



STYLE DESTINATION:
MUSTIQUE

COURTESY THE MUSTIQUE COMPANY



THE COLONIAL REVIVAL FORT SHANDY

A complement to the exuberant early designs of Oliver Messel, the villa—named for the 18th-century hilltop fort ruins upon which it was built—takes its aesthetic cues from the colonial Caribbean styles of the broader region, including louvered doors and broad-roofed verandas to maximize shade and breeze.

were (a stagecraft trick). He kept Caribbean colonial design vestiges like gingerbread latticework and jalousied wooden shutters, but insisted on windows and doorways carefully framing views like a theater's proscenium arch. He advised clients to surround their homes with dense and jungly landscape, like something out of a Rousseau painting, and would then paint the exterior trim and shutters a pale shade of sage that made the house appear as a hidden treasure within the environment. (The color became so associated with the designer that it was called "Messel green.") And perhaps most impactfully, Messel tore down traditional divisions of indoor and outdoor spaces. In a Messel house, life flowed in and out with the breeze.

Did it help that Oliver Messel was also the uncle of Lord Snowdon, bridegroom to Princess Margaret, the alpha resident on Mustique? It did. Tennant saw the opportunity.

"Mustique was an invention—like *Treasure Island*," Tennant is credited with saying. Bringing Messel to Mustique

underpinned that leap of imagination: homes—villas—designed for the performance of life. And a sought-after set-designer-turned-interior-designer to lure new buyers.

He built it, and they came. First heirs and heiresses, lords and ladies. And he built more. Industrial titans and rock and roll millionaires followed. Between 1960 and 1978 Messel created 30 house plans for the island; at least 18 were built. On a sunny day on Mustique, which remains privately owned, now by the Mustique Company, I take a golf cart tour of several Messel legacy villas that are in the Mustique Collection: 84 villas out of the island's total of 120, which are available for weekly rental. (The island's sole hotel, Cotton House, was built in the late 1960s from an existing plantation building by Messel and frequent collaborator Arne Hasselqvist.) The term "rental" masks their opulence and their clientele. Daniel Craig is a renter; so are the Waleses and a longlist of celebrities over the years from Paul Newman to Taylor Swift, along with George Clooney, Paul McCartney, Bill Gates, and Tom Ford.



THE COLOR STORY YELLOW BIRD

Messel's designs on Barbados—the work that caught the fancy of Colin Tennant and the original owners on Mustique—featured a soft shade of sage so beloved (and utilized) by the designer it became known simply as “Messel green.” But on Mustique, he swapped his favor from green to yellow, and several of his original villas, including the aptly named Yellow Bird, have exteriors bathed in a sunny shade that peeks through the foliage of their courtyards and surrounds. Yellow Bird's dining pavilion and Great Room are bright white complements.

I've already been living an enchanted few days on the island: lolling by the pool and wandering among the peak-ceilinged rooms of my Hasselqvist-designed villa, L'Ansecoy, which was long owned by French restaurateur Maguy Le Coze, who cofounded New York's Le Bernardin with Eric Ripert. I've enjoyed peak Mustique hospitality: the practiced, seamless attention of L'Ansecoy's staff (every villa has its own); jaunts to beaches, mingling at the Cotton House's weekly cocktail party, and dancing to a local band at Basil's Bar, the raffish watering hole that has seen every version of high-bred hedonism over its 49 years in business.

But it's stepping into Clonsilla, a very early Messel villa built for an heiress to the Guinness brewing fortune, that overwhelms. In thrall of his stagecraft, I enter through a courtyard of stone and leaf toward the bright light of the Great Room, which opens its French doors to me while giving way out the other side to a terrace, pool, gardens, and sea beyond. That passage from courtyard to Great Room to the theater of the view is a trademark Messel Mustique signature, and the effect catches me like a snare.

I could live here forever, I decide, taking in Messel's soothing Neoclassical symmetries, his passion for the view. I see in my mind's eye the drifts of caftan-draped hostesses, I hear the clinks of ice, the murmurs of secrets. I smell frangipani on the breeze. I feel myself on the threshold of the eternal dance done here on Mustique, away from the glare but spotlighted nonetheless in these sets that began with the dreams of Messel.

And I think about that renegade, chain-smoking princess, needing desperately to escape the constraints of her royal pedigree, who took refuge in her own Messel palace, which she named Les Jolies Eaux after the brilliant Grenadine waters that it overlooks.

“This is my house,” HRH The Princess Margaret said, “the only square inch in the world I own.”

But what a square inch it is.

