OCTOBER 2026

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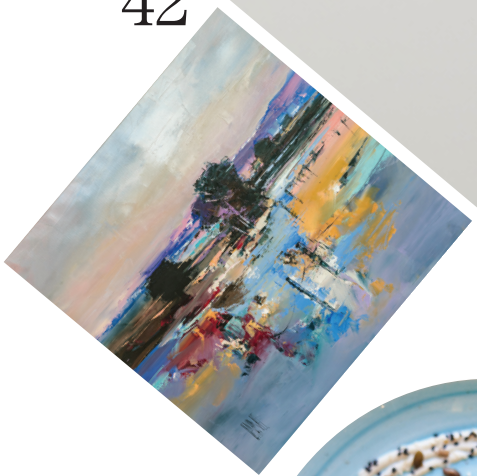


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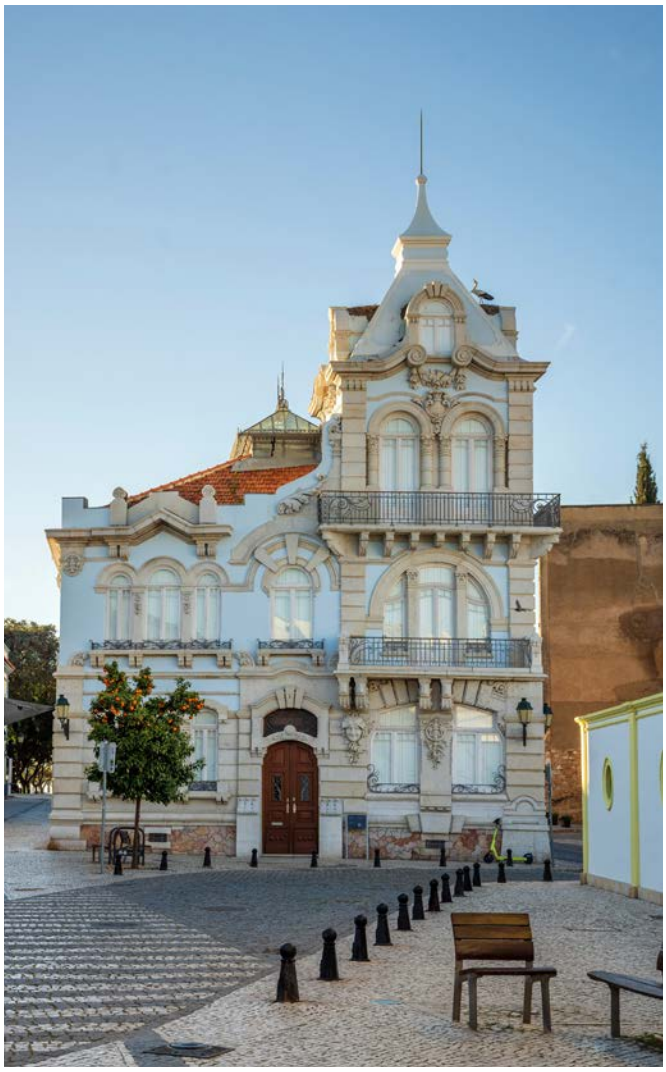
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From Platibanda to Brise-soleil

How three architectural styles shaped the Algarve

ANYONE VISITING THE ALGARVE FOR THE FIRST TIME SOON NOTICES THAT ITS TOWNS LOOK SURPRISINGLY DIFFERENT FROM ONE ANOTHER. WHY DOES FARO LOOK SO MODERN WHILE TAVIRA HAS THE ATMOSPHERE OF AN ANCIENT MONUMENTAL TOWN? AND WHY DOES OLHÃO HAVE AN ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER FOUND NOWHERE ELSE IN PORTUGAL?

