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The Sweet Escape!

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in a Luxe Destination

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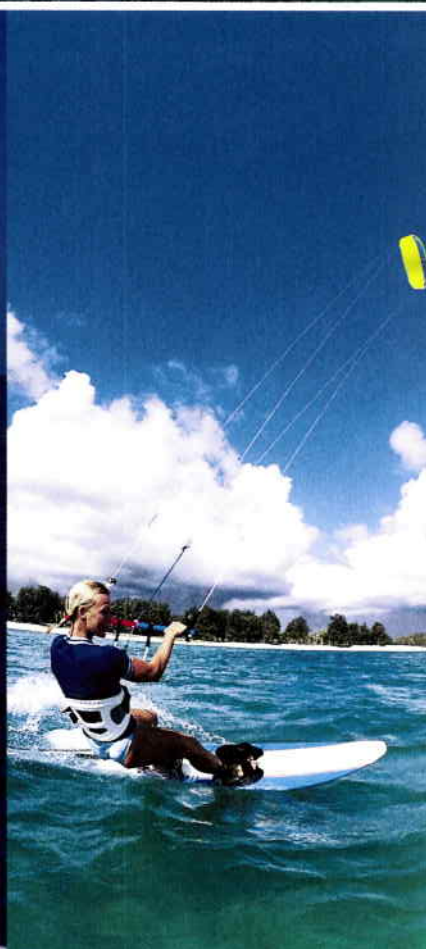
THE FOURTH ESTATE

THE SWEET ESCAPE

In this tropical nirvana, who wouldn't yearn to become a resident longer?

By RUTH J. KATZ

I made my way across the tarmac and eagerly





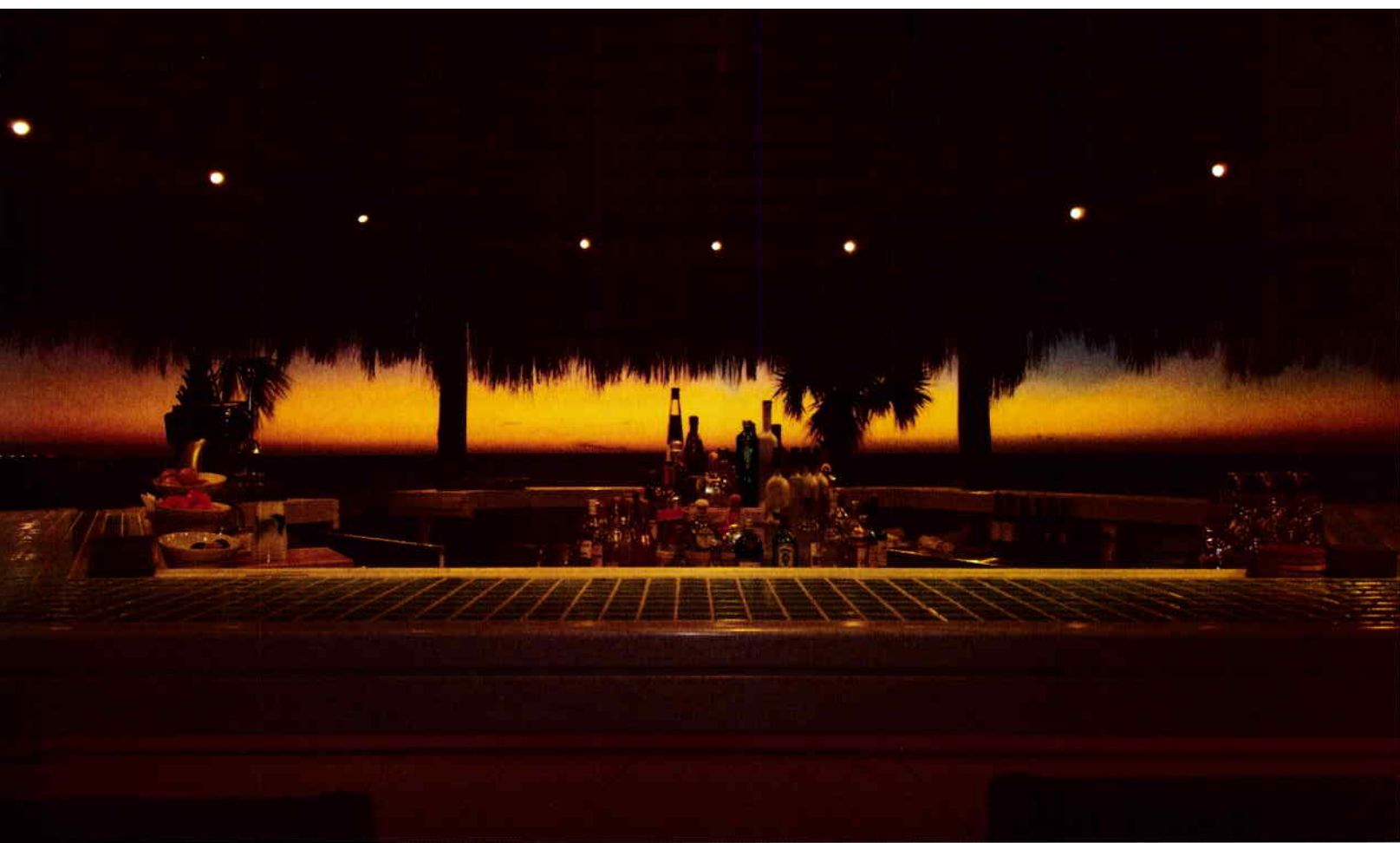
OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP:
Planes can land on the island's newly completed 5,700-foot, private airstrip, which was recently certified for international flights; Customs and Immigration are now on the island, so travelers with their own jets can skip the stop in Provo. BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT: Kayaking, fishing (catch your own dinner and the chef will whip it into a meal the same day), and diverse watersports are all favored pastimes. THIS PAGE:
Homes in Le Grand Cottages area each have a dunking pool in their center courtyard.

