Signs from Romeo de Paoli's hotel projects
Letreiros dos projetos de Romeo de Paoli para hotéis

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ABSTRACT

Romeo de Paoli was born into a family of Italian builders in the recently inaugurated city of Belo Horizonte. He graduated in Engineering and also worked professionally as an architect, builder, visual artist and entrepreneur. He was one of the most important figures in the city's civil construction industry in the first half of the 20th century. Among the thirteen projects approved by the city hall in the 1930s for hotel use in the central area, six were designed by his office. This article explores a brief moment in his career, a gap between the approval of three of these buildings, which still retain their original signs: Imperial Palace (1934), Piraquara (1935), and Cláudio Manoel (1939). Often ignored even by heritage protection agencies, these graphic artifacts are part of Belo Horizonte's typographic landscape. Recording and collecting data such as the building's identity (image, name, address, original use, current use, location, architect's name and date of construction), data on the nominative architectural typography, with photos, specifications on the typeface, composition and materials used, are premises of the investigation and tools for cataloging the Belo Horizonte's graphic memory.

Keywords: Architecture. Design. Memory. Heritage. Typography.

RESUMO

Romeo de Paoli nasceu em uma família de construtores italianos na recém-inaugurada Belo Horizonte (MG). Formou-se em Engenharia e atuou profissionalmente como arquiteto, construtor, artista plástico e empresário. Foi um dos mais relevantes nomes da construção civil da cidade na primeira metade do século XX. Entre os 13 projetos aprovados pela prefeitura na década de 1930 para uso hoteleiro na área central, seis são de autoria de seu escritório. Este artigo aborda um breve momento de sua trajetória, hiato entre a aprovação de três desses edifícios que mantêm íntegros seus letreiros originais: Imperial Palace (1934), Piraquara (1935) e Cláudio Manoel (1939). Frequentemente ignorados até mesmo pelos órgãos de proteção ao patrimônio, esses artefatos gráficos integram a paisagem tipográfica belo-horizontina. Registrar e coletar dados como identidade do edifício (imagem, nome, endereço, uso original, uso atual, localização, nome do arquiteto e data de construção), dados sobre a tipografia arquitetônica nominativa, com foto, especificações sobre o tipo de letra, composição e materiais utilizados são premissas da investigação e ferramentas para catalogação da memória gráfica de Belo Horizonte.

Palavras-chave: *Arquitetura.* Design*. Memória. Patrimônio. Tipografia.*

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INTRODUCTION

When walking through cities, attention is often confined to what lies within the immediate field of vision. A utilitarian gaze frequently overlooks a range of stimuli present in the urban landscape, including signs that display the baptismal names of buildings and the distinctive architectural typography used in their inscriptions. This article focuses specifically on three such permanent inscriptions that identify a trio of hotels designed by Romeo de Paoli, all of which still retain their original signage: the Imperial Palace (1934), Piraquara (1935), and Cláudio Manoel (1939) buildings. These signs represent fragments of an often invisible yet recently documented heritage, each revealing its own narrative.

This study originates from the author's master's research titled *Horizonte tipográfico: um inventário de tipografias arquitetônicas nominativas em Belo Horizonte do período entre 1932 e 1942*, defended in December 2024. By identifying and organizing graphic artifacts that had not yet been cataloged, the investigation contributed to the preservation of memory, identity, and heritage in the capital of Minas Gerais, while also exploring the relationship between architecture and type design. The theoretical and methodological framework draws on prior research conducted on collections from São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, under the supervision of Priscila Farias of the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism and Design at Universidade de São Paulo. The study adopted methods and procedures developed by *Projeto Paisagens Tipográficas* (Typographic Landscapes Project)[1] to address the subject.

If culture is understood as a way of life, then visual culture shapes both the world and the way it is perceived (Freedman, 2002). This field of study is not structured around the names of artifacts, facts, and/or subjects, but rather around their cultural meanings. It is closely tied to the mediation of representations, values, and identities (Sardelich, 2006). The visual culture of a society is thus composed of its pictorial and graphic creations, visual grammars, and modes of communication, as well as the social, cultural, and symbolic relationships that emerge in the production and dissemination of visual artifacts (Campos, 2012).

Frequently regarded as primary sources of research, graphic artifacts are cultural products that serve as mediators of socially shared practices and values. They embody, through their materiality, the customs, values, and technologies associated with the specific time and place in which they are produced and utilized (Santos, 2005, pp. 13-15). According to Braga and Farias (2018), graphic artifacts are defined as any objects created (written, engraved, or inscribed) by humans to fulfill functions related to visual communication (whether two- or

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1   Developed by members of the Typography and Graphic Language Research Group, accredited by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (*Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico* – CNPq) at Centro Universitário Senac, in partnership with the Architectural Typography Research Group, accredited by CNPq at Universidade Estadual de Campinas, with support from the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (*Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior* CAPES), CNPq, and the São Paulo Research Foundation (*Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo* – FAPESP).

three-dimensional) and considered in terms of their aesthetic, cognitive, and semiotic aspects as potential conveyors of information. As sources for examining societal dynamics, graphic artifacts contribute to visual culture and to the construction of collective identities through communicative experiences. Integrated into the urban fabric, they function as part of the informational structure of cities, guiding flows and signaling specific areas.

