

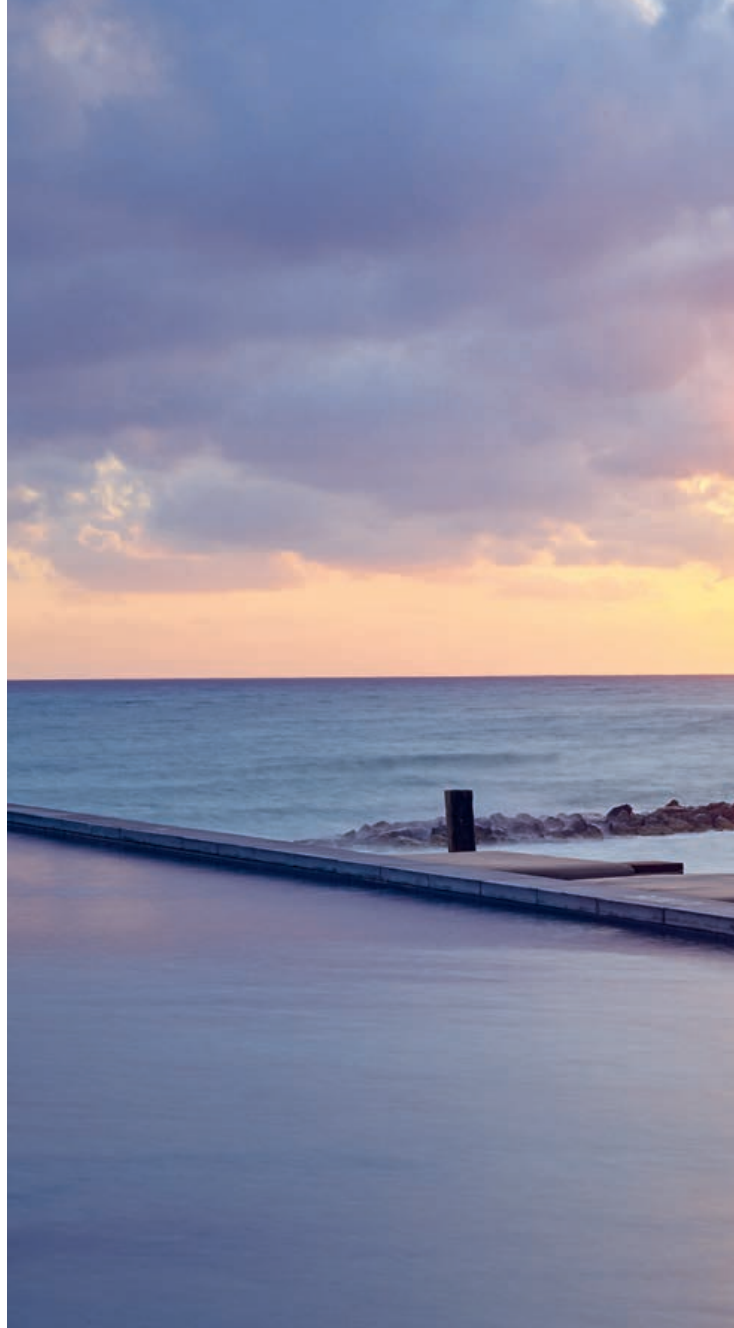
A photograph of a modern building with large glass windows and a balcony overlooking the ocean at sunset. The building has a white facade and dark-framed windows. The balcony has a wooden bench and several lounge chairs. The ocean is visible in the background under a cloudy sky with a warm sunset glow.

Its best-known buildings might still be Roman ruins, but Paphos, the joint European Capital of Culture 2017, is getting a whole new reputation for striking modern architecture

Paphos, Redrawn

Words Nione Meakin Photographs Greg White

“People thought I was from a different planet.”



So says Andreas Vardas of returning to Paphos from London, where he studied, to open his first architectural practice 20 years ago. His visions of angular buildings that nodded to Californian modernism were nothing like the Roman ruins or identikit whitewashed walls that defined the Cypriot city back then – and caused quite a stir.

“The first house I did looked out of this world,” he says. “They were laughing at the office, saying I would never be able to build it. People thought my work was weird.”

It’s fair to say that no one thinks Vardas’s work is weird today. His award-winning studio has designed some 50 buildings across the city, from private homes to public walkways, and is even working on a forthcoming extension to the law courts, proof that Vardas’s new brand of modernism is now part of the establishment. One flagship project, a vertiginous, three-storey home embedded into the cliff in the Melisovounos district, complete with louvred



rooftop garage, wraparound windows and ‘flying’ swimming pool jutting out toward the horizon, looks like the sort of place in which David Hockney might paint James Bond.

