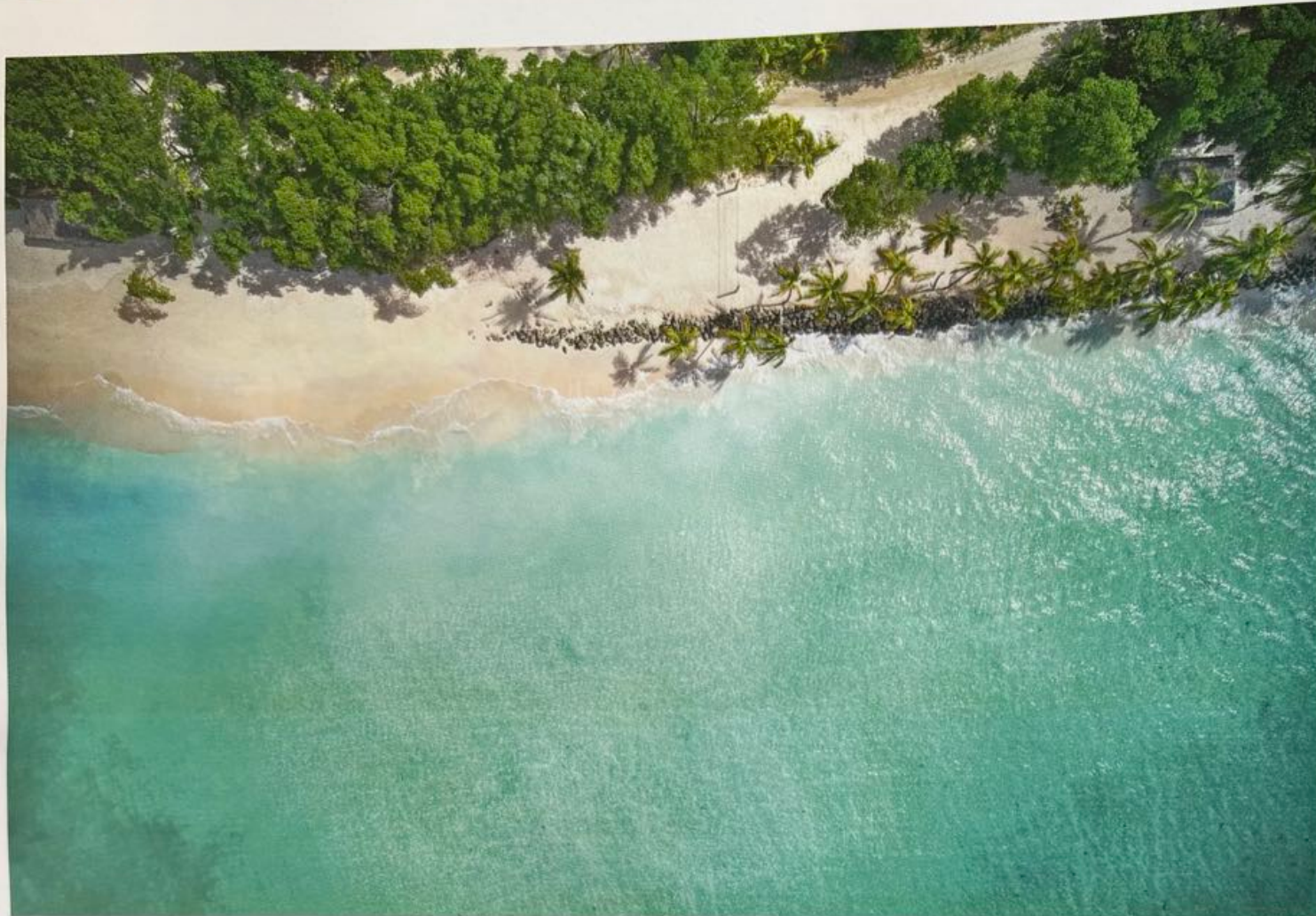


THE  TIMES

LUXX

EPIC FASHION



From top: a golden Mustique beach; one of the Cotton House's new treatment rooms; courts at the island's tennis club

ISLAND BEAUTY

Mustique, the super-rich's favourite island, just got a new spa – a place of palm fronds and sea vistas where all your worries will be rubbed away. KATE REARDON reports



Mustique has it all: powder sand beaches, near year-round sun, total privacy and a fastidiously maintained low-key atmosphere. It's where you would have a holiday home if you had great taste and all the money in the world. In fact, 105 people with great taste and all the money in the world own the island's 105 villas.

