

# Creating a dream home

We talk to Jason Harris, CEO of UDesign, about how a team of award-winning architects and designers go about creating a dream home.

Article by  
Cheryl Gatward.  
Images courtesy of  
BRIGHT.

Vista Lago Residences is an International Property Award-winning development (Best in Spain in Architecture and Residential Development categories) of 18 luxury villas high in the hills above Marbella, built to exceptional standards of design and sustainability, and offering views of the Mediterranean Sea, Gibraltar and the northern coast of Morocco. It is located in the country club

estate of Real de La Quinta, close to a National Park, golf courses, Marbella and Puerto Banús, with Málaga Airport less than an hour away.

At 365 metres above sea level, Vista Lago is situated above Marbella's famous Golden Mile – between the mountains, the sea, and the urban elegance that is Nueva Andalucía. Apart from its stunning views, this luxury community takes pride in

its high standard of construction and sustainable design. The villas display an uncommon level of creativity and innovation rarely seen in residential developments. Everything is designed to maximise the views. Each villa's design and concept is customised to highlight the location's natural beauty. The lounge and terrace merge seamlessly into one large living space. The windows disappear into the walls

At 365 metres above sea level, Vista Lago is situated right above Marbella's famous Golden Mile.





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and frame the unobstructed views of the idyllic natural surroundings. All villas are positioned for maximum privacy on individual plots. Each has large terraces, ample gardens and true infinity pools. The concept behind this development is in its difference. It is different from any other built in Southern Europe, and all of the 18 villas that make up the development, as well as the furniture and fittings in them, are different from each other. The commonality they share is that all are of the highest standard of construction and design, all display a level of innovation and creativity that helps turn a development of luxury villas into a world class work of architectural and interior design, and all have views of the Mediterranean, the Rock of Gibraltar and the continent of Africa beyond.

Dream Homes

A dream come true for many people would be to own one of these exclusive villas. When Jason Harris, Creative Director and CEO of UDesign – partnered with BRIGHT, the company responsible for the development of Vista Lago - first stood on the site and looked around him, he knew he was on one of the most beautiful and unique plots in the area with views to match. He and his team would have to do it justice. What he said tells us much about how the plot dictated the design and the importance of the views that nature provided, and gives us a fascinating insight into residential architecture design in an area that allows for such magnificent views. We also learn how a team of award-winning architects and designers go about building a villa on such a plot.

"All Vista Lago homes display a level of innovation and creativity that helps turn a development of luxury villas into a world-class work of architectural and interior design."





lounge area in the kitchen. The main living room is split into two areas, one being the formal lounge with east and south views, and the other being the kitchen with west and south views. These occupy the footprint of the house, so you don't just have La Concha to your left in the formal lounge, but also have sofas facing the sea to the south. The infinity pool wraps around this part of the villa, so looking out you see water all around, with the pool surface merging into the blue Mediterranean. It's as if you were floating on water. Then you have

Below: view of the fire pit and formal lounge with water all around

the mountain on the other side, all in one room."

Experiencing nature up close

"Time of day, and night, and the weather, changes the views dramatically. Sometimes the clouds form shadows that sweep along La Concha, so it's very much how the mountain reacts to the weather, especially the sunset. It's the same on the south view, where the sea changes colour day to day, from shiny grey to bright blue to darker blue, depending on the day and how

the light changes from hour to hour. We wanted, in our design, to allow residents to experience nature all around them, right through the day. While we have more sunshine here than in any other part of Europe, no two days are the same. Sometimes you see Gibraltar and the mountains of Africa as if they were just down the road, and sometimes the haze creates much greater distance, to such an extent that you see not much further than the immediate coastline. But on a clear night you can see the lights of Tangier." "The interior design and decoration

