

# A taste of the great outdoors

Imagine the scene, lobster and steaks gently searing in the open-air kitchen, guests gathered around the infinity pool and gentle music emanating from secret speakers – this lifestyle can become the norm on the Costa del Sol

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An Englishman's home may be his castle but the well-heeled Spaniard's estate is rather more like his very own village fete. The sultry climate and rolling grounds of a top-end villa are a potent combination, making a Spanish estate the ideal place for the grandest of gatherings. This stands in sharp contrast to the UK where the climate means those with ample land rarely have the chance to use it to its fullest potential. We all look enviously to the Costa del Sol where temperatures level out around 22 degrees and there's clear sunshine 330 days each year. In a location like this, the age-old garden features are undergoing a mild revolution. Traditional characteristics like lawns, flowerbeds and trellises are being replaced with what we might grandly call 'lifestyle options'. Terraces large enough to hold a dinner party are practically obligatory, lavish infinity pools are a must-have and features that were once entirely housebound are have been brought out blinking into the Mediterranean sun. And though the Spanish lifestyle is ideally suited for afternoon relaxation and al fresco dining, the influences on outdoor design come from all over the world. An estate in Marbella might boast a Bali-inspired bar and an outdoor fireplace from Kenya, all accessed through a Tuscan courtyard. With favourable climate, location and finance there's almost no limit to the ways you can bring the indoors out to play.

## A movable feast

Who wouldn't want to dine al fresco on those balmy summer evenings? The opportunity to hold dinner parties is surely one of the prime draws behind owning a spot of renovated outdoor space. For the dedicated host, there are all kinds of layouts to consider – but bear in mind that even southern Spain sees a small amount of rainfall, so it's always a good idea for much of the space to be sheltered. Many of the newest estate properties have immense covered terraces (often larger than the receptions indoors) with ample room for dozens of standing guests, or even a fully attended formal dinner. Newer innovations have included Caribbean-influenced bars topped with thatched roofs and straw huts inspired by the architecture of Bali.

Amongst all the entertaining space, it's still important for a busy party to have an interesting feature as its focal point. With the climate on your side, a vast heated pool is the ideal place to gather around, mingle and perhaps take a dip -



underwater lighting makes it a particularly dramatic sight as darkness falls. When the temperature dips a little during the winter months, an outdoor fireplace or chimenea is the ideal place for revellers to assemble. A good-sized hot-tub can take care of anyone's bathing wishes, no matter what the season!

Nowadays, even if the host is doubling as chef there's no excuse to miss the party, not with the growing range of outdoor cooking facilities that are becoming available. These kitchens without borders don't have to sacrifice equipment for convenience - bespoke services from many Spanish interior designers and architects mean buyers can design their dream culinary zone with practically no restrictions. Expect multiple-burner barbecues, baker's ovens, refrigerators, perhaps even an infrared grill that can sear meat at up to 1,700 degrees! Add a flat-screen television or a home entertainment system to the cooking and dining area and there's serious danger of becoming a confirmed patio potato. Amiri's latest music set-ups include outdoor speakers, an integrated AMX control system and waterproof remote control panels.

Amongst all this high-spec redesigning it would be easy to neglect the more day-to-day aspects of outdoor design, but these need attention if you're looking to match maximum impact with maximum comfort. Consider even the boundaries of the estate; walled gardens and courtyards don't just provide privacy, they create warm, sheltered and intimate spaces for relaxing and entertaining. And this atmosphere

can be heightened by the effects of dramatic lighting - a combination of terracotta wall lights, spotlights in the plant beds and floodlights over lawns and pools can significantly alter the estate's appearance.

When it comes to the garden itself, any decorative greens are going to need special care. Water can be a little restricted in the summer months and keeping those lawns spruce is a strong draw on supplies. All the same, there's still room for a little artifice with a small-scale water feature. Even the choice and arrangement of furniture can add to the impact. For the more traditional Andalusian-style villa you may prefer the rustic look given by natural materials – those planning formal entertaining might consider more modern metallic furnishings.

