

MACO

C A R I B B E A N L I V I N G



US\$7.995

20



“IT ALL STARTED WITH SHITAO,” SAYS BRICE MARDEN. “He was maybe the last great Chinese master painter of landscapes. His work often features bamboo and rocks, and when we were designing the final phase of this garden, I was in a big Shitao phase.”

The 17th-century Chinese maestro’s hanging scroll, *Orchids, Bamboo and Rocks* is in the Met, while Brice Marden’s paintings hang in MoMA—his abstract expressionist canvases fetch eye-watering sums. He and his wife Helen, also a successful artist, bought the atmospheric, if slightly down-at-heel, Golden Rock on Nevis a dozen years ago. A converted plantation inn with a select clientele, Golden Rock was set to be transformed into one of the modern wonders of the Caribbean.

Ed Tuttle, of Aman hotels fame, created a restaurant terrace complete with reflection pools and pavilion that would grace a James Bond movie set. And the aptly named, Florida-based landscape designer Raymond Jungles set about transforming the gardens.

“It’s our aesthetic, but Raymond’s the expert,” explains Helen.

orchids, bamboo and rocks

NEVIS’ GOLDEN ROCK INSPIRED BY QING DYNASTY PAINTER

“Phase one was all about planting around the terrace and stone staircase leading up to it,” recalls Jungles. “We discovered so many boulders, the new restaurant is even called The Rocks. Alignment is important. You have to see the Peak—that’s the heart and spirit of Nevis. Phase two took us up the hill, around the guest cottages and swimming pool.”

Phase three, recently completed, has been reconfiguring the hillside and ghaut running down from Brice’s studio.



“AS A PAINTER, EVERY LITTLE THING YOU DO IS A DECISION—THOUSANDS OF DECISIONS. IN THE GARDEN, THERE’S A STREAM OF PEOPLE, SO IT’S A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS”



The design philosophy might be described as ‘cultivated wild’, the name of Jungles’ most recent book.

“It’s a natural landscape rather than a garden—we don’t want it to look manicured,” confirms Helen. But a fair amount of work went into creating that wild look.

“We went round bamboo nurseries in Florida with Raymond and chose over 30 different varieties to bring over,” reveals Helen. Those bamboos and the rest of the planting for the new terrain filled 28 40ft-containers shipped from Florida to Nevis.

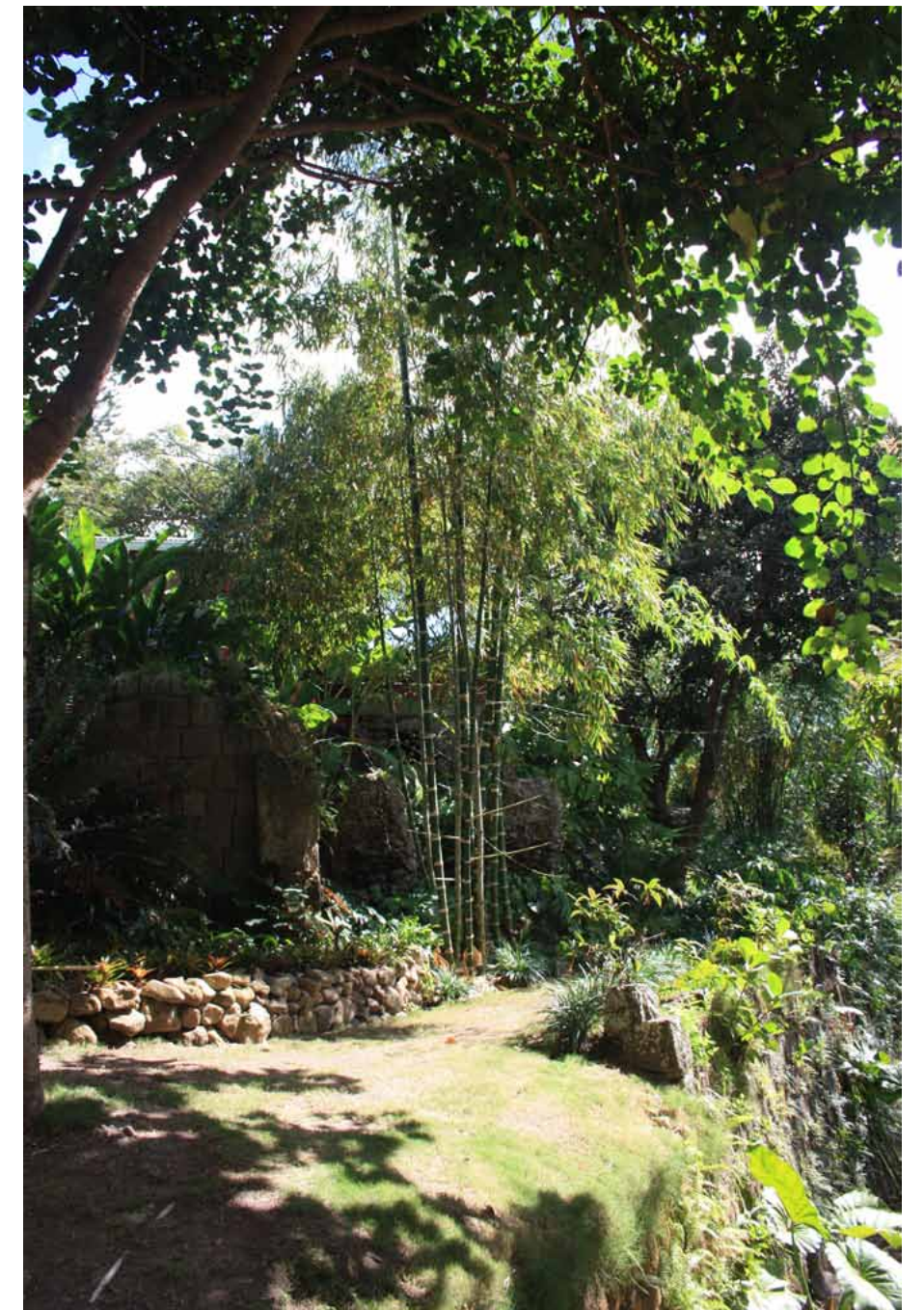
But first, the boulders had to be moved. Brice, now in his mid-70s, and Dave Schroeder, Jungles’ main man, spent several very happy days with a large earth mover repositioning boulders, some over eight feet wide.

