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ESSENTIALS



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PORTRANTS



ERIC  
DESBORDES  
THE TASTE  
MASTER

WORDS MATHIAS DURAND-REYNALDO  
PHOTOGRAPHY ROMÉO BALANCOURT



Executive chef for the restaurants at Eden Rock, Eric Desbordes has happily devoted his life to gastronomy! To say that he started playing with pots and pans as an infant may be a bit of a cliché, or even a stereotype, but not too far from the truth. In the case of Eric Desbordes, it was as if a good fairy waved a magic wand over his crib, when in fact, it was his Italian nanny! As she spent most of her time in the kitchen, young Eric often found himself behind the stove at her side. In retrospect this way by far his favorite spot as a kid. So during the week, when Eric was under her watch, his nanny initiated him into the art of cooking. When the weekend rolled around, he proudly—and with relish—tried to reproduce the same recipes for large family meals. And Eric Desbordes was clearly born under a lucky star. As his uncle was a chocolate maker-pastry chef-ice cream maker-caterer (and a bit of a magician), Eric had a chance to experience the extraordinary confections made possible by sugar! His precocious understanding of gastronomy and his double culinary initiation as a child would define his career, as he equally loves cooking and pastry-making...

Once in high school, in contrast to most of his classmates, Eric knew he was destined for a career in the restaurant business. He started with an apprenticeship at the Médéric hotel school, and quickly rose through the ranks (literally as well as figuratively), finding himself in 1999 on the second floor of the Eiffel Tower, where he got his start in the kitchens at Jules Vernes, one of the leading restaurants in Paris. He spent the next two and a half years at the Hilton, then went directly to the Georges V in 2001. This was there that it all came together for Eric Desbordes, a young chef in the making. He liked the ambiance at the Georges V as well as the spirit of teamwork. He was part of a brigade of more than 100 cooks and realized that this was really his true calling. He began in the role of commis chef, leaving three years later as a chef de partie. He continued on his path to the top by spending a year at the Atelier de Joël Robuchon and another at the Bristol. But his culinary adventures did not stop there, as he moved on to Pershing Hall where he was the chef at age 25. He managed a staff of 25 cooks and served an average of 400 meals per day! In 2009, he applied once again at the Bristol to work at their chic brasserie, 114 Faubourg, the second restaurant at this prestigious hotel. But this time he applied with a certain aplomb, as he wanted to be the chef, which turned out to be a great feather in his cap. There were more than 30 candidates who wanted to get this plum of a job, which he got by a unanimous vote and the management of the Bristol could not have done better. As a result of his hard work and doggedness, under the direction of chef Eric Frechon, Eric Desbordes was

awarded his first star in the Michelin Guide in 2013. A first for such a brasserie!

In 2014, Eric Desbordes discovered Saint Barth, and fell for its magnificent landscapes and the friendliness of the people. When he learned there was a position open at Eden Rock (the most recent addition to the Oetker Collection, which owns the Bristol), he did not hesitate a second before throwing his hat in the ring. He was named executive chef for Eden Rock's two restaurants, On the Rocks and the Sand Bar, under the guidance of the triple-starred French chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten. Like this illustrious mentor, with whom he works very closely, Eric Desbordes has the savoir-faire it takes to satisfy the Eden Rock's savvy and discerning international clientele. And Eric excels at his job, where the biggest challenge lies in understanding, synthesizing, and transposing Jean-George's wonderfully inventive cuisine, with its exotic accents that create a bridge between Europe and Asia. But the master puts all of his confidence in Eric, and allows him great poetic license as he composes in the kitchen with a certain measure of *carte blanche*.

