

# WHAT THE PRESS SAY...

FROM SLEEPER MAGAZINE, OCTOBER 2010



HOTEL REVIEW

## Martinhal *Sagres*

Words: Matt Jarrow. Photography: Courtesy of Martinhal

Billed as "Europe's finest luxury resort" Martinhal combines a boutique hotel with a family friendly resort, both designed by Michael Sodeau Partnership and Carole Taylor of FourWinds Resorts, within a Conran & Partners masterplan.

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**THIS PAGE:** Furnishings in the 0 terrace restaurant and bar include Fed tables by Arper; Curve sofas by Living Design; Jasper Morrison's Plate low tables for Vitra and Vitra's Gingali ceiling lights  
**OPPOSITE PAGE:** The reception area features a variety of light fittings by Lenta & Cole, including Miguel Milá's Estadio hanging lamp, along side Capellini's Uoi cabinet. Behind reception, Dieter Rams' G06 shelving system for Vitra is used for storage

**M**arinhal occupies a 25 hectare site overlooking the beach after which it is named – a wind-whipped stretch of sand, just around the bay from the Cabo de Sao Vicente, Europe's most southwesterly point. Developers Roman and Chitra Stern first saw the potential of this forgotten corner of the Algarve in 2001. The husband and wife team, who met working at PriceWaterhouseCoopers, were looking for a business opportunity to put their MBA education into practice. Prompted by Roman's previous involvement in an Irish hospitality project (Liss Ard resort in Skibereen), they began investigating potential development sites in Portugal, sighting on this unspoilt near the sleepy town of Sagres as the ideal location for their dream project. Despite speaking barely a word of Portuguese, they struck a deal with the existing owners, upped

sticks to Lagos, and set up a small sales office, selling some of the existing villa plots on the northern edge of the development to generate cashflow while they developed their ideas for the rest of the project.

Previously, few tourists ventured this far west along the Algarve, other than windsurfers attracted by the rugged beaches on the Atlantic coast. But according to Chitra Stern, the indicators were there that this would change. "In the late 80s it would have taken five hours to get here from Faro Airport," says Stern. "But the East-West highway was being finished with EU funds, and Faro was in the process of doubling its capacity from four- to eight million passengers. The links to Lisbon and north Portugal have also improved."

The existing masterplan was for a variety of villas with a small motel by the beach, but Roman and Chitra's had bigger plans. Searching for business partners to help



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ABOVE: Guestrooms and lounge areas in the resort houses feature bespoke furniture made by Mads to Michael Soderen's designs; rubber beanbags by Precious McKate, and handwoven cane lamps by a local artisan

► them realise their vision, they met Nigel Chapman and Nicholas Dickinson, hoteliers best known for the creation, and subsequent sale, of two successful UK hotel groups. The first of these, Luxury Family Hotels comprised a series of child-friendly country house hotels including Ickworth House in Sussex, Moonfleet Manor in Dorset and Fowey Hall in Cornwall. Through their other chain, Alias Hotels, they had established boutique hotels in locations such as Cheltenham, Exeter, Brighton and Manchester.

Their concept for Marinhãl combines elements of both, with its boutique hotel overlooking the beach, and a family oriented resort which stretches inland. The combination of five-star service with child friendly facilities has its roots in the operational model established by Chapman and Dickinson at Luxury Family Hotels,

whilst the stylish, eclectic design bears the hallmarks of the Alias properties.

The 38-bedroom hotel offers ten Terrace Rooms in the main hotel building which open onto the gardens, where a further 26 wooden-clad Beach Rooms are located. There are also two duplex Beach Suites featuring loft-style double height living spaces, with the open-plan bedroom situated on the mezzanine level. There are two restaurants in the hotel – the fine dining O'Terraco, which sits next to a lounge of soft sofas and designer furnishings, and the poolside restaurant As Dunas, offering fresh fish and seafood.

The resort comprises a wide selection of spacious Village Houses, with one, two or three bedrooms, set around a central square. Of these, 55 Ocean Houses are perched on the highest point of the resort with sea views. A further 28 Bay Houses enjoy a quiet location on the eastern border of the resort, ►



► overlooking a wooded valley. At the heart of the resort 39 Garden Houses are arranged around a garden, with a children's freeform 'Oasis' pool and snack bar. These semi-detached villas are joined by a continuous high Algarvian garden wall, to provide both privacy and a carefree environment for families with younger children. Completing the development, ten individual Pinewood Houses are set apart in their own 'close' each with their own small private swimming pool.

