

English artist providing panels and paintings for new hotel

JAMES LEE talks to the artist whose work is adding distinction to the de-luxe Hotelapa, currently under construction in the historic Lapa area of Lisbon, and due to be completed in the early part of next year.

CONSTRUCTION of the de-luxe Hotelapa is expected to be completed before the Spring. Its opening will shake up Lisbon's front-rank hotels.

Hotelapa is located in close proximity to the British Embassy and British Ambassador's Residence, in Lisbon's historic Lapa district. The main entrance to the hotel is from the Rua Pau de Bandeira (Flagpole Street).

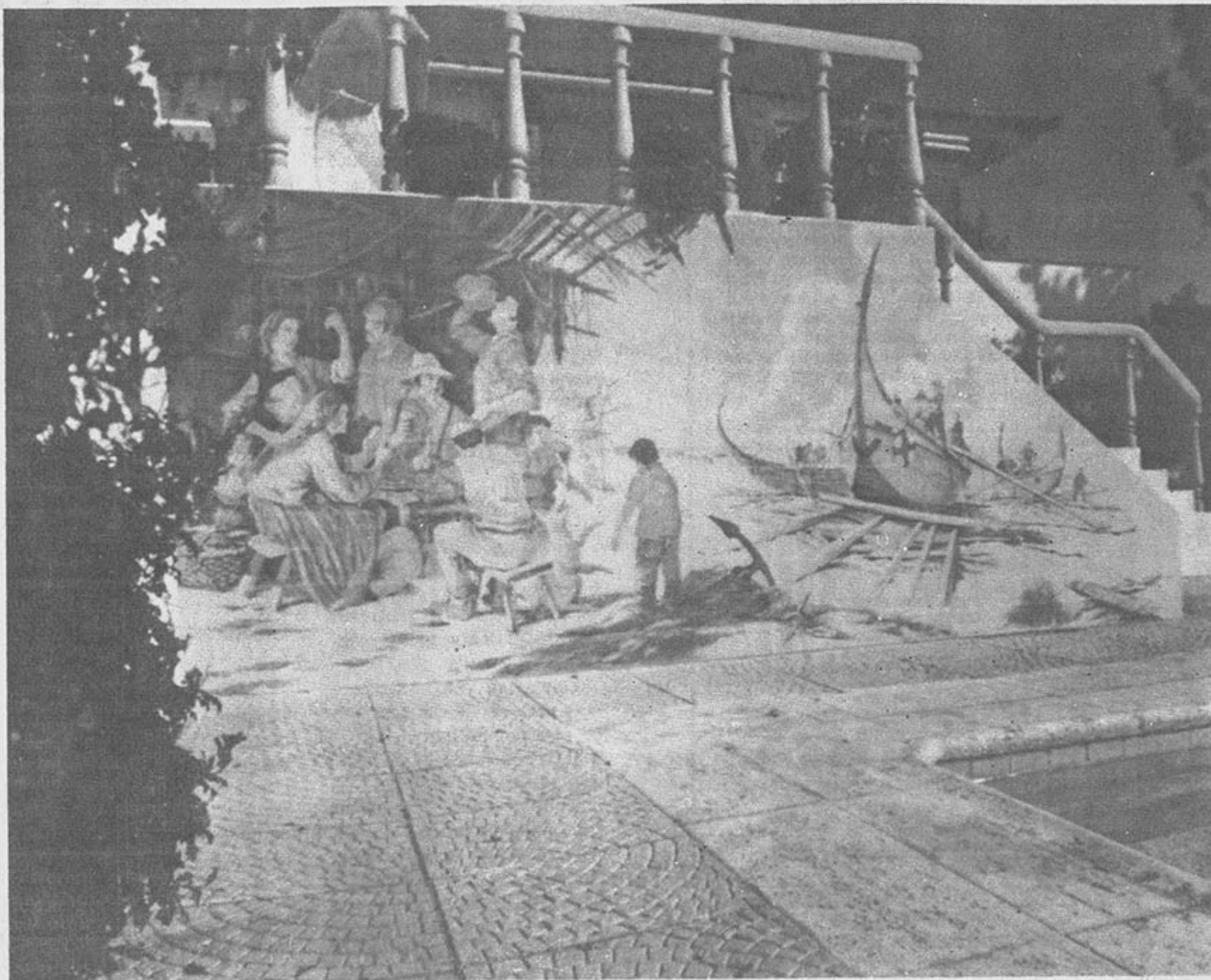
John O'Connor, an English figurative painter based in Sintra, told the APN about his artistic contribution to the decorative details of Hotelapa.

The centre-piece of the outside of the hotel will be a spectacular cascade. John O'Connor has almost finished painting some 150sq.m. of cobalt blue tiles for panels to decorate the cascade. "A faint echo of elements of eighteenth century Chinoiserie" was how the painter described the decorative style of the tiles.

Outstanding ceiling

The cascade is positioned directly behind the hotel's fully restored "palacete". Hotelapa's collective areas are all earmarked for the "palacete". John O'Connor told the APN that the main feature of the small palace was its outstanding ceiling decoration by the "great eighteenth century and early nineteenth century painter Colum Bano". The ceiling has been fully restored to its past glory by Edmund Silva.

