

# JOHN DOAK

AT HOME  
IN THE  
CAYMAN  
ISLANDS

*By Nasaria Budal*

John Doak, along with business partner and fellow architect John Yeo, have redefined what Cayman architecture looks like.

*Photos Courtesy of John Doak Architecture*





Casa J at Vista Del Mar

Originally from the vibrant city of Glasgow, Scotland, architect John Doak moved to the Cayman Islands in 1979 after graduating as an architect from the University of Glasgow and Glasgow School of Art. Doak has lived on Grand Cayman for the last 33 years and in that time he has been recognised and celebrated for his unique architectural designs, which are inspired by all things Caymanian. In fact, the term "Cayman Style" has been used many times over to describe the character of the building designs that originate from the creative likes of Doak and his right-hand man John Yeo. "John Yeo has been my right arm and drafting genius for the better part of 15 years," Doak says.

In 2000, Doak made the decision to get back to the grass roots of designing buildings and structures for private clients. "I became an architect and imagineer again. Five years ago Yeo joined me at John Doak Architecture." Together, the pair possess an innate ability to read each other's thoughts

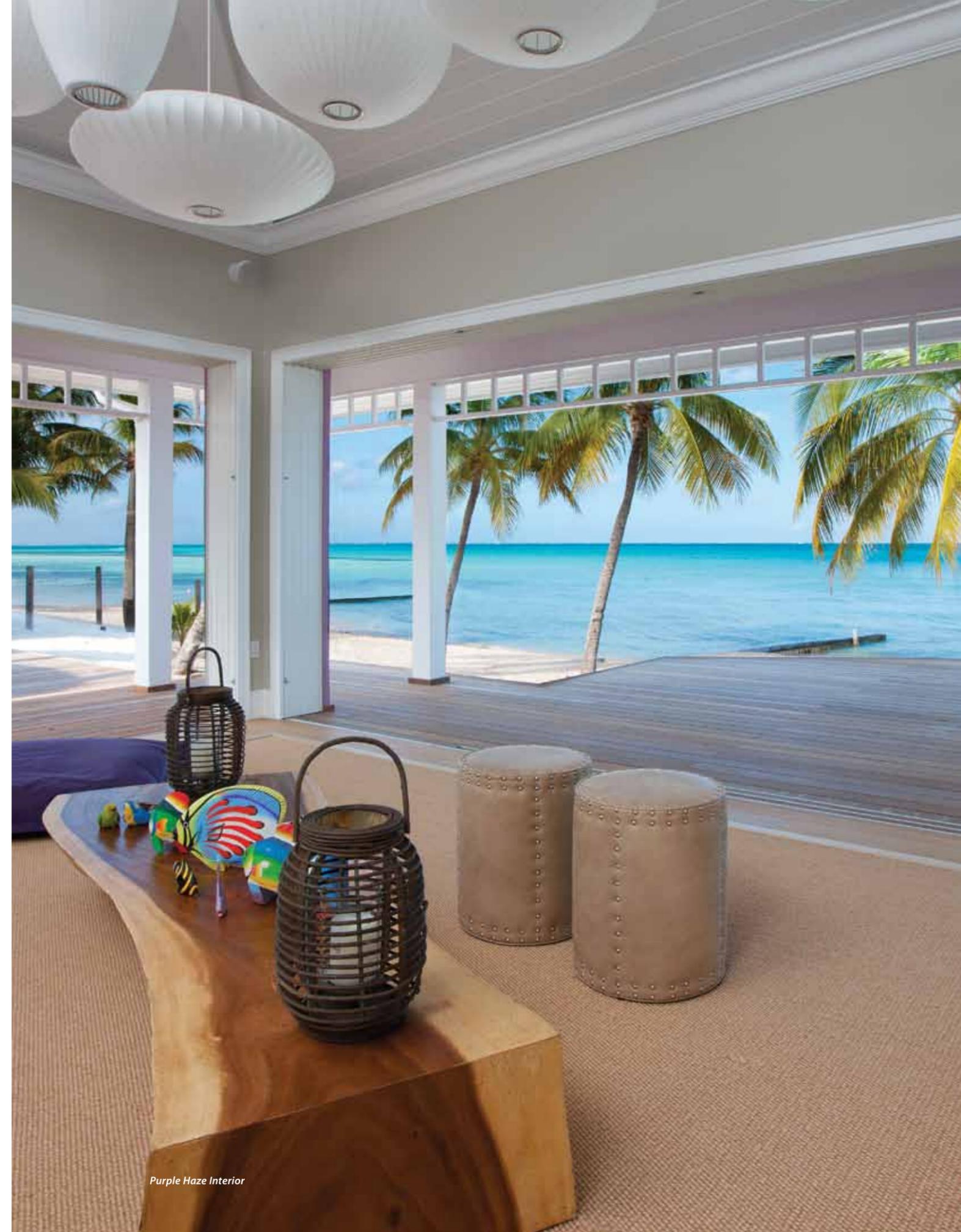
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## THE TERM "CAYMAN STYLE" IS USED TO DESCRIBE DOAK'S DESIGNS.

without having to speak a word, making for a very powerful duo of architectural prowess. "We have an intuitive understanding of one another and what clients want," Doak says. "Most times I do not even have to draw or explain a solution [to meet the client's needs]; John already understands how to solve the situation."

