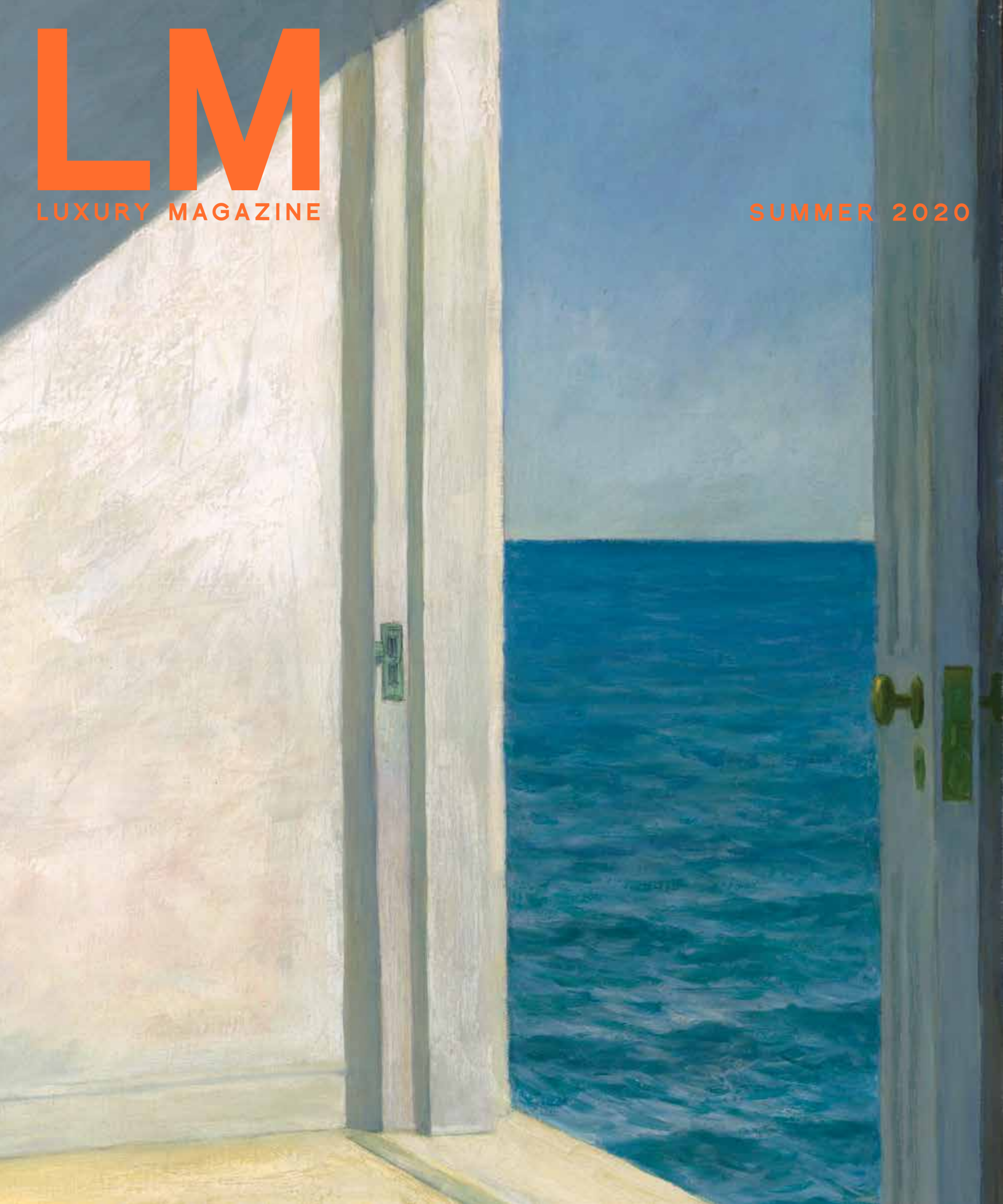
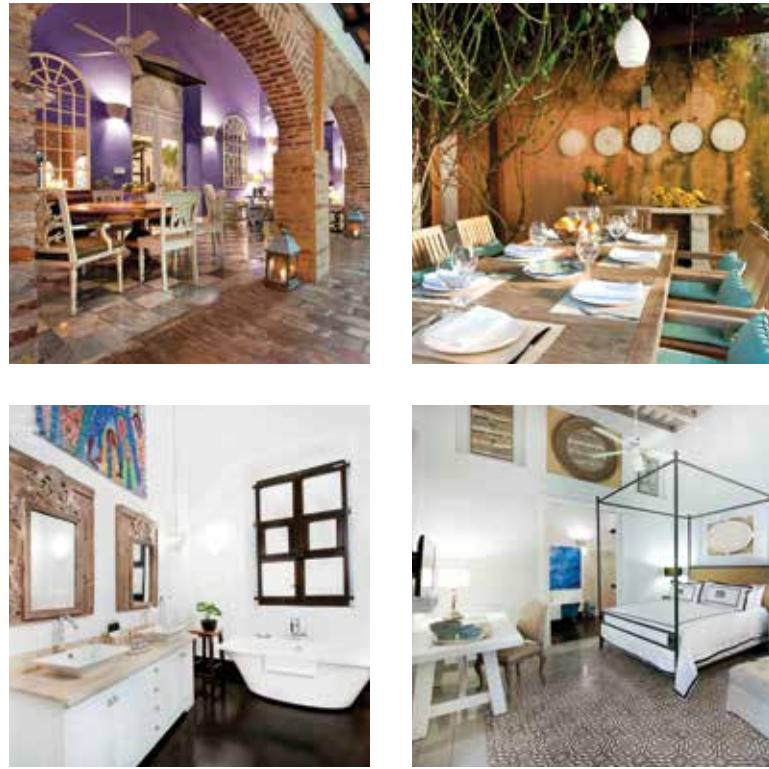


