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THE BEACH HOUSE

THAT PERSONAL TOUCH

It's late in the afternoon; a long languid day of lying in the sun has left me nearly melted. In my room at the edge of a beachfront lake, the four-poster bed with its goose-down pillows and duvet insistently calls. It's tempting to ignore the tap on the door, but I manage to answer it. There stands Annemarie, service ambassador, with a warm smile and a platter of fresh-cut aloe. "I noticed that you got quite a bit of sun today," she says.

The Beach House assigns an ambassador to each of its 21 rooms, ensuring that every little detail is taken care of during a stay, allowing guests to concentrate on relaxation and romance. The program is, as I soon discover, quite literally a most wonderful personal touch.

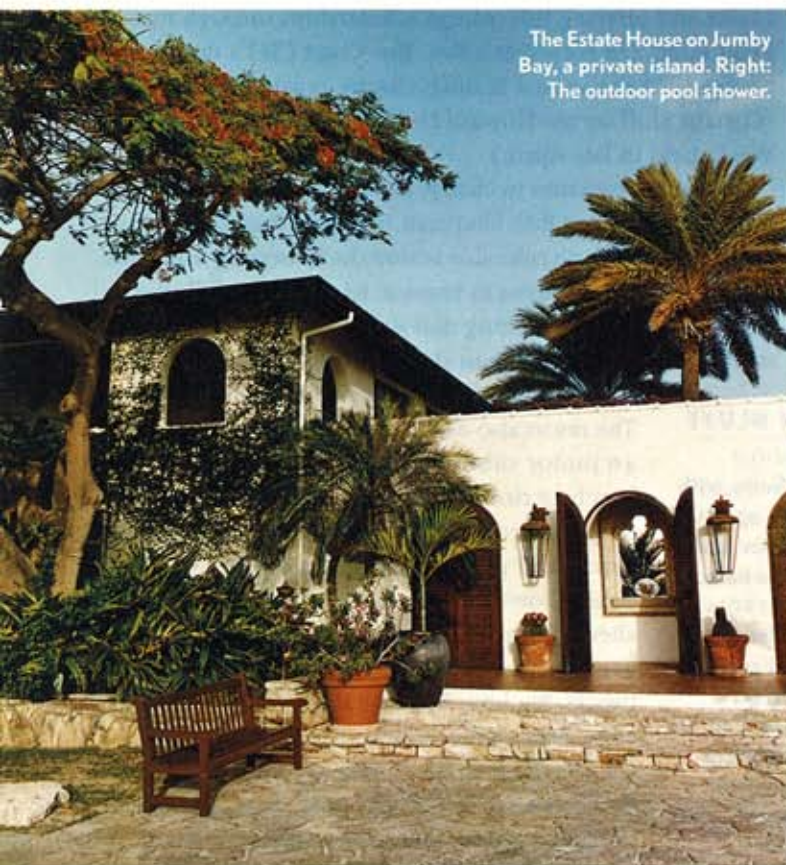
Drifting in and out of consciousness, I'm stretched out on my patio's chaise lounge as Annemarie gently applies the cool aloe juice to

On Barbuda, the beach-blond sister island of Antigua, guests of The Beach House enjoy all the romantic trappings — luxurious suites, fine dining, a nearly endless stretch of untouched sand ideal for private idling — plus the "your every wish is my command" attention of service ambassadors. This eager-to-please corps works the grounds, from the saltwater pool to the Caribbean-chic clubhouse, ensuring each guest's stay exceeds his expectations.

my sun-scorched torso. I try to stay awake, but between the rustling palms, warm ocean breeze and soothing hands, I don't stand a chance.

I rouse just as the light is beginning to fade. Turquoise waves lap at the shore as my companion and I set out on the seemingly endless stretch of pristine Barbudan beach that unfurls in both directions in front of The Beach House. Ribbons of pink sand alternate with white, and we sink past our ankles with each step, as if walking in a fresh layer of snow. Out here, the sole sign that we're not the only people on Earth is a line of blurry footprints from visitors long past.