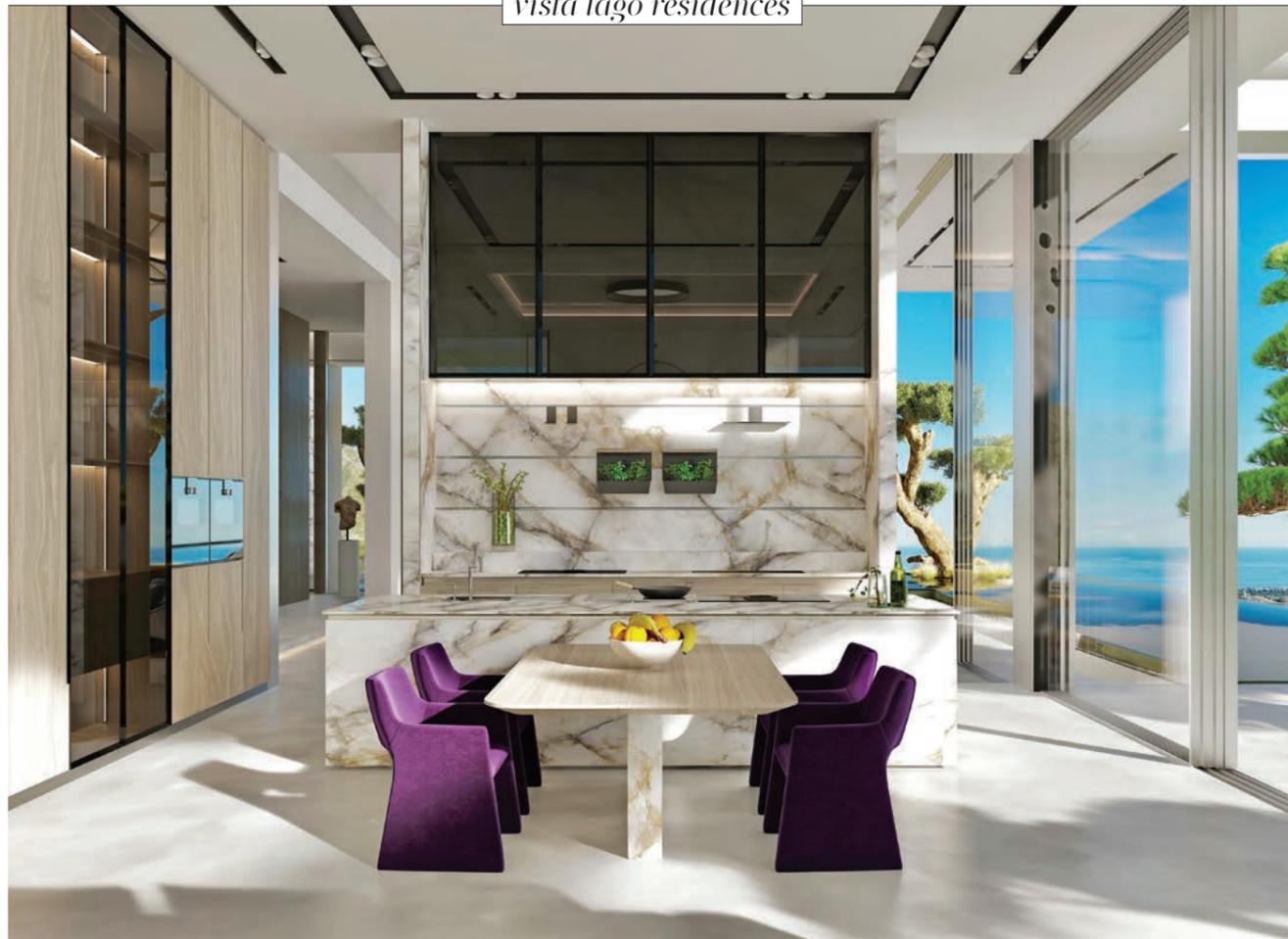
The plot dictates the design

"When we first saw the plot for N°18, we decided there and then to design each room of the villa around each view, in most cases more than one view. The plot dictated the design, as it always should, and nowhere is this philosophy more relevant than on this particular site. We have wide open views to the left, right and centre. Due south-west is Gibraltar, south is Africa, west is the beautifully located La Zagaleta estate and east is Marbella and La Concha mountain, and all these views are totally different from each other. It would have been criminal to have designed on such a plot without the design being subject to the location."

"The key view – difficult to pinpoint in this case – is La Concha mountain, given how much you see of it and how stunning it is at all times of the day throughout the year. That's why we designed the formal lounge in this villa around this view. Although the same could be said of every room in the house, the lounge is where the family spends most time while inside the house, and we actually have a second

Above: the infinity pool wraps around this part of the villa





of the house was also subject to the views. It's a high lounge, measuring 5,5 metres, and the furniture is low. Everything in the house complements the views, from the simplicity of its minimalist architecture to the low-key contrast of tones throughout the inside. The tall glass walls allow you to see all of La Concha mountain, not just part of it, and where a normal window was impossible on one side of the dining room, large roof windows were built instead. The kitchen looks out on a beautiful 180-degree south view, which also takes in Africa and Gibraltar, and La Zagaleta on the west side."

#### World-Class Design

"Yes, there are beautiful locations all over the world, but there is nothing quite like this. It's rare to find a plot in the Marbella area that has not just great middle and long-distant views, but also wonderful immediate views, over wild mountain terrain, golf course, lake and sea, and all within 15 minutes of Marbella town centre. Starting out, we all just sat here looking in all directions, sizing up the views and how to make the most of them, and we did that morning, noon and night. My last thought, when the design process had ended, was to think: "Oh my God, how on earth are we going to match this in the future?"

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To find out more about Vista Lago Residences visit: [vistalago.es](http://vistalago.es)  
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# Sustainable living

*How does a sustainable home help the environment?*

Article by Vivion O'Kelly.  
Images courtesy of BRIGHT.

These days there is a lot of talk about “living sustainably” but what does it actually mean in practical terms? We take a look at Vista Lago Residences, a fully sustainable development, located within a sustainable country club estate in Marbella, to find the answers.



