



From left: Wyler House villa; Fisher House villa.

## MUSTIQUE

A true fantasy island.

by **Cameron Johnson**

It is entirely possible that when you take the late-afternoon flight from Barbados to the island you will land just as the sun is beginning its dip to meet the horizon. That is not a bad thing; the lengthening shadows will make your approach to the island that much more dramatic by highlighting the shoreline, hills, and valleys. But it will mean that it will likely be dark by the time you are driven up to your villa. From your room, the view, breathtaking in the daylight, is lost in the dark, with nothing but a few faraway lights—whether they're from boats or homes, it's difficult to tell—and so you must take in the picture using mainly sounds. And the sound you will notice first, above all others, is one you may not recognize. It comes from tree frogs, a chirpy kind of noise that's surprisingly loud given the size of the tiny creatures. It's rather soothing, and as you unpack your suitcase, the frogs' songs, the sound of the wind ruffling the palm trees, and the crash of waves from the nearby beach all come together in a relaxation-inducing soundscape of unrivalled efficacy.

This is Mustique, a 5.7-square-kilometre island in the country of St. Vincent and the Grenadines in the Caribbean. The population of the island is usually in the vicinity of 1,000, depending on the season and the number of guests, but an exact number is difficult to come by; a precise census is not a priority here.

That's because Mustique is a privately owned island devoted to relaxation and, notably, privacy. But what makes this place different from other sun-drenched destinations with the same mandate is the way in which that privacy is maintained; specifically, without the need for security gates at every turn. Here, by the very nature of its being an island, privacy is a given—which is another reason Mustique is the relaxation location preferred by the myriad celebrities who are regular visitors. (Although the staff are professionally reluctant to drop names, it's known that Mick Jagger, Pierce Brosnan, and Tommy Hilfiger enjoy the island's beauty.)

"In order to set foot on the island, you basically have to be invited," says Ty Kovach, the chief operating officer of the island. "If you're here, you know you're in good standing. ... Our security

keeps a close eye on who arrives on the island." As a result, Mustique is well known throughout the world by superstars and savvy world travellers alike.

For accommodation, the enchanting Cotton House hotel—the only one on the island—is a member of the Leading Small Hotels of the World. It includes 17 rooms, two restaurants, and a terrific spa. But the name of the main residence game here is villas.

The 72 villas for rent through the Mustique Rental Company, all privately owned and built, are fantastic spectacles of design and incorporate every conceivable amenity. To say they vary in style is a vast understatement; one might resemble an Italian villa, another is modelled after a castle, another illustrates the modernist movement in microcosm. Such a mix of style could appear ersatz or gaudy—especially in such a natural setting—but the houses are sparse and so effectively landscaped into the surrounding greenery that it's never an issue. And the company, ever mindful of the main selling point of the island, has gone to great lengths to limit development and preserve the quiet, relaxed *genius loci*. The sale of properties has essentially been capped, which means the light sprinkling of villas will remain just that.

The sense of a community is most evident on Tuesday evenings, when the Cotton House hosts a cocktail party for villa owners, visitors, and anyone else on the island. The goal of these get-togethers is to help newcomers meet the neighbours; after all, the population of the island is not much more than that of a small town.

"You simply must come up and visit our place," says one villa owner, barely two minutes after having met us. We take her up on the offer, and the following day we drop by her home, which is modelled after a Moroccan castle. "We invite you into a fantasy," she says, waving her hand at the extraordinary view: sitting atop one of the highest points on the island, we can take in most of Mustique—the glistening beach, the quiet forest, the occasional villa poking through the foliage—all in one glance.

Along with the beaches and the spa at the Cotton House, Basil's Beach Bar is worth a visit. There are also various outdoor activities: trails for hiking and horseback riding, boat trips around the island, and such. Once a year, the Mustique Blues Festival takes the stage at Basil's. But these are bonus activities, more the exception than the rule of a relaxing stay at Mustique.

And those on the island wouldn't have it any other way. They know the value of privacy, quiet, and isolation. They know that Mustique is a sanctuary unlike any other in the world. ●