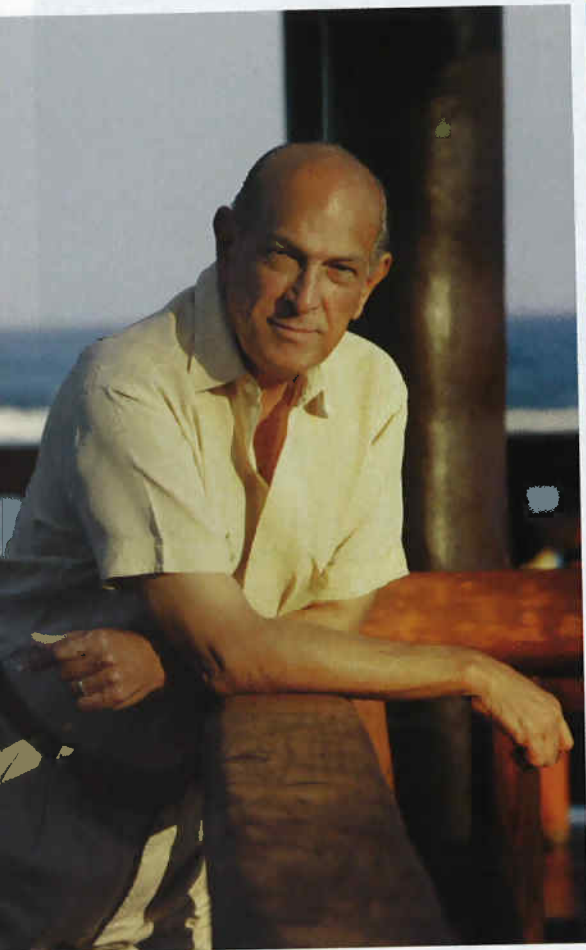


Tortuga Bay

Robin Cherry falls hard for **Oscar de la Renta's** ode to simple luxury on the sun-drenched shores of his native Dominican Republic



"IN LIFE, EVERYTHING IS ABOUT FALLING in love," says Oscar de la Renta as he explains his decision to design and live in Punta Cana, a stylish seaside community and resort in the Caribbean's Dominican Republic. "I came to Punta Cana, and I fell madly in love with it. The

beauty of the place, the nature—there's something magical about it that you don't get anywhere else. From the very beginning, I knew that this is where I wanted to be."

I'm also Punta Cana-bound to experience de la Renta's exquisite taste as

reflected in his interiors for Tortuga Bay, an exclusive enclave within the Punta Cana Resort & Club. The 15 yellow villas are steps from snow-white sand, glittering turquoise water, beachfront golf courses, and a nature reserve filled with lagoons where you can swim in

Above: Tortuga Bay's villas, decorated by Oscar de la Renta, are dressed in a cheery yellow that suits the sunny blue sky beyond.

Below, left to right: Lush palm trees surround the pool, ideal for post-golf lounging. The villas' yellow palette continues in the guest rooms, which feature luxurious canopied beds with Frette linens.



THE PUNTA CANA VISION

Forty years ago, Punta Cana was nothing more than a remote plot of land on the eastern part of the Dominican Republic. There was no airport, there weren't even any roads. The resort was the vision of American labor lawyer Ted Kheel and a spirited, young Dominican named Frank Rainieri. While attending a labor conference in 1969, Kheel convinced 40 of his fellow lawyers to pay \$15 an acre for beachfront property, and when some experienced buyer's remorse, he bought them out. Rainieri plunged in to develop the area, building roads, a hotel, and the airport. Two years later, Puntacana Resort & Club was born. Today, Rainieri is the CEO. In 1997, Oscar de la Renta and his friend Julio Iglesias joined the venture. Tortuga Bay, its refined villas and restaurants decorated by de la Renta, opened at the end of 2005, significantly raising Puntacana's glamour quotient.



solitude but for the occasional sea turtle.

The brilliance of my vacation starts at the airport, where a resort representative greets me just steps from the plane. The owners of the Puntacana Resort & Club also own the airport—the first privately owned international airport in the world. The guide whisks me past waiting crowds, through the shingled VIP security checkpoint, and into a serene private lounge. I'll discover many wonderful things about Tortuga Bay, but in this era of heightened security and torturous travel, this a memorable start.

After the 10-minute drive from the airport, a butler escorts me to my villa in the golf cart I will later use to chauffeur

myself around the resort to golf lessons and spa appointments. I immediately feel like I've walked into the home of a stylish friend. De la Renta's vision for Tortuga Bay was "true luxury in the sense of utter simplicity with tremendous, tremendous comfort," and he has succeeded splendidly.

