

Building a new life in Spain

JUST imagine finding the perfect piece of land — whether it's an uninterrupted view of a glittering bay, a magisterial mountain range, or a verdant green fairway — and then designing your ideal home to go on it.

It's not easy to do it on our crowded little isle, but look abroad and your dream might not be so unattainable.

Spain, with relatively inexpensive land and cheaper build costs than over here, is proving popular with British self-builders. Traditionally, we've been less enthusiastic about new-builds than most Europeans, but the trend is catching on fast, helped by Channel 4's *Grand Designs* which shows the highs and lows of creating your dream home.

Of course, it's difficult to project-manage a home from a few hundred miles away, but if you've done your homework and got some experience already, it helps.

One such couple are John and Maureen Fromson, sixty-somethings from Godalming in Surrey, who are designing their own home on the

Worried by the cost of buying a Spanish holiday home? It's cheaper if you build your own, says Liz Rowlinson

Costa Del Sol. John says: 'We began looking around Marbella and self-build emerged as the best option. We had already converted a barn in Harrogate and built a villa in the Costa Blanca, so not only were we undaunted by the prospect but we were excited about the idea of fine-tuning our dream house.'

The couple contacted Carrington Estates, a specialist land agent operating in this niche market, offering land on a new development, Monte Mayor Golf & Country Club.

'The location sold it,' says John. 'It was five miles inland and 300 metres above sea level with views across to Gibraltar and North Africa. And we also wanted somewhere within easy

distance of the glitz of Marbella and Puerto Banus, but much more relaxing and green.'

John and Maureen bought half an acre of land for €490,000 (£327,000). The price included a lifetime golf right of play for the family — two daughters and four grandchildren — plus use of the on-site facilities such as tennis courts, gymnasium and spa.

The couple are now in the planning stages of their four-bedroom, four-bathroom villa for which they have budgeted £850,000 (roughly £1,070 per square metre build cost).

'To appreciate the panoramic views we went for a contemporary design with big windows. It's very open plan, with a study and TV room downstairs



Sunny spot: First luxury villa self-built by John Fromson (left)

and an infinity pool outside,' says John. The house will take about 13 months to build and the couple have planned four trips next year to oversee the process.

'Carrington put us in touch with a good lawyer and a project manager who will give us monthly updates,' says John. 'Initially we'll spend 50 per cent of our time in Spain, as I can work as a consultant to the pharmaceutical industry from there. But maybe we'll retire to Spain full-time eventually.'

John advises: 'Buying a plot and building a villa is an involved process, so find a specialist and take their advice. Write a list of priorities and stick to them.'

'So if you want to be next to a golf course and enjoy sea views, don't give up until you get them. Set yourself a realistic budget, otherwise you'll treat your bank account like a bottomless pit. I'm hoping to save 40 per cent by building the home myself — the margin for the UK is only 15-20 per cent.'

Carrington Estates UK local rate 0845 094 1168, Spanish telephone 00 34 952 810 868; carrington-estates.com.

DOs AND DON'Ts OF SELF-BUILD IN SPAIN

■ **DO** put yourself in the shoes of a potential purchaser when designing your home. Your dream home may look like a spaceship to the next buyer.

■ **DON'T** rush through choosing floor plans — major changes during building are expensive.

■ **DON'T** give the architect carte blanche on design or budget — they might get carried away at your expense.

■ **DO** arrange all building on fixed-price contract (agree cost at start).

■ **DO** focus on the principal rooms — living room, kitchen, master bedroom. They should all have a 'wow' factor.

■ **DO** use a conventional layout and go for a few large rooms rather than too many small bedrooms.

■ **DON'T** neglect terracing (orientation of sun is very important) and landscaping — infinity pools are very popular.

■ **DO** make sure all bedrooms have a bathroom.

■ **DO** avoid eccentric features and colours — but remember that white is high maintenance.