



AT THE SECLUDED AND NARROW END OF A TINY barrier island in the tropics is a “compound” imagined and recently built amid an ocean dune, an ancient undulating palm grove, and a rough swath of indigenous “bush” stretching a few hundred yards to a coral-stone escarpment that overlooks a broad, sheltered bay. A large and growing family now comes here for holidays. There are already eight family bedrooms, an additional two for guests, and acreage for more when the time comes.

It was a task of Fitzcarraldo-like complexity. The family, the architect, and the decorator had all worked in this remote and primitive environment before and were well aware of the pitfalls and challenges but managed to keep the faith through a four-year collaboration. And for the decorator, at least, it was a project of a lifetime.

Not one but two complete houses—one facing the ocean and sunrise, the other facing the bay and sunset—are supported by a complex of buildings that are out of sight (and mind). Surrounded by a dense and deliberately planted jungle, this complex includes garages, boat storage, vegetable gardens and fruit trees, staff quarters, and electricity-generating equipment—enough to service a medium-sized village.

Yet there is a gentleness and informality to these houses. They may be large and relatively elaborate, but rather than proclaiming extravagance and luxury, they downplay it. The great size of the ocean-facing house is optically reduced by its H shape and its many individual roofs. It appears to recede into the landscape. The graying cedar shingles, rough stone details, and muted

coloring of the shutters were carefully chosen to whisper, not shout.

The approach to the house, a winding drive beneath the canopy of palms, is devoid of pomp and circumstance. One arrives at a winsome portico belying the grandeur within. This self-effacing entrance offers two natural, undisturbed views—the ocean and the palm grove. The Cape

Dutch overdoor is decidedly referential and a foretaste of what will be found inside. It’s all perfectly appropriate for this family with deep and widespread roots in South Africa.

The bayside house, also H shaped, is approached by another winding road. This one terminates in an informal, coral-paved car park shaded by three irregularly placed, enormous banyan trees. They were barged from Florida, were replanted (a further act of faith), and shot out new branches almost immediately.

The view from here is headlong—the elegant and symmetrical structure makes a casement-windowed picture frame for the brilliantly turquoise bay. The radiating wings, containing several bedrooms and baths, are screened by thick landscaping so that the charming central pleasure pavilion appears to stand alone.

It’s as relaxed as can be, perhaps even more than the ocean-side “big house.” Here, too, the materials and furnishings were chosen for maximum ease and comfort, and especially for bathing-suited conviviality.

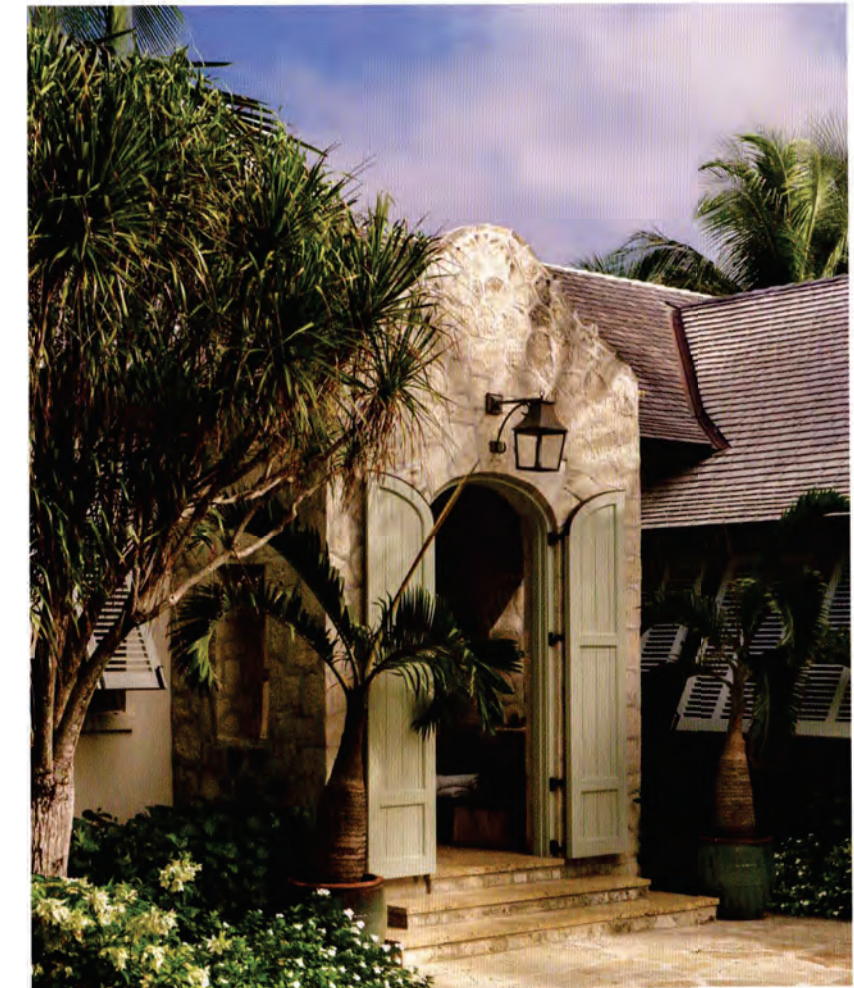
In addition to many seating areas designed to encourage conversation, there are several places allotted for retreat and solitude. One is a spot at the end of the dock, where a hammock is strung between the pilings. In the late afternoon, this is the place to be.