Shut the doors. Turn off the lights. Make sure the immersion heater is switched off. That was about it in days gone by, the full extent of our commitment to energy saving in the home, and we thought of these measures only when going on holidays. And as far as conservation and sustainability was concerned, we hardly thought about it at all. We knew little about passive home construction, and ecology was a word beloved of hippies, earth mothers and their kind. How times have changed. Not just because the price of heating, cooling and maintaining a home has gone up, but because we have all become more aware of the vital importance of conserving what's left of our natural environment. It may test personal commitment to see factories still spew out tonnes of dangerous substances into the air in many parts of the world, but we do what we can. And it starts in the home.

## Vista Lago Residences

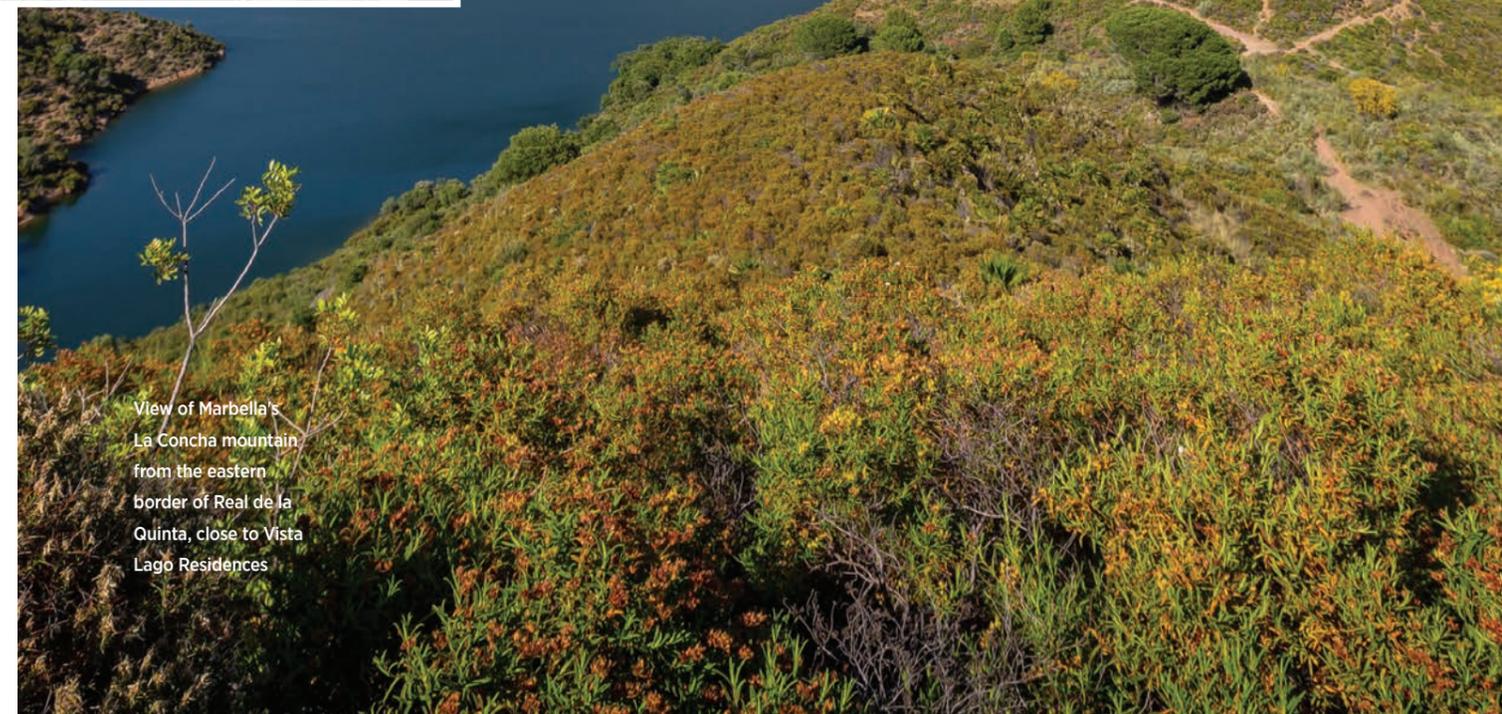
In the case of Vista Lago Residences, it started on the drawing board. Right from the start, BRIGHT, the development company behind this luxury, sustainable development in the hills above Marbella, decided to go the full nine yards in ensuring that this project would be one of the most innovatively sustainable luxury developments in Southern Europe. They also wanted proof that they had done so, and this came in the shape of BREEAM certification, which is a universally recognised badge of excellence in innovative