An L-shaped court of two wings, built into the side of Lapa Hill, is also located to



One of the Chinoiserie panels for the swimming pool area.

the rear of the "palacete". It is here that the lion's share of the hotel's approximately 100 rooms and suites have been built.

Other work done or being done by John O'Connor in Hotelapa includes the painting of a decorative Nereids band around the swimming pool, oval panels for the hotel's bathrooms, and some 240 small panels with views of Lisbon for meeting areas in the hotel.

The finance capital for Hotelapa was put up by Glitter Hotels, owners of the five-star Hotel Albatroz in Cascais. Dr. Simões de Almeida holds the reins at Glitter Hotels. He has ensured from the embryo-phase of the project that only high quality, traditional building materials have been used in construction.

Every room has a balcony

The hotel will be medium-sized, thus facilitating the provision of a personalised service for hotel guests. Ample underground parking space will be available, a necessity in Lapa. All of the hotel's 100 or so rooms and suites will have a balcony.

The hotel will open about one year behind schedule. Construction of the hotel was slowed down by the death last Christmas of the architect for the project, the much-respected Alberto Cruz.

He left a number of unfinished drawings including those of the cascade. Glitter Hotels subsequently asked John O'Connor to take over the decorative

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details of the tiles, stonework and sculpture integrated into the development blueprints.

The discovery of centuries-old artefacts during excavation work put a further brake on building. The artefacts are now fully boxed and protected deep under the hotel's foundations.

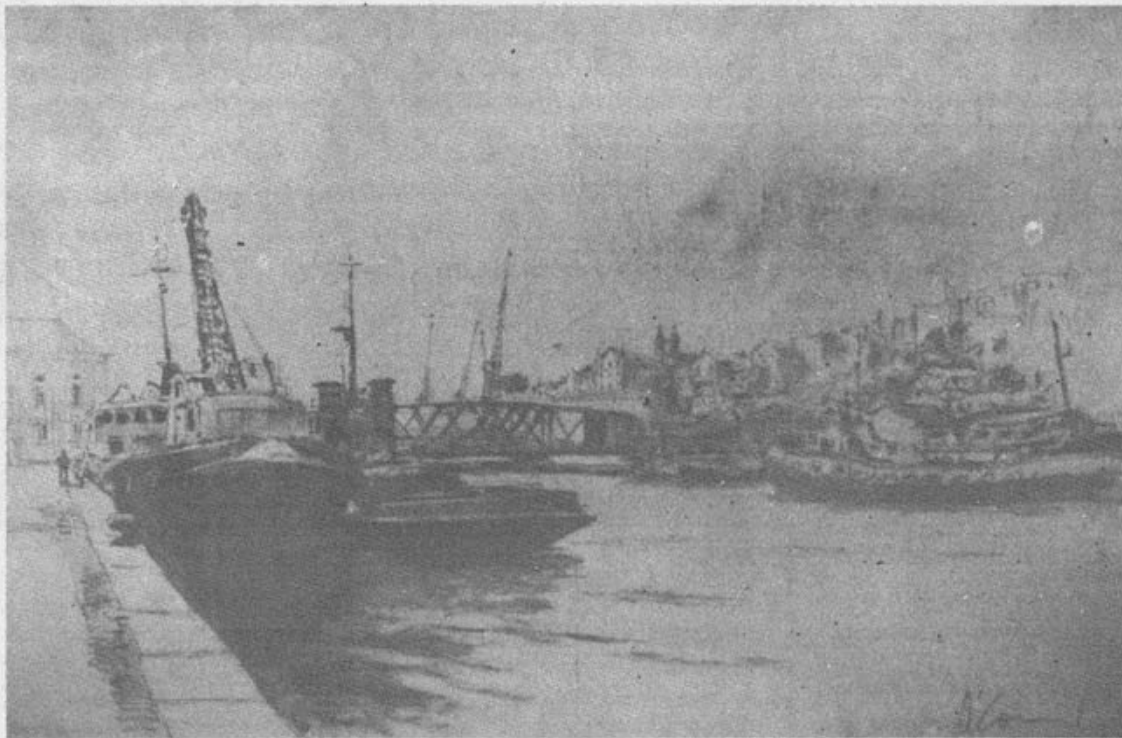
John O'Connor has been living on and off in Portugal since 1973. Between November 21 and November 28 of this year, he exhibited a selection of his works with oils and watercolours at Lisbon's Grémio Literário. The exhibition was sponsored by Selecções do Reader's Digest.

Grand old lady of painting

Asked about his thoughts on contemporary creative waves in Portuguese painting, he commented: "Under the old regime, there was a stagnation of artistic activity. Artists had to leave the country. An example of an artist who left the country is the grand old lady of Portuguese painting, Vieira da Silva." She has been acclaimed in Paris since the 1950s. Now that pent-up energy has been released and an uninhibited freshness of expression is widespread".

John O'Connor referred by name to Julião Saramento, João Grijo and Isabel Gões as being artists at the helm of the current Portuguese creative impulse.

Centuries-old artefacts found during excavations



Above: a view of the River Tagus for one of the meeting areas.

Left: the artist in contemplative mood.



The Santa Justa 'lift' – another of the paintings.