

St. Regis Resort, set on a motu, or islet, on Bora-Bora's coral reef, was created as "a kind of village," says the architect, Pierre Lacombe. Villas, secluded by palm groves, wind along the beaches. On its own island in the lagoon is the Royal Estate, a 13,000-square-foot villa.



HOTELS

St. Regis Resort, Bora Bora

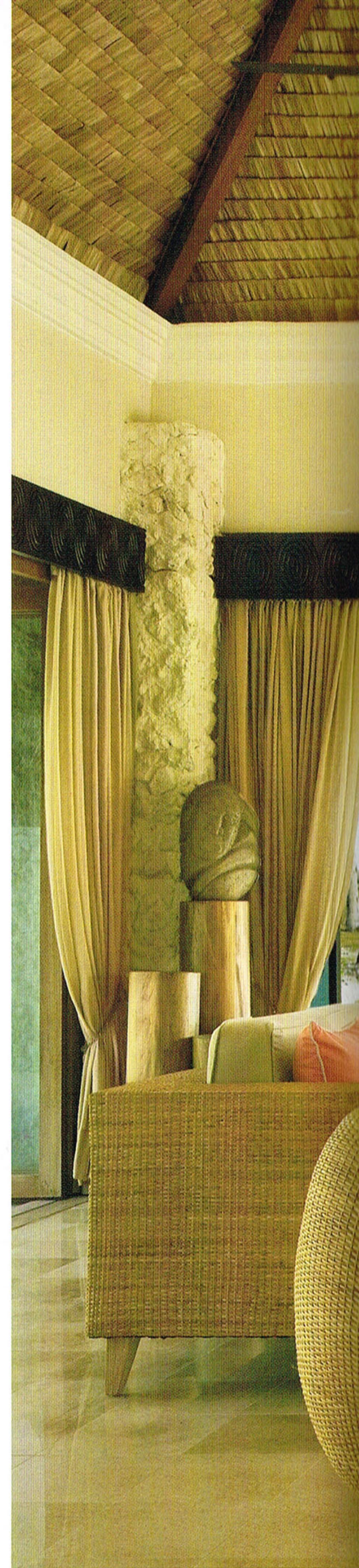
IN FRENCH POLYNESIA, A LUXURIOUS
TAKE ON TAHITIAN TRADITION





The resort feels “modest in scale, despite the size,” says Lacombe. **ABOVE:** The main living room of the Royal Estate reflects the overall architectural style: thatch roofs, open walls and simple, elegant décor. “Every room is a villa; even the little ones are rather big.”

RIGHT: Marble floors and high rafters lend a feeling of grandeur to a corridor in the Royal Estate. **FAR RIGHT:** In the main living room, as throughout, “the furniture has a tropical sense—there’s dark hardwood and rattan—but the line is modern,” says the interior designer, Meriem Hall. “This is really the essence of the hotel—a local connection filtered through a modern sensibility.”



Imagine being given the assignment of designing a luxury hotel for one of the planet’s most spectacular islands. The owner expects you to be deeply respectful of the natural environment while improving on the 44-acre site, which needs to be altered and groomed before construction. There are to be 100 villas, many over water and others on the beach. They must fit in with the French

Polynesian tradition without seeming monotonous, kitschy or expected. There will be a spa, an ambitious over-water restaurant with food supervised by Jean-Georges Vongerichten, a sushi bar and a Mediterranean grill. The project includes multiple swimming pools, a helicopter pad and the integration of 3,000 coconut palms into a landscape that should appear relaxed and indigenous. And be sure not to forget

the 13,000-square-foot Royal Estate—no mere suite—standing apart in its own secluded cove.

It is hardly surprising to learn that architect Pierre Lacombe spent an entire year planning what was to become the St. Regis resort on Bora-Bora for its owner, Louis Wane. “The project seized my life entirely,” he explains. “And how could it not? We moved earth and water—



literally—to create a *boa*, a self-replenishing saltwater inlet. We reshaped beaches. Following the client's wishes, we sought to create an environment that was serene, convivial and intimate, more like a village than a hotel. And then there was my own goal: to try to convey, to the visitor, a sense of the actual culture and life of Polynesia. Nothing, to me, is sadder than traveling thousands of miles to an exotic

resort and coming away from the experience without a sense of what is authentic about the place.”

Conveying a sense of the authentic in the highly protected environment of a luxury hotel is seldom easy, but Lacombe and his collaborator, architect and interior designer Meriem Hall, drew on the vocabulary that comes most naturally to them: volumes, materials, color,

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light and views. They have designed both a place and a relationship to it.

Lacombe, for his part, attuned his structures to the setting by nestling the beachside villas in thick verdure and spacing them out so that they could breathe. For the over-water villas, where obviously trees cannot create a shielding division, he concentrated on imparting a feeling of space within. He left the ceilings open to reveal the roof pitch, devised sliding doors and kept materials simple, consistent and natural: pandanus to line the ceilings, Asian hardwood (mostly *merbau*) for the floors and durable granite in the baths.

Granite seems to have been one of the few concessions to the villas' expected commercial use; they otherwise bring an atmosphere of relaxed elegance and almost residential serenity—providing, that is, your residence hovers over a bewitching turquoise lagoon and looks out on mystical Mount Otemanu.

