

DECEMBER 2023

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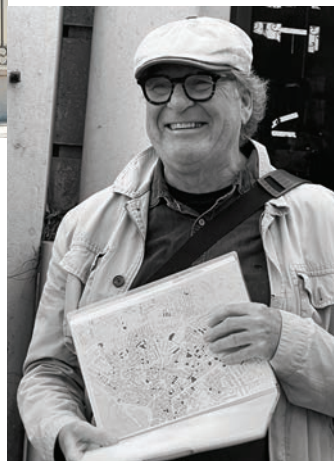


# Where there's *a will...*



*Right: Looking down on the streets of Olhão. Opposite page, top: The Bank of Portugal in Faro, an example of neo-Manueline revivalist architecture; below: The work of architect Manuel Gomes da Costa in Faro. Following page: modernist architecture features across the Algarve*





A MAN WHO SPENT MANY YEARS AS AN ARCHITECT AND URBAN PLANNING CONSULTANT IN THE NETHERLANDS IS COMBINING HIS LOVE OF ARCHITECTURE AND THE ALGARVE WITH A NEW WEBSITE AND APP. WILL KÖHLEN IS THE MAN TO SHOW YOU AROUND

*Words:* LUCY MAYER

**W**ILL KÖHLEN, now retired, has lived in Olhão for the past six years and started blogging about the town's history and buildings out of pure love for it. But he hasn't stopped there. Will has now launched his Architour Algarve website, [architouralgarve.com](http://architouralgarve.com), with inbuilt app, to allow users to step inside the parts of the Algarve they love the most, virtually.

Will says he always felt he had a connection with the region. Living in Maastricht in the Netherlands, which is renowned for its medieval-era architecture, Will was sent to Lisbon in 1986 to learn Portuguese before heading to Maputo, the capital of Mozambique, for four years to work for the Christian Council there.

### Influences

It was in Mozambique that his passion for modernist architecture really evolved when he discovered Pancho Guedes. Born in Lisbon in 1925, Guedes is described as one of the earliest post-modernist architects in Africa, having left Portugal for Mozambique with his mother when he was just seven years old. He designed hundreds of buildings in the 1950s and 60s, many in Maputo where Will was based, as

building activity intensified across Mozambique; Guedes was also involved with many of the churches, which is where Will came into further contact with his work. Inspired, Will then discovered, through his own research, Portuguese architect Manuel Gomes da Costa, said to be one of the most influential architects of his generation in the Algarve, where he was born and worked between 1950 and 2002.

He is said to have left an indelible mark on the landscape and was believed to be responsible for the planning of around 400 buildings; think Casa Miracle and Casa Gago for starters. Will says he felt the two architects he admired so much had many similarities having studied at the same time, and really ignited his interest further: "I felt very connected to them," he says.

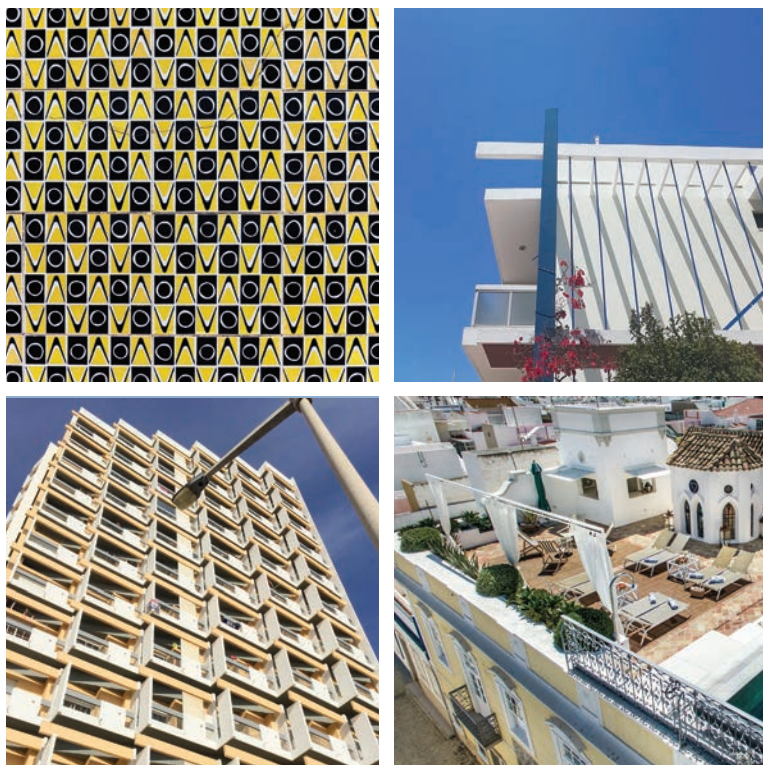
### New vs old

Will admits that there will always be a big debate surrounding so-called traditional and modernist architecture, especially in a place like the Algarve with its rich history, and he's happy to encourage it – anything that gets people talking about the buildings around them. He says he does understand people who are nervous of what locals call the "Vilamourisation of Olhão", but this is why he is careful that his website also caters for those who prefer the older and sometimes more intricate side of the Algarve's most famous towns.

