



Home



My Network



Jobs



Messaging

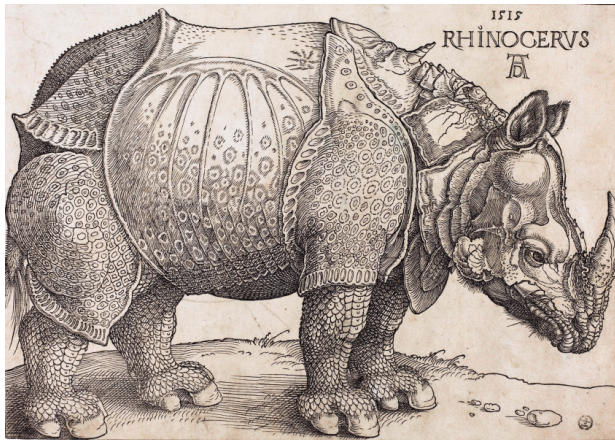


Notif

[Edit article](#)

[View stats](#)

[View post](#)



Lisbon's Unique Street Style Owes it all to a Rhino



Christine Alexiou

Writer/Story Editor/Content Creator

2 articles

February 1, 2020

Some world-class cities like Rome, New York, Paris, Rio de Janeiro or Dubai take your breath away with awe-inspiring,

iconic landmarks they've become synonymous with, while other cities beguile you in a more atmospheric and subtle way. Among those cities is Lisbon, Portugal.



Lisbon's delights lie in the combination of its location on the edge of the sapphire Tagus River, the heady views from the city's multiple *miradouros* or look-outs, the yellow trams traversing the streets and a distinct decorative style.

One of the most eye-catching decorative elements is the cobbled sidewalks and praças, or plazas, laid out in distinctive black and white designs. In a recent New York Times article, Luisa Dornellas, director of the schools of gardeners and stone pavers said, "*They are a carpet that people don't always notice.*"

But the *calçada portuguesa* (Portuguese pavements) are as much part of Lisbon's heritage as a plate of grilled sardines and a glass of port. And legend has it – that the art owes a great debt to a rhinoceros -- a white rhinoceros named Ganga from India.

Ganga arrived in Lisbon in 1515. It was a gift from Afonso de Albuquerque, the Governor of Portuguese India to King Manuel I for his birthday.



In the year prior to the celebration, Manuel was planning his royal procession and worried about getting everybody's shoes (or hooves), regalia and carriages all muddy. It was decided that granite from the Porto region would be used to cobble the main roads of the procession route. And with that decree, the *calçada portuguesa* was born.

Another piece of local lore claims that the mosaics were to be black and white to disguise any rhino droppings at the royal birthday blowout.

Ganga was one of the star attractions during the birthday procession and caused a stir all over Europe. In December 1515, King Manuel decided to send him to Rome as a gift to

Pope Leo X in return for support of Portugal's ventures into the Orient. But the ship ran into a violent storm off the coast of Genoa and sunk killing the entire crew and cargo. Ganga was immortalized as a statue on one of the turrets of the Tower of Belém.

As for the *calçada portuguesa*, the rubble was used to pave the streets and public spaces after the devastating earthquake of 1755. But in 1842 a limestone version in a zigzag pattern was created at the Castle of St. George that most closely resembles what decorates the streets of Lisbon today.




The locals were so delighted by the effect of the mosaic carpets that they became a tourist attraction in the country

and the *calçada portuguesa* spread throughout Lisbon and its colonies.

Among the most famous is the wave pattern in Rossio Square, one of the most popular sites in central Lisbon. The pattern provides inspiration for the 2.5-kilometer-long stretch of Copacabana boardwalk in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Pavers, known as “calceteiros” place chunky cubes of black basalt and white limestone by hand to form murals featuring intricate patterns, animals, flowers, coat of arms, and historical scenes.

 Statue of Poet Fernando Pessoa on Rua Garrett The mostly male artisans are graduates of the City's Escolas de Jardinagem e Calceteiros (The Schools of Gardeners and Stone Pavers) established in 1986 to keep the tradition alive. Their job is to maintain the surfaces in the city as well as to create new ones.

It takes about 18 months to complete the course and receive a certificate. As stated in the New York Times article, up until the 1990s there were 400 pavers in Lisbon but with concrete sidewalks becoming the norm, currently, only about 20 students graduate each year.

The work is extremely labour intensive and not without its critics. Slippery limestone is no one's friend during the winter or a rainstorm. Despite the ability of many Lisbonites – especially the children – to navigate the sidewalks up and down the city's hilly streets with ease – there are accidents. But when Lisbon's City Hall opted for replacing a few stretches with concrete – it sparked protest.

The compromise was to maintain the mosaic sidewalks within the historic city centre while making them safer. Suggested fixes include swapping out some of the slick limestones for gray granite for more traction and on sidewalks that are wide enough putting in a strip of concrete.

While the streets of Lisbon are changing with the times, the mosaics aren't disappearing just yet. They're so prized as part of Lisbon's historical brand that pavers have been immortalized in bronze next to the grand Hotel Avenida Palace in the central Praça dos Restauradores.

 Bronze tribute to Pavers next to Hotel Avenida Palace

Characteristic of the bronze statues of historical figures you can find throughout the city, the monument depicts two pavers, one crouched chipping at the stone while the other tamps down the surface. The plaque reads: “*Tribute from the city of Lisbon to the Pavers who build the ground we tread.*”

Published by



Christine Alexiou
Writer/Story Editor/Content Creator
Published • 3y

[2 articles](#)

In October, I had the chance to visit the lovely city of Lisbon, Portugal. I knew it was a historic city but had no idea about the enchanting mosaic sidewalks and squares. Little did I know there was a connection to a famed rhino in the mix.
[#sidewalks](#) [#rhinoceros](#) [#lisbon](#) [#portugal](#) [#historical](#)
[#decorative](#) [#royal](#) [#photography](#) [#belemtower](#) [#travel](#) [#tourist](#)
[#FernandoPessoa](#)



Like



Comment



Share



Amanda Marsh, CTP and 6 others

2 comments