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09

CONTENTS


26

REGULARS

09 UPFRONT: MUST-HAVES MUST-KNOWS
12 VOLUNTEERING
24 GREAT TASTES
34 WINE: LABEL-SPEAK
42 COLLECTIONS
45 OVER TO VERITY
48 RECIPE OF THE MONTH
61 RECOMMENDED READS
68 WELLBEING
77 BUSINESS START-UPS
78 GARDENING
86 HISTORY
88 PHOTOGRAPHY
91 TECHNO
94 THEN AND NOW
97 MONEY MATTERS
99 GOING LEGAL
101 AGENDA
106 AND FINALLY...


56


72

38

FEATURES

14 **DIFFERENT VIEWS**
The hills have a story, to tell
20 **PORTUGUESE POLITICS**
Your guide to who and what
26 **TABLE TALK**
A new, bold that plans to be around
30 **THE HIBERATION HIDEAWAY**
And now for something different...
38 **THE MODERNIST WEEKEND**
So much to discover right here
50 **CREATING A DESTINATION PROPERTY**
You really need to think this through
54 **MAKING A DIFFERENCE**
Nature's a commitment to the WWF
56 **FAIR PLAY**
Celebrating Christmas early
64 **OFF THE PLAYLIST**
Making music, finding an audience
72 **48 HOURS...**
Serra da Estrela, a high point
83 **RENOVATION WORKS**
Getting into the swim of things

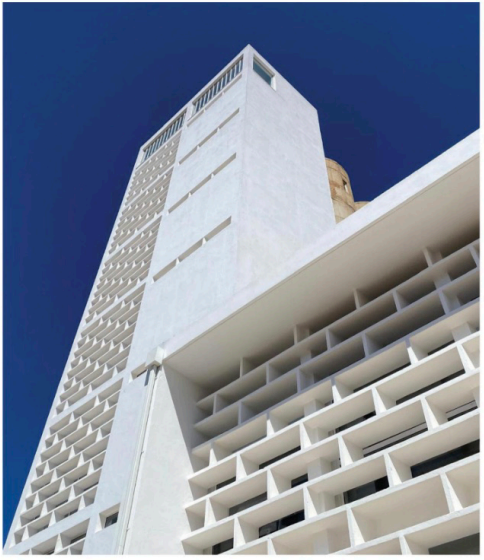

34



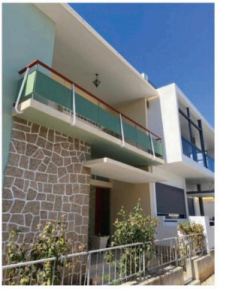
WHAT STARTED IN 2022 AS A RELATIVELY SMALL WEEKEND DEVOTED TO THE MODERN ARCHITECTURE OF FARO HAS GROWN INTO A THREE-DAY EVENT THIS MONTH THAT EXTENDS TO OLHÃO AND THE TAVIRA AREA

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Photography: THE MODERNIST FARO AND AYMERIC WARMÉ JANVILLE



INSIDE FARO'S MODERNIST WEEKEND





Opposite page, top: Christophe and Angélique de Oliveira, founders and organisers of the annual Modernist Weekend initiative. Main picture: Museu Zerò in Santa Catarina da Fonte do Bispo. This page, left: Rua de O Algarve 20, Olhão; above: 31 Avenida Poente, Faro

CHRISTOPHE AND Angélique de Oliveira came to Portugal from France in 2018. Christophe has Portuguese roots, and after falling in love with Faro they opened The Modernist in 2021, a remarkable hotel housed in a 1970s building designed by Portuguese architect Joel Santana.

The idea behind the hotel, renovated by Studio PAr, was simple but powerful: to create somewhere to sleep, eat, drink and, above all, experience architecture. But the project went further. As part of the hotel's identity, Christophe and Angélique wanted to create an architectural event inspired partly by the Modernism Week in California's Palm Springs.

