

# Anguilla life magazine

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# hotels covecastles resort... 25 years of memories

World class architect, Myron Goldfinger and his wife, June, a noted custom interior designer, had a quest back in the early 80's ...to find the perfect beach on the perfect island for themselves and their daughters, Thira and Djerba. Often passing Anguilla on their annual family sail up and down the Caribbean chain, Myron long had the feeling that Anguilla was a special unspoiled place and so the family scheduled a Christmas 1982 visit.

The day before leaving New York, June happened to mention their upcoming trip to a business associate, who immediately told of a best friend who had bought a spectacular beach on Anguilla in the 1960's. Within hours the friend was in the Goldfinger's office with plot plans and the Queen's survey showing an unbelievable 8 1/2 acres of land with a quarter mile of what turned out to be a pure white sand beach.

Off they went, documents in hand to discover not only spectacular beaches on a quite undiscovered island but warm, special people. They found themselves Malliouhana Hotel's first guests in one of two original Meads Bay villas. Popping over to St. Barts for a few days, the Goldfingers so missed Anguilla that they cut short their stay and flew back early to find their new neighbors to be fashion designer Giorgio Armani and his friends. Quite a beginning for their journey!

The road to the land, or lack of it, meant driving across a salt pond by navigating its high points to avoid getting stuck in the muck. People continually asked the couple if they were developing in Angola and thought that surely they had lost their minds! Working out the proper permits and authorizations became a Herculean task. A change of Government cancelled their first go ahead obliging them to completely restart the whole process. With time the new permits and controls were completed and Anguillian builders and their work team began the construction process. Audly Carty, Covecastles' primary contractor since day one, wears a well worn hat for each new phase of the building project. He and Goldfinger are to this day an inseparable pair and that's the way they like it....Myron dressed in white or black, Audly consistently in khaki.

The first four villas, reception building, tennis court, and future infrastructure were carried out within the goal of a



year's completion. It suffices to say that the nature of building 25 years ago was unique. This was a time before faxes, FedEx, reliable computers or telephone lines (only one at Covecastles, in reception for the first two years of operation.) When a document was needed, someone from Goldfinger's New York office went to Kennedy Airport, handed it to a PanAm flight attendant to take to St. Maarten. Then it was up to Tyden Air to get it to Anguilla for the work to move forward.

One of many memorable happenings was when Freddie Hughes, then owner and operator of Anguilla's only bulldozer, arrived one day and promptly sank in the muck of the pond edge. This was a minor set back, for forward was the only direction they could go. Myron insisted that Hughes lay a light coating for the driveway to match the sand. Freddy followed these directions to a T, except that the light material he used was pond bottom. This looked great but whenever you walked or drove on it, the clay adhered to tires or shoes a couple of inches thick. Freddy eventually replaced that surface with light road material.

One of the most important considerations in Myron's overall design was the careful preservation of the property's natural landscape. Often found in the resort gardens with the landscaping crew, watering plants or placing specimen fauna while directing the landscaping contingent, Myron was



Anguillians, construction teams as well as the general population, all call Myron (above in 1985) "Goldie" and it has occurred that outside his SoHo office on lower Broadway, in New York City loud and clear calls of "Goldie" came across the traffic noise. Over 100 men worked every day hand mixing concrete in small batches for the large buildings, as well as hand bending the re-bars. Workers could often be seen sitting on the edge of a 3-story high curved roof eating their lunch and the crew often brought their families on Sundays for a tour of the unusual buildings. The original contractors, Audly Carty and Geoffrey Richardson, still work with architect Goldfinger.

often mistaken as part of the crew. Vegetation was only knee high when there at all on the windswept site, so supplemental palms, yuccas, flowering trees and lilies were planted as highlights to the existing sea grapes, berry bushes and small trees. June recalls, *Eural Thomas, our landscaper helper and Myron driving off to purchase yuccas and coconut palms for that tropical look we wanted from private owners and churches. Arrangements were made with Patrick Vanterpool, now the island vet, to acquire some tall, mature trees from a site in Island Harbour being cleared for a community playing field. An extra long transport truck was contracted to move them to West End but the only problem was the driver made a liquid refreshment stop enroute so his driving became less than stellar. In fact, as he swerved down the road the police stopped him and our coconut trees. A time operation, Myron worried as to the whereabouts of his trees but upon hearing the story could do nothing but laugh given the absurdity of the situation. Another day we went to St. Martin to buy more coconut trees. The easy part was finding them and having them dug up for transport but then came the sea trip over to Anguilla. We finally contracted with Bennie Connor to put them on his Anguilla bound boat the very same day and we hopped on the ferry. Mid point at sea we spied swaying palms on a swaying boat... a moving coconut grove! This memory of passing the slower boat with our trees will always stay with us.*

Covecastles' building design is based on very serious environmental considerations and strong construction methods to create their unique aesthetic forms. The shape of the original four Villas was developed to increase the natural interior ventilation flow (which many guests prefer to recently added air conditioning). Desalination equipment provides bath and kitchen water as well as irrigation needs and concealed rooftop solar panels provide all the hot water needed - real innovations 25 years ago.