LM

LUXURY MAGAZINE

SUMMER 2020





Home Away

To have a super-authentic, eco-centric vacation, check into a charming old village and head to your private cottage that was once occupied by a local—but now offers all the amenities of a five-star hotel.

BY MARK ELLWOOD

While wandering the streets of the romantic Zona Colonial in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic, hotelier Samir Saab came upon a pair of centuries-old buildings. Captivated by the location and beauty of them, exquisitely and expensively built by the earliest colonial settlers, Saab wondered if he had found his next hospitality venture. He considered operating the buildings like a collection of bed-and-breakfasts, with concierge and butler service moments away and summoned 24/7 not from a front desk but by a smartphone. →

Courtesy Casas del XVI (5)



Casas del XVI is made up of two homes featuring a total of seven rooms decorated to reflect their individual histories (opposite).

In 2014, Saab opened **Casas del XVI** (*casasdelxvi.net*): two homes with a total of seven rooms, each decorated by local designer Patricia Reid Baquero, who honored their individual histories. One decorated in contemporary maps and routes of sailing ships belonged to a Columbus-era sailor. Private courtyards and lounges host guest check-ins. The homes purposely do not stand out from their surroundings—rather they are discreet and part of the neighborhood. Call it hospitality hide-and-seek.

The so-called dispersed hotel now operates more than 20 rooms within 7 standalone homes in the city center, including the late Oscar de la Renta's mansion. "We are registered as a hotel, but we're really the anti-hotel," Saab says. "It's more like staying in the historic home of a friend, only when you check out, you have to pay."

A craving to engage more genuinely with a destination is certainly one driver for the rise of these dispersed hotels, per Brownell Travel's Katherine Norton. She also points to the impact of Airbnb and other homestays. "Clients tell me that all the time: 'I want to live like a local.' What they don't say is that they still want to be taken care of, have someone make them breakfast and their bed. These dispersed hotels are gems, because they're the perfect balance. It's the best of both worlds."

Saab agrees, "HomeAway and VRBO have helped; people have become comfortable staying in homes, especially in countries they're not familiar with. They know that staying in a home is just as good as staying in a luxury suite, as long as there's service in the house. That makes the difference."

Overtourism is a factor too: the discretion of slipping into a house that blends with the buildings around it, rather than a grand, glitzy hotel looming over the locals, is increasingly appealing. There's a quiet intimacy to a dispersed hotel that a stately pile cannot match. And restoring ramshackle buildings to bring new life to often moribund communities is the ultimate move in sustainable development; that's another key driver for many luxury travelers right now, explains Simon Mayle, event director for ILTM, a collection of luxury travel shows.

"This is about good, old-fashioned, handcrafted travel," he says. "In the mad polarization of politics or social media right now, my God, you want to run away from it all and go back to something like this, which is just beautiful in its simplicity."