Sunrise and Sunset

OPPOSITE Day’s end in the Bahamas: The dock house makes an intimate spot for reflection and a sundown rum cocktail. The languor-inducing hammock is crocheted. It’s a traditional form from far-off Brazil.



ABOVE An artfully planted palm grove shades the lawn while permitting a full view of the ocean from the “big house,” the size of which is deceptive from the beach. The small roofs and shaded recesses belie the large mass that looms beyond. Both this house and the bayside house were designed by de la Guardia Architects & Urbanists.



ABOVE RIGHT AND RIGHT The picturesque portico is made from coral stone in Cape Dutch style, a reference to the family's origins and enduring interests in South Africa.



ABOVE The entrance hall's barrel-vaulted ceiling and walls are lined in tropical-appropriate pecky cypress. The rustic, striped jute-and-cotton rug makes a beachy welcome mat. The Anglo-Indian settee is fitted with an antique-style cushion covered in rough, hand-woven jute. The mirror is one of several made for the house by Bamboo & Rattan. **OPPOSITE** Rare antique maps of Africa and the family's accruing collection of artifacts are arranged above and on a pair of rattan-trimmed console tables made for the entrance hall. **OVERLEAF** The veranda is comfortably furnished with resin wicker from Casa Mobil, as well as various pieces from Janus et Cie's Lazy Lucy collection.







ABOVE The Indian-made mahogany "cabinet of curiosities" is lined with pages torn from the decorator's reproduction copy of Albertus Seba's *Cabinet of Natural Curiosities*. Referential scientific, anthropological, and decorative objects were arranged and now suggest ongoing additions by the family. **OPPOSITE** The principal room opens to the veranda, to a large courtyard, and to corridors and rooms at all four corners. It's the busy and accommodating social nexus of the house. **OVERLEAF** Deep back-to-back sofas face the fireplace and the dining area, respectively. They are slipcovered in Perennials' Linen. There's also a relaxed mix of modern rattan, cane-backed antiques, and exotic accessories. A familiar and "easy-for-the-beach" blue-and-white color scheme is accented by bits of orangy-pink coral.







ABOVE The jaunty pattern of blue, brown, and white Cuban tiles “papering” the walls in the kitchen reprises the color scheme of adjacent living areas. The steel range hood, painted white to match the woodwork, quiets the visual “noise.” Lazy Lucy outdoor dining chairs are equally at home at the veranda and kitchen tables. They are moved back and forth, depending on the crowd. **OPPOSITE** The enormous, low-silled window slides entirely into the wall and creates an arresting picture frame for the palm-dotted view of the ocean.





