

Palm Beach Illustrated – Le 02 Juillet 2018

PALM BEACH ILLUSTRATED®

JET-SET STYLE

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LIFE AT SEA

**ASPHALT
TO OCEAN**
BEST OF BOTH
WORLDS



Escape

BOHO COOL

The French art de vivre is eloquently articulated in Villa Marie Saint-Barth's bohemian, globally gathered spirit

BY DAPHNE NIKOLOPOULOS



Escape



around Flamands beach, a few are hidden beyond the well-traveled path yet offer ample ambiance and as much luxury as their counterparts at the water's edge. Tucked among the frangipanis and palms on a hilltop above the beaches, Villa Marie Saint-Barth is one such gem that oozes bohemian cool and that French *je ne sais quoi*.



VILLA MARIE SAINT-BARTH IS A BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY OF NATURAL MATERIALS, ETHNIC TEXTILES, A PROFUSION OF SEASHELLS, AND GLOBALLY SOURCED ACCESSORIES, BROUGHT TOGETHER WITH A HEALTHY DOSE OF FRENCH CHIC.

Ever since the French first set foot in St. Barthélemy, in the seventeenth century, the West Indies island has pulsed with a certain worldly frisson. These days, St. Barth's famous flair is seen in its red-roofed villages tumbling toward sapphire harbors, the multitudes of yachts beyond its Saint-Tropez-like beaches, the sophisticated vibe at its bars and restaurants, and the insanely chic boutique hotels frequented by the American and European jet set.

Though many of the latter are centered

Much of its charm is owed to Jocelyne Sibuet, whose family-owned hotels include Les Fermes de Marie in Megève and Villa Marie Saint-Tropez. The visionary hotelier has imbued the company's first Caribbean property with an eclectic, global style appreciated by the world's gypsets—uber-fashionable women and men who prize creative expression as much as the high life.

A bit of a gypset herself, Sibuet traveled across eight countries to source the precise objects that would bring her vision to life. Throughout the property's 23 villas and suites, each of which is individually designed, such finds as a feather trophy from Indonesia or brass pineapple mirrors from Morocco speak to Villa Marie's collected vibe. Everything is handcrafted and rooted in the Earth, with a particular nod to the ocean. Sibuet placed special emphasis on seashells because, she says, they "refer to the seaside spirit." Shells are literally everywhere, from the custom baroque chandeliers and vanity mirrors to tribal necklaces, and they complement other natural accents like raffia lampshades and bamboo everything.





THE VILLA'S RESIDENTIAL FLAIR IS SEEN IN THE LIBRARY (ABOVE), WHERE JET-SETTERS GATHER FOR A RUM COCKTAIL BEFORE DINNER AT FRANÇOIS PLANTATION (FAR RIGHT). OWNER JOCELYNE SIBUET TRAVELED TO EIGHT COUNTRIES TO SOURCE OBJECTS LIKE SHELL MIRRORS AND MASSIVE CEREMONIAL JEWELRY.



With their carefully curated furnishings and textiles, the accommodations recall a posh friend's island getaway more than they do a hotel room. Balconies and broad decks provide residential-style retreats where you can lounge, rum cocktail in hand, and take in the delicate breezes sweeping the hillside. Some of the villas have private pools with panoramic views of the sea below. It's the best of both worlds—a romantic, secluded setting with easy access to the greater universe of St. Barth, should you want it.

A series of steps, similar to those you might traverse in Èze or Mykonos, lead down to the intimate Pure Altitude Spa (with all of two treatment rooms) and the library, with its vintage rattan details, Colonial furnishings, and unusual ethnic textiles. The library also is home to François Plantation, Villa Marie's signature restaurant. The dining room overlooks the gardens, which are beautifully lit by night, and recalls the West Indies of yesteryear. Begin with a Ti Punch from the Rum Bar and nibble on homemade foie gras with apple and pineapple chutney. The dinner entrées are, unsurprisingly, seafood-centric

and include an excellent sole meunière, filleted tableside, and the house specialty, bouillabaisse. If available, don't pass up the pineapple carpaccio for a sweet but bikini-friendly ending to the meal.

The hotel feels remote, but in fact it is a short walk from the enchanting town of

Gustavia and beaches both cosmopolitan and deliciously private. Ask the Villa Marie concierge to arrange a picnic lunch—with a bottle of rosé, naturally—and point you to a secluded cove where you can build your own gypset memories. (860-490-0271, saint-barth.villamarie.fr) ◀◀

