

The country club might seem to belong to another era, but this venerable British tradition is being revived by overseas developers. The result is some of the most exclusive – and expensive – complexes in Europe. **GINETTA VEDRICKAS** reports

Clubs with a Premiership lifestyle

For most people the idea of country club membership inspires nostalgic visions of grand old houses with leafy grounds full of tennis courts, cricket pitches and waiters serving gin and tonics by the swimming pool. But, rather than dying out, this is one British tradition that is gaining in popularity overseas as buyers choose properties that come with their very own country-club membership.

Chris Dyson is currently renting in the Marbella area but couldn't resist the chance to secure himself a 3,400 sq m plot at the Monte Mayor Golf and Country Club. "It really is the best of anything that's available around here and having the chance to get in at the embryonic stage means that I will maximise my investment."

Initially Dyson planned to "sit out" his plot, watch prices rise, and sell on but, having been smitten by the country club concept, he now plans on building a villa there for his own use. "In Marbella, where I currently live, there is a lot of development going on, but at Monte Mayor you are guaranteed greenery around you as both the building and low-density regulations which have been imposed will result in a lot of open space." Dyson, a keen golfer, is impressed by the project's exclusivity: "The idea of having facilities such as a gym, bank and shops all under one roof certainly makes the project far more desirable and gives it added value."

Developer La Perla's Lawrence Maeck describes the country estate as the company's "flagship" in spite of winning awards for previous developments and

says: "It will be the most exclusive golf estate in southern Spain." Maeck believes that attention to detail will guarantee the development's appeal: "We've used hand-cut marble for the pavements and small discrete diskettes for lighting."

Plots start at €198,000 for a 2,005sq m-sized plot with sea and golf views, but some buyers prefer to buy on a "turnkey basis" and pay an inclusive price which includes the plot, villa, swimming pool, landscaping of gardens, all architects' and engineers' fees, building and town hall licences and full project management by the company. For this, prices range from €1,250,000 up to €2,500,000 euros.

Maeck doesn't believe that country clubs will ever be very popular: "People simply can't afford to buy into them, so they will never become a trend, but we have already sold around one third of the plots and there are still some magnificent 3,000sq m plus plots available." Monte Mayor may be exclusive, but it will not be a British enclave, as buyers so far are of 11 different nationalities, among them French, American and Belgian.

A yet more expensive private country estate also has plots and properties for sale just a few kilometres inland from the famous marina of Puerto Banus. At La Zagaleta, a handful of buyers can choose to either select a plot and build their own dream villa, or buy a finished property constructed in Andalusian style. Mike Kirkham of Ocean Estates, who are marketing the 900-hectare private estate, which comes with a private 18-hole golf course, says: "This development

is strictly for the rich and famous; it really is the most exclusive development in the area, and you can only play on the golf course if you are invited to by someone who owns a house here."

La Zagaleta is also classified as a nature reserve with deer, boar, pheasants and eagles making it their home. In addition it has stables, three private fishing lakes and tennis courts. The 5,100sq m clubhouse formerly belonged to Adnan Khashoggi and he also owned the surrounding land. The clubhouse is now under renovation but still has traces of its former owner, with marble in heavy use throughout. It has many indoor sports' facilities including a swimming pool, bowling alley and billiard room, as well as a restaurant and function room.

Currently the cheapest plot available at La Zagaleta is for sale at €1.9m and several Premiership footballers have been spotted looking around the villa which is currently owned by professional golfer Andrew Malley, which is for sale at €3.5m. "Most properties which come up for sale are around the €3m mark," adds Mike Kirkham: "A lot of celebs have bought here and Andrew's villa, which was designed by the architect Miguel Tobal, has everything that you could possibly want, including its own gymnasium, separate staff quarters and a self-contained apartment. You really are buying a lifestyle here."

But the country-club concept is not confined to Spain; in France, too, the newly launched club in the Pays des Sorgues, Provence aims to offer a peaceful retreat

but with all the facilities of a modern country club. Provence Country Club's Guy Buckley says: "This is for people who enjoy the traditional pleasures of a well-run country club where the privilege of membership brings attentive service and excellent facilities, with the added bonus of the relaxed warmth of Provençal living."

Once complete, the development will have an 18-hole golf course and practice tees, pro shops and club house, tennis courts, a large swimming pool, bar, *épicerie* and restaurant for residents and members. Prices start from €85,000 and the 179 one- and two-bedroom apartments will be set in clusters, either among pine trees overlooking the fairways, or overlooking the blue mountains of Le Luberon.

Marseilles is just one hour's drive away and strict planning controls in this area of France mean that few if any new developments or golf courses will be permitted here in the future. Buckley says: "It has taken 14 years to bring this project to fruition. The combination of classic Provençal residences and a professionally managed golf club within such a unique setting will provide huge enjoyment for owners."

Monte Mayor is for sale through Carrington Estates: 00 34 649 995 737; www.carrington-estates.com.

La Zagaleta is for sale through Ocean Estates: 00 34 952 811 750 (UK Freephone 0800-328 0444); www.lazagaleta.com

Provence Country Club is for sale through FPDSavills: 020-7824 9030; www.provence-countryclub.com

The exclusive Monte Mayor Golf and Country Club (above left) and La Zagaleta, the former home of Adnan Khashoggi, which is now a country club and nature reserve