

Awakening Antigua's northern soul

Five-star resort set to breathe new life into Hodges Bay

Lazy afternoons circling the island by catamaran are usually associated with sun, sand, snorkelling and copious amounts of enthusiastically poured rum punch.

It's rare that they also herald the start of a US\$100m business deal set to overturn the woes of three crumbling hotels – two plundered by hurricanes, the third by the financial crash – and transform them into a luxurious five-star resort.

It's fair to say when Jeff Wellemeyer climbed aboard Wadadli Cats one fine day in 2012, he was probably envisaging the first scenario. That was until he spotted the alabaster shell of the half-constructed Hodges Bay Club fringing Antigua's north coast like the shattered dream of a pre-2008 investor.

Wellemeyer asked the captain to stop the boat, before leaping into the water to the astonishment of fellow passengers and swimming ashore to take a closer look.

The halcyon spot ensconced in the leafy residential area of Hodges Bay piqued his interest enough to inquire into buying an eight-acre site incorporating the adjacent storm-ravaged White Sands Hotel and Pelican Club too.

Fast forward four years and the self-made US entrepreneur is one of a number of big names currently ploughing funds and expertise into the forthcoming Hodges Bay Resort, scheduled for completion by winter 2017.

Another notable is multi award-winning Miami architect Kobi Karp who has lent his creative flair to several of the world's

leading hotel companies including Marriot, Hyatt and Hilton.

Known for his ecologically sensitive designs, Karp has been tasked with conceptualising a world-class development with uber-stylish contemporary accommodation and top-notch facilities that meld effortlessly into the tropical landscape.

"We got lucky," imparts Wellemeyer's co-developer John Goard, "Kobi took it on because he liked the project. But he warned us we would have to work backwards before we could go forwards."

That meant a complete overhaul of Hodges Bay Club's original design – and demolishing numerous walls in the process.

"We took 150 truckloads of concrete off the property, replacing solid walls with glass. Kobi wanted to open everything up," Goard explains.

A walk around the site reveals this to have been an auspicious call. Vast open spaces, oversized windows, translucent balconies and the vast multi-storey ceiling of the main building flood the place with natural light and allow it to breathe.

Nods to the environment can be seen



throughout, from the energy-efficient air-conditioning and lighting, to the gargantuan cisterns for storing rainwater and the use of 'greywater' to irrigate the abundant vegetation.

Fronted by majestic royal palm trees and 'living walls', designs for the reception area alone are something to behold. All facilities will be fully open to the public and include three restaurants, two swimming pools, a 'secret garden', tennis courts, health club with gym, souvenir shops, tour desk, a walk-in wine cellar, and cigar lounge with button-back leather chairs. The entire complex will be disability-friendly thanks to elevators and ramps.

The beachfront main restaurant – complete with juice bar and speciality coffees – is wonderfully breezy with perfectly framed views of the water and Prickly Pear island. Above it, the plan is for a 'Nikki Beach-style' restaurant with plenty of couches for relaxation, light finger food, tapas and sushi, champagne and wine, open daily from noon to 11pm. Goard promises "lots of wow factors and a cool, funky vibe".

The third restaurant is to comprise a high-end indoor/outdoor steak and seafood venue with adjoining cocktail bar. Guests can choose from air-conditioned comfort or al fresco dining on the decks overlooking the ocean.

The resort's stunning environs are used to their fullest advantage: every single bedroom has a private balcony with an ocean view.

There are several properties available for sale to those who find they want to extend the holiday or snap up a rental place to generate some extra income. All have been approved under the country's Citizenship by Investment programme, entitling the buyer to apply for an Antiguan passport. They include many of the hotel's 38 rooms, along with on-site studios, two-bedroom apartments, and three- and four-bedroom townhouses. Two magnificent penthouses – each with four bedrooms and five balconies – span a generous 35,000 square feet each.



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A discerning eye for quality is evident in all fixtures, fittings and furnishings – from the custom-made Italian kitchen units with marble countertops to the German concertina-style sliding glass doors and the abundance of innovative appliances.

Located just a five-minute drive from the international airport, the resort offers easy accessibility along scenic sun-dappled roads.

For the developers – who have built several show-stopping projects across the Caribbean – Antigua possesses some unique qualities beyond the hand nature dealt that set it apart from its regional neighbours.

“An island is an island,” Goard says. “But Antigua is unspoilt, old-style Caribbean. It’s like stepping 30 years back in time. It has amazing people and an incredible atmosphere all of its own.” ■

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