



A Mustique group shot taken by Patrick Lichfield in 1973, including Princess Margaret (reclining on bench) and Lord Glenconner (next to her, in white). *Opposite*: Prince William and Catherine Middleton on holiday in Mustique, 2008

A man and a woman are on a boat, smiling and looking towards the camera. The woman is wearing a black and white bikini and sunglasses. The man is shirtless and wearing blue shorts with a red pattern. They are on a white boat with a metal railing. The background shows a clear blue sky and some greenery on the left side.

# THE MAGIC OF MUSTIQUE

*It has long been the exclusive playground of aristocrats and artists. Now, with its Middleton connection, this tiny Grenadine island is once more the go-to destination for jet-set glamour, says Christa D'Souza*

**M**ustique. Approximately two square miles in size. A year-round population of 500. Three restaurants. One hotel. One grocery store where you'd be lucky to find brown bread, let alone balsamic vinegar or Maldon salt. And yet. Of all the nations represented in the pews at Westminster Abbey in April, was it not Mustique that was represented the best? Indeed, with the doctor, the yoga teacher and the tennis pro (not to mention the villa rental lady and the riding instructor) all in attendance, it felt like the teeny tiny island from the Grenadines ought, at the very least, to have its own flag on display. Thank goodness for Basil, the island's de facto ambassador and famous bartender, who was also at the wedding. Over the summer, a pop-up of his famous drinking hole, Basil's Bar, has been set up at The Goring (the Belgravia >

hotel where Carole Middleton and daughters pitched camp the night before the wedding), complete with a palm-fronded beach shack and golden sand. Piña coladas and “Prince’s Poison”, the favoured cocktails of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, will be served.

Mustique. Back in royal favour once more, half a century since the late Lord Glenconner, aka Colin Tennant, famously bought the island for £45,000 and then, as part of his plan to turn it into the most glamorous, most exclusive commune in the world, gave 10 acres of it away as a wedding present to Wills’s great-aunt, Princess Margaret. “PM”, the photographer Patrick Lichfield and his wife Leonora, Mick Jagger, Prince and Princess Rupert Lowenstein – this was the founding crew that first put Mustique (or “Mustake”, as Tony Armstrong Jones disdainfully called it) on the map. Tennant’s aim was to create the atmosphere of one long house party, to which only his very special friends were

at a beach picnic with fluttery tablecloths, bottle after bottle of icy rosé, water pistols to ward off the greedy grackle birds and the likelihood of lunch meandering into dinner.

Anya Hindmarch remembers one such gathering on her birthday. The quiche, made by the Kildare-ish doctor Mike Bunbury, arrived in the island ambulance. “We left it in there to keep cool and then, six hours later, brought it out again for dinner. Fresh wine and candles were driven down and the evening continued seamlessly.”

Off-season in Mustique? Extremely cool. Anya Hindmarch makes a family pilgrimage out here every August; Bryan Adams, a keen paddle-boater, pops over whenever he has the time. Ditto Bryan Ferry and his girlfriend Amanda Sheppard, who stay at Aurora, a magnificent colonial-style villa with one of the best chefs on the island, Tyrone. Their last mid-January posse included Bryan’s son Tara, Caroline Sieber and Nicky Haslam.

the beach. “You don’t have to see anyone if you don’t want to.” Not that your towel is ever going to overlap on to anyone else’s if you do venture down. As one regular describes it: “A crowded beach in Mustique means one party besides your own.”

Deserted beaches, no chances of a cruise ship rocking up, no gaggles of tourists with their rolled-up towels, no paparazzi – and English plugs. These are just some of the things that distinguish this somewhat Portmeirion-esque paradise from anywhere else in the Caribbean (and make it such a perfect getaway for the Cambridges). “If you are into wearing platform wedges on the beach or the St Tropez Club 55 vibe,” as one homeowner says, recalling the Russian family who left early, “Mustique may not be for you.” Meaning, if you are packing heels or thinking of rocking an *Out of Africa* look for the beach – don’t. As per Mustique etiquette, a pair of cutoffs, bare feet and a Sea Monster cocktail for dinner are perfectly fine.

“Which is not to say there isn’t an awful lot of extremely good jewellery at the bottom of Macaroni Bay,” as Anya Hindmarch puts it. Or that people don’t like to party ferociously. Oh, my dear, the parties – particularly between Christmas and New Year. “It’s the only time someone will call you up and say, ‘What are you wearing?’” groans *Vanity Fair*’s Elizabeth Saltzman, who first came to the island in 1986, keen to find an alternative to the social frenzy of St Barts. “At any other time you don’t even have to wear shoes.”

