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DESTINATIONS

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by Pamela McCourt Francescone

HOTELS

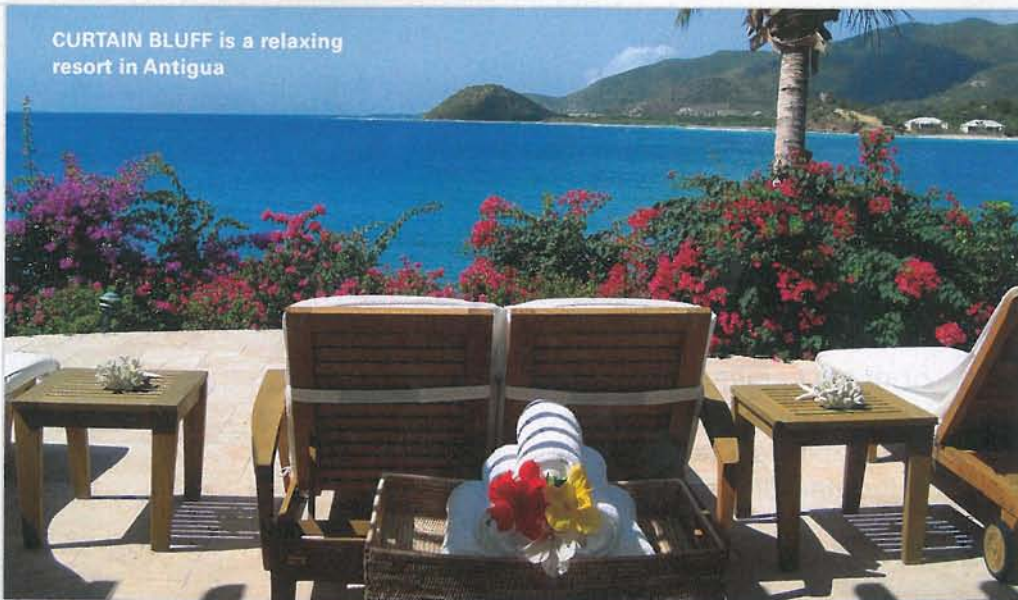
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by David Eisen

On the cover, Gordon Campbell Gray at One Aldwych in London

COVER PHOTO BY EDWARD HILL

BEHIND CHIANG MAI's wondrous nature is an eclectic modern city

CURTAIN BLUFF is a relaxing resort in Antigua



THE SEA nudges the suites at One&Only Palmilla



ENCORE SPA's Far East elegance





CURTAIN BLUFF

"Maybe if we count the number of seashells we have at home we'll figure out how many times we've been here." That was a comment from a couple I sat next to at the beach at **Curtain Bluff** (www.curtainbluff.com) in January as they chose a small conch shell to commemorate their 2009 visit to the Antiguan resort. The comment speaks directly

CURTAIN BLUFF's spa, above, has amazing views of the Caribbean everywhere you turn.

to the loyalty of the resort's clientele; it tends to draw a staggering 80 percent repeat-guest rate.

As for us "newbies," we'd say it took about seven minutes following our arrival to "get" Curtain Bluff, the clincher being when we walked into our second-floor Junior Suite (No. 12) and out onto the balcony, where the Caribbean Sea was rolling up on the shore just a few feet away. On this, the rougher surf side of the resort, the beach remained virtually

empty and, hence, private all day, although a sufficient number of beach chairs were provided to accommodate anyone in search of serenity. Instead, denizens of Curtain Bluff tend to head to the calmer bay side of the beach where an array of casually arranged thatched-umbrellas covering duos of lounge chairs awaits.

Important to know: The beach and pool are not places to see and be seen; in fact, the pool (with two 75-foot lap lanes) seems to

be an all-but forgotten amenity at the resort. Couples instead tend to lie about on the beach all day. Note: Don't expect butlers to arrive every hour; the service at Curtain Bluff is less formal than that. What's important, however, is that bar service is provided on a regular basis at the beach.

