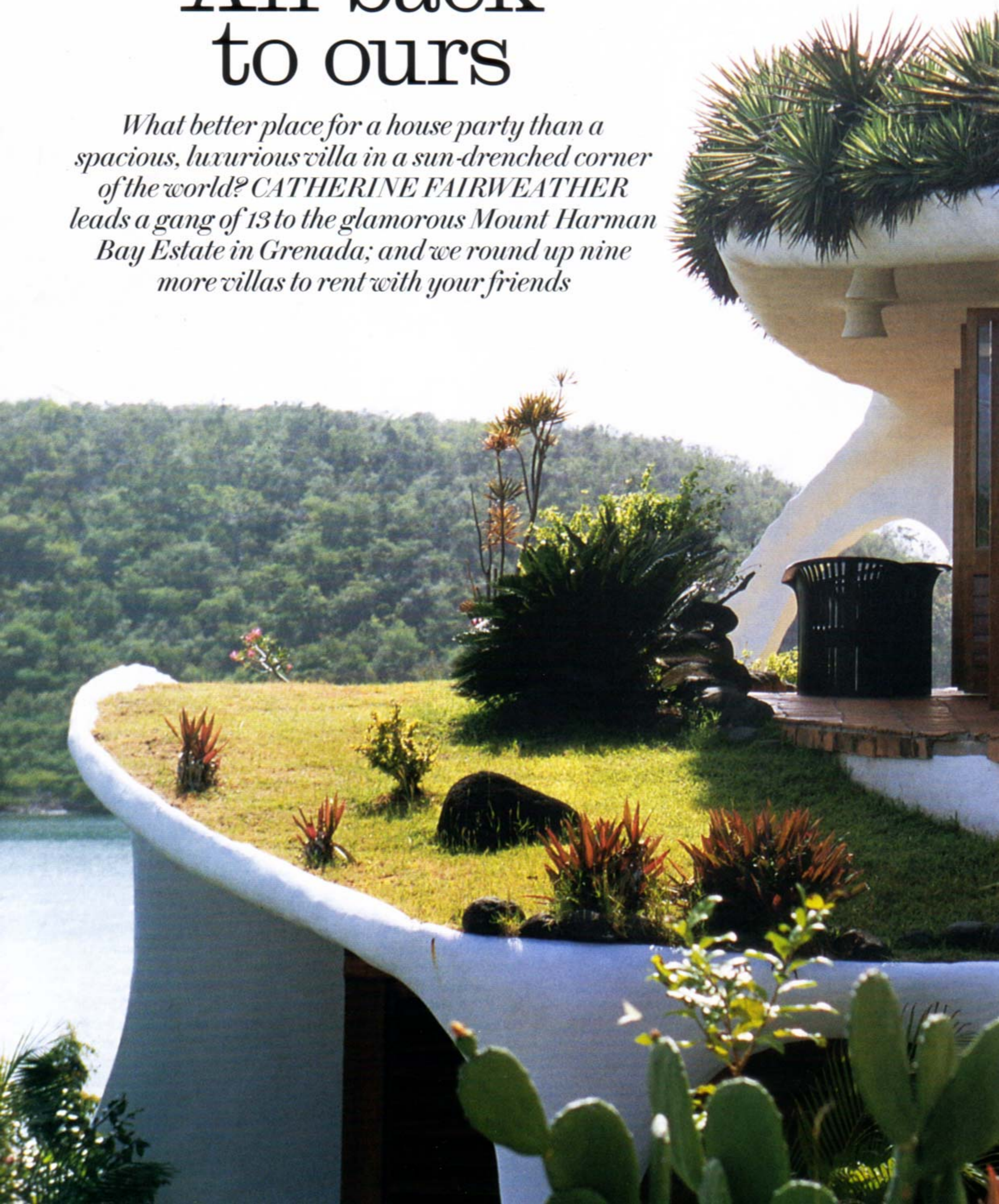
A woman with dark hair and large hoop earrings is shown from the chest up, looking out over a vast ocean under a sunset sky. She is wearing a dark red, long-sleeved top with gold sequins. The background is a soft gradient of pink, orange, and blue, with the ocean's surface visible below.

