



## SO NEAR YET SO FAR – AND SO GOOD

REPORT BELINDA BECKETT PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF SIERRA BLANCA COUNTRY CLUB

# SIERRA BLANCA COUNTRY CLUB

It takes vision – and not a little courage – to build in virgin countryside on land more suited to mountain goats. But, with years of experience developing projects in Alpine territory, SwissMadeHomes is expert at moving mountains and was prepared to do that, if necessary, to create one of the most spectacular and ambitious projects to take shape on the Costa del Sol in recent years.

The Sierra Blanca Country Club is a prestigious residential community clustered around the stunning La Concepción reservoir, an area of outstanding beauty surrounded by the nature reserves of the Sierra de las Nieves and the Sierra Blanca. The land rises to 400 metres above sea level in the pine-scented hills of Istán, yet is only five kilometres along a traffic-free road to Puerto Banús. The plot had remained on the market for years due to the logistics of getting plant, trucks and building materials to the site. But the developers knew that, if their intuition was correct, they would have a project that no other promoter could rival for location.

Thanks to imaginative insight and sagacity of planning, 40 per cent of the resort has been built and sold within six years. Thanks, too, to the expertise of the German constructors, no mountains have been moved either. The houses are built into the hillside at different levels, the lush olive and cork forests providing a breathtaking natural backcloth to this secure, gated community as well as preserving a safe, environmentally-friendly haven for the native wildlife.

“The developers raised a few eyebrows but they had one major advantage – vision,” says Sales Director Asis Farman who was himself one of the first buyers. “They saw what could be done with this astounding piece of land and set about doing it with initiative, inspiration and ingenuity.”

Sierra Blanca Country Club is a countryside *pueblo* in miniature – 100 individually designed villas and townhouse, 90 exceptional apartments and a Hotel and Spa with a private wing of 60 luxury apartments. In accordance with the strict planning regulations governing nature reserves, only 25 per cent of the 253,000m<sup>2</sup> plot will be built, the rest set aside for green areas and gardens. One special concept is that villa buyers can choose their plot and tailor-make the design from a database of hundreds of homes already built by SwissMadeHomes in Marbella. From a menu of themes – Mediterranean, Provençal or Colonial – they can select everything from the colour of the exterior paintwork to the number of bathrooms, size of kitchen and lounge and the materials used.

All the properties have sea views, many also overlooking the turquoise reservoir. At 290 metres above sea level is an Andalusian *pueblo* of town houses with pretty enclosed courtyards; traditional country homes with vaulted, beamed ceilings and interior stone walls occupy the next level; above these are elegant villas with large terraces and gardens, antique-style entrance doors, travertine cream marble floors and artistic ironwork. Higher still, with Marbella’s La Concha peak as a dramatic backdrop, is an enclave of ultrachic mountain chalets and one of the most prestigious complexes of apartments and duplex penthouses (two storey) in this part of the world. Each has a Jacuzzi, the chalets have pools, the penthouses, saunas, and there are community pools for the use of apartment owners.

The design spec. is another exercise in one-upmanship – Roman travertine marble flooring and bathroom finishes, indirect ceiling lighting, wooden windows with electric

blinds and mosquito nets, state-of-the-art domotic home control systems, parking for two-to-four cars and much more.

Another unique selling point is the on-site décor shop, Vivaldi VF Marbella, stocked with soft furnishings, lamps, furniture, *objets d’art*, sample kitchens and even bath towels. “With everything from the architects’ office to the engineers on site, it means that whatever clients need – from extra power points to spotlights or curtain pelmets – they can get it all done here without the need to drive all over the coast,” says Asis.

Last to be completed, in 2009, will be the five-star Hotel & Spa which will double as a clubhouse and conference centre, with indoor-outdoor heated pools, gymnasium, sauna, sports facilities, bars and restaurants. As well as guest rooms and suites there will be a private wing of 48, luxury two- and three-bedroom apartments and 12, three-bedroom penthouses whose owners will enjoy all the services of the hotel.

Buyers snapping up title deeds on what property pundits have coined Marbella’s Green Mile are professional northern Europeans in their late 40s and 50s and several Marbella celebrities have also bought in the area. They are buying into a rural lifestyle quite different from the usual beach or golf resort. On their doorstep are walking trails, fresh mountain springs and the picturesque village of Istán with its quaint shops, weekly flea market, lakeside restaurant and main square where the village elders sit with their *café* and *anis*, playing dominoes, as they have done for centuries. Five minutes in the other direction is Wimbledon champion Manolo Santana’s exclusive Raquets Club, Olivia Valère’s world-famous nightclub and the sophisticated city of Marbella.

There couldn’t be a more perfect spot – the goats will vouch for that! **CONTACT** ■

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