



SOUTHERN STYLE

northern substance

Matthew Lawrence is not a man to whom the concept of 'good enough' has much appeal. With characteristic perfectionism, his Amiri villas combine the climate of southern Europe with north European standards of workmanship. The result, as JACQUES DE MOLAY discovers, is not so much a property, more a way of life.



IF THERE IS A MAN WHO ENJOYS A MORE PERFECT WORK/LIFE BALANCE THEN Matthew Lawrence would be interested to meet him. While many 40-something males are busy having their mid-life crisis, 43-year-old Matthew Lawrence is having the time of his mid-life. A softly spoken and understated man, Lawrence makes the commute to the office at the controls of his Citation jet and divides his time between houses in Jersey and Sotogrande.

Matthew Lawrence is the living definition of the term entrepreneurs: by his early 30s he had already made one fortune in consumer electronics, using leading European designers to create products that were then manufactured in the Far East, giving consumers the chance to purchase quality design at bargain prices. Long before China became the new El Dorado and 21st-century capitalism's favourite hotspot, Lawrence had a full scale business operation and manufacturing plant in the People's Republic.

In the mid-1990s he sold up and moved back to Europe. "I came back at the end of 1996 and set up an office based in Gibraltar, where I am a resident, involved in investing in hi-tech businesses." He then began involving himself in other businesses that he enjoyed and about which he was passionate, for instance, as a keen pilot, he founded Senate Aviation on the south coast of Britain.

Before he moved back to Europe he started taking holidays in southern Spain, on the private estate of Sotogrande. Between Gibraltar and Marbella, Sotogrande was founded in the early 1960s as a super luxurious country club and residential development, set amongst thousands of acres of cork forests and gently undulating hills with views out over the Mediterranean towards Morocco. At Sotogrande the emphasis is on quality and ease of life: riding, golf, tennis, polo, yachting, drinks on the terrace, lunch at the beach club – that sort of thing. Neither flashy nor frenetic, Sotogrande is, like Lawrence, understated and – how does one say – affluent.

"I bought a house in Sotogrande, which I extensively renovated. I bought that in about 1997 and I have been spending more and more time here ever since." And over the years he has been visiting the area, he has seen Sotogrande grow. "The whole place has developed from a rather sleepy, relatively unknown area into one of the most prestigious communities in Europe, with an air of exclusivity to it. It was sleepy outside the main season but that is not the case now. But the development has been controlled here so that it is not overcrowded; it has retained its pace and its own unique air of privacy. It is exclusive and quiet, the atmosphere and environment are nice and people can roam freely and safely around the estate: I have children, and feeling that they are safe and able to enjoy themselves is very important. I like to spend time at my villa, I like the peace and tranquillity and sunshine; with modern day communications a lot of people are able to work from wherever they want. I like getting up in the morning and seeing that the sun is shining on the terraces and that the sky is blue. It is a great way to start the day."

In fact there was only one cloud in the otherwise sunny life that Lawrence had built for himself and his family: the quality of local building work. But instead of just putting up with it, he decided to do something about it and, as often happens with entrepreneurs, what started as a problem has now become a thriving business. "Having refurbished my own property and seen how there are some potentially beautiful properties that are let down by the quality of



Above and below There's no such thing as an off-the-peg Amiri villa. Each one is made to the owner's tastes and specifications. The property featured here is Nijinsky Pedro el Grande 18, Sotogrande.



HIS LOVE OF THE LIFESTYLE OFFERED BY SOTOGRADE INSPIRED HIM TO START ANOTHER BUSINESS, CREATING THE LAST WORD IN LUXURY LIVING IN THIS EXCLUSIVE ENCLAVE ON THE SOUTHERN COAST OF SPAIN

their construction, I set out to build luxury properties on the very southern tip of Europe, but to northern European standards.”

Much as his fondness for flying drove him to set up an aviation business, so his love of the lifestyle offered by Sotogrande inspired him to start another business, creating the last word in luxury living in this exclusive enclave on the southern coast of Spain. His philosophy was the simple one of offering the best. He handpicked a few select plots around Sotogrande and then handpicked a team of professionals from all around the world, specialists in every area from project management to plumbing, to set about creating truly unique properties that must be amongst the most desirable on the estate.

Each villa is different: one might be overlooking the world-famous Valderrama golf course, which was the venue for the 1997 Ryder Cup, while another might have views over the charming marina. Galleried entrance halls, gracious living areas with soaring vaulted or cathedral ceilings, infinity pools, shaded terraces allied to the latest climate control technology and security enhancements are the sort of characteristics that set these multi-million properties in a league of their own.

But for Lawrence, being a class-leading property developer was not enough. “I created the Amiri brand to be more than just a property provider. I really wanted to set about providing not only the property but the whole service around that: helping buyers with recruitment of staff, organising an office and assisting them with every aspect of the whole move. They are not just buying a villa, but a whole lifestyle based around a property that they will enjoy and spend time in with their family. I want those people who buy an Amiri villa to enjoy the way of life that I have discovered and we will help them to achieve that, organising everything for them, right down to having them picked up from the airport in an appropriate car.”

And when it comes to appropriate cars, Lawrence took delivery of a new Arnage T towards the end of last year, so if he wants a break from the controls of his Citation he can always get behind the wheel of his road-going jet.