THE
BAZAAR
TRAVEL
GUIDE

NOVEMBER 2006

All back to ours

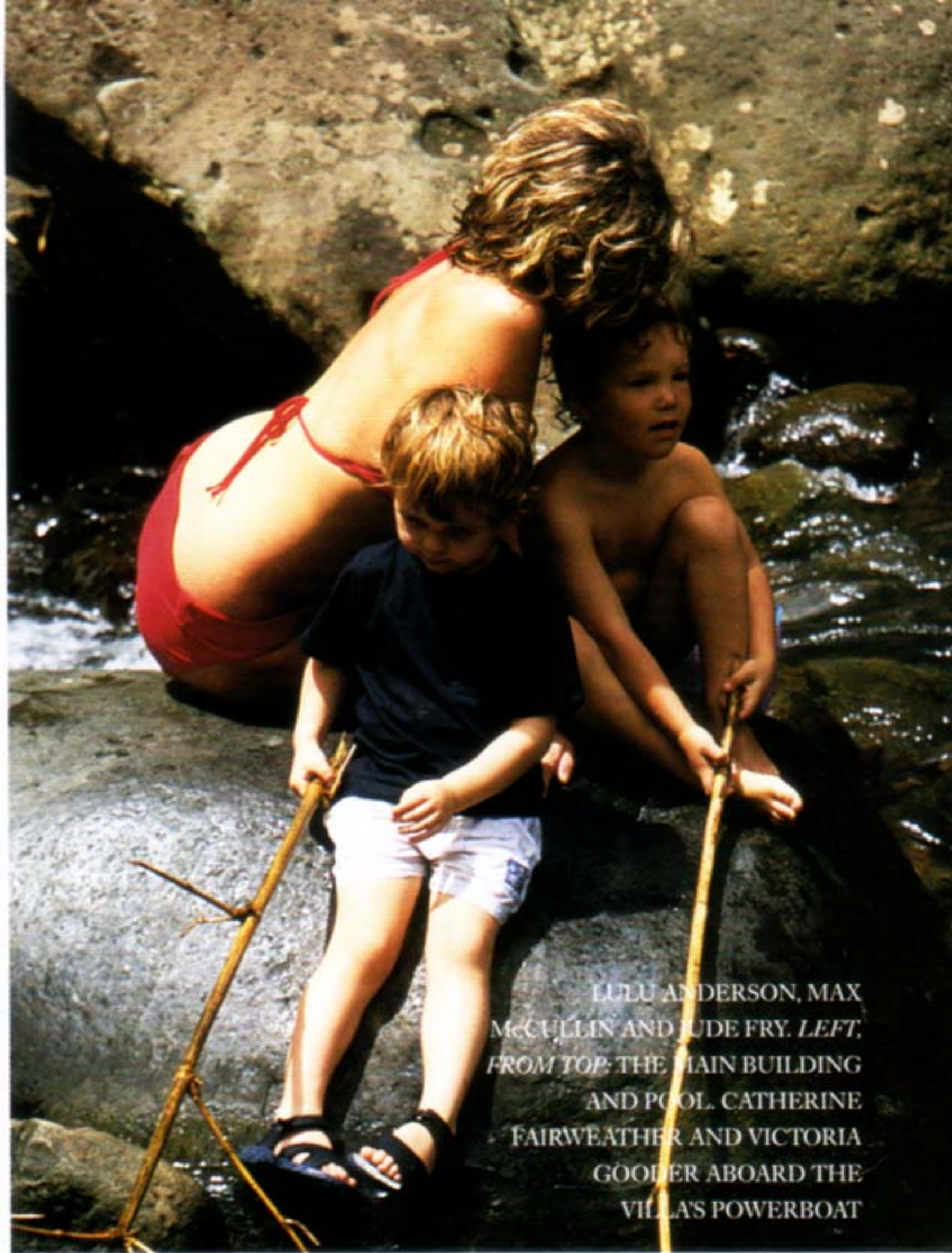
What better place for a house party than a spacious, luxurious villa in a sun-drenched corner of the world? CATHERINE FAIRWEATHER leads a gang of 13 to the glamorous Mount Harman Bay Estate in Grenada; and we round up nine more villas to rent with your friends



PARTY VILLAS



BELLA FREUD PADDLING IN
THE POOL AT MOUNT HARMAN
BAY ESTATE, GRENADA.
OPPOSITE: THE MAIN
ENTRANCE TO THE VILLA



LULU ANDERSON, MAX McCULLIN AND JUDE FRY. *LEFT, FROM TOP: THE MAIN BUILDING AND POOL. CATHERINE FAIRWEATHER AND VICTORIA GOODER ABOARD THE VILLA'S POWERBOAT*



It's not the most auspicious start to a holiday. We touch down on the island of Grenada, in March, to mighty thunderclaps and unseasonal sheet rain. Our villa on Mount Hartman Bay is only a short drive away but, on arrival, the vast white troglodyte interiors of the Cave House, as locals call it, the black Biedermeier furniture and the surreal sight of a candlelit dining table laid as though for a royal banquet, with gleaming rows of cutlery and serried ranks of wine glasses, is all too much. In our jet-lagged state, it stuns everyone to silence. As we arrange ourselves around the oversized wooden table – so big it had to be constructed on the premises by 20 men – it occurs to me that there are 13 of us. Not that I am superstitious about numbers, but still: what induced me to invite a collection of demanding adults and children to an unfamiliar villa on an island recently ravaged by one of the century's worst hurricanes? They may be old friends of mine, but they are strangers to each other. The rain continues to lash down and Dean, the ebullient maître d', recounts how a man and his son from a nearby resort have been swept out to sea in their catamaran and cannot be found. It's a subdued party that slopes off to bed that night.

