

# From Salt and Sisal, to Sun, Sea and Sand

## The Evolution of the Turks and Caicos Architectural Vernacular

**D**ue to a recent surge in the popularity of the Caribbean architectural style, most people are now aware of the elements that define Caribbean architecture. These are epitomized by open, breezy living spaces, fanciful carved wooden detail, long, covered sweeping verandas and vibrant splashes of color that compete with the sky. It is a style that suits the island way of life.

### A Classic Structure Gets a Chance at New Life

In the Turks and Caicos, architecture evolved over time in response to constraints of the natural envi-

ronment, availability of resources and a historical context. In the early history of the islands, Bermudian salt rakers ruled the land, and their presence is reflected in the historical buildings that have survived. One such building is the Government House on Salt Cay. This house has a long and varied history like the island itself. Since the British government first declared ownership of Salt Cay in 1764, they sent government officials to oversee and regulate the day-to-day operations of the highly-profitable salt and whaling industries there. Government House provided shelter for many of them up until the modern era.

www.darrelljonesphoto.com

Another design element was drawn from the traditional French plantation home incorporating French doors, functional shutters, columns and covered porches. This is also a style that has been widely adapted throughout the Caribbean, as it lends itself well to the use of cooling trade winds. Of course, all rooms take advantage of the beauty of the site and take in sweeping panoramic views of the ocean. With a sense that is true to the traditional value of economy, less is more, and the simplicity of the design is artfully created to keep things simple, pure and basic without compromising the quality of the design and the durability of the construction.

As important as the design process, was ensuring the success of the construction phase of development. Throughout the construction phase, which lasted a total of 10 months, the architects worked closely with the building contractor, Caicos Cays Development, to ensure that all went smoothly. To further facilitate the construction process, prior to commencement of construction all of the finishing materials including electrical fixtures, plumbing, roofing materials, etc., were selected. This also reduced the risk of costly changes later on down the road.

Finally, the last decorating touches are applied to give meaning to the house's name "Bamboo House." Some ceilings are covered in bamboo canes, the carpentry in the kitchen has a bamboo motif, furnishings are primarily made from wicker and bamboo, and bamboo plants are scattered through-



out the courtyard and garden. In order to give a beach-like feeling to the house, wood finishes are "limed," which is a traditional Caribbean method of whitewashing.

Other finishing touches include floors throughout the house with a mix of Italian terra cotta tiles



defined with little navy blue inserts. Navy blue and white furnishings decorate the living room and pool deck, with some turquoise accents to echo the ever changing turquoise colors of the surrounding waters of Chalk Sound National Park and Taylor Bay.

Here and there some rustic Moroccan pottery, lamps and lanterns and other objects give splashes of an exotic look. Most windows are framed with long white linen drapes that move with the wind.



and design elements they would eventually want to incorporate into their island home.

It was their primary desire to have a home that would blend well with the local vegetation and surroundings while observing traditional architectural elements. In a search for local inspiration, Grand Turk in particular made a lasting impres-

sion. After studying some of its lovely and colorful older established homes, it became clear they needed to find an architect who could design a home that "belonged" to Providenciales.

In the spring of 2002, they approached SWA Architects, met Simon Wood on site and showed him a portfolio of various collected pictures and ideas taken from many different tropical homes. Together they incorporated several key elements that would make the home truly an island residence.

A typical Spanish/Moorish courtyard is a key element in the design. This walled courtyard prevalent in most Northern African countries, and adapted in most southern Spanish homes, is perfectly suited for an island home. In fact, it is a prominent feature in many traditional Caribbean houses. Like most island localities, good topsoil to plant a lush garden around the house is limited. The courtyard offers an ideal protected and private garden area and creates a logical place to dine and entertain while at the same time creating a central welcoming feature.





island inspired | furnishings textiles accessories



ports of call, grace bay  
providenciales, tci  
telephone 649/941/8055  
www.belongingstc.com

P L A N N I N G   A R C H I T E C T U R E   I N T E R I O R S



PORTS OF CALL, GRACE BAY,  
PROVIDENCIALES, TCI

T 649/941/8044 F 649/941/8043  
WWW.FRKTC.COM

F E N I M O R E   R O S E N B E R G   K O L B ,   L L C .

