

JAMAICA

'MAICAN SPACES

Kathryn Pinto May melds Big Apple sensibility with rustic island charm

BY ELIZABETH HANLEY PHOTOS BY PETER FERGUSON

Rick's Cafe in Negril is only slightly less famous than that other Rick's, the one in Casablanca. For 50 years, tourists and locals alike have gathered at the Jamaican Rick's to celebrate glorious sunsets, dance reggae, drink rum and sometimes, inspired by all three, dive off the bar's sheer rock walls into the sea. For decades no one could comprehend how a structure that jutted so perilously over the water survived so many hurricanes. Wondering ceased, however, when in 2004 Hurricane Ivan came ashore, destroying Rick's.

Even before the hurricane, though, Rick's had become a mess, done in by its own popularity. The place was claustrophobic and disorderly. Kitchen access, as well as the main entry, cut directly through the stage and dance floor, while colors and furniture were left in serious disagreement from years of eclectic additions. Steve Ellman, Rick's owner, thought such visual chaos might act as part of the bar's Caribbean charm, but Kathryn Pinto May begged to differ.

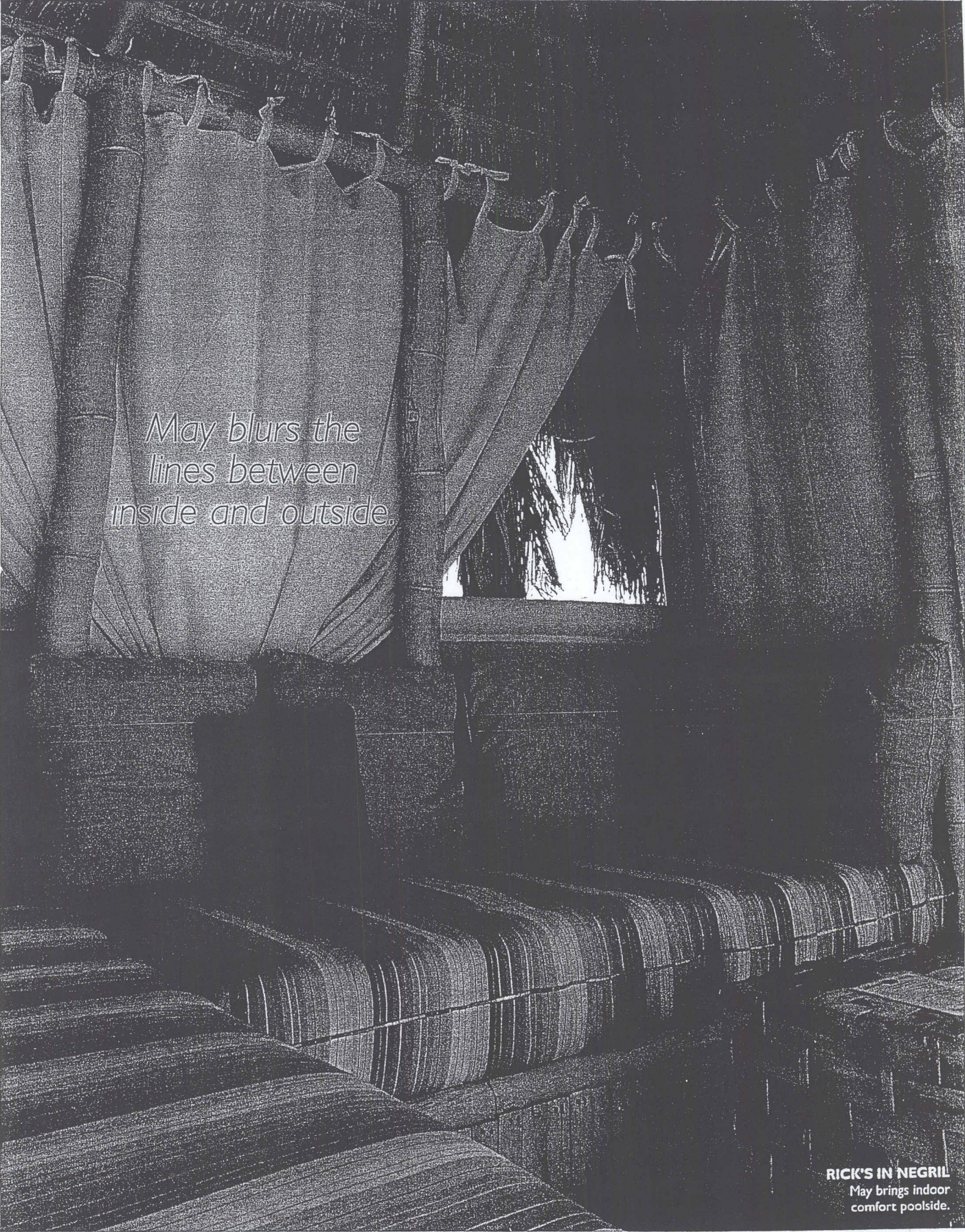
May was born and raised in Jamaica but studied design at the Pratt Institute in New York. She later cut her teeth working for Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren. In 1992, with big-city lessons under her arm, May returned to Jamaica with her husband, Frank May, and their newborn son, Spencer. Her husband went into business making hand-forged decorative ironwork, while she began to wrestle with questions of identity and style all over Jamaica.