It's with this in mind that Will takes me back to his time in Tavira, where he lived before settling in Olhão, and which is filled with classic and gothic buildings. It's here that he made the acquaintance of a tour guide, who has come to be a good friend. Her son is an architect and she had also lived in Mozambique and did walking tours of the town, so the pair had a lot in common.

She introduced Will to the works of Fernando Pessoa who was ►





born in Tavira and whose work is celebrated every year in the town. She had her own connection with the photography club which held regular exhibitions, and it was when Will made the move to Olhão that he decided to join Recriativa (now known as República 14), another arts club, so he could meet like-minded people and pursue his love of the arts and architecture. It wasn't long after this that Will decided to help put together photography exhibitions, and eventually, start walking tours of his own. He says that some of the people who joined knew more about Olhão than he, being a newbie, did, so it was a great chance to learn more about the town in which he was living.

Spurred on by the interest and growing enthusiasm, Will began creating tour maps and handing them out so people could walk the streets at their leisure without a guide. Later, he came up with the idea to go digital: establishing a beautiful website and gradually introducing videos, photos, history pages and details of upcoming architecture events.

Through his expertise in digital technology, he discovered the Pocket Sights app that guides visitors from one point of interest to the next using GPS. But crucially, it is a tour builder allowing users to create a route that takes them anywhere they choose to go - and they're not restricted to roads or major pathways. This is something that Will plans to incorporate in his own app - he had started to build a virtual tour app, but Covid disrupted the process. So, for the time being, he continues to host Pocket Sights on his website as he loves what it can do. But he is hoping to get planning again on the Architour Algarve app by the end of the year.

### With a passion

Will says he wants his app to be accessible to everyone and he wants people to love exploring as much as he does. I ask him if and how he is looking to monetise his website and future app. He offers me a chuckle and says that, as a retiree, he doesn't need the income, and this is a true labour of love. He's looking to give something back which will also whet his appetite for architecture and his love of buildings. He's

especially keen that those using the app learn to develop an eye for architecture with the help of his trained eye. He wants them to learn to look at cities and towns and landscapes in another way, through discovery and discussion. He says that even if you don't like a building, you should learn how to appreciate it, something he himself is doing with the "more decorative" aspects of the Algarve's older buildings - which as a modernist, he says is new for him, too. He says that all the payment he needs is people enjoying themselves, coming together to debate architecture, and maybe a cup of coffee at the end of a walking tour. Will's mantra is that you have to look for "the diamonds" and he's also keen to point out how, importantly, tourism is changing the face of cities like Faro, which he says is actually a very modernist town shaped by the people who flock to it. The ongoing redevelopment of the airport from Faro Airport to Gago Coutinho International Airport is just one example of how modernism is shaped by the ever-growing tourism industry.

So, how does Will promote his new venture? His website contains his blog, and he is firing off newsletters to let residents and visitors know what's on offer, you just have to know where to look. There are a range of locations on offer to tour virtually. They include Faro, Tavira, Loulé, and of course, Will's beloved Olhão. One thing that Will cannot see is how many people are using his tours website and this is part of the reason why he's looking to develop his own app. The only way that he can see actual figures is by setting up a pro contract with Pocket Sights, the app which he currently has installed on his website, which he doesn't want to do.

### And coming up...

So, where would Will like to look at touring next? He tells me he has Portimão firmly in his sights. He's currently investigating what it will take to make this addition, by meeting people and looking at points of interest and of course, the buildings. I have no doubt that he'll make this happen and visitors to the website will get to experience the city, known for its old quarter, busy marina and long beaches, in the near future.

All this talk of tours comes at a wonderful time for Portugal's tourist industry. New analysis of 28 European holiday destinations by Oak Tree Mobility has revealed the best countries for Brits over 50 to travel to this Winter. Every October, searches for "Winter Holidays" and "Winter Sun Holidays" peak in the UK as Brits seek to escape the cold and windy weather that batters it. With this in mind, Oak Tree Mobility has created an index of the best places for a winter break. When it comes to the best destination, Portugal scored the most points for its high number of 'bucket list' activities, high median age, safety relative to other countries and high November to February temperatures on the study. What better news could there be for Architour Algarve? 📍

