

VILAMOURA LAKES

VILAMOURA, ALGARVE, PORTUGAL

2017–2015

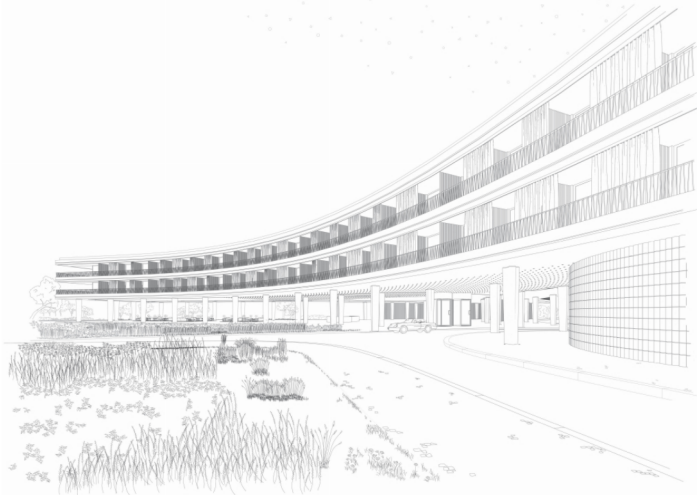
Located in the Algarve and with over 2,000 hectares of land, Vilamoura is one of the largest tourism complexes in Europe. The resort was planned and developed in the late 1960s around a small harbour, flanked by sandy beaches and close to the Roman ruins of Cerro da Vila. Vilamoura has six different golf courses, the largest marina in Portugal (inaugurated in 1974), two beaches, a lawn bowling club with two greens, tennis centre, sports club, shooting range, horse-riding school, 4- and 5-star hotels, apartments and villas, casino, nightclubs and bars.

The resort was founded by Portuguese banker Cupertino de Miranda, later acquired by tourism entrepreneur Andre Jordan, who run it from 1996 until 2004, when it was sold to the Spanish bank CatalunyaCaixa. Finally, and in the aftermath of the financial crisis, the North American private equity group Lone Star bought the distressed asset, revised and re-launched the whole design and development strategy.

At the heart of Vilamoura is the marina, which, with a capacity in excess of 1,000 berths, surrounded by large hotels and residences, is the preferred destination in the whole resort. Since Jordan's tenure, Vilamoura's management had the ambition to expand the Marina into what was then named *Cidade Lacustre*, an artificial inlet that would extended the perimeter of the waterfront into the hinterland. *Cidade Lacustre* corresponded to an ambitious vision, but, given the endless approval process and the implied environmental constrains, it gradually lost its initial goals. The difficulties ensuring that the inlet would be fully navigable and the limitations imposed on the location and maximum height of the proposed buildings, implied an increasingly denser project to meet the financial effort brought by the challenging and costly infrastructure. All these seemed to bring *Cidade Lacustre* to a dead end, with multiple problems arising, notably; the artificial condition of the lakes and canals, the visual barrier of the dam when seen from the floodplain, the density of urban typologies and the difficult integration within the landscape that resulted from the combination of these escalating constrains.

PROMONTORIO's award-winning masterplan had a different design approach which sought to balance environment concerns with the tenets of tourism and leisure, while keeping infrastructure costs aligned with the business plan. The vision for the project, renamed Vilamoura Lakes, is now of an enclosed lake with two islands and an isthmus, with a large enough body of water so that it reaches the ambiance of an inner sea. The main island has been devised as a town centre with a system of meandering streets, squares and alleys that evoke the informal spirit of Algarve's lively historical towns and villages. Surrounded by water on all sides, but crossed by the Praia da Falésia boulevard, the streetscape offers a similar combination of uses to those found in a town centre, where 2- and 3-storey apartment buildings coexist with ground floor retail and services, where small cafés, restaurants and the local newsstands or grocer, are intermingled with small offices and shops, all of which are served by a centralized underground parking.

The connection between the Marina and this new town centre is made by means of a public walkway designed like a green boulevard, integrating within the landscape, both the existing archaeological cluster of Cerro da Vila and the proposed new cultural centre. The latter will consist of a theatre and exhibition centre with an open-air auditorium facing the lake, providing space for major public events. In addition to Vilamoura Lakes, promontorio has provided concept design services for a series of large hotel and multi-residential plots that form distinct clusters within the resort.



Location: Vilamoura, Algarve, Portugal

Client: Lone Star Group

Scope of Services: Master planning, architecture and landscape architecture, including the coordination of the engineering and environmental studies

Project Brief: Macro-plot with 168 hectares for a mixed-use resort development within a consolidated tourism destination

Gross Built Area: 310,000 sq. m (2,855 touristic beds)

Estimated Construction Cost: EUR 465m

Project Status: 2015 (master plan competition, 1st-prize) – 2017 (environmental licensing approval)