Tobago Cool

Named for the exclusive Château Petrus of French wine fame, Villa Petrus is a dream vacation home set in the hills above Black Rock, Tobago. Pat Ganase takes a tour of the luxurious villa.

Photography by Skene Howie

THE PLANE arriving from Europe or North America, or nearby Trinidad, touches down on an airstrip that seems to rise up out of the sea. And you are in another world. Here the air sparkles and smells of sun, that crisp aroma of clothes dried outdoors on a breezy tropical day. From the spring in your step, the lift of your shoulders, you know that you are a long way from the metropoles of the world, bustling places of business and purpose.

You’re in Tobago now, and you’re expected to “limin’” or “lahay,” and relax into the luxury. As you leave the arrivals area, you see a cardboard sign with “Villa Petrus” written in large script. It’s your introduction to Floyd Scipio, your chauffeur and caretaker of the two-acre estate whose focal point is the elegant Wedgewood-blue plantation house that's going to be your Tobago home for the next few days.

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The route from the main road is narrow and winding, but you get there surprisingly quickly—the brochure did say five minutes from the beach. Up from Black Rock, or via the Hopeton road, you climb above the coastal villages through the old coconut and cocoa lands to the top of Prospect Estate. The ascent to Villa Petrus is like the approach to a modern-day castle. A wall of bougainvillea festooned with bunches of peach, purple and crimson above a tangle of vines and barbed trunks, marks the perimeter of your domain. I’m told an invisible security fence surrounds the hill, and the driveway is lit by an orderly row of low lamps.

The formal entrance to Villa Petrus is a circular portico between the two wings of the house—one facing the north-west and the other south-west, roughly—but it is seldom used. Visitors are drawn straight to the verandah which extends from the kitchen to the drawing room around two sides of the house, and whose views reach across the wooded hills to Buccoo and Grand Courland. The porch widens out into the pool patio, a covered area of about 1,500 square feet, roomy enough for a large garden party, or a wedding.

This is the heart of Villa Petrus, this vast floor tiled in china blue and white, where indoor meets outdoors with brisk

Opposite page: Classic white and tricon blue tiled verandah. This cool corner of the villa is shaded by trees and vines.

Above: The 23-metre pool is sanitised without chlorine, using ionised salt water instead.

Previous pages: At left the formal entrance to the central core of the villa—a circular atrium that’s a reception hall downstairs and reading nook upstairs. At right, a large verandah embraces the wings of the house and links to the poolside.
breezes, soothing shade and comfortable recliners. No need to go any further. You consider collapsing in the nearest planter’s chair. Otherwise, there’s a hammock or a banquette suspended from the ceiling.

Gredel, Floyd’s wife, takes you through the kitchen, conveniently positioned off the porch and efficiently equipped with all modern conveniences. Very cold beers are on hand for new arrivals. The five-burner cooktop is serious about food, as are the two ovens. The gas-powered barbecue grill looks large enough to spit a pig or a goat.

Floyd and Gredel live just across the ridge from Villa Petrus. They have been with the house since it was built in 2001. Floyd worked on the house and landscaping, and knows the grounds intimately. He tends the grounds, the orchard, vegetable gardens and the pool. Gredel manages the house, and provides whatever services may be required. But, she says, everything is designed to make visitors as comfortable as possible, and the presence of a housekeeper or chef is discreet and minimal.

“You do as you please,” says Floyd who is especially proud of the pool. He shows the secret shower concealed in a rock wall and surrounded by bush.

The pool feels like it is perched on top of the world. It is 22 metres long, no-nonsense white lane-lines drawn straight through the ultramarine tiles. Its sparkle is maintained using sodium chloride instead of chlorine. The
Hum of the pump is barely audible. Lighting is subtle and delivered through a fibre optic system. But the height of luxury, as you bask in the pool or swim laps, is having the music of your favourite CD fill the garden via the state-of-the-art Bose sound system.

Indoors, the Villa Petrus floats around a circular foyer which links drawing room, formal dining room and a grand staircase to the upstairs. The foyer circle is echoed in a sunny reading nook looking over the front garden.

There are six bedrooms, four of which have ensuite bathrooms. Vibrant colour distinguishes each bedroom: flamingo pink, mauve, ultramarine and key lime green. All are simply furnished in white—white linen, white wood with an antique finish, and white cotton drapery. White mosquito nets festoon the king-size or twin four-poster beds, below white Hunter fans, a pleasant tropical option in keeping with the plantation style, since each bedroom is air-conditioned. According to Floyd, however, most guests forgo the AC: "It's so breezy," he says, "they prefer to open the windows and let the fans circulate the air inside."

Each room has a view of forest and sea. The floors are satin-smooth parquet. Art on the walls is understated: fruit, flowers, beach scenes and a distinctive Luise Kimme sketch of the head of a woman. An unusual series of Tobago characters has been created with the long bean pods of the flamboyant tree. Sculpted, painted and accessorised, the whimsical “pod people” include a bride and groom, belle dancer, mermaid, ladies in evening dress with headdresses.

Villa Petrus was designed by Brian Lewis to fulfil the elegance and style of the traditional plantation house, with a gentle interface between inside and out. Across the hills of Prospect Estate, Tobago encircles and entices you, a serene and serendipitous landscape. It is, as another visitor wrote: “a little piece of Paradise—beautiful house, wonderful views, unsurpassable island.” What more could you want? M
Above: All four-poster beds at Villa Petrus are draped in white muslin. This bedroom has a grand view, from Buccoo to Courland.

Right: The entire house is air-conditioned with the option to leave the windows wide open to the constant breeze.

Opposite page: Comfortable reading nook upstairs. Local art is used in all rooms.