The one thing Mustique never had, though, was a spa (which in the world of the super-rich sits somewhere between "breathing" and "shelter" on Maslow's hierarchy of needs). Thankfully the Cotton House, the island's only hotel, unofficial clubhouse and social hub, has risen to the challenge.

Sitting across the hotel's frangipani-strewn lawn, unbothered by neighbours, the spa feels settled, as though it's been there for some time, even though it opened less than a year ago. There are lots of botanical prints, bamboo and wicker furniture, potted palms, natural light, cushions and books. This is as far away from the sterile, high gloss, groaning-with-marble, mortuary-like spas that many hoteliers consider code for "luxury". Luxury is being made to feel relaxed, comfortable and pampered, and this very human, gentle space does that. There's no performative "You've just arrived with the velocity of a meteorite into the world of super-luxury". It's just fresh, straightforward and delicious. And it's entirely aspirational. Who doesn't want to be the sort of person who has a massage here after a day on a Mustique beach?

Book a Bamford facial with Zemara Simmons and you'll discover she has the hands of an angel. It feels so thoughtful it could make you cry. Then, as you get to the surprisingly vigorous facial massage bit, you discover that she actually has the hands of an avenging angel as she does battle with every stress and strain you've been holding like emotional baggage in your face. She's truly an exceptional therapist – I left looking significantly younger and nicer. She seemed to have rubbed my bitchy resting face right off me.

The spa offers more than 20 treatments including three Bamford facials and eight Bamford body treatments, including the B Vibrant Treatment to "awaken senses and increase positivity" and the B Silent Treatment, which (sadly) isn't training for a passive aggressive fight but for sleep.

Each of the nine treatment rooms has an outside shower. Torn between washing off the delicious

Bamford smell of your massage and the delight of a warm outdoor shower to the sound of birdsong and the wind in the palm trees, the shower wins. There's even a lovely double room if you can't bear to be separated from your pal. All the treatment rooms lead off the relaxation room, which is flooded with sunlight; it also has a little outside space shaded by palm fronds.

Tatler's hairdresser of the year, the talented and charming John Vial, does months-long residencies here; also in residence is Shontelle Mapp, an outstanding masseuse who does things with her elbows that were alarmingly effective. There are beauty treatments such as eyelash and eyebrow tinting, waxing, and mani-pedis in what may be the chicest nail bar in the world with a wonderful view of the sea. It's entirely possible that it doesn't get better than this.

The Cotton House also has a wonderful gym, with the same architecture and restrained vibe but packed with impressive equipment and a studio for Pilates and yoga. If tennis is your thing, the six-court Mustique Tennis Club is run by the tanned and twinkly Richard Schaffer. He came for a couple of years and has so far stayed for 30. He's the opposite of the clichéd uptight tennis pro, wound as tight as a tennis racket's strings. This immaculate facility, with flawless courts patronised by the world's super-rich, could be excruciatingly unpleasant. But as the perfect person in the perfect job – friendly, relaxed and quietly, supremely confident – Schaffer sets the tone. "It's an easy job, it's fun," he says with a laugh. "Once you come here it's hard to go back

to the real world. And why would you?"

The club caters to all abilities. There are some high achievers who take it terribly seriously as well as kids' camps that are all about fun. Although the fun isn't restricted to the kids – Schaffer's "105" drill can feature up to 20 people on the court at the same time. Equally fun is the riding centre, run by the reassuringly competent and chilled South African Kathryn Walker. A gentle hack on one of their ten horses is a sensational way to see the island. Walker is also in charge of four retirees, happily living out their days in the horse sanctuary: "Once the horses are here, they stay here, they don't get passed on." This is no doubt expensive but, again, proves a serious commitment to doing the right thing. All very Mustique, then.

B&B doubles at the Cotton House cost from £600, mustique-island.com

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114 Mustique magic

What's better than paradise? Paradise
with a swish new spa, of course