It's well after sunset when we stroll into the Club House. A handful of people are scattered between the bar and the stylishly simple couches and ottomans that follow graceful curves through the center of the space, creating intimate conversation niches. Louvered shutters, hinged at the ceiling so they can be raised or lowered depending on the weather, line the perimeter, pacifying the sultry onshore wind. White is the prevailing color,



The Estate House on Jumby Bay, a private island. Right: The outdoor pool shower.



ANTIGUA Jumby Bay

At the Estate House, a 230-year-old manor turned restaurant, I call out for Ishmael. Who could resist requesting a wine steward straight out of Melville? He suggests a perfectly chilled Pinot Grigio for my shrimp cocktail, and I immediately decide that 39-room Jumby Bay, a Rosewood Resort, is leading the Caribbean's country club revival. This 300-acre island resort lies two miles off Antigua's northeast coast, but that narrow ocean passage serves as a saltwater privacy gate for a domain where villas are never locked and guests have their own golf carts and fat-tired bikes to zip around the property and to the three deserted beaches.

Recently, following a series of disputes with island homeowners, canceled management contracts, and a lengthy closing, Jumby Bay was taken over by Rosewood Hotels & Resorts. Suave managing director Peter Bowling toiled to reinstate Jumby's original reputation as an enclave for low-profile guests who detest constant tipping and signing bar tabs. Both of these nuisances have been eliminated. Pedaling around the island pathways affords the guilty pleasure of snooping past the estates lining Buckley and Flinty Bays. (Several are available for rent.) Standard guest rooms done in shades of café au lait are scattered along the beach and Pond Bay; larger two-bedroom villas with plunge pools overlook Davis Bay. To compensate for a hillside setting, Courtyard rooms offer new outdoor footed tubs for starlit soaks.

JUMBY BAY

BEST ROOM

Harbour Villa 207, a two-bedroom with plunge pool and full kitchen

COCKTAIL SPECIAL
Grapefruit-and-gin Cool Me Off

DON'T MISS

Picnics on Pasture Bay Beach

FAIR WARNING

Not for night owls—everything closes down at 12 A.M.

Wednesday night stuff-your-face buffet of cold salads and carving stations. It's a throwback that recalls swank dinner dances in Newport or Palm Beach. Adleza, the polite manager, expertly steers me toward grilled-to-order lobster and crêpes suzette. A couple in a green blazer and Lilly Pulitzer sundress start to boogie on the patio. Time warp complete. Long Island, St. John's; 888/767-3966 or 268/462-6000; www.rosewoodhotels.com; doubles from \$700, including meals, drinks, and some activities.

BARBUDA Beach House

It's a quick hop by Carib Air over the 25-mile channel that separates Antigua from Barbuda—but you risk getting pepperoni dumped in your lap if the small plane hits a downdraft. Apparently, Domino's Pizza heads a long list of scarce supplies on the 62-square-mile island; residents returning from Antigua on this twice-daily flight usually haul cardboard stacks and buckets of KFC for the folks back home. Landing outside Codrington, the sole village, it's easy to pick out general manager Marcello Pigozzo on the runway—he's probably the only guy on Barbuda who has ever tasted a genuine Neapolitan pie.

So what is a Swiss-trained, Venezuela-born Italian hotelier with Relais & Châteaux stamped on his résumé doing out here? Shaping up the 21-room Beach House on Palmetto Point—site of a failed hotel venture that was given a new lease on life in April by the same team that launched the House, the super-stylish Barbados resort. Waiting for a goatherd to cross the rutted >>

road, Pigozzo explains that Barbuda's major export is sand. I quickly find out why. As we pull up to the hotel's lowered front doors, they swing open to reveal the plain air Club House, with its purple heartwood decking and white Italian-cotton slipcovered sofas facing an 18-mile arc of pink sand laced with crushed pink coral. Apart from a flock of nesting terns, it's one of the Western Hemisphere's most vacant landscapes.