Indeed, in some ways, these dispersed hotels in converted farmhouses or homes are a throwback to hospitality's earliest days, as Saab points out. "The first such inns were ad hoc setups, where families would rent rooms to weary travelers in their own homes and treat them like family."



Sextantio Albergo Diffuso

Courtesy Sextantio (2)

The cottages of **Sextantio Albergo Diffuso** caught the eye in 1999 of Swedish-Italian financier Daniele Kihlgren. Riding his motorbike through the hill towns of Abruzzo, one of Italy's poorer southern regions, he chanced on the medieval town of Santo Stefano di Sessanio. The gorgeous old settlement was almost empty, its younger inhabitants siphoned away to big cities by the need to find work; many buildings were in disrepair. Determined to help, he returned with \$5 million to create a dispersed hotel, known as an *albergo diffuso* in Italian. Old cottages were artfully renovated with old-fashioned fixtures and subtle modern conveniences tucked out of sight to preserve the rustic vibe. The venture found such success that di Sessanio repeated the concept in nearby Matera, this time reclaiming old caves in which the locals had lived. Kihlgren's next project is more adventurous: taking a cluster of huts on Lake Kivu in Rwanda and turning them into a barefoot luxury experience. sextantio.it →



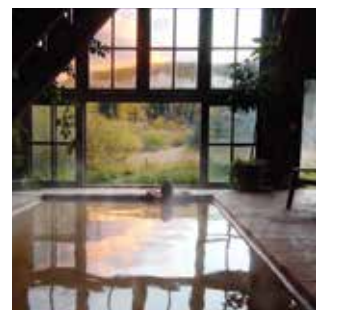


Les Fermes de Marie was opened in 1989 on the outskirts of Megève, France, by interior designer and pop culture mainstay Jocelyne Sibuet, known for her Martha-Stewart-meets-Ian-Schrager taste with Gallic *je ne sais quoi*. It was a stroll around the mountains above the resort town that sparked her vision. The collection of charming timber chalets and farmhouses are operated on the explicit idea that they should feel like a home away from home. fermesdemarie.com

Courtesy Dunton Hot Springs. Opposite Page: Courtesy Les Fermes de Marie (2)



The onetime mining camp of **Dunton Hot Springs** in Colorado went from ghost town to gourmet hideout when it was reconceived as a dispersed hotel by its current owner, Christoph Henkel. Each of the 12 standalone log cabins was hand-built, and has been decorated with antiques and period details. There is also a luxury tent. The old saloon and dance hall now operate as the food and beverage hub, while the natural hot springs nearby function as an al fresco spa. duntondestinations.com →





Even some traditional operators are testing this concept:
Belmond Casa de Sierra Nevada in Mexico's San Miguel de Allende runs six standalone *casas*, or residences, as a 37-room hotel. One was a former convent, another a historic fort. Courtyards, cloisters, and the city's own streets act as connections between them, with the intention for the hotel to blend into its environment. belmond.com

Courtesy Belmond. Opposite Page Courtesy Image. Clockwise From Top Left: L'Enclume, Tomoko Kanagaki, Tichno Tuzano, Curaçao, Tourist Board



Kura Hulanda in Curaçao's capital, Willemstad, sits on a UNESCO World Heritage Site that spans eight city blocks; the 82 rooms are scattered through more than 60 buildings that act more like a colonial-era village than a contemporary hotel. kurahulanda.com



Michelin-starred chef Simon Rogan operates **L'Enclume**, one of the UK's top restaurants in the village of Cartmel. The pioneer of farm-to-table cooking operates his own farm nearby, and has also snapped up cottages in the village. simonrogan.co.uk



In Switzerland, the **Corippo 1975 Foundation** is rescuing the village of Corippo, whose population dropped to a dozen in 2018; it plans to convert several structures into an *albergo diffuso*, deeding the local osteria as the hotel's dining room. It remains to be seen how luxurious it will be. fondazionecorippo.ch



In Japan, the just-opened **General Kyoto** spreads its 229 hotel rooms across 5 buildings and 12 city blocks in the history-soaked cultural capital. In the Bukkoji Fuyacho building, guests of its 16 rooms can retreat outdoors yet avoid the city streets in the *tsuboniwa*, or interior gardens. globalhotels.jp