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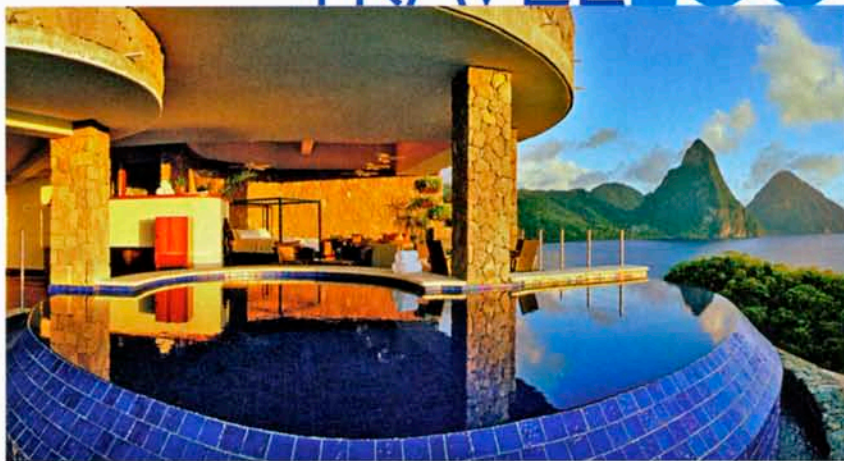
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TRAVELLOG



The Most Exciting New Hotel in the World

The first time I visited St. Lucia's Anse Chastanet a dozen years ago, I stayed in a beach-level room with a garden view. At least it was close to the dive shop. The next time, two years ago, I stayed in a room on the back side of the hotel, where I slept in an oversized bed they'd built for an English rock legend who had a whole lotta love (that's a hint). I'm working my way up. Maybe before I die I'll scale the heights of the resort's exclusive new wing, Jade Mountain.



Nick Troubetzkoy

A couple years ago, Jade Mountain was a mere skeleton of a structure, but the concept of putting plunge pools in every suite, with infinity edges spilling to views of the Pitons, was mind-blowing. So we were eager for Joan Tapper's report and Macduff Everton's photographs. They both used the same word to describe architect/hotelier Nick Troubetzkoy's crowning achievement: "visionary."

"I'm not one to rhapsodize about hotels, but that was something!" says Joan, former editor of *National Geographic Traveler* and our sister-publication, ISLANDS. (The rhapsodizing gets underway in earnest on page 48.)

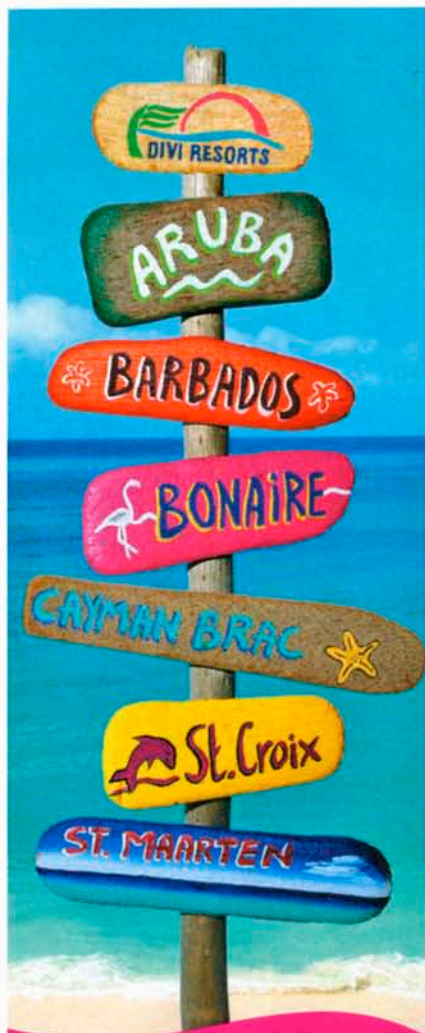
"They really went out there," says Macduff, who was honored as Travel Photographer of the Year in 2006 by the IPA-Lucie Awards. He compares Jade Mountain's comfort level to that of the Four Seasons, Ritz-Carltons and Amanresorts, and the combination of bold architecture and extreme setting to places like the far-out Remota and Explora hotels by famed Chilean architect German del Sol. Put that all together, and you've got — yes — the most exciting new hotel in the world.

Even so, Jade Mountain may not be for everyone, and it's a bit rich at a grand a night and up. But there are plenty of worthy options. St. Lucia is undergoing a growth spurt that has raised its hospitality profile to Pitonian heights, and I, for one, can't wait to get back down there to see for myself.

Cheers,
Dave Herndon

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MACDUFF EVERTON (2)



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How do you like your room? There's not another one just like it, anywhere. And how about that view? Heaven. On. Earth. Scale the heights of luxury at spectacular Jade Mountain — the new resort within a resort at venerable Anse Chastanet — then tour the handful of hotels that have elevated St. Lucia to new standards of hospitality.

