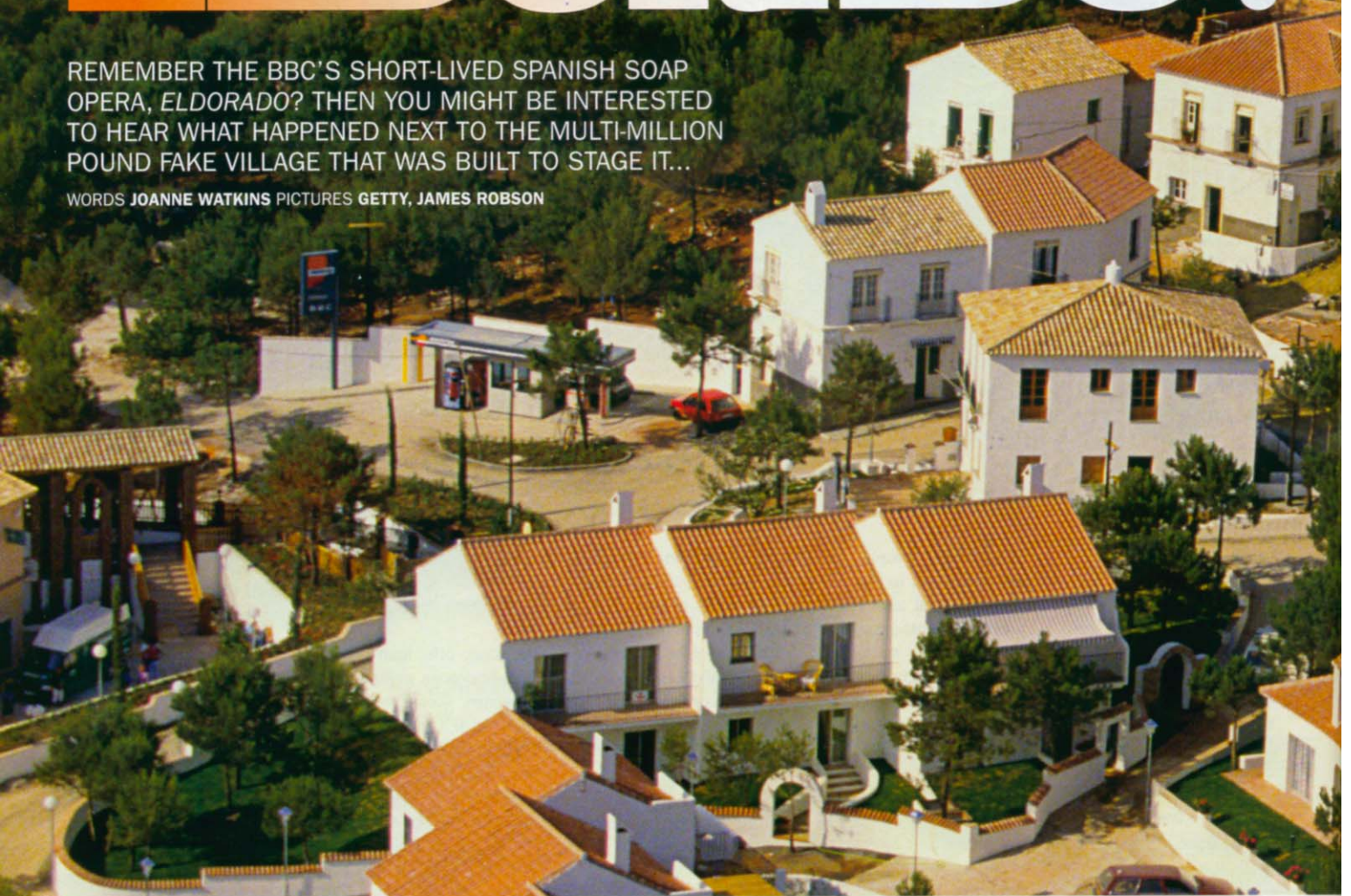


# Whatever happened to... **ELDORADO?**

REMEMBER THE BBC'S SHORT-LIVED SPANISH SOAP OPERA, *ELDORADO*? THEN YOU MIGHT BE INTERESTED TO HEAR WHAT HAPPENED NEXT TO THE MULTI-MILLION POUND FAKE VILLAGE THAT WAS BUILT TO STAGE IT...

