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STYLE

THE NEW VOICE OF AVANT-GARDE

SUBTLE
BEAUTY

ALEXANDRE VAUTHIER
HIGHS COUTURE AESTHETICS
FINE JEWELLERY

STORY DANIEL SCHEFFLER

TREASURED ISLANDS

Private pieces of tropical paradise are available for purchase or rent around the globe, offering the ultimate in privacy, luxury and eco-tourism

ABOVE
At *Song Saa Hotels and Resorts*, people are seeking a certain escape and solitude.

How times have changed in the world of real estate: in 1626, the island of Manhattan, then called "New Netherland", according to the Dutch National Archives, sold for a measly 60 guilders – about HK\$264 today. In more recent years, royalty, the wealthy and celebrities have been paying small fortunes to procure their own islands as symbols of power, places in which to conserve nature, and as luxury hideaways for tropical fun and relaxation.

Private islands are having their moment in the sun, as they are easier to obtain than ever before. The surge

of interest in this niche luxury market is reflected in dedicated real estate brokers and television shows devoted to the subject, while ultrarich Chinese are reportedly shopping around.

Chris Krolow, CEO of Private Islands, says: "The prices of islands took a little bit longer to stabilise after the recession as opposed to mainland real estate, so that could account for why we're seeing more sales now." He believes that reports of actor Leonardo DiCaprio's island-buying trips, software billionaire Larry Ellison's 98 per cent share of the Hawaiian island of Lanai that was recently purchased for US\$500 million, and singer Beyonce's shopping spree around Greece are good signs that the industry is booming.



ABOVE
Nibiwatu, a resort available for exclusive use on remote Sumba Island in Indonesia, has amazing marine life.

RIGHT
Amanpulo in the Philippines has a private beach club.

Following the trend, Christie's real estate will soon offer a luxury real estate opportunity called Amirallah Private Islands, aimed at those who are looking to buy their own eco-friendly island. They will be customisable in size, shape and style, and totally portable.

