

**Fashion**

## The chic of Mustique

The tiny Caribbean island is celebrating its 50th year as the glamour set's favourite getaway. We look at its bohemian allure



Princess Margaret and Colin Tennant (in hat) with friends, 1972 © Lichfield/Getty Images

Nick Remsen NOVEMBER 16, 2018

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Speaking to *Architectural Digest* in 1992, David Bowie was asked why he had built an Indonesian-style property on Mustique — the Caribbean island that is celebrating its 50th birthday this year. “Why Mustique indeed,” he wondered. “Well, I went down to spend a couple of days with Mick [Jagger] and Jerry [Hall] in their house, and while waiting for the boat . . . I was going to take a trip up and down the Caribbean, and it never happened because the propeller fell out, or something.”

Bowie captured in his story the unlikely draw of this 1,400-acre piece of St Vincent and the Grenadines. One goes there not quite knowing what to expect, finds something irresistible in its whatever-happens-happens eccentricity, and ends up sticking around.

Contemporary Mustique’s starry history begins in the late 1950s, when Colin Tennant, later Lord Glenconner, bought it for £45,000, equivalent to about £1m today. It was pocket change for Tennant, a flamboyant, wealthy Scot (who is related to the model Stella Tennant), and he quickly went about establishing the island’s glamorous reputation. In 1960, he presented Princess Margaret with a 10-acre plot of land as a wedding gift on her marriage to Antony Armstrong-Jones, and later he built her a villa, *Les Jolies Eaux* (Beautiful Waters), the private retreat at which she threw her fabled parties. (That villa can be rented today for \$54,000 per week in high season.) In 1968, Tennant formed the Mustique Company, thus privatising the island with the permission of the government of St Vincent and the Grenadines.



Carolina Herrera at Tennant's 50th, 1976

Mustique's visitors have always brought with them a heady combination of louche glamour, fame and a touch of scandal. Unlike its perhaps more conservative Caribbean neighbours, the island is governed by its own quirky rhythms and cast of characters.

This is the place where Robert Mapplethorpe, the late photographer, shot the fashion designer Carolina Herrera lounging in a hammock; it's where you find "Toucan Hill", a sprawling Moorish-style villa located on one of the island's highest points, and "Hummingbird", a mansion covered in travertine that looks like the dry-land equivalent of a superyacht. Recently, Mick Jagger was spotted waving off friends at Mustique's low-key airstrip.





Mick Jagger and Jerry Hall, 1987 © Georges De Keerle/Getty Images

“I remember the very exotic Golden Ball for Colin Tennant’s 50th birthday fete in 1976,” says Herrera, who visited Mustique with her husband as a guest of Princess Margaret. “I also remember one day, at Basil’s Bar [the island’s famous watering hole], when Colin threw an obnoxious, unwanted guest, who had arrived by yacht, into the sea — table and all.” She admires the island’s relaxed elegance and easy style: “Women always dressed simply, but with glamour. No fake chichi.”

Tommy Hilfiger has had a home on Mustique for more than 30 years. His expansive property has 10 bedrooms and four one-bedroom guest cottages. So fond is he of Basil’s Bar that he re-

created it on the set of his Spring 2016 show, transferring its longstanding host and proprietor Basil Charles to New York to serve its signature Rum Punch. “What I love about the island is that it is pristine and elegant, rugged and raw,” says Hilfiger of Mustique’s charm. “It’s glamorous in an understated way.”



Tommy Hilfiger Mustique campaign 2016 © J. Vespa/WireImage for Tommy Hilfiger

Tim Jefferies, owner of Hamiltons Gallery in Mayfair, London, is another regular. “It is impossible to encapsulate all that is so special about Mustique in a couple of sentences,” he says. “But it’s not for everyone. There is one shop, a small supermarket, no marina, no golf course and no nightclubs.”

Certainly, Mustique has its limitations. The roads aren’t in great condition and the mosquitoes, for which the island is named, are a menace. Armstrong-Jones (later Lord Snowdon) renamed it “Mustake”. “Of course, it’s fun to see Bryan Adams paddleboarding across the bay, or notable royals in the surf,” adds Jefferies. “But what makes Mustique so special for me is the laid-back shorts-and-T-shirt vibe. It’s a bucolic, if not slightly boozy, life — and I love it. My daughter took her first steps on the island and I would be very happy if it was where I took my last.”





Lotty B kaftan

The island still boasts a blend of high society and Hollywood types who love its relative privacy. The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge visit with their children. Tom Ford has a pink lipstick named for the place. Designer Peter Dundas holidays there with his crew of fashion beauties: Poppy and Cara Delevingne (the grand-daughters of Sir Jocelyn Stevens, a friend of Princess Margaret's) and Georgia May Jagger (Mick's daughter). "[Mustique style] is a mix of that very British chic eccentric and casual," says Dundas of the island's bohemian spirit. "I always include an element of it in my collections."

"I can't think of any other island that has this mix of rock stars, royalty, and film stars," says Adam Brown, founder of the men's swimwear brand Orlebar Brown, which was recently bought by Chanel. "There's something very English about its look, but it's internationally blended. There's no other place so small that has that level of noise around it."

Indeed, the island boasts its own style, an easy-breezy wardrobe with smart touches: flowing long dresses and statement necklaces; barely-there cover-ups with chic jewellery (which stays on for swimming). At night, at the Cotton House Hotel, men are encouraged to wear trousers — but it's perfectly fine to do so with a T-shirt and flip-flops. During peak party times, the clothes are as idiosyncratic as the architectural styles. Anything goes.

Brown, who remembers scaling a wall in his late twenties to get into one of the island's infamous New Year's Eve parties, is about to introduce a 50th anniversary collection of swimming trunks in collaboration with The Mustique Company. All are printed with photographs of the island. One features a beautifully staged Slim Aarons picture (£225, [orlebarbrown.com](http://orlebarbrown.com), pictured below); another shows the Pink House, the island's main clothing store, which is run by Lotty Bunbury. Bunbury, who has lived on the island for 25 years, runs two clothing labels: Lotty B and Pink House Mustique. Her shop sells her beach dresses and linen shirts as well as items including Frescobol Carioca beach bats and Cocobelle sandals, sunglasses and jewellery. It's also where you can pick up a 36-piece palm-motif dinner service for \$1,265.



“When Colin Tennant first conjured up Mustique, I believe he wanted it to be a place where people’s fantasies could become a reality,” says Bunbury. “In many respects he achieved just that . . . it was more important to be ‘avant-garde’ than to be able to afford haute couture. Perhaps Mustique is unique in that there is absolutely no right or wrong way to be. Unlike a private club, or some of the other Caribbean islands, where people want to look and dress the same, Mustique is filled with variety and the unexpected. It is definitely a place of extremes — from understated to flamboyant, manicured to wild, and simple to theatrical. But it’s never dull.”

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