

# PARROT FASHION

Dellis Cay, a private 560-acre island, is being transformed into a luxury retreat with villas designed by a selection of the world's most acclaimed architects, including David Chipperfield and Zaha Hadid.

**Bill Millard** investigates.

Shore Villas, on Dellis Cay's natural peninsula, have been designed by the Sterling Prize-winning architect David Chipperfield.







When the *New York Times* included the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) in a recent travel-section feature on the 'Affordable Caribbean,' a Dellis Cay wasn't even on the map. This small island near Parrot Cay in the west section of the archipelago, a 20-minute boat ride from the town of Providenciales, has rarely caught the attention of outsiders. Of its 560 acres, only 200 are developable; it contains a rich mangrove forest, ample bird life, no elevations higher than six feet above sea level, and no fresh water. The occasional fisherman might stop there and camp out or spend a night in a hut, says architect Carl Ettensperger, but until 2007, no one called Dellis Cay home.

Dr Cem Kinay, the Turkish-born, Miami-based chairman and CEO of the O Property Group, is turning it from a no-man's-land to an exclusive retreat. In 2004, after 14 years working with partner Oguz Serim running the Magic Life Clubs, an empire of 22 hotels around the Mediterranean, Kinay sold the company to German conglomerate Touristik Union International (TUI) and began searching for a site where he could realise a longtime dream: a design-driven island community where residents and visitors could live in luxury and natural harmony. He knew what he wanted before he knew where he wanted it: Kinay began recruiting architects before choosing a site, says design coordinator Sandra Nassima, and prepared extensive design briefs for a five-star hotel and multiple clusters of residential villas.

In 2005 he discovered Dellis Cay and bought it outright from the TCI territorial government for a reported \$50 million.

Like Harry J Brown and Richard Meier's Houses at Sagaponac on Long Island, or Cai Jiang's Ordos 100 in Inner Mongolia, Dellis Cay will juxtapose works by a range of prominent architects, creating a community where every building is distinctive. Perhaps uniquely among such 'architectural petting zoo' developments, Dellis Cay occupies a site that provides complete privacy and unmatched tranquility. With each group of villas striking a coherent profile, Dellis Cay is a set of variations on a common theme of tastefully restrained modernism, and it is intended for residents whose wealth takes forms beyond mere possessions: people who are highly educated, well-versed in the subtleties of modern design, and able to live in ways that balance personal comfort with respect for natural beauty.

Along with the expected recreational amenities such as tennis courts and a jogging path, Dellis Cay includes a bird sanctuary, a general store, desalination facilities, a school for local personnel, and a fire station. It will be a full-service private community, appropriate for either year-round residence or quick escapes from the demands of the outside world. One aspect of the Magic Life chain's all-inclusive approach to service survives the translation from a wider middle-class clientele to a more privileged market: Kinay is a strong believer in personal attention, and to provide what Nassima calls 'an Oriental way of treating



## DELLIS CAY IS A SET OF VARIATIONS ON A COMMON THEME OF TASTEFULLY RESTRAINED MODERNISM.



Pritzker Prize laureate Zaha Hadid's D'Villa.



One of Japanese architect Shigeru Ban's villas that includes its own over-water pavilion.

## THE MILANESE ARCHITECT AND DESIGNER PIERO LISSONI HAS DESIGNED THE MANDARIN ORIENTAL HOTEL AND THREE SETS OF VILLAS.

people, very welcoming,' he has enlisted Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group to manage the island. The project broke ground in January 2008 and is scheduled for completion by the end of 2009.

### Prestige grounded in expertise

Kinay selected only top-flight talent for Dellis Cay, then matched architects with sites in ways that highlight their strengths. Pritzker Prize laureate Zaha Hadid, whose futuristic designs (once lambasted by critics as unbuildable) merge biomorphic curves, striations, and irregularities into strikingly original, functionally logical buildings, devised the primary master plan and is designing villas along the island's central marina. Japanese design will be represented by Shigeru Ban's southern beach villas and an interior lakeside spa and 'spa villas' by Kengo Kuma. Ban is known for making distinctive use of humble, sometimes unlikely materials, while Kuma reinterprets traditional Japanese design for contemporary settings, extending the emphasis on lightness and efficiency far enough to border on immateriality.

The northern shore will include villas by British minimalist David Chipperfield, an alumnus of the high-profile practices of Douglas Stephen, Norman Foster, and Richard Rogers; he has extensive experience bringing Miesian sobriety and dignity to residences, museums, and civic facilities, particularly waterfront projects such as the River and Rowing Museum (Henley, UK) and the America's Cup building (Valencia, Spain). The versatile Milanese architect/designer Piero Lissoni, renowned for graceful restraint in buildings, furniture, products, and particularly interiors, has designed the Mandarin Oriental Hotel along with three sets of villas around the island's western tip. The experience of working with Kinay and such gifted colleagues to 'design something like a treasure island, like a cartoon idea,' Lissoni says, was 'a great surprise, like a fantastic professional game,'

and their work has been guided by five watchwords: simple, natural, elegant, modern, and sustainable.

Ettensperger, a native Southern Californian who served as managing director of Honolulu-based resort architects Winston Allison Tong and Goo and Hirsch Bedner of Singapore before eventually setting up his own Singapore boutique firm, C&C Studio, is responsible for a striking set of villas constructed atop pilings in an inlet on the southern shore. Ettensperger is one of the hospitality-architecture world's well-kept secrets: his villas at Huvafen Fushi in the Maldives, named World's Best Beach Resort in 2008 by *Harper's Bazaar Travel* and elected to *Condé Nast Traveller's* 2007 Gold List, impressed visitors with a design that brings aquatic life and domestic life unusually close (one can watch stingrays and sharks from one's own sitting room through a glass floor, or get a massage in an underwater spa, looking out at angelfish and octopi a few feet away).

The subaquatic environment is a high priority for Ettensperger and his colleagues, not only to accommodate fishing, diving, and snorkeling as prime recreational options. 'The ecotourism is under the water,' he comments, 'there's more happening under the water than there is above' – but we avoid disturbing the area's coral reefs, aquatic fauna, and other earthly treasures.

Dellis Cay is not a place for the fake or the frantic; it rises above the sort of desperation that pursues opulence to the point of ostentation. This is an island for the confident and the responsible, a refuge from the loudness of the world. It speaks to both the epicure and the Zen practitioner inside every world-weary resident. Once construction is complete, Dellis Cay will also present a long-term challenge to its residents and management to act as honorable stewards of its site. The presence of human beings and their resources mean that this island has lost one form of virginity, but its aesthetic is designed to remain pristine, and its operation has the chance to remain principled. ■