The interior design is one of simple island style, boasting select timber molding, elegant tile flooring and a pure color palette. All of the walls, doors and woodwork are white, while the selected furniture and artwork make a bold visual impact. The same ceramic tile is used throughout the residence, extending to the wraparound balconies. Its clean look, which matches the simple details, creates an elegant coherence and spaciousness.

The residence does not incorporate luxurious features, as its magic is its simplicity and the efficient use of its limited square footage. It has a custom-built kitchen and breakfast bar that open directly into the living area, as well as a graceful, enclosed timber staircase. Its modest pool house with barbeque area and external dining space, topped by a lovely trellis, illustrate island living at its finest. Moreover, the pool's close proximity to the lower wraparound balcony enables these spaces to be used in conjunction with each other.

Modern developments in environmental design have been well-utilized in the Lingnau Residence. The home is well insulated and double-glazed to maxi-

mize the efficiency of the air conditioning system. In addition, it has a solar panel to assist with water heating, and the roof color is white to aid in the reduction of heat gain in the building. In other words: A simple and inexpensive selection of materials and systems has helped reduce energy demands, resulting in a reduction of overall running costs of the home. Thus, the traditional value of economy of design is well incorporated into this modern home.

### Defining a new Style with Traditional Elements from TCI and Abroad

On the other side of Providenciales in the Chalk Sound area, Bamboo House is a splendid example of the blending of old and new architectural values. For more than 5 years, the owners rented different homes at various locations throughout Providenciales and at different times of the year to try and get a feeling for the architectural features