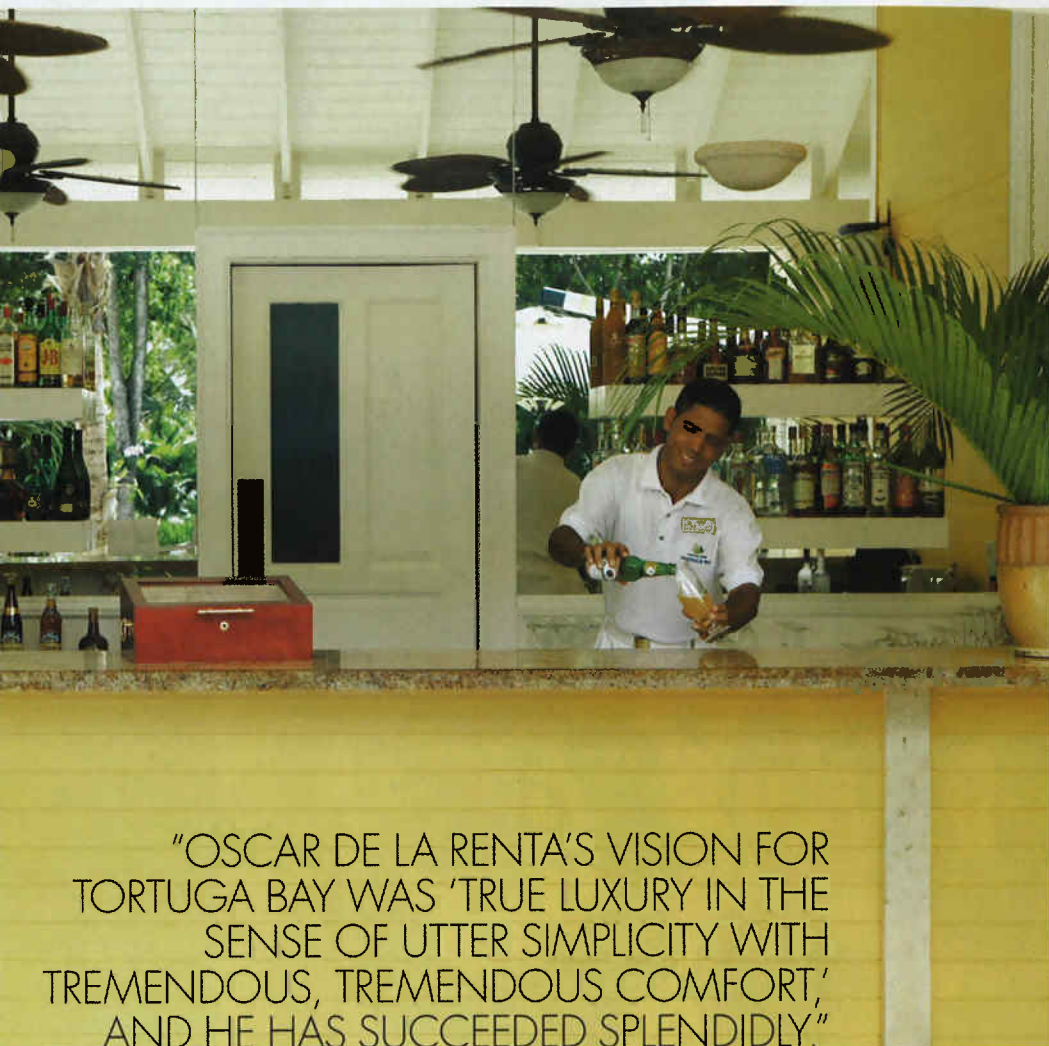
Inside the villas, the color palette, chosen so as not to distract from the island's natural beauty, envelops me with calm. The dominant colors are the buttery yellow of the villa's exteriors, a fresh, pinkish salmon, and a soothing celadon. Asian accents and botanical prints complement locally made wicker and wood furniture (de la Renta also designed

the patio and lounge chairs). The beds are swathed in Frette linens, and with the ocean just steps away, I am lulled to sleep by the gentle sound of lapping waves.

In the morning, I swing open the French doors and welcome the sun while admiring the beach, which looks like it was dusted with sugar overnight. For relaxation, there's Six Senses Spa—which seems superfluous until I indulge in a hot stone massage in a beachside *palapa*.

I feast on oh-so-delicious Caribbean-Asian fusion dishes at Bamboo, open only to Tortuga Bay guests, and the fresh fish with Mediterranean accents at La Yola. There are six other restaurants throughout the resort, but I start every

Below, left to right: Start the evening with a drink at Bamboo Bar. The Six Senses Spa offers massages based on holistic therapies.



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evening with rum cocktails at the Bamboo Bar, chatting with the bartenders.

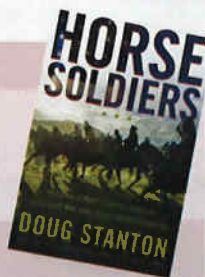
During my stay, Jake Kheel, grandnephew of Punta Cana's developer, takes me on a tour of the 1,500-acre Ecological Reserve. The reserve is managed by the Ecological Foundation, which also conducts scientific research and grows the organic produce used by the resort's restaurants. Kheel, who runs the foundation, brings American university students to the island to assist in research,

SIGNATURE OSCAR


Favorite beach read:
"Right now, I am reading *Horse Soldiers* (2009) by Doug Stanton."

Favorite music to get in the Dominican mood:
"Merengue, of course!"

Favorite beachside cocktail:
"Fresh tomato juice—never canned—with a little bit of basil."



offering them an internship in paradise in exchange for their expertise.

Time passes too quickly, and as I am preparing to leave, a storm threatens to lay waste to the East Coast. No problem—the staff postpones my flight, and I spend an extra night in heaven. I'm forever indebted to Mr. de la Renta. Thanks to his thoughtful design, I too came to Punta Cana and fell madly in love. 

For more on Tortuga Bay, call 809/959-2262, or visit www.puntacana.com.