Eric Desbordes is above all a purist who likes to work with the best possible ingredients. As a result, he spends a lot of time with his suppliers to find the freshest products, seasonal and of local provenance when possible. As he likes to say: "The better the product, the less you have to do to it. You just need to perfect it to bring out the best of its flavors." He uses authenticity and good sense in creating a cuisine he considers simple, informal, and in tune with seasonal ingredients. Even so, his position at the head of two restaurants at the same hotel allows him to use his virtuosity to create two different kinds of menus. At the Sand Bar, which is directly on the sand along the beautiful bay of Saint Jean, the lunch menu has a contemporary slant, light, and relaxed. In the evening, the restaurant takes on a cozy lounge feel with its tables set right by the water's edge for dinner or drinks and small plates. Also for dinner, perched atop the promontory, is the refined ambiance of the gourmet restaurant, On the Rocks. Here, Eric Desbordes expresses himself with subtlety and elegance, creating a cuisine intuitively adapted for the island. In contrast to Paris where the dishes served at the chic hotels are a bit complicated or served with a lot of sauce, he tries to respond to the local climate and the spirit of "light and sunny," that defines the Caribbean. He has recreated culinary classics in a more modern way, adding flavors from around the world. And if asked to speak in more detail about his vision and the specialties he likes to make, he responds firmly: "I don't have any favorites. I like to try everything. There aren't any special dishes that I prefer over others. A good chef reinvents himself every day." These few words sum up Eric Desbordes' refreshing outlook, one that he applies on a daily basis: "In addition to the menus set by Jean-Georges, every week I add two different appetizers, main courses,





and desserts. With my staff, we try various things, we deliberate, and we test new techniques, new recipes, and new tastes." Which makes it perfectly impossible to try and analyze Eric Desbordes' cuisine or provide an exhaustive list of items on the menus at Eden Rock. Words just don't suffice, the proof is in the tasting!

In concluding this interview, he especially wanted to talk about one important aspect of successful restaurants: teamwork. "The chef always plays the leading role, but behind him there is an entire staff that has to work very hard. There are no great chefs without a great staff. Seen from the outside, it seems that the ambiance in the kitchen is grueling and difficult. That is often the case, but don't get me wrong. It can be compared to a rugby team, where there is a spirit of comradeship, conviviality, even complicity. For such a team to succeed means first and foremost that everyone enjoys their position and that there is a collective adventure shared by everyone for the total satisfaction of the client". At the height of the season, between the prep area, purchasing, the two restaurants at the hotel, and four chefs on call for Eden Rock Villa Rentals, Eric Desbordes is at the head of a brigade of 46 people. So we figure he knows what he is talking about...

He adds laughingly, "Oh, I forgot to tell you I have a specialty. In 2011, I won the world championship for pâtés in pastry crust! Well okay, in the Caribbean I can see that doesn't mean much. But it was an honor for me!"

#### OETKER COLLECTION

Oetker Collection embodies the finest of traditional European hospitality. Their elite luxury hotels are strung together like pearls on a chain, unified by a desire to deliver the best that life has to offer. Throughout the entire Oetker Collection, guests discover a passion for living, an appreciation for culture, gastronomy, and the pleasures of nature, which is why generations of guests return year after year to these masterpiece hotels. The properties in the Oetker Collection share the same values and uphold the standards of ultra luxury hotels, such as the Hôtel du Cap-Eden-Roc in Cap d'Antibes, the Bristol in Paris, the Palais Namaskar in Marrakech, the Lanesborough in London, and Eden Rock in Saint-Barthélemy. Each property is one-of-a-kind, reflecting the unique European heritage and sharing the highest levels of service internationally, with exceptional and historic architecture and interiors combining with great attention to detail.



DJORDJE  
VARDA  
BEAUTY AS  
A RELIGION

WORDS MATHIAS DURAND-REYNALDO  
PHOTOGRAPHY ROMEO BALANCOURT



Filling one of the world's most prestigious hotels with over 10,000 flowers per week! That's exactly what Djordje Varda did as artistic director and floral designer for The Ritz in Paris, an urban retreat for crowned heads of state and the biggest stars on the film and music scene. Blooms and blossoms in spectacular shapes and vertical volumes that defy the laws of gravity, these are the designs for which Varda is renowned, as he continually pushes the limits of aesthetic brilliance by creating bold yet ephemeral combinations all across the planet. His oeuvre to date is so impressive that he has been lauded by his peers—and more than just once—while it is not just by chance he was elected as Best European Floral Designer twice in row. A feat never before accomplished by a young, totally self-taught designer!

