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In the Seychelles there exists an oasis of calm, pristine paradise... North Island. And in this world apart, there is a private Villa for each guest to call their own, where luxury and simplicity flow, creating a new signature architectural style – the North Island style.

NORTH ISLAND DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

Part of the “hands on” design philosophy is that the architectural team, Silvio Rech (principal) and Lesley Carstens, lived on site with their two children while designing and creating the North Island development.

By living on site and monitoring the execution of the design, the architecture reads on a very real and immediate level and symbolises a fresh approach to the art of architecture and a handmade interior architecture.

By designing each detail, the feeling of escape escalates and the concept of escaping from everyday life in the world’s capitals and landing on an island with a different set of architectural rules and details is enhanced.

A CELEBRATION OF NATURE

The design celebrates nature. It is a design that is made from details that enhance the special views that show nature at its best, for example:

- Outdoor showers allow guests to feel the night air and see the stars through a coral curtain whilst showering
- Dining on the beach with feet in the sand
- Natural materials

The essence of the design has been to achieve a level of barefoot luxury where guests are in touch with luxury and nature, but all the modern conveniences are close at hand.

PUBLIC AREAS

The design of this nucleus involved the restoration of two historically important buildings on the Island. They are now the library and the Dive Centre, but were earlier the hall in which the coconuts (from the coconut plantation) were stored and the copra furnace where the coconuts were dried by a hot fire in a steel pipe that transected the building.

The layout of the public area echoes that of a small island village with historical layering, as opposed to a brand new hotel placed on a clean slate. The large tree forms part of the architecture of the oval around which other important buildings are placed. It is the central pivot, almost a tree of life or knowledge.



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THE LOUNGE

This is a transparent minimalist building that occupies an important position in the oval. It has modern detailing executed in rough chunky handworked timber, which tie it to the renovated library. While the library is totally enclosed, the lounge is a completely open building, with a flat minimalist roof and 360-degree view of the beach and large tree around to the Island interior.

THE LIBRARY

The library is the custodian of the history of the Island. It houses a large anchor (pulled out of the bay and dating from the 1800s) and a collection of original black and white photos of the early history of the Island. The building has white beach-rock walls and typical arched openings which are glazed.

THE BAR

This is a little jewel fantasy with the primal takamaka trees and roots on the ceiling counter-pointed by the clean-cut design of the double-sided bar. The sandstone riven walling and stainless steel fridges bring smoothness to the takamaka supports. The bar stools are made out of takamaka stumps on site and help take the language of handmade furniture one step further.

THE DINING ROOM

If the lounge was an example of how a building stands proudly on an oval, the dining-room is an example of how a building is set into the vegetation and against the granitic rock. Thus, the distinction between where nature ends and buildings begin is blurred. The backdrop of a pond and stepping stones to the wine cellar add to this fusion of building and plant life to create a forest with a roof: one dines in nature with the sea in front and forest and pond behind. Whereas the lounge is a formal, pure rectangle, the geometry of the dining room is amorphous, imitating a journey through a forest where natural ponds, stepping stones, and secret cave-like cellars unfold. The upside-down casuarina trees are especially tall in the dining room and the ceremony of dining against this natural column is taken further by the uplighting at dinnertime.

DINING POND

Fusing into the granitic outcrop and flanking the dining room is an amorphous pond with stepping stones to the wine cellar. The pond detail is special and tranquil in the sense that the level of the water matches that of the wooden deck. This gives a calm, gliding feeling from polished teak wood to polished water slipping under the deck. The water is broken by two sculptures: a volcanic stone pot with water sliding quietly over its surface, and a casuarina logspout that pours water back into the pond. Both pot and hollowed tree stump are sculptures made from natural material that assists with the design and mechanics of the pond.



