

Island

In a secluded Atlantis in the Caribbean, the rich, the royal, and the rock star roam free, and one woman has held court for decades in a villa designed by Oliver Messel known simply as Gingerbread.

BY MIKE ALBO

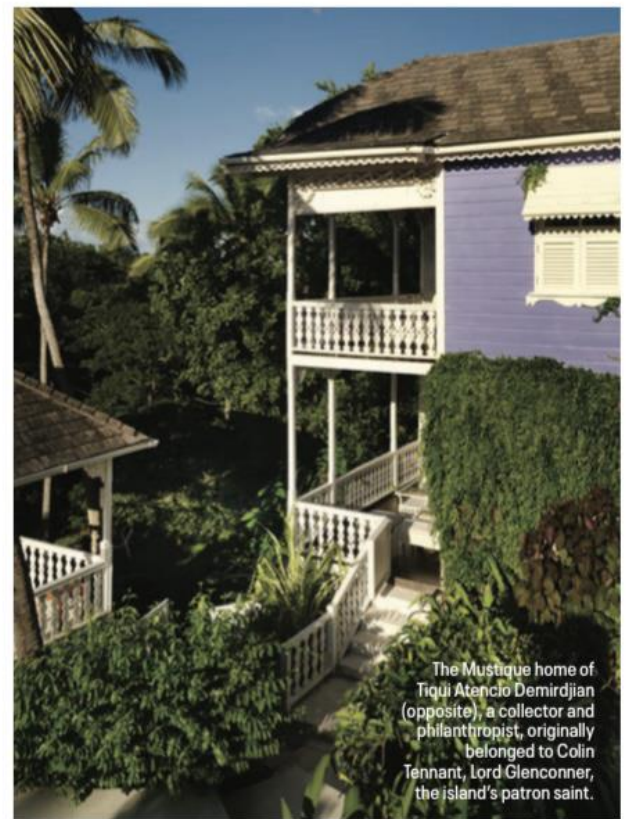
PHOTOGRAPHS BY DOUGLAS FRIEDMAN

On a hot day in mid-January, Tiqui Atencio Demirdjian steers her electric mule around the winding roads of Mustique, wearing a Missoni pantsuit and gold earrings shaped like Möbius strips. The island was coming out of convalescence—a nasty flu had blown through—and nearly every person she ran into was just getting over it.

“It makes sense, since we were all dancing together on New Year’s Eve,” Tiqui says, politely suppressing a cough. The philanthropist and art collector knows everyone here, from Roger Pritchard, managing director of the Mustique Company, to the clerk at Sweetie Pie bakery. “There’s always a huge party with themes. We’ve done Barbie, hippie... This one was Mad Hatters.” Tiqui dressed as the Queen of Hearts.

Like the Galápagos with its exotic iguanas, Mustique is, still, a rare refuge where the rich, the royal, and the rock star roam (along with cooks, housekeepers, and the 365-person staff of the Mustique Company who keep it running). Basil’s Bar still hosts the Jump Up every Wednesday; you might be dancing with Bad Bunny and not notice it. Mick is still here, as is Bryan Adams. The Cotton House is still where you go on Tuesdays to see whom to invite to your cocktail party later in the week, while the beach bar is the chillout lounge where Georgia May Jagger and boyfriend Cambryan Sedlick recently plopped their new baby on a lounge chair for friends to coo over.

White-hot couples like Tomdaya swing by on a yacht. Kate and Lila Grace Moss come to stay at Tommy Hilfiger’s villa for some mom-daughter beach time. Kelly Ripa and Mark Consuelos recently purchased Hibiscus Villa, which overlooks sexy. ➡



The Mustique home of Tiqui Atencio Demirdjian (opposite), a collector and philanthropist, originally belonged to Colin Tennant, Lord Glenconner, the island’s patron saint.



secluded Macaroni Beach.

They all drink together, vape together, and get sick together, and Tiqui, who has been a presence on Mustique since the mid-'70s, has seen it all with her extraordinary ocean-blue eyes. But she won't be writing a tell-all memoir anytime soon—that would be inelegant. And Tiqui, one of the island's cultural preservationists, knows this ecosystem is delicate.