Today, Djordje Varda has moved with his family to an island under the tropical sun, Saint Barthélemy, which serves as his base of operation, as well as an inexhaustible source of inspiration. In choosing this island, it was to live a life of "freedom" far from the tumult of Paris. Which is also one of the reasons he decided to no longer run a flower shop. Djordje works quietly in his small atelier just a few feet from the ocean, where he dreams up his spectacular designs and decors. Yet his island life is far from that of an exile, even if he is "lost" in the middle of the sea, Saint Barth is at the center of everything! In his little spare time, Varda travels around the world to meet the most innovative producers, those that breed new varieties of flowers and new colors by means of inventive hybridization. His discoveries feed his creativity and allow him to propose unique floral bijoux for his original arrays. A tireless globetrotter, he is always in search of that one rare flower that will eclipse all others...

On a daily basis, this major player in the world of staging exceptional events—weddings, conferences, seminars, fêtes for jewelers, or gala dinners—is everywhere with his ultra ideas. But in Saint Barthélemy, his preference is for a different prestigious establishment: Eden Rock. Varda has signed an exclusive contract with this legendary island hotel and is in charge of its decoration, or as he likes to say, "he conceptualizes its visual and emotional aestheticism." From reception to the restaurants, and every suite and every room at the Eden Rock bears his signature. But their partnership does not stop there, as in addition to his design duties, Varda also teaches private floral composition classes for hotel clients, as well as interested individuals. Since from time to time, even this "Stakhanovite of the clippers" finds a moment to pause and impart his most precious possession: his savoir-faire!

As sharing and transmitting his knowledge are among his essential values, these classes in floral arts are the perfect means to do just that.

And let's not forget that Djorde Varda never had any formal training. His talent with flowers came by instinct, by trial and error, and by improvisation. By sheer will, he trained himself to find a sense of harmony and to strive to attain perfection. But at the end of the day, who better than a self-taught master to share his passion with those who follow? So with Djorde Varda as your guide, he teaches his students in small groups and leads you along, step-by-step, gesture by gesture. And a flower is not used in its natural state; it must be liberated from the earth, its excess leaves, and any impurities in order to earn its place as a beautiful blossom in a bouquet. Djordje explains his personal techniques in how to clean the flowers and prepare them so they last the longest, and how the water that guarantees their freshness does not get cloudy. He will reveal "the secret art of the tendril," and other tricks used by professional florists. During one of his visits to the Eden Rock, he will let you help chose the flowers he will use, and your apprenticeship with the master will begin. This collective approach to flowers by way of practical exercises is quite revealing. If you give identical flowers to a group of individuals and ask them to compose bouquets, even though they all learned the same techniques, chances are the bouquets will all be different and in keeping with individual personalities. But as Varda sees it: "I am not there to tell you what is beautiful or not. And I do not impose a certain aesthetic vision, as beauty is subjective and depends on personal sensibility. What's important for me is to give my students the desire to create. It's the best way I know to share my passion..."

Because after all, having made beauty his religion, this master of floral design is passionate about the art of embellishment, and continually astounds us with the power of his work.



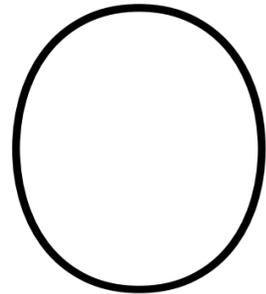


EVENTS

# EDEN WEDDING

WORDS **ELLEN LAMPERT-GRÉAUX**  
PHOTOGRAPHY **BRUNO DUBREUIL**  
EVENT & FLORAL DESIGN **DJORDJE VARDA**





ne of the lucky couples to be married in Saint Barth last year, Alexandra and Andrew celebrated their nuptials at Eden Rock, with designer Djordje Varda planning the reception and transforming The Sand Bar into an exquisite wonderland on the beach.

The bride and groom met for the first time while on vacation in Brazil, but only socially. It wasn't until a few years later when they met a second time in NYC through friends that that began dating. That time was the lucky charm and "forever after" was in their stars.

