

Britain's leading magazine for architectural products, technology and trends

ARCHITECTURE

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2026 | £8.95

M A G A Z I N E

SETTING THE SCENE

How hospitality design is evolving with its audiences

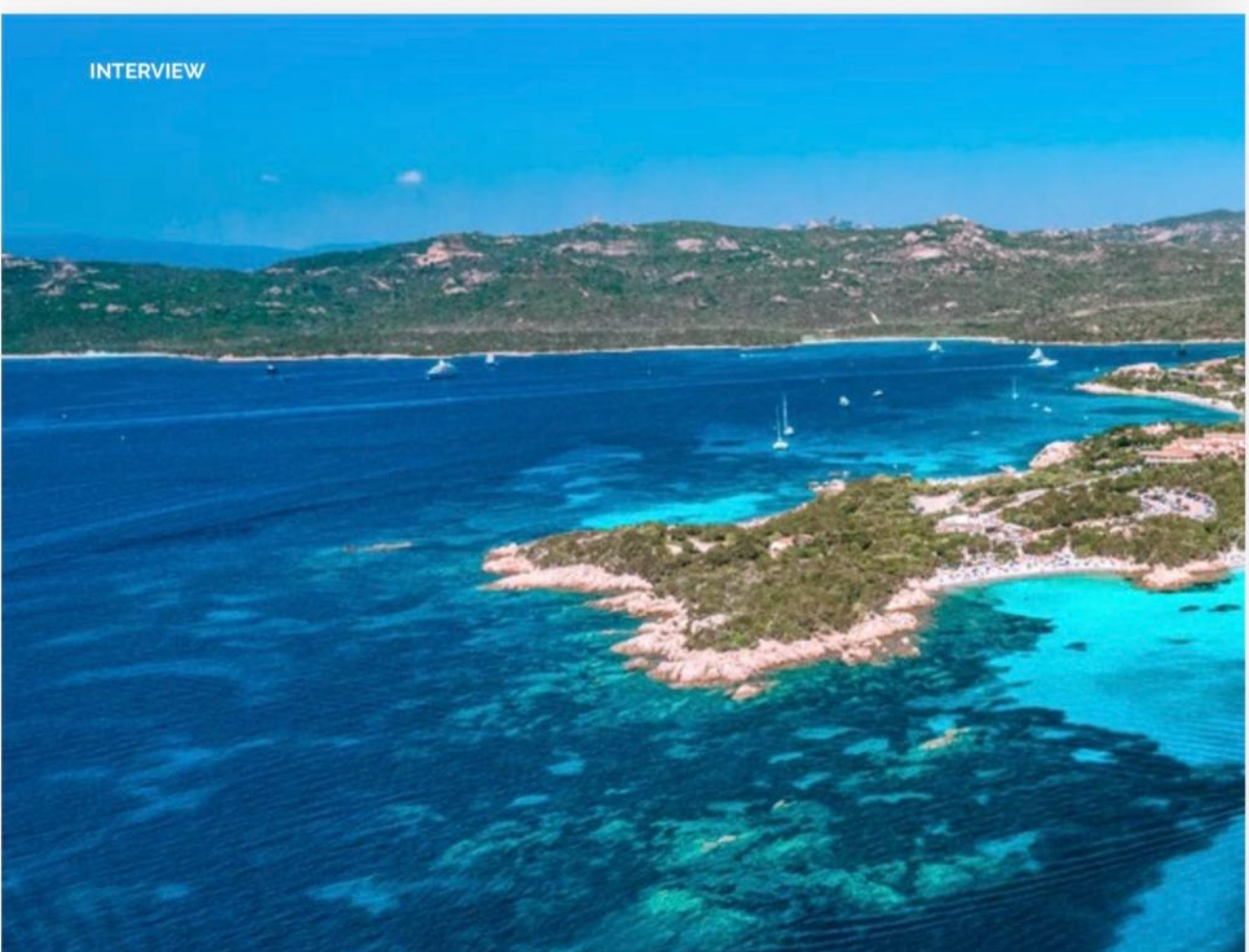


**ENZO
SATTA**

Meet the guardian
of Costa Smeralda

**RETROFIT
REIMAGINED**

Giving historic buildings
a sustainable future



ENZO SATTÀ

What happens when sustainability is treated not simply as a technical standard, but as a long-term obligation to protect the identity of a place?