This article did not seek to provide an in-depth analysis of the typefaces included in the inventory. The field research and digital data cataloging were conducted using the card system developed by *Projeto Paisagens Tipográficas*. Each card used in cataloging a typeface contains seven items that describe its formal characteristics. Analysis of these elements enables the classification of typefaces, particularly for generating statistical data and facilitating potential comparative studies with other initiatives in the field, such as the completed theses by Salomon (2011) on Rio de Janeiro and D'Elboux (2013) on São Paulo. Similar to the present study, those works examined features such as typeface style (serif, sans serif, display, script), orthographic usage (uppercase, lowercase, title case, small caps), weight (light, medium, bold, black), slant (upright, italic), alignment (left, right, justified, centered), material (metal, wood, stone, paint), and relief (high, low, flat).

Often overlooked by passersby, nominative inscriptions form part of Belo Horizonte's material heritage. Many of these inscriptions are damaged or obscured by architectural modifications, traffic signage, advertising structures, electric fences, insufficient maintenance, or poorly executed renovation projects. Documenting and collecting data on these inscriptions, including information about the building's identity (name, address, original and current use, location references, architect's name, and date of approval by the city government), as well as details of its nominative architectural typography with specifications on the typeface, composition, and materials used, serves as a vital tool for cataloging the graphic memory of Belo Horizonte.

THE DE PAOLI

Positioned between the entrance and the screen, Cine Glória showcased the bold engineering feat of being supported by the first 15-meter free-span reinforced concrete beam constructed in Belo Horizonte (MG) in 1926. The residents of Belo Horizonte expressed skepticism. The prevailing sentiment was one of doubt regarding the structural integrity of what was, at the time, the largest, most American, and most extravagant of the city's cinemas (Andrade, 2017). In response to public concern and to demonstrate the project's safety, architect Ângelo Marcelo de Paoli removed the shoring and sat atop the beam himself (Filgueiras, 2016).

Of Italian origin, Ângelo Marcelo de Paoli was born in Polesella, Italy, in 1882 and immigrated to Brazil with his parents at the age of nine. After a brief return to his homeland, he settled in Belo Horizonte, which was still under construction at the time. The abolition of slavery in 1888 and, subsequently, the Proclamation of

the Republic in 1889 formed the historical backdrop for the founding of the new capital of Minas Gerais in 1897.

In Belo Horizonte, Ângelo worked as a bricklayer's assistant, bricklayer, craftsman, and eventually as a builder. On construction sites largely staffed by Black laborers, opportunities for professional advancement were typically reserved for those of European origin. As a craftsman, he contributed to several notable projects, including the buildings of the Finance Department, the former Law School, and the Palácio da Liberdade, where he was responsible for the plasterwork. He constructed numerous mansions along Avenida João Pinheiro; the residences of Estevão Pinto and Benjamim Guimarães; the Pathé Cinema; the *Banco Hipotecário e Agrícola do Estado de Minas Gerais*, located on *Praça Sete*; and Cine Glória on Avenida Afonso Pena, the site where he famously demonstrated his engineering expertise shortly before his untimely death at the age of 45. Ângelo also built a house on Rua Bonfim with his father and brother, where he lived with his wife, Elvira Canfora (Rome, 1889–?), and their eight children: Carmelita, Anita, Julieta, Rodolfo, Roberto, Raul, Remo, and Romeo de Paoli, their eldest son, born in Belo Horizonte in 1908 (Filgueiras, 2016).

While still a teenager, Romeo de Paoli began his career as an apprentice architect in the office of Antônio da Costa Christino[2]. Between 1928 and 1934, he served as a first-class construction inspector for the city of Belo Horizonte. During this period, he earned a degree from the School of Engineering at Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG) in 1932, the same year he established his own office. He was a pioneer in the exploration of limestone quarries in Pedro Leopoldo and Lagoa Santa, municipalities within the metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte. In 1939, he founded Louza Remy, an artificial marble manufacturing company. As an entrepreneur, he also owned a construction materials business, *Construções e Indústrias Reunidas Romeo de Paoli LTDA*, which was founded around 1940 and remained in operation until 1945, when he relocated to Rio de Janeiro. He passed away there in 1994 (Filgueiras, 2016).

Romeo de Paoli was one of the leading figures in the architectural landscape of Belo Horizonte. In addition to the Imperial Palace, Piraquara, and Cláudio Manoel buildings, discussed in this article, his office was responsible for a number of significant projects, including *Colégio Santo Agostinho*[3] (1935); *Edifício Greco*[4] (1936); *Colégio Imaculada Conceição*[5] (1936); the design and construction of the swimming pool, changing rooms, and playground at *Minas Tênis Clube*[6] (1937); *Hotel Madrid*[7]

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2   Portuguese architect and builder born in 1869, he was a renowned designer of buildings in Belo Horizonte, working primarily during the 1910s and 20s. He kept his architecture office active until 1931, one year before his passing on August 15, 1932.

