



JUST IMAGINE

*A Scottish architect helps define indigenous architecture in the Cayman Islands.
Catherine MacGillivray learns what drives “imagineer” John Doak*

Photography courtesy **John Doak**

ARCHITECT John Doak is originally from Scotland but his passion for the Caribbean, its heritage and culture, is evident in his work.

Based in the Cayman Islands where he has lived since 1979, Doak has designed buildings throughout the West Indies.

He is a former partner and design director of the firm Onions, Bouchard and McCulloch (OBM), which has offices throughout the Caribbean, but around seven years ago decided to go out on his own, setting up the architectural and imagineering company, Cayman Style.

The business, which is named after the term for which Doak has become associated, allows him to hand pick projects throughout the islands. “When I arrived here I felt obliged, as an architect, to learn more about the place’s cultural history and see if there was such a thing as Cayman style to describe the indigenous architecture, or what would distinguish the buildings from other parts of the Caribbean,” he said.







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"The design or style of any building or structure, results from three basic influences: the climate, the people and the location. Cayman style, by my definition, is a term to interpret these wide-ranging aspects of Cayman's culture which influence the design of buildings.

"I like to re-interpret and carry the chalice of tradition through the work that I do. Therefore, I'd like to think that the buildings I design are befitting the character of Cayman and elsewhere in the Caribbean."

As part of this concept, Doak feels that many buildings are nowadays erected without thought for their location. "We must respect the site on which we build and take into account factors such as orientation, topography, wind direction and views," he said. "The site should dictate how the house is positioned and not the other way around."

With many people now opting for air conditioning in their homes, Doak is concerned that many of the old-style building techniques are being abandoned in favour of creating "sealed boxes".

"If you have a house with AC then you can basically build it anywhere," he points out. "People no longer appreciate principles such as natural ventilation or why houses had verandas."

Drawing on the vernacular style and combining this with modern building techniques, Doak designs houses which he describes as being inside-outside. This includes features such as steep roofs, windows which are deliberately in proportion to the size of the house and the amount of light required, and planting trees and shrubs in the garden for shade as well as aesthetic purposes.

Although the Cayman Islands are flat – the highest point on Grand Cayman is around 50 feet above sea level – Doak applies the same principles throughout the region, even though the topography differs.

He has seen some variations in his style since 2004, however, when Hurricane Ivan tore through Grand Cayman at a Category 5, leaving a wake of devastation. A huge storm surge meant that not only were many parts of the island under water for a while, the force of the sea completely washed out the beach-front houses and everything inside them.

Many residents who had left the island or taken shelter elsewhere, returned to find their homes nothing but empty shells. Furniture, appliances, cars, fixtures and fittings were strewn across the island or had disappeared into the ocean.

A remarkable recovery effort has seen the vast majority of homes either repaired or rebuilt

entirely but the storm has understandably left islanders nervous about water flooding over Cayman again.

As a result, Doak now designs with this in mind, with buildings raised off the ground. "Many of them are now above tree-line level and this lets homeowners appreciate the cool breeze and enjoy vistas from a much more dramatic viewpoint," he says.

With many high-profile clients, Doak is discreet about the projects he has worked on or are pending but he reveals that he is underway with Silver Reef, which is a 50-room resort in St Kitts, as well as Carenage, an apartment complex aimed at upwardly-mobile young professionals in Cayman. The latter development will have a typical Caribbean look and feel, being brightly coloured, with a private dock for mooring boats.

Doak was behind Jimmy Buffet's Margaritaville, which recently opened in downtown George Town in Grand Cayman, and he is working on a new shopping complex slated for the harbour.

He is also involved in myriad estate-type plantation houses, which he describes as the signature of the firm's current style. He also gives a hint of two boutique-style hotels by a well-known figure in the Caribbean, which are in the offing for the Cayman Islands.

The son of distinguished Scottish architect Archie Doak and artist mother Moira, Doak's progression into his career was not an accident. "I became interested in buildings from a very early age, particularly from an historic viewpoint," he says. "On weekend outings, my family would bundle into our Morris Cowley and set off to visit castles and heritage sites throughout Scotland."

