

FEATURE
HOME

Laio-Back Living

Text:
Michele Geister

Photography:
Denis Valentine

*Front entrance with bridge
over fish pond*



Relaxed living room



Two-toned concrete staircase

The easy, laidback lifestyle of the Caribbean is part of the appeal that sees millions of visitors annually dropping in for just a taste or to recharge. Our incredible climate is a major facilitator to a wonderful, relaxed way of living that is especially enhanced by the right house. For residents who aren't afraid of creativity, a villa style home is the perfect escape from the rigors of the daily grind.

Jamaican architecture and interior design firm Portico Limited, with architects Elizabeth Newman and Doris Gross, has created an idyllic resort style enclave in the hills outside Kingston. St Michael's Garden is a small, gated community of custom homes, built on the site of the former Bellevue Great House that saw service as a pimento plantation, guest house, seminary and private home. Under the auspicious attention of the talented team, a wonderful grouping of unique dwellings has been coming to life.

A recent visit to one of the properties saw a liberal use of wood and water while also incorporating old cut stone walls from the ruins. Hurricane Gilbert in 1988



Back patio with fish and turtle pond



Rustic patio with original stone and brick wall



...a liberal use of
wood and water

*Kitchen with brick oven
and original stone wall*





sounded the death knell for the original building, which had a good run with many personifications since approximately 1765. A diversion from the typical concrete construction, popular in Jamaican housing schemes, makes use of traditional techniques alongside modern innovations that allow natural cooling and enhanced lighting.

Water plays a major role in Feng Sui—the ancient Chinese art of creating positive energy or Chi.

The owner who is a principal in the development, contributing his engineering expertise, explained how existing infrastructure from plantation days was ingeniously repurposed.

“The house was situated on the original concrete apron that the pimento was stored to be washed and dried. Therefore, many water tanks were already on the site. These are what have been transformed into functioning ponds with a few more included for balance.”

The result is the meditative gurgle of water features with bridges and billowing reeds at both front and rare side entrances. Two turtles are domiciled in the pond off the living area deck and are much more adventurous pets than would be expected. Koi free flow throughout both installations.

Part of the ease of this home is its comfortable, natural finishes. Acid-washed concrete floors gleam warmth from inside to out. Its gloss and shine suit the deck and even the stairs.

The use of natural materials also communicates this vibe. The original walls were incorporated into the kitchen area where a brick pizza oven is a delicious special feature as well as coordinating accent. It was relocated and rebuilt brick by brick, twice, to make it a replica of the original oven.

“The stone and brick work that made up the original kitchen walls was restored to keep the original look, and we decided to go with a concrete kitchen counter top to complement the original feel,” the homeowner added.

The adjacent patio is rustically accompanied by the rich, exposed original stone and brick.

The beamed ceilings, with pickled lumber in the majority of rooms, give the casual feel of a cottage, airy and spacious, thanks to vaulted ceilings. Sparse, yet, signature furnishings, simple window treatments or none, celebrate the beautiful building without distractions. The openness enhanced by shutter-style or full-pane windows that swing open to cool mountain air and lush greenery. As many of the original trees and plants as possible, were preserved.

The homeowner shares, “An effort was made to ensure no trees were removed in building the house, so all the original cedar, palm, mango and other trees are still in place. Some of them needed to be shaped to fit the house.”

There’s a tree cutting clause in the lot purchase agreements. Even the master bath with its finish of complementary sandy hued tiles is laid back with an open Balinese style shower and large trees just outside the window.

What a special place this resort style home is, with its retention of heritage and carefully nuanced design choices that effortlessly capture the organic “no problem” spirit of tropical living. **HHG**



Guest bedroom



Earthy master bathroom



Serene master bedroom