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MARCH/APRIL 2013

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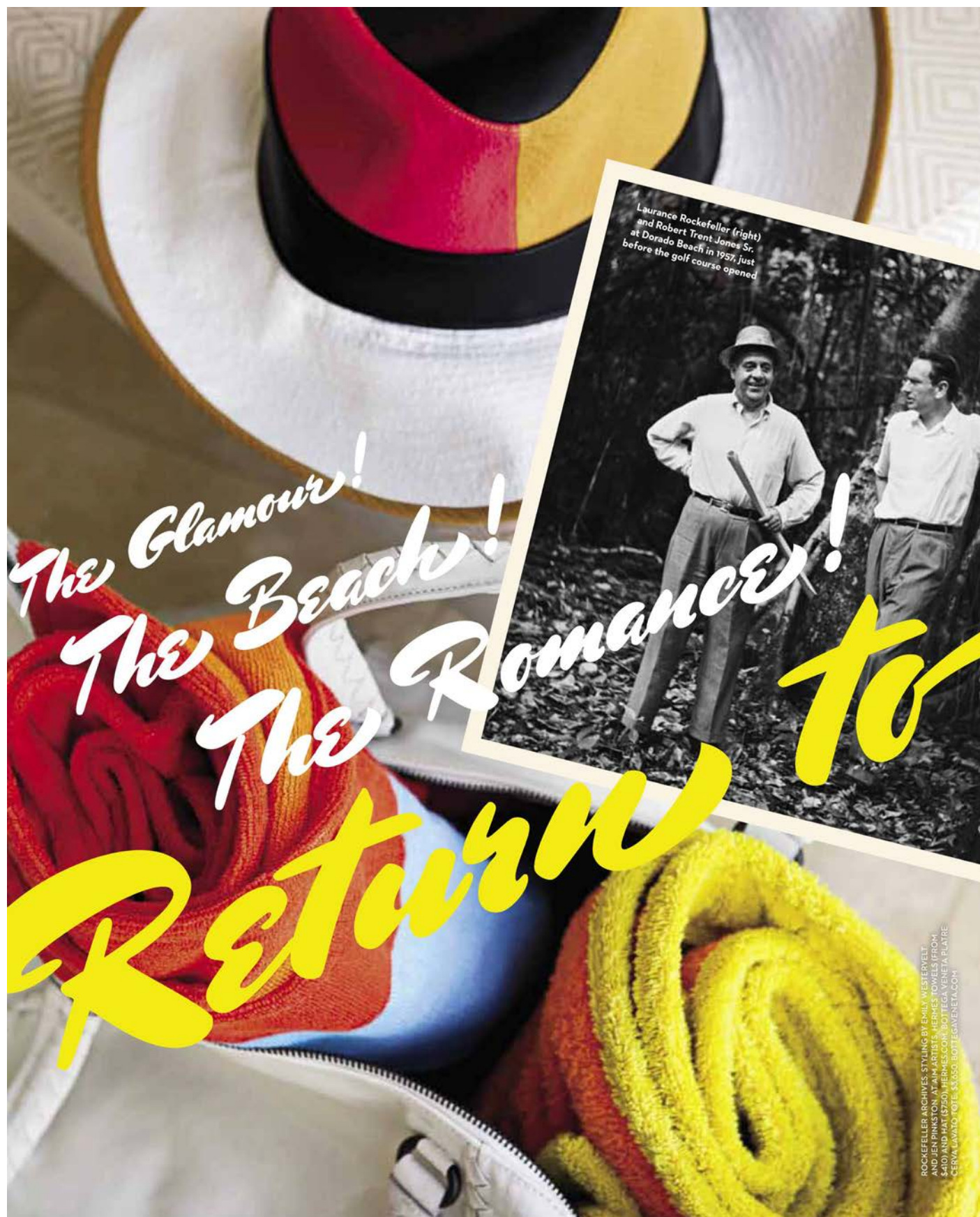
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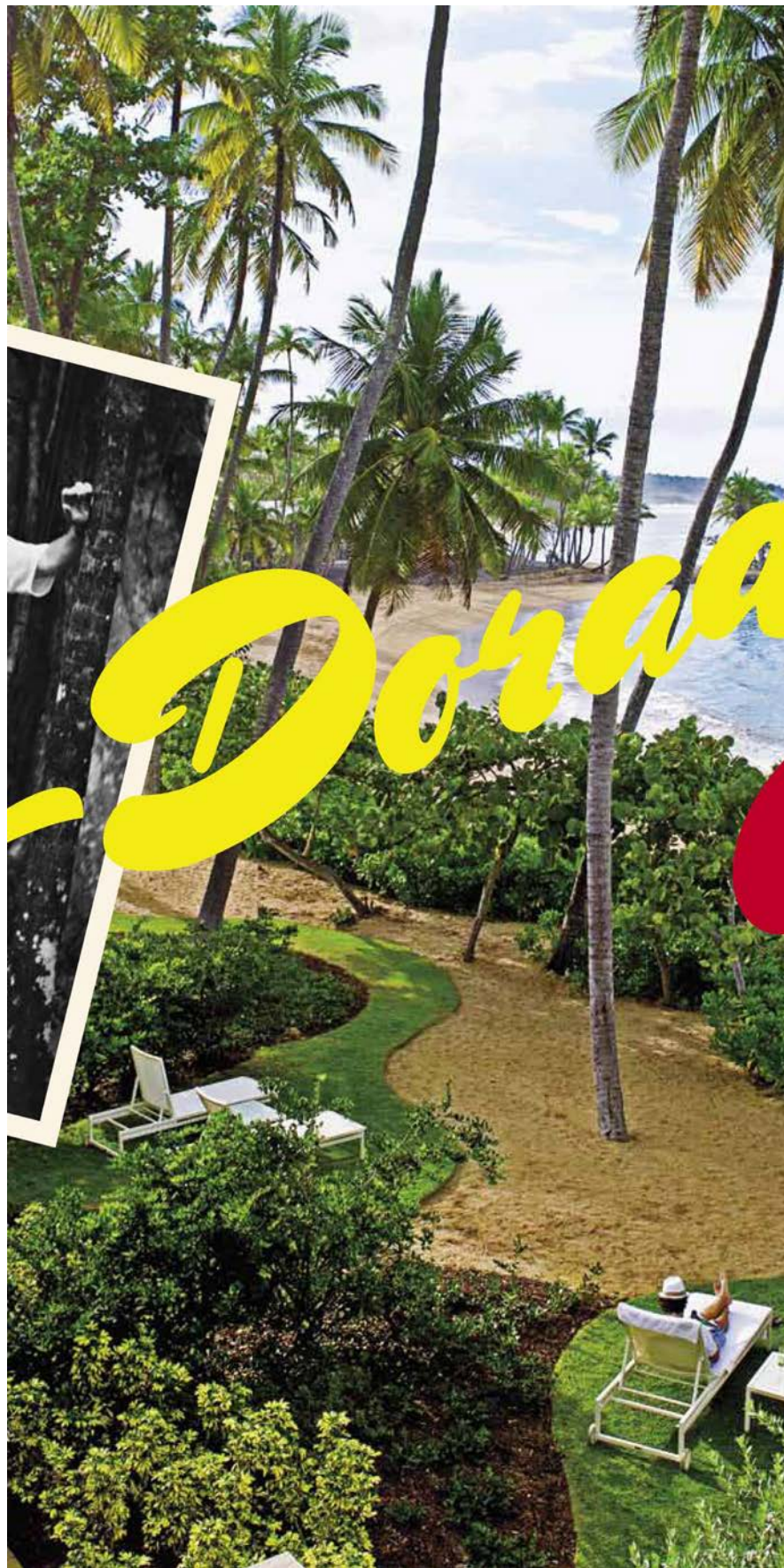


