

Ardisia 300-69A submitted by Renee Lau

Here are some details that I can share about our 5 year adventure building Ardisia:

While visiting the island in May/June of 2011, to escape Illinois and get a break from the gut rehab of our Victorian home north of Chicago (we really like a good project!) we decided to visit St. John (second time on the island) with our two children who were 4 and 2 at the time.

Garrick had been looking at St. John properties as a way to escape the winter blues so he was aware of what was for sale before we arrived. We set up a meeting with Diana Beam who drove us all around the island as we looked at a variety of properties. She showed us several villas as well as the undeveloped plot that we eventually purchased (300-69A Estate Chocolate Hole/Cruz Bay from Christie O'Neil).

To our knowledge the plot had never been developed, unless you know otherwise?

Needless to say it was completely overgrown and in order to see the land Garrick had to hold onto a rope which had been staked into the ground at the roadway with a large railroad spike and shimmy down the side of the hill to walk the property. (Christie O'Neill takes credit for this)

After attempting this, he came back to the car with a ripped shirt and brambles stuck all over his clothes.

Our second attempt to view the property involved me using a water tricycle that I rented from the Westin Water Sports department (I don't even think they have these anymore). I was able to "ride/paddle" over to the shore and snap some pictures with our *digital camera* but still couldn't see much because of the dense foliage. I was also three months pregnant with our third child while I accomplished this daring feat!

After looking at everything, I was charmed by the villa "Splash" which has since been renamed, but Garrick liked the undeveloped land. So...we compromised and decided to purchase the plot of land.

In the end, we thought it would be a great investment, was a low risk opportunity, and worst case scenario, we could always resell the land if we decided not to develop it. What could go wrong if we did decide to build? Little did we know what building would entail!

After sitting on the land we decided to take the plunge to build in 2012. Springline Architects on St. Thomas and Morgante Wilson Architects from Evanston, Illinois, (our neighbors and friends) were able to work out an agreement and so our project began...

Jonathan Duran was our builder and the project was somewhat completed in 2016, 4 years and two children later! We have many fun and frustrating stories during the four years of construction and got to stay in several villas while visiting the island during the "construction years", including Hakuna Matata (stunning), Veridian Gardens (since demolished, rebuilt and renamed) and Villa Marbella.

It was quite a process but the end result was totally worth it!

And about the villa name...after reading every book I could find about the Caribbean and Virgin Islands, as well as several horticultural books about local flora and fauna, I narrowed the list down to two names of indigenous plants that still grown on the island: Tillandsia and Ardisia. I liked Tillandsia but Garrick liked Ardisia, so we compromised and went with Ardisia!