Once they decided to tie-the-knot, they knew they wanted a destination wedding in Saint Barth. Alexandra had first visited the island in 2005 during her last year of college when she joined in on a group trip with some friends. All together, she had been to the island six times before the wedding, and two of the visits were for wedding planning. "Andrew and I had been once together in 2012 while we were dating, which was his first visit to the island. After he proposed, we both already had Saint Barth in mind as a great wedding destination. Not only is the island gorgeous," says the bride, "but at the same time it's intimate. It offers so many great options—accommodations, dining—but in a very small area, which creates the community-like feel we wanted for the wedding, but while still being authentic."

Shopping for the perfect dress can be stressful for some brides, but once again Alexandra was lucky. "I knew from the moment I tried my dress on that it was the one," she exclaims. And she looked utterly stunning in a dramatic dress called "Georgina" by Vera Wang. The bride describes this pencil-thin design with a lace bodice and flared trumpet skirt as "classic but with some edge. Some of the tulle was actually made of horsehair and combined with the delicate Chantilly lace of the bodice it was an interesting contrast." Adding a bit of color, and in harmony with the delicate hues of the flowers, Alexandra's nine bridesmaids wore custom dresses she found at a designer showroom in New York City. With dusty rose skirts and ivory bodices, the colors and some of the details were changed to get them just right for a Saint Barth wedding. "It was ultimately pretty stressful," the bride recalls, "because we had some delays and they weren't completed until just two weeks before the wedding."

Andrew was an extremely handsome groom, wearing a midnight blue suit by his favorite designer, Brunello Cucinelli, with a white shirt and a jaunty bowtie. His nine groomsmen were also in navy blue suits with pale champagne accessories to keep the look formal, but not too 'over-the-top' for a beach wedding. A very talented NYC-based British designer, Rede Finer, made the groomsmen's bespoke ties and pocket squares.



© John Alexander for VARDJA DESIGNS







© Bruno Dubreuil / VARDAS DESIGNS



© Bruno Dubreuil / VARDAS DESIGNS

And for a tropical, St. Barth touch, they also all wore Tahitian black pearl cuff links.

In picturing her Saint Barth wedding, Alexandra wanted something that was “ethereal, beachy, and elegant, but in a simplistic sense without looking overdone.” The Sand Bar, with its seaside setting, was the perfect location for a combination of casual glamour and elegance. Djordje Varda made the room basically white with long tables primarily stretching along the same direction as the beach. The color came from the flowers, with lovely bouquets on the table echoed by lofty arrangements elevated on tall silver candelabras. The blooms comprised the best varieties of beautiful, romantic roses in shades of pale pink, peach, tangerine, white, and ivory, accented by viburnum and long tendrils of green amaranthus lightly brushing the tables. The same shades were repeated in the bridesmaids’ bouquets, while Alexandra carried a bouquet of white roses and viburnum also featuring long strands of amaranthus.

For the ceremony on the beach, four acrylic pillars filled with hydrangea supported the white fabric huppa. Small lights added sparkle later in the evening as the beach was illuminated and banks of candles added even another touch of magic and romance to the scene.

Alexandra discovered Djordje Varda’s work while browsing online: “I saw some of his exquisite work while looking for wedding inspiration on Instagram. I found a photo of a design I loved, but he wasn’t credited so I had to do some work to track him down. It was well worth it because once I saw what he can do, nothing else could measure up. Djordje is in a different category entirely.” As a wedding venue, the bride reports that Eden Rock was “fantastic, the staff is so professional and did an excellent job with all the food and preparations, and they were always accommodating to all our

requests. Marc, who we worked closely with, had joined Eden Rock halfway through our planning period which could have been a challenge, but instead he exceeded our expectations in every way.” The bridal couple stayed in Villa Nina which they found to be not only breathtaking, “but added a lot to our wedding experience because we were able to casually entertain guests there in between wedding events.”

For the bridal dinner, the Eden Rock kitchen lived up to its reputation as one of the best restaurants on the island. The entree choices were filet of beef and snapper, which Alexandra noted were “just as delicious on the day of the wedding as they were during our tasting—there was no loss of quality even when it was scaled up to 90 guests. The hors d’oeuvres were fantastic too and guests were especially raving about the popcorn sundae dessert. Overall the food was fantastic.” When asked what was the most challenging part of the wedding, Alexandra replied: “Going home! Everyone had such a great time that it was difficult to leave St Barth. Watching all of our closest friends and family, many of whom had never met, come together in celebration, getting to know each other, and really connecting. Everyone seemed so appreciative to have been brought together in such a beautiful location most had never been to.”