The Beach House is a manifestation of the "less is more" axiom, ideal for anyone seeking refuge from clutter. The resort's Wi-Fi laptops and complimentary cell phones and personal DVD players are your only links to the clamorous universe. Each guest room has the bare essentials: air-conditioning, a four-poster with silky Italian sheets, an espresso machine, and a terraced view across a reflecting pond to the surf. A guest's every whim is addressed by an SA (Service Ambassador) in a flowing outfit. When she delivers breakfast, Cassie Nixon's smile makes up for the lack of freshly squeezed o.j. (Antigua and Barbuda prohibit citrus imports), and when I return from an off-road trip to the highlands, I discover she's drawn me a bubble bath

dotted with oleander blossoms. All I want is an icy dip in the saltwater pool, but it's the thought that counts. "The staff does everything," says Pigozzo, and he's not kidding. One SA doubles as the resort's snorkel guide; another cleans the pool and then serves dinner.

Despite a lack of armchair diversions, the Beach House can arrange tours to nearby caves, lagoons, and frigate-bird sanctuaries. Horse trails wind along sandy lanes, ending at the resort's beachfront steps. Of course, the real pleasure of life on Barbuda becomes most evident during a chat about aged rums with Mike the bartender, or about the art of spearfishing with Ann Marie, an SA who brings me a fizzy glass of Ting grapefruit soda and lingers to describe camping with her three boys. I take a solitary walk along the sands of calm

THE BEACH HOUSE

BEST ROOM

Oceanfront Suite 23,
closest to the water and
complete with
wraparound deck

COCKTAIL SPECIAL

Grenadine-and-rum

B Passion

DON'T MISS

Jeep tour of Two Feet Bay
with guide

McArthur Nedd

FAIR WARNING

Rough surf

Two Feet Bay; then the resort's sailcloth-shaded restaurant lures me back for Barbuda's second-biggest export: lobster. Palmetto Point; 888/776-0333 or 268/725-4042; www.thebeachbarbuda.com; doubles from \$470, including breakfast and two massages.+

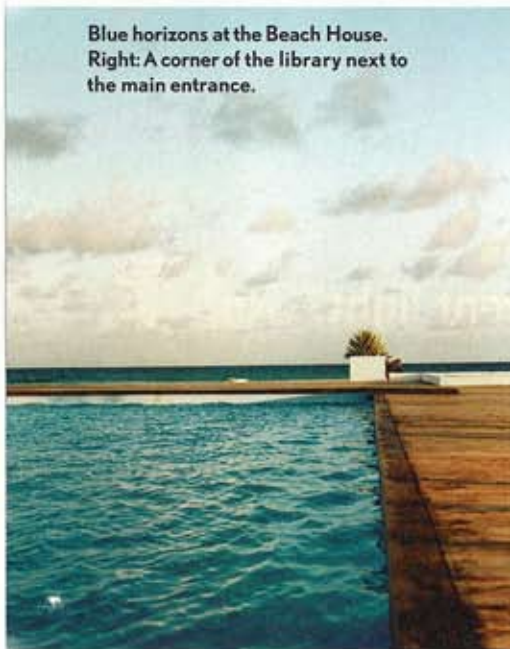
SHANE MITCHELL, a contributing editor for T+L, also writes about the Maldives this month (see page 238).



redefine
yourselves



Blue horizons at the Beach House.
Right: A corner of the library next to
the main entrance.



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SUN, SAND, SEA *and* THEE

With its swaying palms, sparkling sea, supple sand and steamy climate where the less clothing the better, the Caribbean itself has done most of the work for any hotelier wishing to create a romantic getaway. What the following properties excel at is taking these natural gifts and enhancing them, massaging them until the scene is set and the set is cleared for guests to indulge their passionate fantasies. In the romantic resort business, these are the places that go all the way.

R O M A N T I C I S L A N D

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BEACH HOUSE BY JACOB STEINWALL

R E N D E Z V O U S