the “authenticity” of dwellings with “history.”

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NOTES

- 1 Translated by David Rodgers.
- 2 This article is a modified version of a paper presented at the Third Congress of the Association of Brazilianists in Europe (ABRE), hosted in Prague but held remotely in 2021.
- 3 Interview conducted on November 29th, 2019 at the head office of the Brazilian Association of Interior Designers (ABD), located in the São Paulo district of Jardins.
- 4 “People lived in French-style houses, with Bailly projects, many copies and items of furniture from Maison Jansen [...]. Everyone lived in that way, both the group of Brazilian *vieux-riches* and the foreign *nouveaux-riches*, people with lots of money like the Matarazzo family and their 400 companies” (Moroni *apud* Lima, 2020: 63).
- 5 For two recent examples of this effect of French cultural demonstration, including in relation to the valorisation of Brazil’s historical heritage, see Madureira & Angiolillo (2021) and Maciel (2015).
- 6 Instituto Verificador da Circulação (IVC), the institute responsible for verifying print circulation numbers. Data relating to the period from January to June 2018.
- 7 According to IVC data relating to the first half of 2018, the print and digital circulation of *Casa e Jardim* was 112,290 monthly copies, compared to the 95,490 recorded for *Casa Cláudia*, 82,161 for *Minha Casa*, 55,474 for *Arquitetura e Construção* and 25,108 for *Casa Vogue*.
- 8 A central theme of CASACOR São Paulo in 2015 (Available at <<https://casacor.abril.com.br/profissionais/brasilidade-da-o-tom-e-estimula-os-profissionais-da-casa-cor-2015/>>. Accessed on Jan. 13th, 2023), ‘Brazilianness’ remained one of the principal themes of the *Morar Mais* fair, as shown by the yearbook acquired during an observational visit conducted on November 10th, 2019. Undoubtedly a strong influence in this context is the celebration of ‘diversity’ seen globally since the 1990s (Ortiz, 2007).
- 9 The Brazilian presence in this French domestic architecture magazine is discussed in a recently-submitted book (*As boas maneiras de morar. Repertórios prescritivos franceses e brasileiros no século XXI*) and article (“La place du Brésil dans les discours experts sur la maison en France”).

- 10 This sample of the column *Ícones* from the weekly supplement of the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* was selected because of its critical review of historical and transnational interior design, distinct from what guides the more informative articles making up the bulk of the supplement. This platform of authorized opinion does not necessarily reflect, then, the *Casa* supplement as a whole, which was not studied in full since there is no equivalent publication in France with which it could be compared.
- 11 In those cases in which more than one nationality appeared – common in this book whose personalities come from international high society – one occurrence for each main country was counted.
- 12 “A new Provence in which the stars are the family objects” (Rangel, 2008: 4).
- 13 The figures do not correspond to whole numbers because sometimes more than one ‘style’ was mentioned, which led me to introduce a weighting.
- 14 The embryo of the future *Decoração pelo mundo*, the column *Pelo mundo* was created in 2005 (n. 602).
- 15 According to the magazine’s media kit for 2019 (Available at <<https://www.publicidadeeditoraglobo.com.br>>. Accessed on Jan. 13th, 2023), author’s collection.
- 16 The São Paulo capital, where the editorial office of *Casa e Jardim* is located, was probably underestimated in these figures since only places explicitly mentioned were recorded; moreover, the decision was taken to record each place mentioned just once even when a location was evoked more than once in the same issue.
- 17 See the 2015 media kit (Available at <<https://www.publicidadeeditoraglobo.com.br/>>. Accessed on Jan. 13th, 2023). According to the National Association of Magazine Editors, “the South and Southeast are the regions with the highest concentration of readers, surpassing its share of the population” (Fact..., 2015: 21).
- 18 Ortiz (2019: 20) also discusses “the predominance of French and Italian companies and brands” in the universe of luxury goods.
- 19 The books were published in the following order: 1. Modern; 2. Classic; 3. Contemporary; 4. Tuscan; 5. Pop; 6. Vintage; 7. Mediterranean; 8. Ecological; 9. Minimalist; 10. Urban; 11. Provençal; 12. Oriental; 13. Rural; 14. High-Tech;