According to Doak, the John Doak Architecture firm follows the traditional definition of architecture: "We manage the entire project, tailoring the process to meet the client's budget and expectations. We bring together the right people to fulfil the project — everything from structural, mechanical, electrical and plumbing, engineering, home automation, landscape design, and interior design." The firm has an incredible pool of talent to draw on for expert advice and design skills from their consultants and designers located in the Cayman Islands, the United States, Canada and other Caribbean islands.

The designs created by Doak are different from those of the average architect; he describes them as "products of a broader imagination" and agrees that living and designing in the tropics compels any architect to be innovative and maximise the resources available. "Building in the tropics and on remote islands necessitates a sustainable approach; I found myself creating solutions for all manner of things," Doak admits. "It is not a trend for John Doak Architecture, but rather the way we have always designed and built in these parts of the world. The term 'eco-friendly' is new speak for recycling and making sensible choices for materials and methods of construction in an environment where Mother Nature is not always friendly," he joked lightly and added, "Whilst our designs already respect local building traditions, we continue to explore new materials, construction methods and renewable energy systems. We are not obsessively green, but we do understand how to design buildings that are entirely suitable and sustainable in a tropical environment."



Purple Haze Interior



Seagrape House

The design approach that John Doak Architecture is most known for speaks to the place where the building resides; the methodology used by the firm is to show reverence for the building's very surroundings and yet still incorporate these very natural components into the design process. "The buildings and places we design at John Doak Architecture are at home in the tropics. We have developed a reputation as the designers of bespoke beach houses and single-family residences."

One such project is the Seagrape House, a stunning and elegantly traditional Caymanian home located in Frank Sound, North Side — a quiet and untouched district in Grand Cayman. The staircase at Seagrape House was inspired by 19<sup>th</sup>-century

Caribbean great houses, including Grand Cayman's Pedro St. James. The seaside home boasts verandas on all sides, providing both shade and access to and from the home's interior rooms. It makes for a "pleasant stroll amongst the treetops of the overhanging seagrape trees." Seagrape House was so perfectly designed and constructed that the home won the 2011 Governor's Award for Design and Construction Excellence in the Cayman Islands. Late last year, Governor Duncan Taylor awarded Doak with the Cayman Islands Certificate and Badge of Honour for his work in preserving architectural history.

Seagrape House is but one of the many alluring buildings



J. Kevin Foltz

JOHN DOAK has several projects in the works. His firm is currently involved in a number of commercial and retail projects with Camana Bay — a lively town centre in Grand Cayman where restaurants, shopping and entertainment combine in a magical way.

The firm is also the brains behind a major resort hotel currently being built along Seven Mile Beach, the hub of Grand Cayman where the finest restaurants meet soulful lounges and after-dinner entertainment.

But the project to keep on your radar is Doak's book *Cayman Style* — an illustrated timeline of the development of the Cayman Islands that earned a Caribbean Preservation Award in 1994 from the U.S. National Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites. Doak has been working for decades on the transcript, sketches and the watercolours that illustrate Cayman's historical growth, and he promises to publish it one day.



*Tiki Beach Bar and Restaurant*

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ALL AROUND  
CAYMAN, YOU  
CAN SEE  
DOAK'S WORK  
FOR YOURSELF.

Doak has dreamt up and brought to life. He admits he has been blessed with the opportunity to create and build some extraordinary places in idyllic locations, not just the Cayman Islands, but also Jamaica, the Bahamas, Turks and Caicos, the British Virgin Islands, Antigua, St. Lucia, Bermuda, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and of course his native Scotland — where he first practiced architecture. “I once 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 a respect for the natural environment.”

Doak’s architectural influence and love for the arts stem, in part, from his father Archie Doak, who is also an architect with his own practice in Aberdeen and Glasgow. His mother, Moira, is an artist as well, so from an early age Doak was exposed to the arts and his passion for architecture soon developed. “Almost every weekend my dad would bundle me, my brother Christopher, my sister Caroline and my mom into the back seat of our Morris Cowley and head off on one of his ‘Magical Mystery Tours’ to visit ruined castles, stately homes or a museum of some sort.

“My professors Andy MacMillan and Isi Metstein at the Mackintosh School [of Architecture] also played a major role in my early career. Thirty years later, as I designed a beach house in the Caribbean, I could still hear their encouraging Scottish accents over my shoulder, guiding my pencil across the sketch pad.”

Today, Doak readily agrees his design philosophy is best expressed by the words of famous architect Charles Moore, who once said, “If architects are to do useful work on this planet then their proper concern should 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.” It is evident in his work that Doak has put this philosophy into practice; but do not take my word for it. While you are exploring the Cayman Islands, see what Cayman Style really means for John Doak Architecture and visit the buildings Doak and Yeo have designed, including Tiki Beach Bar and Restaurant, Michael’s Genuine Food and Drink, Ortanique, the Central Caribbean Marine Institute and Margaritaville. For more information about John Doak Architecture, visit [johndoak.com](http://johndoak.com) or call 345-946-3625.