

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

FANCY FREE

WITH LACY WHITE BUNGALOWS SHADED BY SWAYING PALM TREES, THE BEACHFRONT DOMINICAN REPUBLIC GETAWAY CELERIE KEMBLE CONJURED FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS IS A MADE-TO-ORDER PARADISE

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Decorator Celerie Kemble, financier Boykin Curry, and their children (Previous Page: from left, Rascal, Wick, and Zinnia) gather in the clubhouse of Playa Grande Beach Club, a compound she created in the Dominican Republic. The chandeliers were custom made locally, and the wicker armchairs are vintage.



Above: The Kemble-Curry residence, named Casa Guava, echoes Dominican vernacular design; Juan Diego Vásquez oversaw the landscaping.

After traveling the world together during their courtship— from Croatia to New Zealand to St. Barts to Bhutan—

interior designer Celerie Kemble and money manager Boykin Curry knew they were in it for the long haul. They also knew, after staying at a multitude of exceptionally snazzy resorts, that they were tired of fancy hotels that had no sense of community. So several months before they married, in 2005, they resolved to find a vacation home, a relaxed tropical spot where they could regularly retreat with family and friends.

“Boykin called it his *Mosquito Coast* fantasy,” says Kemble, who lives with her husband and their three children (sons Rascal and Wick and daughter Zinnia) in New York City. Then one day a friend alerted them to an available stretch of land along the Dominican Republic’s northern shore: 2,000 staggeringly beautiful jungled acres, bordered by a huge beach called Playa Grande that’s lapped by Windex-blue Caribbean waters. Imagine the greatest tropical screen saver you’ve ever seen and you get the idea. “It was like we’d been dropped down into paradise,”

Kemble says. “Looking around, I thought, Oh my God, how do we not screw up this opportunity?”

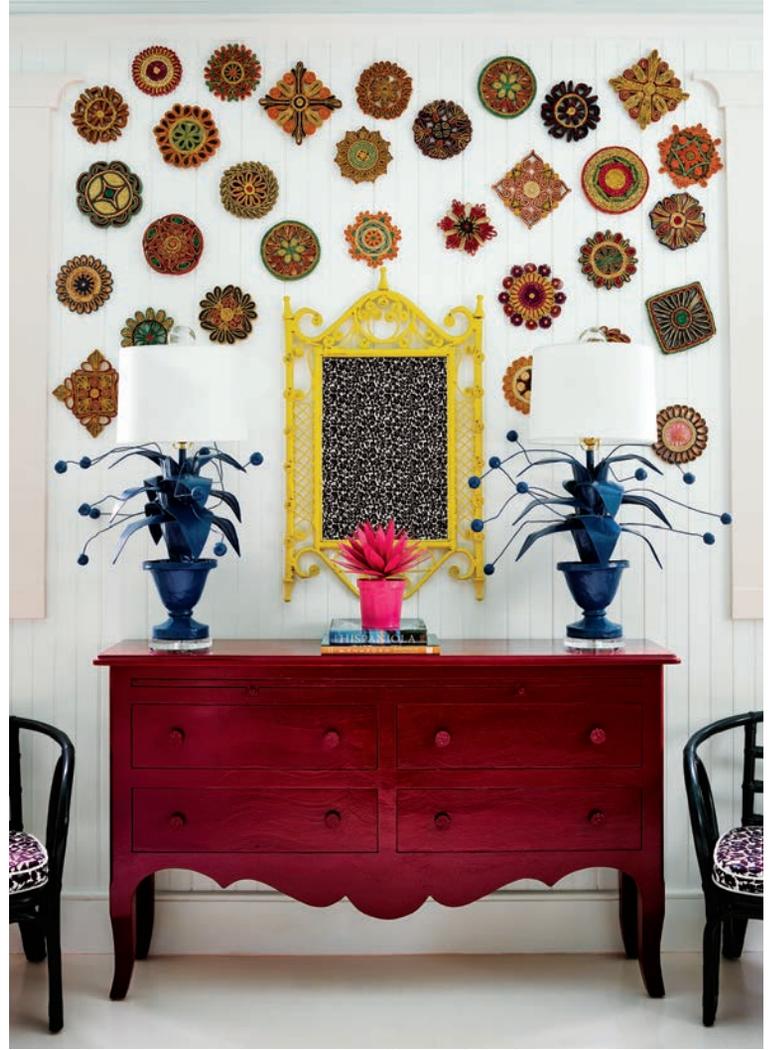
Within weeks, the couple persuaded some friends—among them Charlie Rose, Mariska Hargitay, and George Soros—to come aboard as investors and allow Kemble to mastermind a familial resort with a clubhouse, cabanas, and bungalows. Ten years later, Kemble is standing on the porch of Casa Guava, her oceanfront home at Playa Grande Beach Club, and laughing at the “dream come true–slash–nightmare,” as she puts it, of having complete creative control. “There was the constant fear that people would walk in and say, ‘This place looks like crazytown,’” she recalls, in typical self-deprecating fashion. “Like, ‘Were you drinking while decorating?’”

