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Learning from *Eva*: Domestic Architecture, Media, and Gendered Modernity in *Estado Novo* Portugal

João Almeida e Silva
Nuno Portas Centre for Studies (CENP)
Faculty of Architecture, University of Porto (FAUP), Porto, Portugal
jsilva@arq.up.pt

Abstract
During Portugal's *Estado Novo*, domestic life was publicly tied to family order, femininity, and national tradition. Yet the women's magazine *Eva* (1925–1989), under Carolina Homem Christo's long editorship, made domestic architecture a feature of women's print culture. Through annual Christmas raffles in which readers could win a newly designed and furnished house, the magazine circulated plans, perspectives, interiors, furnishings, appliances, and descriptive texts that familiarized readers with domestic Modernism and models of everyday life. This article examines the *Eva* houses as architectural projects and media constructions, asking how *Eva* mediated Modernism to a female readership under dictatorship. Combining close reading, architectural analysis, and media history, it focuses on the initiative between 1933 and 1971, especially the 1957 house. It argues that these houses did not simply emancipate women but made alternative domestic arrangements culturally legible by translating modernist architecture into the language of comfort, practicality, taste, and household improvement.

Keywords
women's magazines; *Eva* magazine; domesticity; architecture; consumer culture; gender; Modernism; *Estado Novo*; Portugal

Introduction

How did a women's magazine operating under the *Estado Novo* use domestic architecture to circulate alternative ways of living? This article argues that *Eva* did so through its annual Christmas house raffles, which made the home a recurring object of editorial attention and turned domestic architecture into a visible part of women's print culture. Through plans, perspectives, photographs, captions, descriptive prose, and the promise of a fully furnished prize house, *Eva* presented modern domestic space not simply as shelter or decoration, but as a desirable setting for everyday life. The magazine described these houses as 'the materialization of the loveliest dream you have ever dreamed,' as 'modern and elegant houses,' and as dwellings 'completely furnished and equipped, conceived within the most refined modern taste' (*Eva,* no. 982, p. 4; no. 983, pp. 50–51).

The claim advanced here is deliberately limited. This article does not argue that the *Eva* houses emancipated women, dissolved patriarchal domesticity, or directly produced new social relations. Nor does it assume that architecture mechanically determines behavior. Instead, it argues that the *Eva* houses reorganized and represented the spatial conditions under which domestic life was imagined and, potentially, enacted. Through layout, furnishing, visibility, circulation, and publication, they offered readers alternative domestic scenarios at a moment when the home was politically and culturally charged in Portugal.

A distinction between Modernism and modernity is central to this argument. Here, Modernism refers to the architectural movement associated with functional planning, rationalized domestic layouts, new formal languages, and the rejection of historicist or nationalist idioms. Modernity, by contrast, refers more broadly to aspirations linked to technological novelty, consumer culture, household efficiency, and changing expectations of everyday life. One of *Eva's* most consequential operations was to bring these two registers together: to translate architectural Modernism into a broader language of modern domesticity.

This article enters three conversations at once. Architectural historians have shown that modernity circulated through publicity and representation as much as through buildings, while feminist histories of domestic space have shown how the home organized and reproduced gendered roles (Colomina, 1996; Hayden, 1981; Heynen & Baydar, 2005; Weisman, 1992). Portuguese architectural historiography has, in turn, clarified the *Estado Novo*'s ideological uses of architecture and the entanglement of modernism, regionalism, and vernacular discourse (Agarez, 2016; Almeida de Carvalho, 2018; Prista, 2015). What remains less clear is where domestic modernity became intelligible to non-professional readers. This article argues that women's print culture—specifically *Eva* as an architectural medium—was one such site.

Eva matters, then, not because it simply reflected architectural change, but because it helped determine where that change could be socially grasped. It domesticated Modernism editorially, recoding architectural debate into the idioms of taste, comfort, practicality, family aspiration, and household improvement. In mid-twentieth-century Portugal, that mediation mattered. The *Estado Novo* publicly promoted domestic ideals grounded in family order, femininity, morality, and national tradition, often condensed in the rhetoric of the *casa portuguesa*. Yet Portuguese architectural culture was never wholly enclosed within traditionalist discourse. As several authors show, the period was marked by negotiation and overlap among state ideology, regionalist discourse, vernacular reference, and modern architectural practice (Almeida de Carvalho, 2018; Agarez, 2016; Prista, 2015). The *Eva* houses belonged to that field of negotiation. They did not stand outside contemporary architectural debates; they relocated them within a women's magazine and changed the terms on which they could be understood.

This article focuses on *Eva,* published between 1925 and 1989, and directed, edited, and owned by Carolina Homem Christo (1895–1980) between 1932 and 1974. Homem Christo is central to the story. Before taking over *Eva,* she had already built a substantial career in Portuguese journalism and magazine editing. Although she remained listed as

director until 1974, illness had effectively removed her from the post by 1970. The houses were designed by architects, but their public meaning depended on editorial selection, graphic presentation, descriptive framing, and repetition across decades. The *Eva* houses were therefore not only architectural projects but editorial constructions. Their continuity and visibility cannot be separated from Homem Christo's long stewardship of the magazine. The *Eva* houses were promoted as annual Christmas prize draws through which readers could enter for the chance to win a newly designed house, presented by the magazine as a complete domestic environment through architectural drawings, photographs, furnishings, and appliances. The campaigns extended across successive issues and culminated in the public presentation of the house to the winner. As Figures 1–2 suggest, Homem Christo's role was therefore not only managerial: her editorial authority was made visible through these ceremonies, in which she appeared as the magazine's public representative and formally awarded the houses.