**Above: construction nestling into the hillside rather than sitting on top of it**

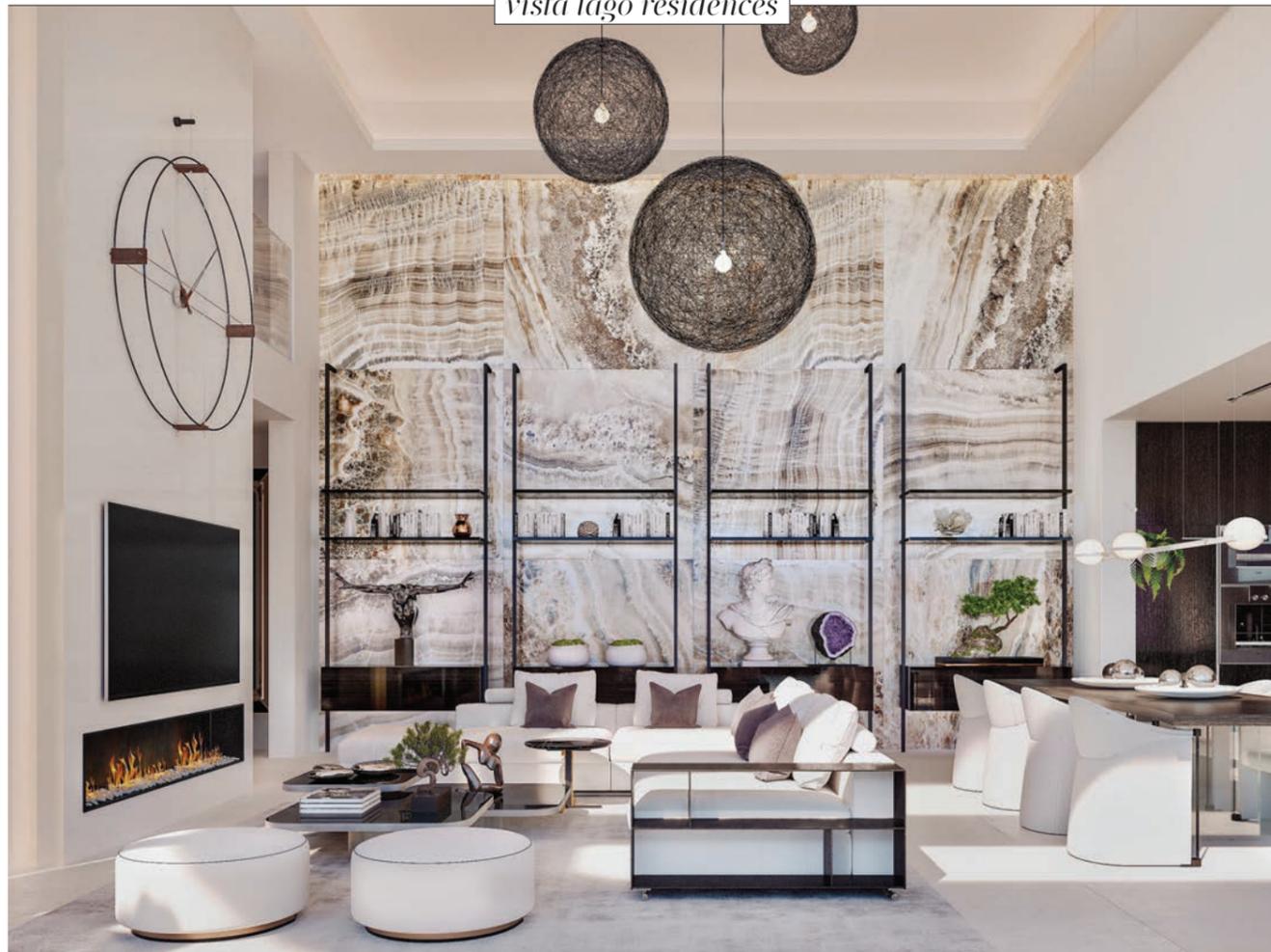
sustainability and conservation technology. This affects the way Vista Lago villas are designed, built and the functionality of their supporting systems.

## Well-insulated homes

For a start, sustainable homes need to be very well insulated, to a degree unusual in residential properties up until recent times. The thermal insulation of the Vista Lago building envelope has been thickened and thermal bridges have been reduced, to achieve a top rating for non-renewable energy consumption and carbon emissions.



View of Marbella's La Concha mountain from the eastern border of Real de la Quinta, close to Vista Lago Residences



An indoor ventilation system with both exhaust and intake heat recovery system is in place in all living spaces, automatically controlled and all contributing to indoor air quality and energy saving by indoor air renewals.

Low environmental impact

Electrical energy consumption is optimised by a heat recovery aerothermal system and a sophisticated intelligent control system. Each villa will have an 8kW photovoltaic installation to contribute to the electrical consumption of the home, including the heating of water. Producing approximately 14000kWh per year, this is more than enough to cover the cooling and heating requirements of each villa, at approximately 5000kWh per year. The interior and exterior lighting will also be energy saving, with high luminous efficiency.

BREEAM Certified

A BREEAM certificate is a guarantee of good living in every sense of the word, involving not only energy efficiency but health and wellbeing, innovative products and processes, land use, materials used in construction, management, pollution, transport, waste and water use. This makes it good for the environment on many different levels, and it also increases the value of a property over the long-term.

