

ISLAND HOME

THE SHOWCASE OF ISLAND ARCHITECTURE, DESIGN AND LIFESTYLE

\$4.95 • JUNE 1994

46714



INSIDE

HAWAII LOA MASTERPIECE

JAMAICAN HIDEAWAY

ESCAPE TO TAHITI

THE BEST OF
INDOOR-OUTDOOR LIVING



PRIVATE PLACES

JAMAICAN HIDEAWAY

OLD-WORLD AMBIANCE AT THE HERMITAGE



This breathtaking home, nestled on Jamaica's remote Bluefields Bay, is designed as adjoining octagons, complete with an octagonal outdoor pool.

With an open and flowing floorplan, the home design was inspired by previous Jamaican Great Houses, including the locally-crafted cedar-and-mahogany archways that frame the rooms.

T
E
X
T

K
E
R
R
Y

T
E
S
S
A
R
O

P
H
O
T
O
G
R
A
P
H
Y



©

J
O
H
N

T
S
A
N
T
E
S

&

J
E
F
F

C
R
E
S
P
I

There is a place in the Caribbean where nightlife and high-rise hotels fade away, where clocks and calendars seem to wind down slowly to a halt, where the azure sea laps gently beside dark earth, green hills, and vibrantly-hued fruits and blossoms. It is a fantasy location, the ultimate escape from reality. The lucky travel there to visit; the truly blessed return to create their dream home.

Known as Bluefields Bay on the southwest coast of Jamaica, this piece of paradise proved irresistible to Washington D.C. architect Deborah Moncure. After visiting this idyllic spot thirteen years ago, Deborah and her husband, Braxton Moncure, found that they couldn't just pack up their bags and go home. They spent years negotiating with the local government, then bought some land and made their plans. The glorious result is The Hermitage.

The home's unique location is steeped in history. Some 250 years ago, renegade pirates led by the adventuresome Sir Henry Morgan set sail for the Isthmus, with plans to carry out a daring raid on Panama. Bluefields (then "Blewfields") became a base for buccaneer strikes against Spanish ships and ports, flourish-

ing with taverns and gambling and carousers.

But today, little evidence of that scandalous era exists. In fact, for more than thirty years, the area has remained virtually unchanged, without the commercial development that has invaded other parts of the island. With no airport, one road, an isolated beach, and only a few private villas, Bluefields Bay is home mainly to fishermen and to those looking to escape, in the true, tranquil sense of the word. The area is isolated and alone.

"We found the island irresistible," explains Deborah Moncure. "For years we daydreamed about finding a waterfront spot in an unspoiled part of Jamaica, where we could spend holidays with family and friends. At first we discussed whether Bluefields was too far off the beaten track of Negril and Montego Bay, but then we decided that was a large part of the appeal of the spot." And after five years of negotiations, the elated Moncures had the opportunity to build their dream house in an unbelievable dream location.

The couple drew upon the tradition of stately Jamaican Great Houses for their design inspiration, with Deborah responsible for all architecture and Braxton as the interior designer who collected the unique furniture and artwork for the

home. "I tried to revive as many of the old motifs as possible," Deborah explains. "So much Jamaican contemporary architecture has neglected the fine details and highlights of Jamaican vernacular. I wanted to rectify that in designing The Hermitage."

And that is exactly what she did. The home takes its name and its sense of gracious style from a plantation house that occupied the site two centuries ago, and many details were drawn from a nearby 1730s Great House, Caledonia, and a late Georgian period sugar plantation house, Acton. Set on four acres of waterfront with a crescent of white-sand beach, the stunning home includes cut-stone walls and carved mahogany woodwork, dramatic gabled rooflines and soaring arched doorways. It is a unique design that not only harks back to a

bygone era, but also succeeds in co-existing harmoniously with the environment by utilizing flowing, open spaces that pay respectful deference to the dazzling location.

The home is designed as adjoining octagons, including an octagonal pool and spa with uninterrupted views of the sea. Wide overhanging eaves extend outward from the wood-shingled roofs to create areas of cool shade and to direct rain away from the home's open sides, but they provide the additional benefit of trapping the soothing sounds of the sea like a shell. Created from primarily Jamaican materials, the home features foot-thick walls of locally quarried coral limestone, floors of pink marble in the octagonal living room, and bedroom floors of random-width *guango* wood.

The spacious pool terrace, crafted from pebbles found at the beach below, is a perfect spot to view an island sunset.



On one boundary of this property runs a deep gully that years ago carried the Bluefields River. Now it is filled with lush tropical vegetation, including *Tarzan*-like vines and tall banana plants. Stones from this gully course, smoothed for so many years by rushing water, were utilized to create the cobblestone terraces and spacious pool surround.