Figures 1–2. Carolina Homem Christo handing over the key to the 1958 *Eva* house in Espinho. The photographs underscore Homem Christo's public role in the initiative and the magazine's active mediation of domestic modernity. Source: *Eva,* no. 1062.

The article's social scope is likewise specific. It does not address all Portuguese women or all Portuguese households, but rather the domestic ideals offered to a largely literate, urban or semi-urban, aspirational middle-class readership. Within *Eva's* pages, gendered subjects were addressed through a recognizable language of family life, household competence, taste, and consumer desire. The houses formed part of that editorial world.

Methodologically, the article combines close reading of *Eva's* Christmas campaigns, plans, photographs, captions, and descriptive texts with architectural analysis of spatial organization and attention to editorial framing. The corpus centres on the *Eva* houses produced between 1933 and 1971, with particular attention to the 1957 house, which condenses many of the series' defining spatial and representational strategies.

The argument proceeds in four stages. It first establishes *Eva* as an editorial medium for architecture. It then clarifies how architecture may matter socially without being treated as a direct cause of behavior. The third section traces the development of the *Eva* houses across changing phases of Portuguese architectural culture. The final section offers a close

reading of the 1957 house, showing how plan, furnishing, appliances, service hierarchy, and magazine representation converged in a compact model of modern domesticity.

Eva as architectural medium: Carolina Homem Christo and editorial agency

Any account of the *Eva* houses must begin with Carolina Homem Christo, because the initiative's continuity, tone, and public intelligibility depended on editorial agency as much as on architectural design. As owner, editor, and director of *Eva* for more than four decades, she made housing, furnishing, decoration, and household advice part of one coherent editorial world. The houses became legible beyond professional architectural circles not simply because they were designed or built, but because they were selected, narrated, serialized, and publicly staged within a women's magazine.

That point matters because *Eva* did not present architecture as specialist discourse. It translated architectural content into forms already familiar to its readers: aspirational domestic narratives, illustrated features, prize announcements, furnishing spreads, advice columns, and articles on household technologies. The magazine did not merely reproduce architecture; it taught readers how to read it. The 1959 house, for example, was described through a 'reading corner' in the living room, a dining area, 'inviting armchairs and a spacious sofa' that gave the room a familial atmosphere, an 'elegant staircase leading to the upper floor,' and a master bedroom 'tastefully furnished, in cheerful colours,' made brighter by 'the light received from a wide window' (*Eva,* no. 1082, p. 34). In such passages, *Eva* showed what counted as convenience, what qualified as good taste, and how a plan could be understood through everyday family life.

This is clearest in the recurring structure of the raffles. A project was announced, elaborated through plans, perspectives, and descriptive prose, then revisited in the Christmas issue as the major seasonal prize, and in some cases followed through to winner selection and realization. Readers thus encountered each house through serial anticipation: as promise, explanation, visualization, prize, and sometimes fulfilled aspiration. In 1954, for instance, *Eva* first promised 'the largest and best house offered since the war,' then introduced Palla and Bento d'Almeida's 'modern, charming, well-conceived project,' later announced that first prize had gone to João Rodrigues, an employee of a confectioner's shop in Braga, and finally presented the completed house, noting that the images in the magazine offered only 'a pale idea of the ideal house that *Eva* delivered in Braga.' Visitors, the magazine wrote, moved 'from surprise to surprise as they discovered yet another touch of elegance, another detail, an architectural novelty. Everything right, good, balanced, and beautiful' (*Eva,* no. 994, p. 43; no. 995, p. 45; no. 1011, p. 34). Through repetition, the house became desirable.

The *Eva* houses were thus editorial events as much as architectural ones. Plans, captions, photographs, and prose formed part of a pedagogy of domestic space. A fireplace, terrace, sliding opening, or built-in cupboard was not presented as neutral technical information. Rather, the houses were delivered with 'lamps, pictures, carpets, etc.' and, in addition to furniture and decoration, included a set of household appliances (*Eva,* no. 1007, pp. 44–45). Such features appeared as signs of comfort, taste, efficiency, or practical intelligence. A plan was not offered in isolation but surrounded by language that translated spatial organization into domestic use.

In this sense, *Eva* should be understood as both a women's magazine and an architectural medium. It made domestic architecture publicly legible in a non-professional context and attached it to family aspiration, household competence, and consumption. Homem Christo's importance lies precisely here. If there was agency in the circulation of these models, it lay not only in the architects' drawings but also in editorial selection, framing, sequencing, and repetition. This mediation was not politically neutral. It allowed *Eva* to introduce domestic forms associated with Modernism into a public sphere structured by censorship and conservative gender ideology, not through explicit opposition, but through the socially legitimate language of feminine expertise and household improvement.

Architecture, domestic routines, and the question of social effect

A central methodological problem raised by the *Eva* houses is how architecture might matter socially without being treated as a direct cause of behavior. This article does not assume that open plans, new materials, or household appliances automatically transformed relations between men and women. Such a claim would be historically difficult to demonstrate and analytically too crude. A more persuasive claim is that architecture helps organize the conditions under which domestic practices occur.