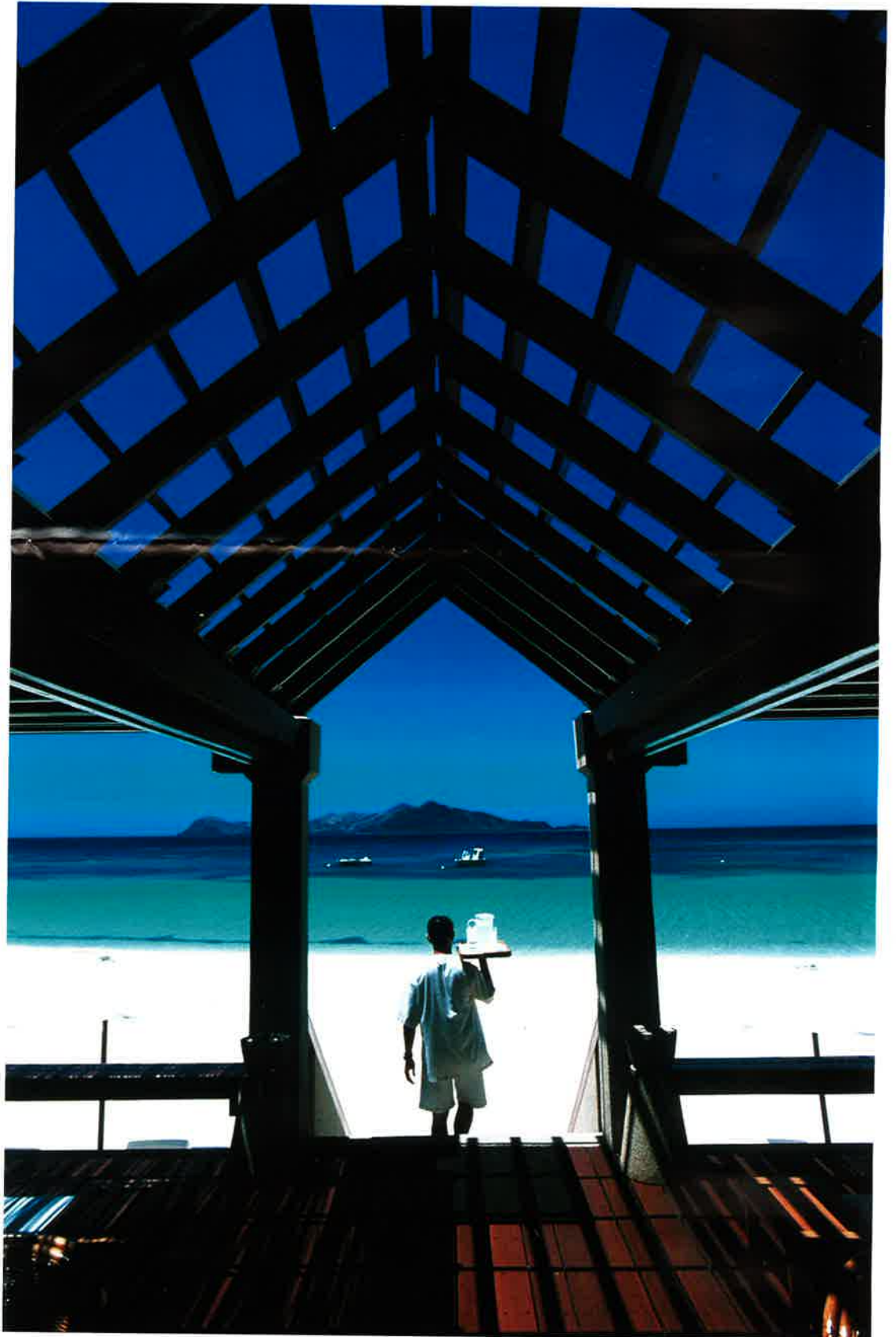
Rory Hunter, co-founder and CEO of Song Saa Hotels and Resorts, believes the private island trend has to do with privacy. He says: "Our lives are so rushed and overwhelming these days, people are seeking a certain escape and solitude – a destination unto itself where others can do the thinking for them so they can fully relax." And that is how private islands trump the amenities of a five-star tropical resort.

Perhaps the most famous example is Necker Island, which has been owned by Virgin founder Richard Branson since 1978. With 30 hectares of picturesque bliss including turquoise waters and stunning coral reefs, the destination in the British Virgin Islands offers the tycoon's guests a place where anything is possible, nothing is ever too much and privacy is a given.

"Necker is run like a home, not a hotel, and operates with the sole aim of creating amazing experiences for our guests," says general manager Kenton Jones.

In response to cynics, who think this trend is simply the latest in billionaires one-upping each other, Vincent Pauchon, director of sales and marketing at Laucala Island, says: "People don't come here to show off, they come here for privacy and to be unseen." The island in Fiji is available to be booked for exclusive use. Beyond seclusion and privacy, the idea of a "barefoot

PEOPLE DON'T COME HERE FOR PRIVACY AND TO BE UNSEEN VINCENT PAUCHON OF LAUCALA ISLAND





ABOVE
 Guests can relax by their exclusive two-bedroom villa at Song Saa Hotels and Resorts.



Amanpulo in the Philippines offers breathtaking views.

PHOTO: MARKUS GORTZ

luxury" lifestyle seems to be one of the biggest attractions to island getaways. Tapa Tibble, general manager at Amanpulo in the Philippines, says the locals make the experience special. "The local people have a quiet and gentle warmth that puts our guests at ease – their nature reminds us of our true nature, which we seem to have forgotten in this fast-paced world."

But there's a bit of glamour involved, too. Fregate Island Private, in the most remote part of the Seychelles, boasts an extraordinary history as a sanctuary for buccaneers in the 18th century. "There is a legend

that hidden treasure is somewhere on the island, and guests like James Bond creator Ian Fleming have been inspired by the location's swashbuckling romance and, of course, its beauty," says Wayne Kafcsak, managing director of the property. "Today, the 'treasure' our guests can experience is the island's seclusion – 2.6 square kilometres of tropical paradise surrounded by crystal-clear azure waters and seven incredible private beaches which have been consistently rated among the best in the world."