"Plus, everyone is still alive," she says, and lets out a hearty laugh. Tiqui first came to Mustique in 1974 with her first husband on their boat from Venezuela, where she was raised. "We heard there was an island where Princess Margaret was building a house. We decided to come find it." They docked in the bay, stopped in a small beachside bar (the storied Basil's), brought their Vespas to shore, and later found a construction site. "I thought I was looking at Princess Margaret's, but I found out it was Mick Jagger's."

In 1975 Tiqui acquired Gingerbread, a villa designed by the island's theatrical haven-maker, the architect and set designer Oliver Messel. It's not far from Mick's, down a short road near the airport. Through the trees you can see a placid fountain mounted with large pineapple-shaped lanterns in front of a modest-size façade the color of Choward's violet candy. Tiqui had it painted upon becoming ➤➤➤

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Small places. Human scale.”







In one of three guest bedrooms, Indian bedding, a 1976 painting by David Benitez, and an aerial view of the island.



Tiqui at the villa's entrance in silk pajamas by Lotty Bunbury for the local boutique the Pink House.

the owner. "Oliver wanted the house to be real gingerbread. He contacted a sort of a mauve brown, a very strange color. I didn't like it."

Between 1960 and 1978, Messel created some 30 house plans, of which at least 18 were built, including Gingerbread, Clonsilla and Phibblestown (the estates of the Guinness family), and Princess Margaret's Les Jolies Eaux. Gingerbread was the first, a residence of Colin Tennant, Lord Glenconner, who purchased the island in 1958 for 45,000 pounds. Tennant lived here as he was building his dream estate, the Great House, next door; it featured an 800-year-old white marble temple shipped from India, à la Fitzcarraldo. He lived there for only a short stint and famously lost all his money. In the end he sold his island shares and moved to St. Lucia. The Canadian automotive bigwig Lawrence Stroll lives in the Great House now. He often hits golf balls into the ocean. You can find them on the coral reef.

Back then Gingerbread was only three bedrooms, a sitting room, and a dining room. For the most part Tiqui has kept the original footprint. She enlarged the gazebo, where meals are served, and widened the kitchen to include a butler pantry and a giant walk-in freezer. (Every season she brings her meat from France.) It's in the gazebo that I find her one morning finalizing plans for one of the two dinners she hosts each season for some two dozen guests. She stayed up until 3 a.m. last night arranging the seating. This is her vacation home, but Tiqui is dutiful to the social rhythms of the island, which she had a hand in creating. "In the old days you could drive up to anyone's house for a visit, check out the pool, say hello," she says. "I wouldn't dream of doing that now without an invitation."

When Tennant was here, his friend Lady Virginia Royston came along. Recently widowed, she had a very public love affair with Basil Charles, the famous former owner of Basil's Bar. Tiqui points down from the living room to a window on the first floor. "That's ➡



Over the years Tiqui has expanded the villa's footprint with bungalows. Outside the Bambi cottage, a crochet hammock from her native Venezuela.

In the gazebo, 18th-century Qing Dynasty parrots on the dining table, designed by Oliver Messel.



where Basil would climb in to visit her.”

There aren't many walls here, but if they could talk they could write the script for *The White Lotus, Season 4*. The many guests over the years range from David Bowie and Iman to Mario Ferrari, Pierce Brosnan, and Raquel Welch. Jean-Luc Lagardère, the late French industrialist, stayed in the “baby room” when he first came to the island, in 1978. “Such a small room for such a big tycoon,” Tiqui says.