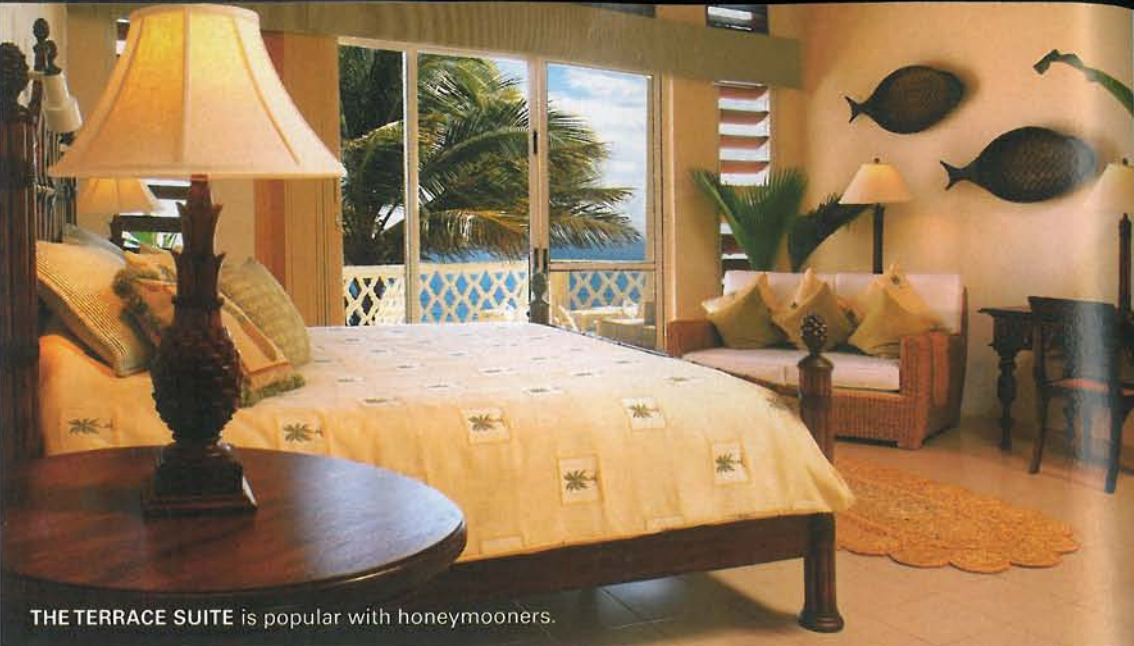
Luxury Travel Advisor suspects that what drives the loyalty and the true Caribbean hospitality at Curtain Bluff is its independent ownership. Howard

and Chelle Hulford opened the property in 1957. Today, they live on property at the highest point of the resort in a to-die-for home that is also used for special receptions and weddings. Hint: If you're invited for drinks up at their abode, dress in your finest resort attire; with open-air living areas, splendid service and elegant balconies, this classy venue will bring out the inner jetsetter in anyone.

Curtain Bluff is run by the very-hands-on managing director, Rob Sherman (roberts@curtainbluff.com; he was a nominee in the *Luxury Travel Advisor* Awards of Excellence for the "Top General Manager" category). He moved to Antigua 30 years ago and never looked back. If you're lucky, he'll take you to his office to show you a 20-year-old photo that depicts a number of Curtain Bluff employees who started their careers at the resort and still work there today.

Note: Because of the trusting, casual ambiance of Curtain Bluff, guest rooms up until a year ago did not have locks; while guests now do indeed receive keys to their rooms, many repeaters stick to the original habit of leaving their quarters unsecured. It's also important to tell clients that rooms do not have TVs, which are available in a public lounge that also houses computers with high-speed Internet.

Guest rooms are spacious at Curtain Bluff, no matter the category. Junior Suites (750 square feet in size) have large bathrooms sporting separate showers and big tubs. (Nice Touch: A small bottle of local rum and a bucket of ice can be found tubside upon arrival.) The sleeping area extends to a step-down living room that leads to the balcony. Added Magic: Minibars are filled with preferred guest beverages,



THE TERRACE SUITE is popular with honeymooners.

ages, including champagne, beers, water and sodas.

