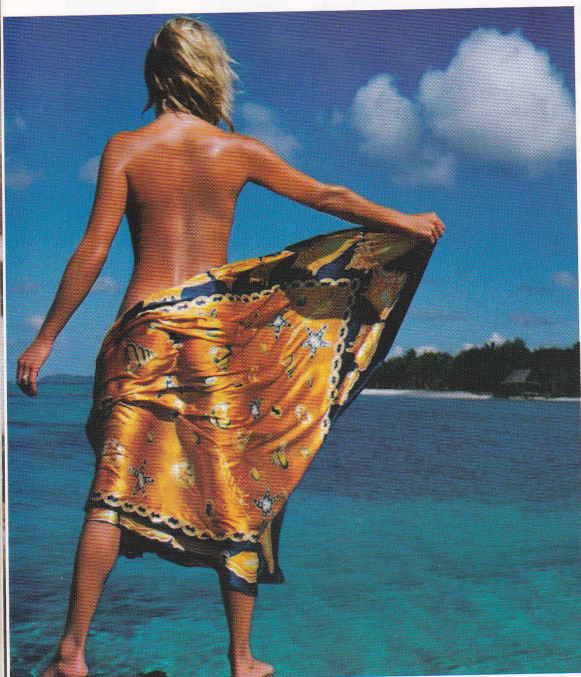


Sheer Delight

In Mustique, Charlotte Bunbury's handpainted sarongs are unexpectedly versatile as well as beautiful





Text by: Angela St. John



Charlotte Bunbury came from a family of artists, so it is no surprise that she followed this path herself. From an early age, her dream was to become a fashion designer with her own shop. One of 10 children of a British Army officer, Lotty (short for Charlotte) was born in Malaysia in 1968 and spent her early childhood travelling from country to country.

After several years of boarding school and a year's art foundation course, she studied mural design at the Chelsea Art College, specializing in stained glass windows. Travelling in Cyprus after her course ended, she met her future husband, Dr. Michael Bunbury. After an extended honeymoon and some missionary work in Southern Africa, they headed back to England with their first baby on the way. Soon after, they saw an advertisement for a doctor on Mustique for a year... Now, nine years later, they are still there, with their four children.

Lotty brought some silk paints to Mustique with her for her "year", as they were much easier to transport than the bulky stained glass equipment and there were many similarities in design. After some early difficulties in getting the right dyes to stay on the silk, Lotty's sarong painting flourished. Her daily walks on the island provided her with continuous inspiration: birds, butterflies, dragonflies, flowers, fish and shells. Her designs were always very basic and simplified, so that it was really the colours that made the design special.

The demand for these stylish hand-painted originals was so overwhelming that Lotty could not keep up with it. She decided to have them printed and in 2000, the first Lotty B collection was released. Since each sarong no longer had to be hand-painted, Lotty was able to spend more time on the designs and mixing the colours, which is really her favourite part of the whole process.

Each design is first hand-painted on to the fabric and then shipped to China, where it is then printed on to a luxurious 16.5 Momme silk charmeuse or silk chiffon (65 x 45 inches). Every sarong is hand-hemmed and hand-packaged in an elegant sky-blue box tied with white ribbon and with its own card, thus maintaining the highest quality for an exquisite gift.

Although the first collection started out with pastels and some vivid colours like pink and turquoise, her clients requested something more suitable for the evening, so she started to experiment with richer colours. The 2003 collection contains the more earthy tones of olive green, terracotta, sand and violet. Although Lotty concedes that her "favourite" colour seems to change all the time, the "Aqua Butterfly" from her first collection remains her "absolute" favourite.

Constantly experimenting with new designs and fabrics, she has recently introduced a chiffon silk. This is so soft and sheer that people think it will change its shape or lose its colour when wet. "Not at all, it is very durable," affirms Lotty. It is so versatile that it can be worn over a wet swimsuit during the day, used as a shawl in the evening or tied as a scarf around a wide-brimmed straw hat.

Recently Lotty has started to expand into a clothing line with bikini tops, blouses and shorts. She has also designed a small women's summer collection sold at JIGSAW in England and hopes to add a children's collection to this. Tommy Hilfiger has even used some of these stylish sarongs on the fashion runways of America to add a bit of Caribbean flavour to his collections. Although previously only sold on Mustique Island, they are now available in the USA, throughout the Caribbean and in the South of France.

These exquisite sarongs are so gorgeous, you simply won't know which one to choose. You'll want to own one of each! Check out her website at www.lottyb.com.