entered the Arrivals building for international flights to Turks & Caicos (just off the southern tip of the Bahamas, some 1,300 miles south of Gotham), I knew that I wanted to stay there. It wasn't just the weather, which caresses your flesh with an average temperature of 83 degrees, tempered by gentle, easterly trade winds. (T&C can boast, on average, 350 sunny days a year.) And it wasn't the jolly-sounding steel band that greeted me here in "Provo" (Providenciales), the largest island among the few dozen cays (only 8 of which are inhabited) that make up this paradise. No, it was the sign at Immigration that made me envious of T&C citizens with special status: "Belongers and Returning Residents" were directed to one side, while tourists were sent to another.

So...there were people here who were actually called "Belongers"! I was eager to be one. And, potentially, I could be—if not in an officially sanctioned fashion, at least in a spiritual way. (*Belonger* is a legal status—conferring certain privileges—that's way too complicated to explain here. Among T&C's diverse Belongers are descendents of British Loyalist families who fled America in the late 1700s.) I hopped onto the Cessna Caravan that in 18 minutes would take me and my traveling companions the 40 miles to Ambergris Cay, my destination.

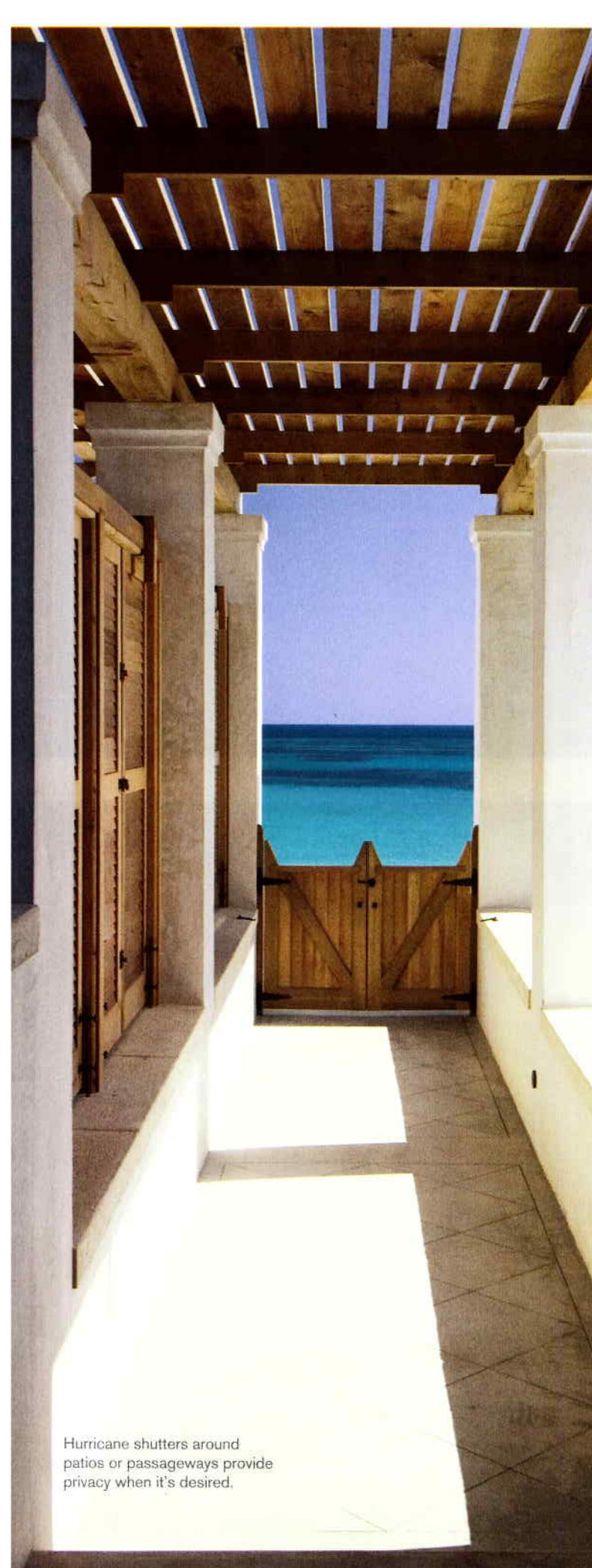
On this tropical island (technically, T&C's cays are *not* in the Caribbean but in the Tropical Atlantic) the DPS Sporting Club Development Company is creating its newest equity-membership community. >>





OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP: Homes are all sited for the best water views. BOTTOM LEFT: The four luxurious safari tents on the southern end of the island feature lavish amenities, plumbing, electricity, and awe-inspiring views. THIS PAGE, TOP: Calico Jack's (named for a pirate of yore) is the epicenter of island activity; vistas from the bar are spectacular at sunset. RIGHT: The view from the deck outside the main living space of a home in Le Grand Cottages neighborhood provides constant maritime "theater."





Hurricane shutters around patios or passageways provide privacy when it's desired.