Domestic space structures movement, adjacency, visibility, privacy, and overlap. A more compartmentalized house distributes family life, service, sociability, leisure, and work across clearly differentiated rooms and thresholds. A house with larger common areas, flexible partitions, integrated kitchens, and stronger garden connections alters those relations. It may make certain activities more visible to other household members, allow the same space to serve different functions over the course of the day, or soften rigid separations between service and representation, even when it does not abolish them. Architecture matters, then, not because it determines action, but because it shapes the setting within which routines are enacted, negotiated, and imagined.

This point is especially important when discussing gender. Domestic architecture does not contain gender in any essential form, but it does help distribute the routines, encounters, separations, and visibilities through which gendered life is performed. The house is not a neutral backdrop to family life. It is one of the means by which domestic roles are organized, repeated, and made to appear natural. This understanding of domestic space draws on feminist work on gender and the built environment, especially critiques of the gendered assumptions embedded in architectural discourse and domestic planning (Agrest et al., 1996; Weisman, 1992).

The significance of the *Eva* houses lies at this level. Their plans do not prove that husbands assumed more domestic labour or that wives escaped patriarchal expectations. They do show that *Eva* repeatedly publicized domestic environments in which family interaction, domestic management, leisure, and representation were arranged differently from more rigid conventional layouts. Open common rooms, multipurpose annexes, sliding openings, integrated technologies, and shifting relations between service zones and living areas did not create equality, but they altered the spatial setting within which everyday hierarchies were maintained or negotiated.

A concrete comparison helps clarify the point. In earlier projects, rooms tend to preserve clearer identities and thresholds: the house reads as an ordered sequence of distinct zones, each with a relatively stable function and social meaning. In later projects, the common room expands, boundaries loosen, and the relation between dwelling and exterior becomes more continuous. The shift is not from hierarchy to equality, but from firmer domestic partition to greater overlap.

The historical question, then, is not whether architecture alone transformed Portuguese society, but how it made some forms of domestic life more imaginable than others. The *Eva* houses repeatedly presented domestic space as an active medium of organization rather than a passive container of family life. Their plans proposed patterns of co-presence, separation, flexibility, and display that readers could recognize, discuss, and desire even when those forms were not widely realized in practice.

What architecture altered, in other words, was not the social order itself so much as the spatial grammar through which that order could be lived. The *Eva* houses did not abolish domestic hierarchy, but they made available plans in which hierarchy could be arranged differently: less through rigid enclosure, more through calibrated openness, managed flexibility, and new relations of proximity, visibility, and circulation. The shift was modest, but historically significant.

Modern domesticity in women's print culture

Under Carolina Homem Christo's direction, *Eva* developed ways of addressing modernity without confronting the regime directly, and the *Eva* houses were among its most effective vehicles for doing so. Presented as practical homes, family prizes, lessons in taste, and models of household management, they introduced alternative spatial ideals into a culture shaped by censorship and conservative assumptions about gender.

What matters most is the way *Eva* translated domestic Modernism into the language of aspiration, practicality, refinement, and household improvement. This made architecture visible to readers who might otherwise have encountered the home through decoration advice, domestic guidance, serialized fiction, or advertising. The house became intelligible not as an abstract professional problem but as a lived, furnished, and desirable environment. In this respect, the article extends Colomina's insight that modern architecture is constituted through representation by showing how, in Portugal, women's print culture could serve as one of the media through which domestic modernity was edited, visualized, and normalized (Colomina, 1996).

The magazine's rhetoric is especially revealing here. The houses were repeatedly presented through formulas that joined taste, comfort, convenience, completeness, and household ease. In 1955, for example, the first prize was described as 'a richly appointed house,' 'beautiful, magnificent, well designed, and comfortable'; in 1958 it was announced as 'a handier house, a more complete one, with more novelty'; and in 1964 the prize was framed as a 'dream house' transformed into an 'enchanted house,' complete not only with furniture, carpets, curtains, stove, kitchen battery, iron, and sewing machine, but also with linen, crockery, cutlery, and even a water heater (*Eva,* no. 1005, p.S1; no. 1043, p.46; no. 1114, p.6). Such formulas turned architectural innovation into an immediately legible domestic promise. They did not ask readers to admire formal daring for its own sake. They asked them to recognize a better organized life: a brighter room, a more efficient kitchen, a more gracious living area, a more pleasant relation to garden or terrace, and a house that seemed easier to manage and more agreeable to inhabit.

That rhetorical operation was crucial. *Eva* did not merely show readers modern houses; it supplied the terms in which those houses were to be valued. Architectural novelty became domestic advantage, formal change became everyday benefit, and spatial reorganization became a promise of comfort, order, and improved family life.

The archive becomes especially suggestive when these formulas are read alongside *Eva's* visual culture. In *Eva,* no. 1040, for instance, the spread 'O mundo de amanhã – Lar doce Lar' juxtaposes futuristic domestic architecture, consumer devices, and scenes of comfort in a way that translates technological novelty into household aspiration (see Figure 3). Rather than presenting innovation as a remote technical future, the spread renders it familiar and desirable through interiors, appliances, and scenes of everyday use. Its significance lies less in any explicit break with dominant domestic ideology than in the way it folds modernity into the visual language of home improvement, comfort, and everyday life.

The *Eva* houses were especially effective because they were articulated with consumer culture. They were never presented as bare architectural shells. They were furnished, decorated, and equipped. Appliances, furniture, textiles, finishes, and garden elements formed part of the proposition. In this sense, *Eva* linked spatial modernity to an aspirational model of everyday life.