"I probably would not have come back home if it weren't for my son," she said. Her daughter, Savannah, arrived in 1995, reassuring her that she had made the right decision. May had promised herself that when she had children, they would be, as she had been, "able to run a little wild within a family large as a clan." And run they do, all over the large front yard of the family's 1970s seaside ranch in Montego Bay.

As with many of her projects, May set about blurring the divide between the inside and outside of her home. Every wall is a "dirty" shade of lime green and furnishings are largely a family affair. "We've sprinkled the house with pieces we have inherited—ironwork from Frank and ceramics from my brother, the artist David Pinto," she said. Their home sits near Doctor's Cave Beach, which May's great-great-grandfather, Dr. Alexander James McCatty, gave to the town in 1906.

With local clients keeping her busy, May set about creating interiors that engaged seamlessly with the surrounding terrain—





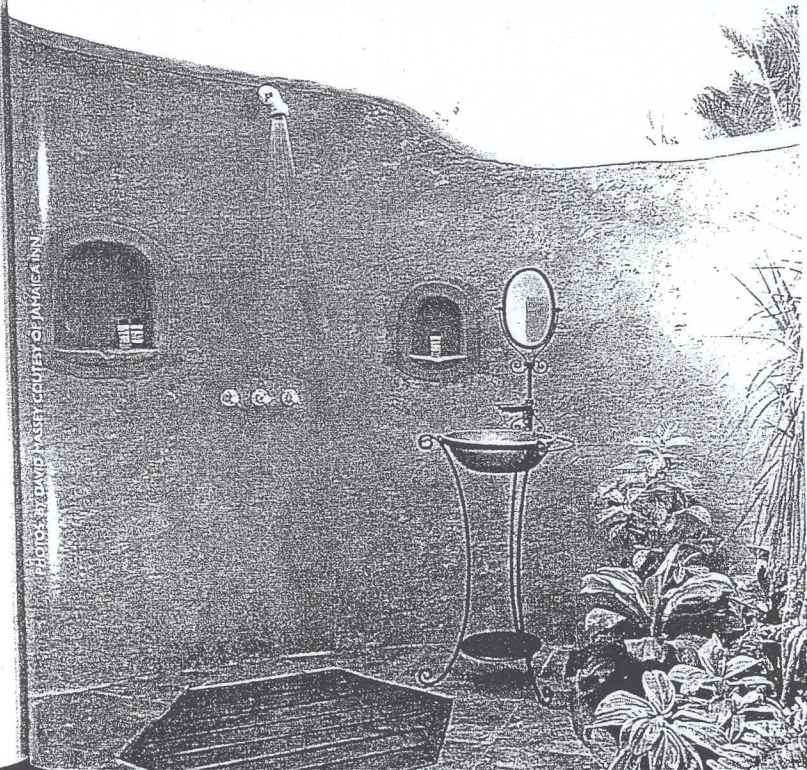
*May blurs the
lines between
inside and outside.*

RICK'S IN NEGRIL
May brings indoor
comfort poolside.

