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OPENINGS

Cast Away: Blackfly Lodge

A couple of old salts create the Bahamas' best new flats-fishing destination

by MONTE BURKE

June/July 2013



PHOTO: JASON MYERS

Open-air cocktails off the living room bar.

Vaughn Cochran says Blackfly Lodge—an exquisitely redone fishing lodge on Great Abaco Island—started as “an art project.” In 2008, the now sixty-seven-year-old artist, former Keys fishing guide, longtime lodge manager, and original member of Jimmy Buffett’s Coral Reefer Band (“I

was the jug-band guy, playing the washboard, mandolin, and banjo”) was contacted by Clint Kemp, a native Bahamian guide, about doing a series of paintings of the rapidly aging crew of iconic bonefish guides in the Bahamas. That plan fell through, but a friendship came out of it. A short time later, a developer asked the two men to assess the Schooner Bay area of Abaco as a possible destination for a new fishing lodge. After three days of excellent fishing with local guide Paul Pinder, Cochran says, he and Kemp found themselves sitting on a roof deck, “watching the sun set, having a Cuban cigar, drinking rum, and wondering, ‘Why the hell don’t we just do this ourselves?’”



PHOTO: JASON MYERS

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The upstairs veranda.

So they did. In 2009, with the help of Canadian financier Dave Byler, Cochran and Kemp founded the first iteration of Blackfly Lodge in Schooner Bay, a new development on Abaco's eastern shore. They leased a six-bedroom house, hired Pinder as the head guide, and started booking guests. Aside from hanging a few paintings, the men left the house as it was. The small, intimate nature of the lodge was a hit. "So we decided to just go ahead and plant our flag," says Cochran, who has managed properties in Costa Rica and Mexico.

With an eye toward expansion, the group eventually bought some nearby land and built their own eight-bedroom structure in the style of a Bahamas veranda house. The new lodge officially opened in March. And this time around, there are plenty of personal touches. Each bedroom is named for a famous angler, such as Lefty Kreh, Stu Apte, and Flip Pallot, and adorned with a Cochran original portrait of said fisherman. Chef Devon Roker runs the family-style kitchen, which serves up breakfast, dinner, and a packed lunch daily. The theme there is local: seafood caught on the lodge's thirty-one-foot Yellowfin boat, and fruits, vegetables, and eggs from a nearby Blackfly-owned farm.

And then there's the fishing. Abaco has quickly emerged as one of the top bonefishing destinations in the Bahamas, if not the world, and Blackfly is within reach of the famous easy-to-hook bones in the Marls, the more difficult big fish on Abaco's ocean side, and the magical Moore's Island, where bonefish share the flats with permit and even the occasional tarpon. The fishing is so good in the surrounding area that when Cochran asked an angler friend to help spread the word about Blackfly, "He said, 'Hell no!'" Cochran says. "He wanted to keep it to himself." Good luck.

>For more information, visit blackflylodge.com

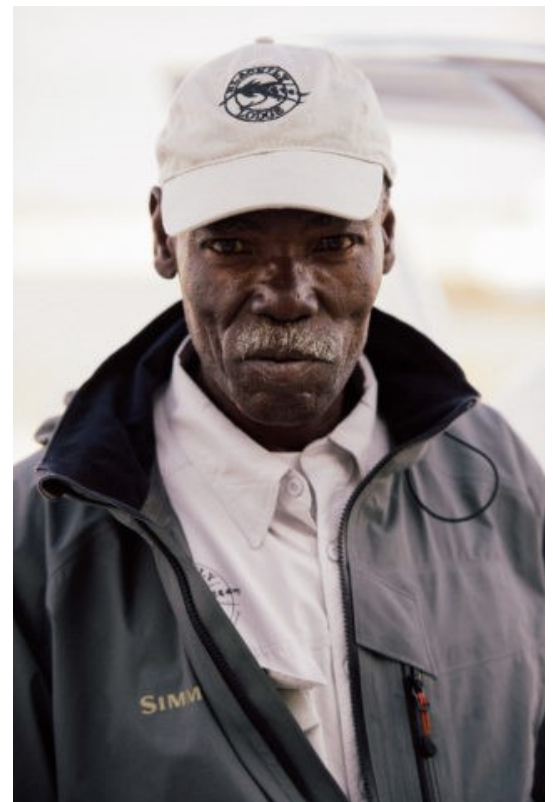


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Fishing guide Derek Gator.