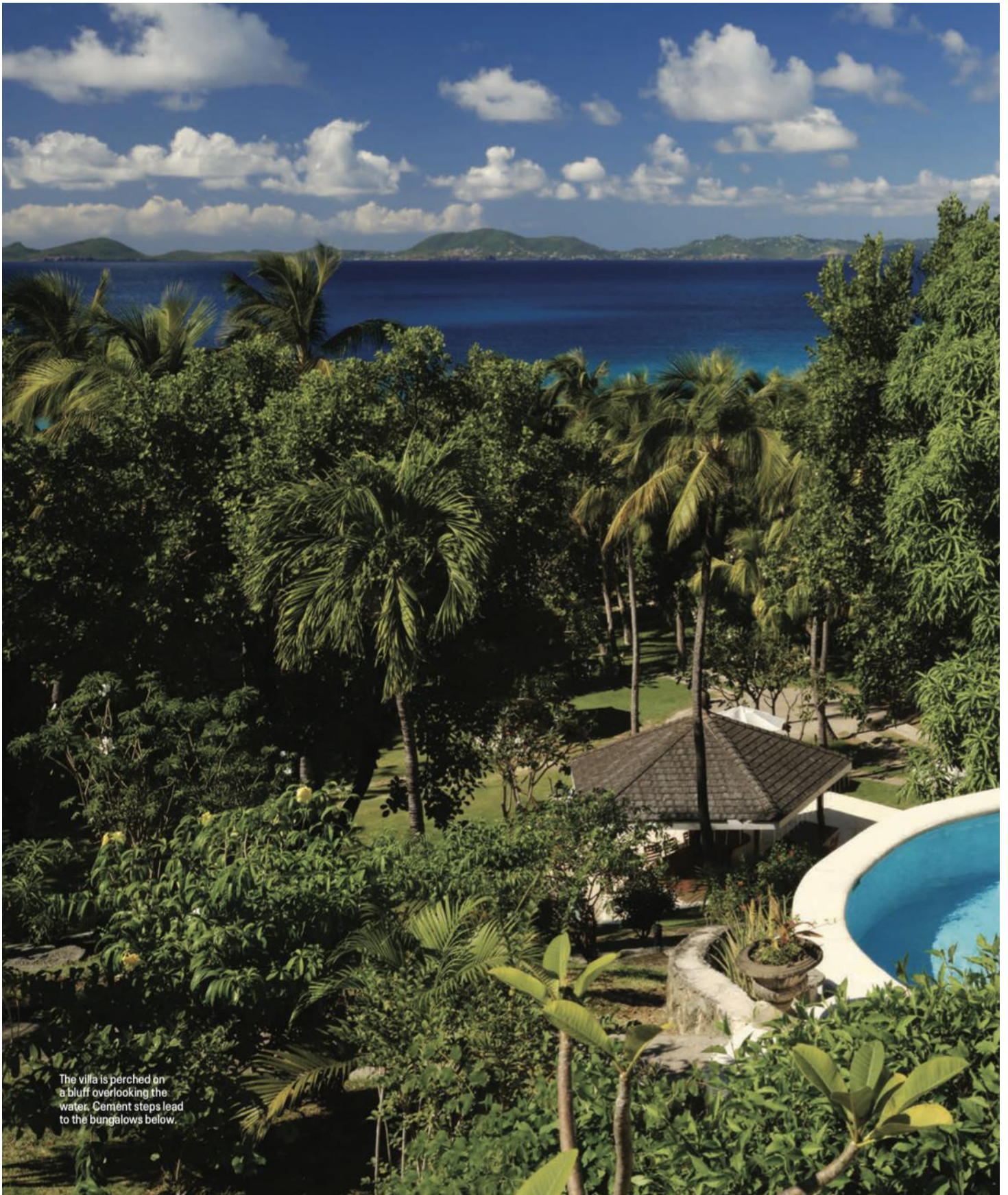
In those days Tiqui would take her motorboat to Bequia Island with Mick and Jerry Hall for pizza. Eventually she befriended Princess Margaret. When Tiqui visited Les Jolies Eaux, “she would offer me something to drink, and I would say, ‘Yes, champagne please,’ and she would say, ‘No, we have gin.’ Very British.”

If there were a Mustique tarot deck, the Major Arcana would include Mick, Basil, and Tiqui. Her card would signify the reign of natural beauty, but also the power of arts and culture. Since her first visit she has become a mother of three, grandmother of six, author of three hefty books (the most recent, *Inside the Homes of Artists: For Art's Sake*, was published by Rizzoli last year), and co-founder (with her husband, the Lebanese-Armenian entrepreneur Ago Demirdjian) of the Mustique Caribbean Contemporary Art Show and Prize. Despite

the flu, the inaugural edition in December was a smash: 18 of 23 paintings sold. “I was so worried, because Mick got sick too, and I was afraid he wouldn't make it. But he showed up,” Tiqui says. He even bought a painting by the young Trinidadian artist Brian Ashing, whose work also caught Tom Ford's eye.

Five decades and hundreds of parties later, the Major Arcana make sure Mustique remains Mustique through efforts like the art prize and the preservation of certain customs (notes, apologies, and thank-yous on villa stationery are hand-delivered; Tiqui has sent foie gras to mend fences with a neighbor). Also regulations. There are now 109 homes, and development is capped at 120 “if necessary,” according to the Mustique Company. And the young Tiquis of today could never just come and snoop; one has to call the company in advance to reserve a mooring. Though there is no visible police presence, paparazzi are swiftly ejected from the island (one company board member called local security “organic”). Even picnics need to be cleared.