Covecastles now comprises the four original 3-bedroom Villas; eight 2- bedroom Beach Houses, three Grand Villas with 4-bedrooms each and The Point, (pictured on the cover and right), with 5- bedrooms, its own pool and tennis court. The modernist fitness center (below right) was recently added directly on the beach. Luxurious and unique to this day, unsurpassed privacy remains the goal as the villas are spread well apart some 100 feet, exactly as the Goldfingers envisioned from day one.

Determined not to have the villas look as though they could be "anywhere", June from day one wanted Covecastles first and foremost to be a visual treat of Anguillian artifacts. She was, and still is, dedicated to local talent and creations. To track down what she wanted, she got in her rental car, one of very few vehicles on the road at that time, so she stood out! Always offering a ride to people walking, who she found often



**Every room faces the sea and views are magnificent through large sliding glass doors and tall windows.**



provided good leads. Off she went traveling up, down and around and into every path, roadway and gap to find an artisan. Becoming acquainted with every business on the island and with luck and lots of fortuitous leads, she finally found the right people who were already doing or could create her designs.

Determined to find the person responsible for an Anguillian model racingboat she had seen on her numerous island excursions, Flemings Building Supply steered her to then young David Hodge. He was unsure he could complete the 5 boats she initially requested (which he considered a large order) as he needed also to rely on his sister to make the sails. But June persevered and convinced him to try. The first boat was completed within three months, then a year passed before the others were forthcoming. In the end, almost at the very last minute, one by one, all five thankfully arrived. David's hand crafted models, including those pictured above, are still in each and every villa and are a testament to his boat building talents now observed in the often victorious Miss Anguilla and Sonic, the 2009 Champion of Champions Boat of the Year.

Most important came June's quest for hand embroidered and crouched cotton bed sheets. She went to the Craft Shop, then in the storeroom of



Wallblake House, begged and pleaded with the women to fashion her designs. Amused but in their kind way interested in helping out this stranger, two retired nurses from the local hospital, Harriet Richardson and Miriam Gumbs, thought they could take on such a commission. The needed thread and dozens of pure white sheets and pillowcases shipped from New York arrived in massive boxes, but the two ladies appeared undaunted by the task ahead. Enough homemade ginger beer was consumed for June to become an honorary Anguillian on her regular visits to their homes to go



*The bedding's intricate stitches are now crafted by the current housekeepers*

over the necessary patterns and required completion schedule. When delivery day arrived only the first set had in fact been finished. Panic not June thought, after many pleas, the ladies were convinced to ask friends to join them to complete the order. In true Anguillian fashion, all were finished, the opening was saved and these special bed linens became another Covecastles' visual treat.

Additionally what became known as the Bedroom Saga involved June's desire to use local artisan work at Covecastles right down the sewing of the raw silk bed covers. She asked around again and found Bernice Fahie, recommended by Miriam Gumbs as a "swell sewer". Bernice was nine months pregnant and could barely reach her machine but sew swell she did and her beautiful work helped open the resort in style. Other "only in Anguilla" crafts quested and found were cornhusk table mats and tomato potholders. The mats were made by Mrs. Richardson of Blowing Point, the potholders came through the Craft Shop.

Then came the Nevisian pottery. In the 60's June's parents traveled to Nevis on business and her New York gallery owner Mother, discovered "Grandmother", who made pottery in her home and fired it in her front yard. Vases, bowls, monkey pots, ducks, cows and more were crated to bring back to New York for herself and the Goldfingers. *They surely did look fabulous, and I was determined to have them for Covecastles*, June enthused. When the time came, the Goldfingers traveled to Nevis to what was by then a small workshop run by the "Grandmother's" granddaughter and found the pieces they wanted. The pottery was packed in coconut husks, boxed and arrangements made with the captain of a local...very local...boat to transport it whenever he was coming to Anguilla.



*June's creative eyes saw these Anguillian made brooms, an integral part of local life, as essential interior design elements as well as another visual treat.*



*While working as architect and designer on the Altamer resort next door, June & Myron (pictured above in 2002) spied an obviously lost, thirsty and very hungry goat. Patrick Vanterpool was called from his East End Veterinary clinic to rescue the goat and return it to its owner. He informed them that no animal rescue organization existed on island. Thanks to that wayward goat, some two years later the couple were the first contributors to AARF which thrives today providing much needed help and rescue for all of the animals of Anguilla.*

of the 15 Villas is owned by a private individual who has purchased their residence with the agreement that they all operate together as one resort creating a unique community as well as opportunities for the staff, some on board since the very beginning.