If it gets competitive at any time of the year, this is it, particularly on New Year’s Eve. There’s always the dinner to go to before the communal fireworks down at the Cotton House. Lawrence Stroll, for example, hosts his at the Great House, the most expensive and heavily staffed house on the island, on the site of the villa Tennant built himself back in the early Seventies. For the “old guard”, though, the ultimate invitation will always be to the beach barbecue Mick Jagger and L’Wren Scott give at Stargroves, the Japanese-style pavilioned villa he has owned since he first came here with Bianca (at last year’s, attended by all generations of Jagger children, the theme was peacocks).

At the Robinsons’ Best of British do a couple of years ago, Anya Hindmarch came as the Queen, Belle did Patsy from *Absolutely Fabulous*, one person came as a jar of Marmite, another a tin of Colman’s. Bryan Adams and crew, meanwhile, all wore hankies tied round their heads, Mrs Mop-style. “It’s something one would never do in, say, St Barts,” says Belle Robinson, “because one would be so terrified of making a fool of oneself.”

Chez Robinson, a vodka shot – typically poured by one of the five children – can >

## *For the “old guard”, the ultimate invitation will always be to the beach barbecue Mick Jagger gives at his villa*

invited. Fifty years on, and many super-luxurious builds later, with a desalination system, a hotel spa, floodlit tennis courts and an ownership boasting 17 different nationalities, Mustique is not quite the quirky, aristo hideaway it used to be.

Boy, though, does it still pack a social punch. Some of the more prominent householders following in the wake of Mick Jagger and David Bowie? Bryan Adams, Tommy Hilfiger and the Canadian retail magnate Lawrence Stroll. Then there are Jigsaw owners Belle and John Robinson, the publisher Felix Dennis (who bought his Indonesian-style house from Bowie) and Sotheby’s golden boy Tobias Meyer. Regulars who come for that daunting week between Christmas and New Year include Tom Ford, Elizabeth Hurley, Elle Macpherson and Jemima Khan. Liam Gallagher, Richard E Grant, Keira Knightley on a break from the *Pirates* set – they’ve all been here.

So, too, have Amy Winehouse, Kate Moss and Hugh Grant all propped up the bar at Basil’s – literally a shack on the harbour. It’s not exactly known for its fine wines and cuisine, but there’s the tree growing through the bathroom, the occasional crab scuttling over your foot and the killer, killer white rum. Oh, to be back there, in a sarong and slightly damp bikini bottoms, sipping a Sundowner or a Mustique Mule at sunset... knowing you might still be there at midnight. Or, indeed,

Amanda is still raving about Tyrone’s baked coconut shavings. “I ended up taking three bags back with me on the plane,” she says wistfully, “and he does the best beach picnics ever, with shells to decorate the table and even bunting in the trees.”

Then there are the Middletons, Mike and Carole, who, according to Brian Alexander, the urbane managing director who ran The Mustique Company (a consortium of Mustique’s homeowners, which manages its services and operations) for 31 years, have in fact been visiting Mustique for about a decade. Wills and Kate came later, the guests of Belle and John Robinson, who, in return for a donation to the children’s eye hospital on neighbouring St Vincent, lent the couple their magnificent Palladian-style villa, Hibiscus, overlooking the indigo waters of Macaroni Bay. The Seychelles, pah. Hibiscus, with its navy infinity pool, its endless supply of Chateau Barbeyrolle rosé, its healing ginger tea and specially designed nude sunbathing deck – what would have been the point of ever leaving it?

The more famous one gets, the more likely one is to stay in. Shania Twain can spend weeks here holed up in her mini tropical resort, Blackstone, writing songs, without anyone knowing she is there. “That’s the point about Mustique,” says Belle Robinson, who frequently invites groups of girlfriends out of season, none of whom bother hitting



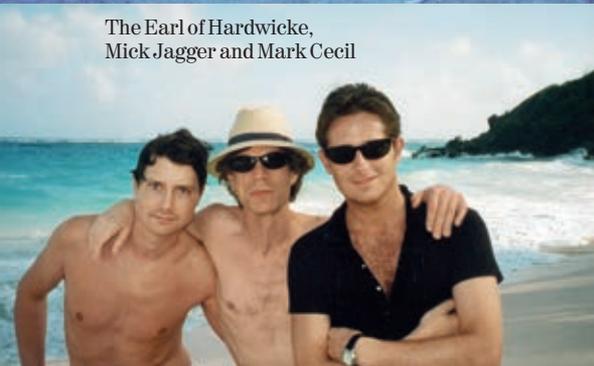
Amy Winehouse,  
photographed by Bryan Adams