Inside, rich mahogany warms the rooms. Carved louvers, wall pilasters, and arch trimwork came not only from Jamaican wood, but from the hands of Jamaican craftspeople. The Moncures even took their cabinetmakers to historic plantation houses in the area to ensure quality reproductions. The attention to detail, though expensive and time-consuming, resulted in a house with a truly “old world” feel — a strong tribute to Jamaican workmanship and design.

The main living area of the home is a twenty-two-foot-wide octagon with wraparound views. From a comfy seat on the sofa, three Jamaican cedar-and-mahogany archways across the room frame dramatic pool and sea vistas. A unique coffee table, locally created to Deborah Moncure’s specifications, features handmade blue and white Kutaya mosque tiles from Turkey, where Braxton once lived. A large canvas from the Moncure’s extensive collection of Balinese

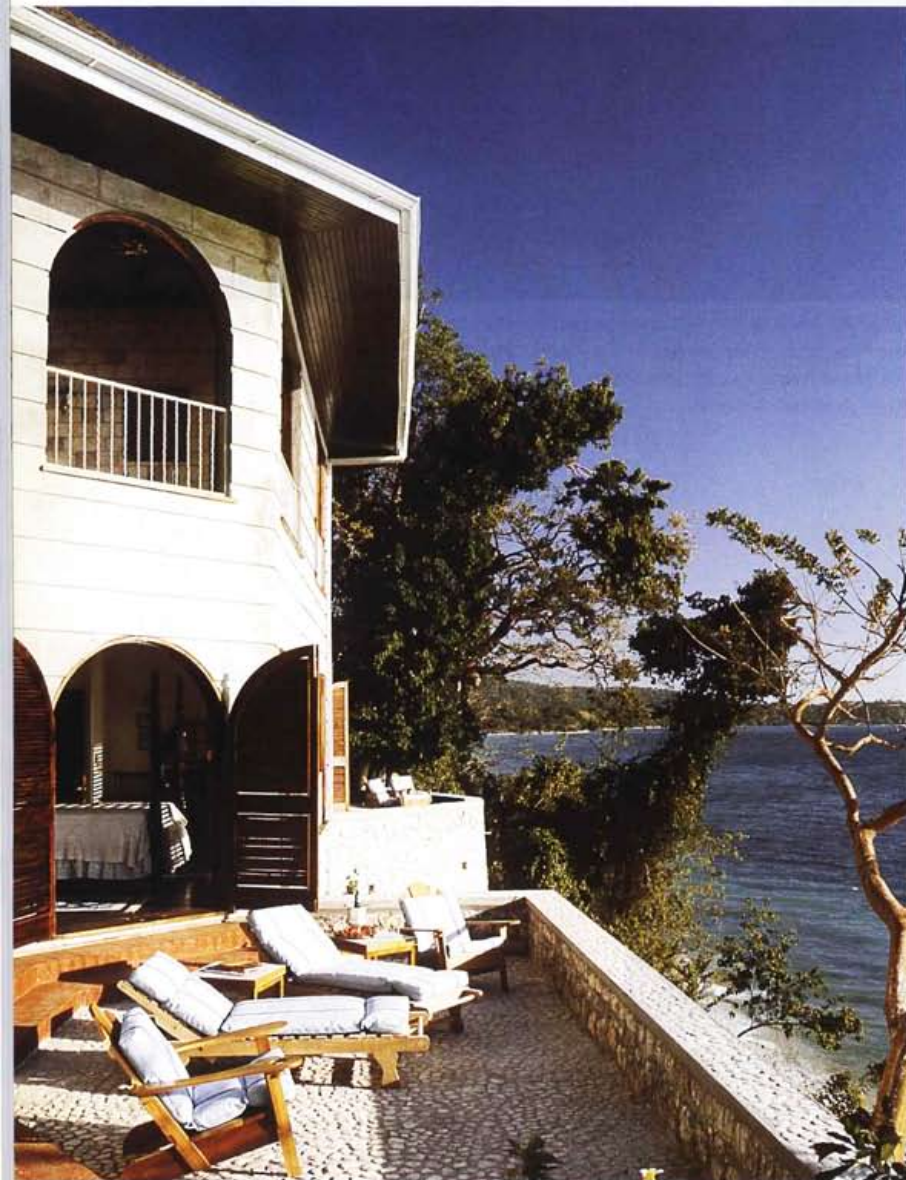


Above: An intimate seating arrangement — next to one of the many open arches in the foot-thick stone walls of the home — provides views of the pool, terrace, and sea beyond.



