

Matthew Lawrence

and the desire to do things better



empire, he returned to Europe in 1996 to enjoy the fruits of his success. "It's not quite as simple as it sounds," says the soft-spoken Englishman. "The formula of combining Chinese manufacturing with Hong Kong trading skill and European marketing savvy is simple enough, and much used nowadays, but back in the eighties it took the right team to pull it off." That, however, is exactly what they did, taking the market by storm with attractive and durable products that were the equal of any competitor but priced well below it.

Matthew's marketing flair and attention to detail showed in the fact that he insisted on European design of his Chinese-made products. "There were already Asian companies copying European designs, but it never looked as good as the real thing, so I knew that we had to go one better." He might as well be talking about his new company, Amiri Developments, because the desire to 'go one better' than the competition is still very much in evidence. "I've always been keen on detail and I love good design, so when I retired from the business and



By Michel Cruz
Photography courtesy of the Amiri Group

When Matthew Lawrence founded Amiri Developments in 2001 he already had a full career as an entrepreneur behind him. And a successful one it was too, making Lawrence a leader in his field and the kind of businessman who flies around the world in his own learjet...

Originally from a marketing background, Matthew made his fortune from plastic toiletry dispensers that sold the world over. After leaving his import agency in the 1980s and joining one of his suppliers in Hong Kong to set up a global soap dispenser's

returned to Europe I was never entirely satisfied with the properties I saw, even though at the time I viewed it very much from the perspective of the consumer."

Having discovered Sotogrande several years earlier en route to a business meeting, Matthew fell in love with this exclusive resort and its easygoing atmosphere. A subsequent holiday with the family confirmed that his wife and children shared his enthusiasm, and not much later the Lawrences bought their first property in Sotogrande. Not content with the prospect of golf alone, however, Matthew started to drift towards a long-held passion for property and the creative process surrounding it. "I had already built up quite a successful portfolio in commercial property in the UK, so in a way founding Amiri Developments was a natural next step."

In a luxury market that has no shortage of agents and developers, his premise was to do what others did, only better.

"It's not intended as a critique, simply a desire to focus on specific details that are often overlooked, and give each project the complete attention and energy it deserves. As a developer, it is easy to fall into a set style or routine, but I remain very much a consumer in how I look at a project in concept, during its construction and at the point of delivering the finished product. It helps to keep me both critical and creative." Taking the client's perspective explains why Matthew always insists on the best, and often most expensive, option—even at the expense of eating away at the profit margin.

"How can I compromise on the quality of doors, windows, beams, kitchens, bathroom fittings, construction materials, lighting, landscaping, swimming pools and above all, location, architectural design and build quality if these are exactly the things that we make our name with? If it costs a little more we either lower our margin and/or raise the price a little. I think people will pay a few per cent extra for better quality, but equally I am

thankfully in a position where I don't have to worry too much about the bottom line and can afford to take pride in what I do. There is already so much mediocre work about; what we are doing is taking a long-term approach, building a brand that we hope will become known for quality, not just in Spain but in other parts of Europe and the Caribbean."

As a result, Matthew's projects—usually large, opulent villas—have rapidly made a name for themselves, drawing attention from peers and press alike in admiration of their design, beautiful finishing and attentive detailing. "It's hard to find sites that are really special, but we don't limit ourselves to one location, so in addition to projects in Spain and the UK we are now also looking at exciting plans for a resort in the Caribbean. The beauty is that we are developing an approach that applies the same criteria of quality whilst producing a wide range of properties in different areas, price-scales and even uses." It's a challenge that this high-flying entrepreneur seems very happy to take on.