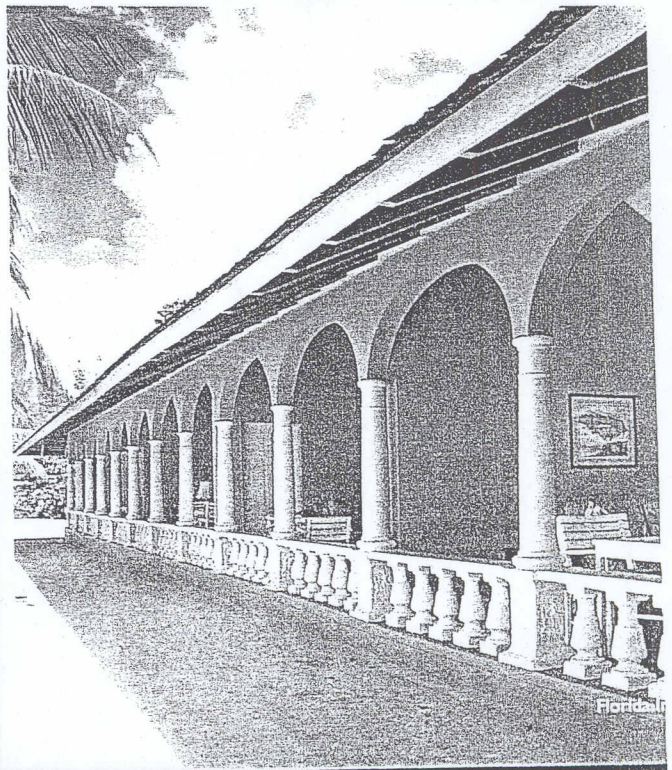


'I had a dream and Kathryn was able to realize it.'

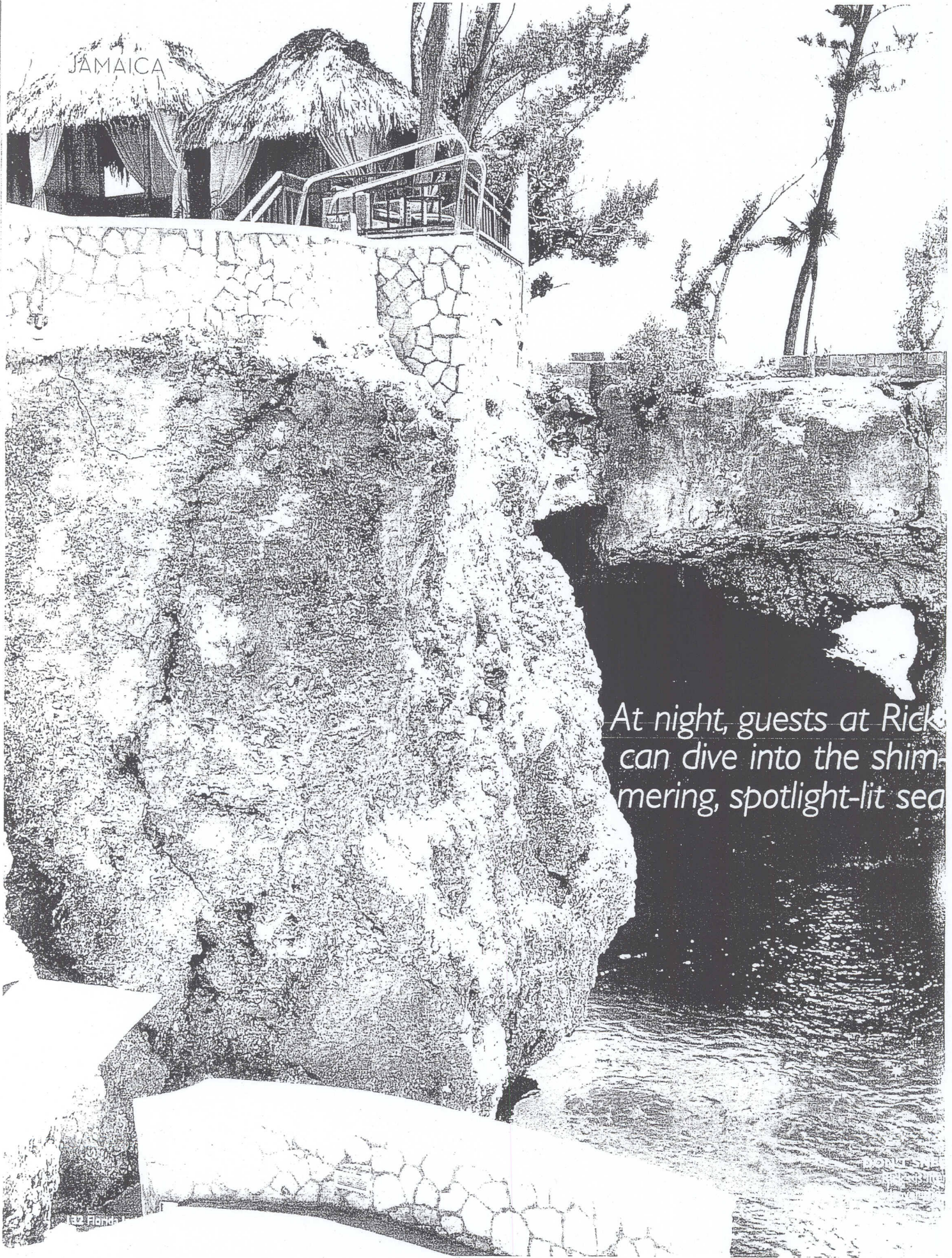
JAM
 One of May's cottages; below signature lime arches; below right archways on gu



