

Design / Green Architecture

Passivhaus may well become the new standard of luxury for tourism

Lloyd Alter [Blogroll](#)
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CC BY 2.0 Costaria is the one in the middle/ Lloyd Alter

It is just so quiet and comfortable.

There are lots of benefits to living in a Passivhaus that are obvious to the person who lives in it full time and has to pay the heating or cooling bills. But what if you are a tourist? Is there a benefit to seeking out a Passivhaus design?



Living area in Costaria/ Lloyd Alter/CC BY 2.0

While visiting Aveiro, Portugal, for the Passivhaus Portugal conference, I got to spend two nights in nearby Costa Nova in [Costaria](#), a two-unit Passivhaus design built specifically for tourism. It is on the site of an older building that was too far gone to fix, but which set the parameters for the new building, "with the obligation to maintain the built footprint, area, volume, height and facade characteristics of the existing building."



Kitchen in Costaria/ Lloyd Alter/CC BY 2.0

The upper unit that I was staying in had two bedrooms, two and a half baths, and a large, comfortable living, dining and kitchen area overlooking the water separating the town from Aveiro. It's designed by [Homegrid](#), which does Passivhaus training, consulting and design, so they handled everything here.



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Costa Nova is a hot summer spot but is pretty empty and quiet in the cool winter. But having never actually spent the night in a Passivhaus apartment, nothing prepared me for the absolute silence in it; it is like an anechoic chamber.



Condensation on the outside of the window/ Lloyd Alter/CC BY 2.0

It was cold and damp outside, damp enough that I saw something I had never seen before: condensation on the OUTSIDE of a window. Usually there is enough heat loss through windows that they get cold enough for condensation to form inside; here, the outer pane of the triple paned window stays cool enough that it is below the dew point and condensation forms on the outside.



Door to rear is to the mechanical spaces/ Lloyd Alter/CC BY 2.0

Passivhaus designs are conceptually simple, but there are a few not so passive components that require a bit of maintenance, like the heat recovery ventilators and the solar hot water system.



© Homegrid plans

Homegrid cleverly put all of this in a two-storey space at the rear of the building, accessible from the outside and with an internal ladder, so that all the units can be serviced at any time without disturbing the people inside.



Big bedroom in Costaria/CC BY 2.0

As for the tourist staying inside, there is not much of a learning curve. You have to remember to turn the system on (I didn't the first night) and to hit a switch that turns on the circulating pump before you take a shower. I had trouble opening the door to the porch because it was a fancy European tilt and turn, which I could make tilt but not turn. I finally figured out that when the handle goes down, it works like a door or a window. They all make the most incredibly satisfying kachunk noise when you close them, much like a luxury car.



Beach behind Costaria/ Lloyd Alter/CC BY 2.0

Being near a beach next to the ocean, one is not going to worry about air quality. Being in very warm Portugal, one is not going to worry about heating bills. Being in a quiet seaside village, noise is not going to be a serious issue most of the time. So why go Passivhaus?

The air feels even cleaner.

Sound is almost eerily absent.

There is a feeling of quality to everything.

Earlier this year I visited [Jonathan Kearn's Passivhaus Reach Guesthouse in Prince Edward County, Ontario](#) and got many of the same feelings. Meanwhile, I am writing this post in a lovely new hotel in Aveiro; normally I probably wouldn't notice the bit of a smell or the sounds of a few cars going by outside. But after two nights in a Passivhaus, I do. I want to go back to Costaria.

I suspect that in the hospitality biz, Passivhaus might just become the new label of quality, even luxury. It just feels different, and worth paying for.

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