3   Located at Avenida Amazonas, 1803.

4   Located at Rua Rio de Janeiro, 348.

5   Located at Rua da Bahia, 1534.

6   With Alfredo Carneiro Santiago.

7   Located at Rua dos Guaranis, 12.

(1937); as well as the Mauro Queiroz[8] (1936), *Tupinambás*[9] (1940), *Império*[10] (1940), Elmar (1947), and Uberaba[11] (1950) buildings; and *Banco Financial da Produção*[12] (1944) (Filgueiras, 2016).

METHODOLOGY

The material corpus of this research falls within the field of memory studies. It is a historical investigation (both documentary and iconographic in nature), employing a qualitative approach with an exploratory character. The theoretical framework is grounded in bibliographic research focused on the fields of graphic design and architecture. The literature review enabled the identification of the architectural styles of the buildings, the clarification of concepts related to typography, and the contextualization of the historical period in which the hotels and their signage were introduced in the city. The scope of the study was limited to buildings authored by Romeo de Paoli, all originally designed to function as inns. Field research was conducted in the hypercenter of Belo Horizonte and considered only those typographic examples that were in place at the time of each building's inauguration.

In graphic memory studies, the object can be approached similarly to how it is treated in the fields of archaeology and anthropology, that is, any artifact from the past is analyzed as a human-made object that offers insights into the material and cultural (both technical and symbolic) aspects of the time and society to which it belonged. In this context, the graphic artifact serves as both a source and a subject of study within the scope of graphic memory (Braga; Farias, 2018).

An ideal methodological procedure for the investigation of typographic landscapes is understood to require not only careful protocols for data collection and systematization but also coherent methods of analysis and interpretation. The resulting data must enable the identification of cultural specificities and allow for the comparison of cases across different locations and historical periods (Gouveia *et al.*, 2007).

Since 2003, *Projeto Paisagens Tipográficas* has been investigating typographic elements present in urban environments. For the study of the city of São Paulo (SP), a card-based system was developed to support field surveys and the digital cataloging of data. The involvement of researchers from various disciplines (including architecture, design, history, geology, and photography) contributed to shaping a comprehensive data collection framework. This system was later adapted and applied in the study *Tipografia arquitetônica carioca* by Carlos Alexandre Salomon (2011), which, like the present research, focused exclusively on nominative typography.

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8   Located at Rua Acre, 107. Headquarters of the Chauffeurs Center of Belo Horizonte. Designed by Ângelo Murgel.

9   Located at Rua Tupinambás, 671.

10   Located at Rua Tupinambás, 379. With Carneiro Rezende & Cia.

11   Located at Avenida Augusto de Lima, 279.

12   Located at Avenida Afonso Pena, 571. Currently *Hotel Financial*.

In both cases, data are organized using two cataloging cards: Card A for the building and Card B for the sign.

In this adaptation, the first four fields are shared by both forms (A and B). Data collection was guided by a route mapped according to the locations of nominative architectural typographies (Figure 1). This configuration is recorded in Field 1, which refers to the order number. The sequence reflects the itinerary followed by the researcher/author and serves merely as a suggested path for navigating and locating the examples under study. Field 2 records the date of the fieldwork. Field 3 documents the building's address, and Field 4 identifies the individual responsible for data collection.