The significance of these objects, however, must be defined carefully. Domestic appliances should not be read as straightforward instruments of emancipation. Mid-century advertising more often presented them as aids to efficient wifehood and improved household management than as means of escaping domestic work. Their role in *Eva* was therefore contradictory: they helped modernize the image of the home while often preserving women's responsibility for domestic competence. Advertisements such as the Morphy Richards examples in Figure 4-5 are revealing here. By associating appliances with streamlined appearance, convenience, and leisure, they suggested that domestic technology could make

household labour lighter, faster, and more modern. Yet that promise did not necessarily redistribute labour; it more often recast domestic work as efficient, stylish, and technologically assisted. Figures 4–5 place architectural modernity and consumer technology within the same visual economy.

Figure 3. 'O mundo de amanhã – Lar doce Lar' ['The Tomorrow's World: Home Sweet Home'], *Eva,* no. 1040, pp. 34–35. The spread links futuristic architecture, consumer technology, and domestic aspiration within the visual language of a women's magazine. Source: *Eva,* no. 1040.

Figures 4–5. The 1955 *Eva* house and a 1963 Morphy-Richards advertisement in *Eva*. Together they show how domestic modernity was framed through both interior design and consumer technology. Source: *Eva,* no. 1029 & *Eva,* no. 1092.

This tension also requires attention to service labour. Any account of domestic modernization in mid-century Portugal must reckon with the continued presence of servants, day maids, or live-in maids in many middle-class households. Where the *Eva* houses retained service entrances, service vestibules, maid's rooms, or differentiated service zones, they did not eliminate hierarchy. In some cases, they redistributed or concealed labour rather than reducing it. The comforts and efficiencies promised to one woman in the household could depend on the paid labour of another.

The consumer dimension of the *Eva* houses was not secondary decoration added to an otherwise architectural project. Furnishings, appliances, textiles, and household equipment were part of the houses' meaning from the outset. They located architecture within a larger economy of desire in which domestic modernity appeared not simply as a matter of plan or façade, but as a total scene of habitation: spatially organized, technologically assisted, aesthetically coordinated, and emotionally charged. The promise was not only a modern house, but a modern way of living in it.

The magazine's architectural discourse also interacted with its broader editorial treatment of gender roles. Articles addressing women's paid work, household responsibilities, and men's participation in domestic tasks formed part of the same discursive environment in which the houses appeared. The *Eva* houses did not provide direct proof of social transformation, but they gave architectural form to questions already circulating in the magazine's pages: who works, who serves, who is visible, and which spaces belong to family life, hospitality, rest, or domestic labour. Architecture did not stand apart from the magazine's gender discourse. It condensed and materialized it.

Seen this way, the *Eva* houses were effective not because they openly challenged *Estado Novo* domestic ideology, but because they inserted modern domestic imagery into a culturally legitimate feminine medium. They made spatial change look practical rather than polemical, desirable rather than doctrinaire, and intimate rather than abstract. Once that mediation is taken seriously, women's magazines can no longer be treated as peripheral to architectural culture. They become part of the machinery through which domestic modernity was imagined, valued, and publicly understood.

The *Eva* houses in Portuguese architectural culture

The *Eva* houses initiative, which ran from 1933 to 1971, offers a revealing lens through which to observe changing domestic ideals in twentieth-century Portugal because it allows architectural change to be tracked not only through buildings, but through a recurring editorial format. Across twenty-three projects, the houses register broader tensions in Portuguese architectural culture without merely mirroring them. They translate architectural developments into an accessible sequence through which readers could observe changes in taste, plan organization, material language, and domestic expectation.

A broad chronology can be traced across four phases. In the 1930s, the emphasis fell on economical housing and modern taste within a still relatively formal domestic order. A long interruption between 1937 and 1950 marks an important gap in the initiative. When the houses reappeared in the 1950s, they often did so first as smaller or weekend-oriented dwellings before becoming more clearly primary residences. By the 1960s, the programs became somewhat larger and more complex, even when overall scale remained modest. Read as a serial archive, the *Eva* houses chart a changing domestic imagination as much as stylistic change.

This chronology also intersects with central debates in Portuguese architectural historiography. Agarez (2016) shows that regionalism, modernism, and local building cultures were intertwined rather than separate; Prista (2015) traces the longer entanglement of tradition and modernity; Almeida de Carvalho (2018) shows that *Estado Novo* architecture combined ideological conservatism with significant modernizing ambitions. Together, this scholarship places the *Eva* houses not as isolated exceptions or simple oppositions, but within

a broader Portuguese field of accommodation and recalibration (Duarte, 1999; Fernandez, 1988; Portas, 1977; Tostões, 1997, 2005).

The *Eva* houses belong to that history in a distinctive way. Their plans, elevations, furnishings, and descriptive language show how architectural Modernism entered domestic aspiration through a popular women's magazine. Their importance lies not only in reflecting architectural change, but in giving it a serial public form. Repeated year after year, the house competition turned shifts in planning, materials, domestic equipment, and spatial ideals into an unfolding story of modern living.

Changes in internal organization make that process especially legible. Although the basic domestic program often remained familiar—bedrooms, bathroom, kitchen, common room, and service areas—the relations among these zones changed significantly. Kitchens became more efficient and better integrated into the domestic whole. Common spaces became less rigidly segregated and more multifunctional. Openings widened. Garden connections gained importance. In some later projects, the house was conceived less as a sequence of enclosed rooms than as a coordinated set of zones with varying degrees of openness, privacy, and flexibility.