And there was certainly magic in the air for Alexandra and Andrew under the moonlight skies on the beach. “During the fireworks, there were a couple of moments that were just perfection. Not only between Andrew and me, but you could see stars in the guests eyes—everything from the reflections of the fireworks on the ocean to the way that the music perfectly enhanced the show, and the awe and energy that created couldn’t have come together more magically. St Barth is truly a magical island.”



© Bruno Dubreuil / VARDA DESIGNS

# SAINT BARTH WEDDING PARADISE

WORDS **ELLEN LAMPERT-GRÉAUX**  
PHOTOGRAPHY **BRUNO DUBREUIL**  
EVENT & FLORAL DESIGN **DJORDJE VARDA**



Imagine the excitement at opening a beautifully printed invitation to a destination wedding on the tiny French island of Saint Barthélemy. Picture the bride in a swish of chiffon walking down the aisle of a centuries-old stone church. Saying "I Do" right on a soft, white-sand beach with pools of turquoise water lapping against the shore and an incredible floral canopy adding the perfume of beautiful blossoms to the ambiance of the scene. Or gathering friends and family at a luxurious villa high in the hills where panoramic views of the Caribbean Sea simply take your breath away! From sunny afternoon tea parties to romantic dinners in the moonlight, Saint Barth provides the perfect backdrop for tying the knot.

As picture-perfect as a movie set, Saint Barth is simply one of those destinations with everything going for it—especially when it comes to planning a wedding that will be the event of a lifetime. The island itself measures just eight square miles, but its terrain is rugged with volcanic peaks reaching toward the sky and steep hairpin turns that would challenge even the most talented racecar driver. Mega-yachts and sailboats vie for dock space in the Port of Gustavia, the hub of the island's seaside capital.

Today, with a resident population of almost 10,000, Saint Barth has an enticing mix of cultures, languages, and lifestyles. The island's native population is made up of descendants of intrepid French settlers that arrived in the late 1600s when the island was under French rule. Then for almost 100 years, from the mid-18th to mid-19th century, Saint Barth flew the Swedish flag, which explains names like Gustavia—named after Swedish king Gustaf III— and the Swedish street signs in a town that is one of the world's best places for people watching—from movie stars to suntanned sailors. Once the island was returned to France in 1878, Saint Barth remained an undiscovered gem for many years. It began to slowly attract international tourists only in the 1960s. Over the last 40 years, the population has increased considerably, with an influx of residents from mainland France, the United States, other European countries, and neighboring islands. Today, the island is truly polyglot, with French the official language, but English, Creole, and a French Patois also widely spoken.

Insiders know that the dress code is casual everywhere, so wedding guests can wear anything from flip-flops to Louboutin and feel at home at the very best places. In fact, weddings parties can enjoy lunch right on the beach where bikinis and cover-ups are all it takes. The most popular beach for lunch is St Jean, where yachts often deliver their guests to the sun-filled restaurant, the Sand Bar at the Eden Rock—a five-star luxury hotel, which is also the ideal location for a rehearsal dinner at the gourmet restaurant, On The Rocks, and many a bride and groom and their guests have danced the night away on the beach, where a stage can be set up for a band or a dance



© John Alexander for VARDIA DESIGNS



© John Alexander for VARDA DESIGNS



floor can stretch almost into the sea. There is perhaps no more romantic location on the island for tropical nuptials.

One of the island's greatest attractions is that Saint Barth is not only one of the safest places in the entire Caribbean—if not the world—it is also a wonderful place to shop, with a line-up of designer boutiques to rival Rodeo Drive or the Via Veneto. From the Carré D'Or and Cours Vendome in the heart of Gustavia, just steps away from the main docks, to the shops in Saint Jean within walking distance of Eden Rock, wedding guests can shop for haute couture clothing, fabulous handbags and shoes, Cuban cigars, Panama hats, contemporary art, luxury watches, and duty-free liquor.

