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ISLAND PEARL

ON THE CARIBBEAN ISLE OF MUSTIQUE, A UNIQUE VILLA REGAINS ITS LUSTER AFTER A CHIC REDO BY LONDON DESIGNER VEERE GRENNEY.



The house is framed on one side by a lily pond and on the other by the sea.
OPPOSITE: In the living room, the custom wicker furniture and the floor lamp are by Soane Britain.



INTERIOR DESIGN BY VEERE GRENNEY
ARCHITECTURE BY ALAIN BOUVIER
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The living room's chesterfields are by Soane Britain, and the ottoman's cushion is edged in a de Le Cuona stripe. OPPOSITE: In the billiard room, the antique Hamilton billiard table was repainted white. Vintage floor lamp, Serge Roche. Pendant, Charles Edwards.



"IF YOU THINK OF MUSTIQUE, you think of the 1970s," says the decorator Veere Grenney of the Caribbean hideaway where rock royalty (including Jagger and Bowie) once partied alongside actual royalty. In fact, it was Queen Elizabeth II's globe-trotting younger sister, Princess Margaret, who first popularized the island with the jet set.

Mustique's allure has always been low-key: There is a simple landing strip rather than a proper airport, no nightlife to speak of, and, in the island's heyday, the roads were unsurfaced dirt tracks. But both then and now, it has offered the greatest luxury of all: privacy. "When the houses here were built, they were absolutely charming, but most had no real luxury, per se," says Grenney, the renowned New Zealand-born, London-based interior designer. "They were slightly old-fashioned and very English."

Many of the most desirable properties on the island were built by Oliver Messel, the English theater designer who moved to the West Indies around 1960 to carve out a new career as a designer of homes. The architecture he created was calm, unpretentious, nostalgic, and put together with a set designer's eye for proportion, along with overtones of colonial villas and cricket pavilions.

The getaway called Obsidian is a case in point. Designed by Messel in the '70s for the society photographer Patrick Lichfield, the beguiling waterfront property consists of a series of airy, gazebo-like structures that feel at once tropical and quintessentially British; even the delicate lacework boards around the roof bring to mind the awning of a railway station in rural England. Grenney points out that the property is imbued with the relaxed spirit of its era:



Mosquito nets, in brilliant white to match the antique linens, protect guests from unwelcome nocturnal visitors. ABOVE: In the master bedroom, the armchair and ottomans are from Dean Antiques. LEFT: A guest room's vintage armchair is from Guinevere. The curtains are of a de Le Cuona linen. OPPOSITE: The wicker lamp in a guest bedroom is by Soane Britain. The nightstand is custom.



The pool terrace is arranged with chaises by McKinnon and Harris. OPPOSITE: In the dining room, the custom wicker table and chairs by Soane Britain were based on vintage designs. For more details, see Sourcebook.

“It’s all wicker, it’s all treillage, it’s all very simple detailing, nothing sophisticated,” he observes.

The current owners bought the house after Lichfield passed away in 2005, and they tasked Grenney with reworking the entire property in such a way that it remained as authentic as possible. While the decor had been practically unchanged since the home was built, the ravages of heat and sea air had taken their effect on the woodwork. Every window had to be removed, and every piece of timber replaced with more durable hardwood alternatives, painted white as before. “Over about 9 or 10 months, we literally replaced everything in the house,” the decorator explains. “But if you knew it in the old days, you would think very little has changed.”

Not that Grenney was simply overseeing a conservation effort: His ethos is more about staying true to the “sensibility” of a property. Thus the furniture is antique, reupholstered in antique white linens to fit with the minimalist color scheme. The exception is the wickerwork dining suites, which were custom made by Soane Britain in London to the original designs.

The result is a subtly upscaled version of what the house always was; it’s still relaxed and unassuming, but stealthily luxurious too. “It’s now much easier to maintain, although, this being Mustique, nothing lasts very long,” he notes. Perhaps not. But one gets the feeling that if Veere Grenney has anything to do with it, Obsidian will endure. □