The contrast between early and later projects is especially telling. The 1933 house by Luís Cristino da Silva and the 1936 project by João Simões still retain a sense of enclosure, composure, and representational clarity. Their massing and room disposition preserve the impression of a house that receives, separates, and orders. By contrast, projects designed in the 1950s and 1960s by Victor Palla and Joaquim Bento d'Almeida are lighter in spatial logic: the common room expands, openings enlarge, the relation to the site becomes less defensive, and the plan increasingly allows domestic life to spread rather than simply occupy assigned compartments. The difference is not merely formal. It marks a shift from a house that distributes life through clearer boundaries to one that accommodates it through greater overlap.

Editorial rhetoric reinforces this shift. Early campaigns tend to stress the exceptional value and formal attractiveness of the prize, presenting the house as an extraordinary object of acquisition. Later descriptions increasingly emphasize convenience, completeness, equipment, and ease of use. What comes into view is not only a different architecture, but a different way of justifying architecture: less through composure and distinction alone, more through practicality, flexibility, and the promise of smoother everyday life.

The most significant change across the *Eva* series was not scale but domestic organization. The houses of the 1930s preserve a clearer partition among representation, intimacy, and service, with more formal thresholds and more stable room identities. When the initiative resumed in the 1950s, *Eva* increasingly framed domestic modernity less through facade and composure than through convenience, equipment, and the promise of easier household management. By the later 1950s and 1960s, especially in the projects of Victor Palla and Joaquim Bento d'Almeida, larger shared living areas, wider openings, garden-facing common rooms, and more flexible internal divisions made the dwelling read less as a sequence of enclosed rooms than as a coordinated field of overlapping domestic functions. The shift, then, was not from hierarchy to equality, but from fixed domestic order to a more open and mobile domestic arrangement.

That shift clarifies the article's central claim. The later *Eva* houses did not erase hierarchy or traditional gender assumptions. Service spaces remained legible, domestic labour remained central, and the projects still addressed a family ideal compatible with the magazine's editorial ethos. Yet they made visible homes in which family life, leisure, sociability, and domestic management were arranged with greater flexibility than in more rigidly conventional models. What changed was not the disappearance of domestic order, but its reorganization.

This Portuguese context also existed within a wider imperial frame. Ana Vaz Milheiro's work is especially important here because it demonstrates that architectural culture under the *Estado Novo* unfolded across metropolitan and colonial territories through

circulations of models, professionals, institutional practices, and spatial imaginaries (Milheiro, 2012). The Portuguese empire was not merely a distant backdrop to metropolitan life. It was one of the arenas in which ideas of domestic order, technical modernization, climate adaptation, and cultural identity were tested, reformulated, and recirculated. Colonial territories were also, at times, spaces where metropolitan prescriptions were applied unevenly and everyday practices cannot be reduced to any simple contrast between greater and lesser freedom (Brasão, 2017). Metropolitan domestic culture under the *Estado Novo* cannot therefore be treated as wholly separable from colonial Portugal, even when this article remains centred on *Eva* as a metropolitan magazine.

This does not mean that the *Eva* houses simply reproduced colonial models, nor that *Eva* addressed colonial readers in any uniform way. To write the history of domestic modernization in mid-century Portugal without acknowledging that wider field of circulation would be to naturalize the metropole as self-contained. In this broader historiographic sense, the *Eva* houses belong to a Portuguese modernity that was imperial as well as metropolitan.

Seen in this light, the initiative occupies a specific place within Portuguese architectural culture. It did not produce the most radical houses of its period, nor did it simply echo official ideology. Its importance lies in making architectural change serial, illustrated, gendered, and publicly desirable. That is why the *Eva* houses belong not at the margins of Portuguese architectural history, but within its media history.

From fixed order to domestic reorganization

Seen across the initiative as a whole, the *Eva* houses suggest a movement less from tradition to liberation than from fixed domestic order to more elastic forms of domestic organization. Earlier houses preserve clearer distinctions among representation, intimacy, and service. Later houses more often compress functions, enlarge shared living areas, and introduce flexible or intermediate spaces, often extending domestic life outward through terraces, patios, and gardens.

The analytical significance of that shift lies in its reorganization of domestic co-presence. In a more compartmentalized house, family life unfolds through clearer thresholds and more separate routines. In a house organized around a larger common area, visual continuity, and flexible annexes, activities occur in closer spatial and perceptual relation to one another. A room may no longer sustain a single exclusive identity; leisure, supervision, conversation, and household management may overlap. This does not dissolve hierarchy, but it does alter the conditions in which hierarchy is enacted.

The same is true of the relation between service and representation. Some *Eva* houses retain distinct service entrances or vestibules, preserving hierarchies embedded in middle-class domestic culture. Yet even here, modern planning often compresses service circulation or integrates household functions more tightly into the overall plan. The result is neither simple continuity nor simple rupture, but a recalibration in which older distinctions persist within a more mobile domestic order.

It is therefore more precise to describe the initiative as making alternative domestic arrangements imaginable rather than empowering women directly or universally. Through repetition, publication, and consumer framing, *Eva* normalized ideas of flexibility, visual openness, domestic efficiency, and technologically assisted management. Those ideas did not eliminate hierarchy, but they did change the public terms of domestic order.

This is also why the *Eva* houses matter as media objects as much as built ones. Their significance does not rest only on whether readers inhabited such houses, but on the fact that they repeatedly encountered these spatial models as desirable, intelligible, and modern. If the earlier houses tended to present domestic life as a sequence of fixed positions, the later houses increasingly presented it as a set of relations to be coordinated. The movement traced across the archive is therefore best understood not as a linear story of emancipation achieved, but as a shift from stable domestic partition to more elastic domestic organization.