PHOTOS BY DAVID MASEY, COURTESY OF JAMAICA INN



Florida Inn



JAMAICA

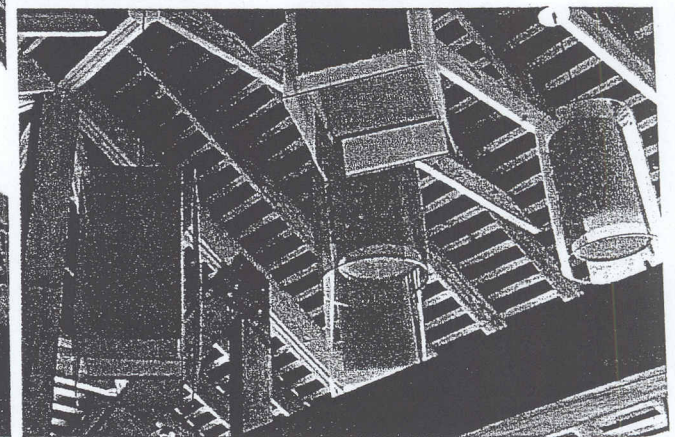
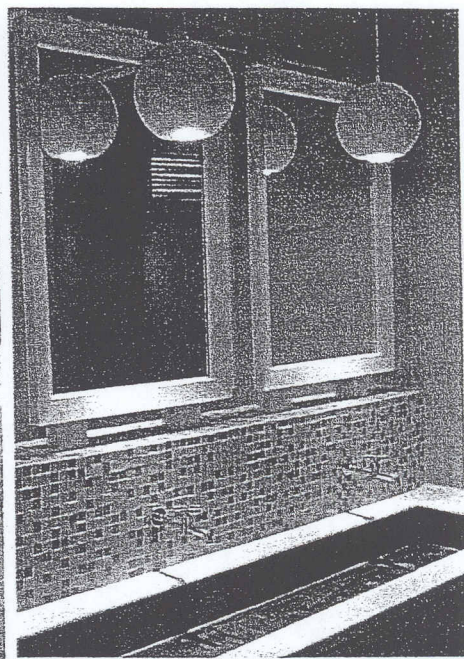
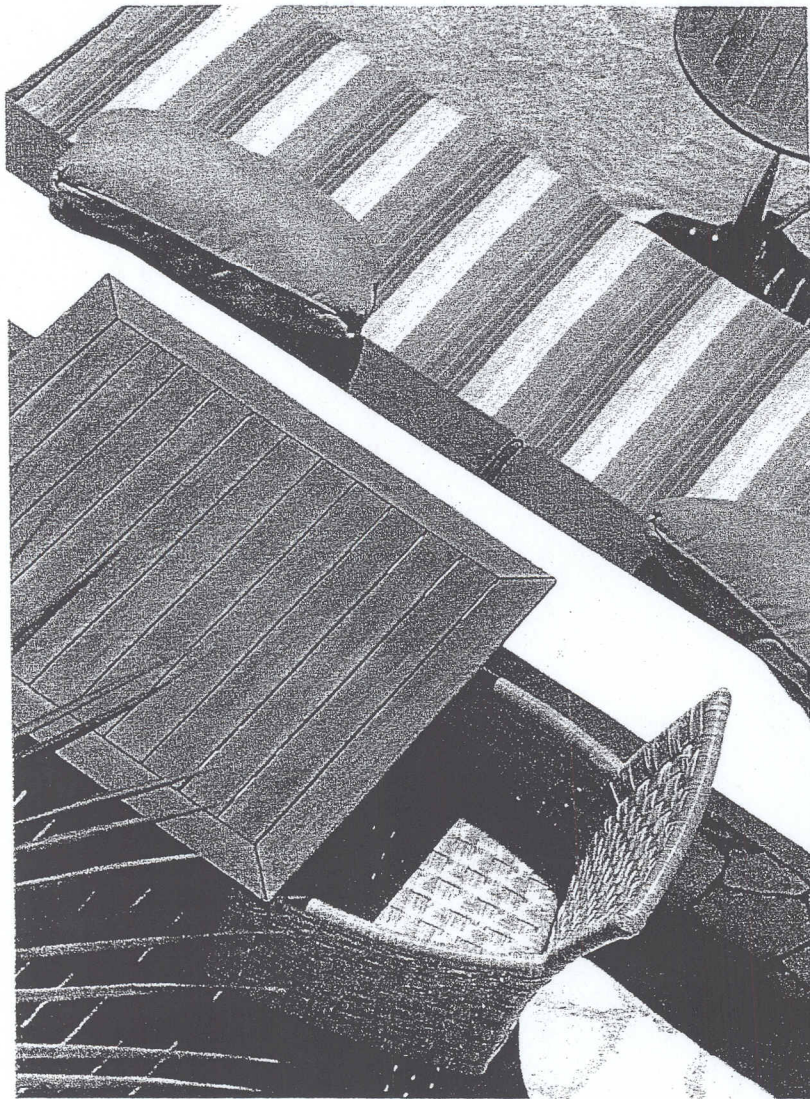
At night, guests at Rick's
can dive into the shimmering, spotlight-lit sea