But Mustique isn't immune to today's chaos agents, both natural and man-made. Oversize wealth has brought oversize yachts to the bay. And not everyone is a fan of the monstrous 30,000-square-foot villa Taliesin, completed by Jack Diamond architects [CONTINUED ON PAGE 107]



The villa is perched on a bluff overlooking the water. Cement steps lead to the bungalows below.





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[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 73] in 2009. A silly putty pink, from the sky it looks like a bald spot. Last July Hurricane Beryl downed a number of trees, partially denuding Macaroni Beach, and sargassum seaweed, once confined to the Sargasso Sea, is drifting into the area.

Gingerbread is perched on a bluff made by an old lava flow. Cracked cement steps wind down to bungalows Tiqui has added over the years along the shore. "Before the lawn this was swamp. It was only coconuts, crabs, and mosquitoes," she said. "We filled it with earth."

Made of bamboo and thatch, the bungalows echo Mustique's beloved, still tiny airport. The beach here is also a rare gem. It was hurricanes Ivan and Dennis. Tiqui recalls, that pushed sand up into this cove, creating a peaceful stretch now protected by a breakwater that she and troll installed shortly after the storms. When Tiqui's children were young, they would play on the beach with the Jagger, Guinness, and Lichfield kids, making toys out of coconuts and friends with the tortoises. (Like the ubiquitous blackbirds, they love the property.)

"What Oliver was onto is special," Tiqui says. "What makes sense here is what fits in with the beauty. Small places. If you need to expand, make another small space. Human scale."

That evening Tiqui's dinner was a triumph. The restaurateur Maguy Le Coze and the Swiss publisher Vera Michalski-Ioffmann (more Major Arcana) were joined by a rich mix of ages and professions, including the artists David Rodríguez Caballero and Marc Quinn (both of whose work Tiqui owns) and the models Adot Gak and Saffron Aldridge, plus Aldridge's son, the filmmaker Finn Constantine and his girlfriend, the makeup designer India Excell. After the feast the guests strolled down the beach to see Tennant's temple. In the moonlight it glowed like a ghost on the shore.

The next morning, as the staff tidies up, Tiqui is thinking about adding a small bar closer to the water. "So we can get drinks ourselves a little spot near the tents. Just a little tiki bar," she says, winking one of her aquamarine eyes. "Of course we will call it Tiqui Bar." **TAC**



HER KINGDOM FOR HIOE!

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 98] sale at otheby's.

Plant and her husband went in aggressively, leveraging their savings as well as a Bitcoin investment. The couple stayed in until \$850,000, then called it quits. The next bid won the piece, which devastated Plant. Sanchez soothed her, saying the second sweater would turn up. "There's no way in hell," she said. A few months later, however, Sotheby's came calling. They had the authenticated replacement jumper. Would Plant, as the runner-up, be interested? he added it to her collection for another undisclosed six-figure sum.

The sweater is professionally packed and stored at a temperature-controlled facility in Los Angeles, along with the rest of Plant's acquisitions. As much as she would like to display the items in her home, she says, "they're too precious for me." The rare occasion to bring them out, as she did for our photo shoot, is very exciting. Wearing a pair of white gloves, Plant gingerly rummages through carefully labeled boxes. "Look at this!" she exclaims, opening a luggage tag on the handle of a Louis Vuitton tote to reveal Diana's handwritten name. "You've got to see this," she whispers, unboxing a snake brooch. I have to ask: Has she ever tried any of the pieces on? Only once, Plant says, recalling a quick photograph she took in that first coat she acquired. But never again. "It's not good to do that."

Plant, who has co-written a book with Richard Dalton, Diana's longtime hair stylist, is in talks with production companies about staging a touring exhibition in 2026. Until then, she loans out pieces. The Kunstmuseum den Haag in the Hague received a Catherine Walker dress and a Chanel suit for a 2023 "Royals & Rebels" exhibition, as well as two Dior handbags for its 2024 "Dior: A New Look" show. "I am very touched that a private collector is doing such an amazing job and is so passionate about these pieces," says Madelief Hohé, curator of the museum's costume and fashion department. "It feels really in the spirit of Princess Diana, how she is handling all this." **TAC**

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