

UNIT 15

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ON THE EDGE



Unit 15 will be rooted in the practice and thinking of AL_A. It will be run by all four directors of AL_A and Raffael Petrovic, which is a reflection of the collaborative way we work. As a studio, we are interested in the identity of places and how the transformation of a piece of city can be occasioned by buildings rooted in place. Our projects are driven by research into geographical, cultural and economic contexts to create a sense of place and community. We are interested in the intersections between craftsmanship, volume production and innovative digital design tools.

The geography of Lisbon is beguiling: seven hills reveal dramatic vistas at every street corner, the Tagus estuary promises so much and the line at which river becomes ocean is palpable. Lisbon's position on the edge of Europe has shaped its identity, its architecture and the civic sensibilities of Lisboa. Rather than being mired in European affairs, Lisbon has always looked outwards, towards the sea, towards Africa, South America and Asia. The city is an expression of its inhabitants and their relationship not only to the sea but also to history and craft: from *calçada* pavements to the *azulejos*, the predominantly blue-and-white ceramic tiles that decorate countless walls of everything from churches to bars. Lisbon is both high octane and

relaxed; it is young and diverse, tolerant and affordable, and washed in a sublime light.

Today the riverside edges of Lisbon, from where the great explorers set off, are disconnected from the city and the hills. We want students to propose buildings that reconnect the city to the waterfront and to redefine the city's twenty-first century relationship to its river. Your proposals should make a piece of city that balances history and modernity, the city of flesh and concrete. The sites will be located along Lisbon's *Arco Ribeirinho* stretching from the EXPO '98 site in the north to the Torre de Belém in the southeast, and on the opposite banks of the Tagus in towns such as Almada or Barreiro. Each of you will select an existing building in the city to research and then integrate into your project.

We will start the year with a three week *charrette* in which students will design a pavilion on the Praça do Comércio in the heart of Lisbon. The aim is to understand and express the key contextual qualities that will drive your thinking. This project should generate initial impulses for your buildings. In early November we will visit Lisbon to indulge in its unique cultural and physical topography. We will explore the city's art, culture, music, food and craftsmanship as well as its riverfront and architecture.