With the completion of the resort came notoriety. First a prominent story in Architectural Digest, which was to become one of two, another first for Anguilla, as well as features in Vogue and numerous other prestigious publications in the U.S. and abroad. A top drawer U.S. rep., David Mitchell and Company, was secured and Mitchell himself personally came to Anguilla to inspect the new property. While visiting the reception area which also housed the laundry, the royal blue beach towels were being washed for the first time and a large puddle of bright blue water started seeping to the front of the building. June just kept on talking to hold his attention, keeping his back turned and drawing him away from the area so he never noticed a thing!

While in the planning stage the Goldfinger's invited their friends Judy and Michael Steinhardt to join in their adventure. Michael said "count me in" even though he didn't like going to the beach and had never been to the Caribbean. Myron arranged to have their charter plane buzz low over the property with the tennis court lights on at dusk for the first view of their new home. Still neighbors, the Steinhardts, their 3 children, and now their grandchildren still enjoy Anguilla in the same way as the Goldfingers, their two daughters and granddaughter.

The first four villas remain as fresh and exciting as when they were first built, and serve as a reminder of what two people can do with talent and determination...Myron creating the striking architecture and natural lush landscaping; June the custom interiors. The operation of the resort and ambience were in place on day one and remain as they were originally conceived...private, relaxed and perfect. Hand embroidered bedding, Georg Jensen and Mario Bucci silverware, custom furniture with raw silk cushions, local craftwork as well as fully equipped kitchens for the adventurous are the hallmarks here.

The warm and welcoming staff operate with quiet discretion and treat all guests like family. June trained the original housekeepers, who had golden hearts but no hotel/resort experience. This involved her donning yellow rubber gloves to demonstrate the fine art of bathroom cleaning. Then it was bedmaking with six pillows instead of one and turning down the raw silk bedcovers to show off the embroidered sheets to their full advantage. Add to this the instruction on coffee pots and toasters. On the very first day June received a call to rescue an exploding coffee pot in the villa next door. It was out of sorts because the holder had been filled to the top with grinds, which expanded in the only direction they could...up and out! When it came to toasters, instruction came but when Myron himself tried to make some well done toast, it ejected itself onto the floor. So much for the horrified staff's introduction to modern conveniences! Fermella Hughes, now head housekeeper and June will never forget being in the shower scraping packing labels off the wall as their unsuspecting first guests were checking in!

Guests consider their housekeepers their very own and would not change them for the world. Especially popular, and greatly appreciated is the unique Eural Thomas, known to all as Thomas and considered as the Mayor of Covecastles. His main job is to oversee the grounds and beach but he is always on hand to greet guests, give up-dates to his special weather predictions and in general entertain all to their great pleasure. Originally from Dominica but now an Anguillian Belonger, Thomas from a family of 10, now has his own home not far from the property.



*Today, Nevisian pottery, another of Covecastles signature pieces, is sprinkled throughout all the villas*

The years have passed, yet the Goldfinger's creation has provided residents and guests alike a refuge from the world like no other. What started as a private house for their family of four, blossomed into what is today the Covecastles Resort community. Their plan was to make this a home for those who came to own a home, and also a home for those who came to Covecastles to make it their private retreat for their stay. Over the years the staff has graciously received guests, and even when it comes to celebrity clientele all residents on the property are cared for with the same thoughtful ambience. One of many memorable guests was Leonard Bernstein, who was also one of the first. He requested that a piano be brought on the beach and in the tradition of accommodating their guests, the staff pulled it off. To this day that feat is a very special Covecastles memory. Not all guests need be famous for sure, but former President Bill Clinton and then Senator Hillary Clinton spent their 2007 Christmas at Covecastles as special guests of Bob Johnson, founder of BET. NY Yankee Captain Derek Jeter called for his reservation himself; British actors Kenneth Branagh and Helena Bonham Carter managed to produce a very proper English Christmas dinner with the assistance of Derek Jacobi (of I Claudius PBS fame). Film star Robert deNiro has stayed multiple times and on one occasion the famous TV star and educator Bill Cosby holidayed here. In addition to many fashion models one guest, the fashion designer Adrienne Vittadini, arrived with a full suitcase of her beautiful sweaters and left with it empty, having given each housekeeper a special gift. Yet the most abundant guests are couples, families, friends with friends, family gatherings and of course, weddings.

Time has passed and Covecastles has grown. Yet it has not lost its focus of being a unique and perfect private enclave dedicated to relaxation and the enjoyment of its quiet white sand beach. Given the profound effect the Goldfingers have had on Anguilla, it is no surprise that today they continue to work hard to assure the future of Covecastles while remaining low key. Covecastles appeals to those who value privacy and this has been the resort's profile for the 25 years which have passed since June and Myron went on their quest for the perfect house on the perfect island.

*(photos courtesy of Architectural Digest, Claire Devenor, Myron Goldfinger and Chris Mason)*