

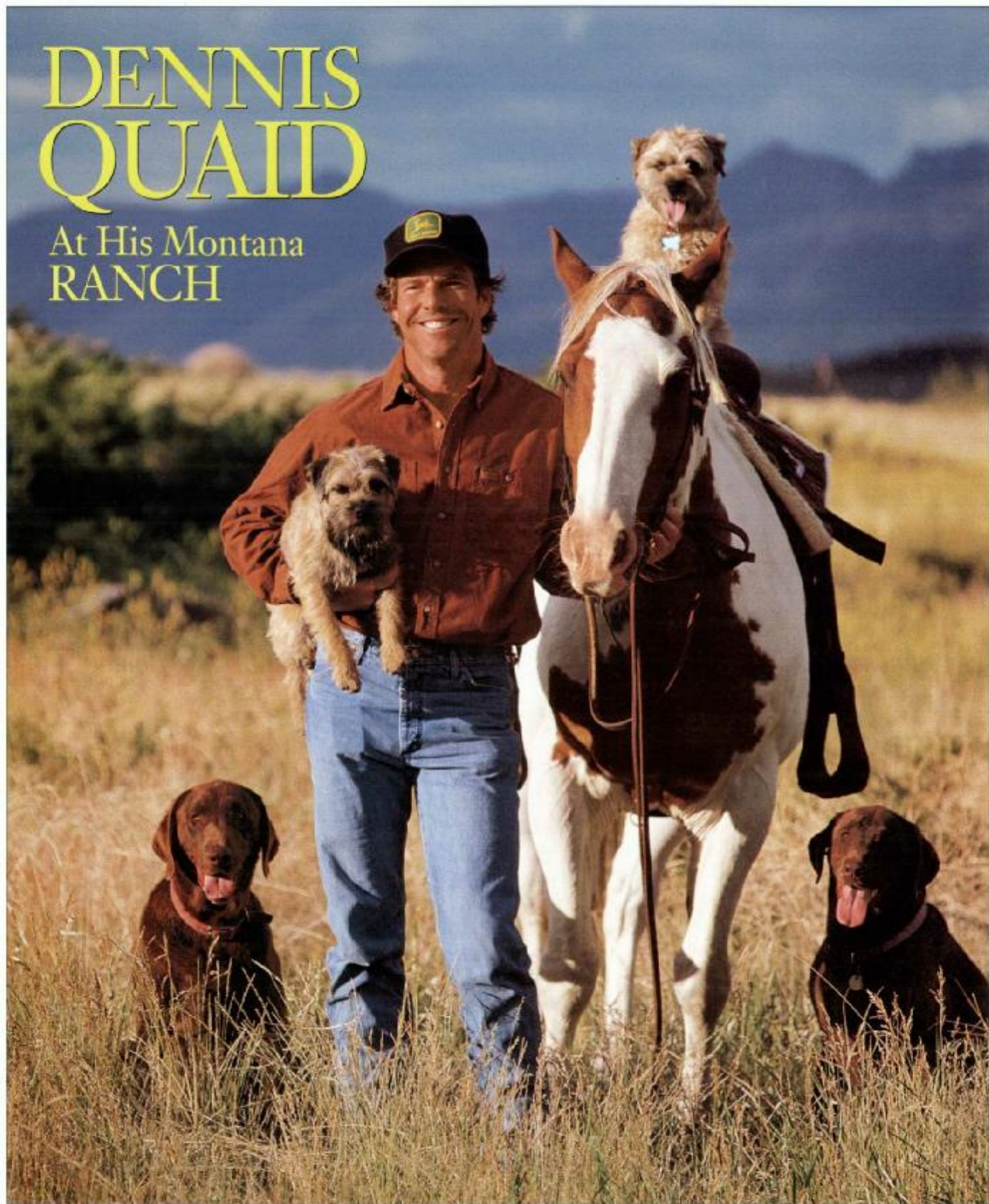
ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE OF INTERIOR DESIGN

OCTOBER 2003

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Wyndham Martineau Bay

French and Spanish Influences Converge in an Island Haven on Vieques

Architecture by Donald F. Evans, AIA/Interior Design by Dan Nelson, ASID

Text by Michael Frank/Photography by Scott Frances



TWENTY YEARS AGO, when Roberto Cacho first visited, and fell in love with, Vieques, the lush, unspoiled seascape, modest towns and sleepy pace of island life reminded him of Manatí, the small beach community on the north coast of Puerto Rico where he grew up. “I was just out of college,” Cacho says, “but already I felt a nostalgia for the simpler, sweeter Caribbean ways that were then—as now—eroding day by day and year by year. Vieques embodied the best of those times and

that place: It was pristine, calm, a little bit forgotten—and a lot undervalued.”

It was so undervalued, in fact, that a young man just starting out in the world could manage, with a group of friends, to acquire a parcel of land about 40 acres in size. Two decades later, that parcel has become the Wyndham Martineau Bay Resort & Spa. Cacho and partners Joey Fuentes, Adam Anhang and Hugh Andrews have developed the hotel with estimable sensitivity to that little-bit-forgotten life that

remains at the core of the Vieques experience.