By Joan Tapper • Photography by Macduff Everton



The dawn sky was barely pink as I eased into the water and swam toward the Pitons. The shimmering liquid reflected the clouds, and I could make out the silhouette of St. Vincent on the southern horizon. The most amazing thing about the scene, though, was this: I was still in my room. Just a few barefoot steps had taken me from bed to the luminescent pool that was the centerpiece of my Jade Mountain suite.

This jaw-dropping new resort within a resort at St. Lucia's Anse Chastanet, the creation of visionary architect/hotelier Nick Troubetzkoy, would make a sensualist out of a Puritan. From the moment I walked through the towering jalousied wooden door of my "infinity pool suite" — one of 24 individually designed and furnished accommodations, all with open fourth walls and awe-inspiring Pitons panoramas — I simply wanted to stare at it, reach out and touch it, inhale it and savor it.

"You have to realize," Brian Woodrow, one of the architects, later told me, "that this building is a personal expression, and it was hand-built." Perhaps it's because of all those hands — of St. Lucian masons, woodworkers and other artisans — that the rooms have such a tactile quality.

Walls of shaped stone ascend to 15-foot ceilings. Under





foot, a polished purpleheart wood floor caressed the soles of my feet and kept me from putting on shoes till I absolutely had to walk outside. The room angled slightly, flowing from entryway to bedroom area to open living room edged by a patio of cool coral stone. The scenery, which left me breathless from mountain sunrise to ocean sunset, was riveting. And then there was that pool ...

Each suite features its own uniquely styled plunge pool. Mine was rose-colored, round, and four and a half feet deep, with an invisible edge that led out toward space. The pool was lined with iridescent glass tiles that showed purple and blue with flecks of gold as the light subtly changed, or when I slipped in for a dip. Their kaleidoscopic light show vied with the view for my gaze.

The tiles, an invention of glass artist David Knox, also covered the shower, but there they were reversed to a rippled rose surface. The bath area was discreetly shielded by a low wall but maintained a view. One morning, as I stood naked, in front of the elegant monolith that mysteriously held all manner of water jets topped by a rain shower, I looked out through the suite's open fourth wall and watched a rainbow-colored fishing boat pull into Anse Chastanet's dock far below.



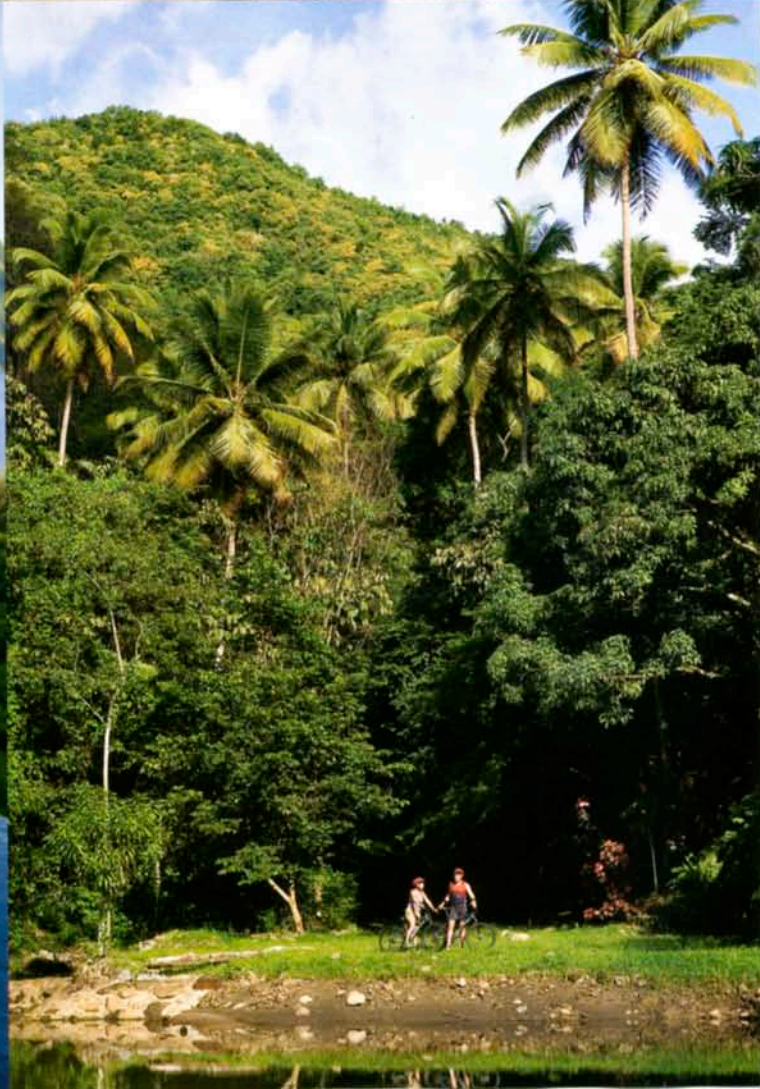
With infinity pools, absent fourth walls, and décor composed of natural materials, exterior and interior are fluid concepts in Jade Mountain's individually designed suites.