After shopping, the best place to stop for a cold drink or a casual lunch is Le Select, the oldest bar on the island, opened by Marius Stakelborough, one of the island's most esteemed senior citizens, in 1949. Now its third locale, smack in the center of town, Le Select is a beehive of local activity, and great place to hear a tall tale or two from the sailors who stop by while in port—or from the locals who are always playing cards or dominoes. As you walk around the inner harbor you'll eventually come to the BAZ Bar, where sushi and live music are served up in the evenings.

When not busy with wedding activities, guests will want to head to the beach. This is an easy task on an island with over 20 stretches of white sand to choose from. Two of the most beautiful are Saline (unofficially the island's "nude" beach) and Gouverneur. For those up for a 15-minute hike, the beach at Colombier is worth the effort. This is also a popular bay for boats to take short sail for a swim or picnic not too far from the port.

Another pure pleasure in Saint Barth is a spa visit! Many of the hotels offer a delicious menu of treatments to pamper the body and soothe the soul—Cheval Blanc Isle de France, Le Manapany, Guanahani, —often in seaside pavilions where the sound of the waves adds to the peacefulness of a restorative day at the spa.

The height of the winter season in Saint Barth is New Year's Eve, when the harbor is standing-room-only with the world's most fabulous yachts, and their glittering guests. At midnight, as fireworks light up the tropical skies, its time to ring in a new year in Saint Barth, that magical little island set between the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, where the simplicity of the West Indies blends with the sophistication of France, and life is just about as good as it gets.

Ultimately nothing is more delightful than a destination wedding in Saint Barth. But planning a wedding from afar and on foreign shores means enlisting the help of serious professionals. Luckily for brides from all over the world, there are highly professional wedding planners can take care of every detail—whether your guest list is two or 250. Many weddings in Saint Barth span three to five days, with guests enjoying everything the island

has to offer. Your parties and ceremonies will be orchestrated by talented professionals who are masters at creating high-end, fabulous events which equal those in New York, Paris, London... event designers, world-class chefs professional lighting, sound, tents, world-class DJ's, extraordinary event and floral design, and rental supplies... everything you imagine is here or can be flown in to make every wedding a homerun!

When it comes to wedding planners, two of the leaders in this niche industry in Saint Barth are Epic Presentations and DK Events. Melanie Smith, the pioneer in the wedding planning business on the island, is the founder of Epic Presentations, and she and her staff are absolute experts in wrangling every detail of the perfect wedding, and making dreams come true. Karine Bensa runs DK Events and orchestrates beautiful and very creative events in Saint Barth, helping realize every step from the ceremony to the reception. Karine and her staff also design the New Year's Eve celebration at Eden Rock, considered one of the most beautiful fetes of the year.

Wedding planners from off island can be of support to the bride but must call upon one of the experts in Saint Barth for the execution of the actual event, especially as the local pros they know the ins and outs of how everything works on the island and get things accomplished with a minimum of anxiety. It takes someone on the ground with a large contact list to make it all seem as simple as floating on a tropical breeze.

One of the incredible assets for planning a wedding in Saint Barth is the presence of an internationally acclaimed floral and event designer—Djordje Varda! His sense of scope when it comes to flowers is extraordinary, he sees beyond the blooms as individual design elements and combines them in magnificent hanging arrangements that drape the décor or tall, majestic vertical arrangements that reach to the sky while lower bouquets dress the tables in pure elegance.

From designing the floral arrangements at The Ritz in Paris to adorning a luxury motor yacht with thousands of white flowers, nothing is too daunting for this Serbian-born artist who made Paris his home before moving to Saint Barth. Having conquered the French capital, he is now designing events and floral décor for the weddings of an upscale international clientele in Saint Barth—if they are lucky enough to get him. His imagination is endless, the bigger the challenge the more inventive the solution as his ideas blossom! Even to flying flowers in directly from Europe to delight every bride with her wedding bower.

So lucky is the bride who chooses Saint Barth for her destination wedding, and lucky are the family and friends who get to come to the island for such a glorious occasion. The island has what it takes to be a perfect partner in producing the most perfect wedding.