Vieques has a particular story, and the hotel seeks to tell at least part of it. From the early 1940s until 2003 it was home to a vast U.S. naval base, whose bombing exercises and environmental policies were in recent years much contested by the islanders and others. After the Navy pulled out, its holdings—two-thirds of Vieques, or about 22,000 out of 33,000 acres—passed into the hands of the Department of the Interior, which created, arguably as a

ABOVE: Wyndham Martineau Bay Resort & Spa is on the north shore of Vieques, eight miles from Puerto Rico. Florida-based architect Donald F. Evans designed the buildings.

“We wanted to keep the scale of the resort low and respectful of the landscape,” Evans explains. **OPPOSITE:** A view from the veranda of the Great House, the main structure.





ABOVE: Chairs, by Christian Liaigre for Holly Hunt, in the reception lounge are adjacent to the Taino Bar, left, where Caribbean-inspired cocktails and appetizers are served.

kind of absolution for earlier governmental policies, the largest fish and wildlife refuge in the Caribbean, all of it on a single island. One important, and positive, legacy this leaves for Vieques is that development will be kept severely limited and perpetually in check.

Long before the wildlife refuge and the Navy, as often in the Caribbean, there were the plantations. On Vieques the crops were sugarcane and pineapples. The Spanish settlers brought over Paso Fino horses, which today roam the land in large picturesque

RIGHT: "In the Paso Fino restaurant, it's important to change the atmosphere over the course of the day. Slipcovers and tablecloths give new life and energy," says interior designer Dan Nelson.



herds. The French built houses, in what eventually became known as the plantation or colonial style: A hybrid vernacular, it showed the hand of many visiting mariners, the British, the Dutch, the French and the Spanish among them. Porches were ample and open, roofs pitched, shutters slatted. Always key was the circulation of air and sunlight, which was welcomed at some times of the day, banished at others.

For many years Vieques, a Spanish possession, had been leased to the French (the *continued on page 106*)

Hotels

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land's oldest guesthouse, as it happens, is known as Frenchman's House), and it was to this legacy that Cacho, Donald Evans, the hotel's architect, and Dan Nelson, its designer, turned when it came to planning the look, layout and tenor of Martineau Bay. "The big lumbering megahotel, with hundreds or even thousands of identical rooms, would have been anathema here. This approach is tired—and rather ruthless in so special a setting," he explains.

Instead, Evans and his group came up with the idea of breaking the hotel down into a great house, which contains the reception area, din-

ing room and bar; a fleet of individual guest villas, ideally suited to families; and nine lodges that house 10 to 15 guest units. Every guest room in the resort has an unobstructed water view. Materials remain simple and site-sensitive and (this is essential) are durable in the erosive Caribbean climate.

Central to the experience, for architect, designer and guests alike, is the hotel's great house. "We wanted everyone to think: Was that building really there?" says Evans. "Was it a plantation house they reused? How old is this place anyway?"

It is all, of course, com-
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ABOVE: The main town of Vieques, Isabel Segunda, is visible from the balcony of a guest room. To ensure a water view, each room is situated at least 35 feet above sea level.

BELOW: The 156 guest rooms are decorated with handmade furniture, works by local artists and "accidental harmony," says Nelson. Brunswick & Fils fabric on wood chair.



Hotels



ABOVE: Guests can swim up to underwater barstools at the resort's pool grill, the Isla Nena, which is open for lunch and dinner. All patio furniture is from Brown Jordan.

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pletely new and conceived from scratch—but with what Dan Nelson calls a “long and fully imagined ancestry.” In outfitting the interiors, Nelson began with the historical Martineau—who was an actual person, an early colonist—but felt free to invent from there: “It was easy to think of this fellow Martineau as a traveler,” he explains. “And an erudite one besides. And of course he had a good eye and would have brought together objects and pieces of furniture from different countries—as we’ve done in his spirit.”

In the Great House, with its striking combined lobby and dining room, Nelson mixed washed-pine ceilings with wrought iron chande-

liers, sconces and lanterns copied from French models. Chairs, which Nelson designed and had fabricated in the Far East, disappear under sinamay (a kind of banana fiber) slipcovers in the evening; china, also inspired by French designs, was “Caribbeanized”—made cruder and more primitive—and manufactured in Mexico. “There’s a kind of quiet internationalism going on here,” says Nelson. “We didn’t want the ambience to speak strictly one language or another.”

Nelson’s multilingual approach reaches an even fuller expression in the guest rooms, where he commissioned toiles that feature palm-tree motifs, had them bordered with raffia and produced an unpredictable headboard. Chaises replace sofas (“They’re sexier—and more comfortable too”); chairs were modeled after Balinese originals Nelson had seen on his travels. He had tray tables made in Vietnam, modified a Dutch

armoire and chose floor tiles in Spain. Light is of course paramount, and it is filtered through shutters at one end of the room and a natural-reed rolling shade that, rather atypically in a hotel of this nature, separates the bedroom from the bath.

Why this unusual approach? “It’s very simple,” says Nelson. “If you come all the way to Vieques, you ought to

have the experience of looking out at the ocean while you bathe. You ought to be as close as possible to a sparkling sky. That kind of luxury is what the Caribbean is all about.” □

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LEFT: One of nine plantation-style lodges, which contain varying numbers of individual rooms. The buildings have two or three stories, with five guest units on each floor.