On Sardinia's north-eastern coast, Costa Smeralda® encompasses a landscape of granite headlands, emerald water and low-lying architecture woven into the terrain – a place whose extraordinary natural beauty began attracting global attention in the late 1950s and which, within a decade, had become one of the Mediterranean's most celebrated locations.

The Consorzio Costa Smeralda was conceived in March 1962 by Prince Karim Aga Khan IV as a non-profit association to manage, oversee and protect the territories and properties in Gallura

associated with Costa Smeralda®. Its remit extends across environmental stewardship, security and infrastructure development, while maintaining standards intended to safeguard both the landscape and long-term reputation of the destination. The area administered by the Consorzio spans approximately 31 square kilometres and around 55 kilometres of coastline across the municipalities of Arzachena and Olbia, with 96.3% of the territory remaining green space.

Working with leading international architects, the Aga Khan helped create a distinctive architectural language rooted in local materials, soft forms and a close

relationship with the setting. More than six decades later, the Architecture Committee continues to oversee development within the Consorzio's boundaries, upholding the vision established from the outset.

Few people are better placed to reflect on that legacy than **Enzo Sattà**. He joined the Costa Smeralda architectural team in 1973 and went on to work with the Aga Khan for more than 50 years. He spoke to **Eamonn Duff** about the evolution of this unique model of architectural stewardship, how its principles have been maintained across generations, and what they might offer to places facing similar pressures today. ►





YOU HAD A LONG ASSOCIATION WITH PRINCE KARIM AGA KHAN. WHAT STANDS OUT MOST TO YOU ABOUT THE WAY HE THOUGHT ABOUT ARCHITECTURE AND PLACE?

At the heart of the Aga Khan's approach was adapting architectural interventions to the physical characteristics of the site, together with the use of traditional local materials: granite, terracotta for flooring and roofs, timber structural elements for roofs, particularly juniper and chestnut, and ceramics for interiors. All of this was

complemented by careful attention to outdoor spaces, using predominantly native plant species.

COSTA SMERALDA'S® BEST-KNOWN BUILDINGS ARE HIGHLY INDIVIDUAL, YET THEY STILL FEEL PART OF THE SAME PLACE. HOW HAS THE CONSORTIUM ACHIEVED THAT BALANCE BETWEEN ARCHITECTURAL FREEDOM AND COHERENCE?

The first buildings in Costa Smeralda were commissioned by the Aga Khan

and designed by three architects: Michele Busiri Vici, Luigi Vietti and Jacques Couëlle. All were of established national and international renown, each with a highly distinctive architectural style. At the same time, they worked within the architectural and landscape guidelines central to the Aga Khan's vision: the careful integration of buildings into the natural environment through the appropriate use of traditional local materials and the skilful articulation of the volumes making up each project, together with the careful selection and use of native plant species in gardens.

The freedom of expression granted to the architects, within rules established by the Consortium, resulted in a coherent and harmonious landscape, urban and architectural development of the area – one that has endured over time.

THE ARCHITECTURAL FRAMEWORK HAS EVOLVED OVER SIX DECADES TO ACCOMMODATE NEW TECHNOLOGIES, CHANGING LIFESTYLES AND CONTEMPORARY EXPECTATIONS. HOW DO YOU DECIDE WHEN EVOLUTION STRENGTHENS COSTA SMERALDA'S® IDENTITY – AND WHEN IT RISKS DILUTING IT?

Over time, the Costa Smeralda Consortium has grown from the six founding members of 1962 to more than 3,000 members today, while the original three architects





have been succeeded by several dozen others. There has also been a substantial transformation in lifestyles, accompanied by the emergence of new technologies. In terms of lifestyle, the initial experience was centred on the simple enjoyment of the sun, the greenery and its scents, the rocks, the beaches and the emerald-green sea. This has gradually evolved towards a more active way of living, with indoor and outdoor spaces designed to encourage greater social interaction, leisure and wellbeing, as well as a growing interest not only in sporting activities but also in cultural initiatives.

As for the development of new technologies, among the most significant changes has been the adoption of higher-performance materials for thermal insulation, such as high-performance glazing, which has made it possible to create much larger glazed surfaces and thereby enhance panoramic views from inside. Other important developments include the widespread use of air conditioning, as well as the introduction of solar thermal panels and photovoltaic systems.