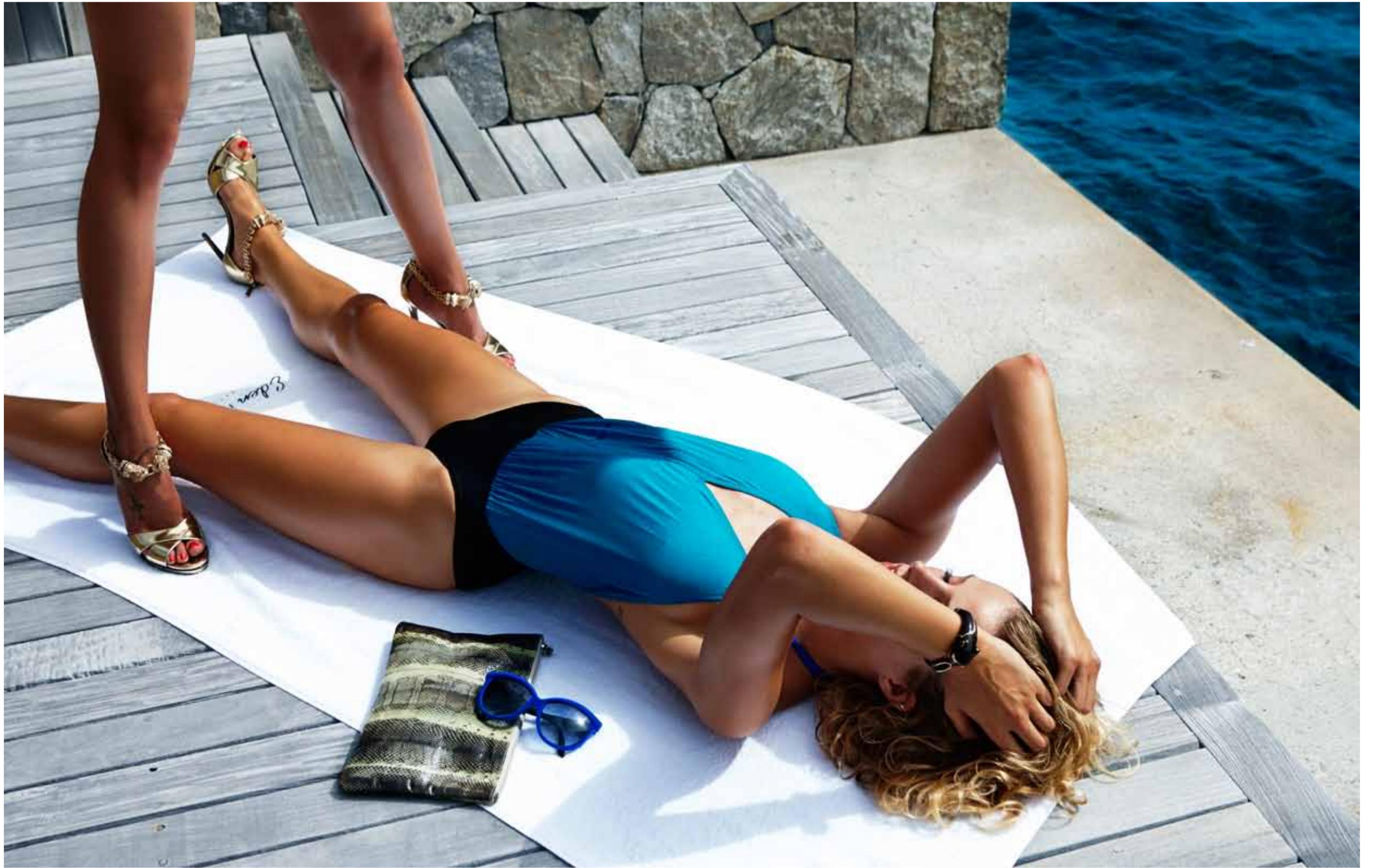
# TWINS

PHOTOGRAPHY **LUCIAN BOR**  
ART DIRECTION **BRUNO DANTO**  
MODELS **JULIE ORDON, FANNY FRANÇOIS**  
STYLE **CHOPARD, ROBERTO CAVALLI, VOLVER, EDGAR**