The 1957 house: plan, labor, and the representation of a domestic ideal

The 1957 project is especially revealing because it condenses many of the initiative's central themes into a compact and legible design while also leaving a relatively rich editorial trace. From that year until 1963, the main Christmas prize no longer consisted of a single fixed house; instead, readers were offered two alternative projects from which the winning household could choose. In 1957 both options were designed by Victor Palla and Joaquim Bento d'Almeida and publicized first in the October supplement and then in the December Christmas issue. The spread reproduced in Figure 6 presents those alternatives not only as architectural proposals, but as desirable domestic futures.

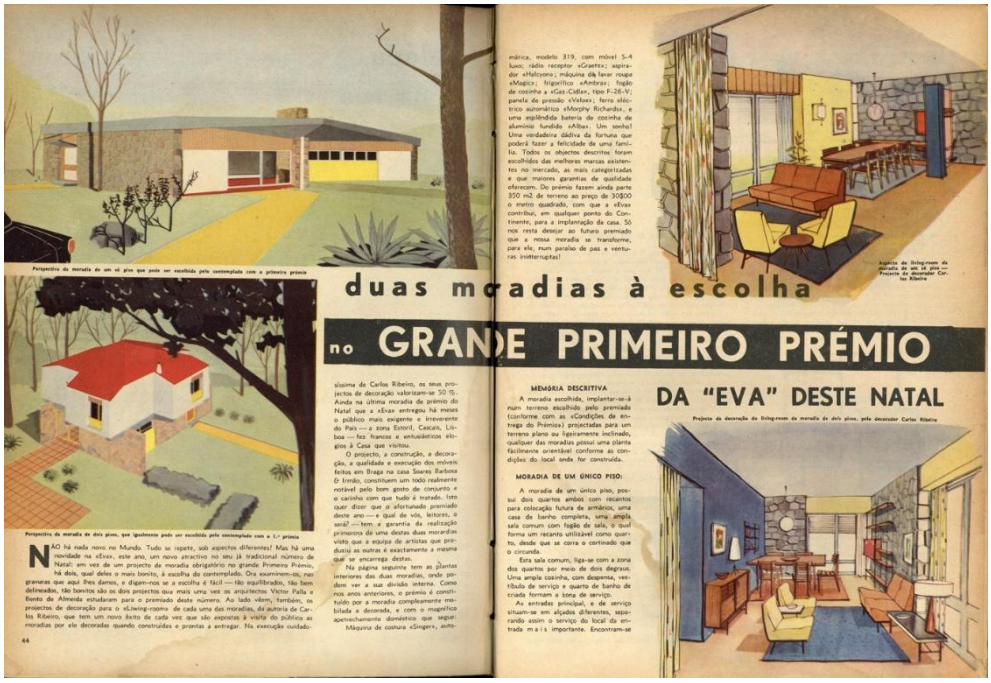


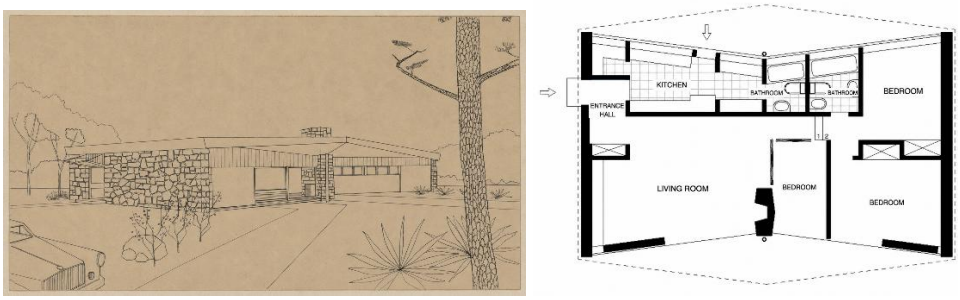
Figure 6. 1957 *Eva* houses: two house models offered as the first prize in *Eva's* annual Christmas competition. The spread presents the projects as both architectural proposals and consumer fantasies. Source: *Eva,* no. 1031.

The single-storey version, examined here, measured 94.90 square metres, with additional paved exterior areas, and combined modest scale with a carefully differentiated domestic program. The archive is unusually precise in this case. From 1957 onward, and until 1963, the magazine presented 'two magnificent houses' as alternatives for the Christmas prize. In that first year, the December issue introduced two new projects, one single-storey and one double-storey, described as 'so balanced, so well designed, so beautiful,' while noting that in both cases 'the common room would have two sliding doors opening onto the garden' (*Eva,* no. 1029, p. S1; no. 1031, pp. 44, 46). Taken together, the October supplement, December issue, and later winner reports allow the 1957 house to be reconstructed not only as a plan, but as a serial editorial event that moved from anticipation to realization.

Following Judith Butler's understanding of gender as constituted through repeated acts rather than fixed essence, the 1957 house can be read not as a device that automatically produced new gender relations, but as a spatial framework within which domestic roles were staged, repeated, and potentially reconfigured (Butler, 1999/1990). Its importance lies less in its size than in the way it recalibrates domestic relations through plan, visibility, and use.

Figures 7–8 make that recalibration legible by showing the enlarged common room, the flexible annex, and the continuity between interior and exterior.

