

# Oil Nut Bay

by David Blacklock

The far east end of Virgin Gorda is terra incognita for most of us. If we've been out that way at all, it's the Bitter End that comes to mind. A few of us might have ventured over to Biras Creek for dinner but beyond that, nothing. Charter yachts sometimes venture into Deep Cove or the nether reaches of Eustatia Sound, but few bareboats wander that way, leaving the wild headlands of Oil Nut Bay pretty much deserted.

**On a recent weekday, I ferried up to North Sound and was met at the dock and directed to a monster inflatable runabout—30 feet of grunt—whose skipper was David V Johnson, the developer of Oil Nut Bay and the owner of the Biras Creek Resort. Emblazoned on the boat's inflatable tubes was the seal of the North Sound Yacht Club, a new superyacht-capable marina Johnson is to develop in the North Sound, near the Fat Virgin Cafe.**

Pushing the twin throttles forward, David Johnson drove us out through the cut by Siba Rock and through the newly buoyed channel that leads to the eastern end of Eustatia Sound—the site of Johnson's newest development project at Oil Nut Bay. He's not one to dawdle; we roared our way out into the sound, past Deep Cove and further to where the signs of construction were clear to see. A crew was hard at it finishing off what is to become the Arrival Dock. Behind it, a newly manicured beach awaits the

barge-loads of Barbuda sand which will transform it into an idealized form of Caribbean shoreline.

Above us the ridges and hillsides filtered the sea breeze. Soon the ridges will be the site of new homes as the development moves towards fruition. According to Johnson, there will be "temporary desalination and power hooked up within 30 days and then we can begin bringing in landscaping. By the time homes get built and there's a full opening will be about two years from now."

An award-winning developer for his environmentally sensitive projects, Johnson and his Victor International Corporation have been active largely in Michigan, USA, where his luxury community projects have earned him such accolades as "Environmentalist of the Year" by the Michigan

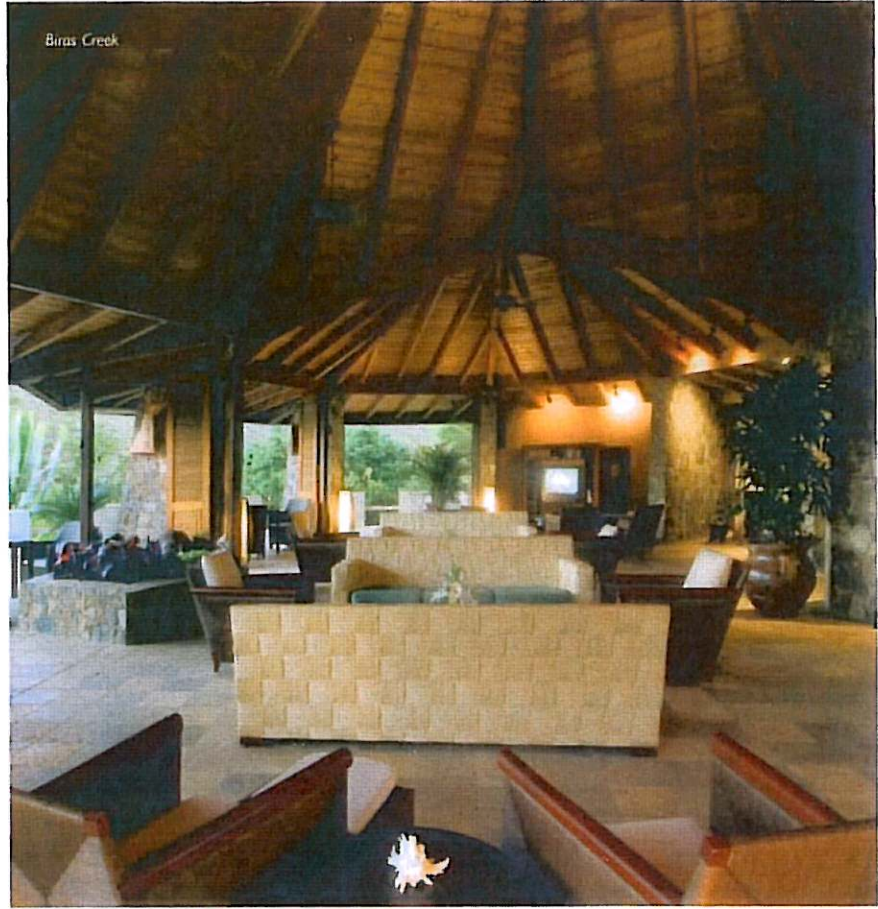
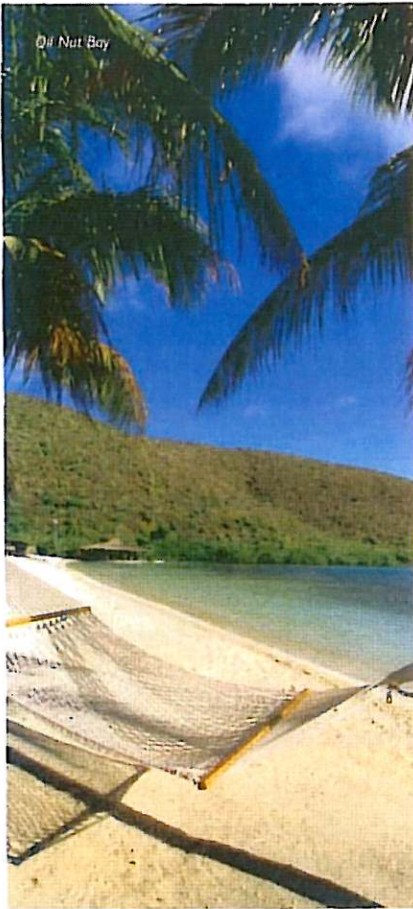
Chamber of Commerce and the International Award for Excellence given by the Urban Land Institute. Donald Trump he is not, though he may lose a few merit points for that Barbuda sand.

