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A series of villas in Cabo Verde synergise local craft and contemporary design

Near Mindelo, capital of the Cape Verde island of São Vicente, twelve Belgian 'Barefoot luxury' villas have just been erected in the same stone as the surrounding rocky slopes. This project turns simple and conscious living into intelligent spatial design, seamlessly combining local craftsmanship with contemporary architecture.

barefoot luxury

In a world where we are slaves to speed, we long for slow living. Living with peace and attention, living in synergy with nature in sustainable buildings is the new luxury. Enjoying life barefoot is the philosophy behind the new 'Barefoot Luxury' project in Cabo Verde. The initiative of Serge Hannecart and Jan Talboom includes luxury holiday villas, a restaurant and smaller lodges.

unpretentious villas

The Cabo Verde archipelago consists of a mystifying moonscape with craters, bumps and rocky terrain as far as the eye can see. This barren landscape with its gorgeous hues of brown, ochre and red contrasts dramatically with the deep blue Atlantic Ocean.

The first phase of "Barefoot Luxury" nestles luxury villas on the rocky slopes of the Baía de João d'Evora, a bay on the island of São Vicente. Expect ethically responsible tourism. POLO Architects developed a sustainable spatial vision.

“The nearby charming, old colonial city of Mindelo has a tragic history. After the Portuguese settlers arrived, they brought African slaves with them. Their descendants now live throughout the islands. This context has determined the way we deal with this project. The last thing we wanted was to plant an alienating luxury holiday resort in a relatively poor country. Respect for the surrounding landscape was essential.”

Patrick Lootens, founding partner POLO Architects

local craftsmanship

The Baía de João d'Évora project was carried out with respect for the environment and the local communities. The holiday homes were built in the same material as the surrounding mountains, so that it flawlessly blends in with nature. The villas, typically one- or two-storey structures, were built in rough concrete, using the traditional, local construction method. Some walls and elements consist of stacked blocks of basalt from the surrounding valley. The roads connecting the villas were also constructed in basalt. For this labour intensive method, the local craftsmen's know-how was crucial; this goes to show that local craftsmanship and contemporary architecture are perfectly compatible.

cool embrace

The villas were designed - so that residents could get the best views and as much light as possible. In addition, the homes were built as a structure embracing a central patio, including a pergola for shade. This refreshing embrace creates an immaterial outside living space offering shelter from the harsh winds besieging the valley. Rotating panels made of African Kotibe wood offer residents the option to choose between wide ocean views and protection from the wind.

African vintage

Each villa has its own garden with swimming pool, an indoor and outdoor kitchen and bedrooms with an adjacent bathroom. The houses were stylishly furnished by the Antwerp-based interior design office Going East. Vintage furniture and local finds complement the no-nonsense architecture perfectly.

“Most of the furniture in the villas is made by local artisans. We have searched the Mindelo markets for local objects ranging from shark teeth to Awalé game boards and wicker baskets. The interiors remind us that we are on African soil.”

Anaïs Torfs & Michiel Mertens, Going East.

Nowadays, sustainability and development are often approached using a high-tech mind-set, constantly looking at new technologies. These villas in Cabo Verde offer a perfect example of a well-considered low-tech approach forging bridges between cultures.

www.barefootluxury.be

BAREFOOT LUXURY | location: Mindelo, São Vicente, Cabo Verde | surface: phase 1: 16,3 ha
programme: villas, a restaurant and lodges | client: LIFE
partners: interior design: Going East | photography: Francisco Nogueira

POLO Architects

POLO Architects was founded in 1991 by Mauro Poponcini & Patrick Lootens. Today, The design-focused practice with expertise in urbanism, architecture, interior design and research consists of a dedicated team of over 110 highly skilled, multidisciplinary professionals working in Antwerp and Brussels based studios on assignments throughout Belgium and beyond.

www.polo-architects.be

press contact

An De Dycker
PR & communication coordinator
add@polo-architects.be

Tavernierkaai 2 bus 28
B 2000 Antwerpen
+32 (0)3 225 18 84