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CELLAR

The cellar is cave-like and made of rock-walling. The ceiling has palm tree texture imprinted indelibly onto the off-shutter concrete and some recesses from which the light washes down the walls of the bottle racks. Bottle racks are executed in chunky oversized raw timber which is washed with down-lighters. Being enticed across the water to a wall of wine bottles is part of the ceremony of dining amongst the upside-down takamakas.

FRONT LOUNGE/DINING DECK

As the large Indian almond is centre point to the oval, a large takamaka is centre point to the large deck which stretches from lounge to bar to front dining deck. This large deck changes character as it performs different functions.

In front of the lounge it becomes a transition between lounge and beach. The colour of the deck cushions and beach sand is similar enabling one to glide effortlessly from deck to beach.

Flanking it, in front of the bar, the deck is punctured by large granitic boulders, and helps with the concept of merging the building into nature. This aspect of the design is taken further by the takamaka bar stools, and a series of boulders, boulder-like chairs, conical chunks of wood, upside down trees, all alongside the takamaka tree. Add to this the landscape view of the beach from the dining room and one can see how the architecture is a place from which to appreciate the natural beauty and forces at play.

SWIMMING POOL

The swimming pool is a short walk from the side of the public area and along the granitic outcrop. The view from the pool looks back along a kilometre of beach. This is a delightful surprise, as one would not expect to find a 45m vanishing-edge pool at the end of a modest walk off the public area in the forest. The pool is carved into the hill in an unexpected way and the steep shady banks create the feeling of a hanging garden. Pockets of private decks and upperdecks all have magnificent views across the beach back to the Grand Paloss and just a hint of Villa 11. The pool is a private meandering experience with white marble-stone plaster that is the same colour as the beach and the colour of the water matches the sea. Rock walls blend gently into the hillside and large boulders counterpoint furnishings as they protrude through pool and deck.

WEST BEACH BAR

A short drive across the Island takes one to West Beach and the Sunset Bar. This is an informal, innocent architectural intervention on a natural phenomenon. The building is made out of coconut uprights (felled from the Island), a palm leaf roof and pine floors. There is a small open kitchen with a wood-burning oven that adds to the simple, uncomplicated experience.



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MATERIALS USED

TAKAMAKA TREE

This is the large 'upside-down' tree which was used to create the dining room and the Villas. The trees had died from vascular wilt disease and so the Ministry of Environment requested that they be removed. It was then decided to use the trees as part of the construction of the North Island development. This helped create a haute couture Robinson Crusoe look that makes North Island's identity different to other island resorts. An environmentally friendly product was used to neutralise the vascular wilt.

The takamaka is indigenous to the Seychelles, although it was originally introduced to the area over 200 years ago from Indonesia.

Smaller takamaka tree branches were also used as:

- Handrails
- Showers
- Screens
- Root pergolas
- Uprights in the dive centre and the outdoor salas.

CASUARINA TREE

A number of casuarina trees, an invasive species to the Seychelles, were removed during the construction process. These trees provide ideal wood for the use of furniture. Casuarinas have been used in the hanging tables in the dining room and the balustrades in the Villas.

SAND-BLASTED PINE

This wood comes from South African commercial plantations. The finished product has been sandblasted and bleached to resemble driftwood. All the external decks have been built utilising this material. Exposure to the sun will continue to bleach the wood and improve its look. The pine is pre-treated against termite attack with a wood preservative containing boron – a product from Australia.

BANUAS

This is the chunky square hardwood timber used as upright columns in the Villa bedrooms and some of the main areas. The timber was distressed using a chainsaw to give it a weathered look.

The banuas were also sliced up and used for:

- Beds – bases and headboards,
- Built-in seats
- Some walling,
- Desks,
- Built-in wardrobes,
- Butler's station (kitchenette) – including the cooking area, sink and mobile trolley,
- Some light fittings,
- Door frames,
- Carved toilet doors,
- Frames for louver doors and windows

This wood comes from commercially certified Indonesian plantations and is sold with an environmentally friendly certificate.