Doak launched into his career straight after studying at the prestigious Macintosh School of Architecture in Glasgow. A three-year degree course and two year master's course were coupled with practical training with Gillespie Kidd and Coia, Scotland's foremost design firm, best known for Roman Catholic churches and educational buildings.

Doak worked principally on a number of university buildings, including Oxford and Cambridge.

His move to the Caribbean, however, was more accidental than deliberate, although now it seems he is here for good. "At the time I formally qualified as an architect, all my friends were getting married and setting themselves up with mortgages and commitments to stay in Glasgow," he recalls. "In 1979, I decided to see the world for a while and wrote off to find out what opportunities might be available."

Doak had hoped for a post in Singapore or Hong Kong when he received a call out of the blue from architect John McCulloch of OBM. "After a brief telephone interview, I accepted McCulloch's offer but it was only after digging out my atlas that I discovered Cayman was in the Caribbean and not the East Indies. What a pleasant surprise"







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Doak loves all the islands in the West Indies, although he cites Jamaica as being his favourite and often goes there to find inspiration for his work.

He also pays homage to his Jamaica-born wife Jackie, executive vice-president of the real estate development company Dart Realty (Cayman) Ltd., for an appreciation of all things Caribbean.

Indeed, he has taken the cultural interest of the Caribbean to heart and, over the years, has served as board member and consultant to organisations such as the National Trust for the Cayman Islands, the Cayman National Cultural Foundation, the Cayman Islands National Museum and the National Gallery as well as various schools and churches.

"As an architect I have an opportunity to provide varied expertise to those organisations and I'm pleased to provide this knowledge, particularly when it might benefit the youth and the next generation of these islands. There is little value to what I do unless I share my knowledge with those who might follow on."

He is also working on a book on Cayman style architecture, which chronologically defines the styles of Cayman's buildings through the years.

Aside from his business, Doak has many other interests, including sketching, painting watercolours, collecting books on architecture, making furniture, creating sculptures from coconuts, constructing dog kennels and anything else that requires to be designed.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

MACO, (*mako*).

*Verb: A French Patois word meaning
'To mind other people's business'. Exclusive peeping.*



People keep asking me the same question. Over and over again for the past eight years, they want to know: "Aren't you afraid you're going to run out of content?"

Let me answer the question by giving you an idea of what we have been up to lately.

The MACO team started out the year island hopping to territories we had not yet featured. Photographer Cookie Kinkead, writer Kerri Tucker and I explored the Turks and Caicos islands which will be showcased next issue. We then ventured to the Cayman Islands, where the buoyancy of the people is inspiring. In 2004, Hurricane Ivan, a category-five storm caused catastrophic damage to Grand Cayman. A quarter of all buildings on the island were reported to be uninhabitable. But there is still plenty to celebrate.

Architect John Doak has devoted much of his career to celebrating Cayman Island style. (Page 62) Born in Scotland (his accent is unmistakable) Doak has made the Caymans his home and has designed some of the country's most intriguing dwellings. And he has improved his designs to be more hurricane resistant.

Grenada, another island devastated by Ivan, is also a story of hope and recovery. Real estate developer Peter de Savary shows boundless faith in the future of Grenada by investing in million-dollar resorts with luxury villas, spas, haute couture boutiques and restaurants. (See "Just say Yes" on page 92) Bruce and Sally Hemming also found a quaint "board house" in Petit Bacaye, Grenada, which is the counterpoint to the ultra-modern, high-end villas which will be popping up.

While Kerri, Cookie and I were "outback," slaving over laptops and cameras to bring you the best of the region, the at-home team decided to have a Caribbean version of the New Zealand "hangi," which involves burying meat, vegetables and ground provision in a fiery pit for hours. This is not your ordinary backyard barbecue. See for yourself by turning to page 130.

So, still think we might run out of content?

Not a chance.

Neysha Soodeen
Editor-in-Chief