



The links course at Praia D'El Rey Golf and Beach Resort

# Portugal's new golf coast

Will golf developments transform the Oeste region into the new Algarve? Not if local people can help it, reports HELEN DAVIES

The game of golf may be all about rules — who can join the club, what you can wear, fiendishly complicated scoring systems — but there's only one golden rule when it comes to property. Build 18 holes of landscaped grass and sandy bunkers, and people and profit will follow.

The British flock to villas and town houses surrounding a well-manicured and well-watered golf course. It has worked in Spain, Cyprus and the Algarve. Now, north of Lisbon, Portugal's silver coast — so named for its pristine white beaches facing the Atlantic — is looking to golf to turn its real estate gold.

Ten years ago, the Oeste, or western region, 130 miles of beach and jagged cliffs between Lisbon and Figueira da Foz, with its undulating hinterland of windmills, vineyards and cabbage fields, was relatively unknown to British property hunters.

But the new A8 motorway (a byproduct of the Euro 2004 football tournament) has cut journey times from Lisbon to the area in half, opening the colourful market towns of Caldas da Rainha and Turcifal, and pretty fishing villages, such as Peniche.

At the region's centre is Obidos, a medieval walled town of whitewashed houses, brimming with pink bougainvillea and geraniums, that nestle in the shadow of the castle at its apex. Properties in Obidos rarely come on the market and are snapped up by buyers prepared to pay a considerable premium for the location.

Ten minutes' drive from Obidos, the Praia D'El Rey Golf and Beach Resort opened its 18-hole links course in 1997. When the first villa plots went on sale they cost £45,000, but have now jumped to £450,000. A five-star Marriott hotel and spa have followed.

According to Charles Roberts, director of sales at Praia D'El Rey, prices in the western region are 25% cheaper than the Algarve, and up to half the price of a comparable property on the Spanish Costas.

Prices at the resort, a 600-acre site bordered by sand dunes and wooded hills, start at £136,000 for a one- or two-bed flat to £255,000 for a three-bed town house with use of a communal pool. But for a villa, expect to pay from £350,000 to £1.5m, depending on the size and specification of the plot.

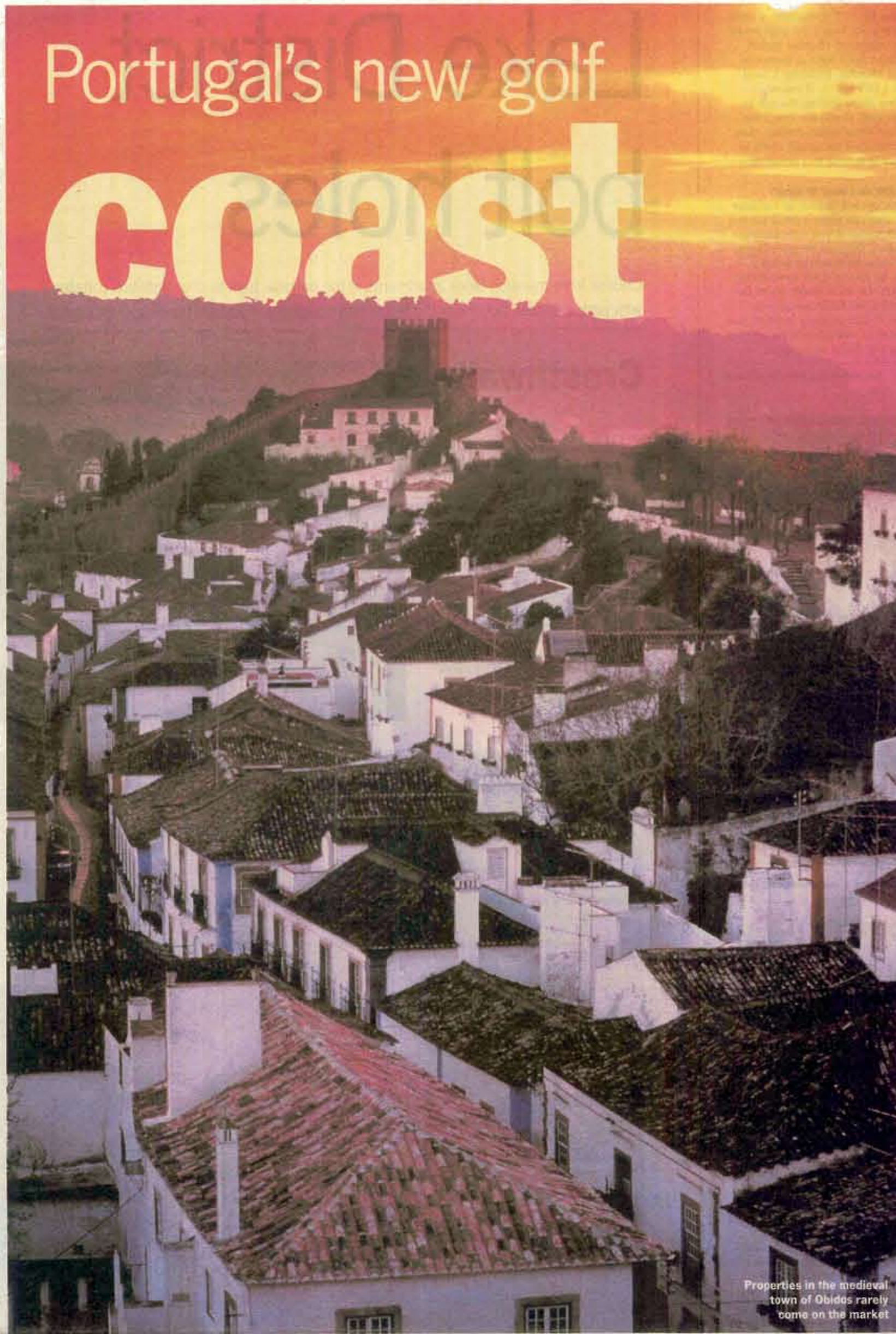
Launched last month, the final phase of the development, which will total 1,350 homes, includes a new "golf village" and a smaller development closer to the shoreline, where 70% of properties will have views of the Atlantic and the two and a half miles of beach at the resort.