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CLUCIANA GUMPOLES

These gumpoles come from South Africa. They were hand-peeled, to give a hand-made feel and were used for:

- Roofs – smaller poles
- Uprights – thicker poles

These were also treated with environmentally friendly "Polesaver wraps" from Australia.

ROSEWOOD

The main dining floor is made of rosewood from Southern Africa. This is a hardwood that was made to look weathered utilising hand tools.

TEAK

This plantation hardwood from the East was used for Villa floors, distressed and varnished to add an element of elegance, which contrasts with the bleached outdoor decks.

GIANT BAMBOO

Some large-scale bamboo from Mahé has been used for light fittings.

COPPER AND BRASS

Used for up/down lighters designed on site.

BEACH ROCK CURTAINS

These are the curtains that create privacy in the outdoor areas adjacent to the baths and showers. This gives a wonderful effect as the light shines up the coral curtains at night.

YLANG YLANG

Roofing grass from Bali was also used on certain vertical screens. It closely resembles the local 'latanier' roofs.

SANDSTONE

This material was sourced from South Africa and was used on the counter tops in the outdoor lounge area of the Villas and riven walling on the main bar.

GRANITIC ROCK

The Seychelles are the only granitic islands in the world and the rock gathered on North Island itself has been used extensively in the project. The Seychellois method of packing rock was used in the process.

The rock was also used in the Villas in the love seats, and the back of the bathroom walls, as well as in the public areas and in the main pool walls.



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ROOM BY ROOM THE VILLA

The concept of the Villa is one couple to one castle. Each Villa is a private domain allowing guests to surround themselves with all the objects and experiences in their own private way.

The entrance is up a ramp from the back of the Villa (except for Villa 11), so that guests enter the outdoor lounge and are bowled over by the panoramic view of the ocean. The takamaka trees frame the view and it is refreshing to see how accessible the beach is.

The floor here is teak with wooden dowels and handcrafted edgings that form part of the exterior bark of the tree. The large pivoting door is hinge-free and has copper up-down lights that light up each column. The pergola is an extension of the takamaka tree and has an evocative root-like feel that sets this apart from other pergolas. This is a room with a view and contains a comfortable couch and dining table as well as sandstone hanging drinks tables and side servers.

Altogether guests become aware of the celebration of nature and its forms, and the feeling of barefoot luxury.

MAIN BEDROOM

Guests enter the main bedroom through folding stackaway glass doors. The room can be air-conditioned or the doors can be left open and the fans on. There is a small lounging area in front of the bedroom, from which to admire ocean views. The dressing room area at the rear has a desk and a wardrobe. The bed is handcrafted on site from massive banua chunks, as is the dressing table. The floor is polished teak with wavy edges of bark that have been left unpolished.

BATHROOM

The bathroom is more of a bath house with a large bath for two and a huge vanity area with two oversized mirrors. The basins are far apart to allow lots of space for storage. The vanity area is made up of a sheet of distressed rosewood. The supports are made from leadwood tree stumps and one large boulder.

MASSAGE AREA AND OUTDOOR SHOWER

The bathroom leads to an outdoor shower, where the water pours out of a log instead of shower head.

This is a shower under the sky or stars – there is no roof. This is a liberating experience and is a signature touch of most of Silvio and Les's architecture.



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SALA

This is an enclosed area next to the private plunge pool. It has a roof, a mattress and cushions and is located on the wooden deck. The idea here is for guests to relax in the shade and enjoy finger-lunches and drinks at midday when it is too hot for outdoor activities.

THE KITCHENETTE

This is a small rock building with a barrel-vaulted roof.

LOUNGE/SECOND BEDROOM

The air-conditioned lounge has a desk with wireless Internet connections for business executives. Alternatively, it could be used as a double bed or two single beds. This offers a high level of flexibility to the guest.

