

Your house *in winter.*

What the Algarve does to a home while you're not there — and why the damage you find in March was decided in October.

WINTER GUIDE

Most owners come back in March and find the same things: a patch of mould in a bedroom, a stain under a window, paint lifting on the side that faces the sea, a terrace that let water through. It looks like winter did it.

It didn't. Rain only finds what was already open: a hairline crack nobody filled, a hole where a satellite bracket used to be, paint that was applied over a damp wall, a terrace membrane that was patched rather than replaced. Winter is the test. The result was decided before you left.

The most expensive houses we see are not the neglected ones. They are the ones that were fixed quickly and cheaply, several times — a plaster on the wound, every year, until the wound is the whole wall. This guide is about not being that house.

THE EIGHT THINGS YOU FIND IN MARCH

01 Mould and damp inside

WHAT YOU SEE

Dark patches in bedroom corners, a smell when you open the door, condensation on the inside of windows.

WHY

A closed house with no ventilation for five months. Moisture comes in through cracks and stays because nothing moves the air.

IF YOU WAIT

Left for a second winter: plaster that has to come off, furniture that has to go, and a smell that never quite leaves.

02 A leak you didn't know about

WHAT YOU SEE

A stain on a ceiling, a soft patch in a wall, a floor that has lifted.

WHY

Water that came in through a roof terrace or a window joint in November and had four months to travel.

IF YOU WAIT

The repair is never where the stain is. By March the water has followed the structure and the bill has followed the water.

03 Holes and cracks in the facade

WHAT YOU SEE

Hairline cracks around windows, open joints, a hole where a fixing was removed, render that sounds hollow when tapped.

WHY

Movement, sun and salt open the surface. Every crack is a way in. Every winter it gets wider.

IF YOU WAIT

A crack filled in October costs a morning. The same crack after two winters costs a section of render and the paint on top of it.

04 Paint that has failed

WHAT YOU SEE

Flaking, blistering, chalking. Paint that comes off on your hand. Usually on the side facing the sea.

WHY

Paint applied over damp render, without primer, or in a single coat on a wall that needed three. It looked fine in July.

IF YOU WAIT

There is no such thing as repainting over failed paint. It all has to come off first — which is where the cost is.

05 Terraces and roofs that let water through

WHAT YOU SEE

Pooling on the roof terrace, a membrane that has cracked or lifted at the edges, moss in the joints.

WHY

Membranes that were patched, not replaced. Drains that were never cleared. A terrace that was tiled over a problem.

IF YOU WAIT

This is where the leak in point 2 came from. A terrace done properly lasts fifteen years. A patched one lasts one winter.

06 The patch on the patch

WHAT YOU SEE

Several layers of different repairs in the same place. Sealant on sealant. Paint on filler on paint.

WHY

Each year someone fixed the symptom quickly and cheaply, because it was cheap and quick. Each time the underlying problem got worse.

IF YOU WAIT

At some point the only fix is to take it all back to the wall. We do that work every spring. It is the most expensive work there is, and almost all of it was avoidable.

07 Rot in the woodwork

WHAT YOU SEE

Shutters that won't close, a pergola post that gives under your hand, a frame with dark soft patches at the bottom.

WHY

Wood that was stained or oiled over old finish, without sanding back, without end-grain sealing, in one coat. The finish looked right for a season. The water went in underneath it.

IF YOU WAIT

Rot travels along the grain. A section treated in October is a repair; the same section after a wet winter is a new shutter, a new post, a new frame.

08 Rusted metalwork on balconies

WHAT YOU SEE

Railings and balustrades with rust bleeding through the paint, flaking at the base, fixings that move when you lean on them.

WHY

Steel that was painted without removing rust, or with a decorative coat instead of a rust-inhibiting system. Salt air does the rest, and it does it from the inside out.

IF YOU WAIT

This is the only item on this list that is a safety matter, not a cost matter. A balustrade that has rusted at its fixings does not protect anyone. It has to be treated or replaced before the property is used again.