Words: **WILL KOHLEN**



MICHEL FIGUET

Left to right: The Palacete Belmarço in Faro with its neo-Manueline details; entrance to the Grand House Hotel in Vila Real de Santo António; Casa Gago Rosa, Faro, where Le Corbusier, Brazilian architecture and the Mediterranean climate come together naturally

TAKE FARO. Behind the imposing city walls of Vila Adentro lies a compact historic centre whose story reaches back to Roman times. Narrow streets wind between whitewashed houses, past a cathedral with its distinctive half-tower and the former brewery on the edge of the old town. Everything speaks of the past.

But walk through the classical Arco da Vila and the scene changes almost abruptly. By the harbour stands a stark white hotel; further on, apartment blocks, broad avenues and an abundance of 20th-century architecture dominate the streetscape. Suddenly Faro seems like a completely different city.

Olhão also looks surprisingly modern, but in a completely different way. Here it is not the large buildings that catch the eye, but the houses themselves. Flat roofs with terraces, extensions reached by external staircases, cube-shaped chimneys and rooftop terraces create a unique townscape, with influences from North Africa and the Mediterranean building tradition. The three architectural styles discussed here can only be found sporadically throughout the town. For modernism, you need to cross to the other side of the railway; architecture from the dictatorship period can be recognisably traditional, but can also be surprisingly modern.

Tavira is the other extreme. The town immediately reveals itself as a historic settlement, with its churches, convents and grand houses. Its roofscape tells a different story, too: traditional pitched roofs, with large and small roof planes sloping in different directions, create an almost picturesque townscape.

Jazz legend Duke Ellington once said: "There are really only two kinds of music: good music and the rest." Perhaps the same could be said of architecture. As soon as you try to define architectural styles, you quickly find yourself in a maze of terms, movements and exceptions.

This article focuses on three architectural movements that shaped the Algarve between 1880 and 1975. They did not follow one another neatly and frequently overlapped, but together they tell the story of a region that continually reinvented itself.

ECLECTIC, ROMANTIC & REVIVALIST, CIRCA 1880–1935

The architecture of the prosperous middle classes

At the end of the 19th century, the Algarve was undergoing profound change. The canning industry was booming, trade was expanding and the arrival of the railway brought the coastal towns into ever closer contact with the rest of Portugal and Europe. And the prosperous middle class commissioned villas, town houses, shops and cafés that were intended not only to be comfortable, but also to make an impression.

There was no single style for these new buildings, but a family of styles united by a love of decoration, craftsmanship and historical references. Neoclassical columns appeared alongside Moorish arches, Renaissance details alongside elegant ironwork, and Portuguese ornament alongside French and Italian influences. Richly decorated façades, stone surrounds, elaborate cornices, cast-iron balconies and monumental entrance doors tell the story of a time when a house was also a statement.

A typically Algarvian feature of this period is the **platibanda**. This raised parapet conceals the pitched roof behind a richly decorated crown of stucco, balustrades, pinnacles, vases and geometric patterns. Platibandas had already appeared in the Algarve's vernacular architecture, but around 1900 they became a defining feature of the homes of the prosperous middle classes. Sometimes classical motifs dominate, sometimes Neo-Moorish or Neo-Manueline influences. So when walking through Faro, Olhão, Loulé or Tavira, do not only look ahead. Look up.

A textbook example is **Palacete Belmarço** in Faro. Neo-Manueline details, Neo-Moorish motifs, elegant ironwork and richly worked stucco come together in a single composition.

A very different example is **Villa Marília**. Its richly decorated stucco, with Moorish motifs, gives the villa an almost exotic character. Cafés, too, were designed to impress. **Café Aliança** in Faro, designed by Quintas Júnior and ▶

opened in 1932, still evokes the atmosphere of the grand coffee houses of Lisbon and Porto; **Café Calcinha** in Loulé belongs to the same tradition.