Just steps from the beach and surrounded by a tangle of sea grape, coconut palm, and almond trees, Playa Grande’s lacy houses rise up from the jungle like Ladurée pastries. The architecture is



Above: The slipper chairs in the house's living room are from Celerie Kemble's line for Henredon.
Below: Vintage garden chairs surround the dining table; old cabana paintings frame the folding doors, and D. Porthault linens dress the four-poster in the master bedroom beyond.





Clockwise from top left: Botanical art by Natural Curiosities hangs in Casa Guava's living room. Vintage trivets join a wicker mirror in one of the children's rooms; the lamps are by Stray Dog Designs. Celerie Kemble outfitted the clubhouse's great room with custom-made furnishings by local artisans as well as vintage pieces.

delicate in a French Colonial sort of way, topped by pale-green metal roofs and ornamented with porches and gingerbread trimmings galore. But there's a slightly idiosyncratic, artisanal feel to the buildings that is wonderfully distinctive. All that fanciful fretwork, it turns out, was cut by hand. "I wanted something that felt romantic yet wild," says Kemble, whose inspirations included Dominican vernacular styles and the Victorian family compound where she grew up in Palm Beach, Florida.

Working with builder Marc Johnson, Kemble and historic preservationist Elric Endersby dreamed up structures sheathed in reclaimed palm wood and enriched with latticework flourishes—such as panels and fanlights—that play with the tropical light, splintering it into dappled patterns while also inviting even more air flow. "I wanted the whole place to feel saturated with sun and salty air," Kemble says. Ceilings and floors are painted in a palette of *macaron* pastels, and rooms are filled with heirlooms, pieces from the decorator's line for Henredon, flea-market finds, and deliciously odd metal furnishings and light



fixtures created by Pedro Noesi of Neno Industrial, a Dominican design studio. “Celerie throws together a crazy combination of new and old and high and low,” her husband observes, “but rather than looking like a cluttered mess, it all feels right, as if the objects had been looking for each other.”

In the compound’s clubhouse—where everyone congregates for long, lazy lunches and sunset cocktails—Kemble painted the 22-foot-high ceiling pale aqua and paved the floors with handmade tiles in a pink, navy-blue, and yellow pattern. Softly colored fabrics that bring to mind sun-faded flags mingle with vintage Indonesian ikats and Muriel Brandolini floral cottons alongside shell-encrusted chairs. Not that Playa Grande is all sugared almonds and petits fours. “We’re at the edge of the jungle, where there’s a lot of drama and darkness,” says Kemble. “It kind of demands some bold Gauguin-style touches amid all the lightness and prettiness.”

A ferocious-looking papier-mâché lionfish mask presides over the clubhouse’s great room, along with chandeliers whose tendril-like arms are bedecked

with blooms Kemble calls “alien tulips.” Small elephant-shaped tables are positioned next to sofas while staghorn ferns sprout on the walls.

Call it preppy meets primitive. In her children’s bedrooms, Dutch-wax prints in raspberry, blue, charcoal, and burnt orange catch the eye like exotic bouquets, striking what Kemble refers to as “just the right balance between clash and cohesion.” And in the clubhouse’s upstairs sitting room and bar, more brash wax prints—in orange, purple, and turquoise—are juxtaposed with glossy white walls and mint-green window frames, setting up an intimate hideaway for guests to kick off their shoes and curl up with a margarita.

“I think interiors that are well designed tell people how to behave,” Kemble says. “Here, I want them to know they’re supposed to be barefoot but they can also put on a grand hat and their emeralds and go twirl around on the beach. I want them to feel the flow of generations and hear the kids shriek and laugh as they run between the houses and the pool. Basically, I want it to be a place that captivates people, so they keep coming back.” □

Above: Cabanas by the New Jersey Barn Co. flank the compound’s swimming pool; concrete sheep decorate the lawn.



Clockwise from top left: A ceiling light designed by Kemble Interiors oversees the children's playroom; the furniture is upholstered in Dutch-wax prints from AKN Fabrics, and the orange rug is from Nomadic Trading Co. Sconces by Schoolhouse Electric & Supply Co., a mirror by Roost, sink fittings by California Faucets, and handmade floor tile add charm to a guest bath. A Casamidy headboard centers a guest room; the sconces are by Schoolhouse Electric & Supply Co., and the rug is by Shyam Ahuja.





Above: Kemble and her daughter, Zinnia.