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**JOHN
DOAK**
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architect's casa is his castle

WEST INDIAN GREAT HOUSE IS HOME OF RENOWNED ARCHITECT
IN MEDITERRANEAN-STYLE COMMUNITY IN CAYMAN. NOW FIND OUT WHAT A RUMBANA IS



LEFT Casa J from the
Salt Creek waterway
ABOVE Guests' courtyard
and bathhouse in background

HAVING BUILT HIS HOUSE IN A CAYMAN ISLANDS COMMUNITY FOCUSING ON MEDITERRANEAN-SPANISH DESIGN, ARCHITECT JOHN DOAK CAME UP WITH A SUITABLE NAME. He called his home "Casa J."

The "J" stands both for his own first name and that of his wife Jackie, following on from their previous home, which was named "Villa J."

"Now the house is built, some nickname it Castillo J," jokes Doak, who is originally from Scotland where the adage goes that a Scotsman's home is his castle.

Truth be told, despite the Mediterranean concept of the development at Vista del Mar, Casa J is West Indian in design, and built in the style of a three-storey great house.

At each corner of the property is a pavilion, one being a garage, the second a guest house, the third a gateway, and the fourth the "Rumbana," a cabana where Doak keeps his collection of rums.

This ordered arrangement of buildings creates a garden on the north, south, east and west sides of the great house.



“All sides of Casa J lead out to a special garden; on the east is a private garden for the guest house, the north is the swimming pool, the south is the entrance court, the west is the kitchen fruit and herb garden,” Doak explains.

Like great houses in times gone by, Casa J is built in a commanding position. Located at the end of a cul de sac on the tip of a peninsula in Grand Cayman, the residence enjoys a spectacular and panoramic view over the waters of Salt Creek and out towards North Sound and Barkers.

“To the north and west, the waterways are bordered by mature mangrove which is inalienable, so our views should remain undisturbed forever,” says Doak.

The exterior has an Italianate or Mediterranean aesthetic and colouring, surmounted with barrel-shaped clay roof tiles, while the windows and doors have Bahama or colonial shutters.

“The residence has the overall impression of being quite palatial but, as individual buildings, it is domestic in scale,” Doak explains. “This allows the property to cater to a variety of large or small social gatherings, whether formal or laid back, for the children and their friends, for visiting house guests or relatives.

“We’ve hosted a wedding reception for over a hundred, but there is always a private spot where you can curl up and enjoy a peaceful moment by yourself.”

Internally, the house is laid out symmetrically in a classic Caribbean Georgian floor plan, each corner room having two sets of windows to allow views, daylight and cross breezes.

Doak is not only a qualified architect, designing houses across the Caribbean, but he is a qualified interior designer too, while Jackie is a real estate developer.

However the couple chose to work with the Orlando-based firm Marc Michaels, a leading residential interiors company in the United States, and Michelle Butler of Cayman-based Design Studios for “Casa J”.

The look they have been striving to attain is “homely, relaxing and comfortable,” according to Doak.

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ABOVE LEFT Italian colouring and Bahama shutters

LEFT Side view of house, palatial but welcoming

ABOVE Entrance to Casa J, a modern West Indian great house



FAR LEFT Dining room with Indonesian wood table, a survivor of Hurricane Ivan
 LEFT Owners designed kitchen and pantry themselves
 BELOW Great Room has 12-foot high ceilings and large wooden beams

"We designed the kitchen, pantry and laundry layout ourselves and then developed the cabinetry styling and appliance selection with Downsview kitchens," he says.

The informal dining area features a refectory-style table such as you might find in a monastery and which is a conversation piece during dinner parties.

"The table is a well-worn Indonesian hardwood, dinged and dented over time," says Doak. "We had the table in our former house which became flooded by the storm surge waters of Hurricane Ivan in 2004. The dining table top stood above the floodwaters, so it became the safe place for items that needed to be high and dry as the tidewaters rose. There's a lasting stain from one of the objects that was stacked there. It made such an interesting design in the wood that we left it as a memory of that historic event in our life."

The great room is the family's main living area and is the largest space in the house, with ceilings that are almost 12 feet high and feature large wooden beams.

The Doaks have taken time to "grow" into this area but have finally decided on traditional West Indian mahogany furniture to combine a fairly formal ambience with homeliness.

Doak's office is adjacent to the great room and is very much a space for comfort and creativity.

"I don't draw so much these days at a drafting table but I continue to hand sketch all my designs for buildings and homes in Cayman and across the Caribbean," he says. "I still have all my sketches from the past 30 years. I like to slob out on deep couches when I'm sketching, so my home office has a monster leather sofa that I love to collapse into and create from."