Long before the architects sat at their drawing boards, BRIGHT had taken a close look at the terrain in its natural state and determined that it would stay in this state as much as was humanly possible. Their aim was two-fold: to reduce the visual impact of the buildings on the environment

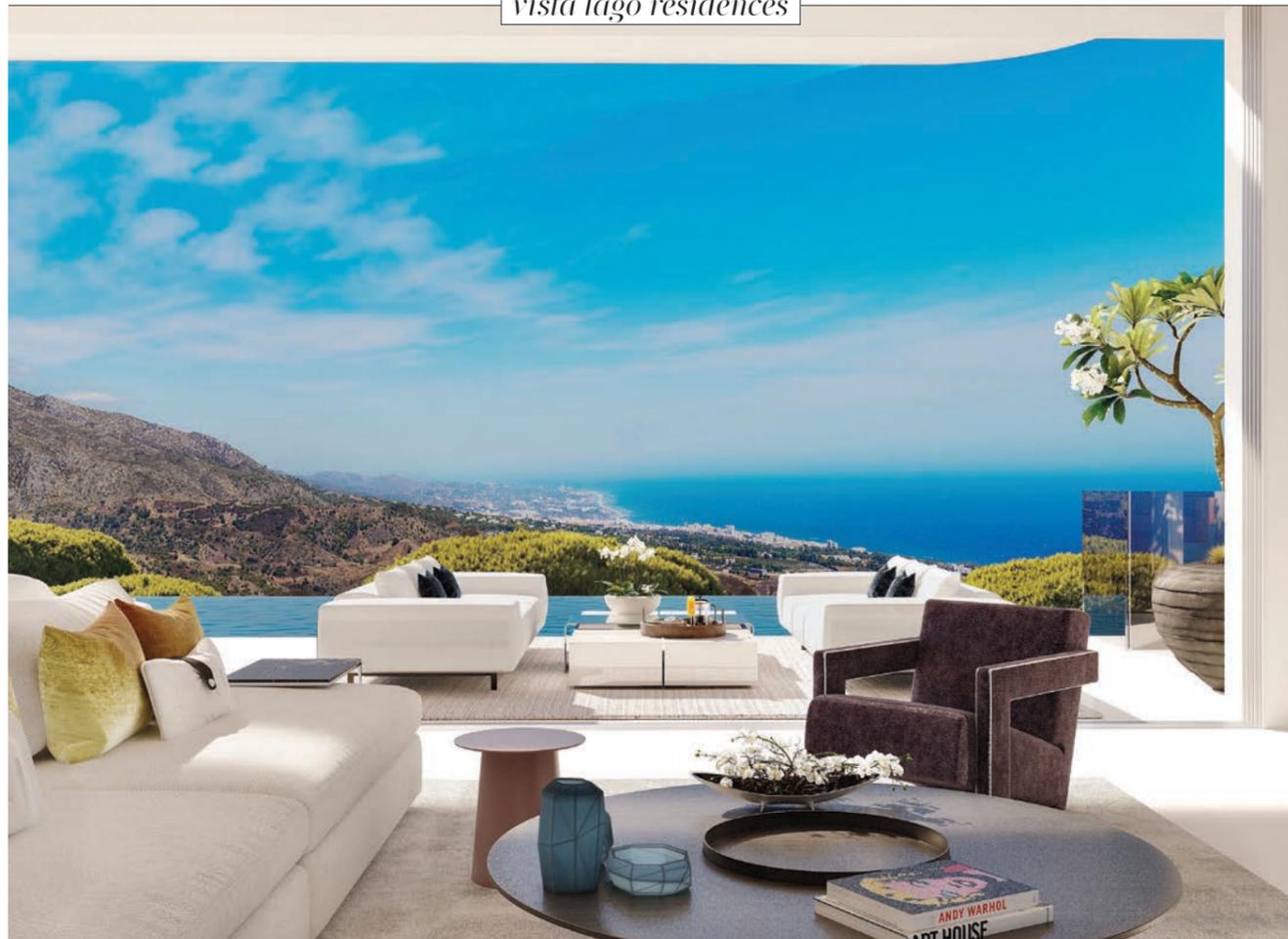
Above: Vista Lago Residences follows numerous and strict environmental guidelines

and to take advantage of their better adaptation to the Mediterranean climate.

Saving Water

Storage of rainwater and grey water will exceed 75 percent of toilet, irrigation and washdown water use, with minimised drinking water consumption, reduction of the amount of water to be treated, grey water and rainwater made suitable for irrigation re-use, highly effective dual-flush systems in all toilets, pressurised water-saving systems in the taps and a rainwater harvesting system capable of meeting 50 percent of irrigation demand. Every time a resident washes their hands or has a shower, they can be certain that water used is not being wasted. And when the rain falls, they can be sure the soil moisture sensors will detect the rain and adjust the automated irrigation system accordingly.





