

CARIBBEAN HIGH STYLE: Jill Hartley kicks off our three-page special with a \$300 martini

Posh frocks and real rocks



Dressing up is *de rigueur* on Canouan island

"I HAD that Queen Noor in my catamaran the other day. Johnny Depp? Yeah. He's been with us loadsa times. Pierce Brosnan? Lovely bloke. He's matey with that royal snapper Patrick Lichfield."

Blatant name dropping passes for normal when you're cruising the Tobago Cays with Eastender Captain Phil and his Scottish wife Nicola. For the past 14 years they've lived on board their luxury catamaran *Splendid Adventurer* and ferried the rich, royal and famous on snorkelling trips from the society island of Mustique in the Grenadines.

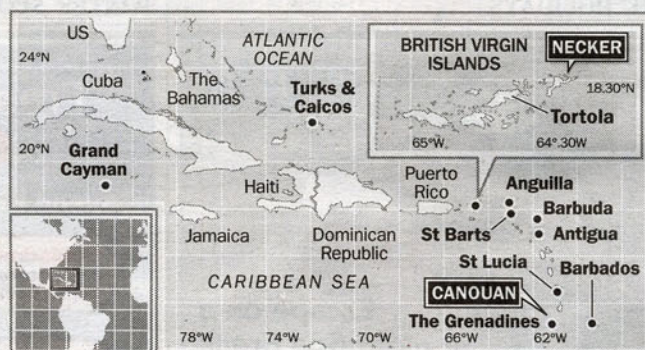
Nowhere does ostentatious luxury better than the Caribbean and this year Mustique gained a rival with the opening of Raffles Resort Canouan, only a few miles away, which has a world-class Amrita Spa and Jim Fazio-designed golf course, two major points up on its neighbour, as well as day cruises with the loquacious Captain Phil.

Flying in from Barbados, a hundred miles east, in an eight-seater Cessna, our first view of Canouan was of a stupendous Palladian-style villa. This impressive architectural fantasy, housing a gourmet restaurant and casino, is partly owned by Donald Trump, king of bling and no stranger to extravagant projects.

His property company is planning to build more than 100 villas on the island, the first expected to be ready by April



It's quite acceptable to wear diamonds at breakfast at the Raffles Resort on Canouan, which has its own-label caviar and a Trump casino



next year, costing between £530,000 and £1.6 million. The white sand for the beach is already being shipped in.

When the Swiss-Italian banker Antonio Saladino bought Canouan in 1990, the island didn't even have mains electricity. He invested £105 million and brought in the late architect Luigi Vietti, who worked for the Aga Khan on the Costa Smeralda. Now, with a management team from Raffles Resorts, the Far Eastern hotel chain, it has been transformed

into one of the world's most sumptuous resorts.

First impressions were of a small Mediterranean village, with a pinch of Florida and a *soupcou* of Surrey, plonked down on a perfect tropical island. It's bigger than I anticipated, with many of the 156 rooms in villas scattered over the slopes. The unexpected centrepiece is a 17th-century stone church, said to have been transported brick-by-brick from England by a now forgotten philanthropist.

My room was huge with two bathrooms, a generous four-poster, kitchenette, two six-seater sofas and a terrace big enough for a drinks party. Much of the furniture and ceramics were from Mexico, with extra flourishes from Morocco. Lovely — but the only Caribbean flavour was a mango in the fruit bowl.

Everyone is given their own golf cart for zipping to the beach, spa, or restaurants. This is vital, as some are ten min-

utes' drive away. It's great fun, but taking a cart out to dinner, almost impossible in heels, increases the surreal quality of staying in a man-made paradise. The resort has impeccable service with armies of flunkies to bring fresh towels and cold drinks. They also have a habit of turning round your golf cart, no matter how neat your parking. Weird, and strangely annoying.

Our fellow guests were all well-heeled Americans — 70 of them part of a Manhattan wedding party with celebrations lasting a week. Naturally they like to dress up and Canouan is the kind of place where diamonds are acceptable at breakfast.

To appeal to the frocks-and-rocks brigade, the resort has the Trump casino, Raffles private-label caviar in the La Varrenne gourmet restaurant, and a \$300 martini where the olive is pierced with a 24-carat gold sword. You get to keep the hand-blown martini glass and the sword, presented in a velvet-lined box, but Theo, the barman in Bellinis bar, says he's had no takers as yet. We suggested that Mr Brosnan may be interested, for obvious reasons. "Yeah man," said Theo, "we're expecting him to drop round any day now."

So that's it. Canouan may be unreal, in some ways surreal, but where else do you get to drink a martini next to James Bond? Just make sure he stands his round.

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Need to know

Getting there: Jill Hartley visited Raffles Resort Canouan Island with Abercrombie & Kent (0845 0700614, www.abercrombiekent.co.uk). Seven nights, including return flights to Barbados with British Airways, connecting flights, transfers

and breakfast in a garden view room, cost from £1,709 per person. An all-day catamaran trip, including lunch, drinks and snorkelling equipment, costs \$840 (£530) for a minimum of six. A day for two costs \$720 (£450).