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**GLAMOROUS INTERIORS IN TOWN AND COUNTRY**

by Terence Conran, John Stefanidis, Barbara Hulanicki, Tom Bartlett

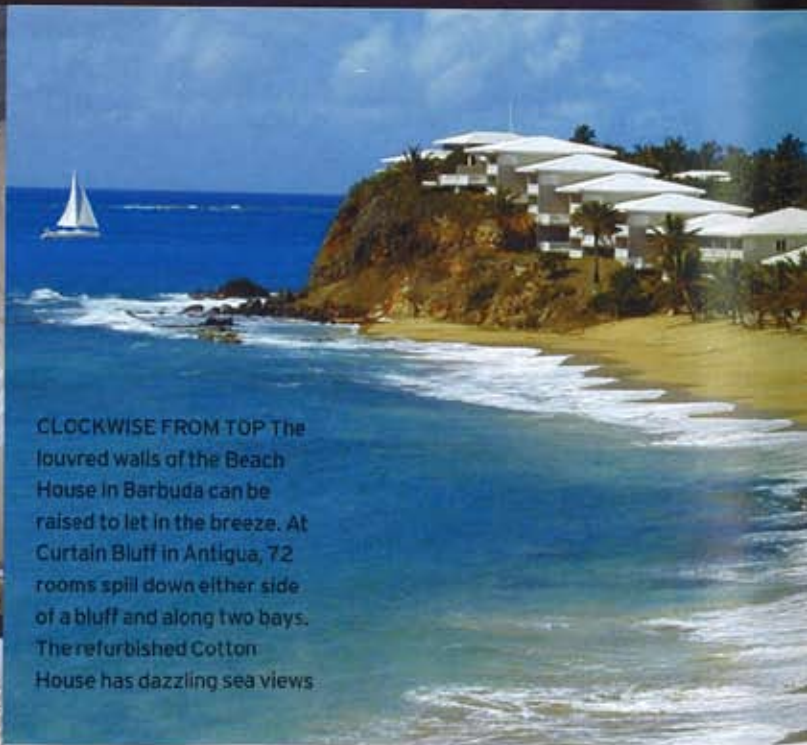
**EXCLUSIVE** David Linley celebrates  
20 years in design





# Caribbean resurgence

Hotels in the Caribbean offer visitors new elegance, luxury and escapism, report PAMELA GOODMAN, ELENA BOWES and KATE PATRICK



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP The louvred walls of the Beach House in Barbuda can be raised to let in the breeze. At Curtain Bluff in Antigua, 72 rooms spill down either side of a bluff and along two bays. The refurbished Cotton House has dazzling sea views

Tourism's wheel of fortune spun very quickly in the latter half of last year. The Caribbean witnessed its deadliest and costliest hurricane season on record, enduring 15 named storms (a name is always a bad sign), over 3,000 deaths and more than \$42 billion in damage. The 2004/05 Caribbean winter season didn't look promising... until the tsunami struck. While Thailand, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Malaysia suffered in their abandonment, the Caribbean (except for the worst-hit islands of Grenada, Haiti and Grand Cayman) bounced back into favour.

For a few years now, a slow but steady design revolution has been taking place in the Caribbean, following in the footsteps of Asia and the Indian Ocean, where new levels of hotel luxury have been pioneered. Parrot Cay in the Turks & Caicos, Villa Nova in Barbados and Carlisle Bay in Antigua were three of the most high-profile hotels to get the design ball rolling, and, although the hurricanes threatened to stem the tide of change, thankfully the show has gone on.

### THE COTTON HOUSE, MUSTIQUE

Mustique is a most peculiar place and quite unlike any other Caribbean island (except possibly St Barths). The air of wealth, ease and contentment that the island exudes seems hardly real: it is a pleasure ground of manicured perfection, of beautifully maintained roads and landscapes, of tennis courts, cricket pitches and playgrounds – and that's just the public areas. Behind the scenes, on hilltops or beach fronts, is the multitude of sensational private villas whose owners, and their house-party guests, provide the life and soul of the island. The central point of focus, however, is the Cotton House hotel, upon which, during the season, home owners and their guests descend for a weekly drinks party to rub shoulders with each other and assorted hotel guests (an interesting mix of would-be property buyers, overflow guests from the villas, honeymooners and discerning holiday-makers).

A year or so ago, the management of the Cotton House was taken over by Grace Leo-Andrieu, an immensely chic Paris-based hotelier with a track record of style and flair, who closed the hotel for a serious seven-month refurbishment. The sense of space at the hotel remains unchanged – there are vast expanses of lawn and none of the buildings is too imposing. The wonderful Great House, with its wide veranda, also remains unchanged apart from its sleeker, whiter interior. The real alterations have taken place in the rooms, reduced in number to just 20 (nine of which now have private plunge pools) and refashioned with a predominantly neutral palette interspersed with flashes of colour. A new pool has been built in the garden, while the old one has been incorporated into the Cotton House Residence, a fabulous two-bedroom villa which comes with butler, plasma screens, outdoor shower and enormous bathrooms – definitely the next best

thing to renting a house of your own on the island.

The upgrade comes with a new service ethic, too. The staff are, without exception, welcoming, smiling, courteous and efficient – four words I have never used in an article on the Caribbean.

### PETIT ST VINCENT

The makeover here is cosmetic compared to the major surgery at the Cotton House, but it demonstrates how small details can go a long way. PSV (as this 115-acre island is more familiarly known) took a fair old wallop from Hurricane Ivan, but the scars have healed quickly. Haze Richardson, the owner, never wanted his island to be anything other than a complete hideaway and retreat, and he fully intends to keep it that way. PSV is neither chic nor flashy, nor even particularly sophisticated. Its pleasures are simple and homespun. The island is as much a farm as it is a tourist resort, with chickens and dogs, tractors and vegetable gardens. There are no swimming pools, no TVs, no air conditioning (the cool Atlantic breeze does that) and no phones – not even mobiles, which get no signal here. By night, guests manoeuvre round the island by torchlight; by day, total privacy rules. Each of the 22 cottages scattered across the island is its own microcosm, safe from the prying eyes of other guests or staff. Only if you raise your yellow flag by the entrance to your room will you be disturbed for room service; if the red flag flies, no one will come near you. The same applies at the various sunbathing and snorkelling points around the island, where hammocks swing beneath shady, thatched huts and where lunchtime picnic hampers are delivered on request.

So what of the refurbishments? The understated, at-one-with-nature appeal will never change. The upgrades come in the form of new linen sheets, pillows, towels, bathrobes, mattresses and teak deck furniture – not much, you might think, but it's amazing how, even after a day of doing nothing, a few creature comforts make all the difference. At PSV you need the Robinson Crusoe instinct. You need to love the sea, the wind and the stars. You have to accept that you are hiding from the outside world and that no one will find you – a rare blessing in a busy world. **PG**

*Pamela Goodman travelled as a guest of ITC Classics (tel: 01244-355527, website: www.itcclassics.co.uk).*

*Seven nights at the Cotton House cost from £1,776 per person, on a B&B basis; seven nights full board at PSV cost from £2,110 per person. Both prices include flights.*

### EDEN ROCK HOTEL, ST BARTHS

While the Eden Rock Hotel has always had the best views in St Barths from its rocky perch overlooking the French island's stunning St Jean Bay, the hotel now is as striking as its setting. Over the past 18 months, owners David and Jane Matthews, who bought the historic hotel 10 years ago, have refurbished much of the original site and expanded the hotel to the adjacent beach, formerly the site of the Filao Beach Hotel, which they bought and >

