



Garden of Eden: the \$50 million home

This villa on Barbados's platinum coast is one of the most expensive properties currently on the market. Nicola Venning finds out what that kind of money buys

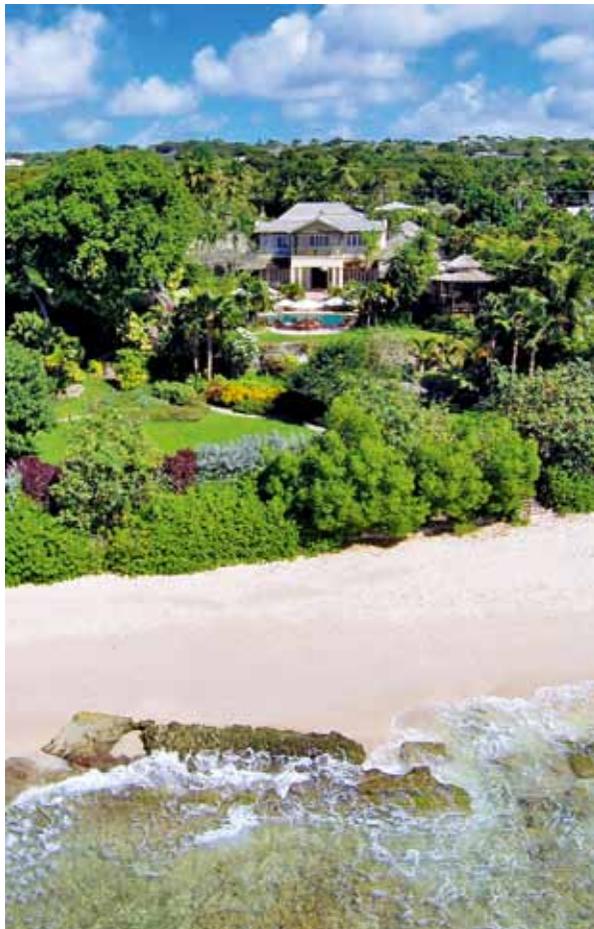
IT would be easy to live in Gardenia. Its large, airy rooms, soaring ceilings and striking views of the azure Caribbean combine with an all-pervading sense of relaxation. Despite being one of the island's grandest beachfront mansions on the exclusive West Coast, it has an inviting informality. The impressive scale of the classically designed home, which is on the market for a bold \$50 million (£31.9 million), is softened by mellow, creamy coral-stone walls and an architectural playfulness.

6 Gardenia's comfortable elegance lends itself to outdoor living 9

The influence of Oliver Messel, the tastemaker and supporter of traditional Barbadian great-house architecture, who also lived in the area until his death in 1978, is apparent throughout: there are flattened stone arches, slender Grecian-inspired columns and light filigree metal- and woodwork; the finishes on shuttered windows, doors and verandah are all in the famous Messel sage green. 'Somewhere in the background is his relaxed classical architecture,' explains Larry Warren, the architect who designed the nine-bedroom 10,495.36sq ft home.

Gardenia's comfortable elegance lends itself to outdoor living: the verandahs are wide, every bedroom leads to a balcony and the impressive gazebo, used for alfresco dining, sits against a backdrop of palm trees and ocean vistas.

Although there are some 90 beachfront homes on the West Coast, Gardenia is unique, partly due to its privacy. Set in the Garden area of St James parish, it sits back from the coast road in almost three acres of verdant seclusion (which is a lot on this prized patch of coastline). The mature tropical garden, which includes frangipani, bougainvillea and ylang-ylang, as well as magnificent 200-year-old mahogany trees and a tennis court, tumbles down to about 250ft of pristine beachfront.



Gardenia, on the exclusive Barbados West Coast, sits in almost three acres of verdant seclusion and has some 250ft of pristine beachfront. \$50 million (£31.9 million) through Knight Frank (020-7629 8171)

'This is a home for people who will winter here every year,' believes Sam Mahon, consultant real-estate broker with Bajan Services, affiliates of selling agent Knight Frank (020-7629 8171).