An energetic, focused individual with a closely trimmed beard, Johnson bears a resemblance to Larry

Ellison, the perennial America's Cup challenger. Johnson suffered a broken neck some years ago and walks with the

## *A crew was hard at it finishing off what is to become the Arrival Dock*

help of a cane. This impediment has done nothing to temper his tendencies towards high-speed travel; it seems. Having abandoned our rocking runabout for an all-terrain 4-seater, Johnson roared off up and down trails and bounced over rocks and gulleys as we held on to the roll bars for support. Clearly familiar with every inch of his 300-acre dreamscape, Johnson pointed out sightlines and vistas which will soon be



the exclusive province of the fortunate owners of the homes to be built here. A total of 88 homes will be built throughout the 300 acres, on sites ranging from one acre to ten acres.

Among the plans for the community, there will be a Nature Centre which Johnson describes as a "casual interactive place with a wildlife biologist and a marine biologist. We'll bring in guest speakers, we'll have reciprocal programmes with

local schools in the summer time to make them part of what we're doing"

Speaking of his overall approach to business, Johnson told me "I broke my neck in 1978 and I learned there's more to it—God, money and friends are in perspective. It's our way of being able to participate in the community and give back," he yelled as we bounced our way down a rocky road. "We have a strategic alliance with the government, a strategic alliance with our owners, and we work together to have an overall harmony in the community. We're all in it together."

"My goal was to deliver a community that the people of the BVI are proud of, that will benefit them

as a global brand and that provides construction jobs and service jobs but also provides a sense of pride that we've done this together and we've accomplished something that will last for the next hundred years," Johnson said. "Just as Little Dix Bay was an original world-renowned brand and which

is still a great place, but it's forty years old, I've been an environmentalist for thirty years—we're the largest per-capita users of electric

vehicles in Bay Harbor (Mich) and that's what we're going to have here. We've worked for three years to perfect the electric vehicle here and we're going to do all kinds of things with solar and wind [energy generation] that will allow us to work from a carbon-neutral standpoint."

When reminded that his environmental stance closely resembled that of his neighbour Sir Richard Branson, Johnson praised Sir Richard's work of branding the BVI and his Necker Island complex. "We have the ability to globally brand North Sound as the environmental

