

By Georges, They've Got It



At last the gorgeous west coast of Cyprus has the super-luxe report it deserves in the comely form of Cap St Georges, says Leonora Oldfield

Cyprus may not appear to be the obvious place to build an exclusive and luxurious holiday haven, especially when the project's number one priority is for top security and privacy. After all, the island is a popular destination of mass tourism, with 2.4 million visitors per year. But this is exactly what Georges Andraos, the London-based architect, plans to do.

Andraos's past projects include residences for Middle Eastern nobility and London restaurants such as Noura and Café de Paris. He has designed palaces in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates and castles in Scotland. Now his focus is on Cyprus. Having searched the country far and wide, he has found the place for 50 'highly specified, contemporary villas'.

'Cyprus has changed in the past five years,' says Andraos, sitting in his London office in Chelsea Harbour. 'A big Russian and Norwegian community is demanding high-quality service. Cyprus has been undervalued for a long time, with developers building for the lower and middle markets.' His project is different. 'This is the first project in Cyprus which is going to give serious attention to detail, service and privacy.'

Andraos fell in love with Cyprus as a child when visiting from his home in Lebanon. Over the past couple of years he has been scouting for the perfect location on which to build his villas. The result, Cap St Georges, in the western district of Paphos, is a gem.

Paphos has an important role in Greek mythology: it was off the coast between there and Limassol that Aphrodite, goddess of love, was said to have emerged from the waves, and today Paphos is on the Unesco World Heritage list.

'It is a very rare location for a development because most of the western part of Cyprus is occupied by the Akamas mountains,' says Andraos. 'When Cyprus joined the EU in 2004 it was recommended that the Akamas peninsula should be treated as a biosphere reserve, so nobody is allowed to touch or develop it.' While the north, east and southerly regions of Cyprus have been built up to cater for tourists, Paphos, famed for its gulfs, coves, capes, points and beaches, has escaped relatively unmarred. 'Sophisticated Russians are now looking at Paphos rather than Limassol,' observes Andraos.

The recent revamp and extension of the airport in Paphos, with helipads and private-jet facilities, means that getting there has never been simpler. In fact Andraos's timing has been impeccable. 'This is an important factor,' he notes. 'It is only twenty minutes away from the site, but you never hear any aeroplanes where we are.'

Cap St Georges is also only three kilometres away from Coral Bay, the recently approved, largest marina in Cyprus, due for completion in 2011. 'I expect many of the clients to arrive by sea, sailing to Cyprus in their private yachts from other Mediterranean marinas,' Andraos says.

The plot of land he has so carefully chosen overlooks the only island off western Cyprus, the isle of St Georges, also known as Cleopatra's Rock, which is steeped in history and folklore. 'There are some magical stories about it,' says Andraos. 'It is said Cleopatra used to come here to pray.' The land slopes gently upwards from the sea, so each villa has a sea view and is wonderfully positioned for the spectacular daily sunsets. 'The potential for cocktail parties is enormous,' beams Andraos.

The concept is a new one. The villas will operate around a clubhouse which has all of the facilities of a top hotel – a restaurant, bar, spa, tennis court, a yacht and concierge service. Other sporting attractions, apart from those involving water, include golf.

There are three international-class courses close at hand. If club life does not appeal every day, there is also the option of keeping yourself to yourself in the privacy of your home, with private chefs, gardeners and housekeeping. The club will

serve as a focal point. 'It is a place where you can meet people if you do not want to meet them in your house,' says Andraos.

There are three levels of villa to choose from: minimalist, classical or bespoke. Once you have made that choice, Andraos as architect works with the highly renowned interior designer Mary Fox Linton and landscape architect Stephen Woodhams to design the house.

The houses are zen-inspired. They are large and open-plan with glass windows that slide away on to the garden. Each house has a barbecue, a dining area under a pergola and its own swimming pool. 'We are very keen on swimming,' says Andraos. The pools are well-equipped for lengths — 'not silly, ridiculously shaped things. These are proper pools.'

It should go without saying that each house has its own jacuzzi, on the balcony or next to the pool. A less obvious accoutrement is the yoga platform that many of the houses have outside the master bedroom. The villas are filled with gadgets, one allowing the owner to view his house when he is not there. Each house also has its fair share of flat TV screens and speakers in bathrooms. 'The villas are designed for people who live a hectic lifestyle. We like to party and we will not stop partying, but then we need to relax and when we relax we need to relax hard,' says Andraos.

Keeping up with the times, Andraos has made sure that the villas are also eco-friendly. 'We are eco-conscious,' he says. There is a treatment plant on sight, solar panels on the flat roofs, green roofs, and even two artesian wells to maintain a year-round lush landscape. 'Cyprus has a shortage of water, and we are very conscious of these things. This is not opulence for opulence's sake — but it is opulent.'

From this idyllic spot the closest town is Paphos, a fishing-harbour town that Andraos describes as 'low-key and tasteful'. Unlike its better-known and more commercial western neighbour, Limassol, Paphos retains a small-town charm. 'At the same time,' says Andraos, 'there is quite a lot of life — nightlife, bars and clubs.'

The harbour front has recently been pedestrianised, and the town plays host to a number of music and opera festivals in the summer. 'Paphos is incredibly smart,' says Andraos. This is evident during paseo, when from 6pm locals and holidaymakers don their best clothes to stroll the streets. The usual tourist attire of flip-flops and shorts is nowhere to be seen.

Despite such sophistication, Paphos is less expensive than Limassol. 'It is very up-and-coming,' Andraos says, 'and it is a very good investment for anyone coming in, especially at the early stages.'

Smart Paphos may be close at hand but one of the advantages of this development is its privacy — far from paparazzi and from any main roads. Construction is starting in January and is due to take fifteen months. Savills is handling sales, and the price tag will range from €4 million to €10 million.

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