2022: The first Modernist Weekend was born

The main venue was the former Fábrica da Cerveja, the old brewery on the edge of Faro's historic centre. It was an appropriate setting: an industrial building occasionally used for cultural events. There were exhibitions by artists including Richard Walker and Sander Patelski and photographer Michel Figuet, architects, artists, gallery owners and architecture enthusiasts came together. Sander had just added three buildings by Manuel Gomes da Costa to his collection of modernist posters. We discovered that we had both lived and studied in Maastricht, and soon found ourselves talking about architecture, modernism and our shared connection with the city. For a moment, the world felt very small.

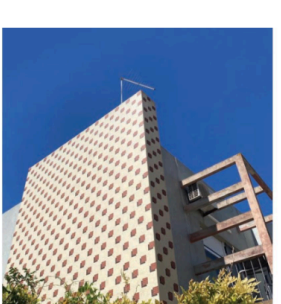
That weekend resulted in my first film about an architectural walk with Christophe. It also introduced me to people who have since become familiar faces every year. We meet, greet each other and exchange stories. My friend Paulo Pedro, an architect from Lisbon who grew up in Portimão, is another regular.

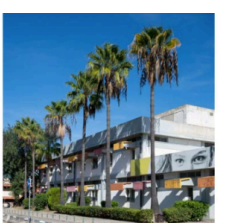
2023: From the city to the beach

A year later, the programme had expanded. One of the most memorable evenings was a party at Hotel Aeromar on Ilha de Faro, complete with a 1970s theme and guests in costume. There was also a large British delegation from the Twentieth Century Society, following a detailed article about the weekend in *The Guardian*. They were delighted to discover Aeromar, designed by Manuel Gomes da Costa, because the building itself is an important part of the island's architectural history.

That year I also walked across Ilha de Faro with Richard Walker for the first time. It was a revelation. Most people come to the island for the beach. You can sit in the sand, drink a glass of chilled white wine at Café do Zé and watch the beach life go by, believing you are simply at another Algarve holiday destination.

Richard makes you look again. Suddenly the beach houses become architecture: modernist villas composed of cubic volumes, terraces and pergolas, cobogós and carefully designed responses to sun, wind and light. The wonderful thing about these walks is that you keep thinking you have already seen everything. Then someone says: "Look at that." It happens again and again. And gradually it becomes clear that the story is not only about Gomes da Costa. It is about a period in which Faro changed ▶







Above: top left, clockwise: Vivenda Estrelita, Olhão; Universidade do Algarve, Campus da Penha, Faro; the Museu ZerO, presenting digital art in a building that has arisen from the former Cooperativa Agrícola. Opposite page: Modernist Weekend walks are shared by so many, there to learn and to enjoy

from a relatively small provincial town into a modern city, with new housing, apartment buildings, infrastructure and a different way of life.

2024: Gomes da Costa gets a face

In 2024, my Dutch friend architect Ed Vliegen came to the Modernist Weekend in Faro for the first time. He wanted to see as much as possible, so we joined several tours. One of the highlights was the Edifício Tridente, one of Gomes da Costa's major urban projects. Dominating Avenida 5 de Outubro, it is impossible to miss: large, geometric and self-confident. It also shows that the architect was designing for a growing city.

And then there was our little architectural pilgrimage. Ed wanted to see Álvaro Siza Vieira's Capela do Monte, the Pritzker Prize winner's only chapel in the Algarve. Architect and friend Jacob Bakker joined us, and on the way we made a detour to a villa in Almancil by Eduardo Souto de Moura, Portugal's other Pritzker Prize-winning architect. That is exactly what makes a weekend like this so enjoyable. You start with a programme, but you never quite know where you will end up.

2025: More discoveries

By 2025, the Modernist Weekend had become something of a yearly celebration of discovery for me. I joined a landscape tour with my partner, starting at the iconic Jardim da Alameda João de Deus and ending at the gardens of the University of Algarve's Penha campus. I also visited Casa 1923, an Art Nouveau building renovated by Faro-born architect Vânia Brito Fernandes of Studio PAr. The transformation into an urban hotel won an Algarve architecture award for Heritage and Rehabilitation and later a national award.

Meanwhile, my own research into Manuel Gomes da Costa has developed into a book, *The Architecture of Manuel Gomes da Costa in Faro & More*. It presents 34 projects from his oeuvre. I know their stories, sometimes their residents, and increasingly the reasons why they look the way they do. Just before the presentation of my book at Gama Rama Gallery, I received an email from Daniel Farinha, Gomes da Costa's eldest grandson. He wanted a copy of the book for himself and his mother, the architect's daughter. Suddenly, my research is connected not only with the buildings, but with the family of the man who designed them.

