



The Lime Tree Valley Diaries



From dust to design



by Andy McTiernan

Visualising a design that will evolve from a tract of land into a remarkable residential community is no mean feat. Especially, when the envisaged collection of outstanding dwellings must eventually rub shoulders with a neighbouring area of sand destined to become a world renowned golf course. Exactly what are the

components essential to the orbit of consideration? Despite my know-it-all inclinations, asking me would only result in a vague result, for while I am elated when a publication flat plan comes together, this type of activity falls outside my discipline. Thus it is important to address ones questions to responsible people for whom these matters are food and drink.

With this observation firmly in mind, I spoke to two of the company Partners at CHI Development Group, Mr Marcus O'Grady and Philip Lloyd along with Roger Wakeham (CHI's Development Director) whose end product is sprouting at pace at the Jumeirah Golf Estates. In this second outing of the Lime Tree Valley Diaries, I sincerely

hope you were sufficiently riveted by the first of the line; we delve into what fell into the melting pot in terms of bringing LTV's concept, design and planning to fruition.

There is such a creation as a developer's manifesto, generally referred to as 'the design and technical brief', which embraces the methodology and science behind decisions, for while the intention is to build an enclave of extraordinary villas, how you arrive at the detail is an intensive road to travel. The first port of call being the market study, its function to give the developer a sense of comfort in the fact that what is being planned will be successful; as well as a basis for financing where necessary. According to Marcus, "We secured the services of Investment Boutique to assist with the scheme, which in turn worked with a number of focus groups to form finite opinion going forward with the feasibility study. To emphasise the length and breadth of the process, a 6 month period of planning and a commercial study were concluded before the focus groups swung into activity."

The consensus was that a design comfort zone existed common to many villas in Dubai. "As opposed to following a well trodden path, we deliberated long and hard on the range of villa sizes, accommodating differing cultures,

**Villa 74,
YOUR VIEW.**





how many bedrooms, planning for permanently resident maids and drivers etc. We elected to create an ensuite bathing facility in every bedroom; a visit to Jack Nicklaus' Bears Club in Florida convinced the Partners that both bathrooms and kitchens were paramount, taking the view that Americans are adept at designing their living space. The marketing study also threw up a number of other factors; the provision of preparation kitchens in addition to communal gathering kitchens and family rooms to be located on the first floor, both highly recommended. However, not all the features in the original report have remained the same, for example we woke up one day and said to ourselves these really are Mediterranean style villas; therefore they should have terracotta tiles as opposed to marble. The latter seemed to have been a consistent feature in high-end properties in Dubai without taking into consideration how appropriate the material was to the final design. Another detail surprisingly absent from the Dubai real estate planning approach, was that properties of varying built up areas can co-exist in the same street without loss of commercial value. To this end, Lime Tree Valley has properties ranging from 4,200 sq ft up to almost 10,000 sq ft within the 121 units. Ultimately this has created a street scene with more variety."

Adding my own ten cents worth to the dialogue, I do know that from a developer's point of view there is commercial value in the replication of kitchens and bathrooms across the estate, to the detriment of detail of course. Exactly the

opposite approach was taken at LTV. In CHI's words, "we wanted a point of difference expressed through the street environment and within the villas. We never went down a route of duplicating kitchens and bathrooms as these are both spaces that influence and are influenced by personal preference. Taking this attitude a stage further, there are actually only 8 villa types within Lime Tree Valley but in expanded terms there are 23 versions."

These variations have been achieved by flipping villa types to right and left handed alignments. In some cases garages have been kept separate, in others they are joined to the house together with differing setbacks. As part of my of academic progression, I am now aware that the setback for a side-on garage is for instance 3 metres whereas a front-on garage requires a setback of 6 metres - all nuances that present a distinct shift in appearance eliminating the cookie cutter housing impression that can pervade other locales. Next add the astute use of towers, Greek stone clad walls and differing heights of buildings, all external variables which underwrite the CHI street scene philosophy.

Roger and in, "Above all we wanted to make a statement, careful planning for the look of the street was important, we concluded that the goal was an almost American open plan frontage aspect thus opening up the social dimensions. As we have a fine golf course on one side, the design thread of the street scene should be devoid of repetition. Obviously the structural variations



and alternate elevations are essential to the perception of diversity. However you cannot discard the vital importance of external colouring. Pastel shades are historic and sit well in clear sunlight; you will see fresh white and ochre in abundance nestling among Mediterranean hills and the luminous qualities prevalent in Dubai are similar"

It was noticeable during my personal site tour that CHI have also delivered a broad range of interior spaces, ranging from the huge open planned Tarragona with free flowing spaces to the smaller, Castellon, with its more homely atmosphere. Sitting between those villa types is the Almeria with its central courtyard space that illuminates the entire interior of the villa. CHI describe the logic, "we saw no harm in creating a variety of options for potential buyers as it can be an odd sensation when visiting neighbours on the same street, to experience your own villa on another plot!"

Taking the individuality factor a stage further, in the early days of LTV, CHI allowed clients to a degree to put their own stamp of difference on the villas they had bought via internal adjustments to layout, opting for the inclusion of basements, kitchen revamps etc. Basements, an unusual feature in Middle East, have proved to be subject to a number of Planning Authority amendments, with, half way through the project, plumbing no longer allowed in situ and the addition of light wells and fire escapes compulsory. "We now have very large storage rooms' suggests Philip with a sense of irony.

CHI recognized early on during the planning period that the needs of the Dubai clientele was gradually shifting and that developers are not just builders but part of a service industry and a client prepared to spend several million Dirhams on a property was to be respected for their worth. A raft of change requests later, in the interests of the contract schedule, escalating costs and logistical issues the personal adjustment phase has been capped. However, from a PR perspective allowing the changes has gained immense kudos for LTV.

Good design and the delivery of successful properties is much easier when budgets are unlimited; however as Marcus O'Grady points out, "We did not set out with an excessively extravagant budget, but it is a budget that we have pretty much stuck to regardless of the extra access we have afforded our clients in terms of changes as well as other authority imposed amendments to plan. It is of course easier to be a good developer if you have unlimited funds, yet CHI have used a set of design criteria which has enabled us to achieve at Lime Tree Valley what we initially envisaged and what the market study recommended."

Unless you happen to be in the business it is hard to grasp the sheer complexity of putting a development of this standard together, nevertheless a little insight goes a long way toward establishing the sagacity of the investment. Lime Tree Valley continues to roll out in style. Until the next diary entry then!