

An Aerie Tale

A Mequon Couple Builds a Vacation Nest in Anguilla

By Carolyn Kott Washburne • Photography by Christian Gomez and Michael Wilson



Melody and Jon Dill named their vacation villa "Bird of Paradise" after the rare bird from Papua New Guinea. On a clear day, Melody says you can see across the Caribbean Sea to St. Eustatius and St. Kitts.



Melody and Jon Dill of Mequon built their dream in Anguilla, a small Caribbean island east of Puerto Rico, dubbing it the Bird of Paradise. Theirs was a vision as far removed from Milwaukee as you can imagine, but they laid their plans with builders and architects from right here at home — resulting in an exotic and luxurious retreat that was created by and for people who spend most of their time in Southeastern Wisconsin.

Location, Location, Location

"When people ask us why we chose Anguilla, we respond with two words: great beaches," says Melody. "Also, English is spoken and the U.S. dollar is used, so it's an easy place to visit." Most important, she added, it's not nearly as crowded as places like Jamaica and the Bahamas, and because no jumbo jets can land and no mega cruise ships are allowed, Anguilla has kept the charm of the old Caribbean.

The Dills, who used to work for an arm of the State Department and traveled extensively, first visited Anguilla in 1982 and couldn't get the place out of their minds. "Every year we tried someplace new, but after a decade of traveling in search of the 'perfect beach,' we decided Anguilla was the one." During their second trip they bought a condo, which served as their vacation home until the Bird of Paradise was completed in 2006.

Building the Nest

It took the couple a year to find the property, a year to get the plans drawn and two years to build. Assisting them in making their dream a reality were architect Guy Courtney of Dallas plus a number of Wisconsin-based subcontractors including Lakeside Development of Mequon, which finalized the drawings; Water Technology and FLM Engineering, which designed the plumbing, electrical systems and pools; and Donna Sweet of Haven Interiors in Milwaukee. "Cisterns, hurricane shutters and the generator were all learning experiences for these Wisconsin builders," Melody says. Because Anguilla is an arid island, cisterns collect water from the roof, and the villa has a water treatment plant, plus UV, charcoal and sediment filters; because electricity is not reliable, a generator is a must-have feature.

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Absolutely everything but cement was imported from the U.S. “There is no Home Depot or Lowe’s on Anguilla,” Melody says. “Every nail, every 2x4, all paint, etc., was sent via 40-foot containers from Miami.” The couple also made a trip to Singapore and Bali to have their furniture custom made and to purchase glass hurricanes, stone carvings, tableware and more.

A Perfect Perch

As for orienting the house on the site, the couple knew they wanted to have access to a beach but not be immediately on it because of the hurricane threat. As a result, the Bird of Paradise is perched on the side of a hill, with a path leading directly to a crescent-shaped beach on Sandy Hill Bay, a two-minute walk to swimming, snorkeling and a safe harbor for a small yacht. Because Jon did not want to look into a black hole at night, the home faces southeast, with a view over the Caribbean Sea and the lights of St. Martin and St. Barths in the distance. Daylight hours offer panoramic views of the mountains of both islands.

All of this attention to exquisite detail has resulted in a home that offers a unique blend of spacious comfort, luxury and quiet ambiance. Designed in the Tropical Asian style integrated with the indoor-outdoor living concept, the home is a series of buildings, each with a suite interconnected by lagoon-style pools, gardens and walkways. “We actually cross a bridge to enter the master suite,” Melody says.

Anguilla’s outdoor ambiance is captured in large verandas and terrace patios, both shaded and open. An Indonesian bale, or daybed, is nestled in a grove of palm trees overlooking the sea — perfect for massages and naps. The home is also a showcase for the Dills’ Oceanic art collection and for handsome details such as stained wood peaked interior ceilings and finely chiseled rock walls.

Mi Casa Su Casa

When the Dills are not using the Bird of Paradise, the whole villa is available for rent. The amenities include three swimming areas, four dining experiences, and multiple living areas, including an exterior living room with fireplace. There are four bedroom suites with an office that can serve as a fifth bedroom. Frette linens, Bulgari toiletries, a masseuse and a chef enhance the feeling of luxury here.

The Bird of Paradise has hosted movie stars who want privacy (“Sorry, we can’t name any names,” says Melody), families who love the villa’s spaciousness and couples who enjoy the ambiance of home ownership.

“In addition to being beautiful, the island is fascinating,” says Melody. “Our son J.B. has been visiting since he was six months old. Over the years he has collected fossils, explored caves and dug for pre-Columbian Arawak pottery. This is more than just a beach vacation spot.”

To learn more about the Bird of Paradise, visit www.anguillabird.com.

The home is decorated in the Tropical Asian style, with Oceanic art and African artifacts collected during the couple’s extensive travels. The indoor-outdoor rooms are connected by meandering pools, gardens and walkways.