But keeping these pristine properties for escape and indulgence isn't enough. "Our mission from the very beginning was conservation and community development," says Song Saa's Hunter. His resort, which is the only private island available for exclusive use in Cambodia, has the philosophy that "luxury treads lightly", calling for a financial contribution to its foundation and a "giving back and forth" sharing between guests and locals. This takes the form of "activities that allow for learning and deeper understanding of the lives of others as well as on marine conservation".

The private islands available for sale and rent across the world seem to share this eco-friendly attitude. Laucala's Pauchon says the island's owner – Red Bull co-founder Dietrich Mateschitz – dreamed of creating a luxury resort "without compromising the natural beauty on the island – every single detail was strategically planned to blend as much as possible with Fijian roots, culture and nature".

Amanpulo Resort, situated on a private island in the Sulu Sea, offers guests a high-end getaway built with eco-consciousness, from the insulation to lighting and water conservation practices.

It's no surprise then that eco-tourism makes for



Guests at Nibizatu, Sumba, Indonesia can choose free-diving.



MANY PRIVATE ISLANDS ARE TURNING THEIR FOCUS ON CONSERVATION INTO PART OF THE APPEAL

great business in this market, according to Krolow of Private Islands Inc. This is especially true for island owners, as it ensures their investments are kept pristine. "Overdeveloped islands ruin what people want to see – beautiful beaches and wildlife," he says.

Many private islands are turning their focus on conservation into part of the appeal. Nihiwatu, a resort available for exclusive use on remote Sumba Island in Indonesia, is one such destination. "With the hotel in conjunction with the Sumba Foundation, all of our profits go to supporting and maintaining the local nature and cultures," says Jarra Campbell, Nihiwatu's director of marketing and business development.

The philanthropic nature of American billionaire owner Chris Burch is reflected in his resort's support of water quality, education and malaria issues on the island.

Exclusive experiences combined with complete privacy plus ecological and cultural consciousness are all must-haves when buying or renting an island – with each destination also offering something distinctive to enthrall guests and owners alike. Laucala, for example, offers a DeepFlight personal submarine to its guests for a unique underwater experience.

Owning a small piece of paradise, where you can feel good while doing good, is a dream that has become reality.

ABOVE
Guests can enjoy a beach barbecue at Amanpulo in the Philippines.

BELOW
The beautiful sunset at Song Saa Hotels and Resorts.



PHOTOS: JUSTIN MOTT, FRANK MONTANARO

PERFECT PROPOSALS

A PRIVATE ISLAND SETS AN UNFORGETTABLE SCENE FOR POPPING THE QUESTION. HERE ARE SOME STORIES OF MARRIAGE PROPOSALS AT THESE EXCLUSIVE GETAWAYS:

SONG SAA, CAMBODIA
WWW.SONGSAA.COM

"A VIP guest invited a number of his close friends and family for a holiday at Song Saa. On arrival, one of the friends was so taken with the island, he immediately decided to fly his fiancée in and get married 24 hours later."

How to get there: Dragon Air (code sharing with Qatar Airways) offers a daily flight to Phnom Penh, where a boat will deliver you to the island. Book at dragonair.com.

NECKER ISLAND, BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS
WWW.VIRGINLIMITEDITION.COM/EN/NECKER-ISLAND

"A young gentleman wanting to propose on the beach requested a skydiver to parachute down to Turtle Beach dressed as James Bond with the engagement ring."

How to get there: Qatar Airways flies from Hong Kong to Miami, where a charter hop lands you on the island. Book at qatarairways.com.

NIHIWATU, INDONESIA
WWW.NIHIWATU.COM

"At the guest's request, we organised a Sumbanse warrior to approach a couple on a hike for a memorable proposal."

How to get there: Nihiwatu's private charter can take you straight to the island from Hong Kong.