

## HERITAGE

contemporary



FOUNDED IN 1822, LEITÃO & IRMÃO HAS BEEN MAKING FINE JEWELLERY AND DECORATIVE HOME PIECES IN PRECIOUS METALS FOR OVER 200 YEARS. THE CHALLENGE? TO ALWAYS INNOVATE WHILE KEEPING THE TRADITION

Words: SANDRA GATO



*From magnificent decorative pieces in precious metals, to exceptional homewares hand-crafted by true experts, to the finest jewellery, Leitão & Irmão offers the best*

**E**VEN IN A REPUBLIC such as Portugal, there are 'royal' brands – design houses that have been selling the most exquisite pieces for centuries for the kings and queens (when we had them), and those who enjoy precise and beautiful craftsmanship. Leitão & Irmão belongs to that group.

Founded in 1822 in Porto (in Rua das Flores, known to be the street where jewellers traditionally opened house), Leitão & Irmão introduced an atelier, a place where clients could enter and watch the intricate pieces being made by hand.

#### Becoming a royal favourite

Within ten years, the company had built a solid relationship with the Portuguese crown – we were a monarchy at the time – as D. Pedro IV of Portugal (who was also Pedro I of Brazil) and José Teixeira da Trindade (one of Leitão & Irmão's founders) established and shared a personal bond.

Later, in 1872, D. Pedro II, Brazil's emperor, elected Leitão & Irmão as Ourives da Casa Imperial do Brasil (Official Jeweller of Brazil's Imperial House) and the brand moved its headquarters from Porto to Chiado, right in the centre of Lisbon, to be closer to the royal house.

It was a decision that proved to be clever and brought added success because not long after, in 1886, the Portuguese royal family presented D. Amélia

de Orleans a precious set of jewels – a tiara, necklaces, a brooch and even a pair of binoculars – when she married D. Carlos, future king of Portugal. Just one year later, the most prestigious of titles was bestowed on Leitão & Irmão, that of Jeweller of the Crown. And before the 19th century came to an end, the house opened its new and modern oficinas in the capital's Bairro Alto area, where it has remained to this day.

#### Crowning glory

Throughout the years, many amazing custom-made pieces have been produced by the brand, using the best materials to create exceptional objects. All magnificent, yes, but a true highlight must unquestionably be the crown made for the queen of all queens, Our Lady of Fátima in 1942. The gold-embellished piece was meticulously crafted by a skilled team of 12 experts over a three-month period, and features around 3,000 precious stones.

In 2017 another crown was made by the company for Our Lady of Fátima. Given the name ►





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It is a symbol of our cultural identity, a space where the  
artisanal gesture and the client's emotion meet.



of Crown of the New Millennium, it is a modern interpretation of the original piece and can be admired in Lisbon's Cathedral.

One of the most important collaborations of Leitão & Irmão happened at the turn of the century, in 1900 when, with Columbano Bordalo Pinheiro, one of the greatest artists of the time, they created a baixela (a serving-ware piece) considered to be one of the masterpieces of Portuguese fine jewellery.

Even with a history of more than two centuries of creativity and precise craftsmanship, there were some obstacles in the way, such as the fire that destroyed the Chiado store in 2020. But the brand's huge resilience was proved when the store reopened after only six months where it stands tall, right in the heart of the city centre.

#### Always moving forward

When a brand has a 200-year history there is a compulsory word, learned by intuition and by heart: adaptation. Juggling the need to keep the traditional values of the brand and surprising the customers with innovative products and designs, the challenge has always been to decide wisely, in terms of business direction but mainly of creativity. That is why, although still being a family business, now in its sixth generation, Leitão & Irmão recently hired an exterior creative director: Ricardo Preto, a highly-experienced Portuguese designer.

We asked him a few questions in order to understand better what he intends to bring

*The company's new Creative Director, Ricardo Preto, left, recognises the 200-year heritage of Leitão & Irmão, and its undisputed ability, as one of its most valuable assets*

to this brand with its long, proud history, and his view on the relevance of Leitão & Irmão's expertise in this fast-moving digital era.

#### AlgarvePlus: How would you define Leitão & Irmão?

**Ricardo Preto:** Leitão & Irmão is a house with more than two centuries of history, where craftsmanship, time, and Portuguese culture converge. It is a brand that has transformed heritage into a living creative territory – a legacy that does not crystallize, but renews itself. To me, Leitão & Irmão represents that rare ability to unite precision, memory, and contemporaneity. It is a symbol of our cultural identity, a space where the artisanal gesture and the client's emotion meet.

#### AP: What led you to accept this huge challenge?

**Ricardo Preto:** My first feeling was enthusiasm; the second was respect. The historic dimension of the house – which has crossed generations, styles, and fashions – demands a lot of listening and accurate sensitivity. I immediately felt that this was an invitation to dialogue with the past, not to reproduce it, but to carry it forward. Leitão & Irmão is part of the emotional memory of many families and also of Portugal's cultural history. The idea of transforming this legacy into a contemporary language was irresistible. It is a challenge that requires reflection, rigor, and vision – qualities that I believe define me as a designer.

#### AP: What will be your creative approach to the brand?

**Ricardo Preto:** I see this mission as an exercise in lucid renewal: evolving the brand without losing its truth. I intend to refine codes, clarify aesthetic values and translate the house's artisanal excellence into a current, relevant, and global language.

My approach is based on an essential principle: tradition is not an endpoint, it is a source of the future. By deeply understanding the brand's DNA, it becomes possible to build contemporary

narratives that maintain the integrity of the heritage.

More than designing products, it is about designing vision – turning the dialogue between the atelier and the store into an emotional ecosystem, where craftsmanship becomes experience.

#### AP: What characteristics do you consider to be differentiating factors at Leitão & Irmão?

**Ricardo Preto:** The uniqueness of Leitão & Irmão lies in its artisanal and cultural heritage – a rare legacy that combines technical precision, memory, narrative, and Portuguese identity.

For this brand, jewellery is not just about beautiful objects: it is time shaped, it is a human gesture, it is material culture.

The brand stands out for its ability to transform this depth into something that remains contemporary.

In addition, the intimate relationship between the atelier and the store – between creation and emotion – gives it a dimension that few houses possess: that of a living cultural space, where tradition and modernity meet naturally.

#### AP: Can you please give us a brief description of your own story to date?

**Ricardo Preto:** My career has been marked by a transversal approach to design – spanning fashion, accessories, product and creative direction. I have worked across different geographies and cultural contexts, from Asia to Avenida da Liberdade, always with the intention of observing the present and transforming it into aesthetic language.

All this experience has allowed me to develop a strategic and sensitive vision that unites formal rigor, cultural depth and narrative clarity.

To Leitão & Irmão, I bring this maturity: the ability to articulate heritage and contemporaneity, offering the brand a renewed, global voice that remains faithful to its roots. ©

**Leitão & Irmão** Bairro Alto atelier: Tv. da Espera 8 a 14, 1200-176 Lisbon  
Chiado Flagship store: Largo do Chiado 16/17, 1200-108 Lisbon  
Estoril store: Av. Clotilde 52, 2765-211 Estoril. [Leitao-irmao.com](http://Leitao-irmao.com)



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