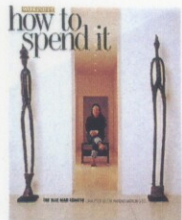


# how to spend it

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The good guy who broke the mould, p30. Photograph: Clive Frost

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44



18



37

**8 THIS TABLE IS BOUGHT BY RICH AND POOR...**

Jonathan Margolis asks what, exactly, is the secret of IKEA's global appeal?

**16 PAST MASTERS**

Ned Denny heralds the thriving trade in titles

**18 CHILLER VILLAS**

James Henderson tracks down Caribbean villas offering peace, privacy and a mesmerising view

**27 THE SUIT THAT CAME IN FROM THE COLD**

Simon Mills on the tailors and designers who are breathing new life into "black tie"

**30 THE NICE MAN COMETH**

Damian Foxe meets John Rocha, the designer whose empire is thriving despite suggestions that he had committed professional suicide

**37 ME & MY GAME**

Liz Gill talks to six winning individuals about their less than trivial pursuits

**43 ECLECTIBLES**

Philippa Clark acquires delectable knick-knacks

**44 THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY**

Damian Foxe on plumped-up fashion

**59 FERRARI GTO, £6.59M O.N.O.**

Simon de Burton on a car that could become the most expensive motor ever sold at auction

**63 A FRAGRANT NEW DAWN**

Sniffing the zeitgeist, Lucia van der Post says today's scents need to do more than smell nice

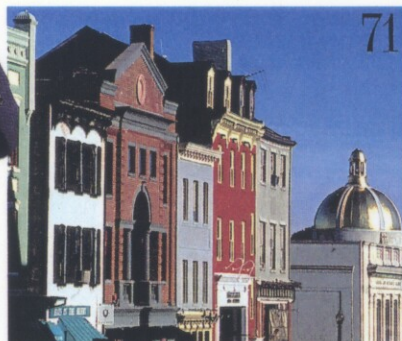
**69 TECHNOPSIS**

Jonathan Margolis explores gizmo boulevard

**71 THE SMOOTH GUIDE**

Rupert Wright gives Washington his vote

**74-78 INSIDER TRADING**  
**WRY SOCIETY THE CULT SHOP**  
**E-NOUGH PRIVATE VIEWING**  
**ALL OVER THE SHOP OBJECT LESSON**  
**PLEASURE ZONE EX DIRECTORY**  
**THE LUX COLUMN**



71



8



where early architecture was derived from marine techniques.) Protected by the bedrooms, which catch the ocean breeze to keep them cool, the kitchen, living room and pool are open-sided and calm. In its dramatic setting on a cliff-top on the windward side of St Barts, Maison Cap au Vent offers the ultimate in privacy. It is decorated with Italian ceramics and paintings of local architecture. And all this against the magnificent ocean backdrop, studded with offshore islands, and a pool which mimics the ocean.

The Dominican Republic seems an unlikely place to find true luxury. As one of the Caribbean's poorest countries, its tourism consists mostly of all-inclusive hotels with knobbly knee competitions and mounded buffet food. But there are also enclaves of great wealth there.

Casa de Campo is a huge country club compound ranged around a series of golf courses. The Dominican designer Oscar de la Renta may recently have moved on (to Punta Cana on the east coast, where he has overseen the development of some very comfortable new villas), but Casa de Campo is still worth considering because it has a huge number of exquisite houses – besides a few grandiose monstrosities – about 180 of which are for rent.

Perhaps the most striking villa in the compound stands in Bahía Chavón. Designed by American architect Hugh Newell Jacobsen, this is an exercise in tropical minimalism, a delightful series of tall white buildings with slender wooden columns and steeply pitched

## A view over uninterrupted ocean is mesmeric, but the finest sight in the Caribbean is a seascape of islands.

shingle roofs. Straight white lines are broken by concertinaed French doors and full-length louvres pegged out on stilts. Brilliant white and the cream of coral rock are the dominant theme (you'll need strong sunglasses if you stay here), but they are offset by neat splashes of pastel – sky blue, lilac and the green of the infinity swimming pool. The villa feels a little stark, but the hard edge of the architecture is softened by the décor, of Argentinean hats, mounded white cushions and tropical greenery, which grows between the houses and in the showers which are open to the sky.

