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ISLAND LIFE. RESORTS. VILLAS. HOMES. ARCHITECTURE. PROPERTIES & CULTURE





Cayman Islands Award winning prolific  
ARCHITECT

JOHN DOAK

All Photos courtesy of John Doak

“If architects are to do useful work on this planet then surely their proper concern must be the creation of place - the ordered imposition of man's self on specific locations across the face of the earth. To make a place is to make a domain that helps people know where they are and by extension know who they are.”

These are the words of architect Charles Moore, the philosophy that has most inspired John Doak's approach to architectural design in the Caribbean.

John Doak is internationally renowned for his firm's extraordinary body of award-winning work of island residences, estate houses, resorts and commercial projects in the Cayman Islands and throughout the Caribbean where he has lived for the last 32 years.

In this special feature we take a look at two of John's completed projects, SEAGRAPE HOUSE, the 2011 Governors Award for design and construction elegance for a residence and the elegant dual property of VILLA AZURE & PURPLE HAZE.

We also took the time to find out a little more about the man.

When did you discover your love of architecture?

My father Archie Doak was an architect with his own practice and offices in Aberdeen and Glasgow, Scotland. My mother Moira was an artist, amongst her many talents, so my parents introduced me to the arts and architecture from an early age.

Prior to attending the Mackintosh School of Architecture which was located on the Glasgow School of Art campus I worked with Scotland's leading design firm Gillespie Kidd and Coia where I was privileged to be involved in the design of buildings at a number of Oxford and Cambridge colleges and some magnificent Catholic churches across Scotland.

The combination of these experiences was hugely influential to my appreciation of cultural history, the creative Arts, the importance of place and the natural environment. My love of architecture and passion to design buildings and places were most inspired by my father Archie Doak and my professors Andy Macmillan and Isi Metzstein at the Mackintosh School.

Why the Cayman Islands?

In 1979 I graduated as an architect and, after almost seven years of studies, it seemed an opportune time for me to experience other parts of the planet before settling down so I made inquiries in the Middle East, Hong Kong and Malaysia where a number of my college friends were heading. Out of the blue I received a call from an expat Glasgow architect John McCulloch who recognized my surname and after a brief telephone interview offered me a position in his Cayman Islands office.

Eventually as the design director of the firm OBMI managed the Cayman office, and design/build all over the Caribbean in Bahamas, BVI, St Maarten, Antigua, Cuba, Dominican Republic and also Bermuda.

How would you describe your style and is there a particular style favoured by your diverse international clientele?

The buildings and places we create at John Doak Architecture are at home in the tropics and speak to the place where they reside.

We don't necessarily have a style but like chefs we combine the ingredients of budget, client aspirations, accommodations, the assets and constraints of the site and creatively concoct a unique place that is tropically spiced. In culinary language our buildings respect the "terroir" or locale by blending context, siting, budget, scheduling and construction feasibility.



John built his own impeccable Spanish influenced Caribbean home in the Cayman Islands

What is your view on the sustainable Eco-friendly trend?

Building in the tropics and on remote islands necessitates a sustainable approach so for us it's not a trend but rather it's the way we've always designed and built in these parts. The term Eco-friendly is newspeak for recycling and making sensible choices for materials and methods for construction in an environment where Mother Nature isn't always friendly!

In the tropics there are so many aspects of the natural environment to consider, the sun's intense and often relentless heat, the brightness of the sunlight, the easterly breezes which in the summer can reach hurricane force winds.

The corrosive effects of the salty air, the times of year when it doesn't rain in contrast to the rainy season from June through September, the ability to transport materials from mainland USA to a potentially remote site on a small island where there are no roads and nowhere to dock a supply ship.

So beyond the siting of a building to enjoy the views to the ocean and the orientation of the house to capture the breezes, the design and 'buildability' of any residence in the tropics should address shading from the rain and sun, hurricane storm protection, earthquake resistance, lightning protection, longevity of materials to resist decay and corrosion, along with the need to understand the logistics of building in a location that may have local labour and expertise limitations.

Do you have a favorite architect if so and why ?

I admire the residential architecture of Hugh Newel Jacobsen whose houses have a very contemporary and recognizable signature, but are completely at home in the various locations they are built around the world. He has a complete appreciation for place and cultural context.

Do you have a favourite building in the Caribbean?

I love the Georgian elegance of the Great House at Good Hope in Jamaica which comprises connected pavilions gracefully arranged on a hillside to capture breezes, enjoy spectacular views.

What's next for John Doak ?