The Queen arrives  
in Mustique in  
1977, welcomed  
by  
Princess Margaret



Mare Quinn's  
photograph of this  
year's Easter bonnet  
parade, judged by  
Basil (in foreground)

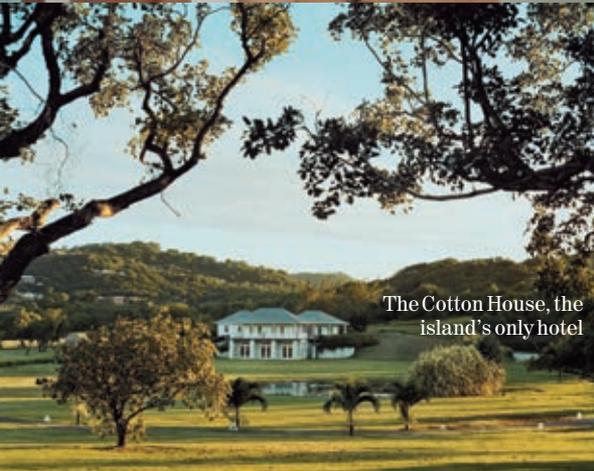


The Earl of Hardwicke,  
Mick Jagger and Mark Cecil



Tommy Hilfiger and wife Dee  
Ocleppo, photographed for  
*Vogue* on their private beach

Eric Boman, Graciele Catalrossi, LFI



The Cotton House, the  
island's only hotel



Keira Knightley on holiday in Mustique, 2005



Jamie Hince, Kate Moss, Tricia Ronane and Basil Charles, January 2010



Anya Hindmarch and Belle Robinson's families



Left: a Robinson family Christmas party, 2009. Right: "Foxy Mustique" - Belle Robinson's daughters Jessie and Izzy recreate a classic Roxy Music album cover



be obligatory in order to gain entry to a party. (Indeed, as a joke, the kids once lined up five glasses, secretly filled them with water and then, in front of a new party of Americans, proceeded to down the lot.)

Take the pool-hopping ritual started by the swarms of teenagers who roam the island unaccompanied at night, and hijacked by a few, ahem, juvenile adults (the 60ft pool at Frangipani is supposed to be a particular challenge). Take Basil's Wednesday night "jump-up", where Wills got on the karaoke machine and belted out Elvis. Then, of course, there is the ritual New Year's Eve streak down the runway when the clock strikes 12. Or, indeed, wearing a bonnet at the Easter parade, an annual event taken most seriously by islanders and homeowners alike. Back in the Seventies it was judged by Tennant (and one year by Bianca, who wore a scooped-out cactus on her head). Not surprisingly, perhaps, the bonnets created by artist Marc Quinn and his household were the winners of this year's parade.

How does one day go, then? Despite the late nights, as Wills and Kate soon sussed, it begins early in Mustique. A swim (or a gallop) on Macaroni before breakfast usually cures the most pounding of headaches. Around midday, just before lunch, it is nice to pootle down to "town" in one's sputtering golf buggy (avoiding the tortoises as you go) and have a desultory wander round; a coffee and croissant and a gossip over the international papers at the Sweetie Pie Bakery; and then a supermarket sweep of the kaftans on offer at the Pink House boutique, made by Lotty Bunbury, the doctor's pretty blonde wife. You could also check out Corea's, the only grocery shop on the island – but beware the prices. "We ran out of tomato juice and had to buy fresh tomatoes," recalls Amanda Sheppard. "We ended up making the most expensive Bloody Marys in the world."

