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BAHAMIAN RHAPSODY

The owners of this newbuild in the Bahamas turned to trusted interior designer John McCall to provide their house with a British sensibility, practical furnishings and interiors that are not 'too beachy'

TEXT DAVID NICHOLLS | PHOTOGRAPHS ALEXANDER JAMES

A George Smith sofa and armchairs, along with Fifties rattan chairs from A Rum Fellow and nineteenth-century bobbin chairs from Westenholz, form an inviting seating area at one end of the great room. The painted panels on the wall are by Suffolk-based muralist Graham Rust



OPPOSITE At the centre of the great room, books and objets are displayed on a table from William Yeoward, sitting on a dhurrie from Guinevere. THIS PAGE FROM TOP The loggia's dining area has an acacia-framed mirror from Guinevere. A second seating area in the great room



When a story begins with 'we'd been invited for drinks on Valentino's yacht one summer...', one might reasonably expect to be regaled with tales of glamour and decadence, and with any luck a little indiscreet name-dropping. But those are not the details that stood out when the interior designer John McCall boarded the fashion designer's boat in Majorca eight years ago. Rather, he recalls how appealing he found the combination of mahogany and the colour blue on the 46-metre superyacht. 'It's not reinventing the wheel, but it really stuck in my mind and I wanted to be able to use that in a project one day,' he says.

That opportunity arose a few years ago, when a long-standing client bought a plot of land on a tiny island in the Bahamas. The owners, who have four children, had previously hired John to decorate their houses and flats in England, so they trusted him to devise an interior style for a beach house that didn't feel 'too beachy'. Designed by the Miami-based architects de la Guardia Victoria, it is on a beachfront site of nearly two-acres and is reminiscent of the eighteenth-century plantation houses more commonly found elsewhere in the Caribbean.

The U-shape building creates a courtyard through which the house is entered, a little like a Palladian villa. The wings comprise bedrooms and service areas, leaving the main body of the house dedicated to places where the family can congregate. The first of these is a large loggia,



pillared and pleasantly shaded, and used as an outdoor sitting and dining room that overlooks the courtyard. Here is the first glimpse of how John made use of the combination he noted on Valentino's boat, as wood and cane furniture has been teamed with cushions in blue and white.

While the architects made good use of the neoclassical symmetry and formality, John's design has softened the edges. Enter the 'great room' from the loggia and you encounter a large and handsomely decorated space where loose-covered George Smith sofas and armchairs seem inviting, while patterned textiles and decorative accessories draw the eye across the room. 'It's understated,' John says. 'I hate it when you're upstaged by soft furnishings.'

That is not to say there isn't a sense of drama. The high walls are made from a creamy white coral stone quarried in the Dominican Republic, a material pleasingly textured due to its fossilised inclusions. These are further enlivened on the interior of the great room by three of six painted panels commissioned from the internationally renowned muralist Graham Rust – the other three hang elsewhere in the house. They depict scenes from the *The Tempest*, the owner's favourite Shakespeare play, and hint at the severe weather to which this idyllic island can be subjected. John recounts a wild storm the night before the final installation of furniture: 'We woke up to find dozens of beach chairs from another island washed up in front of the house.'

Delicate fabrics aren't a wise choice for a house where the boundaries of indoor and outdoor are constantly

ANTICLOCKWISE FROM TOP Pendant lights from Charles Edwards hang over the island in the kitchen, which leads into the television room (bottom left). Rattan chairs from Century Furniture in the loggia. OPPOSITE The cypress-panelled library walls are decorated with maps of the Caribbean





blurred. With this in mind, John and Olivia Stirling, an interior designer he brought in to help, specified upholstery and soft furnishings that could handle the heat, humidity and salty air, not to mention the casual lounging of children in wet bathing suits. This laid-back attitude is reflected not only in the style of the large kitchen and dining area, but in its position. Rather than being a behind-the-scenes area, it is to one side of the great room and very much a part of the family home. It is also a buffer between the great room and the less formal television room.

On the other side of the great room are six bedrooms decorated with a light touch. Printed textiles add subtle flourishes to these all-white spaces, while artwork and accessories give a nod to the seaside location. Most of the furnishings in the house were shipped from England, with crates filled with finds from John's favourite sources, including Soane, Charles Edwards and Christie's.

Knowing the clients well meant John was able to make many decisions without sign-off. It's one of the reasons the project took a relatively short period of time: from the initial meeting with the architects to their first night in a fully furnished home, it took just two years. 'The neighbours couldn't believe it,' John says. 'It usually takes three to five years to complete a project like this.' The neighbours are also intrigued by the interior style of the house. 'They think it looks so British,' John says with a smile □

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OPPOSITE ALL PICTURES An all-white palette characterises the bedrooms, bathroom and hall, with details such as the 'Daisy' hanging light from Soane (bottom left) adding flair. THIS PAGE FROM TOP The beachside location of the house. A pool and pool house to the side of the main house

