

of remaking ungrounded, full of menacingly designed on-off, poorly coordinated and unrelated either to one another or to their physical or cultural context. The last 20 years have seen a new approach for the theoretical, a new view, explosion of an ego, bending sticks around and needs to grow with its inhabitants. It is the physical fabric that allows communities to flourish and to accommodate change in use, social structure, and technology. The future developments may say for dense, or dependent are they on the statistical snapshot of a moment in design.

The residential too is almost certain to be here to stay, and, if it helps in raising the profile of architecture in the residential sector, it is a luxury we cannot afford. Yet, it should be at least continuously re-assessed. We must avoid using archaic notions as a fashionable trappings, a vehicle to express wealth and individuality.

Edwin Heathcote is the FT's architecture critic.

The group dynamic

Developers have a new strategy: luring buyers with 'collections' of houses conceived by several 'starchitects'. But, asks **Edwin Heathcote**, are many visionary heads better than one?

Architecture is a bulky and expensive thing to collect. However, next to the absurd prices paid for art, antiques and design, it can begin to look like a secure and useful investment. "Curation" has become the latest buzzword in residential real estate. Developers differentiate high-end schemes by acting as museum directors or art patrons, creating a "collection" of houses from architects usually found designing cultural institutions.

You too can live in a masterpiece, the literature invariably says. It's off-the-shelf *avant garde*.

In some ways this is a positive development. Instead of erecting traditional island bungalows, towering condominium blocks or Dallas-style supermansions, property companies are now scouring the world for architectural talent and commissioning beautiful, modern, luxurious homes. It's the globalisation of good taste, surely, and that must be a good thing.

Yet, just as globalisation has a downside – most clearly visible through commercialisation and pollution – these new developments are not necessarily an unqualified good. Architecture is pure environment and when radical and disparate styles are grouped for display in one place – like exotic animals in a zoo – the risk is a non-community that sits uncomfortably between exhibition, private collection and gated ghetto.

There is nothing new in bringing so-called "starchitects" together on housing projects. The Hampstead Garden Suburb, founded outside London in 1906, included buildings by the great arts and crafts architects, from Sir Edwin Lutyens to Charles Voysey. The 1927 Weissenhofseidlung in Stuttgart was an experimental estate coordinated by Mies van der Rohe, the most refined of modernists, and included houses by him, Walter Gropius, Charles Le Corbusier and Bruno Taut, among others. These settlements, and their imitators across continental Europe, were driven by social

returning troops resulted in the Case Study Houses – laid-back Californian modernism from talents including Charles and Ray Eames, Craig Ellwood, Eero Saarinen, Pierre König and Viennese émigré Richard Neutra – which remain hugely admired.

What we are seeing today, however, is very different from these past attempts, driven more by publicity, branding, sales and ego. This sort of architectural zoo has been used effectively in the public realm; cities commission modern blockbuster buildings to boost tourism and revitalise former industrial areas. But when taken to its extreme in international expos, or world's fairs, the result is nearly always a cacophony, with a few scattered highlights that last only a season. Houses, by contrast, must endure.

Probably the finest architecture-led development under construction today is Bom Sucesso, a luxury golf resort an hour's drive north of Lisbon, Portugal, described as "the largest exhibition of contemporary homes in Europe". Rather than gathering big stars regardless of aesthetic compatibility or sympathy, the developer has chosen relatively like-minded architects – mostly Portuguese but with a few foreigners, such as the UK's David Chipperfield, thrown in – to produce a harmonious site.

Álvaro Siza, father of contemporary Portuguese design, has contributed a restrained house built around a heart and lung of kitchen and courtyard leavened with a series of kinks and angles that interrupt the clarity of the geometry. Eduardo Souto de Moura's grass-roofed villas are embedded in the landscape like terraces, their long, low fronts exposed to the distant sea view. All the houses are clean, clear and white – a thoughtful modernism that nods to the blocky cubes and white-washed walls of Portuguese tradition while retaining a pure, refined aesthetic.

Prices are also accessible, ranging from €245,000 for a one-bedroom property to €2m for the best villas, and sales have been deservedly strong, with the first 350 houses already sold and a new phase of 240 being launched.