Other facilities at the resort include the Raposinhos kids club, the Finisterra spa, and Os Gambosinos, an informal, bistro-style cafe. Incorporating such a wide variety of facilities required some clever masterplanning. Architect Matthew Wood of Conran & Partners has taken an environmentally sensitive approach to the landscape, with a series of simple low-rise buildings crafted from local materials using modern construction techniques and geometric forms.

The aspiration, explains Wood, was for the resort to look like it had grown organically from the wild and rugged landscape, in contrast to the "sterilised, highly irrigated" resorts found further east along the Algarve: "Our guiding principal was a low density development. We wanted to 'touch the ground lightly' and draw attention to the land."

Wood's masterplan seeks to capitalise on the sea views from within Marinhãl, whilst also acknowledging the external view of the resort from nearby Sagres: "We worked hard to maximise each unit's vistas of the ocean. Houses were designed with 'upside down' accommodation with living areas on the first floor to make the most of the spectacular views," explains Wood. "We knew the hill at Marinhãl would be prominent in the panorama, so we tried to keep the mass broken to make it crystalline and organic and avoided any big shapes."

The construction was delivered by ►

ABOVE: Twentytwosone supplied a variety of lighting and furniture for the public areas of the hotel. The As Dunas restaurant features Moon's Raincloud lights, Eames chairs from Vitra, and Arper's Fred tables

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LEFT: The pool at Martinhal enjoys a spectacular position overlooking the beach, where guests can lounge on FatBoy beanbags and take advantage of the pebble bar  
ABOVE: Cooran & Partners' masterplan was realized by JLT Architecture, using natural materials to create these wooden-clad Beach Rooms at the hotel

► Lisbon-based practice JLT Architecture, led by José Luis Teixeira Pinto and Filipe Bonito. Natural materials such as traditional plaster, stone and wood were used, with much of the rock removed during the excavation process being recovered and used in the buildings. Also collaborating on the project were Lisbon-based landscape architects Biodesign, who have sought to preserve the indigenous flora and fauna through an organic planting programme.

Interiors in both the houses and the hotel have been created by Carole Taylor of Four Winds Resorts (Nigel Chapman and Nicholas Dickinson's operating company), working with London based designer Michael Sodeau. Taylor's concept was to use simple forms and structures, in keeping with the exterior of the buildings and their surroundings, to create comfortable, homely yet luxurious interiors with clean lines. These ideas were then translated by Sodeau, who created sophisticated yet low key schemes for the hotel guestrooms and resort houses, through the use of muted tones and local natural materials such as cork, cane and stones.

"Our goal has been to create living spaces that would be strong yet transparent and layered in form - completely modern yet saturated with Portuguese traditions," explains Sodeau. "The décor is accented with the use

of as much natural material native to Portugal. Everything is unique and has been specifically designed for this project to create a soft domestic feel, not standard contract pieces".

Sodeau travelled extensively in Portugal, sourcing a unique stone from the local town of Monchique - 'Sienito Monchique' for a series of tables and glass lamps from Portuguese company Atlantis. He also worked with Gransorie, an old Portuguese company that recycles cork, to produce a collection of tables and stools using a high-tech pressing process. A local artisan was enlisted to rekindle the traditional craft of cane weaving using the reeds that grow naturally in the Algarve, Sodeau commissioning him to hand-make a series of *astaria em cama* woven lamps.

Italian company Gervasoni also produced a series of rattan floor lamps. London-based Modus developed the majority of the furniture including beds and headboards, bedside tables, mirrors, desks, desk chairs and bedroom lounge chairs.

Now that the project is complete, Chitra Stern can reflect on the near-decade she and her husband have spent on Martinhal: "We have created something that is going to be here forever, which has changed the area for the good. I think we've come up with something really innovative, which hopefully will be an exemplar to other resorts." ■

### EXPRESS CHECKOUT

**Martinhal**  
Quinta do Martinhal, Apartado 54  
8650-908 Sagres  
Portugal  
Tel: +351 282 420 022  
[www.martinhal.com](http://www.martinhal.com)

→ 38 guestrooms (hotel); 152 houses (resort)  
● 0 Tennis, 40 Dunes (Hotel) Or Gamboides (resort)  
T Pebble Bar (Hotel) Glass Pool Snack Bar, Club 98, Village Square Juice Bar (resort)  
● Fountains Spa, tennis courts, swimming pools  
+ Ropewalk kids club, meeting / function

**Developer:** Sagrimar SA  
**Operator:** Four Winds Resorts SA  
**Architects:** Matthew Wood at Cooran&Partners (masterplanning); JLT Architecture  
**Interior Design:** Nigel Chapman, Carole Taylor, Michael Sodeau Partnership