Tops digs at the resort are the 2,000-square-foot Morris Bay and Grace Bay Suites, which supply extra posh touches, such as four-poster beds and Jacuzzis on the balconies. They can also connect to Junior suites. Premium accommodations are also available higher up on the bluff.

We were surprised to learn that Curtain Bluff is an all-inclusive resort; all meals, drinks and water sports are a part of the pricing.

The spa at Curtain Bluff is a home run, thanks to the high level of service from therapists who were trained in Bali. There's more: Each of the five treatment rooms has an open-air balcony with chaise lounges. The dressing area is cozy, but it's only a prelude to the very large relaxation area, where guests can lounge around prior to their treatments; we enjoyed a dose of ginger tea prior to heading off to our 90-minute Signature facial. Hint: Ask for Sharon. After one's treatment, it's advisable to head back to the relaxation area, where a Jacuzzi overlooking the sea awaits and guests are served a tapas-style snack. Be sure to book treatments six weeks out for the busy Christmas and Spring Break periods through Randy (268-462-8400; thespa@

curtainbluff.com), the spa concierge. The facility's director, Gilly Shillingford (gillys@curtainbluff.com), can also answer questions.

Don't overlook the tennis facilities at Curtain Bluff. Three resident instructors meticulously encourage guests to strive for top form on the four courts. There's also a squash court, yoga, swimming in the 75-foot pool, croquet and a full range of motorized and non-motorized water sports.

We loved Curtain Bluff's Beach Restaurant, which serves a luncheon buffet but also serves up a great menu selection. In the Main Dining Room, a wide selection of French continental cuisine (with a bit of Caribbean infusion) is served with very caring service; we also loved the local live entertainment every evening. Afternoon tea and hors d'œuvres before dinner are other thoughtful touches we enjoyed; we also enjoyed that reservations are not taken for dinner, meaning there was no pressure to track down the maitre d' each evening to snag a good table. There's also a fabulous wine cellar housing 25,000 bottles; be sure to ask for a private wine tasting.

The luxury travel advisor liaisons for Curtain Bluff are Annette Williams or Sandra McKay

ADVISOR INSIGHT:

Joshua Bush of Park Avenue Travel chose Curtain Bluff for his honeymoon and we think that's a pretty strong endorsement. Bush, who appeared on the cover of *Luxury Travel Advisor* last April, said he chose the resort "because it's a place where you don't have to think about anything. The normal activities and hassles of a vacation (signing checks, worrying if activities are full or expensive, getting dressed up for dinner) are nonexistent at Curtain Bluff, allowing complete serenity. We found it to be a great way to unwind after the busy planning of our wedding and an opportunity to disconnect from the stress of real life. This escape allowed Jen and me to re-energize and be refreshed after our return. Curtain Bluff is very special to us and I would bet we will return for many milestone anniversaries!"

in reservations (curtainbluff@curtainbluff.com). They can also assist with transfers from VC Bird International Airport, which is a 35-minute ride away.

Curtain Bluff will close for its customary renovations on July 31. It will reopen on October 31.

—Ruthanne Terrero

SIGHTINGS



1. DURING CARIBBEAN MARKETPLACE in St. Lucia, *Luxury Travel Advisor's* Stephanie Gordon stopped in at Discovery at Marigot Bay. She is shown here with Carl Otto Beviere, the resort's resident manager, and Angela Torille, the resort's sales manager

2. CURTAIN BLUFF OWNERS Howard and Chelle Hulford on site at their bluff-top home at the Antigua resort. *Luxury Travel Advisor* Editorial Director Ruthanne Terrero recently visited the resort; see page 12 for her review

3. DORCHESTER COLLECTION showcased the signature libations—both cocktails and mocktails—from its member hotels at The New York Palace. Pictured is Chris Cowdray, the CEO of Dorchester Collection, with *Luxury Travel Advisor* Managing Editor David Eisen to his right

4. JIM STRONG, center, president of Strong Travel Services in Dallas, during his visit to Four Seasons Tented Camp Golden Triangle, Thailand. He is flanked by Camp Manager Michel Volk to his right and to his left by General Manager Todd Cilano as monks prepare a blessing ceremony.