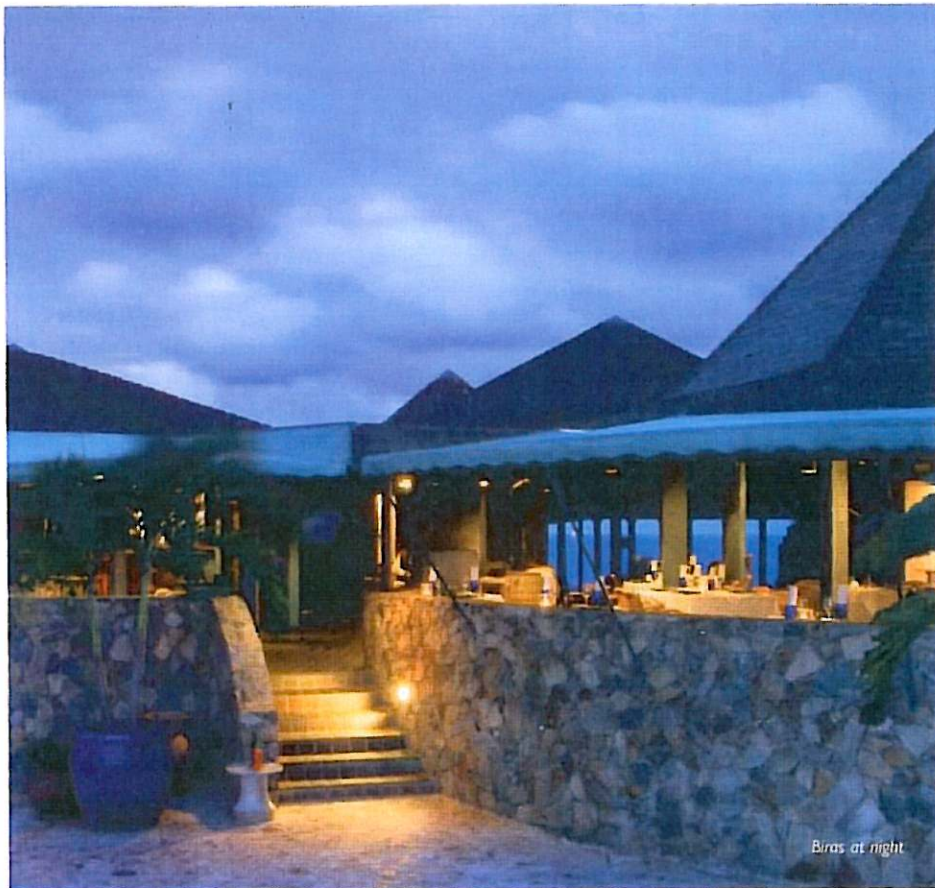
*"We have the ability to globally brand North Sound as the environmental jewel of the Caribbean. . ."*

*. . . our customer wants the environmental chic . . .*

jewel of the Caribbean—we're thrilled he's our neighbour and we have the same goals." Laughing, he continued "We're even going to have a flamingo exchange programme with him!"

"We've learned from our guests at Bras who've been coming back for ten or fifteen years that what keeps them coming back, that makes them want to come to Bras rather than say the Four Seasons in Nevis—our customer wants the environmental chic, a certain casualness that they feel that they're a part of nature—riding their bikes, hiking, enjoying that sense of adventure. They may be 35 years old, they may be 65 years old, but it's a place they're going to come and bring their children, bring the grandchildren and come year after year and get to know the people that work in the hotel on a personal basis and look forward to seeing them. You know, fifty per cent of our team at Bras has been here more than ten years."

Oil Nut Bay is to be developed debt-free. While this self-financing gives the developer freedom, others may lack, the current financial crises formed the backdrop to our conversations. When asked about the economic environment, Johnson told me, "It's very serious. I believe that we came within hours of a global financial




Biras at night

collapse. Globalisation used to be just a buzz word 15 years ago, but today you're seeing governments, industry and banking work together globally. The first round was to prop the banks up to keep them from failing. The next round is to make them create liquidity and put money back out into the marketplace because right now we're dealing with a kind of frozen environment."

"In today's world," he continued, "we're really in the fear-management business. So we help people to have the confidence and to move forward. We still have purchasers who have cash and are willing to say this is a long-term commitment and see the value in it—if I had 500 or a thousand units here I'd probably be ready to slit my wrists!"

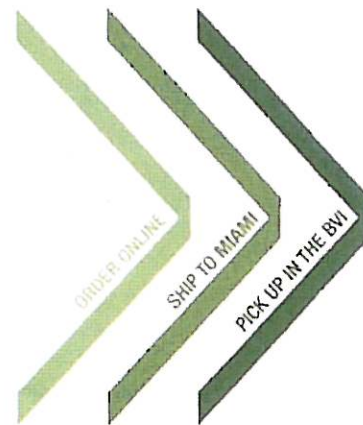
With wrists intact and confidence high, Johnson summed up by saying, "You know it takes more than beautiful houses, it takes more than beautiful elements, it takes (the owners) wanting to be there, their kids wanting to be there—for the kids to say 'I want to go back, I want to go back!'"

"Oil Nut Bay is a new paradigm in hotels," Johnson said. "We've shifted the enterprise value to benefit the owners. They get 65% of the rental income and we keep 35% for managing and operating it. The guests that come

participate in all the facilities, all the buildings. We want a certain heat and energy—that way the people working in the restaurants will do better—they feel better about what they're doing, they make more money, the buildings are being used and the whole place is alive. That's what we meant by heat and energy." 



Since our visit to Oil Nut Bay we are informed that there have been a couple new developments – the arrival dock is built and the Beach Club is under construction now, according to PR person Kristin Rust. She sent us this picture of the arrival dock.



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