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VILLA DESIGN: QUESTIONS OF LIVING

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Staffan and Monique Tollgard launched their design studio in 2005. Focused on delivering interior design services to an international clientele, the practice quickly garnered recognition for its bold take on contemporary design. Since then it has expanded into a multi-disciplinary studio offering design services, contract procurement, product design and two showrooms in the heart of London's design district. The studio offers an award-winning architectural interior design service, working creatively and collaboratively to create bold, contemporary interiors that are eminently liveable. A background in feature film and documentary production characterises Monique and Staffan's work: a commitment to the power of story-telling, to the narrative that their clients bring, to the history of the buildings in which they work and the shared stories of the design objects they curate.

Our ambition is always to tell a unique story that combines environment, architecture and identity. We call this the 'Red Thread': the creative DNA that runs through every piece of creative work that we undertake. Why does our client want to live in this type of house, in this place in the world? When it comes to villa design, the questions we want to answer – the questions of living – are hugely important. They are questions not just of living, but questions of thriving. The villas that we design for our clients are often for the most important moments with their friends and family: the times when they are away from work and when they are allowed to truly experience the environment, architecture – and indeed, their identities outside of their 'normal' lives. We see a few key threads that run through the design of villas that get this right.



Above: An oak & moleanos azul bar in a traditional villa in Quinta do Lago, Algrave



Above: Gandia Blasco exterior furniture on a terrace in Quinta do Lago

CONNECTION BETWEEN INSIDE AND OUTSIDE

Lionising the environment beyond the villa walls and windows is hugely important. Our clients buy places that connect them to nature or to a cultural identity and we want to emphasise these lines of sight. We do this by taking inspiration from the colours, textures and materials beyond the windows and working them into the textures, fabrics and materials of the interiors.

We also try and make exterior 'rooms' feel incredibly comfortable to make sure they are lived in – and that they stand up to family life.

LOCAL EXPERTISE: MATERIALS, TRADITIONS AND ANSWERS

Making the most of local expertise

and vernacular materials and traditions further strengthens the connection between architecture and environment. In Portugal we have worked on a few villas in the Algarve and have been lucky enough to experience first-hand the excellence of the stone masons and joiners. We love to use the local Moleanos azul, a blue / grey limestone with fossils and flecks in it. It is cool during the summer and warms up when the fire is lit during the winter.

The overhanging roofs in Portugal help keep the interiors cool – another local question of living that's answered with traditional technology.

SPACES FOR CONNECTION

When we start space planning with our clients we ask a lot of questions about how the villa can support

family life. Where can you play board games? Where will you hang out together? How can you ensure that the villa answers all the questions of family life away from home? While TV is a way to relax at home after a busy day, in a villa it should be less important, so we try and tuck it away in a room where it's less invasive. A casual bar area to hang out in, centrally located, is a great way of creating a place to play a board game, share a bottle of wine or a coffee or catch up.

In the summer house we designed on a Danish island we made sure that one of the family's passions could be played at a moment's notice. With specialist cabinet-makers KBH we designed a bespoke dining table that turns into a ping pong table with a beautiful brass and leather net.

We also find that an oversized kitchen plus a scullery or back kitchen allows more people to prepare, cook and tidy up together – turning one of the every-day routines into a shared more enjoyable family ritual.

ROBUST BELONGINGS DESIGN

The demands on villas are often quite intense. We make sure that the materials, fabrics and furnishings can stand up to these by rigorously road-testing them. It's not uncommon to find samples lying around in our studio that have sun screen smeared all over them, or wine spilled deliberately on them to see how they fare. We do this because we want our families to kick-back, put their feet on the

coffee table or sofa and really enjoy their time away without being worried that the silk cushions will need to be dry-cleaned.

SOMETHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY

For many of our clients, their villa reflects a huge achievement in their lives – somewhere not just to relax with their families, but also to celebrate and to create something extraordinary. We see this reflected in their commitment to doing something out of the ordinary with the architecture or interior design. In Quinta we designed a stunning sea of Bocci glass lights to illuminate the central glass staircase designed by local architect Armando Guerreiro. His double height glass windows, with their

angular framework, became one of the red threads in our design of the interiors, and we wanted the lighting to add beauty and brilliance to this architectural marvel. Every time our clients go up the stairs there's a little hit of joy.

And that's at the heart of great villa design. Lots of hits of joy so that the time spent within rejuvenates, relaxes and refills the soul.

Photography by Richard Gooding, Vasco Célio and Mary Wadsworth.

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Above: The design scheme in the Danish Summer House brings the textures from the landscape inside through slubby linens and subtle accent colours