Once you know what to look for, you will find this architecture everywhere. In Faro at **Casa 1923**, in Olhão at the former **Café Mourão** and **Recreativa Progresso**, and along Avenida José Costa Mealha and surrounding areas in Loulé. The municipal **market halls of Loulé** and **Olhão**, with their Neo-Moorish influences, also belong to this architectural world. These are buildings that look back to another era, but together they tell the same story: one of growth, new opportunities and the desire to make an instant and ever-lasting impression.



Above: Loulé's unmissable municipal market. Below left: Casa Verde in the main pedestrian street in Faro; right: Casa Folque in Vila Real de Santo António

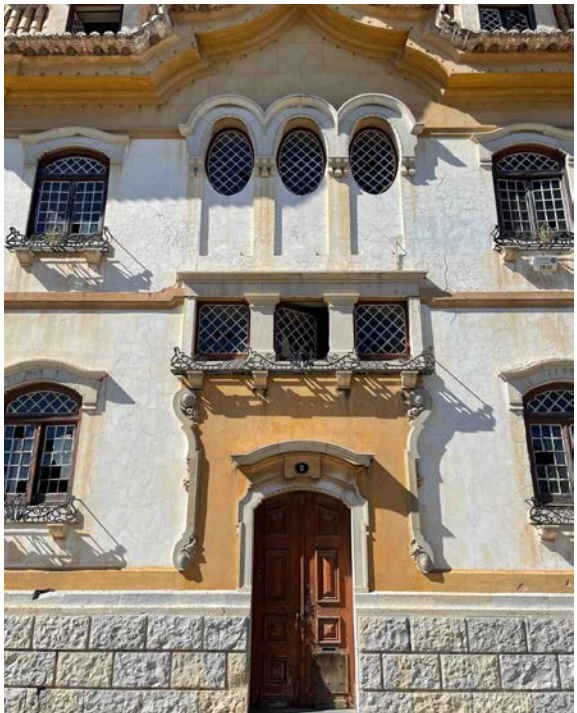
THE ARCHITECTURE OF A NEW NATIONAL IDENTITY

While the prosperous middle classes had already displayed their wealth, from the 1930s Portugal's rulers took a different approach. Under António de Oliveira Salazar's authoritarian Estado Novo regime, architecture was expected to express order, restraint and dignity. Thus emerged **Português Suave**, seen particularly in public buildings – banks, post offices, courts and schools.

Symmetrical façades, tiled roofs, stone entrances, pediments and round arches evoked an idealised image of Portugal. The style was strongly influenced by the ideas of architect Raul Lino, whose books and essays on the **Casa Portuguesa** helped establish an image of the traditional Portuguese house.

Once you know the style, it is easy to recognise its symmetry – gently undulating tiled roofs, cornices and small corner towers. In the Algarve, the buildings also acquired a distinct local character through the use of local limestone, often revealing fossilised shells and other marine life.





The most important practitioner of this architecture in the Algarve was **Jorge Oliveira**. In 1943, Duarte Pacheco, the Minister of Public Works, sent him to Faro to help guide the region's rapid urban expansion. Oliveira designed numerous public buildings and houses in Faro, Olhão, Portimão and Vila Real de Santo António. In Faro, his work can be seen in the **Caixa Geral de Depósitos,** with its distinctive round tower, and the adjacent **Casa Verde**. Step inside this clothing and fabric shop and take a moment to enjoy its 1950s interior.

Português Suave was not restricted to public buildings. The primary schools built during the Estado Novo are also typical examples. They were standardised modern school buildings, but whitewashed walls, red tiled roofs, arches, verandas and other regional features gave them a deliberately traditional Portuguese appearance.

A very different variant can be found in the east of the Algarve. On the banks of the Guadiana in Vila Real de Santo António stands the impressive **Casa Folque**, designed by **Raul Lino** in 1926. The villa has a monumental entrance with columns and mansard roofs, referring to the architecture of the Pombaline period.

Designed by Lino for Sebastián Ramirez, the Spanish director of Vila Real de Santo António's largest canning factory, it is regarded as an important precursor to, and influence on, the later Português Suave style.