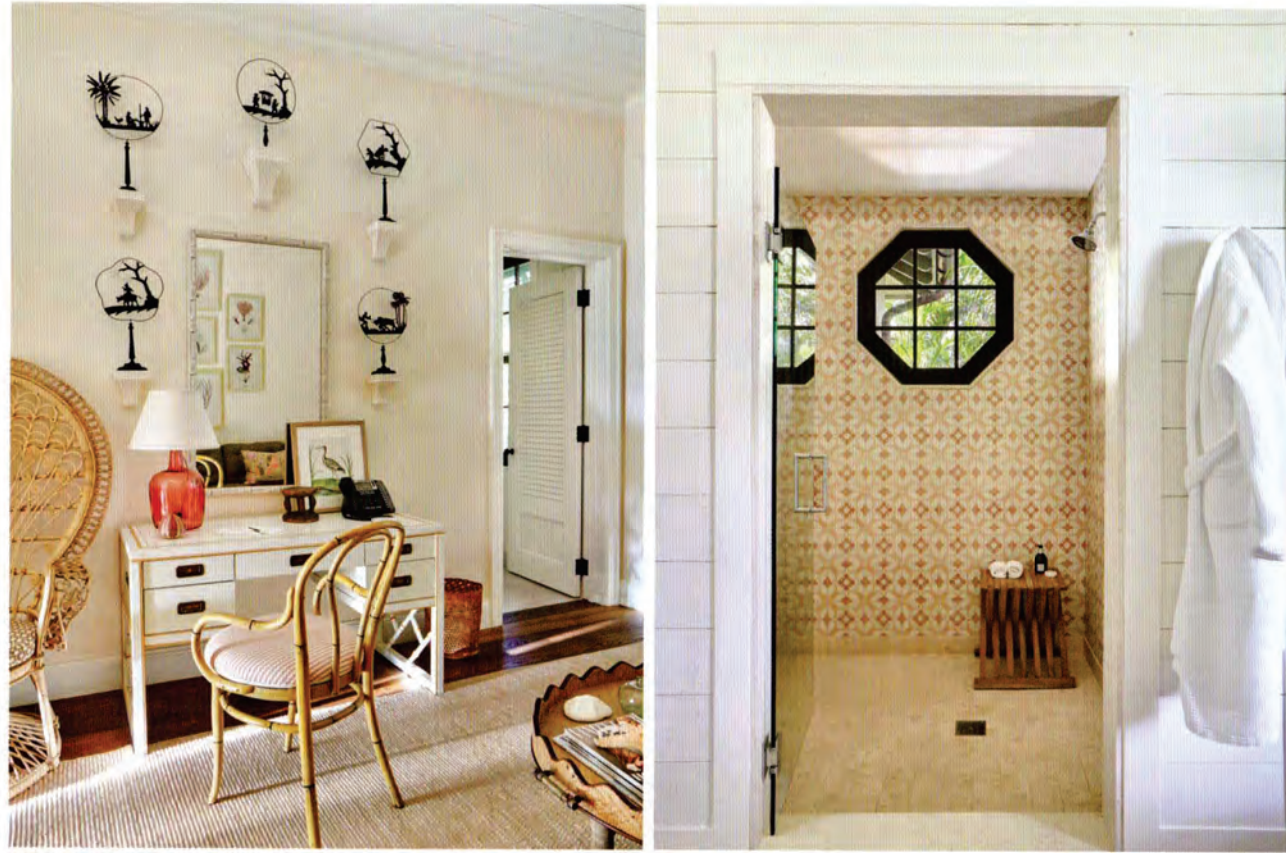
OPPOSITE The courtyard is bracketed by bedroom halls, which are designed to resemble enclosed verandas. They terminate in hip-roofed one-room pavilions. **ABOVE** The salient feature of the boys' room is an embroidered reproduction of a 1789 map of Africa made in India by Ranjana Khan Home. The actual map appears over the bar next to the living room. The bedside table marries two vintage rattan night tables with a mahogany base and a tray made by the Raj Company. They can be separated if the beds need to be pushed together. **OVERLEAF** Another embroidered hanging from Ranjana Khan Home hangs in the master bedroom behind the pickled-teak and cane bed. A fussy dust skirt was eschewed here and wherever else possible. The facing chairs from Bielecky may have the most advantageous spot in the house. The clients joke that this is where they have their *House of Cards* moments.





ABOVE The cypress-lined study has the air of a captain's bridge. It features a 270-degree view of the garden. The ocean lies "dead ahead" from the extra-long campaign-style desk, which was made for the room. **OPPOSITE** The comfort of various tub shapes was debated, but in the end we went with Waterworks' Candide model for its sublime silhouette against the protective and decorative panel of Cuban tile.





ABOVE LEFT An anachronistic but useful boudoir is adjacent to the master bedroom. It's decorated with a set of antique fan frames, most likely from Indochina. The intricate silhouettes tell entire Kara Walker-like stories. **ABOVE RIGHT** The baths were all "color coded" with unique tonal combinations in the same patterned tile. **BELOW AND OPPOSITE** Another wing contains a feminine suite of rooms for the girls in the family. The twin beds were painted white and, in a divergence from the Indian theme, the mirrors are Mexican tinwork studded with turquoise stones.





ABOVE The "little house" facing the bay at the western end of the property serves as a guesthouse. A swimming pool and a dock populated with boats for fishing and other watersports compete with the lovely prospect of *dolce far niente*. **OPPOSITE** Masonry banquettes fitted with cushions bring a hint of Cape Dutch style to the terrace.





