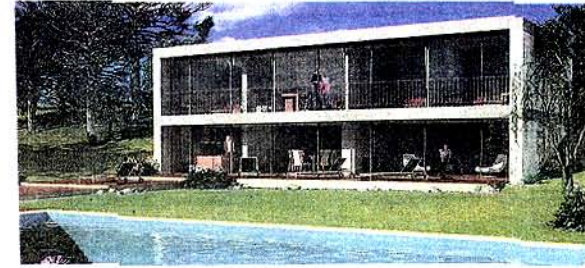
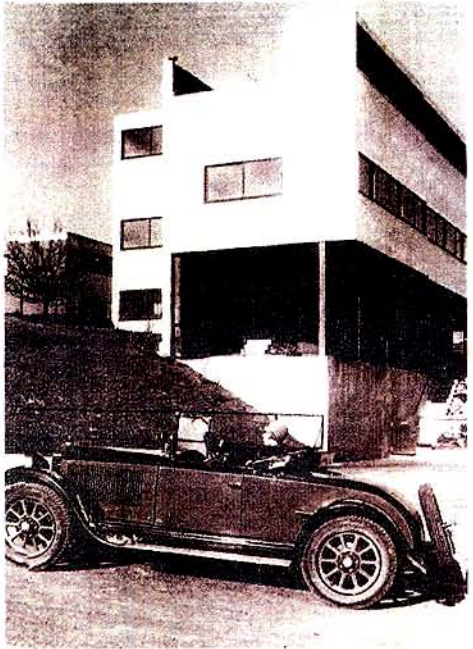


OVERSEAS

ALAMY



Glass at the 1920s Weissen Estate in Stuttgart middle left is the model for the villa by Alvaro Siza Vieira left, and another by Eduardo Souto de Moura, bottom far left, at B Sucesso near Obidos top far left. José Mourinho below, Chelsea's manager, among those to sign up for house the

HERE COMES THE WHITE

Portugal's best architects are reviving the Bauhaus spirit on the coast, says John Price

DO BUILDERS create rubbish houses because they have to satisfy our rubbish tastes? Or is it that our tastes are rubbish because we have never known anything better?

Either way — across the world — it is the tried and tested, the uniform, the comfortably conforming, the predictable and the dull that dominate. Old hat sells best. So, what if a builder breaks with the formula? Would it mean financial ruin? We might be about to find out, and in a pretty unlikely place too.

Halfway up Portugal's coastline, sandwiched between the Atlantic and a huge natural lake, two million square metres of rolling country is being cleared of its towering eucalyptus trees to make way for 600 uncompromisingly contemporary homes.

What is more, they are going to be set within a golf course, although there is scant evidence that people who enjoy hitting small white balls with a stick were ever at the front of the queue for innovative housing. Le Corbusier was not well known in caddying circles.

The place is Bom Sucesso, a former farmstead near the medieval town of Obidos, close to miles and miles of unspoilt beaches along the Silver Coast. It is less than an hour's drive from Lisbon airport (flying time from

London is two hours). Here the developer Acordo is spending €250 million (£173 million) building villas and townhouses, a world-class golf course, swimming pools, hotel, shops, restaurants and all the other sport and leisure facilities you associate with an international resort. It has its own dedicated beach with sailing and water sports on the adjoining lake.

But it is the houses that will mark it out as special. The developer has signed up 14 of the country's leading architects and given them a free hand.

They include the internationally renowned Alvaro Siza Vieira and Eduardo Souto de Moura. Both men are household names in Portugal and are about to become better known here too. They are collaborating on this year's Serpentine Gallery Summer Pavilion in London — a showcase for new architecture. The British architect David Chipperfield has been lined up for the project at a later date.

Master planners for the venture are Wimberly, Allison, Tong & Goo, known as WATG, the name behind some of the most successful resorts and hotels in the world. The British golf course architect Donald Steel has done the course.

Between them they are offering a sophisticat-

ed 21st-century take on the Modern Movement of the 1920s and 1930s. Bom Sucesso's closest relative is the Weissenhof Estate in Stuttgart. It was built 70 years ago by a clutch of designers who went on to become the brand leaders of Modernism — Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier among them.

In the Bauhaus manner they broke with architectural tradition to build simple, un-

Le Corbusier was not well known in caddying circles

ornamented and functional homes of glass, steel and concrete, laying the foundations for what was to become the "International Style".

The Acordo director, Miguel Roque Martins, a dynamo of a man and the driving force behind Bom Sucesso, sees it becoming a mecca for architecture pilgrims and golf nuts alike.

His enthusiasm is gripping. So is his candour. "We are going to create a place that will be a permanent exhibition of architecture. We have found a beautiful site and are saying to

the best modern architects we can find: 'Show us how to build a great home'."

Are they taking a risk? "Yes," says Roque Martins. "Probably 60 per cent, maybe 70 per cent, of the public won't like it. We are letting architecture lead the way. It's more expensive, but it will give us better homes."

One person who does like it is Dr Telmo Faria, the Mayor of Obidos, an exquisite walled town that traces its roots back to before the Roman Conquest.

The mayor, a 32-year-old former history professor who is pushing an Obidos bid for World Heritage status, is also passionate about the modernist experiment on his doorstep. He brought opera to the town and is talking to Roque Martins — who has an art gallery in Lisbon — about setting up a painting prize. "We want more diversity. We want more people coming here," the mayor says.

Bom Sucesso's architects have come up with a wonderful permutation of designs, all utilising the same basic ingredients: concrete, steel, stone, wood and acres of glass. Roofs are to be thickly insulated and planted with grass, and exterior walls will be draped with creepers, rendering many houses almost invisible to their neighbours.

There are 100 different house designs and each of the 600 homes will be individually tailored to its particular site. There will be a mixture of villas with their own swimming pools and clusters of townhouses sharing pools. Ninety per cent will be single-storey.

Modern boxes they may be, but wonderfully clever and beautiful-looking boxes too. It is architecture you cannot normally buy, and if you could it would be a one-off and cost a fortune. Prices for one to three-bedroom townhouses are from €165,000 to €249,000. The villas range from €320,000 for three bedrooms to €660,000 for five.

Fifteen per cent of the price is payable on exchange of contracts, and a further 25 per cent during construction.

You pay a tax of 3 to 6 per cent depending on the value of the property, and you should allow an additional 1.5 per cent for notary and registration fees and about 1 per cent for your own lawyer's fee. Purchasers buy the freehold of the property, but can also enter long-term investment contracts to cover costs. Under one scheme the owner has the house for ten weeks a year and puts it in a rental pool managed by the resort for the other 42 weeks. A second scheme is for owners to have the house six weeks a year and for it to be used by the hotel, with full hotel services, for the remainder. That comes with a guaranteed 5 per cent net return on investment for three years.

Pete Wimberly, one of the founders of the WATG consultancy, said decades ago: "The value of good design — what a building looks

like and how it feels to people — can be run on a cash register."

So will it work here? Well, here are some clues. The houses are not built yet and already the idea is being copied in Spain. About 100 properties have sold off plan, by word of mouth without a single advertisement.

José Mourinho, Chelsea FC's manager, signed up. Having lived in a Siza house in Obidos, he has gone for another one at Bom Sucesso.

The answer looks like a Yes.
□ Full details of Bom Sucesso from Hamptons International, 020-7589 8844 or www.hamptons-int.com