MODERNISM, CIRCA 1948–1975

The optimistic architecture of the post-war Algarve

After the restrained architecture of the Estado Novo, a new era began in the 1950s. Modernism embraced progress, technology and a better future. Historical styles gave way to light, functional buildings in which space, light and comfort took centre stage. Its great inspiration was the French-Swiss architect **Le Corbusier**, who described a house as "une machine à habiter" – a machine to live in.

Load-bearing walls gave way to columns, floor plans became more flexible, large windows brought in deep daylight and flat roofs became terraces. Ornament disappeared; the function of the building determined its form.

In the Algarve, however, modernism acquired a very distinctive character. The sunny climate called for different solutions from those used in Paris or Rotterdam. After the Second World War, many Algarvios also returned from Brazil and Venezuela, bringing not only capital but new ideas about living and building.

To recognise Algarvian modernism, look out for three things in particular: **brise-soleils**, **cobogós** and deep **balconies**. Brise-soleils keep out the fierce summer sun, while cobogós – perforated concrete screens originally developed in Brazil – provide shade, ventilation and privacy.

The architect who translated these ideas most convincingly was **Manuel Gomes da Costa**. From his one-man practice in Faro, he designed hundreds of houses, apartment buildings, churches and public buildings. His principle was simple: keep the sun out in summer and invite it in during winter.

His finest buildings are concentrated around Faro's market hall, where the **Modernist Axis** is now recognised as municipal heritage. Walking through the area, you discover dozens of buildings in which modernism has acquired a distinctly Algarvian character.

The absolute highlight is **Casa Gago Rosa**. Here, Le Corbusier, Brazilian architecture and the Mediterranean climate come together naturally. Clean geometric forms are combined with elegant brise-soleils, airy cobogós and a carefully orchestrated play of light and shadow.

Buildings such as **Edifício Agora**, beside the market hall with its two donkeys on the roof, and the **Pires & Brito building**, show the versatility of Manuel Gomes da Costa. His architecture is modern without being cold, functional without being dull, and international without losing its regional identity.

Nowhere in the Algarve is modernism as prominent as in Faro, but Faro is certainly not the only place where it can be discovered. In Loulé, you can find fine examples by **Manuel Laginha**, while **António Vicente de Castr**o left a distinctive modernist oeuvre in Portimão.

Manuel Gomes da Costa's projects are also widely represented beyond Faro, including in Olhão, Tavira and Vila Real de Santo António. In Santa Luzia, he designed the striking concrete **Igreja Matriz**. In Santa Catarina da Fonte do Bispo, a former agricultural cooperative has been given a new life as **Museu Zer0**. That is precisely where the strength of Algarvian modernism lies. International ideas were adapted to the sun, the wind and the way of life in southern Portugal. The Algarve gave modernism a character of its own.

Below: The striking concrete Igreja Matriz in Santa Luzia was designed by architect Manuel Gomes da Costa, who created hundreds of buildings from his office in Faro



Look around

Perhaps this also answers the question we started with. Faro, Olhão and Tavira are not telling different stories. They are telling different chapters of the same story. Today, anyone walking through the Algarve is unknowingly moving through a century and a half of architectural history. The richly decorated platibandas recall the prosperity of the middle classes around 1900; the quiet symmetry of Português Suave reflects a period in which tradition and national identity were central; and the brise-soleils and cobogós of modernism tell the story of a region that looked confidently towards the future after the war. Understand these buildings and you will never see the Algarve in quite the same way again.

WANT TO DISCOVER MORE?

Explore the Algarve's architecture with ArchitourAlgarve's digital architecture trails on the STQRY Guide app, or download them from architouralgarve.com. Guides on Manuel Gomes da Costa's architecture in Faro and on Cubist and other architecture in Olhão are available at Gama Rama Gallery in Faro, Museu Zer0 in Santa Catarina da Fonte do Bispo and Clinar bookshop in Olhão.