01 Ed. Imperial Palace

02 Ed. Piraquara

03 Ed. Claudio Manoel
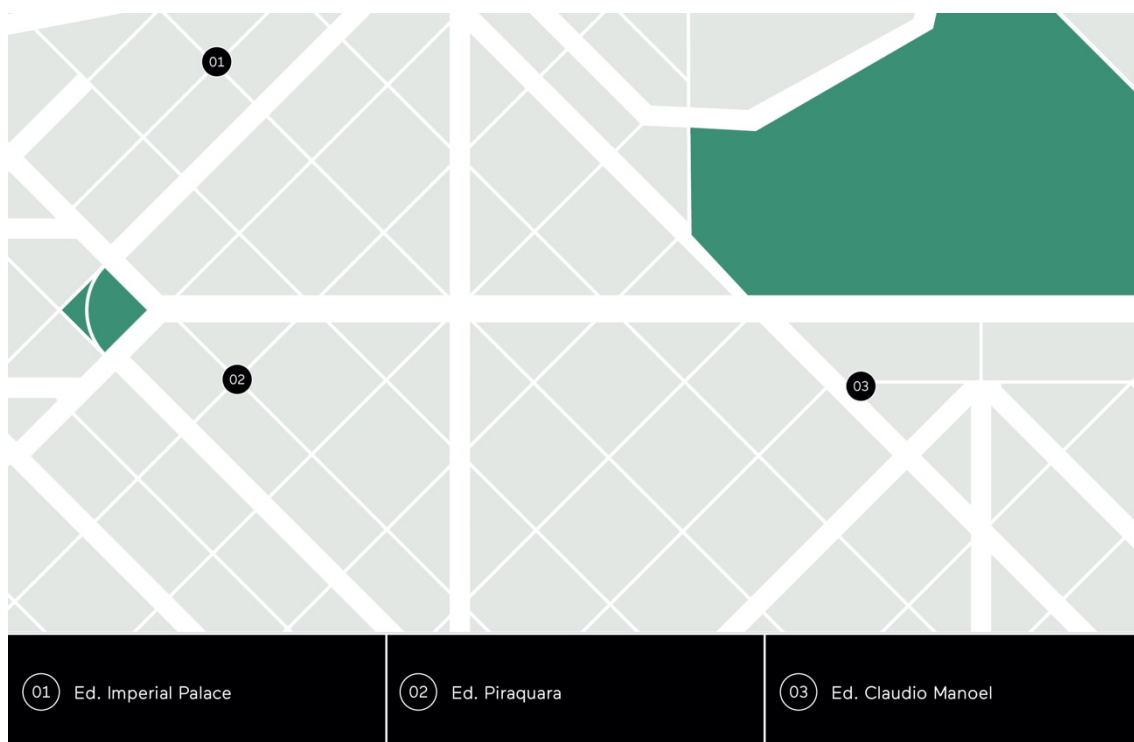
Source: Author's archive (2024).
Figure 1. Location of the inventoried typefaces.

In Form A, Field 5 refers to the architectural style of the building. The date of project approval is recorded in Field 6. Information regarding authorship is provided in Field 7. Field 8 classifies the current condition of the building. Fields 9 and 10 document the original and current uses of the property, respectively. Field 11 contains a map indicating the location of the object of study within the urban area, while Field 12 is designated for a digital image of the property. Finally, Field 13 is reserved for additional observations by the individual responsible for the survey.

Form B contains specific data related to the nominative architectural typography. Field 5 records the authorship of the typographic element. Field 6 provides information on the condition of the sign, while Field 7 indicates its visual placement. Fields 8, 9, and 10 classify the typography according to family, orthographic use, weight, slant, alignment, material, and relief. Fields 11 and 12 include visual documentation: a general view showing the typography's position and proportion in

relation to the building, and a detailed image of the typographic element. Field 13 is reserved for additional observations. *Edifício Cláudio Manoel* (Carlos Manoel Building) features two distinct typographies: one for the word *Edifício* and another for the name of the poet and *inconfidente*[13]. In this case, two separate forms were created (B1 and B2), one for each occurrence.

One of the main modifications introduced to the card system proposed by *Projeto Paisagens Tipográficas* in this study was the inclusion of an item specifically addressing the condition of the sign. Previous studies assessed only the condition of the building; however, during the course of this research, particular issues were identified that adversely affect the condition of the nominative architectural typography, even in cases where the building itself remains well preserved. In the present sample, two-thirds of the signs were found to be in poor condition, primarily due to compromised legibility caused by electric fences, pipes, concertinas, inadequate maintenance, and advertising installations.

Data collection was conducted in two stages. The first stage took place in the field, guided by the card system, during which photographs of the buildings were also captured. The second stage involved supplementing the data through consultation of official records at the Public Archives of the City of Belo Horizonte, the Urban Information and Registration Department, and the Abílio Barreto Historical Museum. Figures 2, 3, and 4 present Forms A and B for the three inventoried buildings, completed with information gathered from both stages of the research process.

Source: Author's archive (2024).
Figure 2. Cards A and B used in the survey of *Edifício Imperial Palace*.

13 *Inconfidente* refers to someone associated with the *Inconfidência Mineira*, a historic Brazilian independence movement, so it's often kept as a proper noun or translated as "*Inconfidente*" to retain the historical context.

Source: Author's archive (2024).
Figure 3. Cards A and B used in the survey of *Edifício Piraquara*.

Source: Author's archive (2024).
Figure 4. Cards A and B used in the survey of *Edifício Cláudio Manoel*.

As part of the research project *Horizonte Tipográfico: um inventário de tipografias arquitetônicas nominativas em Belo Horizonte do período entre 1932 e 1942*, the streets of the city center were surveyed over the course of a week to catalog typographies relevant to the study, along with the *façades* of the buildings in which they appeared. The focus was on the city's earliest vertical constructions in the Art Deco and proto-modern styles. An initial set of approximately 60 examples was narrowed down to 24 inventoried signs following the cross-referencing of collected information. For the purposes of this article, the analysis is limited to the previously cataloged data concerning the three buildings highlighted herein: Imperial Palace, Piraquara, and Cláudio Manoel.

ESPM-Rio, Diálogo com a Economia Criativa, Rio de Janeiro, v. 10, n 29, p. 162-180, mai./ago. 2025.

