

Island Life

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Prime Properties, Caribbean Style



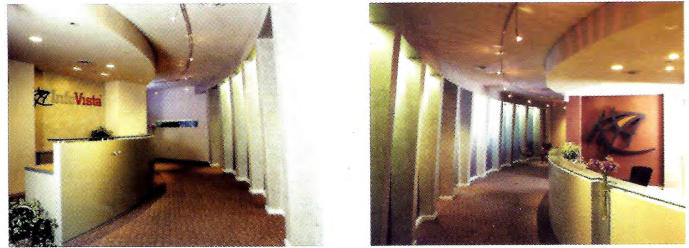
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GLOBAL REACH

A Caribbean architect infuses the cold interiors of the northlands with the warmth and colour of the tropics.

Text by: Sonja Dumas • Photography: Supplied

The sensual and spirited design of the Caribbean is by no means limited to those territories located in or near the Caribbean Sea. It finds its way into high-technology halls of innovation all over the world. The work of one such Caribbean designer can be found in Virginia, USA. Diane Taitt is an architect and interior designer working with GTM Architects in Maryland, USA who has designed several interiors with a contemporary Caribbean flair.

According to Taitt, who grew up in Trinidad and Tobago and went on to study architecture at Pratt University in New York, her Caribbean roots are never far from her aesthetic approach to her

Above and opposite page: Fluid curves and contours are central themes in many of Diane Taitt's designs.

work. "As a Caribbean architect in the US, I incorporate my island influence wherever appropriate; the vibrant colors of the islands, the materials native to the islands; the intricate and beautiful forms of our flora and fauna, the elements and forces of nature, such as water, that affect us both aesthetically and spiritually."

After working with several architecture firms in New York City, Taitt decided that she would have more creative licence in interior architecture. "It afforded me a greater opportunity to express my art; I've been designing commercial interiors ever since."

Many of her recent projects have been for cutting-edge technology firms which wanted to infuse what could be a cold, hard, technology-driven environment with a sense of

warmth and personality.

Her work for Earthlink, a fast-paced, dynamic, high-tech environment is one such space. Amidst a burst of tropical blues and sand tones, she designed a break room called the Bamboo Reef, full of Caribbean imagery. Canted metal poles at the entry to the Bamboo Reef symbolically give a hint of what is to come. Upon entry, the floor and crisp lighting capture the sea and sky of the Caribbean. The floor represents the Caribbean Sea — a myriad of interweaving cobalt blues and greens, while the bright spotlights evoke the brilliant tropical sky. The sinuous soffits echo the serpentine floor patterns and the playful color palette is reminiscent of many an island house, full of vibrant blues, lime greens and bright yellows. Mega-mural abstract images of water and waves wrap entire walls and real mature bamboo

NETWORK CAFE





poles define the dining spaces. This cheerful space transports burnt-out, overworked employees to an island paradise — even if just for their lunch break!

The internet café of the U.S. office of the Swedish telecommunications firm Telia is another example of Taitt's Caribbean imagination at work. Yet another upscale corporate office, the space reflects the energetic, forward-thinking culture of the company, which has a central concept of putting the employees first. The idea was to provide the employees with a central meeting area that would encourage employee interaction, get their creative juices flowing, and provide an entertainment area. Sweeping curves in the ceiling soffits and floor, and canted walls and special light-

Opposite page: The internet café of the Swedish telecommunications firm Telia is a central meeting area to encourage employee interaction.

Above: The Bamboo Reef, a break room, transports burnt-out, overworked employees to an island paradise.

ing respond to the bar as the central element, and set the ambience in playful and continual flux. The colours are reminiscent of bamboo, sun, golden saffron, melon and tobacco. The space reflects a funky yet sophisticated downtown Caribbean vibe.

Taitt believes that movement and light carve and shape a space. "I do believe that sensuality permeates the Caribbean. It is visible in the food we eat, the exotic drinks that we have created. The way an island woman moves her hips as she walks, in harmony with the earth, the steel drums and soca music, our landscapes. Fluid curves and contours are a central theme used in many of my designs as a symbolic connection to the sensual, sexy and sometimes unexplainable energy of the island life."

The intricate spiral of a seashell was the sublime inspiration for Infovista, a French internet marketing firm also based in Virginia. The organic spiral draws people into the space, seducing them with the rhythmic movement as the

light dances across the translucent curved walls that are imbedded with iridescent fabric. The evenly spaced canted pilasters punctuate the space, and are symbolically reminiscent of the inner walls of the seashell. The walls are a glazed hand-rubbed texture; the result - a delicate tri-colour finish with the appeal of the inside of the shell. The soft colour palette adds to the ambience of sands and seashells. The result is an environment that has the gently kinetic as well as calming effect of a day at the beach near sunset.

Taitt also plans to design and run a Caribbean restaurant in Washington, D.C. in the near future. With such a successful track record of tropical design, the space promises to be inventive and state-of-the-art Caribbean. In general, her work augurs well for the success of a contemporary Caribbean design approach for business spaces in the international environment. 