

# Kalamame

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**A** family moves from their home in Miami to start a new life on a small piece of paradise in the Caribbean Sea. It may sound like the beginning of a novel, but for David Hew, it's the story of how he grew up—and the story of one of the most intimate, classic resorts in the Bahamas.

Kalamame Cay, encompassing two slices of land on either side of a deep-green bay known as the Cay and the Cove, began as a private home for the Hew family more than fifteen years ago. “We weren’t at all hoteliers to begin with, we’d been going to the Bahamas since my sister and I were young, traveling back and forth on the boat from Miami,” says Hew, currently the director of the resort. “We ended up spending more and more time there, we rented, we bought, we built, and my parents finally said yes, this is where we want to be. We found the Cove first, it was privately owned and they wanted too much, so we looked across and found the Cay, which was Crown land, owned by the British government. We petitioned to buy it, presented our whole plan for building and for giving back to the community, but it was honestly, “We like to entertain, lets do it on a larger scale.” By that time, the Cove had come back with a reasonable offer, so we bought both. My dad definitely had an “oh shit” moment, at that point,” says

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Hew, laughing, “but we went ahead. My mother designed it all and my father built it; we moved into the house in the Cove on Christmas Eve 1994.” When it officially opened, the property was comprised of the Great House and three other buildings; dining was at the family table, guests mingling together at every meal.

Hew’s memories of the place from those years are fond, though very different from those of more recent visitors. “I was maybe 12 and it was such a cool way to spend those years. You’d be sitting next to royalty one night and tech tycoons the next, it was all very cool.” The resort was originally a top location for fly-fishermen, attracting a wide variety of those who were interested in the sport, but along with the demographics, the landscape itself has change. “When we first got there, there wasn’t anything there. We planted all the young coconut trees from seeds, we had no TV, spent all our time reading or outside, running around on the island or out on the boat.” Though his older sister lobbied to stay at school in Miami on weekends instead of coming home (in a fit of teenage pique, she referred to the island as “Alcatraz”) Hew took a different tack: “When I was around sixteen, I started importing my social life, bringing friends with me on weekends, and it was great fun, lots of freedom. At the time our demographic for the guests was a lot older, couples coming to fish, but it’s come down a lot now.”

The property currently has 18 rooms spread over villas of various sizes, as well as a handful of homeowners. “It’s turned into quite a little village. The word is spreading farther and wider through word of mouth, and it’s getting bigger, but you still have your privacy, it’s still remote. There’s nothing on Andros except us, so you don’t really leave, life is centered around there. It’s a place to get away from it all and really disconnect. We’ve of course added more new technological amenities, if you need the Internet it’s there, but it’s not at your fingertips, you sort of have to entertain yourself.” The planning and decoration of the property, from the earliest design vision to execution came from Hew’s mother, who grew up in Jamaica in a family of builders and engineers, at a time when the island was, as Hew describes is, “between two worlds, still a colony when she was young, and then in her early teens it became independent.” There is a strong reference to the old Caribbean design in her aesthetic, blending the refined mahogany and antiques of the English with more rustic Indo-Caribbean pieces, with a happy underlying homey quality. The resort is as much about old books and Persian rugs as it is about the beach house French doors and perpetual ceiling fans, all breeze and light. “We were doing this on a sort of phase by phase process, it grew organically, so it was designed like it would be part of our house and then an extension of our house. Every room has its own character and personality; guests say its almost like you’re at a friends house. When

we first opened we moved all our books from our house in Miami, and they filled all the rooms, but with everything from nursery rhymes and physics textbooks to “What to Expect When You’re Expecting,” like at a friends house, and we try to stay true to that.” Hew’s own role in the company has evolved along with the property, at first strictly in PR and marketing, and now that he’s based back at the resort in the Bahamas, taking on a more integrated role. “I was living in England after university, and I realized after my sixth English winter, “What was I doing?” so I ended up coming back. Now I’m running it more hands on; part of the charm of the place is that we do live there, we’re in the dining room every day, we spend time with the guests and chat,

Looking to the future, Kalamame, like many of its peers, is looking towards improving their eco-consciousness aspect to go along with the changing expectations of their visitors. “I don’t want to say we’ve pared it down, but instead of a six course meal and white glove service, we’re finding that people don’t need an unnatural variety of food to feel like they’re being pampered. Wherever possible we use locally grown and sourced ingredients, which is particularly hard on an island; we’re converting all the water heaters to solar and the generators eventually as well. A number of the guests that come through are asking about that as well, and we want to go down that path.

“The foundation for a new system like that is hard work, but once

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and continue the feeling that you’re at our house and you’re our guest. It’s a nice progression for me, although in some ways it does defy having a title.”

As Kalamame has grown from almost a bed and breakfast into a full-fledged hotel, its goal of remaining true to the family’s nature made the learning curve somewhat quicker. “It’s still white tablecloths in the evening and casual breakfasts, because it’s how we live. It’s just a challenge of keeping in intimate, but we’re not looking to expand that quickly.” All signs, however, point to Kalamame not remaining under the radar much longer; in the past six months alone, Hew says he’s seen a change in the resorts’ guests. “It’s been a lot of newcomers recently, but they’re coming back within six months, which is crazy. When we opened it was for fishing, where men could come and not leave their wives somewhere they’d enjoy, not a fishing lodge. We wanted to shift it from adventure travel to leisure travel, and that broadens our audience as well.” Mostly, though he attributes it to a change not in the resorts’ tactics, but in travelers themselves. “Everyone is traveling a lot farther a lot younger, the sky’s the limit, people are more inclined to take a gap year and go to Asia or do a year abroad, so by the time people reach their early 30s, they’ve seen a lot of the world. When we first started out it seemed like there was a big education process to make people realize you didn’t need a TV or a phone, and now everyone gets that, and they’re getting it younger. We’re getting those niche clients who have the same mindset and the same likes. Last week I looked around the dining room and there was no one over 40 or 45; last year there wouldn’t have been anyone under. It can be quite a comical mix sometimes, that’s how we’ve seen it changing.”

it’s laid it’s sustainable. I think we were all due for a wakeup call, and because of all our effort, it’s not something we would decide, ‘forget this, we only want white asparagus.’ Regardless of the ethical aspect, it doesn’t make sense to invest that time and effort only to have it go away, and I think on a broader scale it will remain, because in the long run once you do it, the cost comes down so much.” For example, a recently installed water filter means that the water from Andros, which actually supplies bottled water companies in Jamaica, can be filtered here and served directly; they’ve also had a great response from local farms who can now expand and build with the extra business. “I think as we’re going into this process we’re really reminded that here, you don’t need a lot. We picked Kalamame because of the surroundings, because you can wake up, watch the dolphins, see the sunrise, and go back to bed. Once you remove some of the distractions, you actually see where you are and go ‘Wow.’”

The Hew family has continued their personal and professional expansion into the islands with Kanopi House, in Jamaica. “We opened in Jamaica about a year ago, that again started as a private house and expanded. It was emotional to have that homecoming in Jamaica. When my family left, it was like they were never going back, so seeing my grandmother spend time there, it’s wonderful for her to see it again. I am personally mesmerized by the idea of Dominica, even more remote and far away. We’re always talking about what’s next. My father’s a doer, you have to be to move to the middle of nowhere and do this, and everything is starting to run itself here, so all I can say is, ‘watch this space.’” ■