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**Main picture:** Los Barcos, near Malaga, was built as the set for *Eldorado*, but it may still have the potential to become a real resort

**Far right, above:** Polly Perkins, who played Trish Valentine, still lives in the area. Tourists now stay on set in the apartments

**Far right:** Roger Walker and Kathy Pitkin played husband and wife, Bunny and Fizz Charlson, in the 1992 soap

**H**itting British TV screens in July 1992 in a blaze of publicity, *Eldorado*, the BBC's soap about the day-to-day dramas of a bunch of British expats in a purpose-built Spanish village, ran for barely 12 months before being pulled.

The BBC had hoped that, by shooting in a sunny location – near Coin on the Costa del Sol – it would tap into the popularity of feel-good Australian soaps and have a success story on the scale of *Eastenders* on its hands.

But the soap flopped, the crew and cast were sent home, and the BBC was left with a loss of £2 million, most of which was spent on the construction of 'Los Barcos', a fake town in the mountains above Fuengirola, Malaga – which took just five months to build.

In the early 1990s, an army of over 200 local builders had crowded into the

area and built a resort of traditional-style villas, together with restaurants and bars, a shopping centre, church and swimming pool. Surrounded by thick pine forest, it was an idyllic spot. So what happened to the set after the cameras stopped rolling, 14 years ago?

When *Eldorado* folded, Coin's council acquired the site and turned half of the set into a real hotel. Hotel Ciudad del Cine (or 'Hotel Cinema City') is now a Mecca for the small but dedicated band of *Eldorado* fans that visit the site, and surrounding area, each year. The hotel complex includes all of the villas featured in the soap, and there are 170 rooms and 26 apartments to choose from.

The set remains untouched, the crew and actors long gone – bad boy Marcus Tandy (played by Jesse Birdsall), Vanessa Lockhead (Julie Fernandez, who more recently played Brenda in *The Office*)

and 'tart with a heart' Trish Valentine (Polly Perkins, a local resident snapped up by the BBC) among them. Today, tourists can visit the church that still dominates the old town, or browse the shopping centre.

Despite *Eldorado's* demise, many of its cast recall their time there fondly.

"Wouldn't it be lovely to go back one more time for a spot of filming and a night at the hotel?" says Julie Fernandez. "What memories it would bring back!"

Polly Perkins, who was discovered by BBC producers while working as a singer, had lived in Coin for some years, and still lives nearby with her family.

She remembers the soap having problems right from the early days of filming. "Some of what we put out wasn't brilliant," admits Polly. "We were dropped in at the deep end. There was no time to iron out the problems before the



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**“ We were dropped in at the deep end. There was no time to iron out the problems before the show started airing ”**

show started airing.” *Eldorado* aside, Coin has a lot to offer. A typical Spanish town, with a Moorish influence, it has pretty whitewashed houses and cobbled streets and beautiful gardens and fountains. It's a peaceful spot for a holiday, despite being just five kilometres from Malaga airport and, what's more, it's currently being touted as one of the Costa del Sol's most up-and-coming hotspots.

If you fancy living there, Coin has a wide range of properties to buy. Prices for apartments start at around €165,000

(£112,000) and townhouses from €180,000 (£122,000). Perhaps Coin's growing popularity will be key to Los Barcos seeing a new lease of life in the coming years. Currently little more than a soap ghost town-cum-tourist attraction and an occasional working set for local soap operas and films, for much of the time, the set stands empty – yet round the corner from a property hotspot.

Rumour has it that rather than see the 'village' go to waste, local property developers may keep the spirit of *Eldorado* – and its characters who went in search of a sunnier lifestyle – alive for a little longer by converting the set into a real resort. So, one day you could find yourself living in your own corner of *Eldorado*. ☀

*For more information on the latest news for Eldorado fans, visit [www.losbarcos.org.uk](http://www.losbarcos.org.uk)*