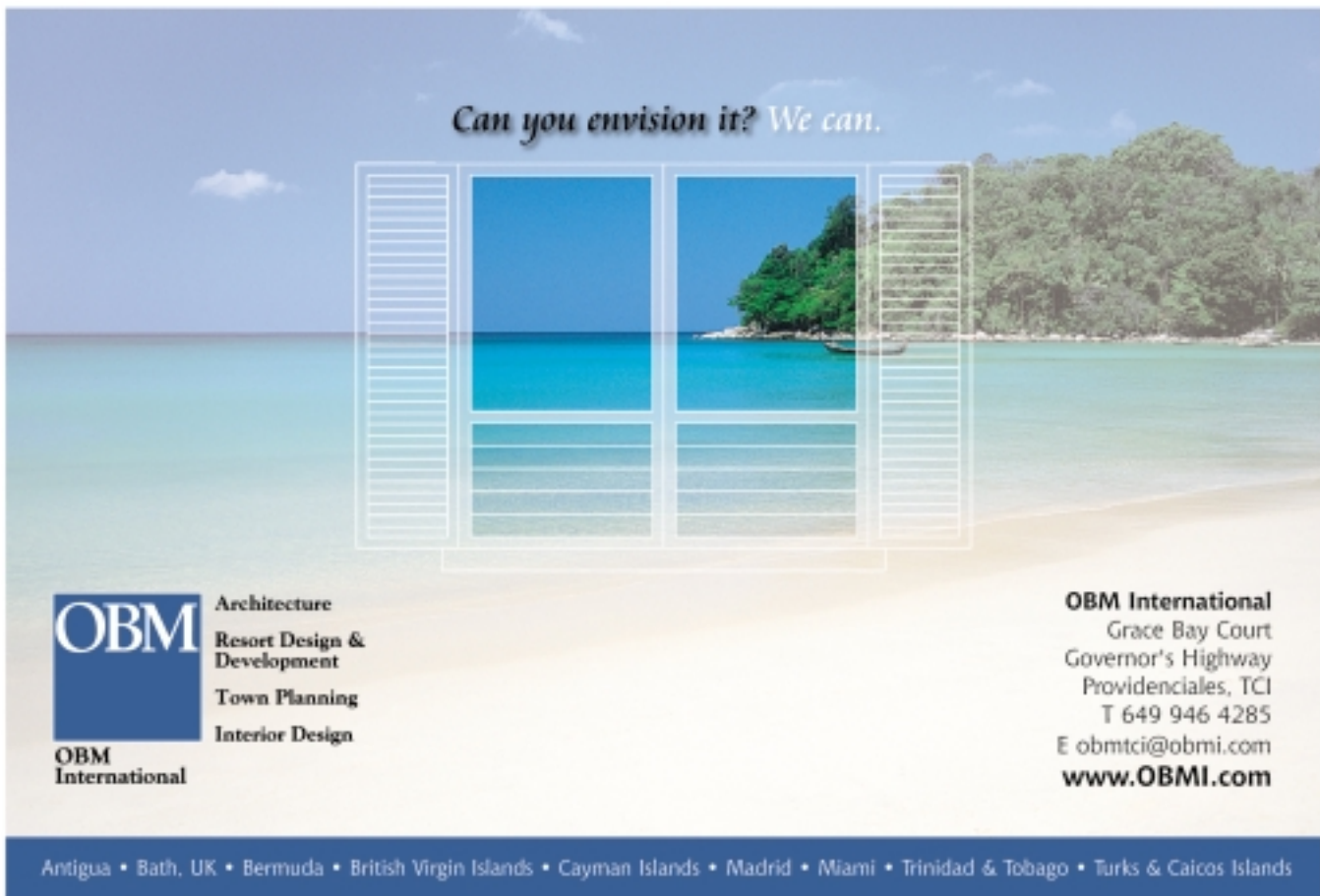


www.dairrelljonesphoto.com

Turning  
*Dreams*  
Into Reality

LEE & ASTWOOD  
architects  
Suite 101a, Grace Bay Court,  
Grace Bay Rd.,  
Providenciales, TCI  
P: 649 946 5210 F: 649 946 5211  
www.leeastwoodarch.com

*Can you envision it? We can.*



**OBM** International  
Architecture  
Resort Design & Development  
Town Planning  
Interior Design

**OBM International**  
Grace Bay Court  
Governor's Highway  
Providenciales, TCI  
T 649 946 4285  
E [obmtci@obmi.com](mailto:obmtci@obmi.com)  
[www.OBMI.com](http://www.OBMI.com)

Antigua • Bath, UK • Bermuda • British Virgin Islands • Cayman Islands • Madrid • Miami • Trinidad & Tobago • Turks & Caicos Islands

R E F L E C T I N G T R A D I T I O N T O D A Y

S I M O N W O O D A S S O C I A T E S  
A R C H I T E C T S A N D M A S T E R P L A N N E R S

tel 946 5911 fax 946 5912 [www.swa.tc](http://www.swa.tc)



The elements of design that were observed to fashion traditional homes are still as relevant today as they were 200 years ago, but circumstances have certainly changed. On Providenciales, where an unprecedented development boom has taken place, all the luxurious amenities any heart could desire are now available for the asking. Today's residences are crafted with a sensitivity to the traditional vernacular while at the same time, adding features that define a new Turks and Caicos style of living.

### Designing Traditional Values into Modern Living

Designed in the traditional West Indian style, the Lingnau Residence, located in Leeward at the eastern end of Providenciales, is a fine example of island living. Designed by design-consulting firm OBM International, this home is approximately 2,200 square feet and boasts a variety of beautiful design features particular to the Caribbean region. Its palette of pale green is complemented by crisp white detailing, such as its upstairs balustrade, abundant columns, intricate fretwork and romantic French doors. Topping off this delightful abode are overhanging eaves and a traditional corrugated metal roof. A private dock and luxurious pool complete its look of Caribbean splendor.