THE WINTER CHECK

Thirteen things to do, look at, or have someone look at before you leave — and once more in January. Print this page and give it to whoever holds your key.

INSIDE

- ☐ **Ventilate**
Leave interior doors open. Set a dehumidifier or a timer on the air conditioning. A closed house with still air is where mould starts.
- ☐ **Shut off the water**
At the main valve. A leak in a closed house runs for months.
- ☐ **Look up**
Every ceiling, especially under a terrace or a flat roof. A faint stain in October is a repair. The same stain in March is a ceiling.
- ☐ **Look in the corners**
Bedroom corners, behind wardrobes, inside cupboards on outside walls. That is where damp shows first.

OUTSIDE

- ☐ **Walk the facade**
Slowly, on all four sides. Look for cracks, open joints, holes, render that has lifted. Photograph anything you're not sure about.
- ☐ **Tap the render**
Where paint has bubbled, tap it. Hollow means the render has separated from the wall. That needs repair, not paint.
- ☐ **Check the terrace and roof**
Clear the drains. Look at the membrane edges and where it meets walls. Any lifting or cracking means water gets under it.
- ☐ **Check the wood**
Pergolas, shutters, window frames. Press with a thumbnail. Soft means rot has started — usually because the last finish went over old paint without proper preparation. Sand back, seal, then oil or paint, before winter.
- ☐ **Check the metalwork**
Railings, balustrades, gates. Look for rust bleeding through paint and rust at the base of posts. Push firmly. Anything that moves is not a railing any more.

ADMINISTRATION

- ☐ **Who has the key**
And do they know what to look for? Give them this page.
- ☐ **Who do they call**
If they find a leak in January. Have a name and a number ready before you need one.
- ☐ **Your insurance**
Check what it says about unoccupied periods. Many policies limit cover after thirty or sixty days.
- ☐ **Photograph everything**
Every room, every facade, the terrace. Dated. If something goes wrong, you'll want to know what it looked like before.

WHAT CAN WAIT — AND WHAT CAN'T

What you found	Verdict	Why
Hairline cracks, closed joints, paint chalking	Spring	Cosmetic for now. Fix before next winter, not during this one.
Open cracks, holes, hollow render	Before winter	These are the openings the rain will use. Every month open is more water inside the wall.
Terrace or roof membrane lifting or cracked	Now	This is the source of most leaks. It does not get better on its own and it costs more every week.
Failed paint on the sea-facing side	Before winter	The paint is no longer protecting the wall. What's behind it is now taking the salt.
Rot in shutters, pergolas, frames	Before winter	Rot spreads in wet months. Treated in October it's a repair; in March it's a replacement.
Rust on balcony railings or balustrades	Now	A safety matter. Rusted fixings do not hold. Treat or replace before anyone uses the balcony.
Active leak or mould	Now	Not a maintenance item. Call someone this week.

WHY NOVEMBER TO MARCH IS THE TIME

Everyone paints in summer. That is when the house is full, the contractors are booked, and the walls are too hot for paint to cure properly. Between November and March the property is empty, the days are dry more often than people think, and the work can be done without costing a single night of use. The one condition: the surface has to be prepared properly. Rushing the preparation to beat the rain is how the patch on the patch starts.

WHAT WE DO

We are the people who take the patches off. Interior and exterior painting, crack repair, terrace and roof-terrace waterproofing, damp treatment, wood restoration — done once, properly, on a fixed price and a confirmed date. Most of our spring work is repairing what was done quickly the year before. We would rather see you in October.

SIX THINGS YOU CAN HOLD US TO

- One fixed price, agreed before we start
- A confirmed start date and handover date
- One contact person, from quote to handover
- A photo update every working day
- A clean handover — floors, furniture and terraces protected
- A written guarantee on workmanship

Found something on the list that worries you? Send us a photo. You'll get a straight answer, and a fixed price if it needs one.

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