15. Surrealist; 16. Colonial; 17. Ethnic; 18. Rustic; 19. Asian; and 20. Nordic.
- 20 The titles of the books are (in English translation):
 1. Contemporary houses; 2. Colours and textures; 3. Living rooms; 4. Kitchens; 5. Bedrooms; 6. Bathrooms; 7. Cupboards and shelves; 8. Interiors always in vogue; 9. Optimized spaces; 10. Work environments; 11. Apartments and lofts; 12. Contemporary living rooms; 13. Fitted kitchens; 14. Designer bathrooms; 15. Colour in the environment; 16. Beach houses; 17. French rural homes; 18. Renovated buildings; 19. Simple and elegant; and 20. Wood in interior design.
- 21 It is also worth mentioning that *Art et Décoration* was one of the foreign titles acquired by a forerunner of interior design in Brazil, Antonio Borsoi, the son of Italian immigrants from São Paulo and a graduate of the Lyceum of Arts and Crafts, responsible for the interiors of the Guanabara Palace, the National Library, the Fire Brigade Building, the Colombo Pastry Shop and the Iris Cinema (Dantas, 2015: 23). The same periodical provided a source of references for the Art Deco Collection of Fúlvia and Adolpho Leirner (Simioni & Migliaccio, 2020).
- 22 “We are French people from France, we are not like AD [Architectural Digest], publishing internationally. We have some presence abroad, but they are French issues, so they cater more for ex-patriots [...] *Art et Décoration* is really France.” Interview with the chief editor of *Art et Décoration*, conducted on March 29th, 2017 in the magazine’s editorial office in Levallois-Perret, on the western outskirts of Paris.
- 23 Interview conducted via teleconference in July 29th, 2020.
- 24 According to the interviewee, the high frequency of South Africa is also due to the many ‘architect houses’ located on the seashore that became famous globally.
- 25 In the analysis of Fernando Atique (2019: 166), based on the works of Silvana Rubino and Maria Cecília Londres Fonseca. Discussing the disappearance of Monroe Palace – the first Brazilian building to receive an international award – and the Solar Monjope in Rio de Janeiro in the 1970s, Atique shows that the campaign to demolish the former building began in the Institute of National Historic and Artistic Heritage itself and that the demands to preserve both buildings emanated from sectors of

Rio society rather than from specialists working for the Brazilian bodies responsible for conserving the country's architectural heritage.

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"O BRASIL OLHA PARA O BRASIL"? O "MORAR À FRANCESA" NOS REPERTÓRIOS PRESCRITIVOS CONTEMPORÂNEOS (2000-2015)

Resumo

Se hoje se defende que os jardins e habitações ecléticos brasileiros nunca foram tão-somente cópia conforme de modelos europeus, visto que operaram uma apropriação específica inexistente na Europa, poder-se-ia tentar mostrar, num sentido inverso, que os modos de morar prestigiados no Brasil contemporâneo seguem orientados pelos referenciais estrangeiros. Com base no tratamento quantitativo e qualitativo da crítica de arquitetura e decoração, na observação de feiras dedicadas à casa e em entrevistas com profissionais de arquitetura doméstica franceses e brasileiros, este artigo postula que a ode contemporânea à "brasilidade" obscurece a persistência dos critérios de excelência advindos dos países que historicamente impuseram sua dominação simbólica e, no caso em pauta, do "bom gosto francês" (real ou imaginado) nas representações da "bela morada" no Brasil dos dias de hoje.

Palavras-chave

Origem nacional;
Repertórios prescritivos;
Arquitetura doméstica;
Brasil;
França.

"BRAZIL LOOKS AT BRAZIL"? "FRENCH-STYLE LIVING" AMONG CONTEMPORARY ARBITERS OF TASTE (2000-2015)

Abstract

Although it is commonly argued today that Brazil's eclectic gardens and dwellings were never just a copy of European models, since they involved a singular appropriation not found in Europe, it can also be shown that, conversely, the ways of living celebrated in contemporary Brazil are still informed by foreign reference. Based on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of architecture and interior design reviews, the observation of interior design fairs, and interviews with French and Brazilian professionals from the area of domestic architecture, this article postulates that the contemporary ode to 'Brazilianness' obscures the persistence of criteria of excellence imported from countries that have historically imposed their symbolic domination and, in this specific case, the continuing influence of 'French good taste' (real or imagined) in representations of the 'beautiful home' in today's Brazil.

Keywords

National origin;
Arbiters of taste;
Domestic architecture;
Brazil;
France.