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Italian complex draws on star architects with range of styles

GARDONE RIVERIA, ITALY

Lake Garda villas offer distinctive features while evoking a village feel

BY SUE CHESTER

A cluster of contemporary homes designed by star architects are set to rival the grand villas here that once housed the likes of the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio and Mussolini's mistress.

Villa Eden Gardone, on Lake Garda's southwestern coast, was created by the Signa Group, an Austrian development company. The group invested 65 million euros, or \$83.8 million, to commission David Chipperfield, Matteo Thun, Richard Meier and the Austrian firm Sphere to design a community of 11 freehold villas and a four-apartment clubhouse.

Construction began in June 2012, and is scheduled to be completed next spring. Prices range from €2 million to €15 million, and eight of the units are already sold.

"The facilities' concept was to be comparable to an art exhibition, curated with homogeneity, a united ensemble," said Markus Mitterrutzner, the project's managing director. "So an elite group of top names were needed for the execution."

Signa deliberately chose architects from a range of styles so the completed project would have a village feel and offer buyers a choice. "Chipperfield embodies architectural restraint; Sphere is modern with a funky twist; Thun is eco-based architecture and design; Meier, white and light," Mr. Mitterrutzner said.

Brought together at Gardone, the architects discussed their initial ideas, something that Bernhard Karpf, who is in charge of European projects for Richard Meier & Partners, said he enjoyed. "It was interesting to see how they approached it," Mr. Karpf said. "There's nothing right nor wrong. Each approach is valid, each architect makes a decision what's important for him."

Mr. Chipperfield, who is based in London, said he took inspiration from the towering columns of the lemon houses around Lake Garda, traditional wooden structures that protect the orchards.

The architect used columns on the front facades of the two villas he designed to create what he called "a strong architectural personality." Inside the villas, the columns frame views of the lake, while outside, they help create shaded spaces.

Villa David Chipperfield North, as the house is labeled, is perched at the highest point of the development, a 4,500-square-meter, or 48,000-square-foot, residence with a 700-square-meter living area, two kitchens and four bedrooms. The pool and terrace sit above the main villa, and there is a two-bedroom guest house at the bottom of the property.

His second design, Villa David Chipperfield West, is similar: A lap pool separates the spa/pool house above and, below, an 800-square-meter, four-story home with a self-contained studio unit in the basement.

The "Landmarkbuilding," actually three identical units that house four small villas, was designed by Mr. Thun, the Milanese architect, as was the clubhouse. He included grassy roofs and plantings to merge the units into the landscape.

In contrast, he said, the clubhouse was meant to be an eye-catching focal point: "For public use, it should say, 'Here I am' for whoever wants to go in; the opposite of the villas, which say 'Please don't disturb.'" Both projects adhered to what Mr. Thun calls his "triple-zero" philosophy — using local materials so "zero kilometers" are involved, and generating "zero carbon dioxide" and "zero waste."

The clubhouse's glass facades, he said, were inspired by Garda's clear waters. "I wanted it to be like an aquarium, why I chose the delicate patterned pale blues and green stained glass," Mr. Thun said. "The site is spectacular, overlooking the south part of the lake that's so wide you feel like you're by the Med. Unlike Como and Maggiore that are deep and dark lakes, Garda is very light with white stone so it's very blue, like the Maldives of northern Italy."

Clubhouse facilities, for Villa Eden

Residents and their visitors, are to include a restaurant, lounge bar, spa, li-

brary and cigar room. There are four apartments on the upper floors — two with two bedrooms and two with three bedrooms — so residents can just come downstairs for dinner or a massage.

The three-bedroom villa that Mr. Thun designed, with about 550 square meters of living space, has two stone-clad wings supporting a glass-fronted living area that the architect calls "the window of Lago de Garda" for its uninterrupted views. The bedrooms also are on the upper level, while a below-ground level includes a gym and wine cellar.

Mr. Meier's 600-square-meter villa is L-shaped, with the base facing one direction and the upper level placed perpendicularly, giving the living room the broadest possible views. There are three en suite bedrooms and a gallery-style studio.

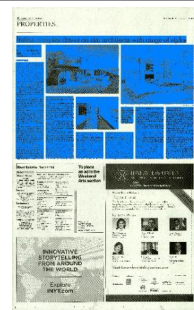
Sphere, the design division of ATP, one of Austria's largest architectural firms, created three villas with different layouts.

Villa Sphere South, for example, has "real tension between the hill and the villa," said Marc Mark, the firm's director. The rectangular upper floor, which has three en suite bedrooms, overhangs part of the ground-level terrace, creating shade or protection from the rain. The upper floor includes atrium space and a gallery over the dining table on the 120-square-meter ground floor, what Mr. Mark called a "very Sphere" detail. "We love the element of surprise, without getting ridiculous," he said.

Villa Sphere West is a U-shape of three structures around a lap pool, while the Villa Sphere North's simple two-story design contrasts with its unusual interior layout.

All the properties will have under-floor and ceiling heating as well as cooling systems, fireplaces, pools, wine storage and service areas, and a minimum of three parking spaces in the underground garages. Some are designed with spas and home cinema rooms. The complex, which will have its own heliport, will include security, concierge, cleaning and laundry services.

Enzo Enea, the project's landscape designer, has created picnic spots at viewpoints among the olive trees and



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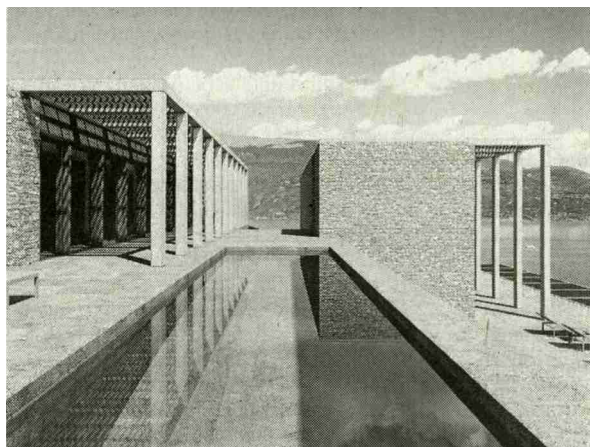
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lavender beds.

Rob Atkins, director of Domus Nova, a London-based real estate agency specializing in architecturally designed homes, said small developments such as Villa Eden were distinctive.

“Anything like this is a true statement,” he said. “The developer can ex-

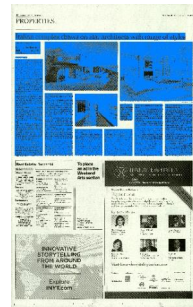
pect to earn a markup of at least 20 percent to 30 percent, but thereafter, these properties won't trade hands very often. The owners will keep hold of them and therefore after their initial purchase, they will effectively set their own price.”



Above left, the three-bedroom villa designed by Matteo Thun; above right, the L-shaped villa by Richard Meier; and, left, Villa David Chipperfield East.

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