**Top right:** The Lingnau Residence in Leeward  
**Below:** The luxurious pool completes the look of Caribbean splendor



The most prominent design feature of the Lingnau Residence is a wraparound balcony on the upper and lower levels that is accessible on the lower level from the living area and bedroom and on the upper level from all bedrooms. These are the main areas where the traditional Caribbean detailing, particularly handrail design and fretwork, are incorporated. Also, a segment of the lower area of the wraparound balcony is screened in and accessible from the living area, effectively and inexpensively increasing an enclosed living space. This creates the perfect indoor/outdoor lifestyle for the owners who use the property as a holiday home throughout the year.



“ Topping off this beautiful abode are overhanging eaves and a traditional corrugated metal roof. ”

Unfortunately, in recent years, the structure has been abandoned and is in a serious state of disrepair. It is not safe to roam through. Considerable works will be necessary to secure the building and make sure that it is not irretrievably lost forever. Now, the Turks and Caicos National Trust have stepped in to fulfill this function. They have begun the painstaking task of collecting historical data on the structure and over the next several years will attempt to restore it to its original integrity. They will then open and operate it as a guest house. This massive undertaking will require input and donations from several sources. A small fund has already been raised to help secure and restore the roof as a first step, but much more will be required before the house is again habitable. Any persons wishing to contribute to this worthy cause should contact the National Trust at 649-941-5710.

Although it has recently fallen into a state of disrepair, the aspects of this historic home's design, which define the Turks Islands' vernacular, are clearly visible. In a sensible design feature inherited from the Bermudians, a stone kitchen with a classically designed chimney is contained in a separate structure away from the rest of the house. This allowed heat and danger created from cooking fires to be kept away from living quarters.

// This house has a long and varied history like the island itself. //

The entire property is surrounded by a traditional stone wall made from local stone and mortar prepared from crushed conch shells and painted with a whitewash of lime. The gate posts, which mark the entrance to the property, are highly ornamental in their design, and many different styles of this architectural feature can be found throughout the Turks Islands. These traditional

walls and gates served the functional purpose of keeping livestock such as donkeys and cattle out of gardens. The walled gardens also created an intimate courtyard gathering space.

The house itself is a classic example of Turks Islands' architecture. The hipped and gable-ended roof lines with no overhangs reflect a scarcity of materials in addition to a practical solution to tropical cyclones. Broad overhangs, so prevalent to the rest of the region, are expensive to build in terms of materials and create a locus for hurricane winds to lift and carry roofs away. It is topped off with traditional cedar shingles and tin. While the shingles were applied to more upscale homes, tin was commonly used and had the benefit of easy re-use after tropical cyclones made their way through.



Far Left: A view from Bamboo House over Taylor's Bay  
Above: The Government House on Salt Cay  
Left: The structure of Government House is in a serious state of disrepair

Government House photos by Hitesh Mehta

## Architecture



The garden is designed to incorporate the simple elements of scent, color and wind. Blooming plants with exotic fragrances like night-blooming jasmine and frangipani are planted in the courtyard to perfume the air. To "see" the breeze in the garden, different tall sea grasses were planted to move gracefully in the wind. For splashes of color, bougainvillea was planted around the house to introduce bright deep pinks.

Still keeping in mind that "less is more," no sophisticated electronics, computer gadgets or fancy objects are present in Bamboo House. It is furnished as a vacation home, and it is also rented occasionally for seasonal rentals, keeping things comfortable but in essence practical and simple.

In only a few years, the garden will be fully established, and the brilliant design of the house will make it a real Provo home, blending it with the surroundings like it has always been there.

### Designs to Withstand the Test of Time

Traditional island design elements in architecture have withstood the test of time. They are as practical today as they were centuries ago when the islands' original settlers first constructed their homes here. These elements are now being artfully employed in modern structures that define a new island style. No doubt these new buildings will become the classic designs of the decades to come.

DESIGN AND BUILD

*RAISING THE STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE*

NOW EXPANDING IN NORTH CAICOS

**TDMG**  
CONCORDIA

WWW.TDMG.LTD.COM 649-941-3445