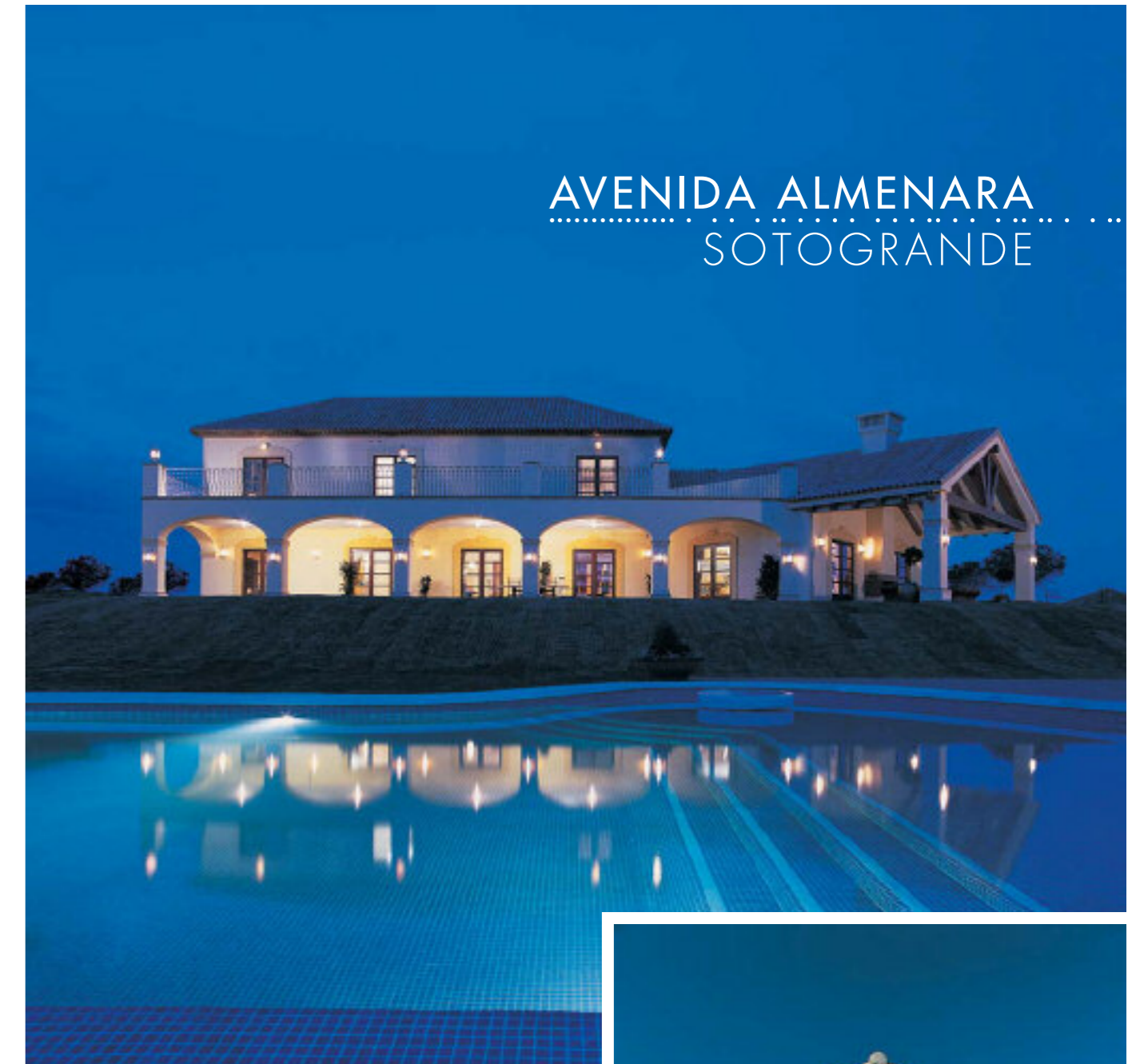
## In search of seclusion

But before you plan all these spectacular additions, it's wise to select a location that suits your needs. For many, the western Costa del Sol summons but one name – Sotogrande. Over 40 years after it was founded, the 4,500-acre community still grows in fame and appeal, managing to offer unbeatable entertainment facilities in a location that can still provide near-total seclusion - if you've the money and inclination. Los Cortijos de la Reserva is a selection of top-end villas in an exclusive gated complex adjacent to the golf course and clubhouse. Sold pre-construction, a villa with good-sized grounds and a private pool can be priced up to £965,165 (€1.4 million). Several re-sales are currently on the market around the community, including some astonishing customised villas that combine traditional architecture with really state-of-the-art functions – these can cost as much as £3.1 million (€4.5 million).

The countryside north of Marbella is home to some of the most extensive and palatial estates. Perhaps the pinnacle of the luxury market is represented by one of Diana Morales Properties' latest instructions – a San Pedro estate valued at £10.7 million (€15.5 million) and boasting 10 bedrooms, a lavish pool and covered living areas, all sitting on a plot large enough for six further buildings. Whoever ends up owning this estate will have to be seriously wealthy – one would also hope they've got the most glittering of social lives. After all, with all this prime Andalusian living space, wouldn't it be a real shame not to take full advantage of every precious metre?

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## AVENIDA ALMENARA SOTOGRADE



The formal courtyard suggests something of the grandeur of this six-bedroom property. Designed in the Andalusian Cortijo style, its extensive grounds include a huge heated infinity pool, covered terraces, patios and – perhaps most special – a Balinese guesthouse.

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Price: £4,803,140 (€7 million)

