

The Passive House, According to Papik Fisas: The Diari de Sant Cugat Interview

In June 2014, the Diari de Sant Cugat set out the foundations of passive construction with the founder of PAPIK Group: orientation, insulation, airtightness and ventilation.

On 20 June 2014, the Diari de Sant Cugat published an interview with Papik Fisas, founder of PAPIK Group, about a construction model that was then beginning to gain ground in Catalonia: the passive house. The conversation, written by journalist Àgata Guinó, summarised a professional career and explained, in accessible terms, why a well-conceived home can cut energy consumption to a fraction of that of a conventional dwelling.

From carpentry to energy efficiency

Papik Fisas had already spent around twenty years working with timber by the time of the interview. He started as a carpenter's assistant to fund his Physics studies and, faced with a growing volume of work on his own account, left the degree in its third year to devote himself fully to the business. He later completed several studies related to business administration.

The initial venture focused on bespoke furniture. Around 2006, the company concluded that this model had no long-term future and redirected its activity towards energy efficiency. Fisas travelled to Germany to gather information, in a country where passive construction was already well established. "It is something very much alive, and new developments appear every day," he explained in the interview.

The four factors of a passive house

As Fisas set out, a passive house is a home designed to minimise energy consumption, and its performance rests on four factors. The first is the orientation of the building. The second, technically demanding insulation. The third is airtightness, a concept then little used in the local sector, which consists of preventing uncontrolled air infiltration and leakage through the building envelope. The fourth is mechanical ventilation: the air is renewed by a unit that, at the same time, preserves its temperature.

These principles still define the Eskimohaus system at PAPIK Group and shape the approach to every construction project, and they also guide energy retrofit work on existing homes.

Four months on site and an emerging sector

The interview put the number of companies building passive houses reliably in Catalonia at three, and identified the main challenge as expanding operations to the rest of Spain. The construction timeframe was one of the underlying arguments: a passive house was built in four months. The difficulty, Fisas noted, was logistical, because working far from home complicated the care of the workforce, a priority for the company.

As for the structure of the team, the company had twelve permanent employees, although a single site could mobilise between thirty and forty people. The projects portfolio already reflected that growing activity.

The energy cost, in figures

The figure that best summarised the proposition was economic. According to the numbers given in the interview, a passive dwelling of around 130 square metres consumed roughly 500 euros a year across all services, equivalent to some 40 euros a month. That order of magnitude, hard to match with the conventional construction of the time, distilled the core argument: efficiency was not a marginal improvement but a change of category in the running cost of a home.

A decade after that interview, the four factors Papik Fisas described as novel, orientation, insulation, airtightness and ventilation with heat recovery, have become the expected standard of any serious construction.