Laurance Rockefeller (right)
and Robert Trent Jones Sr.
at Dorado Beach in 1957, just
before the golf course opened

ROCKEFELLER ARCHIVES. STYLING BY EMILY WESTERVELT
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IN ITS HEYDAY IN THE
1960S, PUERTO RICO'S
DORADO BEACH WAS THE
NE PLUS ULTRA OF ALL
THAT WAS SWELL AND
SWANKY IN THE CARIBBEAN,
THE RESORT WHERE
EVERYBODY WHO WAS
ANYBODY CAME TO
PLAY. CAN THEY DO
IT AGAIN?

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
KEN KOCHEY

At first I was skeptical. Much as I love the Caribbean and much as it is sorely in need of a new *haute* spot—especially one with direct flights from New York that get you there in time for lunch, not jet-lagged in late afternoon—a \$342 million Ritz-Carlton resort in Puerto Rico sounded... perhaps a tad over the top? In fact, some of it seemed almost kitsch, as the marketing team ticked off the highlights: treetop massage “rooms,” a \$30,000-a-night pink villa where Amelia Earhart overnighted before disappearing in 1937 (and already booked for New Year’s Eve by native daughter Jennifer Lopez), airport-to-resort delivery via a black Mercedes-Benz Sprinter (with enough neon lights inside to be its own Vegas casino—my description, not theirs) and 114 rooms with an entry price of \$1,500 a night in season—no kidding and no discounting.

Really?

“Please, darling, come and take a look,” cooed the lovely young public relations woman in charge of making sure that the



1-2. The beach is steps away from the suites, with bedrooms that open onto porches. 3. Carolina and Friedel Stubbe in their art-filled home. 4. The resort's main pool. 5. Lounging by the plunge pool of a standard room. 6. Sunning by a rooftop plunge pool. 7. Enjoying cocktails at the Positivo Sand Bar. 8. The soaking tub in a king suite. 9. The porte cochere arrival area. 10. Servicing the main pool. 11. Ambassadors of an environment class studying a reef located in front of Su Casa.



word got out. "I know you'll like it."

So I did, last October, prior to its opening in December. And you know what? It is nothing short of spectacular—grand, to be sure, terribly chic and unlike anything else in Puerto Rico. But then, that's exactly how Dorado started out way back when.

In the walls of the Caribbean Property Group offices are black-and-white pictures circa 1958, when the environmentalist billionaire Laurance Rockefeller opened Dorado Beach as one of the Caribbean's first great luxury resorts. To this day, as you luxuriate beachside and the seawall built some 100 feet out in the turquoise waters ensures that the ocean breaks "just so" and you needn't worry about rough-and-tumble surf, you'll thank him for such futuristic thinking.

The property had previously been a coconut and citrus plantation owned by Clara Livingston, one of those adventure heiresses—cum—pilots and a close friend of Amelia Earhart. In fact it was Livingston who entertained

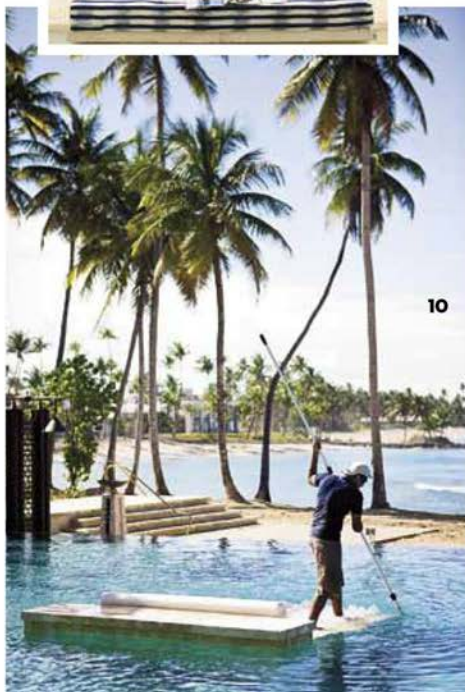
Earhart in her big, pink hacienda the night before she disappeared. (Called Su Casa, the house has been gorgeously refreshed as a four-bedroom hacienda available at \$30,000 a night.) Back then, Dorado Beach was the ne plus ultra of swank for the Elizabeth Taylors and Ava Gardners of the world. But, alas, time and funky real estate developments were not kind. Until five years ago, when a Puerto Rico developer named Friedel Stubbe and the New York-based Caribbean Property Group bought Dorado for \$150 million. Ritz-Carlton Group was brought in to manage the property, and the resort positioned itself as the centerpiece of what will be a \$1 billion restoration of the entire 1,400 acres.

Every great resort needs a vision—and deep pockets. Laurance Rockefeller had both. So, too, does Friedel Stubbe, who is at the diamond-hard center of Dorado Beach. The 64-year-old Stubbe, who grew up in Puerto Rico and attended Harvard Business School, seems to epitomize a new and very savvy Puerto Rico. Standing in the middle of his

Real Estates

Residential property is an important part of the new Dorado Beach, with the first 13 residences priced upwards of \$7.5 million each already having been sold. Dorado is banking on the fact that Puerto Rico recently introduced incentives—like decreased property taxes for the first ten years—to stimulate investment.







