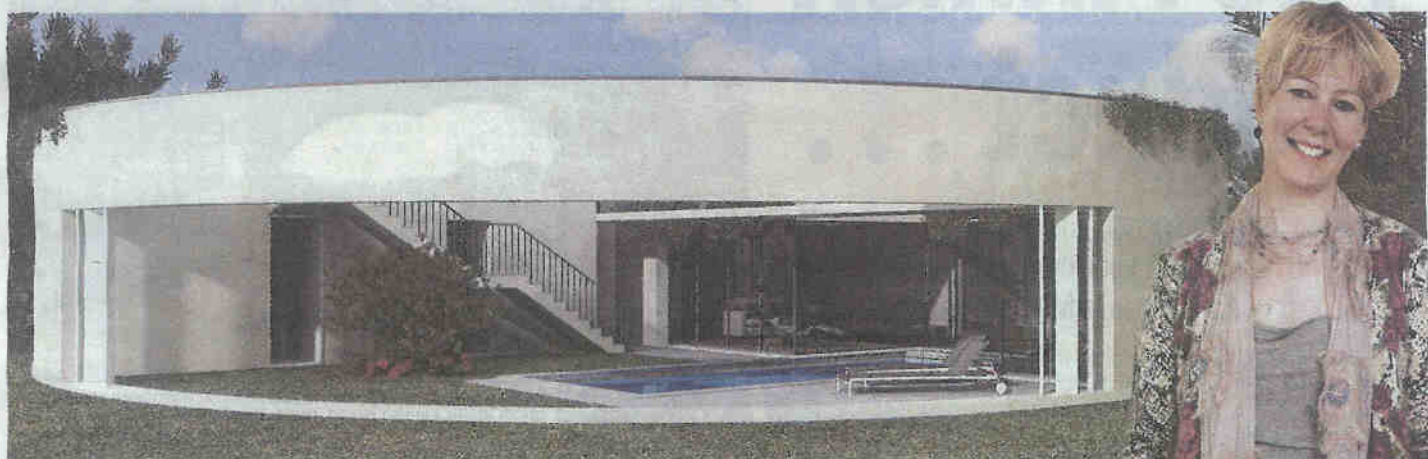


A 'living exhibition of architecture' on the coast north of Lisbon is putting the design back into holiday housing. Zoe Dare Hall reports



Life in the round: A cutting edge Bom Sucesso house (above) and the castle and historic townhouses of Obidos (below)

CIRCULAR homes entered via their grassy roofs and finger-shaped villas — Bom Sucesso on Portugal's western Silver Coast is a housing development with a difference.

This is the world's first 'design resort', with the accent very much on architectural innovation. Its developer, Acordo, promises that, more than being just another residential development, it will be a 'living exhibition of architecture'.

It is set on a 1,000-acre site — only 6 per cent of which will be developed — half a mile inland from the unspoilt beaches near Obidos, an hour's drive north of Lisbon.

Each of the 21 leading home-grown 'starchitects' involved (the Portuguese embrace their architects like we do chefs), along with Briton David Chipperfield, has designed a set of villas or townhouses, with a total of 600 due for completion in spring 2008.

The ground rules are that no property can be higher than two storeys and each must have a grass roof so that, when viewed from the surrounding hillsides, the resort blends in with the greenery of the on-site golf course and miles of eucalyptus forests.

Beyond that, the architects have been left to their own creative devices — to great dramatic effect.

Among the most prolific names involved is Alvaro Siza Vieira, the Norman Foster of Portuguese architecture, who has designed 17 white cube villas, two of which have been bought by Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho.

Siza also designed the resort's shops and restaurants. 'You are buying a signed, limited edition of an artist's work,' says Goncalo Castelo Branco, Acordo's executive director.

'It's rare to say you live in a Siza house. Architects of this calibre usually design museums or stadia all over the world and don't have time for individual houses.'

'There are buyers who appreciate that and who wouldn't buy anywhere else — and, of course, there are those who just don't understand the appeal.'

Architect Jose Pedro Falcao de Campos, a former student of Siza's, kept his 23 two-storey townhouses low and discreet so as not to distract from the grand master's villas behind.

'Siza Vieira's style isn't about being fashionable or high-tech,' says Campos, 44. 'He uses basic, natural materials such as stone to brilliant effect and I didn't want my houses in front to distract from him in any way. I wanted mine to blend in with the golf course, with rooms that are flooded with light.'