2026: Three cities, one architectural story

And now there is the fifth edition – a milestone worth celebrating. Something fundamental has changed. The Modernist Weekend is no longer confined to Faro. For the first time, Olhão and the area around Tavira are part of the programme. The organisers describe it neatly: three cities, three days, one architectural story.

For me, the inclusion of Olhão is particularly significant. I have been living there for years and have developed my own tours and research around its architecture.

At first sight Faro and Olhão seem very different. Faro has a more urban post-war modernism, with villas, apartment ensembles and many buildings by Gomes da Costa, while Olhão has its famous Cubist townscape, especially in the old fishing neighbourhoods of Barreta and Levante: white,

cubic houses with flat roofs arranged in an almost labyrinthine pattern. Later, modern architects added their own architectural language along Avenida da República and on the expanding edges of the town.

This contrast makes the new programme especially interesting. Richard Walker will lead a tour in Olhão, and the tour concludes with two unmissable moments at Fábrica de Olhão: a visit to Boomcubist, Richard Walker's art exhibition inspired by Olhão's unique architectural character, and the opportunity to purchase a signed copy of his book *Faro Modernism*.

The question is no longer simply: where are Faro's modernist buildings? It becomes: how did modernism develop across the Algarve? That is a bigger story.

The other new destination is equally fascinating. In Santa Catarina da Fonte do Bispo, in the municipality of Tavira, stands a former agricultural cooperative designed by Manuel Gomes da Costa, with a remarkable collection of grain silos. For years I wondered whether the building would ever find a new purpose. It finally has. The former Cooperativa Agrícola has been transformed into Museu Zer0, a museum of digital art. What makes the project particularly interesting is that the existing architecture remains an essential part of the new use.

I was able to visit the building during the transformation and later attended its opening. In the darkness, projections and sound filled the spaces beneath the old silos. Moving images were projected across the walls: it felt as if the future had temporarily taken over a building from the past. It is exactly the kind of combination that allows the Modernist Weekend to grow: architecture, adaptive reuse, art and heritage becoming part of the same story.

The buildings you normally cannot enter

If I had to give one reason to attend the Modernist Weekend, however, it would be the open houses. Casa Gago, built in 1955 for Alfredo Gago Rosa, is one of the most important examples. With pilotis, large areas of glass, a flat roof and a protective second skin of open concrete blocks, it reveals the international influences within Gomes da Costa's work. This year visitors can see both apartments, including one that has retained many of its original 1950s elements.

Other highlights include a number of familiar landmarks encountered on the architectural walks: Casa Verde, The Modernist, Edifício Tridente, and Edifício Chelsea. And, of course, Ilha de Faro returns, with Richard Walker's *From Bauhaus to Beach House,* placing the Algarve's beach architecture within a wider international modernist story.

More than a weekend

There is also a wider cultural question behind all this. Faro once hoped to become European Capital of Culture 2027. The city did not reach the final shortlist; Évora as eventually selected. Modernist heritage formed an important part of Faro's cultural ambitions, and for several years the municipality was involved in the Modernist Weekend.

Political priorities change, however, and the municipality has since stepped back from its role as co-organiser. That makes initiatives such as the Modernist Weekend even more important. Architectural heritage needs people to keep looking at it, talking about it and making it visible. And perhaps this is especially true in Olhão, where there now seems to be growing political interest in the city's architectural heritage.

Recently, Olhão's mayor Ricardo Calé, looking through Richard Walker's *Faro Modernism,* recognised one of Gomes da Costa's projects. "I know that architect," he said. "He designed my parents' house." It turned out to be one of three villas on the edge of Olhão. His family had lived in Vivenda Maria Helena.

The Modernist Weekend could hardly have found a better reminder of what architecture can mean: not simply buildings, but part of a city's collective memory.

The Modernist Weekend takes place on 6, 7 and 8 November 2026 in Faro, Olhão and the Tavira area. Visit themodernistweekend.com for details.