The house included two bedrooms, a bathroom, a large common room with fireplace, and a kitchen with pantry and service vestibule. Yet the plan did not rely on rigid compartmentalization. The common room could generate an additional sleeping or working area by means of a curtain; a short change in level distinguished the bedroom zone from the social area without fully isolating it; and large sliding openings connected the interior to the garden. At the same time, the distinction between a main entrance and a service entrance preserved a conventional hierarchy within the plan. The project is therefore significant not because it abandoned domestic order, but because it recalibrated it.



Figures 7–8. Perspective drawing and plan of the 1957 house. Together they show the spatial features central to the article's analysis: the enlarged common room, flexible annex, fireplace, stepped transition, and continuity between interior and exterior. Source: Perspective at Palla & Bento d'Almeida Archive; plan by author.

That recalibration can be described through several concrete spatial mechanisms. First, the large common room created a shared visual field in which family activities became more mutually visible. Second, the curtain-defined annex loosened the strict correspondence between one room and one function, allowing the space to accommodate work, guests, leisure, or sleep according to changing daily needs. Third, the stepped transition between common and private areas maintained distinction while softening separation. Fourth, the sliding garden openings extended domestic activity outward, making leisure and sociability part of a larger spatial continuum. Together, these devices made the house less a sequence of fixed rooms than a coordinated system of spatial relations. The magazine's own presentation sharpened this effect. Figure 9 is especially revealing because it translates the project from drawing into a scene of inhabited domestic life.

In the descriptive framing, what was emphasized was not abstraction but use: the room that could serve several purposes, the garden relation that enlarged daily life, the comfort of the fireplace, the practical arrangement of the service area, and the completeness of a house delivered ready to inhabit. The selected version, the magazine explained, included 'two bedrooms, both with recesses for future wardrobes, a complete bathroom, and a large common room with a living-room stove, which would create a corner usable as a bedroom once the surrounding curtain was drawn.' The service zone consisted of 'a large kitchen, with pantry, service vestibule, and maid's bathroom,' while the common room was connected to the bedroom area by two steps and to the garden by wide sliding openings. The house was to be delivered 'completely furnished and decorated, with magnificent household equipment,' and was described as 'a dream! A true gift of fortune that could bring happiness to a family' (*Eva,* no. 1031, pp. 45–46).

Figure 9. Publication of the 1957 Christmas prize house in *Eva*. Interior and exterior views translate the project from plan into a desirable scene of everyday domestic life. Source: *Eva,* no. 1049.

These features do not prove that men and women behaved differently, nor do they warrant claims of achieved egalitarianism. What they do show is that the house altered patterns of visibility, circulation, overlap, and accessibility. In a more compartmentalized dwelling, work, privacy, sociability, and domestic management are more sharply distributed. Here they entered into a different spatial relation. The plan matters, then, not because it guarantees changed conduct, but because it reorganizes the setting in which domestic conduct might be performed and perceived.

The service vestibule and separate service entrance make this point still clearer. The plan did not abolish hierarchy. It retained a distinction between service and representation recognizable within middle-class domestic culture. This matters analytically because it prevents the project from being romanticized as socially progressive in any simple sense. The house demonstrates that modern domestic architecture could preserve conventional hierarchies even as it reorganized common life more flexibly.

The question of domestic labor is therefore inseparable from the plan. The 1957 house presented itself as efficient, comfortable, and technologically up to date. Like other *Eva* prizes, it was to be delivered furnished, decorated, and equipped with appliances. As a later issue put it, 'the contents of the house included furniture, carpets, lamps, pictures, curtains, etc., with this furnishing further enriched by electrical appliances' (*Eva,* no. 1055, p. 44). These objects formed part of the project's promise. They linked architectural Modernism to an aspirational domestic scene in which taste, convenience, and comfort were integrated. Yet they should not be interpreted as signs that domestic work had ceased to be gendered. The house still presumed domestic management, and the existence of service facilities indicates that such management might depend not only on the labour of the housewife but also on paid female labour.

This tension is crucial. The project staged a modern domestic ideal in which labour was reorganized, aestheticized, and technologized. Appliances suggested efficiency and relief from drudgery, but not necessarily freedom from domestic responsibility. Service zones preserved the possibility of delegated labour without challenging its feminized character. The

house therefore condensed the contradictions of domestic modernity rather than resolving them.

Its representational dimension intensified this effect. *Eva* did not publish the project as a technical drawing alone. It surrounded the plan with exterior perspectives, interior views, descriptive prose, and the emotionally charged narrative of the Christmas raffle. Readers learned not only what the house looked like, but how to desire it and how to understand it as a setting for family life. Before the house was ever inhabited physically, it was already inhabited imaginatively through the magazine.

The raffle format reinforced this movement from representation to possibility. When the winning couple selected the single-storey option, the project crossed from editorial fantasy into lived realization. That mattered because it confirmed that the house was not merely an image of modernity but a plausible domestic environment, even if still exceptional. The magazine's commentary framed that realization as the fulfilment of a family aspiration.

The 1957 house is exemplary not because it is wholly typical, but because it concentrates in especially legible form the operations traced throughout this article. It joins spatial flexibility to editorial framing, domestic efficiency to consumer appeal, and modern planning to persistent hierarchy. In doing so, it shows with particular clarity how *Eva* turned architectural Modernism into a culturally intelligible image of domestic life.

Visibility, repetition, and public desire

The recurring presentation of the *Eva* houses on covers, in supplements, and in Christmas issues deserves special emphasis because visibility was one of the initiative's principal instruments. Each campaign paired floor plans, perspectives, descriptive prose, and graphic design in ways that made architecture readable within the visual language of a popular magazine. Readers did not encounter these projects as isolated technical documents but as repeated images of domestic aspiration embedded in a broader culture of consumption, celebration, and household fantasy.

