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## Sustainable style

With one of today's key words being sustainability, surely one of the key questions must be how to maintain a sustainable community. And surely, at least in part, an answer to this question must be the maintenance of year round residents and the continuation of the community through the following generations.

By Fiona Perris

Many young people today face a huge dilemma when deciding where and what to purchase to be their home; a modern apartment on the eighth floor in the city centre, or a village house near to all amenities, but maybe requiring some work?

Many choose the brand new apartment, after all there are plenty available; they are normally light and spacious with modern fixtures and fittings and glossy new tiles and windows. Very attractive; little to no maintenance, but, however, rarely can a resident in an apartment block, however small, forego the costs of the condominium which can vary greatly, and have to be paid on a regular basis. Just one non-payment of condominium fees by one property owner can lead

to problems like the lift may no longer operate, or the front door lock is not replaced, for example.

An old house in the village may not seem a sensible option at first glance; renovation works will be necessary (including all the bureaucracy that accompanies this work) and quite often the shape and size of the original building may seem extremely restrictive but, whether for sentimental reasons (family roots, childhood, etc.) or for the fact that people can own a house without any further encumbrance apart from the usual maintenance, many people dream of owning a house in their local village but are convinced that this is not possible.

The cost of such a property is not the only obstacle the younger generation may face, although one factor that influences the cost in many picturesque village centres is that many of the sur-

rounding buildings have been purchased by outsiders who may only use the property for a few weeks each year; attractive investments which attract more investors.

### Drawing the crowds

One of the fundamentals of drawing in visitors to a location is the look and feel of a place and many visitors, now more than ever, seek out those areas which they find at least visually appealing. Some seek hotels and apartments close to the beach and surrounded by bars, restaurants and night clubs as they are not particularly interested in straying far from their chosen destination, but many seek the typical sights and sounds associated with their destination including the charm offered by typical Algarvean buildings associated with the traditional white-washed walls and brightly col-

oured window frames, capped off with ornate chimney pots.

### Taking measures

Some municipalities have been successful in passing laws through parliament to ensure certain requisites are maintained in strategic areas. In the Algarve Faro, Tavira and Portimão are three such examples, with various restrictions imposed by legislation on certain aspects of the exterior of buildings in certain areas of the municipality, principally those within areas of historic interest. Other councils impose restrictions on a municipal level, like Monchique.

In Portimão concern about many of the old buildings, some abandoned for years and in danger of collapse, in the area extending from the old bridge south and west, led to the council's request for legislation to be put in place in May last year in an attempt to ensure that the area can be restored and renovated maintaining the architectural identity. Through this legislation Portimão has the right of preference over the purchase of any of the buildings contained within the limits defined by

the map (see decreto lei 10/2008, published May 26) which encompass the area up to the football ground (including the town hall), the commercial centre and the labyrinth of streets that extend all the way up to the Rua Infante D Henrique and the old bridge.

In Tavira, the council has licence to impose certain conditions on the architecture and the exterior aspect, one condition being that in the historic town centre light-coloured Santa Catarina roof tiles must be used and solar panels and air-conditioners must be hidden from view.

In Faro buildings from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries should preferably be painted with *cal* (white-wash) to which certain colours may be added, with doors also painted in traditional colours, along with other regulations which aim to preserve the character of the historic town centre.

The council of Monchique also prefers the use of certain materials in order to maintain a "harmonious integration of buildings in the rural/urban environment", although exceptions may be considered.

But what about other areas?



• Faro council lays down some very specific rules

### Ferragudo – maintaining tradition

This picturesque fishing village grew up on the left bank of the Arade river inhabited by the families of fishing folk and became an essential centre for the production of sardines during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, offering employment for both the male and female populations.

With the huge increase in urban area in Portimão and Lagoa and the provision of state subsidised housing, many of the younger generation who grew up in the village began to move away, lured by modern, accessible housing, infrastructure and proximity to employment.

The image impressed on anyone's mind who knows and loves this village is that of a small hill, covered in tiny whitewashed buildings, the fishermen's quay, the majestic church overlooking the river, and just behind this the São João fort - once a strategic defence point, now in private hands, and, in recent years, having undergone huge renovation works whereby, at least from the exterior, the character has been maintained, restoring the fort to its former majesty.

But what of the hill, the labyrinth of tiny streets and stairways, the traditional buildings, that rise up behind the Praça Rainha D Leonor?

