

The Most Magical Villa on the World's Most Luxurious Island



Ann Abel, CONTRIBUTOR

Magic, fantasy and romance. Those are the words that everyone uses about Toucan Hill. It's the most fanciful, improbable villa on one of the world's most fanciful, improbable islands.

"I wanted it to be completely different from what rational people have in their lives," says owner Tatiana Copeland, the business magnate and philanthropist who spent ten years creating the house. "It's a house you would never live in, in your real life. It's a fantasy house. People who go step back from reality."

The same, she says, is true of Mustique, a speck of an island in St. Vincent and the Grenadines that is owned by a private company made up of the rich and famous who own the 105 homes here. She would know—she was first invited to the island by Princess Margaret, who put the place on the jet set map back in the 1970s, when it was owned by Colin Tennant. Even though the island is not as anything-goes as it once was—think Studio 54 on the beach—Mick Jagger is regularly seen at the weekly party at the island's one hotel.

Copeland and her husband, Gerret, returned again and again after that first visit. "We told ourselves we had to discover other places," she recalls. "And then we always said we miss Mustique" with its safety and tranquility. They stayed in most of the houses on the island but never thought they would build one—until they saw a piece of property at the highest point of the island, which the Mustique Company was encouraging them to buy. Back then, in the 1990s, they practically had to crawl on their hands and knees to see it. "There were no roads.



"Downtown" Mustique

It was paradise. There was a 360-degree view. We gave into the pull of it and gave it a go."

That view remains a jaw-dropper. "I wanted to create a wow factor when you first come in," says Copeland of her concept for the house, which guests enter via a flight of stairs. At the top, they're greeted by an infinity pool framed by arches and the ocean beyond. "You've left a cold environment and been traveling a long time. I want you to walk in and say wow." Guests, myself included, really do walk in and say, "Wow," out loud. (I recently stayed as her guest.)

"When I'm there, my favorite is to sit back with a drink at the end of a work day to watch the sunset," she says. "It's mesmerizing. The world is at your feet. It's unusual to find a place in the world where there is that infinity feeling. Mostly we're surrounded by people, buildings, trees. This is the world at your feet."

But a villa at the top of an island doesn't make a magical, romantic fantasy, no matter how stunning that view is. That's where Copeland's design comes in. She found a fanciful solution to an island problem: the house could not be wood because of the termites, sun and rain. Not wanting a modernist box, she woke up one morning and thought of the Alhambra. Concrete lent itself to that Arabian style, which is rich in opportunities for opulence, romance and intrigue.

It's 1,001 Nights and then some. There are dazzling mother-of-pearl inlaid tables, silver-clad sitting furniture, art work with precious gems and, in Copeland's own suite (available for an additional fee), a bed clad in 18-karat gold. The details are endless: Moroccan stars, arches, tile work, lanterns and toucans are everywhere.

Windows are aligned for perfect sunset views. The four bedrooms in the main house, all intentionally equal in size, are painted in bright, extremely specific tones: “Scandinavian blue,” “butterscotch,” “warm sage” and “Moroccan sands.” There’s a tile courtyard with a fountain, a rooftop “*mirador*” deck, a two-person “passion pit” overlooking the sea and a large deck beside that infinity pool.



Toucan Hill's wow factor

In the early days of construction, when the island was even more dominated by Oliver Messel–style architecture, “people thought she was nuts,” says longtime house manager Patricia Medford. Turns out she was ahead of her time, for seeing that people want to escape the everyday. “This is her version of Morocco. This is fun, fantasy. You could live in other houses on Mustique. This is a party house.” Medford has organized parties for 300 people, flying in jazz bands, fire dancers and other entertainers, but notes that it works equally well for a party of two.

Considering all the design confidence, it comes as a surprise that Copeland had no background in interiors. She tried to find a designer to execute her vision but no one would do it. “So I sat down and started drawing,” she says. “I’m in the world of finance, so the fun of this thing—you can imagine. I said, ‘Can I ever use the other side of my brain to design something, with Gerret?’” (The villa’s name is a play on her initials and the idea that two can make it happen.)

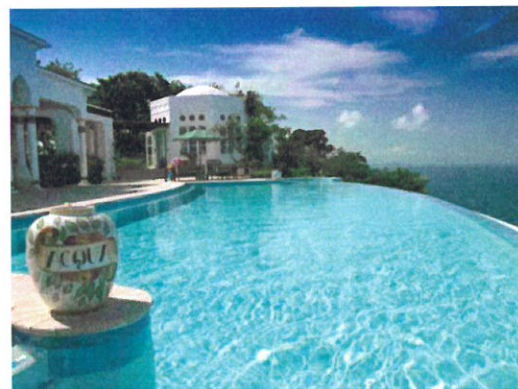


The Scandinavian blue bedroom

The drawing took her more than two years, during which, “I had a wonderful time thinking of Turkey and Tunisia,” but not actually visiting—at the time, she confesses, Neiman Marcus had an extraordinary collection of furniture from those parts of the world. Eventually she hired an architect to make sure nothing would fall down, and building took another eight years. When she came across her plans years later she was struck by how close the finished product resembled them. “I always feel it’s my house. I found almost everything. I created this incredibly beautiful fantasy.”

She’s justifiably proud of her accomplishment, but during our conversation she emphasizes that her design is just a start. “No matter how beautiful it is, no matter how much it’s a paradise, if you don’t have the right staff it’s not quite as great”—and her team of seven are absolutely the right staff. “I’m blessed with a fabulous manager and staff. They make the house come alive. It’s so important. It’s not just a building and a gorgeous fantasy. It’s the people.”

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The pool