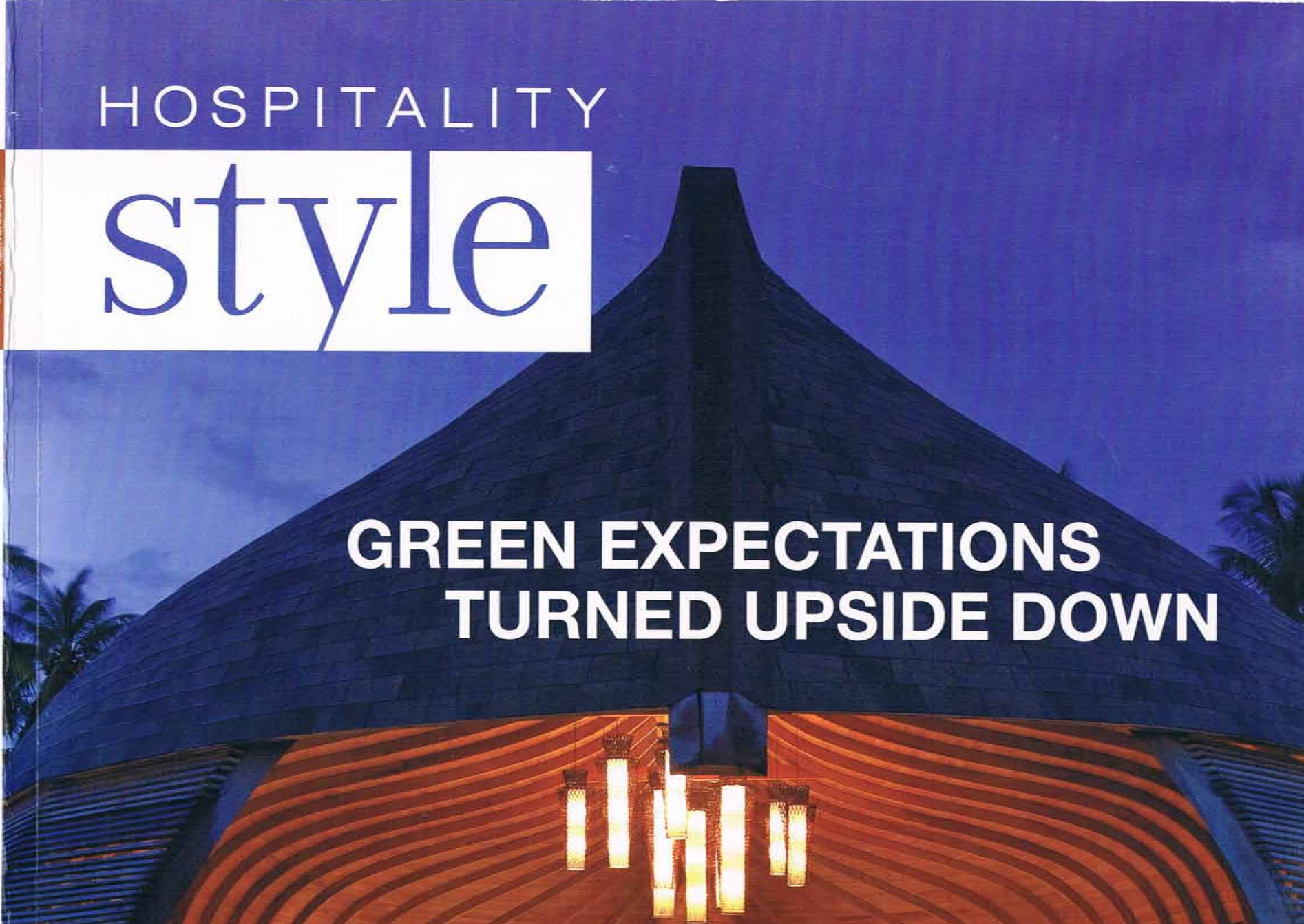
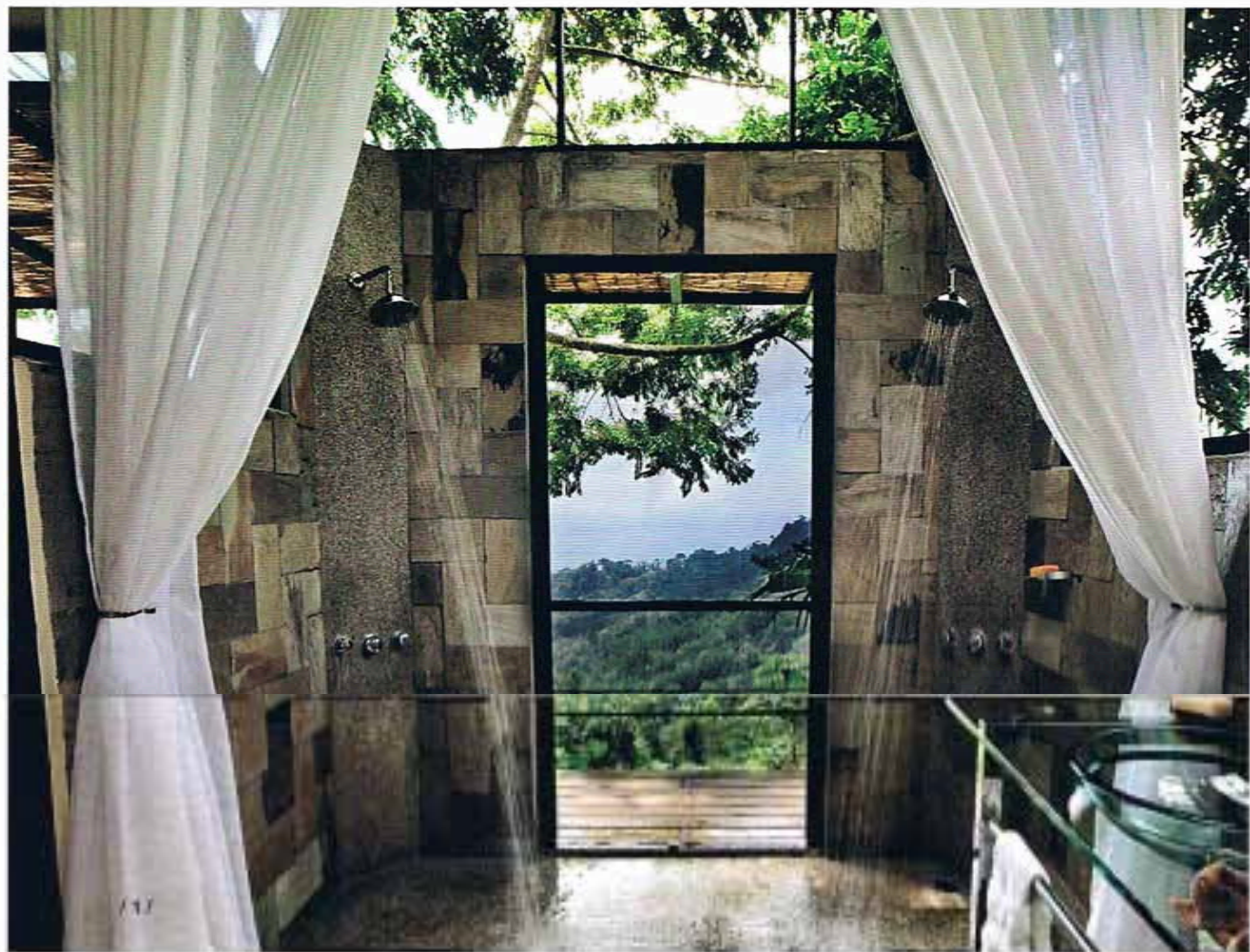