Paphos – this year’s joint European Capital of Culture, with Aarhus, Denmark – has undergone a quiet architectural revolution lately. Designs like the luxurious Almyra Hotel and a surprisingly striking Orthodox church are just two pieces in a growing movement that has seen the Cyprus government announce a €60m investment in new projects, including the regeneration of central Kennedy Square and a revamp of the Markideio Theatre.

“Paphos is definitely projecting a different image these days,” says Natasha Michaelides, as we sip black coffee in a restaurant of the Almyra, one of three properties owned by her company, Thanos Hotels. Like Vardas, she has been key in helping to cast the city in a new light, transforming the former Paphos Beach Hotel into the Almyra, whose elegant lines soon won it a place in the Design Hotels portfolio.

“We wanted to create something fresh and new that didn’t really exist in Cyprus – it was a first,” Michaelides says. “It’s modern, but not so much that you feel like you’re entering a club or art gallery. It’s still comfortable.” Chic additions, such as the freshwater infinity pool and glass-fronted spa attract travellers who never had Paphos on their bucket list before, while monthly pop-up nights featuring local artists aim to plug tourists in to the city’s creative community.

“The context here was to be arrogant,” says Vardas of his own work with a smile. “To show off and say, ‘Here is what can be done’.” In contrast to his swanky private residences, his design for the pedestrian walkway that now snakes along Paphos’s seafront was built on

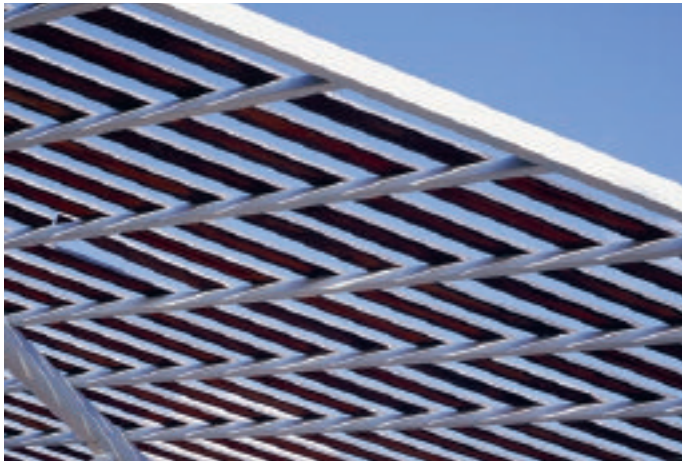


Clockwise from far left The reception of the modernist Almyra Hotel; sea view from its infinity pool; a treatment room at the hotel; architect Andreas Vardas



“Chic additions, such as the freshwater infinity pool, attract travellers who never had Paphos on their bucket list before...”





Clockwise from bottom left The Vardastudio-designed Chrysanthou Shoe Emporium; window detail of the Georgiou brothers' St Theodoras district chapel; terrace of the Prodromos & Desi Residence, designed by Andreas Vardas; the 'flying' swimming

pool atop this hilltop house affords amazing views out over the city; one of the temporary structures built in the city park for the Paphos City of Culture 2017; slatted roof of the Muse café; funky modern ceiling lights are just one way to create a contemporary feel



“zero budget”, using scrap wood and marble cut offs. “People use it so much and seeing that makes me happy.”

While Vardas might well have followed his contemporaries overseas to set out his stall in a bigger European city, he claims returning to Paphos has afforded him a freedom he would never have had elsewhere. “It’s hard to establish a new business somewhere like London, where all the big firms get the best jobs and if you want to make it in architecture, you have to work for them. I wanted to do things my way.”

There are added incentives, too, such as Paphos’s plentiful supply of land and its accommodating local authorities. Plus, Vardas



Clockwise from top left Local architect Costas Koutsoftides; stark interior of the Electricity Authority of Cyprus’s headquarters

adds, “It’s different designing for your own town. I grew up here. I understand the local materials and every day I get to see the impact my work is having on the city.”

Businessman Christos Chrysanthou is one of the many who have fallen for Vardas’s striking style. When Chrysanthou Shoes marked its 25th anniversary last year, he commissioned the architect to revamp the firm’s stores, starting with its biggest outlet in Propyleon Street.