OPPOSITE Paneled in textural whitewashed pecky cypress, the central room has a beachy "soul." The sunny color scheme purposefully diverges from that of the big house to set a palpably different tone. The large and colorful encaustic painting over the sofa was serendipitously found in a Palm Beach shop when the scheme had already been determined. **ABOVE** The room is full of surprises. The white-lacquered tabletop conceals a full-size billiards surface, and the four-part map of the Bahamas folds back to reveal a television.



LEFT Golf carts arrive from the big house and park under transplanted banyans shipped from Florida. Also from Florida came the suite of custom-designed rattan furniture fitted with cushions covered in Perennials' Linen, which can be scrubbed clean with soap and water. The striped rug of wool interwoven with tough jute fiber has the look of a multicolored and beach-appropriate sisal. **ABOVE** The tile pattern in the kitchen is the same as the one in the big house but in a different color combination. The endearing, white-enameled Big Chill refrigerator is set in a niche like the old-fashioned fridge it is not. **OVERLEAF** Hallways in symmetrical flanking wings lead to the guest rooms.





OPPOSITE In a guest room, the window folds out of sight, and an insect screen can be rolled down at night. The low-slung bamboo-and-brass daybed is a rare model by Jacques Adnet. **ABOVE** These twin beds share a single, wall-mounted headboard. The multi-hued striped fabric from Lee Jofa furthers the nautical atmosphere established by framed charts of the surrounding waters. The dock is only steps away. **OVERLEAF** Sunsets here rarely fail to take the breath away.





DUNMORE TOWN ON TINY, REMOTE HARBOUR Island in the Bahamas is a trove of charming houses dating back to the Loyalist era in the late eighteenth century. Vernacular shipwright's cottages made from native pine and a few grander ones made of stuccoed coral stone girded by wooden verandas line the harbor front. Beyond the village, along the two-and-a-half-mile length of the very narrow island, are several generations of straightforward holiday houses for winter residents from all over the world. More recently, Harbour Island has been abuzz with building and has become a hotbed of activity for an international and cosmopolitan group of architects and decorators.

A coconut's throw from the harbor on the windward side, overlooking what is said to be one of the best beaches in the world, is the Dunmore, a beach club and hotel. The rolling, verdant grounds are dotted with guest cottages and a recently constructed series of more elaborate (and staffed) villas built by the hotel's American owner. A single architect provided the common thread for these successively built villas. Stylistically similar, they form a pleasing grouping of syncopated yet compatible volumes in varying materials and subtle colors.

Bahamian building styles were fully embraced but recalibrated for the requirements of today's holiday residents. This house, the fourth in the series, appears to be a modest raftered cottage from the front gate, but is in fact a complex three-bedroom structure equipped with all the latest mod-cons. And down the dune beyond, there's also a guest cottage and pool.

The Dunmore's owner, whose day job is "Texas real estate magnate," took particular interest in the architectural possibilities and the construction process. He was eager to apply the lessons learned about the vagaries of the weather and the arrangement of the rooms from the building of the three earlier villas. Thankfully, he was a laissez-faire decorator. He had left the furnishing of all these successively "flipped" villas to a roster of august decorators. I may have been fourth in the queue but was still happy to oblige.

The materials for the interior are in the vernacular "less-so" category, but none is inappropriate or out of place. Imported pecky cypress and Cuban tile were used liberally. Both are longstanding Harbour Island traditions.

Furniture in bug-resistant teak and forgiving rustic finishes was designed and ordered from India. As usual, great emphasis was put on durable fabrics, mostly outdoor ones, used even inside to resist wet bathing suits. The carpets are all close to the color of beach sand.

As usual with projects in these remote places, the decorator arrives prepared. Every single piece of furniture, pillow, sheet, glass, and fork was collected in the States over the construction period, delivered via containers, and installed in one fell swoop. It's a bit like making a birthday cake on a camping trip. Careful planning and strategic preparation are critical.

The cheerful staff of the club was there to greet the new residents when they arrived at their very thoroughly complete house. The veranda seems to hang over the world's best beach. They say this newest house in paradise is "the keeper."