PLANOES



GUSTAVIA  
SPECIALS:  
BONITO  
LIQUID  
POETRY

WORDS MATHIAS DURAND-REYNALDO  
PHOTOGRAPHY ROMEO BALANCOURT



**D**on't ever change a winning team! In the case of Bonito, that means that Juan-Carlos, Laurent, and Jonas are back once again for another winning season. Managed by Nicolas Gicquel, this casual chic restaurant/bar, with its relaxed and friendly ambiance, is well on its way to becoming a culinary landmark in Saint Barthélemy. But it must be said that Juan-Carlos and his outstanding staff have worked hard to get there. Conceived as a large beach house, whose goal is to make everyone feel at home, whether with friends or family, Bonito is an unusual place in many respects. To begin with, Juan-Carlos likes

to say that people come to Bonito "because you are immersed in a unique atmosphere and sense of energy." And with its dining tables on the terrace, its large, cozy, living room/bar that overlooks the Port of Gustavia, its charming interior design, comfortable furniture, and especially its exceptional cuisine, it's not by accident that so many clients consider Bonito like a home away from home...

When it comes to the menu, its roots are in traditional French cuisine accented with flavors that come directly from Latin America. There is a selection of traditional ceviches prepared in Peruvian style, «tiraditos» and "anticuchos" as well as numerous other specialties made with seafood and shellfish from the depths of the ocean. But if Bonito has a reputation in Saint Barthélemy as being a "fish restaurant," it is a grave error to pigeonhole the food as one-note. Working alongside chef Laurent Cantineaux, there are at least seven specialized cooks who work full-time in radically different posts. So in addition to seafood, the menu at Bonito is one of the largest and most diversified on the island. But the real jewel here (and it's a shame to pass it by) is Bonito's fabulous and much talked about "bar with a view." A true bar that makes more than a slight impression—especially with its drop-dead panoramic views. And one does not have to eat in order to enjoy the happening bar scene.

Behind the bar is Jérôme Hurtado de Mendoza, the regular bartender and "mixologist" at Bonito. He favors premium liquors and alcohols, and like a top chef has made an art of the complex alchemy of mixed drinks. It takes just a quick look at his cocktail menu to get an idea of Jerome's sense of precision. The menu (intentionally simplified) is classified by category: champagne, vodka, rum, gin,

specials. The names of the cocktails exude a sense of humor and a dash of poetry. So the “Lady In A Red Dress” might be found next to the “Porn Star,” while “Lychee Loves Coco ” is not found far from “Gin Crazy Lavender.” These evocative names give a hint as to what might be found in your glass, along with other tasty surprises. Traditional mint leaves, lemon juice, and honey have given way to basil, cucumber, watermelon, kumquat, and organic carrots. Pepper, coriander, thyme, and sisho leaves are also added for a touch of spiciness. Jérôme especially enjoys finding new combinations of tastes and flavors, without simply creating a trendy new cocktail. “You must never distort the ingredients that go into the composition of a cocktail. You must always perceive the alcoholic base note of the drink, which should be strong yet well balanced. At the same time, a cocktail should be easy to drink and not be too overpowering.” This master “shaker” tells us with a bit of modesty that he is still surprised by new ideas and flavors, as well as the many new techniques developed by talented bartenders all over the world. “I learn every day. The world of cocktails is a world in perpetual evolution. Mixology is getting closer and closer to the universe of pastry making. You have to know how to measure and use numerous ingredients with finesse. Today, just mastering the various kinds of alcohol is not enough—subtlety is required. And above all, you must understand and anticipate the expectations of your clients.” So it is not unusual for the bartender to be brought over to a table and asked to create a “special” not found on the menu. “Mixology is like second nature to me. It’s instinctive for me to create a cocktail that corresponds to the person’s character.”

The bar at Bonito is designed for relaxation, sharing, and discovery. Open every evening, this cutting-edge venue instantly transports you elsewhere as you take in the extraordinary views of the ocean and the equally extraordinary “Bonito Sunsets.” As for Jérôme, listen carefully! With each melody of the shaker, try to imagine what mysterious brew he is concocting for you. Maybe the brand new “Varda Cocktail,” created in collaboration with the talented international floral designer Djordje Varda. The recipe will always remain a secret. But it contains a mysterious premium alcohol, the essence of plants, floral liquors, and a fabulous orchid “imprisoned” in a glass made to order...