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A visit to the Municipal Public Archives was conducted with a focus on the three buildings examined in this study. The process demands great care to avoid damaging the archival materials, which include official seals approving the construction and the signatures of the builder, property owner, and the architect and/or engineer. In this research, project authorship is attributed to the technical manager who signed the plans. The date associated with each building corresponds to the date of project approval, as indicated in the documentation. Of the items inventoried in this study, only the original plan for the Imperial Palace Building is preserved in the Public Archives collection. The original plans for the remaining buildings were lost; however, copies were located in the Urban Information and Registration Department, which operates exclusively through the online service portal of the Belo Horizonte City Hall.

Subsequently, a visit was made to the library of the Abílio Barreto Historical Museum, an institution dedicated since 1943 to the history, research, production, and dissemination of knowledge about Belo Horizonte. The museum houses the Romeo de Paoli Collection, which comprises 131 printed photographic positives of his architectural works. The high-quality, well-composed images reflect the architect's commitment to documenting his projects and confirm that the signs on the buildings examined in this study were installed at the time of their inauguration.

Research conducted at the Library of the School of Architecture at UFMG led to the discovery of Carlos Roberto Noronha's master's dissertation, defended at the institution in 1999. Entitled *Área Central de Belo Horizonte: arqueologia do edifício vertical e espaço urbano construído*, the dissertation investigates the emergence and dissemination of verticalization in downtown Belo Horizonte, aiming to make the spatial conformation and the vertical city produced therein more legible (Noronha, 1999). The term *archaeology* refers to the detailed documentary analysis of the evolution of buildings in Belo Horizonte, structured across eight periods, one of which encompasses the timeframe addressed in this study. Noronha's work served as a reference for the description of the buildings examined here and provided a range of historical data instrumental in framing the notion of modernity in the city under investigation.

Although this study is limited by criteria related to the location of buildings, time frame, authorship, and function, the same methodology may be applied in future research to other groups of examples, with the aim of expanding the cataloged typographic landscape.

AN INVENTORY OF NOMINATIVE ARCHITECTURAL TYPOGRAPHIES

Research on graphic memory and visual culture shares a common interest in understanding the visual propositions and forms of a society, as well as how these elements are reflected within them. The researcher plays an active role in selecting, interpreting, and recontextualizing a set of graphic artifacts. The formation of such a collection has the potential to evoke the collective memory of a people in the present and, through a narrative of the past, contribute to the construction of their identity. Visual communication elements associated with the graphic universe, such as illustrations, photographs, and typographic components, are regarded as legitimate

subjects of research related to graphic memory. The collection and organization of these elements are essential for the development of databases that support the majority of studies in this field (Braga; Farias, 2018). The aim of this article is to establish a collection of graphic artifacts found in the typographic landscape of Belo Horizonte.

The surplus generated by favorable export prices led to a wave of prosperity in Brazil at the end of World War I (1914–1918). This economic upswing helped solidify Belo Horizonte's role as an administrative center and significantly transformed its economic foundation. As the city expanded and established itself as a hub for industry, commerce, and services, the demand for hotel accommodations increased accordingly. A proliferation of guest houses emerged to meet the growing needs of visitors drawn by the city's administrative functions as the state capital. Of the 13 vertical buildings intended for hotel use that were approved by the Belo Horizonte city government within the boundaries of the hypercenter during the 1930s, six were designed by the office of Romeo de Paoli[14].

The three buildings designed in this section follow the Art Deco style, with signage integrated into the architecture through cultural matrices reflected in both the lettering and the linguistic elements employed in the construction. The Piraquara, Imperial Palace, and Cláudio Manoel buildings exhibit modern characteristics consistent with the architectural style in which they are embedded, and their typographic treatments are unprecedented, which contributes to their exceptional value as heritage assets. All signs are executed in display and light typefaces, applied in metal relief (high relief) and positioned centrally. Among them, only the Imperial Palace building features typography placed at the entrance. In contrast, the signage for Cláudio Manoel and Piraquara is located on the sides, aligned with the height of the first balcony, and does not serve to indicate the building entrances.

Verticalization was almost synonymous with the modernity embodied by Art Deco. In typography, this is reflected in a tendency toward fonts with condensed proportions, a characteristic evident in all examples presented here. In architecture, the formal composition is further emphasized by *façade* elements that project longitudinally, enhancing the building's scale by extending beyond its structural boundaries (D'Elboux, 2013).

Edifício Imperial Palace (Hotel Imperial)

Two years after graduating from the UFMG School of Engineering in 1932, de Paoli received approval to construct the Imperial Palace Building (Figure 5), intended to house a hotel of the same name at Rua dos Guaicurus, number 446. This project represents the first of three by the architect analyzed in this study. The exterior's decorative richness is characterized by vertical lines and a rationalist approach devoid of ornamentation, defining the building as belonging to the geometric style. Regarding typography, this approach manifests as a geometrization of letterforms (Baines; Haslam, 2005, p. 82), a quality shared by all three signs documented.