The strict Costa Smeralda Building Regulations, mandatory for all Consortium members, together with their continual adaptation to changing residential needs and oversight by the Costa Smeralda Architecture Committee, have enabled the architecture to remain contemporary while preserving its distinctive stylistic identity and high standards of quality.

THE ARCHITECTURE COMMITTEE HAS A WRITTEN FRAMEWORK, BUT ARCHITECTURE ULTIMATELY INVOLVES PERSONAL JUDGEMENT. WHAT QUALITIES TELL YOU THAT A NEW PROPOSAL GENUINELY BELONGS IN COSTA SMERALDA® RATHER THAN MERELY IMITATING ITS ARCHITECTURE?

The Costa Smeralda Architecture Committee consists of ten members with proven professional experience, five of whom are architects. The Committee evaluates projects through a considered interpretation of the detailed provisions contained in the Building Regulations, while respecting the architectural tradition of Costa Smeralda as it has evolved over time.

The architecture of the first architects who worked in Costa Smeralda was highly distinctive stylistically, but also very much a product of its time. It subsequently inspired a high level of quality in later building projects in every respect: the harmonious proportions of the volumes composing each work, their careful integration into the natural environment, the use of traditional local materials, and so on. However, it did not lead to their styles being simply imitated.



WHEN THE ARCHITECTURE COMMITTEE CONSIDERS A NEW PROPOSAL, WHERE DOES THE MOST DIFFICULT JUDGEMENT USUALLY LIE – IN THE BUILDING ITSELF, ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH ITS SETTING, OR THE CUMULATIVE EFFECT IT COULD HAVE ON COSTA SMERALDA® AS A WHOLE?

The greatest challenge when reviewing a project is undoubtedly to assess it not only from an architectural perspective, but also in terms of how appropriately it integrates into the site and the wider territorial context. This is done while respecting the sensitivity and creative approach of the architect. In the most difficult or potentially controversial cases, the Committee may ask the architect to attend the meeting and explain the architectural choices that define the project, as well as how it responds to the physical context of the Consortium – both its natural landscape and existing built environment.

DO YOU SEE ARCHITECTURAL GOVERNANCE ITSELF AS A FORM OF SUSTAINABILITY – NOT ONLY REDUCING ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT, BUT CONTROLLING DEVELOPMENT PRESSURE AND PROTECTING THE CHARACTER OF A PLACE OVER TIME?

The control of development pressures and protection of the character of the place over time have been achieved not

only through the rules established by the Consortium, as described above, but also thanks to the awareness among its members that respecting these rules serves not only to preserve the quality of the architecture and the environment, but also to protect the long-term value of their real-estate investments in Costa Smeralda.

THERE ARE MANY BEAUTIFUL PLACES TODAY FACING A SIMILAR CROSSROADS BETWEEN DEVELOPMENT, TOURISM AND PRESERVATION. COULD CONSORZIO COSTA SMERALDA'S MODEL OF LONG-TERM ARCHITECTURAL STEWARDSHIP WORK ELSEWHERE, OR DOES IT DEPEND ON THE VERY PARTICULAR CONDITIONS IN WHICH IT WAS CREATED?

The creation of the Costa Smeralda model, based on high-quality tourism development combined with environmental and landscape preservation, was the result of the development vision conceived by the Aga Khan and his determination to implement it.

It was also made possible by the physical and socio-economic conditions of the area, as well as by the favourable political circumstances at the municipal and regional levels in Sardinia at that time.

I believe the Costa Smeralda Consortium model, which has continued to be successful for more than 60 years,

could certainly be applied elsewhere, provided that favourable physical and socio-economic conditions exist, together with the necessary political will.

DRAWING ON YOUR LONG ASSOCIATION WITH PRINCE KARIM AGA KHAN AND YOUR EXPERIENCE OF COSTA SMERALDA, WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO FUTURE GENERATIONS ENTRUSTED WITH SAFEGUARDING THE ARCHITECTURAL PRINCIPLES ESTABLISHED BY THE CONSORZIO?

My main advice would be to have a clear long-term development vision and detailed planning, supported by highly qualified professionals from every field relevant to the development process: environmental specialists, landscape architects, architects, engineers, economists, experts in planning legislation, communications, public relations and marketing. To safeguard the quality of the development, it is also essential to establish precise rules from the outset, ensure that they are properly enforced, and adapt them over time to technological advances, changes in lifestyles and shifts in the market.

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Photography: Consorzio Costa Smeralda