DPS, based in Bluffton, South Carolina, has successfully restored, created, or built several well-known destination properties (including the Ford Plantation in Georgia, the Greenbrier Sporting Club in West Virginia, and the Snake River Sporting Club in Wyoming). The complete build-out was planned to comprise 550 home sites, but, since many members are already snapping up several lots to establish family compounds or get more wide-open space, it's likely there will be closer to 500 members. Although only a dozen homes have been built, more than 170 members have staked claims to their lots. As you zip around the island at a whopping 20 miles an hour in a golf cart (cars are not permitted, and "traffic" signs warn of "Iguana Crossing," *not* deer), you pass signboards unobtrusively planted on countless lots, indicating the names and hometowns of future residents. The members hail from many states—Kentucky, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Texas, Illinois, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey—and, not unexpectedly, from London (there are direct flights to Provo), considering that this is the British West Indies. Yet, despite its British governance, the American dollar is the currency in use. (And it's worth noting that there is neither property nor income tax.)


Ambergris Cay is 1,100 acres of pristine land—3.3 miles long, 1.5 miles wide, with 8 miles of waterfront. One-third of the island will stay untouched, devoted to a nature preserve. The prolific Turk's Head cactus, a protected plant that appears to be wearing a bright-red fez, may have given the archipelago its name. Ten miles of hiking and biking trails will cross-cut the island, and there will be an Environmental Learning Center, on a spit of a peninsula, which will be overseen by naturalist T. J. Jett, currently on board. There will of course be the expected amenities, including a beach club, a spa and fitness center, tennis and squash courts, a members' lodge with concierge services, a dining room and bar, billiards and card rooms, a movie theater, a children's center, a library, and even a bowling alley.

But the island is heaven already: members whose dream manses aren't yet built stay in other members' homes that have been put into the rental pool (for members only), or "rough it" in four gloriously outfitted African safari tents at the southern tip of the island. (This is *glamping*—glamorous camping at its finest—with Frette linens, Molton Brown toiletries, Oriental carpets, and mahogany beds.) They can spend their time deep-sea or bone fishing, kayaking, snorkeling, scuba diving, picnicking on nearby cays, taking nature walks, or just lounging by the pool with an iced tropical punch from the nerve center of the island, Calico Jack's bar/restaurant area.