HOSPITALITY

style

**GREEN EXPECTATIONS
TURNED UPSIDE DOWN**





PARADISE PRESERVED

Rancho Pacifico's owners and "crows of 10 guys with hand tools and a lot of energy" join forces with nature to create a symbiotic Costa Rican resort. BY MARY SCOVAK, EDITOR





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// Guests looking through one of Rancho Pacifi-
ca's "windowless windows" at 50 lush acres and the
ocean beyond may find it hard to believe this serene
open enclave was conceived from outrage. But before
luxe villas invited world travelers to sleep
the trees—literally—or use its spa without walls,
ere was the consternation: Costa Rican native Silvia
mendez-Krauss and her husband, Garrison Krauss,
n as "thousands of pristine acres fell into the hands
yvestor investors hungry to cash in" on the nation's
velopment push.

"Their lack of experience, questionable morality
d unpassionable greed, coupled with the country's
ck of enforcement [regarding environmental pro-
tection during construction] led to the clear-cutting
many needless tracts of rainforest throughout the
untry," says Jimenez-Krauss.

It wasn't development per se that incensed the
users; it was the environmental erosion they saw as
e byproduct of traditional architecture, design and

WHAT MAKES THIS SMALL PROJECT STAND OUT IN A GROWING WORLDSCAPE OF GREEN COMPETITORS IS THE INTENSITY OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITMENT IN ITS DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION.

construction methods. So, in 2003, they acquired land
along Costa Rica's less-developed southern Pacific
coast and began exploring ways to create a true five-
star resort in the jungle that would minimize the human
footprint and safeguard as much green space as
possible in perpetuity.