The island of Tobago is a late developer in Caribbean terms, but in keeping with the demands of current tourists (who are looking for more space and are often happy to strike out away from hotels), it has chosen to specialise in villa "complexes" – including Plantation Beach Villas and the new Stonehaven Villas (also designed by Hasselqvist).

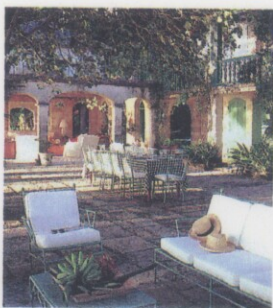


Top: Mullins Mill, a Barbadian plantation house dating from the 1830s. Above: Shogun, a piece of Japan on Mustique. Below: the colonial grandeur of Fustic House, Barbados.

These complexes have appeared around the islands in recent years (Royal Westmoreland in Barbados is another example) and they are not that different from some hotels whose "rooms" are actually villas dotted around a garden. The villas in these complexes tend not to have the style of private houses, but if you prefer to have central facilities such as a restaurant, they are worth adding to the equation.

As well as these complexes, Tobago also has some alluring independent villas. From the mountainous slopes of the

north coast, Villa Being gives on to a vast expanse of open ocean on one side and private organic gardens on the other (seasonal fruits and vegetables are served by the cook). Villa Being is also a series of separate buildings, this time Gaudíesque pavilions, brightly coloured inside and out – sun-yellow, pink and garish green – and topped with fanciful, pagoda-like finials and wavy eaves. Tucked in among the pavilions are a dozen patios and courtyards bursting with bougainvillea and oleander. There are original works from Caribbean artists throughout, as well as Caribbean antiques, including the impossibly comfortable Trinidadian Morris chairs. Villa Being is also riding another new Caribbean wave, that of clean living and yoga – it offers itself as "Pilates for the soul". Massage treatment is arranged by the masseur to the Trinidadian Olympic team, while reiki and different sorts of yoga can also be arranged on



request. Of course the perfect Caribbean house must have the perfect tropical setting, and here Villa Being does well, with a meditation platform that looks out to sea. It gets the best of the sunrise and sunset, but it also has fantastic views of the Caribbean moon and its silver tail reflected on the water.

A view over uninterrupted ocean is mesmeric and soothing, but the finest sight in the Caribbean is surely a seascape of islands. Some of the most dramatic Caribbean scenery is to be found in the British Virgin Islands, where volcanic slopes sweep from the sea as steeply as theatre curtains. There are plenty of excellent villas in the BVI; the most dramatic is Steele Point, whose setting – it clammers over the western end of Tortola, clinging to the cliffs – is simply spectacular. The views are magnificent, ranging for nearly 300 degrees around the point; Jost van Dyke and St John stand to the north and south, while smaller islands are sprinkled around.

On the cliffs, pathways meander among the trees and rocks around the main house. Platforms, with statues, appear at every level and stairways link the pool, suspended on the cliff face, down to the swimming deck and its translucent water. Most spectacularly of all, though, the main bedroom hovers 40 feet above the sea, with full-length windows on three sides. There are few settings like it anywhere in the islands. And it's a stunning view to wake up to. ♦

### BLUE-SKY THINKING

Most villas are booked on an accommodation only basis, although many tour operators will arrange flights. Packages include maid service, a cook, and transfers. Rates are for a week in high season (January-April 15). **BARBADOS** The Owners' Syndicate (020-7801 9801) offers **Mullins Mill** (sleeps 12) for £14,040. Elegant Resorts (0870-333 3340) offers **Fustic House** (sleeps 12) from £26,290. **BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS** Villa Connections (01625-858 158) offers **Steele Point** (sleeps eight) for about £4,500. **DOMINICAN REPUBLIC** **Villa in Bahía Chavón** (sleeps eight) is best booked direct through Casa de Campo (001809-523 3333, www.casadecampo.com), which offers the house for £29,160. **MUSTIQUE** Classic Connection (0870-7519380) offers **Blue Waters** (sleeps four) for £5,136. **Shogun** costs £18,000 for up to 14 and £19,500 for up to 18. Villas can also be booked through Mustique Villa Rentals (01628-583 517). **ST BARTS** **Maison Cap au Vent** (sleeps six) is in Wimco's luxury collection; freephone (US hours) 0800-898 318, www.wimco.com/luxury. £12,700 for three bedrooms, £14,100 for four bedrooms; no cook. **TOBAGO** The Owner's Syndicate (as above) offers **Villa Being** (sleeps six) from £7,335.