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14 *Edifício Imperial Palace, Edifício Piraquara, Hotel Majestic* (1936), *Hotel Madrid* (1937), *Edifício Império* (1938), and *Hotel Metrópole* (1939).

Source: Museu Histórico Abílio Barreto (2024).
Figure 5. *Edifício Imperial Palace*.

With its axis of symmetry arranged to emphasize the corner, *Edifício Imperial Palace* exhibits a classical architectural composition, characterized by a symmetrical structural organization. Notable architectural elements include Cremona-style window locks and tripartite Venetian windows (Noronha, 1999). The first floor consists of retail spaces and the hotel entrance, while the hotel itself occupied the second through fourth floors. Above the metal doorway, the words *Imperial Palace* are displayed in capital letters. The monospaced geometric typography (Figure 6) closely resembles the type used for the word *edifício* on *Edifício Cláudio Manoel*, which will be discussed subsequently.

During the initial field visit conducted in March 2023, it was observed that the *Hotel Imperial* sign was superimposed over the original signage (Figure 7). Consequently, a second visit took place in November 2023, at which time the obstructing structure had been removed, revealing the object of study amid pipes, wires, and considerable neglect.

Edíficio Piraquara (Hotel Gontijo)

In 1935, de Paoli's project for the *Edifício Piraquara* (Figure 8) was approved; the building continues to house *Hotel Gontijo* today. The four-story structure features a chamfered corner defined by vertical frieze markings (Noronha, 1999). Above the marquee, display typography is applied in a light, uppercase font, notable for the letter Q rendered as a complete circle and the letter A's eye nearly

Source: Author's archive (2023).
Figure 6. Signage of *Edifício Imperial Palace*.

Source: Author's archive (2023).
Figure 7. Hotel Imperial sign overlaid on the original signage on the *façade* of *Edifício Imperial Palace*.

Source: Museu Histórico Abílio Barreto (2024).
Figure 8. *Edifício Piraquara* (*Hotel Gontijo*).

forming a triangle due to the low position of its crossbar (Figure 9). Characteristic of Art Deco typography, this geometric formalism often reduces letters to their basic shapes (D'Elboux, 2013).

Beyond the chamfer, the sequential volumes form projections that alternate between balconies and solid masses, one of which culminates in a triangular shape featuring large glass bascules. The bold manipulation of proportions is also evident in the signage, where condensed and expanded letters alternate. As a modifier of modernity, the style incorporates influences from geometric decoration and Cubism, as well as Art Nouveau (Jubert, 2006, p. 220), which commonly applied horizontal bars at the terminals of the letter's mid-height strokes (Consuegra, 2004, p. 271), exemplified by the letter *A* on the sign. According to the typographic classification system proposed by Catherine Dixon in 1995 (based on the British Standards BS2961), letters with these features are described as curvilinear, characterized by the presence of combined curves and highly stylized lines (Silva; Farias, 2005, p. 67-81; Baines; Dixon, 2008, p. 184).

During the visit, the presence of concertina wire, electric fences, polyvinyl chloride (PVC) pipes, and two additional signs (advertising devices) on the same *façade* was noted, all of which obstruct the visibility of the subtle nominative architectural typography.

Source: Author's archive (2023).
Figure 9. Signage of *Edifício Piraquara* (*Hotel Gontijo*).

Edifício Cláudio Manoel (Hotel Metrópole)

The project for *Hotel Metrópole* in *Edifício Cláudio Manoel* (Figure 10) was initially commissioned from the Italian architect Raffaello Berti[15], who had settled in the city in 1929 at the invitation of his colleague Luiz Signorelli[16]. This project marked Berti's first approved vertical design following the regularization of his professional status as a foreign architect. However, the design was completely reformulated, including its volumetric aspects, by the office of Romeo de Paoli, who obtained approval from the city hall in 1939.

A distinctive example of Art Deco architecture in Belo Horizonte, the building features volumes that extend beyond the alignment, introducing dynamic movement to the *façade*. The projecting elements are adorned with vertical friezes, including the curved corner (Noronha, 1999). Two types of lettering coexist on the same sign (Figure 11): a monospaced, uppercase, condensed, sans-serif style with rounded edges for the word "*edifício,*" and a cursive style in upper and lowercase used for the name of the poet Cláudio Manoel. This cursive lettering represents an exception among the other modern uppercase letterforms, which led to the creation of two separate B cards for this example (B1 and B2) (Figure 4).

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15 Raffaello Berti (Pisa, 1900 – Belo Horizonte, 1972) graduated as an architect in 1921, the same year he arrived in Brazil. In Minas Gerais, he was responsible for hundreds of projects. In 1930, he helped found the School of Architecture at UFMG, where he taught until 1967.

16 Luiz Signorelli (Cristina, 1896 – Belo Horizonte, 1964) began his architectural career in Belo Horizonte in 1925. Of Italian descent, he designed, among others, *Clube Belo Horizonte* (1928), *Automóvel Clube* (1929), *Hotel Sul-Americano* (1928), and the Public Security Secretariat (1930).