Back in the early 1980s I wrote a series of articles for the daily newspaper in Cayman with the hope of one day producing a book. In 1994 I received an American Express Preservation Award for the manuscript. Some decades later I continue to finalize the manuscript, drawings and photographs for a book which is expected to be entitled "Cayman Style" which chronologically considers the development of the Cayman Islands from its discovery in 1503 by Christopher Columbus to the present day. Beyond that I shall continue to celebrate the building traditions of the tropics whilst exploring new techniques to meet the changing lifestyles and technological needs of those who live or visit these wonderful islands in the Caribbean Sea. ■



# VILLA AZURE & PURPLE HAZE

Location: North Sound, Grand Cayman  
Architect: John Dook







photos and text John Doak

Inland from Grand Cayman's famous Seven Mile Beach is a shallow lagoon called North Sound where Caymanians and visitors spend lazy weekends at anchor in the shallow aquamarine waters, snorkelling at Stingray City or chilling with friends at the Rum Point beach bar.

On the east side of the lagoon is a sand peninsula called Cayman Kai where a quiet community of beach homes has emerged over the last twenty years. In contrast to the hubub of Caymans famous Seven Mile Beach strip, Cayman Kai is a secluded neighbourhood of vacation homes for North American "snowbirds" who fly down to the islands each winter in search of sun, sea and sand.

In 2009 a couple on Xmas vacation were strolling up and down the shoreline by Rum Point and fell in love with a little wooden beach shack known as Villa Azure, idyllically set on the golden sand shoreline with tall leaning coconut palm trees. Overlooking the beautiful waters of the North Sound lagoon the site faced west so it also enjoyed magnificent sunset views.

The siting of the property was perfect however the family required a beach house that would accommodate the immediate family members and also be a place for life long friends to visit and celebrate the holiday periods so a new Villa Azure needed to be designed to replace the beach shack. ▶







By Easter the project had been granted building permits and the design/build team set about delivering a completed project in time for the family to celebrate the following Xmas 2010.

The completed main pavilion houses a master suite, two guest suites with a communal Great Room comprising kitchen, dining and a lounge area with panoramic views towards the North Sound. Surrounded on all sides with a classic Caribbean style verandah, each room in the house has high wood boarded ceilings and enjoys the cooling easterly breezes through the French doors which open out from each space.

The garden spaces between the buildings were lushly landscaped to compliment the tropically styled architecture and pastel colouring.

As the family enjoyed their new beach house during Xmas 2010 the neighbouring property, known as Purple Haze, became available. It was decided that the first beach house was so perfectly laid out that another beach-house with a replica floor plan would be built alongside. ▶







*Villa Azure*

*Purple Haze*

The new Purple Haze would have a more contemporary look with lots of glass to capture the spectacular panoramic views of the ocean. Purple Haze was also designed and built within twelve months along with a beach deck, outdoor dining cabana and spa situated between the two houses.

"It was certainly a challenge to design and build each of the houses within a 12 month period," noted architect Doak, "not least on two very tight pieces of land where we had to preserve existing trees and barely enough space to store the construction materials and site huts but we had two very well organised builders who worked tirelessly to meet the clients' timelines." ■

What John Doak has created here is nothing short of, stunning.

In every aspect these joint properties represent beach living design at its very **FINEST!**





# SEAGRAPE HOUSE

Location: Frank Sound, Grand Cayman  
Architect: John Dook





photos and text John Doak

Seagrape is situated on a 1.3 acre site on the beach on the Frank Sound Marine Park, Grand Cayman. The house was thoughtfully located and built to minimize disturbance to the established trees and plants with, where possible, the use of local firms, suppliers and materials. The tropical landscaped garden has been blended into the existing vegetation, planting only indigenous trees and plants.

Framed by a magnificent colonial Caribbean wrap around balcony, the design is in a traditional Caribbean/Plantation house design style with an indoor/outdoor approach, air conditioned inside living space which opens onto an outdoor living area affording shade and breeze. ▶







Seagrape was built to be energy efficient, with two inch insulation on all exterior walls and Icynene sprayed roof insulation to create a tight envelope. CWS doors and Neuma doors were installed to provide the highest Energy Star ratings for insulation.

Air conditioning throughout the property is provided by a geothermal system using ground source heat pumps in a vertical closed loop system resulting in significantly lower energy bills. Rain water from the roof is harvested through internal down pipes to a 5000 gallon cistern and this water is used for garden irrigation.



Primary living space is on the first floor with the living room, kitchen and master bedroom with tree top garden and ocean views. The outside living area has a partly enclosed Lanai and a covered verandah (50 ft x 15 ft) overlooking the beach. A mezzanine roof area provides a large room used as a library, study, office and entertainment area. The ground floor, which in an extreme storm case would be considered sacrificial, has utility areas, a guest suite and three watertight rooms for the solar, geo-thermal and SWRO plant. Seagrape, a vision of environmentally conscious properties. ■