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July+August 2010: The Green Issue

Cover Story: WATG's Green Team

Thompson Takes Toronto

YLH Convenes at Luxor

India's Exotic Le Sutra





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On the cover: Left to Right: WATG’s Shaun Hannah, Krystal Solorzano, Grace McClurg and Rashana Zaklit



One of the resort's four cottages; shrubbery hides its elevation off the ground.



Heather Lockington

Cotton Tree: Braving the Storm

A luxurious retreat boasts ready-for-the-elements design

BY KELLY HUSHIN

Every locale has its own definition of a sustainable retreat. In a busy metropolitan area, it's often about conserving energy or cutting back on waste. In a remote village, it might be about preserving a section of rain forest. But in a place like the Cayman Islands, sustainability is about making sure you don't have to reconstruct your resort after next season's hurricane.

That's what it was about for Heather Lockington, the passionate and involved owner of Cotton Tree, a new boutique resort on Grand Cayman composed of four luxury cottages and various on-site amenities. When she and architect Joelle Meghoo of MJM Design Studio reviewed plans for the new property, which would sit only a few feet above a serene white-sand beach, they had to look beyond sourcing materials that merely looked or felt green to elements that could stand up to whatever Mother Nature might bring on.

"Sustainability needs to be considered in the context of the environment and over

the long term," says Lockington. "That is why Cotton Tree's cottages have concrete roofs. Something built of wood may feel natural and sustainable, but it is going to have to survive storms, sea spray and termites. Rebuilding the cottages every year doesn't strike me as sustainable."

Hurricanes were at the top of their list of concerns when planning the develop-

ment, which took about three-and-a-half years. Meghoo, who leveraged experience gained while working on the Hyatt hotel on Grand Cayman's tourist hotspot, Seven Mile Beach, collaborated with Lockington to create a serene and contemporary feel at Cotton Tree while also taking into account the environmental challenges of the island.



Aerial view of the resort.



Left: A master bedroom in the two-bedroom cottages.

Below (left to right): A dining area in one of the cottages; a master bathroom.

“As Hurricane Ivan was fresh in our minds, the structural integrity was a priority,” says Meghoo. “It was Heather’s idea to have a concrete roof over the houses below the zinc-finished trussed roof used for its authenticity, and to raise the cottages on pillars”—a traditional construction technique on the island.

The cottages draw on past lessons learned in the Cayman Islands. Like counterparts around the world, builders on the Caymans elevate structures to prevent flooding and allow for more cooling, thereby minimizing the need for air-conditioning. A large cistern collects water used

for watering the grounds, which play host to various wildlife and local flora, including banana trees that produce succulent mini-versions of the fruit Lockington serves to her guests at breakfast.

Being involved in every aspect of the resort from its development to its current operation, Lockington takes the hotel owner’s role to a new level, spending much of her time on property. Her goal is to offer true Caymanian hospitality in a property that reflects local sensibilities with a modern bent. It was not easy for her and the team to specify materials and furnishings, especially since Lockington was in

England with her daughter for part of the time during the process. But once they settled on ocean colors outside, focal walls for emphasis inside and found furniture collections from Adriana Hoyos, the design scheme started to come together.

“We wanted to arrive at a modern design with traditional roots,” says Meghoo, “a modern interpretation on Caribbean architecture. It was our first time designing a boutique hotel and the challenge was to make each cottage feel private—unique on the inside while maintaining a certain cohesiveness.”

It was also very important to Lockington that local activities and influences were brought onto the property, such as a painting class with a local artist and outdoor spa treatments by the sea from a Caymanian spa therapist.

“My vision for Cotton Tree is really based on what I like to do when at home, and my hope is other families feel the same,” says Lockington. “This vision is reflected in the local products I use, the local art, the local activities available, the design of the cottages and the seclusion and privacy that has been planned at the location.” **BD**

