



SC

THE ULTIMATE LIVING

OBSSESSION: THE LURE OF THE SEA

GLOCALISATION: LOCAL DESIGNERS GO GLOBAL

GOURMET: SPANISH INFLUENCE

ART: AN ANCIENT ART RE-EMERGES

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THE LURE OF THE SEA

A modern interior space with a wooden ceiling and floor. A large glass wall on the left reflects the interior and shows a treadmill. In the background, two people are standing near a counter. In the foreground, a small boat with the word 'CRUSADER' on its side is visible, along with a blue water bottle and a white cap on the wooden floor.

DREAMING OF A PICTURE PERFECT HOME BY THE SEA? THE GOOD NEWS IS THERE IS NO NEED TO TRAVEL HUNDREDS OF MILES TO GET A SLICE OF PARADISE.

STORY DAVEN WU IMAGES SEVEN PALMS, ISTOCKPHOTO





■ For many of us, the idea of paradise conjures up images of the ocean — cool nights and warm days, rose-hued sunsets against a pink horizon, and white washed beach houses with the windows thrown wide open to catch the breeze and the rhythmic melody of gentle lapping waves.

From literature to celluloid, it is an irresistible image that grips our imagination, speaking to us of nostalgia, blossoming love, youth, and emotional reconnection. In the iconic flick *Summer of '42*, a young boy falls in love for the first time by the sea with the luminous Jennifer O'Neill. In *Beaches*, an ailing Barbara Hershey returned to her home by the sea to say her final farewells. And who can forget the lush beach scenes that set the first intense blushes of romance between Barbra Streisand and Robert Redford in *The Way We Were*.

Indeed, the allure of living by the sea is as powerful today as it has been for centuries. And it is why beach vacations where we flock to water to rest, recharge and recline are a mark of successful holidays.

Interior designer Albano Damiano is one of the lucky few who enjoys the trappings of a beach holiday, every day. His home, overlooking the South China Sea, has been a deliberate investment in a lifestyle that reaps great personal rewards. "For me, there is a pure energy force in being near a body of water," he says. He should know, having worked on several AmanResorts. "Spiritually, a home by the sea offers a feeling of peace and tranquillity. It's a place where you can return to recharge and refresh."

From the grand mansions of the Hamptons to the villas clutched precariously to the cliffs surrounding Cote d'Azur, the bragging rights of a sea-fronted home have traditionally been the province of the well-heeled. But in the new millennium, the traditional concept of living by the sea has morphed into one geared for a new, mobile, business-savvy consumer who needs to be plugged in 24/7 or who prefers to work from home. Today's consumer may want beachfront action but is rarely willing to commit to the air miles to get it.

This explains the allure of sunny spots like Bondi Beach and Cape Cod, where access to sun, sand and surf is knitted to physical proximity to the stock market and offices.

"People need to escape the rat race," says Juan Luis Briceño, the director of Studio Butter-Briceño, a Helsinki-based architectural firm. "This calls for a retreat within a peaceful environment and there's no better way to do so than a beach home which is close to the city."

Briceño adds that the idea of mobility, which at one stage made it difficult to conceive of life outside the city, has changed. So much so that canny property developers are responding to the demand and recruiting top-of-the-line architects in the crusade.

Anchored 20km off Abu Dhabi and mere minutes from downtown by helicopter, the Nurai development by up-and-coming architect Dror Benshetrit blends private villas with soft sand and spa in an area that barely stretches 1.5km.



speedboat garages. Both were snapped up, entirely off the back of a computer-generated film, by Italian bankers at US\$2m each at the Hong Kong launch.

In Singapore, SC Global Developments is working with Kerry Hill Architects, long time collaborators of Aman Resorts, to unveil their vision of beachfront living with the upcoming project, Seven Palms. A bijou 41-villa development perched on Sentosa Cove and overlooking tranquil Tanjong Beach, Seven Palms is positioned as Singapore's only bona fide beachfront residence. And while other residential properties on Sentosa are fronted by a rock-lined coast with no direct access to the nearby beaches, Seven Palms provides all the pleasures of beachfront living while being less than

In the Asia-Pacific region, investors continue their love affair with Phuket's good international schools, golf courses, hospitals and postcard perfect stretches of powdery white beaches. Last year, the Royal Phuket Marina launched two 10,000-sq ft Aquaminiums, swanky Venice-inspired residences with private

20 minutes from the CBD. This last point is important. As Briceño points out, urban dwellers are constrained by their built environment, which by its nature, is conceived for the collective, rather than the individual. This means the option of privacy tends to be confined to interior space within walls. Seafront residences facilitate a more "natural" environment in which the individual takes centre stage.

From an investment perspective, it's true that beachfront homes do not come cheap, but it's equally true that they rather effortlessly maintain an allure that is recession proof. As Daminato says, "From a real estate or urban planning point of view, a water frontage means that developments will not—short of land reclamation—rise up in front of you to block your view."

Gabriel Cardon agrees. The French expat is currently building a waterfront home on Phuket. Beachfront investment, he says, makes special sense in the current market "as the property price will seldom depreciate. No one can take away the view from you."

And that, as the ad goes, is priceless. ■