What makes this small project stand out in a
growing worldscape of green competitors is the inten-
sity of the environmental commitment in its design and
construction. "The first decision was to limit the cutting
of trees," says Jimenez-Krauss. That's pretty much
eco-friendliness as usual. But the Krauses took that a
step further. They minimized the need to clear ground

11 / Natural light
buries the rich,
saturated tones
of the stone program
that defines the
resort's bones.

12 / A half-wall
creates a sense
of privacy for the
bath area without
interupting the
openness of the
space plan.



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for the central public areas and villas by integrating the lobby, White's, full restaurant and guest quarters into the existing forest.

Most of the excavation, including that for the pool, was done by hand to reduce the usage of heavy machinery "to practically zero" and prevent the environmental havoc left in its wake. Work crews were kept to just 10 people to limit damage from foot traffic. Before any dirt was shoveled, the Krauses considered the possible run-off patterns. "We didn't want anything that would flow down from the site and possibly limit the water supply in the village below," adds Krause.

Rather than clustering the five villas around the core of the complex, the Krauses scouted out the surrounding jungle for locations that would afford desirable sites within the trees and adequate privacy for guests. "We had to go deep into the jungle for several of the treehouse villas. So we built an extensive network of boardwalks to reach them without disturbing nature—again with much of the work done by hand," says Jimenez-Krause.

Designed by Krause, each of the villas sits on a platform customized to the growth pattern of the trees. The two most recently opened treehouses sit on sites

30 ft. above the ground. "They're probably the only treehouses in the world with two Swiss showers and hi-and-here glass seats," says the co-owner/designer.

Everything is about the vista, from the positioning of sinks and showers with mountain views from every angle to private decks with Jacuzzis. French doors were used wherever possible to open up the villas to the gardens and the jungle. But when compromise was required between editing the aesthetic or trimming the trees, it was the design that had to give.

Sourcing materials durable enough to work in this challenging climate yet convey five-star quality "caused a lot of sleepless nights," Krause says. "Natural local wood was out of the question," he points out. "And farm-raised wood was in short supply. So we used wood beams purchased from a local tree farm for a few strategic applications and relied primarily on steel and concrete." To give these rustic components a luxe edge, workers sealed the concrete with natural stucco or clad it with natural stone brought in from around Costa Rica and Latin America. Metal siding, either

painted or naturally oxidized, underscores the cool, contemporary style. Organic paints in subtle, earthy colors provide a natural but contemporary link to the surroundings. "We definitely didn't want bright tropical colors," he adds.

"We also learned to use bamboo, from cut pieces for lining to bamboo curtains and even ceilings," says Jimenez-Krause. "It's great because it works even in our wet environment." So do the eco-friendly plastic roofing laminates. "They can hold up in the humidity while effectively blocking bright, hot sunlight," she says.

For the interior design elements, the Krauses sought out local craftspeople, then trained them to execute pieces with a warm, authentic, modern feel. And, yes, there was a learning curve. "They were good at what they do but had limited design expertise," says Jimenez-Krause. "We guided them through an educational process that helped them raise the level of workmanship while learning about design. They really stepped up to the challenge. Their workmanship gave

157 Green doesn't have to mean rustic. As evidence, the cool, contemporary lines of the whitewashed stone, vaulting and concrete.

158 Overhangs shelter the private balconies, creating additional living space in a shaded haven.

159 Architectural elements such as this angled seat double as storage elements, thanks to the padding of the stone cladding.





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 The floorplans and images weren't too far off from the property's real-world results.

us the freedom to create our own doors and furniture.”

But freedom came at a price. It took five years to build the five suites and two villas, and more than an acre of money (not initially expected [the owner did not disclose the budget]). “Staying on time and budget is not easy in Latin America. We didn’t manage to do either. But, we allowed for more time and cost overruns—which is the end aligned our expectations with reality,” says Jimenez-Krause.

“The most ‘out there’ aspect of the design is the concept,” she adds. The pioneering effort behind the Small Luxury Hotel of the World resort has translated to a variety of green certifications including a five-eco-label rating from ecogreen.org, coverage in international travel magazines such as *Travel + Leisure’s*

Hotels issue, and travel and design award nominations including four consecutive annual World Travel Award nominations for Latin America’s Leading Green Hotel and *Playboy’s* “Sexiest Hotel in Costa Rica.” More importantly for the owners’ point of view, it has demonstrated that a luxury resort can be both chic and modern and still close to nature. “It was and is a labor of love,” says Jimenez-Krause. **ES**