

The Spanish investment of evergreen playgirl Xaviera Hollander has made her truly happy

Why I am still hooked on Marbella



WAGES OF SIN: Xaviera Hollander was Marbella's original playgirl and ploughed the proceeds of her bestselling book into Villa Caprice, left

By Gordon Miller

Xaviera Hollander might not be the only retired hooker in Marbella, Spain, but she's the only one to have made a fortune from a book about a life of sin.

Her *Happy Hooker* revelations about her time as a New York madam sold 16 million copies and in 1976 she ploughed the profits into Villa Caprice, in the hills behind Marbella. She rents out the five-bedroom villa for upwards of £2,350 a week.

'It has been the perfect investment,' she says. 'I bought the house for the equivalent of \$50,000 (£27,500) and it's now worth £1.4 million.'

'I've just overseen a £100,000 facelift, completely redecorating and refurbishing the place, so that it's a truly lovable property with a mature private garden, plenty of sunny and shady terraces and a wonderful pool.'

At the lower end, the holiday rentals market on the Costa del Sol is poor

because of oversupply – a consequence of the huge building programme in the region that has seen more than a million properties under construction in the past three years. But luxury villas, such as Hollander's, are in demand.

'Imagine a pyramid,' says Sam Caplan, a director of lettings agency Rent Marbella. 'On the bottom there are, let's say, 2,000 two-bedroom apartments for rent, while at the top there are just five 11-bedroom villas.'

'It is easier to rent out those five villas than all of the 2,000 two-bedroom apartments. In general, however, the price of rentals has dropped in the past few years with there being such a high supply in both the long and short-term lettings market.'

Villa Caprice dates from the Forties



– long before Marbella's Seventies jetset heyday, when Hollander arrived. 'I was the original playgirl in a town that knew how to party, although drink and drugs were never my scene,' she says.

'I loved the Latin way of life, having spent time in Mexico. But Marbella has changed. It's so much more developed now and there's a lot of new money around, but really I don't see much of it because I spend my time at the house, usually writing.'

To date Hollander, who is in her 60s, has written more than a dozen books; her latest is *Child No More*, a memorial to her parents – her first non-erotic work. It covers her peripatetic life which has included periods in Indonesia, where she was born, and Canada, America and South Africa.

A relationship took her to New York. When it ended she quit her job as the Belgian ambassador's secretary, became involved in a call-girl agency and the rest, as documented in *The Happy Hooker*, is history.

So scandalous was the publication of the book that Hollander was 'invited'

to leave America, prompting her to utter the immortal line: 'In America, you can get away with murder, but not with sex.' She has long since been forgiven.

Hollander has little difficulty renting out her villa, and Kristina Szekely, Marbella's legendary estate agent and society queen, confirms that the high-end holiday rental market is strong.

'Our clients are looking for absolute luxury – service, somewhere to put the boat – whether they are renting a villa or a penthouse,' she says. 'Many people rent for a whole year and plenty of them go on to buy here.'

There is an international flavour to the rental set: Marbella is perennially popular with the British, attracted by the smart shops and restaurants, quaint old town and glamorous boulevards, as well as the beaches and golf courses of the Costa del Sol.

There is always a buzz around Marbella and, according to Tracey

McLeod, director of Exclusive Marbella Estates, beachside properties can bring in £800 to £1,000 per week in July and August. 'But rents are lower on the golfing side of town, where you'd expect to get £600 to £800,' she says.

'The beach side will always be the place to buy to rent; there isn't a great rental market for golfing properties because golfers find they can get very good deals which include hotel accommodation and access to the courses.'

Most of Marbella's holiday-let villa owners rent out their property for the peak season and use the income to cover their overheads – utility bills, community fees and any extras – over the rest of the year. But with Marbella's mild climate there is year-round interest, especially from older people looking for some winter sun.

● To book Villa Caprice call 00 31 206 733 934, e-mail info@apartments-marbella.net or visit www.apartments-marbella.net

Marbella magic



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