### Climate Control

Climate control is an essential factor in comfortable living, and with heating and cooling systems that allow for independent adjustment of temperature settings for each of the main living areas, the temperature of the air in the home does not have to rely fully on the excellent ventilation resulting from state-of-the-art architectural design, by which at least 80% of the working area in every kitchen, living room, lounge and study will benefit from direct daylight from the outside (quite apart from the numerous other measures taken to ensure savings in artificial light energy). While these homes have thus been designed to take full advantage of natural airflow, they also have an intelligent climate control

Above: the view from your sofa at Villa N°3, Vista Lago Residences

system that optimises electricity consumption and includes monitoring of the system by mobile device, or a thermostat. Add to this heat pumps and an aerothermal heat recovery system for both the HVAC system and the domestic hot water system, underfloor heating systems, photovoltaic panels systems and a renewable energy system to heat the swimming pool, and one has, in very simple terms, a comfortable and care-free home.

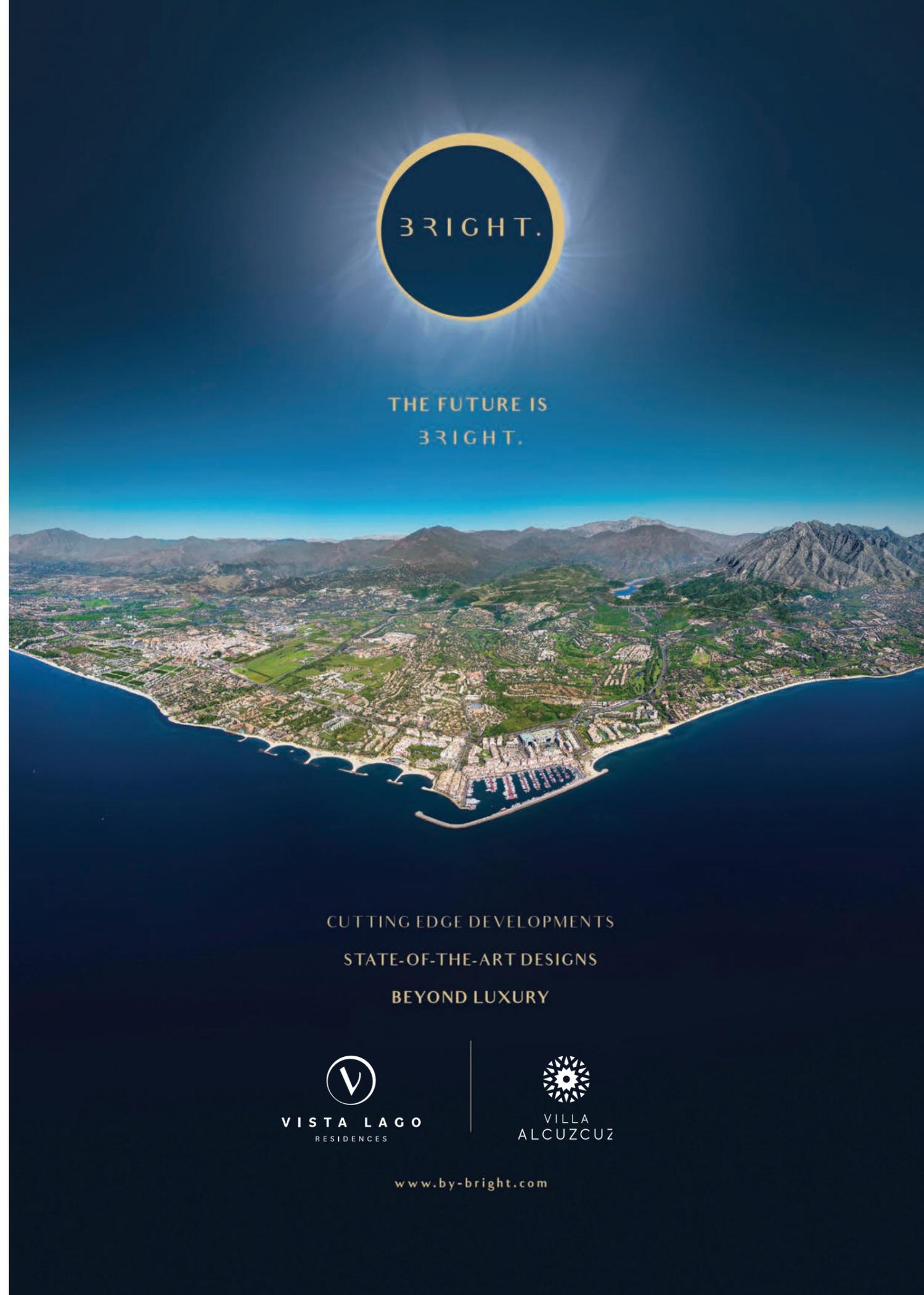
### No shortcuts to excellence

The “Excellent” level in BREEAM Sustainability Certification means following numerous and strict environmental guidelines, from the environmental footprint of the materials used throughout the home life cycle to the impact of the home, both inside and outside each villa, on the environment.