Marlene Uldschmidt a German architect resident in Ferragudo for some years now, has come up with a plan which she intends to present to the Lagoa municipal council which could go a long way to maintaining the famous views of Ferragudo, but still offer innovative housing solutions, encouraging younger home owners back into the heart of the village and in turn, retaining a thriving economy.

Presently no rules, municipal or otherwise, are in place to maintain the typical aspect of the village centre and the worry remains that too many of these traditional homes may be lost through reconstruction, providing a totally changed view of the hill, something which is evident already.

Marlene has worked on three projects in the village centre, all of which have maintained the integrity of the village style, including her own modern office and home, and she is now proud to have been chosen by a Portuguese family, with a history of generations in the village, to re-

design and reconstruct another of the village homes.

Together with her team of architects the so-called "prototype" has been developed, a model designed to maintain the exterior aspect of the central village properties, but which offers extremely modern living conditions in the interior. As Marlene explains: "A house must be seen as an organism which should be respected and cared for just like ourselves. If we don't preserve them we cannot protect them."

Marlene promotes and abides by the use of traditional materials in most of her designs, *cal*, natural pigment for colour, typical Santa Catarina roof tiles, wood or ceramic or stone tiles for the floor. In other words: "To keep parts alive, leaving memories and evidence which can be witnessed and interpreted by future generations." Another important criteria, she points out, is the relationship between the neighbouring properties, although certain restrictions to this regard are imposed by the council, visitors and residents alike, cannot miss the difference between more recent buildings and older one-storey structures.

### The Prototype

The design and concept of the Prototype is "extremely flexible" according to Marlene, a design which "can be easily adjusted by way of minor alterations, to meet the owner's needs," not a "monotonous stereotype."

By employing the flexible Prototype, "we can, by way of simple and effective building intervention, reduce the time and cost of the work, guaranteeing a modern, quality redevelopment, but always with attention to the historic character" of the building.

Taking into account that the majority of the village homes lack natural light due to the façade, the Prototype overcomes this problem, having the stairwell area fronted by glass, allowing for much better illumination throughout the property.

### Other ideas

Marlene has also, on her own initiative, prepared plans for the redevelopment of the Praça Rainha D Leonor with the aim of opening it up more. She firmly advocates the removal and relocation of the stone benches (almost a public toilet for the local dogs) from their current location which almost close the square complete-

ly and to make use of the fact that, as visitors cross the old bridge, the square and the hill behind represent Ferragudo's calling card.

### The Junta da Freguesia

After speaking to Marlene, we spoke to the president of the local parish council, Luís Filipe dos Santos Alberto, who has seen and approves of Marlene's project and who also told that plans had been presented by the parish to the municipal council (Lagoa) over two years ago, also aimed at certain criteria to be imposed on the exterior of buildings in order to retain the historic centre, but on which the council has not yet voted.

Alberto recognises that urban development is necessary but notes that Ferragudo has grown immensely over the recent past and that some rules must be put in place to preserve the traditional nucleus. The *junta's* request that the council recognise the historic centre of the village as an area where measures be put in place to protect the style and look of the central village does not seem to be an impossible task, especially when comparing with other examples in other areas, like Faro, Tavira and Monchique.

Both he and Marlene spoke about the Marina development for Ferragudo with both pointing

out a slight flaw in the plan, the connection of the planned fishermen's wharf to the village, by way of a short walkway to the old bridge. For both it seems that Ferragudo has been forgotten in the plans for its Marina namesake.

Alberto told of us of the plans to redevelop the area at Praia da Angrinha, the area between the village and the fort and explained that the missing connection from the Marina was a logical step and did not represent a great area.

Luís Alberto feels passionately for the village he represents and also told us of other plans which the parish wanted to execute in

order to retain "*traço antigo*", restoring certain public buildings to their former glory.

News of Marlene's plans were first seen two weeks ago in the Barlavento newspaper when she was interviewed by Elisabete Rodrigues. Marlene places importance on the Portuguese community in which she lives and wanted them to be aware of what may happen to their heritage and her suggestions to ensure its survival. Now it is the turn of the foreign community and in order to encourage change in urban planning it is important that the community be heard.



• Marlenes proposal for her Portuguese clients home

Ferragudo is just one example and we would like to hear of more, and also from anyone willing to support this project to maintain the historic centre of Ferragudo.

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