The capacity to do things you might not do back home, to literally push back the furniture and dance, can probably be traced back to "de Lord", as all the islanders used to call Colin Tennant. "Patrolling the island like some benign ruler; playing Prospero with a colonial flair," as Bryan Ferry described it, Tennant indelibly set the tone, gave it its DNA. Leonora Lichfield, former chatelaine of Obsidian, the Oliver Messel-designed villa spectacularly overhauled by hedge-funder Pierre Lagrange, remembers the fiftieth-birthday party he threw himself in 1976. Messel (the theatrical designer and architect whom Princess Margaret commissioned to design her villa Les Jolies Eaux, and who set the gingerbread-house style of the island) came in a gold death mask, Princess Margaret wore a jewelled turban and Leonora wore

silver and gold Zandra Rhodes. The highlight of the evening came when four islanders, wearing nothing but oil and coconut "sporrans" painted gold, came in carrying a throne draped in mosquito netting, which Glenconner theatrically slashed with a machete – to reveal Bianca.

As for the food, in those days Leonora Lichfield remembers it being pretty rough: "Green bean salad, stuffed punkin [sic], more green bean salad, that was your lot – or, if you were lucky, some kid pie", courtesy of the wild goats (and sometimes cows) that used to stray across the dirt tracks. In other words, all a far cry from the publicly manicured lawns and infinity pools and state of the art Paolo Piva-designed villas of today.

At the same time it still feels very British. As one regular observes, "In a way you could twin it with Bembridge on the Isle of Wight. You don't just pitch up here. You sort of have

## *At Basil's Wednesday-night jump-up, Wills got on the karaoke machine and belted out an Elvis number*

to have a reason to go." Although there is no actual vetting procedure – as in the day of Colin Tennant, who was known to greet undesirables with a 12-bore in hand – a certain self-censorship prevails. If Jeannette Cadet, the all-powerful rentals manager of The Mustique Company, utters those two words: "not available", it doesn't matter what you know to the contrary, or how much you are willing to pay. It's not.

There's a dark side to Mustique, too. The still unsolved murder of the French heiress Suzie Mostberger at her villa, Fort Shandy, in 1998; the slight lingering feeling of "them and us" that, so they say, was the reason David Bowie and Iman sold up.

Then there's the vague incestuousness of it all, the knowledge that once you get on that tiny rickety yellow plane at Barbados, no matter how many copies of *The Sunday Times* are held aloft, you will be forensically scrutinised. Stylist Martha Ward, who went there as a guest of Carphone Warehouse co-founder David Ross and his girlfriend Emma Pilkington last Christmas, describes it thus: "You know what you did the night before will be the topic of everyone's breakfast the next morning. I'm still trying to work out if I like that village feel or not."

The sea, too, is misleadingly rough. Show-offs like to pretend they swim on Pasture Bay, on the vicious Atlantic side. But trust me, Macaroni, on the leeward side, so called after two buccaneers called Mr Mackay and Mr

Rooney, can be tricky, too. Time the waves wrong and you will most definitely end up sprawled on the shore with your bikini bottoms wrapped round your head. Which all adds, somehow, to its parallel-universe allure – that feeling of being cut off from the rest of the world. "It's a little like Patrick McGoohan in the Sixties series *The Prisoner*," a regular who has been renting for almost 20 years cheerfully puts it. "It's beautiful and perfect, but because it's so small you can start to feel a bit hermetically sealed."

And yet. Where else can someone like Will strum his guitar on the beach as he did last time he was here, without getting papped? Where else do you not have to panic because you haven't seen the kids for six hours (they're either playing pinball in Felix Dennis's giant games room or at someone else's house – three rings round the island and you'll find them). Where else can you find

yourself at a beach barbecue dinner with a guest list that includes a rock god, an international fashion designer, the tennis coach, the doctor and maybe even the local builder, too?

For all its exclusivity and insularity and seeming impossibility to penetrate, once you actually get there, it's really quite democratic. It's very inter-generational, too. No child apartheid there, that's for sure. As Dora Lowenstein, who was at dinner with Mick Jagger and L'Wren Scott last New Year's Eve noted: "I looked round the table and suddenly realised that for the first time there were more children than grown-ups."

"Mustique is very democratic," agrees Brian Alexander, "but in a way so was Colin. I remember everyone kicking up a fuss when Mary Wells Lawrence and her husband, Harding [the head of Braniff Airways], wanted to build their huge dream house, The Terraces, in the Eighties and there was this big outcry because it didn't conform to the prevailing Oliver Messel style. But he said, you're wrong! Everybody should be able to build their dream house, which is exactly what everyone has done."

"Inevitably much has changed," agrees Bryan Ferry. "Good food and wine, flawless staff, Wi-Fi galore – and a new prosperous international crowd, all enjoying the good life. Everything is perfect. But at the heart of the place is an extraordinary natural beauty which hopefully will never change." ■