“Andreas’s work is distinctive in Cyprus,” says Chrysanthou. “Before him, there weren’t many architects using these cube shapes or arranging space the way he does. Now, his signature style is everywhere. People are even starting to copy him. Hopefully, it will

A very brief guide to Paphos

How to ‘do’ the joint European Capital of Culture this summer

Eat classic local ‘slow meze’ at the family-owned [7 St Georges Tavern](#), with a fixed menu of locavore dishes. For cocktails, [Muse](#) sits on a cliff edge, with views across the whole city and great sunsets.

Stay at the [Almyra](#), the coolest hotel in Paphos – think Zen minimalism, clean white rooms and great food, from in-house Asian-influenced poolside seafood at Notios to Greek taverna Ouzeri, right by the sea.

Do visit the [Paphos Archaeological Park](#), with its Roman villas and their preserved mosaic floors. You can walk from the park’s Tomb of the Kings to [Geroskipou Beach](#) via a pretty coastal path.

Get cultural in Paphos’s big year. Highlights include an [art-inspired, open-air feast](#) in the quaint village of Lemona (19 May) and a [theatre show around a shipwreck](#) by the sea caves of Pegeia (15 Aug). [pafos2017.eu](#)

encourage new designs and a new identity for Paphos. In 10 or 20 years' time, we're hoping that this shop will blend into a backdrop of contemporary buildings."

Still, in a city where the most revered architecture was created by the Romans, not everyone is a convert to this new boxy modernism aesthetic. Mention the 2012 building that houses the Electricity Authority of Cyprus, for instance, and the faces of many locals turn as dark as its façade. In the midst of so much white plaster and blue sky, architect Eraclis Papachristou's thunderous black design stands out like Darth Vader at a wedding. "People either love it or hate it," says a manager cautiously.

So when, a few years back, fledgling architects Michail Georgiou and his brother Odysseas set out to build a modern Orthodox chapel in the St Theodoros district, they knew they would have to pull something very special out of the bag. The pair were commissioned by their dying uncle, who wanted to see the land he owned turned into a community space.

Clockwise from top right The entrance to the modern chapel designed by the Georgiou brothers; Odysseas and Michail Georgiou; the chapel's distinctive curving roof



"As far as houses of worship go, it's a rare unicorn"

The result, while borrowing heavily from the traditional domed chapels dotted across the region, is double-take worthy, appearing from the outside like a minimalist Scandi timber structure, but with sumptuous, undulating Gaudí-esque curves, all carved from a single piece of reinforced mortar. As houses of worship go, it's a rare unicorn.

"Our uncle was quite open-minded, but the neighbourhood... Not so much," says Michail, who, with his long hair and scarf, looks every inch the hip, University of Nicosia architecture lecturer he is. "They had never seen a church without windows. There was a lot of suspicion." The brothers moved quickly, sending details of their project to major European art and design blogs. News spread and soon coaches of people started arriving to see the chapel. "It became hard for residents to carry on objecting when so many people were excited about it."





According to Michail, contemporary architecture in Paphos hasn't quite hit critical mass, but it's in the post. "Our generation is one of the most educated to date. Most of us have lived abroad, because there were no universities here until recently. Now that we're coming back, with all the influences we've absorbed, things are changing fast."

The 2004 opening of Cyprus's first-ever architecture-degree course at the University of Nicosia has brought new students and teachers to the country. "It's all helping to create a discussion around architecture here."

In the city's municipal garden, more building work is taking place: a series of

"A quirky Le Corbusier – inspired climbing frame intended for the city's many stray cats"

temporary pavilions designed as part of one of several exhibitions commissioned for Paphos's year as the European Capital of Culture.

Among them, architect Costas Koutsoftides points out a quirky, Le Corbusier-inspired climbing frame intended for the park's many stray cats. One of Paphos's most-established architects, Koutsoftides has witnessed first hand the positive impact the Capital of Culture title is having. "There's not been much development here for a while, mainly because of the financial crisis, but then the 2017 project came along and started changing the aesthetics of the town. People have started updating their buildings, and fixing them for the better. This park was neglected but now it's been reorganised. People have started coming back."

"Paphos is changing, partly because of places like ours but also because of all the new cultural projects surrounding the 2017 Capital of Culture," says Natasha Michaelides at the Almyra Hotel. "There's much more to see and do now beyond simply lying on a beach."

Clockwise from top left Vardastudio's AB House features concrete pipe sections; the city park's cat climbing frame; the Western Pedestrian Promenade includes resting points made from recycled wood



DESTINATION PAPHOS



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The five-star Elysium hotel is on the beachfront and all rooms have a balcony or terrace with Med views.



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Seven nights all-inclusive at 4-star Avlida, departing London Gatwick 11 October, from £415pp.



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flies to Paphos from five destinations. See our guide on page 138. **easyJet.com**

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