There are no shortcuts to excellence. Attaining such a degree of environmental friendliness has been a long and arduous road, built up bit by bit over many decades by dedicated pioneers in the protection and conservation of the natural world. How far we are from full-percentage sustainability in home construction we do not yet know, but in a Vista Lago villa we are getting very close.

As the author Robert Swan said “The greatest threat to our planet is the belief that someone else will save it.” We all have to do our bit, and like charity – it starts at home.

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# The inspiration behind BRIGHT

Michael Rodziewicz is a different kind of developer than most. Not an out-and-out commercial salesman, his gentle, good-natured manner speaks of someone who approaches the creation of beautiful homes in a more considered, personal way – and it shows in his latest offering, Vista Lago Residences.



This article first appeared in Essential Magazine

Article by Michel Cruz.  
Photography by Kevin Horn.  
Images courtesy of BRIGHT.

If you could select the perfect team to create a collection of beautiful, value-added homes, who would be in it? An architect, *bien sur*, a skilled landscaper and interior designer, naturally, but what about the original concept – the very essence that gives such a project life and soul? Should it not be led by someone who is passionate about design? A conceptual artist with the vision and desire to break

established moulds and create something new and exciting, yet also sensible and valuable? BRIGHT might be the answer to this question, as this boutique developer with the very personal approach blends passion with innovative ideas to come at property development in a new and fresh way. Change is a word that is bandied about too freely, and it has no value unless there is also substance to it; but in the case of BRIGHT, the substance is a different process of development, and its physical embodiment are the collections of design-led properties that carry the name.

Above: Michael Rodziewicz, CEO of BRIGHT and Lina Diksaite, Sales & Marketing Manager

## A Fusion of Architecture & Interior Design

If you consider it well, a property is the product of architectural design and interior styling, but so is BRIGHT, the creative force behind Vista Lago Residences. It came about from a successful collaboration between Michael Rodziewicz and Jason Harris of UDesign, who subsequently formed a partnership where BRIGHT as a specialist property developer is complemented by the craftsmanship and design skills that UDesign has become so well-known for. “Our whole way of thinking when it comes to property development is design-driven,” says Michael Rodziewicz, CEO of the group that has adopted a more intuitive approach to property development. “And the design, in turn, is an expression of creativity, but always in the service of producing a certain feeling, a canvas for a lifestyle. Once you design things from this perspective, you look at the small details as well as the bigger picture.” Born and raised in Poland, Michael has an international outlook on life and the ability to see the bigger picture. His business background gives him the acumen for figures, the astuteness to separate sound concepts from flawed ones, and also leads to quick decision-making. His passion, however, has always

been design, and with both strong conceptual skills and an eye for detail, he has the right ingredients for the job.

## A Different Approach to Designing Homes

One of the things that makes him different is the fact that for Michael this kind of work is a pleasure as well as a business. “I think those of us who are active in something as creative and important as designing homes should see it as a privilege, not just a commercial venture,” says the man who builds every home as if it was his own – and therefore gives it the TLC and consideration it deserves.