The office is completely surrounded by floor-to-ceiling bookshelves and the walls are covered with historic maps of Cayman and other Caribbean islands.

Doak also has a comprehensive collection of



THE GREAT ROOM IS THE FAMILY'S MAIN LIVING AREA AND IS THE LARGEST SPACE IN THE HOUSE, WITH CEILINGS THAT ARE ALMOST 12 FEET HIGH AND FEATURE LARGE WOODEN BEAMS

BELOW Free-standing bathtub in master suite has own bay window
BOTTOM Guest bathroom
RIGHT Poolside veranda



THE PIECE DE RESISTANCE, THOUGH, HAS TO BE THE FREESTANDING BATHTUB IN THE MASTER SUITE, WHICH IS SET IN ITS OWN BAY WINDOW WITH COMPLETELY PRIVATE VIEWS

architectural books and he is currently putting the finishing touches to his own literary effort entitled *Cayman Style*, a history of, and designer's guide to, Caymanian-influenced architecture.

Upstairs, the master suite is the heart of the house on that floor, with wonderful views over the water from the large bay window. There is also a sitting room that doubles as a study and reading room or for watching late night television.

"Quite frequently we find it a handy place for that Eureka moment in the middle of the night when you have to grab the iPad and create something sensational or realise an idea," says Doak.

The piece de resistance, though, has to be the freestanding bathtub in the master suite, which is set in its own bay window with completely private views.

The children, meanwhile, have their own rooms next to their parents' suite.

"Jackson (8) and Cameron Claire (10) have their own bedrooms and bathrooms, essentially the same configuration but our daughter has a classic four-poster princess bed while our son has a bunk-style bed that transforms (in his imagination) to a fort or a galactic cruiser or a tree house with a zipline to escape from," Doak explains. "With boys, the style and theme change constantly."

The guest house, known as D-Cabana (after Doak, of course), has arguably the best views of the whole house, with a vista over the water and a private beach, as well as its own entrance.

In an upscale bed-sitting room style, there is a king-size bed in the middle and a kitchenette for guests to cater for themselves should they wish to do so.

Behind the bedroom is the bathroom known as the Bath House, which Doak designed as a whimsical kind of temple finished with Moroccan motifs and embellishments.

There is an indoor shower but french doors open out from the Bath House to a private garden with an outdoor shower too.





FAR LEFT To the north of Casa J is the pool
 BELOW LEFT The Rumbana room is where
 owner keeps his rum collection
 LEFT View from Rumbana to Salt Creek

“IN MUCH THE SAME WAY AS MY INTEREST
 IN EXPLORING THE DIVERSITY OF THE CARIBBEAN’S
 MULTI-NATIONAL HISTORY, I DISCOVERED
 (AND NOW SAVOUR) THE VARIETY OF RUMS
 OF THE REGION, AND BEYOND,
 IN SUFFICIENT QUANTITIES TO JUSTIFY
 A FULL-SIZE RUM BAR”

To counter balance the guest house, Doak designed an indoor-outdoor space, complete with a barbecue kitchen, for relaxing by the pool and where you will often find him in his Rumbana cabana.

The cabana, which has doors that slide out of sight into the walls, has a rum bar and is a multifunctional venue for weekend entertaining.

“At weekends we open up the Rumbana and chill out with the kids, friends and anyone who happens to sail by or pull up at the dock,” says Doak. “In much the same way as my interest in exploring the diversity of the Caribbean’s multi-national history, I discovered (and now savour) the variety of rums of the region, and beyond, in sufficient quantities to justify a full-size rum bar.”

For a quiet moment, it’s time to slip away to the “fishinin’ corner spot” where Doak and his elder son and daughter, Johnny and Jaime, enjoy casting a rod at night to see what they can catch.

“We recently caught a magnificent mutton snapper which Johnny’s fiancée, Chef Sara, then cooked up in the kitchen and we all had a lovely, memorable family night under the moonlight of the Rumbana,” says Doak.

At the other end of the noise spectrum, is the top floor of the house where, like a true Scotsman, Doak can escape to and practise playing the national musical instrument of his homeland—the bagpipes.

“Casa J is a wonderful place to wake up to, to live in and to come home to,” Doak says. “We love its location at the end of the peninsula, its orientation to the sun, the sea, the cooling breezes and its tropical garden setting surrounded by the beautiful waters of Grand Cayman.

“Perhaps, best of all, is that moment late in the evening, sipping on a fine rum, when the sun has already gone down and the moon is up in the sky.” M