VILLA 11 (VILLA NORTH ISLAND)

This is the champion of style – perched on rock with a magnificent surprise entrance and fantastic view of the beach, with picturesque palms forming a natural frame.

The bathroom is the piece de resistance with a panoramic view across East Beach to Mahé, Praslin and La Digue. Here the principles of the architectural style have truly come to life. The leadwood trees that form the posts are hoisted high in the sky and frame the turquoise-blue sea.

The bath is 1.2 by 2 metres and has sloped ends (great for couples) to enable sitting and lying in the bath, with a ledge for a champagne bucket.

To the side of the bathroom and down a handcrafted staircase is a depressed deck, almost hanging from the bathroom, which is an outdoor shower hanging off a large granitic boulder. Looking down at it one sees large tracts of turquoise sea partly screened by palm leaves. A hollowed out casuarina log delivers the water from a spout above the granitic boulder.

A few steps beyond the outdoor shower and around the granitic boulder is the surprise outdoor deck made of chunky timber and a perfect space to gaze over the expanse of the Indian Ocean from the unusual “mokoro” lounger. The area is very private and can be an alternate dining venue within the space of the villa.



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SILVIO RECH AND LESLEY CARSTENS

Part of the architects' design philosophy, based on their body of work produced during the period 1993- 2003, is to develop a particular style of architecture and interior and lifestyle for each situation.

This is a list of their works (Lesley joined Silvio from the "Masai Versailles" onwards) from 1993-2003. Works prior to 1993 were of a modern nature and in large cities in South Africa:

- Makalali competition (1993) for Charles Smith.
- Lutopi Bush Camp (1994) South Africa. Next door to Makalali. Client wishes to be anonymous.
- Makalali Bush Camp (1996), South Africa. Winner of "Most Innovative Hotel Design of the Year", Tatler Travel. A breakthrough in a new style of bush camp. Prior to Makalali most bush camps were colonial style. Makalali celebrates an African style and has been widely used as an example of African design. All architecture and furniture and fittings were designed and manufactured on site by Silvio. Total design under one umbrella.
- Ngorongoro Crater Lodge (1994) Tanzania. Conservation Corporation Africa (CCA). Dubbed the "Masai Versailles", this is a national heritage site. 400 Masai were on site, handcrafting a large portion of the interiors. Silvio and Les met a group of Zanzibari carvers on this job, who subsequently moved with them from site to site.

- Grumeti River Bush Camp (1997) Tanzania. Part of the CCA circuit in Tanzania.
- Lake Manyara Tented Camp (1997) Tanzania. Also part of CCA circuit in Tanzania.
- 1998: work on North Island began with their first visit to the Island after which they were appointed as architects and advisors for the North Island development.
- In addition, Silvio and Les won two competitions for their work on Jao and Mombo (Wilderness Safaris camps in the Okavango Delta).
- Casa Silvio & Lesley (1999-2002), Westcliff, Johannesburg, South Africa. Private house.
- Jao Camp (1999), Okavango Delta, Botswana Wilderness Safaris. Renowned for its building on stilts overlooking waterway.
- Mombo Camp (2000) Okavango Delta, Botswana. Wilderness Safaris' flagship camp in the Delta.
- North Island (2001) Work on the staff village commenced and a sample Villa was built with a very small team.
- North Island (1998-2003) Silvio and Les lived on site designing and executing the North Island front-of-house.
- Completed July 2003.



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PROJECT TEAMS SILVIO RECH (PRINCIPAL) AND LESLEY CARSTENS:

Architects and interior architects – Overall design concept and pieces of handmade furniture executed on site (involvement from January 1998 to June 2003).

MAIRA AND JOHN KOUTSOUDAKIS (LIFE):

Interiors and pieces of furniture executed off-site, staff uniforms (August 2002 to June 2003)

PATRICK WATSON:

Consulting landscape designer (January 2001 to June 2003)

PAUL PAMBOUKIAN:

Lighting consultant (October 2002 to June 2003)