Designed to resemble a traditional hilltop village, with pitched terracotta roofs and whitewashed houses with a splash of bright yellow, royal blue or blanchmange pink, the village will include a much-needed supermarket. Owners will pay annual resort service charges of, on average, £1,600.

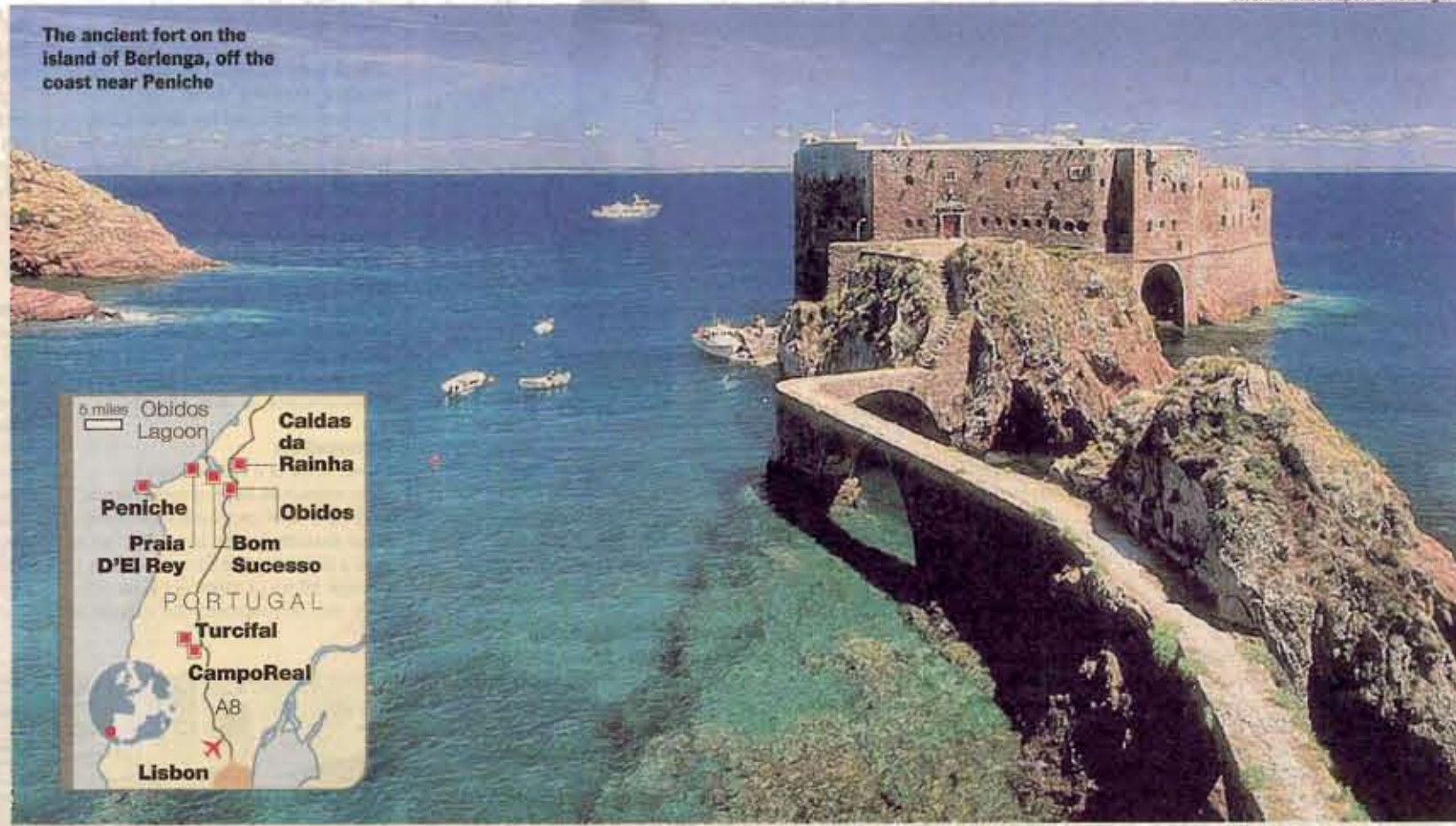
"About half the buyers are British," says Roberts. "They don't even have to like playing golf. In fact, only 25% of people who buy actually play."

