



On a prime cliff-top site in Mallorca, Jeffrey Archer has built a palatial villa — but the novelist comes here for work, not play, says Emma Wells

In one of the short stories in Jeffrey Archer's latest collection, a property developer who wants to build a group of super-luxe houses in Mallorca nearly comes unstuck thanks to both the government and the planners. When it came to constructing his own villa on the island, however, the bestselling writer and former deputy chairman of the Conservative party says he encountered few of those troubles.

"It was actually a very smooth process," says Archer, 70, standing on the wooden deck of his sprawling home in a small community southeast of Palma, the island's capital. "Although when I submitted the plans, they assumed I was building a small hotel. It has turned out to be slightly larger than I expected — I didn't get the proportions quite right. But I do love the feel of it."

It's certainly impressive. The 15,000 sq ft house — which Archer has christened *Writer's Block* — sits on a 70,000 sq ft cliff-top plot, and is formed of a series of low-slung geometric stone structures, linked by a 75ft gallery, with a main, 60ft-long living area, six bedrooms, two offices, a cinema room and 180-degree vistas of the Mediterranean. "I had come to Mallorca to write for more than 20 years, staying in different

houses, until I finally decided to have my own place, exactly the way I wanted it," says Archer, who has sold 250m copies of his 20 novels and collections of short stories worldwide, including the chart-toppers *Not a Penny More*, *Not a Penny Less*, *First Among Equals* and *A Prisoner of Birth*. "Uninterrupted sea views and silence were the main requirements. And when I saw the site, at sunset one evening, I knew this was it."

The peer — his official title is Lord Archer of Weston-super-Mare — started building in 2007, and, apart from the odd burst pipe and malfunctioning water feature, the home is practically complete, thanks to the efforts of a team of British and Spanish architects, the award-winning garden designer Stephen Woodhams and a whole host of highly skilled local craftsmen.

"Because the world had collapsed [economically], suddenly every builder was available," he says. "We got the best of everyone in Mallorca, so we were very lucky." Archer is particularly proud of the rough-textured walls that feature inside and out. Made of a light-gold local stone, they were lovingly hand-built, each one taking up to a year to complete.

The house must feel a million miles from the dingy, cramped prison cells

in which he spent two years, after his conviction for perjury in 2001. In the private, landscaped grounds — planted with rows of architectural-looking *Agave attenuata*, spider aloe and white agapanthus — there is a vast L-shaped infinity pool, set up to the cliff edge, by which sun-loungers are artfully positioned. Just beyond it, paragliders rise and fall on the thermals.

When it came to the interiors, Archer kept it in the family, asking the British designer Tara Bernerd — now his ex-daughter-in-law — of Target Living to take charge. Smoked oak and a local creamy stone cover all the floors, which are dotted here and there with Paul Smith rugs and oriental carpets. The neutral palette is lifted by linen-covered furniture, often in deep purples, from contemporary-design shops such as B&B Italia and Minotti.

Archer says his wife, Mary, 65 — they have been married for 44 years — made all the decisions on the garden and furniture, "and art and pictures are me. Although there is nothing of great value here, as the sun would ruin it". He keeps his estimated £30m collection, including paintings by Picasso, Miro, Lowry and Hockney, at his London base, a flat overlooking the Houses of Parliament. But he has still taken great care in the choosing and display of eclectic artwork in his Mallorcan home, under the guidance of the top gallerist Chris Beetles.

In the main living space, a bronze interpretation of *Leda and the Swan*, by Enzo Plazzotta, rises sinuously out of a small pool, and on the walls hang Colombian contemporary art and two sets of Sunday B Morning prints of Andy

Warhol's Marilyn. In the cream master suite a "staggering" table was constructed out of 700 cast-iron butterflies by the young sculptor Katy Poett. Opposite the bed hangs a landscape of Shoalhaven, New South Wales, "by the great Arthur Boyd. It's a masterpiece, and I've promised it in my will to the Australian government — they were screaming about me taking it". He has paired it with an impasto painting, in similar style, by Nicholas Harding, who won the Archibald prize in 2001.

In a spare bedroom are three woodcuts by Nanni Fumagalli, "the greatest living Italian woodcarver. Even bedrooms should have good pictures". The gallery running the length of the home has been used to display photographs: the Rat Pack and Audrey Hepburn feature, as do Margaret Thatcher — to whom Archer is a confidant — and National Geographic award-winners.

However, despite the home's grand proportions, its plush interiors and its endless distractions, it is in the self-

contained stone writing room, perched away from the house on the cliff, that Archer spends most time. For although he may cut a laid-back figure — in pale chinos, yellow polo shirt and slip-ons — he is anything but.

"Everybody comes to Mallorca for holiday and fun," he says sternly. "I come here to work. Friends are only allowed onto the premises at night, never when I'm working. And by 10pm I'm in bed."

Visitors must take off their shoes to enter his 540 sq ft private cabana. Inside, a carefully positioned, contemporary, grey marble-topped desk, looking out across the sea and over to Palma, is the main piece of furniture. To one side, neatly arranged, are the felt-tip pens he uses to write manuscripts longhand (it is the task of his personal assistant, Alison, to type them up). And, instead of gesturing towards the startling art installation at one end of the room — a set of oversized paint brushes made out of Murano glass "because of my love of art" — he is quick to point out the silver Garrard egg-timer on the desk as more significant. A bespoke gift from Mary, the timer runs for "exactly two hours", Archer explains. Ruthlessly disciplined, he divides each working day into chunks: 6am-8am, 10am-noon, 2pm-4pm and 6pm-8pm. "If you allow yourself to take time off for a quarter of an hour a session, that is one hour a day wasted, adds up to about 28 hours. So this timer doesn't allow me to be lazy."

Right now, he's working on the five chronicles of his new hero, Harry Clifton — the first will be published in May next year. He says he plans to come to



Artistic flourishes include Andy Warhol prints and, left, a 'staggering' table made from 700 cast-iron butterflies



Archer, left, says 'uninterrupted sea views and silence' were his main requirements

Francesco Guidicini

Mallorca seven times a year to write, often for several weeks at a time. "It's heavenly here, morning, noon and night. And I find it easy to write here. Mary [who is the chairman of Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and has her own office in the house] always says she gets so much more done at this house — there is nothing to disturb us."

The hard work is certainly paying off. Archer's wealth was estimated by The Sunday Times Rich List this year at £65m, and *Writer's Block* is now his third residence. The main family home is the Old Vicarage, in Grantchester, Cambridge, where he and Mary raised their two sons, William, now 38, and James, 36, and where he writes in a folly at the bottom of the garden. He

doesn't write at the London flat, despite its spectacular Thames views.

Specter is tight-lipped about how much he has spent on his Mallorcan home. "Of course, it was a total waste of money," he says. "But there's no difference between spending three-quarters and spending the whole penny: if you spend three-quarters, you get a three-quarter house." Michael Cunningham,

a Savills agent on the island, says it would fetch "well over £10m" if it came up for sale. Archer is adamant that it won't. "The thought of selling is inconceivable. It has taken so long, and it's exactly what I want. Even if someone walked in with X million, where would I go? It's not what things are worth that's important: it's whether you can replace them."

And *Thereby Hangs a Tale*, Jeffrey Archer's sixth collection of short stories, is published in paperback on Friday (Macmillan £7.99)

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