



Thursday, March 19, 2009

Cube designs in starchitects' golf resort by the sea



Bom Sucesso is a golf resort designed by leading European architects near Obidos, 50kms north of Lisbon in northern Portugal.



A villa designed by 2009 RIBA gold medallist Alvaro Siza Viera



A house designed by Madalena Cardoso Menezes Francisco Teixeira Bastos.

Something radical is happening in golf resort planning: **KEVIN O'CONNOR** visits a development in northern Portugal designed by 23 European starchitects.

FUSING "art and nature" was the demanding challenge given to architects designing Bom Sucesso, a resort about 50kms north of Lisbon – but the result is visually remarkable. For art, read architecture and for nature read the coastline washed by Atlantic breakers.

That's the setting for a development of villas and townhouses designed by teams of Europe's leading architects, each a prizewinner for previous work and each willing to mesh with others' ideas to deliver the resort known as Bom Sucesso – the good success.

The architects include Portugal's Álvaro Siza Viera, who has just won Britain's top architectural prize, the RIBA gold medal for 2009; Manuel Aires Mateus, who is designing the hotel in Dublin's Grand Canal Dock; and David Chipperfield, one of the UK's internationally best known architects.

The idea for Bom Sucesso came from Paulo Graça Moura, an entrepreneur who for once deserves the title of "visionary". "Not one designer said it was difficult and not one said it was easy," according to Ricardo Garcia of Acordo Group, which financed the project.

The architects were given a blank canvas on which they could build houses sparsely spaced from each other and different in exterior and interior appearance.

They had space, as planners allowed no more than 7 per cent of the rural 642-acre site to be built on. Hence stretches of walls that appear at first sight to be just – well, walls – conceal terraces of cubist homes, which are accessed by Newgrange-like passages.

Car-parks are under houses and in other plots, stretches of sculptured fencing hide courtyards of yet more "bunkered" living quarters. It is visually impressive and harmonious, snaking in sculptured contours along man-made undulations that overlook the golf course.

Also, with an eye to ecology and green politics, electricity comes from wind farms on surrounding hills, waste water is recycled and care was taken to protect ancient plantations of olive trees and forests. Much thought, too, went

into east and west orientation to maximise light and to have living areas face into the spectacular lagoon of the nearby medieval town of Obidos, where the Atlantic breakers encroach into the land like the wash of a giant whale.

As well as architects like Vieira and Chipperfield, add leading European names of the caliber of Alcino Soutinho, Carla Prata and you get the flavour of something radical happening in the realm of golf resort planning.

The golf will provide much of the lure for renters and purchasers: the 18-hole championship course, launched last September, was laid out by Donald Steel. Obsessive golfers – is there another kind? – will raise their game, as they look onto cushioned fairways, imagining spins to dog-legs, calculations as mysterious to non-golfers as the prickly pride of adults chasing balls into tiny holes with less strokes than bankers.

So – what is it like to inhabit one of these ultra-modern creations, the townhouses and villas of Bom Sucesso? According to designer Carlos Prata, he made “day area to the east and night areas to the west”.

After a couple of nights here, my mantra of more modern, more cave is enhanced. Solid slabs of walls make one feel both protected and bunkered. I imagine myself an animal finding a lair that one could seek shelter in. Though from what? The sun – or latent anxieties. Odd that.

It has Smart technology so smart it takes working out – remote controls for drawing blinds across plate glass walls and spotlights that sense body movement at night, which saves putting on a bright light and great for loo-going.

Prices start around €350,000 and €375,000 for one and two-bedroom townhouses and soar to €1.5 million for a villa with a long curving façade on a hill: it has five bedrooms, a glorious courtyard, gardens and a private pool. In effect, a modernist villa in itself, half a Roman amphitheatre, the only building on this particular hill.

So far 3,000 rounds of golf have been sold, as have all but three of the 120 houses built so far, a third to buyers from Spain and Portugal, another third to British and about 30 to Irish owners.

Two Irish people in the dining room, newly arrived to take possession, told me they were “very pleased” with their new home, but did not wish to be named.

The entire enterprise has been given the seal of approval by the Portuguese government as a superior tourist product.

Even in these financially-stretched times, several local banks offer mortgages around 70 per cent of loan-to-value, including Caixa Galicia, Banco Espirito Santo, Caixa de Depositos and Barclays BBVA.

FACTFILE

A TOTAL of 1,071 villas and townhouses are to be built on 642 acres at Bom Sucesso by the time it is completed in 2012. In the first phase, 610 are planned on 385 acres – 120 are already built. The resort will include a hotel with a spa and retail and leisure facilities.

Just three of the 120 built so far are left for sale, with another 85 in the first phase for sale from plans. Two-bedroom townhouses cost from €375,000, three-bedroom townhouses from €595,000. Three to five-bedroom villas on their own plots are for sale from €590,000 to €1.5 million.

Four villas are for sale under a fractional ownership scheme, costing between €142,000 and €197,300 for a quarter share. This would entitle the owner to 13 weeks use of the villa per year, in periods of two weeks each.

Bom Sucesso is close to beaches, nature parks and spectacular lagoons and to some of the best fish restaurants.

The Donald Steel golf course is championship par 72, with the first nine holes on level and the return nine on rough, all with panoramic views of the coast and mountains. Local fees are about €70 a round, though residents have deals.

[www. bomsucesso.net](http://www.bomsucesso.net)

*This article appears in the print edition of the **Irish Times***