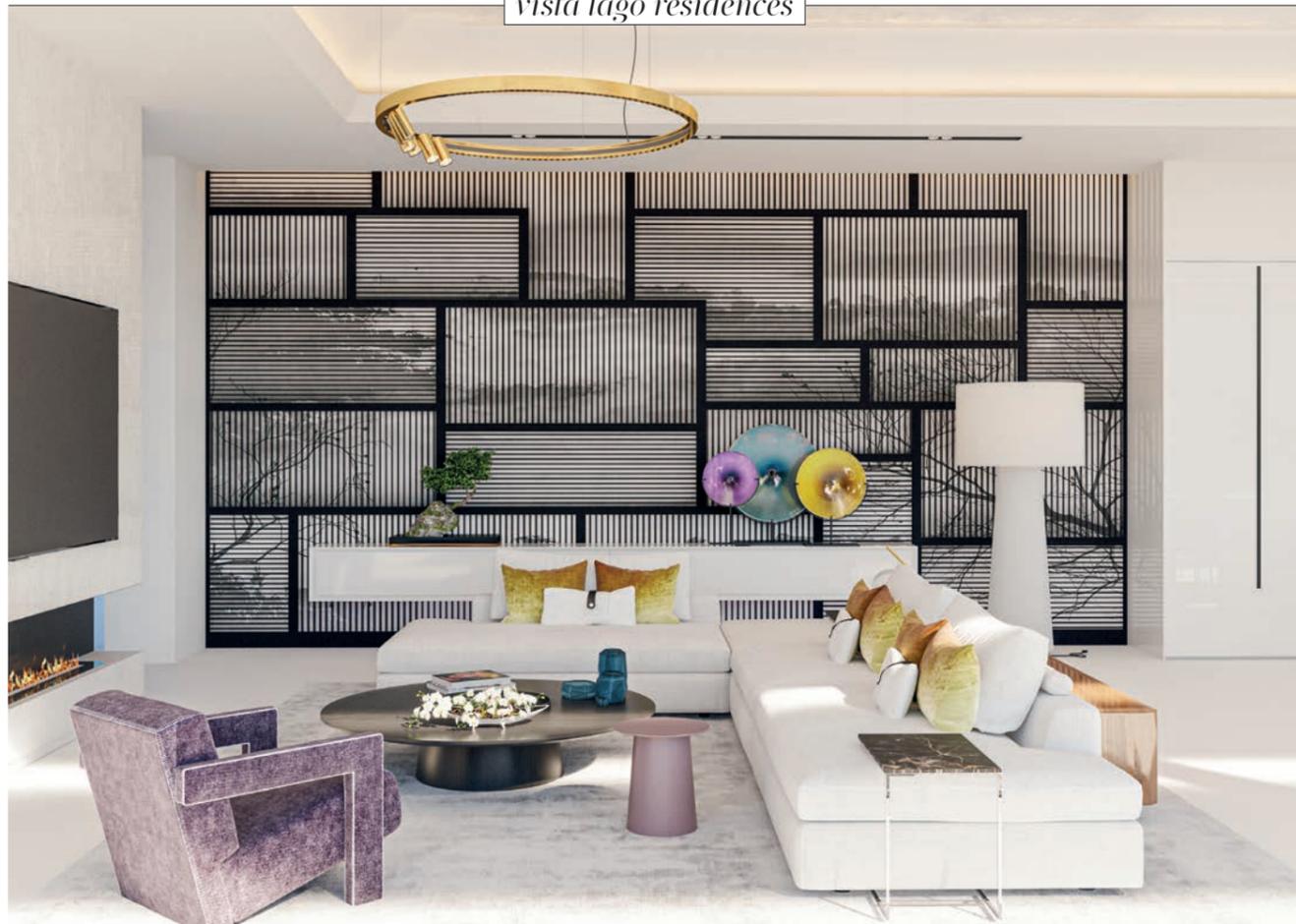
“If the process that leads to something is different, the outcome will be too,” says Michael. “We’re businesspeople and make sure the figures work and the business is run in a sensible manner, but whoever said that the creation of homes should be directed from a spreadsheet? We design ours around the resident, the living spaces they need, the furnishing in such rooms – and from this the concept comes to life.” Following this sequence, one arrives



at homes that are subtly different from the norm – and more in tune with the needs of the end-user. “We put our experience in creating bespoke decorative solutions to good use, and we work the other way round to most developers, imposing not a ready-made interpretation of what we think the market wants, but carefully crafting and sculpting the concept until it makes great sense from an aesthetic, sensory and practical point of view.”

“The buyer has the freedom to express their own style, from choosing materials and detailing to having furniture and decoration made entirely to measure.”





### From Concept to Reality

When Michael talks about his work, he sounds like an enthusiast, an idealist even, but the concepts he outlines are taking form in his latest project, the boutique development of 18 villas that make up the gated community of Vista Lago Residences. “For me it is a labour of love and, in spite of the hard work involved, such a pleasure to see it come together.”

The setting is a gated villa community within Real de La Quinta, itself a gated country club whose focal point is divided between sea views and the manmade lake situated at the heart of the main valley. The lake is ringed by a pathway that borders a private six-hole golf course, features a sports complex as well as a lakeside swimming pool and sundeck, and a stylish clubhouse with

Above: the view from your sofa at Vista Lago Residences

wellness centre and panoramic restaurant. Later a small boutique hotel and commercial area will also be added. Bordering this estate is the National Park of the Sierra de Las Nieves, with an enormous expanse of protected nature – and yet, Marbella and its beaches are just ten minutes away. “If you want to create a special lifestyle environment in the homes and their amenities, then the surroundings have to be in sync with that too,” says Michael, “and developing the way we do, there was never any question about doing so in a sustainable way, so we work to BREEAM standards for the entire project.” Having achieved international acclaim for Villa Alcuizcuz, a 1,300m<sup>2</sup> plus modern mansion that also won ‘Best in Spain’ and ‘Best in Europe’ accolades at the International Property Awards, BRIGHT is building a name for itself as a boutique developer of design-led homes – not to mention a level of bespoke finishing seldom seen, complete with full interior design support from UDesign. “Everything we do is thought of with the homeowner in mind, and the finishing touch of this is to create a wonderful modern villa where the buyer has the freedom to express their own style, from choosing materials and detailing to having furniture and decoration made entirely to measure. As a result, every villa at Vista Lago Residences will be a unique home while having all the advantages of forming part of a gated community.” It’s a new kind of development style, driven by passion for design and detail, and the desire to design from the buyer’s perspective.

*This article first appeared in Essential Magazine, Marbella.*

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