Source: Museu Histórico Abílio Barreto (2024).
Figure 10. *Edifício Cláudio Manoel* (*Hotel Metrópole*).

Source: Author's archive (2023)
Figure 11. Signage of *Edifício Cláudio Manoel* (*Hotel Metrópole*).

CONCLUSION

Research conducted in the hypercenter reveals a set of artifacts largely unfamiliar to the city's inhabitants. Once brought to light, these items constitute a collection of primary graphic materials that may serve as future references and as a repertoire for new projects and visual languages. This initial comparison between the hotel buildings designed by de Paoli and the typographic elements applied to their *façades* contributes to the historiography of the graphic field in Belo Horizonte and opens new avenues for research by broadening the understanding of the city's visual and material culture.

Romeo de Paoli distinguishes himself from his contemporaries by the volume of buildings he documented through photography and the consistent quality of these records, each bearing one of his many distinctive signatures. Intent on affirming his authorship, he signed some of his works with small metal plaques, such as the one affixed to the concrete *façade* of *Edifício Imperial Palace*. He also employed various forms of identification — stamps, handwritten marks, and advertising devices — at construction sites, presenting himself as designer, builder, architect, and structural calculator.

Many Art Deco fonts and alphabets were originally developed for use in magazine titles or posters. Their qualities suited for prominent display may explain their frequent application in architectural typography (D'Elboux, 2013), which, as demonstrated by the three examples discussed, contributed to giving buildings a modern and sophisticated appearance. The high-resolution photographic surveys conducted by the author served as the basis for creating vector drawings of the signs (Figure 12). Given the ease with which these architectural elements can be replaced, vectorization serves as a valuable tool for the preservation of heritage assets in restoration processes and in the reconstruction of damaged elements, as it enables the reproduction of the original design (Gouveia *et al.*, 2007).
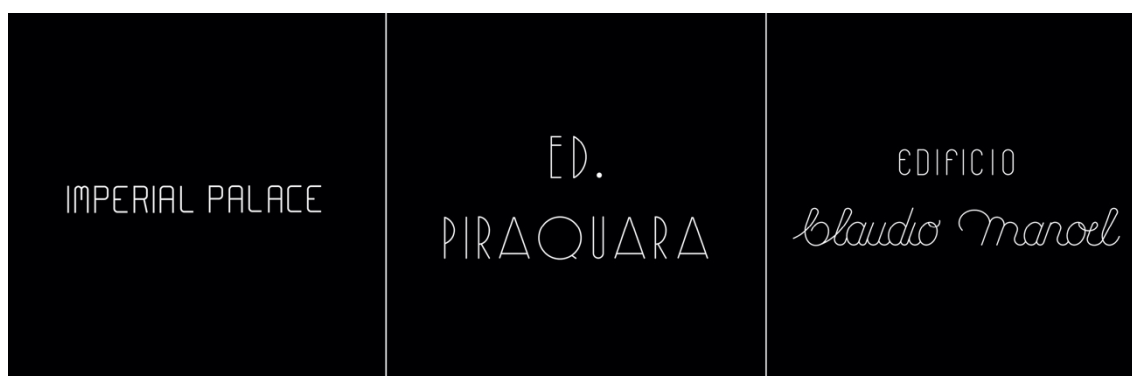
Source: Author's archive (2024).
Figure 12. Vector drawings of the inventoried typefaces.

Although all three buildings are designated as historical heritage sites, public archives overlook the presence of their inscriptions. Research conducted in these repositories revealed no records of drawings or other data, such as location, measurements, or typographic style specifications, related to the signage examined in the

architectural plans. The authorship of these artifacts remains unknown. Consequently, the investigation focused on methods of visual language analysis and the techniques employed in the creation of the inscriptions.

Research sources on the topic are scarce, superficial, and lack systematic organization. The library of the UFMG School of Architecture, named in honor of architect Raffaello Berti, maintains a physical newspaper archive stored in a single drawer, in which no information related to Romeo de Paoli's projects was found. Ninety-four years after the establishment of the first autonomous architecture training center in Brazil, the institution has yet to compile a collection of materials documenting the key professionals and buildings from the city's modern period. Furthermore, no academic studies on Romeo de Paoli were identified in research repositories, indicating a broader lack of interest in investigating the city's spatial development and the principal figures involved in its formation.

The Belo Horizonte City Hall does not maintain a unified platform for accessing building documentation. Searches within the Belo Horizonte City Public Archives are conducted exclusively through the cadastral index, with no available filters for architect, building, architectural style, or geographic location. During the days spent handling archived plans, the storage and access conditions were found to be alarming, posing a clear risk of loss, an outcome that is not uncommon, as the survey revealed that two-thirds of the physical plans consulted had disappeared. At the Urban Information and Cadastral Directorate, copies are provided free of charge; however, the quality is notably poor, with building details and critical information — such as dates and signatures — often rendered illegible. In some instances, a QR code has been conspicuously inserted over project details or typographic records, obstructing their visualization (Figure 13).

