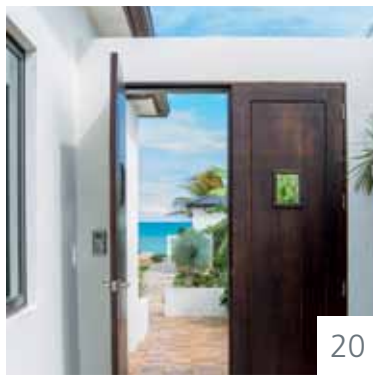


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THE COVER

A few footsteps, an open door, and Nature's drama awaits at the cliff-top Antigua home of Dr Joey John and his wife Laurie.

PHOTOGRAPHER JONATHAN MURPHY



PERCHED ON A SMALL CLIFF IN CROSBIES ON ANTIGUA'S NORTHERN COASTLINE, WHERE THE TRANQUIL CARIBBEAN SEA MEETS THE WILD ATLANTIC OCEAN, IS THE HOME OF DR JOEY JOHN AND HIS WIFE LAURIE. FEATURED HERE IN MACO VOLUME 15 ISSUE 1.

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OF DAHLKE'S PAINTINGS BUT STILL KEEPS ITS INNOCENCE

the virgin house

WRITER ANDREA MILAM PHOTOGRAPHER DON HEBERT

WE SPEED ACROSS ST THOMAS ROADS, THE SOUNDS OF METROPOLITAN ISLAND LIFE PERMEATING THE CAR AND INVADING OUR CONVERSATION.

Varied genres of music—dancehall, reggaeton, roots reggae—drift out of roadside bars. Concrete trucks, a common sight in the US Virgin Islands despite the economic collapse of the past few years, barrel down the road in a hurry to arrive at the latest new-build. Open-air taxis stuffed to the brim with eager tourists whiz by, their drivers relaying island lore and pointing out important sights over a loudspeaker.

Gradually, the sights and sounds of St Thomas's commercial district, Red Hook, give way to quieter streets lined with private homes, and suddenly, without warning, the car dives off the road and down a driveway so unnoticeable from the main thoroughfare that I peer left at my driver—interior designer Kurt Hakansson—to make sure this diversion was intended.

After a short jaunt down the driveway, lined heavily on either side with typical island forest, I'm following Mr Hakansson down a set of stone stairs, his brisk pace betraying his eagerness to show off the brilliant home renovation undertaken by his firm, Haddad Hakansson. We pass under a whitewashed wood awning before stopping at the entrance to the home's living room.

I pause on the brick walkway, taking in the sight before me: muted blush-coloured wooden shutter doors, their recessed panels outlined with a thin swipe of golden yellow, are open flat against the home's robin egg-blue exterior. Framed perfectly by this medley of classically Caribbean colours is the living room, whose gleaming white marble floors reflect its collection of contemporary furniture and the clean lines of its exposed-rafter whitewashed wood ceiling.



In the far corner of the living room, the home's owner, a distinguished man in his seventies, is reclined in an elegant teak and rattan British Colonial steamer chair, a glass of red wine in hand, eyes closed as he soaks up the serenity of the light jazz music notes drifting around the room. I feel like I've stepped into a painting; and in a way, I kind of have.

The tableau one experiences upon entering this fully renovated 1960s home overlooking St Thomas's iconic Magens Bay is no accident. In fact, it's an homage to artist Don Dahlke, whose whimsical oil paintings of traditional Caribbean scenery framed by open doors and windows, were a significant inspiration during the home's recent overhaul.

"I kept asking people to come up with a Caribbean palette of colours, and they would bring me these ochres and browns—Italian palazzo colours," says the home's owner, referring to the Italianate villa style of architecture and design that's currently sweeping the Virgin Islands. "I said, 'no, I want the bright colours.' So I suggested Don Dahlke, and he came here and pulled together a bunch of different schemes."

Hakansson adds, "He did these little three-by-five paintings, and we picked two combinations out of those." Dahlke, an international artist, evokes the warmth and allure of West Indian life, and is known for framing views through the architecture of windows.



PREVIOUS PAGE Entrance to the living room
 ABOVE LEFT The courtyard suggests Italian villa style
 LEFT Outdoor dining
 ABOVE Entrance is marked by blush doors outlined in yellow

IT'S AN HOMAGE TO ARTIST DON DAHLKE, WHOSE WHIMSICAL OIL PAINTINGS OF TRADITIONAL CARIBBEAN SCENERY FRAMED BY OPEN DOORS AND WINDOWS, WERE A SIGNIFICANT INSPIRATION DURING THE HOME'S RECENT OVERHAUL

Dahlke's mock-ups are still displayed as a piece of artwork in one of the two guest bedrooms, while the colour scheme he chose for the dwelling's exterior announces to visitors that they are entering a home whose architecture, landscape, and even owner, will bring them back to 1960s life in the Virgin Islands.