Jackie Stephens, 45, an interior designer from St Agnes, Cornwall, is one of the 100 British buyers at the resort.

'I was looking around Europe and couldn't find anything that appealed. Everything looked the same,' she says. Then she and her husband Eric, 55, visited the resort and were so

In the art of Portugal

struck by its innovative design and beautiful setting that they bought a bigger villa than intended and are considering moving there permanently.

Their four-bedroom house is one of 12 villas designed by Joao Luis Carrilho da Graça. Each is slightly different in shape and has an elevated living space which extends on stilts over the golf course. They cost about £675,000.

Jackie says: 'It is one of the largest houses on the development and very flexible with open-plan living space that maximises views and privacy.'

'It is big enough to live in permanently and has a large garage and basement storage rooms.'

THE Silver Coast's lack of development also appeals to Jackie. 'If Bom Sucesso had been in the Algarve, I doubt I would have bought,' she says.

'This area is relatively rural with few other developments and building along the beautiful coast is strictly controlled. But it has recently become more accessible thanks to new road links and plans for a new regional airport.'

One fear that some househunters at Bom Sucesso express is that their

properties may be so idiosyncratic that they will appeal only to a niche market when it comes to reselling. But Jackie is confident that design will win out.

'These properties may not appeal to people who are not interested in design or those who prefer a traditional Portuguese style,' she says.

'But the fact that many of the properties are being bought by the Portuguese is a reflection of the esteem in which architects such as Siza are held over here.'

Despite the bespoke approach, properties at Bom Sucesso don't come with an designer price tag. Prices are on a par with other new-build properties on local golf developments and about half the cost of villas on golf resorts in the Algarve.

Two-bedroom townhouses at Bom Sucesso start at £233,000, while David Chipperfield's villas overlooking the lake range in price from £370,000 to £1.35 million, available through Hamptons International.

Most villas are part of the rental pool managed by the on-site five-star hotel, which offers an eight-year contract allowing personal use of up to ten weeks a year. Rents cost from about £100 a night and the average annual occupancy rate is 40 per cent.

'We guarantee a 5 per cent net yield for the first two years while the resort

is getting established,' says Goncalo Castelo Branco. 'You can also put villas in the rental scheme, but most buyers say they intend to use theirs regularly.'

Service charges cost between £100 and £135 a month, depending on the property.

FOR those who prefer a more familiar Mediterranean style of architecture, the Silver Coast has two other main developments.

These are the Campo Real Golf and Spa Resort, 40 minutes drive north of Lisbon, where three-bedroom townhouses in the latest phase of the development cost from £290,000, with villas from £316,000, available through Premier Resorts; and Praia d'El Rey, a 600-acre golf and spa resort centred on a five-star Marriott hotel.

The pastel-coloured, Mediterranean style townhouses cost between £235,000 and £415,000. Kerry and Mark Woodhead from Maidenhead, Berks, have seen their two-bedroom apartment at Praia d'El Rey — bought off-plan through Savills Select Resorts — appreciate by around £25,000 in a year. 'As an investment, it's been fantastic,' says



Stylist: Jackie Stephens owns one of the designer villas

Kerry, 38, who works with Mark, 42, in his sports memorabilia business.

'We've always loved Portugal and we wanted something we could use ourselves all year round for family holidays and long weekends and for renting out, but we didn't want to be on the more developed Algarve.'

With a four-year-old daughter, Hannah, and a baby due in January, Kerry says Praia d'El Rey is ideal for families. 'There's a fantastic beach and great facilities including a children's club and a golf course.'

'With a lot of resorts, you feel you're in a man-made development in the middle of nowhere, but this is very convenient with the lovely town of Obidos on the doorstep and Lisbon an hour away, so you have plenty of culture and great shopping. It's a very relaxed place where you feel secure.'

For buyers at Bom Sucesso, it is not so much security but the sense of novelty that they are after. And if the house designs don't get you, the golf course will.

Apart from the 17th hole, which will be one of the most stunning in Portugal with views across the lake, a surprise awaits you at the 10th — you tee off from the roof of the clubhouse!



CONTACTS BOOK

Hamptons International
(hamptons-int.com; 020 7758 8447)

Savills Select Resorts
(selectresorts.co.uk; 01202 765 490)

Premier Resorts
(premiercamporeal.co.uk; 020 8940 9405)