Buyer Jackie Stephens affirms the draw of the architecture. She had intended to build a house with an architect in the US but decided on Bom Sucesso after studying Siza's work. If this development can attract her to a country where she had never intended to own a home, as well as winning over the staid golf set, it must have a future.

Lower Mill Estate is a similar development that has already generated acres of newsprint. Located in a beautiful part of the Cotswolds, it is a (positive) reaction to

The second home market is booming and architecture is a desirable accessory. Developers want beautiful buildings

the UK government's pledge to support domestic construction in sensitive rural settings if it is of sufficient quality.

Most of the 500 residences are not very ambitious but at the core of the project are 46 "landmark" homes designed by an impressive list of architects. These range from New Yorker Richard Meier and Beijing-based Yung Ho Chang (collaborating with Californian Greg Lynn) to some of Britain's finest. Sarah Featherstone's delightful Orchid House is a camouflaged organic structure inspired by a local wild flower; Piers Gough has used eccentrically stacked timber-clad hoops; and

the reliably tasteless Will Alsop has designed a huge arch with room pods hanging from it.

Pitched at prices of £2m to £5m, they are conceived as starting points to be developed with buyers rather than as faits accomplis; co-ordinating architect Richard Reid describes the process as something between purchasing an artwork and commissioning a design. So far, one house has been built and buyers have put deposits on three more.

Lower Mill represents an eclectic cross section of contemporary fashions – some radical, some intelligent, some hideous – but it is hard to conceive a bigger picture. Lacking the purity of its Portuguese counterpart, it is indeed a "collection" of houses one might see flipping through the pages of a design magazine. But architecture is almost always better when it has some kind of context, either to empathise with or react against. When that context is reduced to a clamour of voices in the wilderness, each trying to out-original each other in form and panache, the result can be far from pleasing.

Houses at Sagaponac is another ambitious second home scheme, located on New York's Long Island. It was instigated by the late developer Harry Brown, who in the late-1990s was dismayed at the "McMansions" swamping the Hamptons. (Since his death in 2005, his daughter Morgan has carried out the work.) The stellar cast of architects is pictured on the website in an extraordinary Vanity Fair-type group shot: Richard Meier, in a "curatorial" role and adding another of his early modernist kickbacks; Zaha Hadid, who contributes a characteristically dynamic design; Dutch practice MVRDV, with an ethereal glass structure melting into trees; Reiser Umemoto, with an elegant, serpentine experiment in the bending of a frame to accommodate a landscape;

and Richard Rogers, whose house with overhanging eaves looks curiously like a grandstand.

In spite of the starriness of the designers, these are relatively modest homes for the Hamptons (2,500 to 3,000 sq ft on lots of a little more than an acre) at relatively modest prices (\$2m to \$3m). It's not working class housing, of course, but costing the same as many Manhattan apartments, Sagaponac makes contemporary architecture more accessible for the moneyed classes. Four designs (from Hariri & Hariri, Annabelle Selldorf, Henry Cobb and Shigeru Ban) have been built and sold, one is under contract and three more are on the way, although none will be available for sale until it is almost complete. Perhaps surprisingly, a relatively polite and uniform conventional modernist language has been arrived at here. Few of the designs are groundbreaking but few are poor and there is coherence in the same kind of games with solid and void that the modernists were playing with in Stuttgart.

The latest entry in the starchitect development category is the O Property Collection (an arm of Vienna-based Magic Life), which is launching at Dellis Cay, a private island in Turks and Caicos. With homes by Piero Lissoni, Kengo Kuma, Ban (again), Chipperfield (again) and Hadid (this time master-planning and responsible for a marina park), this project is, even more than the others, aimed at the (private) jet-set, who accumulate houses as they do cars. Prices range from \$3.5m to \$10m for villas and \$2m to \$4m for apartments, and chief executive Cem Kinay, who hand-picked the architects involved, says he expects two types of buyers: US baby boomers drawn to the privacy, exclusivity and beauty of the island, and design and art collectors who want "special pieces" in the world.

Bar the incongruously traditional colo-

Constellation:
Houses at
Sagaponac by
Henry Cobb, top.