The home's owner is a real estate developer who splits his time between St Thomas and Massachusetts but who grew up in St Thomas.

"I think that when my father came back from World War II, they wanted to move to a warmer climate, and St Thomas was the place that popped up on the radar," he explains. "Everybody was running in those days from creditors, criminal records, ex-wives, looking for cheap booze. I don't really know why my parents came here, but they did."

Upon arriving in the mid-1940s, the family lived at first in downtown Charlotte Amalie, where the majority of island residents had their homes. It wasn't until about 15 years later that they purchased approximately five acres overlooking Magens Bay, a pristine stretch of sand that often finds itself on lists of the world's most beautiful beaches.

Unlike the grand luxury homes built in the Virgin Islands today, the home was built at a reasonable scale for its time, relying on extensive openings and outdoor spaces to give it a feeling of greatness.

"Nobody lived outside of town in those days," says the homeowner. "They all claimed it'd be an eternity before anybody ventured out of town, so this was pretty pioneering."

In 1960, the family traded in the hustle and bustle of Charlotte Amalie for the incredible peace of five acres out in the country, looking down over Magens's glimmering white sands and brilliant turquoise sea. Although he'd left for college and to do a stint in the US Air Force, the homeowner returned to this abode over the years, bringing his children to visit his mother, who passed away in 2008 less than two years shy of her 100th birthday.

"By the time my mother passed away, the house was honestly pretty grim," he admits. "I suspect that in the early Sixties, the concrete was made with sea salt, which eventually rotted the electrical conduit and the plumbing. The underground maze of pipes had plugged up, and I was ready to—I hate to admit it—take a bulldozer to this thing and level it out."

UNLIKE THE GRAND LUXURY HOMES BUILT IN THE VIRGIN ISLANDS TODAY,
THE HOME WAS BUILT AT A REASONABLE SCALE FOR ITS TIME,
RELYING ON EXTENSIVE OPENINGS AND OUTDOOR SPACES
TO GIVE IT A FEELING OF GREATNESS

BELOW Living room with gleaming marble floor and exposed rafters



DESPITE A NEAR-COMPLETE OVERHAUL,
THE HOME'S ORIGINAL AURA REMAINS.

IT'S A TRUE OASIS AMONG THE
SURPRISINGLY BUSY PACE OF LIFE
ON ST THOMAS TODAY



Instead, he found a contractor who said he could fix the problems, and then Hakansson worked with him on the renovation. "It was time to turn over a new leaf, move on, move into the next decade. I don't think my mother would approve," the homeowner adds with a playful smile.

Despite a near-complete overhaul, the home's original aura remains. It's a true oasis among the surprisingly busy pace of life on St Thomas today. The three main freestanding structures are connected with outdoor spaces, predominantly laid in brick, where Dahlke's colours set a cheerful tone. Featured prominently in the courtyard between the living room and bedrooms is a simple stone fountain, whose bubbling water brings a heightened level of peace to the already tranquil ambience. Lining the walkways, tucked into corners, and surrounding the fountain are lush potted plants, pulling the very nature of the home site's fertile land into the dwelling itself. A meandering stone path, original to the home's 1960 construction, opens up to a large pool, where the homeowner makes sure to take a dip at least once a day.

There are no gates, fences, or locks; the home's security is provided by the maid and the gardener, who've both resided and worked at the property for more than half a century.

"It never occurred to me to change how open the house is," says the homeowner. "It was built in an era when you wouldn't have worried about that. I look at the McMansions that everybody builds, heavily air conditioned and fortified, and I think life's too short to live like that."

The home's furnishings and décor are devoid of the typical brightly flowered upholstery, wicker materials,

and general Caribbean kitsch, and the refined pieces—including a handsome teak four-poster bed, original to the home that still welcomes visitors in the guest room—manage to meld perfectly with Dahlke's colours.

"We struck a balance between finding things that work here while still meeting the homeowner's aesthetic appreciation for things that are not traditionally Caribbean," explains Hakansson. "I wouldn't think to take a heavy red chenille fabric and put it in a location like this, but it works," he adds, nodding toward the living room's bold, dominating couch. "You can very quickly become a caricature of what your style is, and we didn't want to do that here. There's a simplicity or gentleness to the home...I feel it could just envelop me."

It's time for me to make a reluctant departure. We leave the oasis behind, and I brace myself for the return to the 21st century.M



ABOVE Swimming pool amidst thick foliage

RIGHT Garden feature reflects peace and serenity of the oasis

FAR RIGHT Patio looks out to garden and beyond