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1. Mi Casa chef José Andrés.
2. A customized foosball table in the bar at Mi Casa.
3. The arrival pavilion.
4. A chic corner of the bar.
5. The entrance to Spa Botánico.
6. Outdoor dining at Mi Casa.
7. A tree-house platform for massages.
8. Tuna *aranitas*, a combination of tuna, plantains, tamarind and wasabi.

1





artfully decorated living room, five minutes from the hotel itself, Stubbe is—like Rockefeller before him—a serious collector of modernist art and design, most of it acquired through the impeccable eye of his 46-year-old Venezuelan wife, Carolina. Together they've made sexy, cool, crazy contemporary art, like a tailor-made Kiki Smith piece in the guest rooms, a hallmark of the new Dorado.

Stubbe's grandparents settled here as farmers from Germany, but Friedel himself made his reputation and fortune through real estate. He's also deeply involved in the cultural and social fabric of the country. "If you want a great community, you need great education and great health care, and up until now we haven't had that," says Stubbe, who's developing a 160-bed Johns Hopkins hospital with Goldman Sachs and was instrumental in bringing the American School in Switzerland to these parts. Puerto Rico, he says, has so much to offer, so much more than the stereotypes of *West Side Story*. "It's filled with incredible culture, people and landscapes. The sports here, from kayaking and kite surfing to golf and horseback riding, are on par with any place in the world. And we've tried to take advantage of all that." With Dorado, Stubbe hopes to position his country as a luxury destination, something he admits hasn't been part of the equation of late.

With the Caribbean Property Group and Ritz-Carlton as his partners, he may well succeed. So far it seems to be working. A few changes along the way—Daniel Boulud was to have been the original chef, but it's now the hot Barcelonan José Andrés, who's behind The Bazaar in L.A., Miami and D.C. and seems perfectly in tune with the direction of the brand. The hotel itself is a knockout, with 100 rooms and 14 suites, right on the beach. In fact, the beach is just outside your room—so, too, are landscaped lawns and individual infinity pools. There's a bit of Aman Resorts minimalism going on here, and combined with a native razzle-dazzle, it works. Would I have preferred the rooms be built as stand-alones at \$1,500 a night? Yes, but even so, they have the intimacy of individual apartments. The Reserve brand from Ritz-Carlton, of which Dorado is the flagship in North America, will eventually include 20 high-end resorts. Right now there is only Dorado and a property in Krabi, Thailand (Phulay Bay, which

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we featured in The New Asia Issue, October 2011). Next up is the refreshment of Cerromar, an unfortunate blight on the otherwise Eden-like property. Built in the 1970s and far less luxurious, it was meant as a companion piece to Dorado. The concept never really worked and the place sits sadly neglected.

When I visited in October, before the arrival of the first "real" guests, finishing touches were still being added. The grounds were a mess—what with 1,000 employees working around the clock—but even then you could see the future. For starters, there are four gorgeous golf courses, of which Robert Trent Jones Sr. designed East and West. Spa Botánico was shaping up as a pioneer in the field—five acres of lush gardens, walkways, little bubbling pools, a boutique with everything imaginable to smear, moisturize, detox, exfoliate and beautify yourself, as well as massage platforms perched high in the trees. Imagine the Swiss Family Robinson as one percenters and you get the point.

José Andrés was still perfecting the menu for the restaurant, Mi Casa, emphasizing freshly caught seafood, small dishes and brand-new experimental cooking, all inspired by his signature contemporary Iberian touches but also reflecting the tastes and produce of Puerto Rico. Then again, anything you could possibly want is available on a customized basis—from the ordinary to the not-so-ordinary. One night our party had a craving for roasted suckling pig, black beans and rice. No problem; it was delivered to Su Casa, where we were staying, along with all the other elements of an authentic Puerto Rican picnic-cum-banquet. Even without the knives and forks in place, the kitchen and Mi Casa dining room were dazzling, designed in a totally modern vernacular with verve and wit by architect Juli Capella, a close friend of Andrés's and a native Barcelonan as well.

Fashion icon and *Vogue* contributing editor Candy Pratts Price, who is also Puerto Rican, recently flew down for the weekend with her husband, Chuck Price, to see what all the fuss was about. Price, whose brother and nephew live 30 minutes away from Dorado, in San Juan, gushes, "Dorado has enough chic that I say, 'Skip St. Barths this season.'" —R.D.S.

For reservations, call 787-626-1100 or go to ritzcarlton.com.

212 departures.com

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