The newly minted private, 5,700-foot airstrip is a compelling draw for many members with personal planes. The recently dredged marina, under construction, will be able to accommodate vessels up to just over 200 feet in length. For now, members interested in boating content themselves with the small fleet under Captain John Mallette's stewardship.

Under Captain Mallette's guidance, the 33-foot AmberCat catamaran headed out to give us visitors an opportunity to deep-sea fish, snorkel, and generally frolic. Our first stop was the nearby uninhabited, snaggle-

The Fourth Estate—In a Few Column Inches



NAME:	Turks & Caicos Sporting Club at Ambergris Cay
DEVELOPER:	DPS Sporting Club Development Company, LLC
LOCATION:	Ambergris Cay, Turks & Caicos Islands, British West Indies
NEAREST AIRPORT:	Airstrip on the island; nearest international airport, Providenciales (PLS)
APPROXIMATE FLYING TIME FROM NYC METRO AREA:	3 hours to Providenciales; then direct 20-minute flight to Ambergris Cay
YEAR GROUND WAS BROKEN:	2004
PROJECTED COMPLETION:	Currently, all infrastructure facilities are complete, including a desalinization plant; for members there are facilities for water sports, a dining area/bar (Calico Jack's), pool, and tennis courts. By 2011, the marina and all members' amenities should be complete.
SIZE:	1,100 acres
TOTAL NUMBER OF HOMES, WHEN COMPLETED:	Approximately 550
GOLF COURSES:	No golf course on the island, but private club plane/golf-taxi available to 12 courses around the Caribbean (such as Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico)
LOTS:	from 1/3 acre to 8 acres, ranging in price from \$600,000 to \$6 million*
PRE-DESIGNED HOME PRICES:	\$3 million and up*
MEMBERSHIP COSTS:	\$95,000*
ANNUAL DUES:	2008, \$6,000*; anticipated in 2011, \$14,400*
ANNUAL COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION FEES:	2008, \$2,700*; anticipated in 2011, \$5,040*
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:	www.lifewellplayed.com ; 877.815.1300

*all prices subject to change

toothed volcanic Fish Cay, where I harvested wondrously white sea salt (salt was a major export from T&C from the 17th to the 19th centuries), which collects in the briny shallow hollows on the cay.

We were treated to a humpback whale-sighting—a mama and a calf swam alongside us for a brief time in the 28-foot-deep water, entertaining us with a breach now and again. We snorkeled above a sunken sailboat that had smashed on a reef (it was like diving for buried treasure!) and paddled among the many indigenous colorful fish; we learned that the barrier reef here is the third largest in the world, after the Great Barrier Reef in Australia and the vast reef off Belize. We even caught our dinner, a 12-pound king mackerel that executive chef Ulrich Sterling transformed into tangy ceviche appetizers and a scrumptious main course, grilled and doused with a pineapple soy glaze.

Ultimately, nine different residential island neighborhoods will be developed, five of which call for custom-designed homes. At present, however, houses have been built only in Le Grand Cottages area; these are predesigned homes, somewhat customized (starting at \$3 million), and available with charming preselected furniture packages (additional fee), so they are virtually turn-key. They are gracious

and thoughtfully created, with a small pool in the center courtyard of each, and with views overlooking the deep Atlantic side of the island. The western side of the island is bounded by the shallow Caicos Banks (“the Flats”). Because of the island’s topography—elevation is not quite 100 feet—some homes may be blessed with both sunrise and sunset panoramas.

No matter where you site your home on this majestic island, you cannot go wrong. Every lot just beckons you to sit out on your future patio or deck with a chilled drink that ought to have an umbrella in it, and, well ... “belong” to the splendor of it all. And, later, when you’ve returned to the hustle-bustle of your city life, you’ll be longing for Ambergris Cay. **TME**

Senior contributing editor Ruth J. Katz has written extensively for *The New York Times* and for more than 20 years has contributed to *New York* magazine. She was on-air talent at Fox TV for several years and has been a contributing editor to *Redbook*, *New York Home*, and *Golf Connoisseur*, among many others. She is currently the Style Editor at *Promenade* magazine and covers luxury travel, real estate, shopping, and service.

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