This uniquely-designed home takes its name and its sense of gracious style from a plantation house that occupied the site two centuries ago.

All terraces, including this one adjacent to a bedroom, are positioned to take maximum advantage of the warm sunshine and tropical breezes that bless this location.



paintings graces one wall, with a locally-carved frame of Jamaican mahogany that continues the motifs of the piece. The expansiveness of this central room makes it a perfect hub for home entertaining, with seating for up to twelve and the adjoining outdoor terrace for added space.

Thoughtful design was also employed in the spacious kitchen. Separated into two main areas, the kitchen features a butler's station adjacent to the dining room, with space set aside for silver polishing and for the storage of fine china and crystal. The actual working kitchen includes double sinks, a Vulcan stove, and a large imported Amana refrigerator. To allow hot air to rise, the entire kitchen is open to the peak of the roof (twenty-two feet above), which keeps the space at a comfortable temperature. The ample cabinetry is of water-resistant Jamaican clear cedar.

Furnishings are classic throughout the home, due in part, no doubt, to Braxton Moncure's background. He is a fellow of the Royal Furniture History Society of London and is compiling a catalog of Jamaican-made furniture of the Colonial Period. "So many wonderful pieces of Jamaican furniture are sent abroad because people want to obtain U.S. currency for them," he laments. He believes that, instead, significant pieces should remain in the country as part of the island's heritage.

The Hermitage's furniture collection includes antique dining room furnishings, re-assembled from a Jamaican Great House that was destroyed by Hurricane Gilbert. The nineteenth-century table, mahogany with removable leaves, was milled in England. It is surrounded by classic Jamaican Georgian dining chairs and flanked by an oversized nineteenth-century Jamaican mahogany sideboard with roped legs and a scrolled backboard.

Four bedrooms, including two master suites, feature antique four-poster mahogany canopy beds with starched white lace linens. Elegant touches such as marble showers in the bathrooms, antique light fixtures, and handcrafted eight-foot-high curved-top French doors grace the interior decor. The louvers and latticework ventilators allow tropical tradewinds and brilliant sunlight to filter inside. Island-style ceiling fans help breezes to circulate, and for unusually warm evenings, an air-conditioning system cools the bedrooms.

Indeed, the view that this home boasts makes it difficult to stay inside. But the Moncures prepared for this by orienting each of the four bedrooms toward the sea, so that the sounds of the surf are omnipresent and the magnificent stretch of coast is the first sight of the morning. The tranquil master bedroom opens onto a loggia, where wraparound views can be enjoyed in privacy.

But the terraces also beckon. The large pool terrace on the



Right:
The bedrooms,
which feature
antique four-poster
mahogany beds,
are all oriented
toward the sea,
to bring in the
sounds of the surf
and the specta-
cular sight of the
Jamaican coast.

Below:
No detail
was forgotten
in making this
home a dream
getaway.



upper level is accessed directly from both the living room and dining room. And the pool itself features a large deep end on one side and seats with whirlpool jets on the other . . . talk about a perfect spot to sip champagne at sunset! The lights of Sav-la-Mar, seven miles away across Bluefields Bay, twinkle in the distance.

The three downstairs bedrooms open onto private terraces overlooking the water. Hidden further down at sea level, a secluded seaside patio features gates that open directly onto a perfect white-sand beach and the sparkling Caribbean. Nearby, a magnificent cottonwood tree marks a two-bedroom guest cottage which, when combined with The Hermitage, creates a total of six bedrooms.

As the Moncure's business remains based in the D.C. area, they do not live at The Hermitage year-round, opting instead to make regular visits to their favorite slice of island paradise. However their family history, and their hearts, remain entwined with this remote coast of Jamaica. The couple were married at

nearby Mullion Cove (their six-bedroom villa on the adjoining two acres of waterfront), and their two children were born in Montego Bay, receiving Jamaican passports when they were three months old. "We felt that starting out the lives of our children in Jamaica was a wonderful gift to them," Deborah explains. And when her father passed away, the family began work on a garden at The Hermitage to be dedicated to his memory. The island nation has become, for the Moncures, their adopted homeland.

The family's love of Jamaica and of classic home design has inspired them to allow other fortunate individuals to experience the serene beauty of Bluefields Bay. The Hermitage is now offered as an exclusive private villa rental, as are three other Moncure-owned waterfront properties nearby. Becoming involved in the luxury resort business was not the couple's intention, but as more property became available, the idea evolved naturally. And it is not surprising that the Moncures' affinity for the land and concern for the natural environment makes them ideal proprietors for this special, pristine, private place called The Hermitage, just as it made them the ideal couple to create it. 🌺