Don't miss
the
view

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MODERN ELEGANCE

Clockwise from r left, Cool minimal in the bathroom; Rick's; red Chinese lanterns hang over bar from the exposed beam ceiling; wick wood and wild colors—showing off flair for juxtaposition



spaces locals considered home and tourists mistook for paradise. Most recently, May was hired to design the new Rick's, which reopened this summer. The now two-story space is infused with Big Apple minimalist elegance, despite May's claim that there is a "real fear of chic in the Caribbean." Upstairs she exposed the dark wood beams of the cathedral ceiling and painted the inner walls various tones of rust, yellow and muted gold. Lighting comes mainly from red Chinese lanterns that play against dark, wood fans. Some of the upstairs tables are shellacked tree trunks more than three feet wide. The space has no outer walls, only terraces; birds and guests alike come and go as they please.

"I love 'dirty' colors," May said, referring to the rust and yellow paints found in Rick's and the lime green used in her home. "Using dirty colors is the only way I've found to work in Jamaica. We're already saturated in color." Observing the nearby hibiscus flowers, she said, "How can anybody possibly top that color? If you try, it doesn't work. You have to play against it."

Stretching halfway across the main room at Rick's is what appears to be a granite bar; it's actually polished concrete. "This used to be an above-ground pool," she said, referring to the 1970s when the club was the private home of Jamaica's first Governor General. May's bar continues the dirty rust tones, and has light and dark wood set in a geometric pattern that she repeats on the ceiling. The floor is a mix of classic, floral Cuban tile and panels of simple concrete inlaid with

hardwood. Over toward the dance floor and open decks, the color scheme shifts to dirty royal blue and silver.

The evening light hitting the blue makes Rick's feel moonstruck. As the light changes, once-subtle details, patterns and tones come into focus. A limestone banquette looks like it's made of silk, and spotlights hitting the diving areas make them shimmer. May also added a pool to the new Rick's but placed aluminum dining tables in the shallow end, to encourage guests to sit down and keep cool at the same time. A wall hand-built from locally quarried limestone—one of May's signature materials—undulates around the various rooms while another leads to the entrance.