This repetition mattered because it normalized what might otherwise have remained exceptional. The contrast with the regime's preferred image of the traditional home did not need to be stated polemically each year; it was already present in the recurrent circulation of houses organized around openness, functionality, integrated furnishings, domestic technology, and stronger relations between dwelling and site. Through repetition, what first appeared novel could come to seem plausible, desirable, and even expected.

The campaigns' force lay not only in frequency but in structure. Each year's house entered the magazine through a recognizable cycle of announcement, elaboration, visualization, prize, and, in some cases, realization. That rhythm made the *Eva* houses more than isolated editorial features. They became anticipated events within the magazine's annual calendar and, by extension, within the imaginative horizon of its readers.

The same process also operated at the level of language. Certain values recurred insistently across decades—comfort, elegance, completeness, convenience, novelty, refinement, family happiness. This vocabulary did more than embellish the houses; it stabilized the terms through which they were to be understood. The modern house was made legible less through technical explanation than through a repeated emotional and practical lexicon.

Conclusion

The *Eva* houses were more than Christmas prizes or stylistic showcases. They constituted a long-running experiment in the mediation of architecture through women's print culture during the *Estado Novo*. By commissioning architects associated with Modernism, circulating plans and images, and linking the house to furnishings, appliances, and aspirational consumption, *Eva* made domestic architecture legible to a readership beyond professional architectural discourse. These were houses imagined as 'the materialization of the loveliest dream you have ever dreamed,' 'modern and elegant houses,' and dwellings

'completely furnished and equipped, conceived within the most refined modern taste' (*Eva,* no. 982, p. 4; no. 983, pp. 50–51).

Working within the conventions of its time, *Eva* did not openly oppose the regime's ideology of family and domestic life, nor did it straightforwardly advocate women's emancipation. Instead, under Carolina Homem Christo's editorial leadership, it inserted alternative spatial models into a familiar commercial and cultural framework. In doing so, it turned the home into a site where modernity could be imagined, rehearsed, and partially normalized.

The argument of this article is deliberately limited, but it is not minor. The archive does not justify claiming that the *Eva* houses dissolved patriarchal domesticity or directly transformed gender relations in practice. It does justify a different and more consequential claim: the *Eva* houses made domestic reorganization publicly thinkable. Through plans, images, furnishings, and editorial framing, they rendered new relations among family life, service, comfort, visibility, and everyday routine both intelligible and desirable.

The broader historiographic implication follows from that point. The history of domestic modernity in Portugal cannot be written adequately if architecture, media, and gender are treated as separate domains. Existing scholarship has illuminated the ideological uses of architecture under the *Estado Novo*, the entanglement of modernism with vernacular and regional traditions, and the imperial circulation of architectural models. What remains less examined is how a women's magazine could function as an architectural medium in its own right: not simply reflecting domestic change, but shaping the terms in which domestic space could be seen, desired, and discussed. In that sense, *Eva* was neither a passive container of architectural images nor merely a source of lifestyle rhetoric. It was one of the media through which domestic modernity was socially translated.

Print culture therefore belongs inside, not beside, architectural history. The *Eva* houses show that domestic modernity circulated not only through buildings, architects, institutions, and exhibitions, but also through recurring editorial formats addressed to non-professional readers. *Eva* did not merely report domestic change after the fact; it participated in the cultural work through which modern domestic space acquired public intelligibility.

The 1957 house has served here as a condensed example of that process. Its large common room, flexible annex, stepped transitions, garden connections, appliances, and service hierarchy demonstrate how modern domestic architecture could recalibrate domestic order without abolishing it. The project shows particularly clearly that spatial flexibility and social hierarchy could coexist. It also shows that the magazine's representational work was inseparable from the house's architectural meaning: before the dwelling was ever inhabited physically, it was already inhabited imaginatively through *Eva's* pages.

That tension is not a qualification to be explained away, but one of the article's conclusions. The furnishings and appliances associated with the *Eva* houses tied them to a vision of domestic efficiency that was modern but also contradictory, since it often preserved women's responsibility for household management and could depend on the labor of other women. Likewise, service entrances, maid's rooms, and differentiated service zones remind us that spatial modernization did not erase hierarchy.

That mediation is precisely what makes the *Eva* houses historically significant. They did not need to be fully emancipatory to matter. Their importance lies in the ways they made alternative domestic arrangements visible within authoritarian Portugal and rendered them culturally plausible. In doing so, they expanded the repertoire of domestic forms that readers could recognize, discuss, and desire—and they did so from within, rather than outside, the cultural authority of the women's magazine.

Seen in this way, the *Eva* houses contribute at once to architectural history, media history, and the history of domesticity. They show how domestic architecture circulated through popular print culture, how a women's magazine served as an architectural medium, and how gendered domestic modernity was negotiated through recurring acts of publication and representation. Once that is visible, the field must reckon not only with architects and

buildings, but with the media forms that taught readers how modern space was to be inhabited, desired, and understood.

Eva, then, did more than raffle houses. It taught readers to read domestic space as modern, to attach modernity to comfort and family aspiration, and to imagine alternative forms of everyday life within a political order that sought to stabilize them. The larger lesson of the *Eva* houses is not that they delivered liberation in any simple sense, but that they helped make modern domestic life thinkable where it was not supposed to appear so easily.

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Conflict of interest
The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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