

## Real Escapes | by Michael McRae



Colonial glamour:  
the Residence  
on the Rocks

When Prince Will and her royal shyness, Kate Middleton, patched things up last summer, they jetted off on separate flights for a lovers' rendezvous in the Seychelles, the honeymoon and holiday hot spot of royals, rockers and other paparazzi prey. Known as Africa's answer to Hawaii, the remote Indian Ocean archipelago north of Madagascar is a playground for publicity-averse high rollers, not least because they can hole up in the kind of posh digs that former hotelier and longtime Seychelles habitué Karl Ammann recently completed on Mahé Island, the largest in the Seychelles group.

Perched in the lush tropical forest above the Banyan Tree Resort (where Paul and Heather stayed in happier days), Ammann's retreat overlooks the palm-fringed coral beach and glittering turquoise waters of Intendance Bay. The walled compound features an airy Creole-style

# Offshore Holding

Wildlife activist  
Karl Ammann's new  
Seychelles retreat  
is a villa fit for royalty.

Photograph: courtesy of Karl Ammann

two-bedroom main house with verandas upstairs and down, a one-bedroom guest-house and a tiled infinity pool with a vertiginous ocean view.

The Swiss-born, Kenya-based wildlife photographer and conservation activist, recently named one of *Time* magazine's

The design and interior decor evoke a sumptuous plantation house from the islands' French and British colonial eras. Each room is stuffed with antiques and tribal pieces that Ammann and his wife have collected over 30 years of traveling in Africa and Asia. "The shopping was the

AMMANN BUILT A VACATION RETREAT on the north side of the island in the 1970s, but he acquired this particular piece of paradise free, as a kind of gratuity, after a long and winding road that began 25 years ago in Kenya's Masai Mara Game Reserve. At the time, Ammann was a

partner in a tented camp in the Mara called Intrepids. Before it was sold, Ammann organized a safari for ex-Beatle George Harrison's business manager. Ammann learned that Harrison and the actor Peter Sellers had jointly owned about 700 acres of beachfront property in the Seychelles in the '70s, before the newly independent government nationalized the land for development. Ammann tipped Harrison's manager about the possibility of recovering the Intendance Bay property and became a point man in a complicated transfer to a private investor group, which brought in Singapore-based Banyan Tree Holdings Limited. For his matchmaking efforts, Ammann received his pick of residential plots, and by the time Banyan Tree Seychelles opened in 2000, he'd already selected a prime lot and



Ammann's two-bedroom house is furnished with antiques from his travels in Africa and Asia.

"Heroes of the Environment" for his crusade against the bush meat trade, named his retreat "Residence on the Rocks" after the massive granite boulders that pop up here and there around the property—beneath the poolside gazebo, flanking the Jacuzzi and somewhat incongruously in the living room, where one wall resembles a fossilized brontosaurus haunch. Each building was carefully situated so as not to disturb the landscape, and built to exacting green standards, right down to salvaged Burmese teak flooring, recycled French doors and filigreed cast-iron railings. The lights are LED, the drinking water is purified with infrared light and the double-insulated roof is fitted with solar panels. At night, hot water is produced by heat exchangers powered by the air conditioners.

fun part," says Ammann, who joined InterContinental Hotels in Africa after graduating from Cornell's hotel school in 1974. "My wife and I bought a lot of the furniture and architectural salvage on trips to India, Myanmar and Thailand. All of the timber we used was recovered from old buildings in India. We had the rugs made by a women's collective in Rajasthan. I had everything shipped in by container, which made it quite easy."

Not so finding Seychellois tradesmen to assemble it all. In the end, Ammann threw up his hands, hired a resident German architect as construction manager and imported laborers from India. The project came in about eight months behind schedule, but Ammann says, "I'm now getting...very close to what I set out to achieve."

called in the architect who designed Intrepids Camp.

Having a resort as a next-door neighbor is a boon. Villa guests check in at the Banyan Tree and shuttle up to their aerie via electromobile. Need a Balinese massage and spiced honey splash after that long flight? Dial the spa. Feeling peckish? Call room service. The resort staff will stock the villa's kitchen, send a chef to cook for you or throw a cocktail party for 50 if you're in the mood for company. They'll also clean up afterward while you're shopping in nearby Victoria, the capital, or shuttling by helicopter to tiny, privately owned Cousine Island—all of 62 acres and a sanctuary for critically endangered hawksbill turtles and the Seychelles magpie robin—for a day of snorkeling or bird-watching. There's world-class bone-

Photograph: courtesy of Karl Ammann

fishing and sport diving at islands farther afield, and the Vallée de Mai on Praslin Island remains much as it was when British explorers declared it to be the original Garden of Eden.

During Ammann's final white-glove inspection, a stranger mysteriously appeared and wandered from room to room.

"I finally asked him, 'Can I help you?'" Ammann says. "He was a Russian staying at the Banyan Tree, and I think the only three words in English he knew were 'Will you sell?'" The answer: "Nyet."

"I'm never going to build another place like this in my lifetime," says Ammann, who is 59. He and his wife plan to hang

out there occasionally, but the rest of the time, it's up for grabs—unless, of course, Will and Kate have first dibs.

*Rates from approximately \$2,500 to \$5,000 a day, depending on season and number of bedrooms occupied. [www.residenceontherocks.com](http://www.residenceontherocks.com).*



**Frontierland: Bahia Mala on Chile's Patagonia coast**

# YOUR MEN IN PATAGONIA

➤ There's getting away from it all, and then there's getting to Bahia Mala, a 1,729-acre coastal property in remote Chilean Patagonia. From the U.S., you fly commercially to Puerto Montt, Chile, then hop a helicopter trip direct or charter a plane to a small airstrip 30 minutes from the property—by boat. Bahia Mala has a furnished 1,300-square-foot lodge, four smaller cabins with beds, plenty of well water and a generator. What it doesn't have is a road connecting to civilization. This is off-the-grid living, a wildlife and

fishing paradise, and yours for \$3.5 million.

"Southern Chile's a frontier area," says Trent Jones of **Hall and Hall**, a 50-year-old Montana-based ranch management and realty firm that represents Bahia Mala, along with a selection of other properties for sale in Patagonia. "You have to have a spirit of adventure. It's not for every buyer, clearly."

Hall and Hall's service is to take a risky enterprise—buying remote land in countries where titled ownership can be difficult to verify—and making it as transparent and streamlined

a process as possible. They've been in this business as long as anyone, first venturing to the southern hemisphere in 1992 when Ted Turner sent them to find him an Argentinean fishing ranch. After completing that sale in '95 and letting another decade of economic and market uncertainty pass, they began forging contacts in Chile and Argentina (and more recently Brazil), amassing a portfolio of varied properties on both sides of the Andes with excellent fishing, dramatic scenery and wildlife.

"Hall and Hall brings a

credibility factor to the table," says Spencer Moore of Silver Spring, MD, who has just listed his 3,500-square-foot Chilean fishing lodge, Río Palena, with the firm for \$925,000. When he bought the 18-acre riverfront parcel in 1995 he lacked the help of an agent, "which was a little tricky," he says. "Chileans are a very friendly and hospitable people, but they'll never tell you how many acres they have—or how many cows they have. It was a challenge." [www.hallhall.com](http://www.hallhall.com).

—TAYLOR ANTRIM

Photograph: courtesy of Hall and Hall