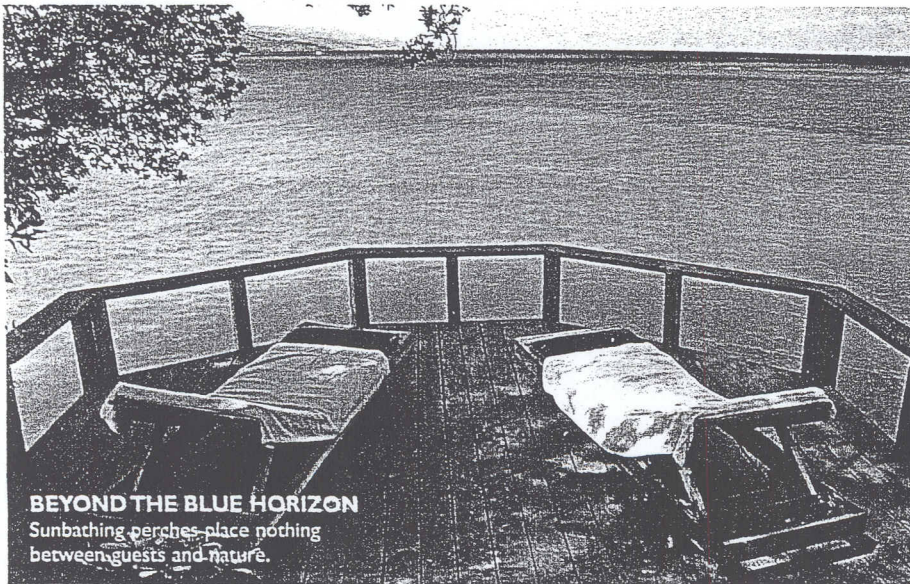
If you want to hear jazz in Montego Bay, Blue Beat, another Kathryn Pinto May project, is the place to go. The club is located in what locals call the "hip strip"—Montego's equivalent of a High Street. The space offered May only 900 square feet with which to work, so she fashioned it into a cocoon of quiet blues complete with banquettes, small ottomans and round cocktail tables. There are no true windows, only slashes of illuminated blue glass to set the mood. Nine video screens display archival footage of great black performers, sharecroppers and chain gangs. And, of course, there is a small stage. Chris Blackwell, the head of Island Records, often brings guests to Blue Beat to hear music. "Jamaica has never before had a club as sophisticated as Blue Beat," said Prem Mahtani, who owns several of Jamaica's most exclusive jewelry shops. May also designed Blue Beat's next-door

JAMAICA



BOTTOMS UP
Enjoy a drink at kicks while keeping your feet cool.

May has prevailed, even though 'there is a real fear of chic in the Caribbean.'



BEYOND THE BLUE HORIZON
Sunbathing perches place nothing between guests and nature.

neighbor, Marguerite's restaurant. For this she employed teal shades that compliment just beyond its deck. "Some people say being in a boat here," May said, "but I like more like dining in the water itself."

Since arriving back in her homeland, May also worked on various hotels. Sandals asked her first to design staff uniforms and entire rooms. At the Couples Resort in Ocho Rios she hung lanterns like musical notes over the piano. In the cottages of the venerable Jamaica Inn in Ocho Rios, she kept things almost restrained, employing dark woods and stones. With May, however, there is always more. In the seemingly demure cottages she hung topaz chandeliers over the bath, housed outdoor showers in undulating limestone walls, tiled the Jacuzzi floors with stones the same as the sea below. "I had a dream and Katharine was able to realize it," said Mary Phillips, manager of the Jamaica Inn.

Often in the evening on Montego Bay, May walks along a promenade she designed: a protected reef and white-sand beach. The promenade was part of the beach's \$40 million renovation. Pieces of rod salvaged from the island's railway were used to fashion the delicate ironwork structure seen along the walk.

Near to the beach is the Doctor's Cottage, renovated in 2002. For this project May redesigned the interior of what had been a two-story, white-tiled changing area. Jamaican dark woods and natural light add to the beach back seaside atmosphere. Hidden garden paintings of fish and manatees by local artists add a romantic touch.

But all is not tasteful restraint—May also worked on chain hotels and resorts, too, in Margaritaville, which some might consider a tourist trap. Her commission to provide décor for turtling giant parrots wearing pirate hats mirrored Calvin Klein, but for May this is simply another expression of life in the Caribbean. As she said, "It's too is someone's dream." ■



THE FAMILY
From left: Frank Spencer, Kathryn and Savannah