There appears to be no established objective to promote access through the dissemination of public collections. The requirement to pay for the digitization of plans of iconic buildings reveals a disregard for public property and a lack of strategic planning aimed at ensuring accessibility. The methodological process of this research prompted a critical reflection on archival practices and raised interest in contemporary models for the dissemination of collections. Although archival science is a scientific discipline, it inherently supports public access by facilitating the communication of the informational content of documents. From this perspective, the dissemination of collections pragmatically reinforces the constitutional right to access information—and, by extension, to culture and memory (Lopes, 2018, p. 8).

The absence of information on the inventoried items highlights a significant gap in the methodologies employed by heritage preservation agencies. In cases involving inscriptions on buildings of historical significance, where architectural typography constitutes an integral component of a valued legacy, its documentation is both essential and urgent. This issue aligns with the concerns raised by Moema Oliveira (2021) regarding the reasons why Brazilian design from this period remains marginalized. As a result, designers often fail to recognize it as part of the country's design history, and it continues to be undervalued by the very institutions and researchers dedicated to heritage preservation.
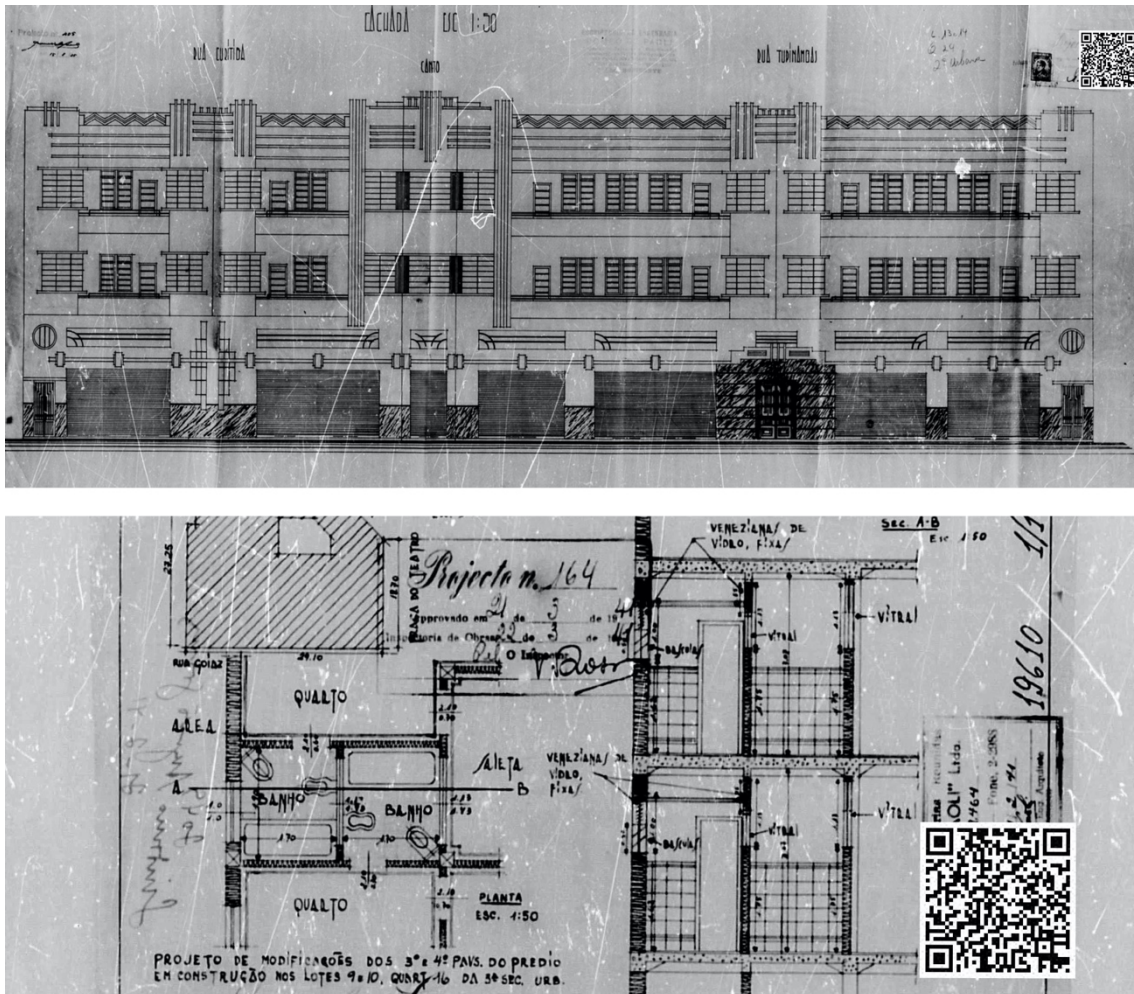
Source: Diretoria de Cadastro e Informação Urbanística (2024).
Figure 13. Examples of plans signed by Romeo de Paoli, provided by the Directorate of Urban Registration and Information..

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