NICK TROUBETZKOY AND HIS WIFE, Karolin, came to St. Lucia from Canada more than three decades ago and spent years working on Anse Chastanet until its 14 simple accommodations were transformed into 49 luxe rooms with sensuous, art-filled interiors, lots of wood, and folding doors that showcased the views.

But Jade Mountain is literally and creatively on another level — “an architectural poem to celebrate one of nature’s most amazing settings,” Karolin called it as we sat down to dinner at the Piti Piton Restaurant, one of the dining rooms available to Jade Mountain guests.

“It started out as something else altogether,” said Nick, whose professorial white beard and glasses disguise a crusty sense of humor. Jade Mountain — whose name hints at his passion for collecting miniature jade peaks — was conceived as six villas on a hillside, with four units in each. “What a flawed concept that was!” he said. “We did one first floor, and then stood there and said, ‘We can’t see the Pitons.’ I wanted to maximize the view for everyone. Meanwhile, crews are digging in the ground.”

Eventually, the plan evolved into five





tiered levels that resemble a Maya temple when viewed from the sea. The resort sits 160 feet above the water and towers some 80 feet high. The height was “balanced by bridges, which are very horizontal,” said Nick, who professes a hatred for high rises. Indeed, a number of walkways jut back toward the hill at different levels and angles, adding a visual dynamism that’s as stimulating and unusual as the interiors.

Some last details were still being finished during my visit late last year, like the top-floor clubhouse, with a sitting area, bar and multicolored circular pool canopied by a skylight. Above that will be a “celestial terrace,” for yoga perhaps, or stargazing, or just for marveling at the killer view. Jade Mountain will also have its own small spa and fitness center, and a road that will bring visitors to a reception area separate from the resort below.

Landscaping includes a five-level waterfall and two watercourses that Troubetzkoy designed, and though the greenery was hardly mature, plants were beginning to erupt from rocks everywhere. A few features were also curiously, and deliberately, being left unfinished: There were 89 stone pillars around Jade Mountain topped only by spikes of bare rebar.

“Why?” I asked Nick.

“Each column will have its own symbolic ending,” he said. “This building is anti-repetitive, so every column will be different. I’m inviting guests to make proposals. We’re very interested in sculpture.” Think of the columns as

Anse Chastanet’s beaches are base camp for snorkeling and kayaking excursions, and mountain-bike rides through the jungly grounds of an 18th century sugar-cane estate.

“potential aspirations,” he urged, with a twinkle in his eyes that left me uncertain as to how serious he was.

Then I remembered something Brian Woodrow had told me: “What’s unique about this project is that there was a willingness to experiment and no fear to revise.” Perhaps I really was supposed to submit some pillar-topping ideas.

PERIODICALLY DURING MY STAY, I MANAGED TO drag myself out of my room — it was hard — to enjoy the rest of Anse Chastanet. I spent some time on the silver-sand beach, alternately lounging and swimming in the sea.

I jumped aboard a boat that took me around the corner to Anse Mamin, the resort’s other beach, at the edge of an 18th-century sugar-cane estate. Inside its gates are 12 miles of mountain-bike trails that range from groomed beginner’s paths to steep single tracks. Being more of an urban cyclist than a jungle biker, though, I contented myself with a stroll through the shady forest, past the atmospheric stone walls of the old boiling house, where a stairway to nowhere was flanked by brilliant wild ginger blooms.

I dined at Apsara, the nighttime East Indian incarnation of the resort’s beachside restaurant, savoring a minty lamb chop appetizer followed by luscious coconut and chili prawns. But I was always drawn back to my room. Every time I pushed open the huge wooden door, it was like unwrapping a present and finding a precious gem — that amazing panorama mirrored in the irresistible pool.

Late one afternoon, as twilight deepened into dark, I arranged with the spa to have a massage in my room. I lit some candles and turned on the pool’s fiber-optic lights; the room flickered with warmth and color. Herbert Joseph, a laser-fingered massage therapist, set up his table on my patio. As I listened to the sounds of tree frogs and vague waves, he found and un-kinked every knot in muscles I didn’t even know I had.

Jade Mountain, like Anse Chastanet, has no televisions, phones or radios. It’s up to you and your companion to entertain each other ... Nature, of course, is always present to assist. On my last night I woke up in the dark hour before sunrise and noticed that a crescent of the ceiling’s edge had cleverly been left open to the sky. From my pillow I peered into space and saw a brilliant sparkle of stars, all twinkling, I’m sure, with potential aspirations.

■ Jade Mountain, Anse Chastanet Resort, 758-459-7000; jade.mountainstlucia.com. Daily rates (per room): \$950 to \$1,470 in low season (\$1,150 to \$1,600 high).