“Brice is a deep thinker; he’ll set a rock, look at it for an hour, then twist it round a little. I’ve learnt so much working with him—amazing sense of aesthetics,” avers Jungles.

“As a painter, every little thing you do is a decision—thousands of decisions,” explains Brice. “In the garden, there’s a stream of people, so it’s a collaborative process.”

The rocks and bamboo are the skeleton of the new landscape, and the result is almost sculptural—more about shape, texture and shades of green than hue. “The colour provided by vibrant bromeliads, red torch gingers, bright orange ground orchids, and of course the bougainvillea is the icing on the cake,” reveals Jungles, “the seasonality.”





“AS WELL AS SHAPE AND TEXTURE,
THERE’S ALSO MOVEMENT AND SOUND”

At the heart of phase three is Brice’s Rock, a huge flat-topped boulder guarded by *dendrocalamus gigantea*, the Asian genus of giant clumping bamboo which creates amazing shadows on its surface. “It’s a contemplative place. Brice sometimes paints with bamboo sticks, so hopefully he’ll be inspired,” says Jungles.

As well as shape and texture, there’s also movement and sound. “I like the movement of the palm fronds in the breeze—quite amazing,” smiles Brice. “They dance in the breeze. I sit out on my studio terrace and it’s really still, then one leaf moves, then the next. And then there’s the sound of rustling. Movement and sound together—I love it.”

The three-acre site was a stony wasteland before its transformation, but some coconut palms, flamboyant, avocado and mango trees have been saved. A few royal palms have been transferred from other nurseries on island.

But interspersed are all manner of imported exotica: *copernicia gigas* from Cuba, siamensis bamboo from Thailand, quipo trees from Panama, red lipstick palms, magnificent terminalias, and assorted agaves including the rare werklia from Costa Rica and tequilana, from which tequila is made. There are cannonball trees and *lignum vitae*, giant fishtail palms, sweetly scented brunfelsia and gorgeous if spiky red seyal acacias.

“Helen is drawn to spiny, thorny things like the burglar palms,” laughs Jungles. There are 28 of them on site; other bristly critters like *euphorbia lactea* are not to be tangled with either. The idea of importing non-native species is not an issue for Helen.





THE DESIGN PHILOSOPHY IS 'CULTIVATED WILD',
"IT'S A NATURAL LANDSCAPE RATHER THAN A GARDEN—
WE DON'T WANT IT TO LOOK MANICURED"

"Go back to the early days of sailing—people took plants everywhere, seeds were often taken home. So I find all that indigenous stuff a bit prissy."

Triumphantly, 18 months after completion, not only does the landscape resemble a Shitao painting, it's as if the trees, walls and plants have been there forever. "This has to be one of the top gardens in the Caribbean," believes Jungles, "and behind it are two of the greatest living American artists—that's pretty cool."

Brice and Helen Marden are happy here. "It's a remarkably Zen space," beams Brice. "I work every day and just want to stay on the property. To us, the whole garden is magical."

Best of all, as Golden Rock has 11 guest cottages and opens for lunch and dinner daily, we can all share in their sense of wonder.[M](http://goldenrocknevis.com)
goldenrocknevis.com