

the house that jack built

ST JOHN DEVELOPER EMBRACES NATURE
AND CREATES A BEACHFRONT VILLA WHICH
IS LOVED FOR ALL ITS PERFECT IMPERFECTIONS

PETER BAY IS THE HIGHLY COVETED ADDRESS OF ST JOHN, US VIRGIN ISLANDS. This north-shore neighbourhood is synonymous with affluence and prestige. The homes here are sprawling multi-million dollar manors of perfection, their immaculately maintained finishes gleaming under red tile roofs. But the home of the man who started it all, who transformed Peter Bay from an undeveloped 38-acre overgrown parcel to an enclave for the well-heeled, has a decidedly different feel.

Peter Bay developer Jack Andrews's Beach House, positioned right along the neighbourhood's white sandy beachfront, feels as though it's been there for hundreds of years, through the island's Danish plantation period, its 1917 transfer to the United States, and its subsequent discovery by the tourism industry in the late 20th century.

Rather than fight nature in an effort to keep his three-bedroom beachfront villa pristine, Jack Andrews has allowed the island's moist north-shore environment to work its magic. Tropical vines climb the villa's walls; trees are blanketed by downy, verdant moss. Lush greenery and brilliant tropical flowers burst from planters and line the outdoor walkways that connect the home's interior spaces.

"I just wanted it to look old, like it had been there for hundreds of years," Andrews explains. "It's beautiful as far as I'm concerned."

The home's architecture adds greatly to the old-world feel that Andrews sought for his St John home. Virginia-based architect Michael Oxman, who's designed several houses on St John, worked with Andrews to include subtle touches that make the Beach House feel hundreds of years old rather than its true age of just a few decades. Thick mullions divide the windows into small panes; walls are thicker at the openings, giving the illusion of thick walls throughout. The home's plaster is rough and imperfect; curiously, this look was difficult to achieve.

"The men putting on the stucco would try to make it perfectly flat and smooth, but I don't like that look because it doesn't have texture," says Andrews. "It was difficult for me to get them to not make it so smooth. Finally, I told them to just put on a rough coat and we'll come back a second time to put the finish coat on. So they quickly put on the coat, trowelled it out, and that rough coat came out the way I like it."

The living room's overstuffed furniture and dark, heavy woods throughout the home also evoke the old-world feel. In fact, some of the furniture is as old as Andrews wants his home to appear. Several of the Beach House's hutches, armoires, shelving, and the large dining room table were imported from Haiti by St John boutique Bamboula. Many of the items originated from France in the 17th century. Ipe, an incredibly dense and durable tropical hardwood, is featured prominently from the main house's staircase and handrail to the master bedroom floor.

"There was a big pier that was going to be built in St Thomas about 50 years prior to when we were building the Beach House, and they'd imported all this ipe for the pier, but it never got built," says Andrews. "They ended up needing to remove the wood, so I picked up several truckloads of three-inch beams and planks for less than \$15,000."

In addition to helping curate Andrews's desired old-world feel, the ipe—which was also used in part of the home's structure—gave the Beach House the strength to survive the two major hurricanes that struck the Virgin Islands since the home was built: Hugo in 1989 and Marilyn in 1995.





Andrews also wanted his island abode to feel warm and welcoming to his family and friends, and to the vacationers who rent his villa when he's back home in Virginia.

"We wanted a place where people could come in with wet bathing suits and sand on their feet," he says. "There's a large Persian carpet in the living room with a lot of yellow, which hides the sand. We chose furniture that could withstand wet bathing suits."

It's possible the home appears a touch too welcoming, as Andrews discovered the day an Italian couple wandered into his home from off the beach and asked what time dinner was served.

"I invited them in and suggested they join us for a glass of wine," Andrews recalls. "After a while they said, 'This is not a hotel, is it?' I said, 'No, this is my home.' They came back the next day with a whole load of Italian food and we partied on the beach."

A few weeks after their encounter, Andrews received in the mail first-class plane tickets to Italy to attend the jazz festival in Perugia, Italy—which, it turns out, was a production of his unintentional house guest. Andrews attended the festival and revelled in the charm and history of a true old-world city.

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ABOVE V
RIGHT ABOVE C
RIGHT C

The Beach House has proven to be an ideal oasis for celebrities who come to St John in search of a respite from all that the life of a celebrity entails. A large dish near the dining room table holds a curious collection of coconuts that, upon closer inspection, reveal celebrity autographs. American football superstar Peyton Manning’s signature graces one of the coconuts; Kenny Chesney, who famously celebrated his short-lived marriage with Renee Zellweger on the very beach that the Beach House fronts, has also left his mark on the autograph collection.

It would seem that celebrities have been drawn to the Beach House property since before the home was even built. During the 1980s development of Peter

Bay—which Andrews purchased with the help of Peter Griffith, St John real estate agent and father of actress Melanie Griffith—big-name stars such as Madonna and Arnold Schwarzenegger considered purchasing lot 13A, though none of them decided to act. In the end, Jack took 13A for himself.

Andrews didn’t just put Peter Bay on the map; he’s also to thank for the red tile roofs that have become a St John status symbol in their own right. During the design phase with Michael, his architect and longtime friend, the duo sought a way to tie together the home’s freestanding elements.

“The objective was to create an element—a theme—that would tie all the architecture together,”



LEFT V
BELOW C

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says Andrews. "We decided the most visible thing would be the roof, so we decided to use red tile. We made that a standard in Peter Bay's design covenants. Subsequently, everybody wanted to have the red tile roofs like Peter Bay."

For all the home's unique charm and beauty, its showstopper architectural element relies on the brilliant blue water for which St John's north shore is so well-known. Upon arriving at the Beach House, you must first pass through a heavy wooden gate that offers no hints to what lies beyond. Swing the gate doors open, and prepare yourself for the thrilling surprise of the kind of beauty that stops you in your tracks. There before you, a plaster-coated arch supported by four columns frames the home's long, narrow swimming pool, which reaches out to the cerulean waters of the Atlantic. This is the one place where landscaping was removed to enhance aesthetics, offering the perfect window out to sea. The skill of the architect is evident here in the way the architecture dances so harmoniously with nature. In a house whose aim is to appear old, imperfect, rough around the edges, your first experience with the Beach House is one of unforgettable perfection.M



IF YOU GO:

- 1 There is no airport on St John, so to get here you'll fly into the Cyril E. King Airport on nearby St Thomas, which is serviced by several major airlines including American, Delta, JetBlue, United, and US Airways. Direct flights arrive from a handful of major cities including New York-JFK, Chicago-O'Hare, Atlanta, and Washington-Dulles. Once you arrive on St. Thomas, you'll take a 30-minute taxi ride to Red Hook, where you'll catch a ferry to Cruz Bay, St John. The ferry ride is approximately 20 minutes.
- 2 A rental car is recommended, and there are plenty of rental car companies on St. John. There are also many open-air taxis called "safaris," and hitchhiking is a very common, safe, and accepted mode of transportation here.
- 3 Bring decent hiking shoes, a swimsuit, snorkel gear, and a good book.
- 4 Getting out on the water is a must when you're on St John. The nearby British Virgin Islands beg to be explored. Create your own itinerary with smaller private boats, like Palm Tree Charters (www.palmtreecharters.com), or spread out and relax on beautiful, handmade Kekoa (www.blacksailsvi.com).
- 5 If a trip to the BVI is on your itinerary—and it should be!— don't forget to bring your passport.