Mike Catt, England rugby star and member of the winning 2003 World Cup team, and his wife, Ali, bought two three-bed town houses overlooking the seventh hole at Praia D'El Rey; one to holiday in, one to let as an investment. Catt, 34, relaxes off the pitch by playing golf.

"Prices have been rising by an average of 20% a year for the past five years," says Roberts. "Such a rate of growth can't continue, but the proximity to the shoreline and the sea views should ensure a healthy appreciation."



Properties in the medieval town of Obidos rarely come on the market



The ancient fort on the island of Berlenga, off the coast near Peniche



There are now two championship courses in the region, one at Praia D'El Rey and one at CampoReal, and plans for two more. The Portuguese Open has also been earmarked for the greater Lisbon area for the next three years. So could the Oeste become the next Algarve?

Not if Telmo Faria, Obidos' young and forward-thinking mayor, who has just been re-elected with 70% of the vote, has anything to do with it.

"I get two or three investors a month knocking at the door trying to build," he says. "But we don't want lots of resorts. We don't want to be like the Algarve."

"We want investors to make a fortune, but if the road they choose to make money is just selling houses and thinking of euros per square metre, then we're not interested. We want something more visionary."

With plans to open a second airport at Ota — just 20 minutes from Obidos — in the next six years, the temptation to build will be very strong.

However, the Portuguese government has recently introduced tough environmental and planning legislation, with a view to preventing the unrestricted building that has destroyed much of the Spanish coastline and has affected the Algarve, too.

Under the new guidelines, a big resort such as Praia D'El Rey would not now be given planning permission.

The latest project to be given the green light is Bom Sucesso, a 400-acre site behind the Obidos lagoon, Portugal's largest natural lake. On the site of an old farm, six miles from Obidos, 14 of Portugal's top architects, including Eduardo Souto de Moura and Alvaro Siza, who designed this year's summer pavilion at the Serpentine Gallery, have contributed to what the developers call "the world's first minimalist design resort".

At the moment, the £170m project resembles a dusty moonscape, but when it is completed in 2007, there will be 600 properties — all vast swathes of glass — built around a championship golf course.

"We are selling art," says Goncalo Castelo Branco, sales director of Bom Sucesso. "Each home is like a work of art."

The site's natural gradients will be used to screen houses from each other and to optimise views, and each house

will have a grass-covered roof. The developers plan to plant 10,000 trees on the site and promise the added convenience of a helipad. The second phase, yet to launch, will include six villas designed by English architect David Chipperfield, most famous for his rowing museum at Henley-on-Thames.

It is a spectacular project. Ultra-modern in style, rather like Californian condos in the Portuguese hills, they are holiday homes in which you will want to display your Eames chairs and Le Corbusier-style recliners.

Further inland, set in wooded hills, is the more traditional CampoReal Golf and Spa Resort, which will have up to 372 units including villa plots, town houses and apartments. The project is the brainchild of Eduardo Netto de Almeida, a local businessman and keen horseman.

Roy and Petrina Foreman sold their villa in the La Manga Club in Murcia, Spain, in the early 1990s, and have reinvested in a house on a golf resort in Cyprus and a four-bed town house at CampoReal. They bought the property off-plan 18 months ago — it will be ready in June 2006 — for £156,000. Prices for a four-bed town house now start at £210,000.

"We love the idea of being close to Lisbon, and towns such as Estoril and Cascais," says Roy, a lawyer from Cleethorpes, Lincolnshire. "We can go to a football game or the Grand Prix, but, at the same time, we're in the real Portugal — nothing is anglicised."

"I play golf, but badly," admits Roy. "I see a golf course as a safer bet for an investment. I may also get to practise."

So what is CampoReal's developer, Netto de Almeida's, handicap? "I don't play golf," he grins. "It's just business."



Mike Catt, right, with England team-mate Jonny Wilkinson

## FOR SALE



Designed by Eduardo Souto de Moura, this five-bed villa at the Bom Sucesso resort is for sale with Hamptons (0870 458 3631, [www.hamptons-int.com](http://www.hamptons-int.com)) for £440,000



In traditional style, this three-bed town house at the Praia D'El Rey Golf and Beach Resort is for sale for £275,000. Praia D'El Rey, 0800 977 7001, [www.praia-del-rey.com](http://www.praia-del-rey.com)



A four-bedroom town house at the CampoReal resort, with use of a shared pool, is for sale with Premier Resorts (0800 083 5300, [www.premieresorts.co.uk](http://www.premieresorts.co.uk)) for £210,000