When it came to envisioning the interiors, Meriem Hall was pleased to discover that the owner shared her interest in letting the rooms tell a story. A former set designer, Hall likes to coax narratives out of places. “Rooms are just rooms until you imagine a life for them,” she says. “This is particularly true of hotels.” The story Hall wanted to tell here is about the path of early visitors, who came to the South Pacific on liners, were met by Polynesians in their canoes and were guided into a piece of unmistakable paradise.

“All of this has to be subtly done, mind you,” she points out. “There’s always a danger of turning a place like this into a theme park. That we wanted to avoid at all costs. My approach was to stay as connected to the setting as possible: You’re in a remarkable lagoon in the South Pacific. There is nowhere in the world that looks like this. I wanted the interiors to be mindful of where they were, in every detail.”

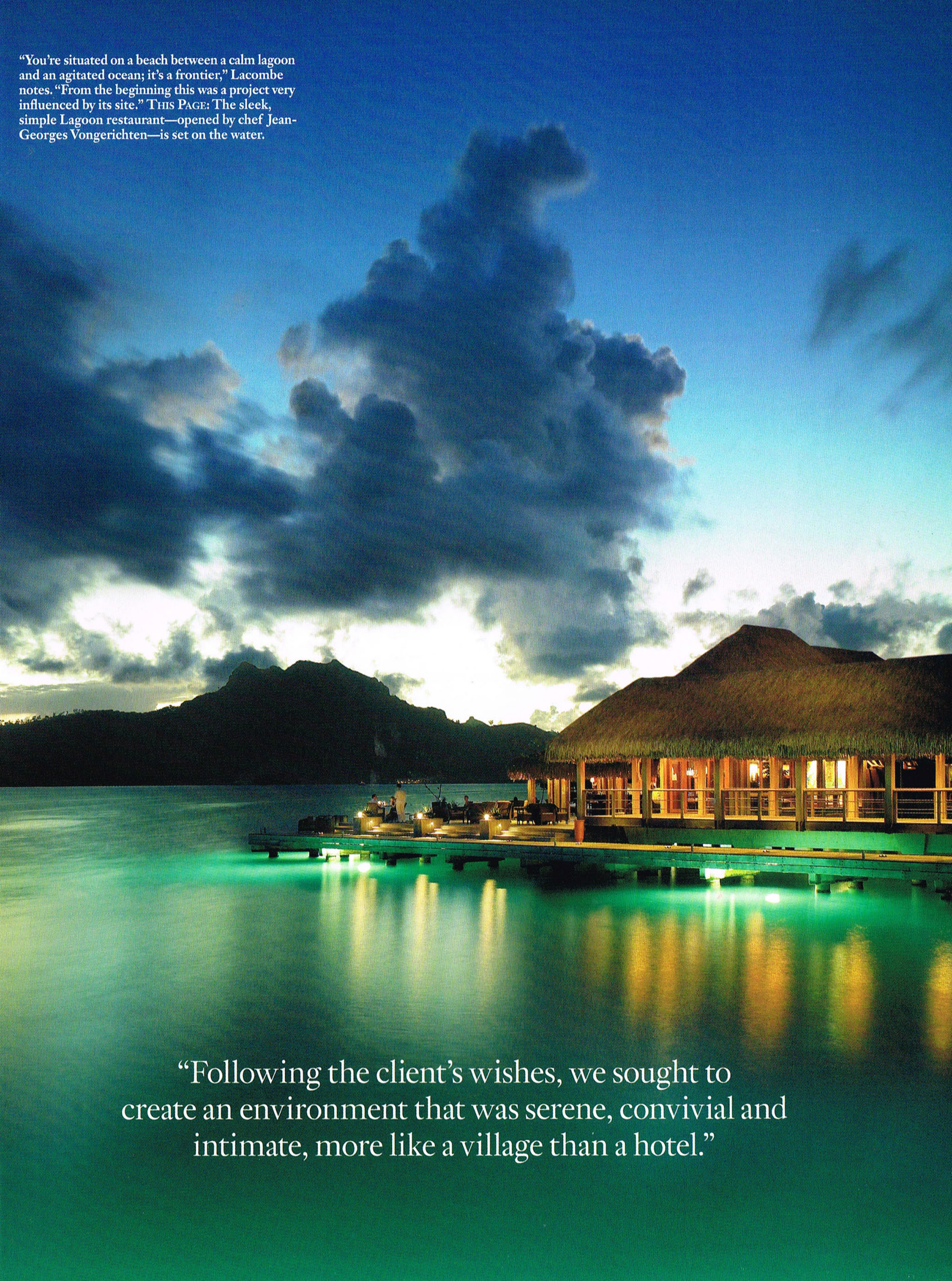
Hall’s work began where Lacombe’s left off. She took his “beautifully formed” rooms and gave them texture, nuance, detail. She also infused them with a touch of the feminine. His clean wood boxes were softened with rugs, draperies, upholstery.

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ABOVE LEFT: A bedroom looks out to the water through gardens landscaped by Lulu Wane. To establish a French Polynesian feel, Hall covered the walls in a woven rattan “like raffia.” She had everything manufactured in Southeast Asia, then shipped to Tahiti, “where there’s no wood to work with.” Scalamandré bedcovering print. **LEFT:** The Royal Estate’s private swimming pool.

“You’re situated on a beach between a calm lagoon and an agitated ocean; it’s a frontier,” Lacombe notes. “From the beginning this was a project very influenced by its site.” THIS PAGE: The sleek, simple Lagoon restaurant—opened by chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten—is set on the water.



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