But morning breaks early in the tropics, and when sunlight slices through shuttered windows and falls in stripes across the mosquito net, our spirits are lifted. The doors to the bedroom open on all sides to three acres of cactus-studded garden with views of the sea. A yacht glides into the silky expanse of bay, cradled by the wooded headland of a nature reserve and protected from the open ocean by a coral reef.

Above me, like something out of a fairy tale, the house squats – a giant insect on a nest of jungly undergrowth. The small boys are enchanted by the space-age decor and architecture. 'It's Tracy Island,' they shout as they clamber around the internal waterfalls beside the main staircase and living-room wall. Below me, manicured lawns slope down to a pool with an electronic awning and a water-mist spray that can be activated at the press of a button to keep sunbathers cool. A folly resembling a pirate's look-out rises out of the decking; and just off the wraparound beach are a motor cruiser and bobbing jet boats. It is all straight out of James Bond – just as fantastical, futuristic and fabulous.



VICTORIA GOODER AND
NICK ARCHDALE ON LA
SAGESSE BEACH. BELOW:
COZMO JENKS IN THE POOL

It is notoriously difficult to find villas anywhere that are large enough to comfortably accommodate the varying demands of a very large group of people. Our party is made up of singles and marrieds – some with children, some without. The great thing about Mount Hartman Bay Estate is that there is no best room for anyone to bicker over. All 12 suites are equally enormous, with spectacular views, and all boast the latest hi-tech sound systems and plasma screens – as you would expect from the villa's entrepreneur owner, whose history is in design and technology. Richard Lee is a man of vision and means, and everything in this villa, which he bought and reconstructed three years ago, is on a generous scale: beds, wardrobes, soaps, wine cellar. There are pods of rooms in different zones so that, for instance, the children's hysterical giggling over sightings of frogs and lizards need never disturb the canoodling couples. The newly besotted can go to the romantic tower with its *Romeo and Juliet*-style balcony and funky glass staircase leading to the bed. During our stay, the beach house, with its own pool, was requisitioned as the bachelors' retreat, and its wide wooden verandah doubled as an impromptu dancefloor or as a yoga platform for our sunrise salutations with the marvellous Mike.

My friends are used to getting what they want back at home and must have tested the crew of 16 staff with their various requests. One was macrobiotic; another a vegan; the third AA. The Italian suffered from spinal problems and wanted her mattress removed; the fifth had a child with nits and an allergic reaction to mosquitoes.

The staff, managed by ex-SAS factotum Pete, whom we nicknamed Bionic Man, met each challenge with humour and grace. When we casually said we wanted to dine alfresco, they towed the roasting spit and grill to nearby Hog Island for a Caribbean-style barbecue under the tamarisks on the sand. They encouraged my friend, an eminent painter, to waterski, even though a car accident had left him with a withered arm. They gave us cookery demonstrations and babysat the boys.

It was easy to fall under their spell and, as the week progressed, to be seduced by the crazy history and easygoing charm of Grenada itself. We explored languid beaches and the lush tropical hinterland



dotted with waterfalls in our 4x4s. We insisted on being ferried around in the flashy Bladerunner 51 powerboat, making glamorous entrances at buzzy beach shacks, such as the Aquarium, for lunch.

Could it have been the buoyant spirit of the island or the villa's innovative design that generated such a euphoric high? Or were the laughter and high jinks fuelled by the daily injection of rum punch, the psychedelic sunsets, massages and yoga sessions that turned even the most argumentative of us into docile, beatific jellies? As a venue for a party, it was hard to beat; no hotel could provide a space so large and flexible in which to party, or one so private and restful in which to relax. And to cap it all, the man and his boy reported lost at sea on the first day were happily found, 50 miles offshore near Tobago, dazed, but safe and sound. Good news for our final send-off. □ *Mount Hartman Bay Estate* (0870 428 8411; www.mounthartmanbay.com). *The Estate accommodates up to 24 guests in 12 double rooms (including the Beach House, which can also be rented separately), from £2,750 a person a week, including all food and drinks, staff of 16, transfers, all boats and the use of two Mitsubishi Shogun 4x4s. Excel Airways* (0870 777 6911; www.goldencaribbean.com) *flies twice weekly from Gatwick to Grenada on Thursdays and Sundays, from £350 return.*