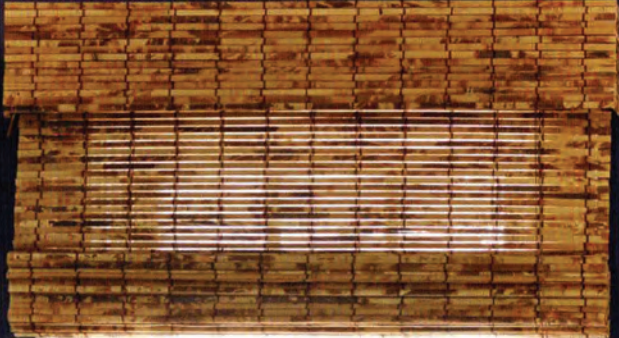
Harbour Island

OPPOSITE Pickled pecky cypress takes its first bow in the entrance hall of this Harbour Island house. Though the decorator suggested materials and finishes, Maria de la Guardia of de la Guardia Victoria Architects & Urbanists designed the house and its many charming Caribbean details.



ABOVE AND OPPOSITE Pickled pecky cypress makes a second appearance on the living room ceiling over wide, white-painted plank walls. The rusticated jute-and-wool striped rug is from Studio Four. The decorator designed the octagonal center table and durable inset travertine top. It was finished in a similar driftwood-like "pickling" to echo the ceiling. Above the sofa is a large-scale work on paper by the English artist Christopher Brooks, a frequent Harbour Island visitor. The backgammon table is set with extra Palecek dining chairs. They mimic the vintage Albini "conversation" chairs that are pulled up to the seating areas.







PRECEDING PAGES From the living room, there are two deep blue views: the sea and the dining room. Its walls are painted in Benjamin Moore's high-gloss Champion Cobalt. Most of the time, the square dining table is pulled up to the banquette. When centered in the room, it can be expanded with the semicircle side tables that flank the doorway (out of frame). A framed Noguchi lantern makes a graphic and restorative bull's-eye "painting." The unlined curtains are an indoor/outdoor fabric that withstands the intense Bahamian sun. **ABOVE** Moroccan tile covers the backsplash and the counters of the cozy bar. It is only a few steps from the living room, entrance hall, and front veranda. **OPPOSITE** The decorator eschews upper cabinets whenever possible, allowing patterned kitchen walls to carry the day. The Cuban-style Katie tile is from Villa Lagoon Tile. The Raj Company made the kitchen island, which was fitted with a Caesarstone top after it arrived from Mumbai. The kitchen floor is impervious porcelain, chosen to flow seamlessly into the coral stone-like travertine floors throughout.





LEFT The guest cottage is approached via the convivial pool terrace but opens to its own private porch and exclusive view. The decorator rarely uses printed fabrics for curtains, but here, Schumacher's relaxed Tree of Life-patterned cotton Palampore-seamed apt. The print contains as many blues as can be seen in the ever-changing scene beyond the doors. **ABOVE** In this guest bathroom, the vanity and its stone top came directly from Restoration Hardware. **OVERLEAF LEFT** Another bath has a permanent sun-loving guest: an Alex Katz beach towel by the Art Production Fund is framed under glass. **OVERLEAF RIGHT** A durable Telas de Lenguas woven cotton makes a sensible headboard and upholstered bed platforms for this twin bedroom. The purple colorway is a twist on this traditional, usually blue and white, Majorcan fabric. A one-of-a-kind purple batik sarong hac just enough yardage for the two decorative pillows. Palms abound on the property, so the fan-shaped leaves can always be replaced before the arrival of new guests.





To enliven the playroom, the plaster walls were painted peacock blue in a faux-bois pattern by Frank Reijnen. Black-and-white photos of shells from a vintage conchology book were enlarged and framed for the walls. The wicker chairs swivel toward an unseen and very large television. Vintage "tulip" uplights by Swiss designer Max Bill are classics of modernism. They alleviate any need for ceiling lighting.



OPPOSITE The tall, pickled-teak tester bed was made in India for the tray-ceilinged master bedroom. Without a canopy and hangings, moving air is unimpeded. Wicker and rattan abound: chairs, dressers, baskets, and accessories. Even the ivory ceramic bedside lamps are lashed in split caning. **ABOVE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT** Another set of shell photographs, these in faded "vintage" color, make a pretty and locally pertinent display. Detail of an exceptionally elegant rattan peacock chair. The single fabric panel behind the bed softens the room in the absence of curtains, which would crowd the windows.



TOP AND ABOVE Hipped roofs, shutters, louvered porches, and intimate scale are several of the Harbour Island traditions skillfully employed by de la Guardia Victoria Architects & Urbanists. **RIGHT** As the pool terrace and the guest cottage are down an incline from the house, the view of the ocean is unobstructed. The comfort of the veranda furniture belies its indoor/outdoor durability. Only a few cotton batik pillows and the two vintage rattan conversation chairs need ever be brought inside.