At this time of year, the annual pilgrimage of winter-sun enthusiasts begins and owners who 'winter' on the island will flock to the palm-fringed white beaches and crystal-clear sea to enjoy the warm temperatures as well as a host of amenities available locally. Fine-dining restaurants such as Cin Cin and Lone Star rub shoulders with the barefoot simplicity of charming (albeit increasingly rare) beach-shack bars. St Nicholas Abbey, an authentic converted plantation great house, which offers tours to the public, also has a popular restaurant and sells its own mature Bajan rum.

The Royal Westmoreland golf course and Barbados Polo Club vie to entertain the glitterati who flock here. Notable owners include Cilla Black and Sir Cliff Richard as well as Andrew Lloyd Webber,

who owns multiple plots on the Sandy Lane estate. Local-girl-made-good singer Rihanna opted for Westland Heights, a smaller inland development.

Gardenia is one of only a dozen or so beachfront mansions on the West Coast in this price bracket; another currently on the market is Four Winds, a Palladian-style mansion that sits in just over 2½ acres on Gibbes Beach, one of the best areas of shoreline on the island. Owned by British financier Sir Martyn Arbib and also designed by Larry Warren, the six-bedroom home has 350ft of beach frontage as well as a tennis court and swimming pool and is on the market for \$55 million (£35 million) through Savills (020-7016 3740).

Although most high-end beachfront homes tend to be in a classical style, there are also a few contemporary villas. Footprints is a modern, California-inspired, stylish, five-bedroom beachfront home in St James parish, with interiors designed by Kelly Hoppen. Sitting further down the price ladder from both Gardenia and Four Winds, it's on the market for \$12 million (£7.168 million) through Chestertons International. The home's modern design includes fun features such as an outdoor terrace bath.

Traditionally, these prime beachfront homes are generally the most sought after although, currently, there is a wide range of properties for sale, especially in the \$10 million to \$25 million (£6.4 million-£15.9 million) price range. 'Traditionally, we wouldn't have as many homes on the beach for sale, which is an indication of a slow market,' says Mr Mahon.

Agents estimate that prices on average have dipped about 20% since their peak in 2008, although some apartments, of which there is an oversupply, have seen falls of 30% and more. However, although often empty throughout the year, trophy beachfront homes on the West Coast have been 'most protected, being most in demand', says Richard Young of West Coast Villas, affiliates of Sotheby's International Realty (00 1 246 432 5050). 'It's only the truly wealthy who demand or can afford this level of luxury and privacy.' ➤

Property news



Caribbean idyll

Tortola, \$2.5 million (£1.59 million)

Coral Hill House, Smuggler's Cove Beach
3 bedrooms, studio, infinity pool
Savills (020-7016 3740)

This traditional Caribbean house is positioned to take advantage of the magnificent westerly and northerly views of the islands of St John and Jost Van Dyke. The open-plan layout makes the most of sea breezes and expansive terraces offer lots of outside entertaining options.



Extraordinary views

Tortola, \$7.775 million (£4.96 million)

Celestial House, Long Bay
5 bedrooms, pool, Jacuzzi
BVI Sotheby's International Realty (00 1 284 494 5700)

Sitting on Long Bay's hilltop, overlooking one of the island's most famous beaches, Celestial House has a wraparound verandah and an infinity-edge swimming pool. It's a 15-minute drive from the West End Ferry Dock for passage to other islands and the international airport.

Contemporary Caribbean



Grand Cayman, \$1.89 million (£1.2 million)

Oceana Villas, George Town
Savills (020-7016 3740)
This modern development stretches from George Town harbour to Seven Mile beach and so is within walking distance of the action but is close to the beach. The apartment has professional appliances, an infinity-edge pool and parking.



Barbados, \$3.995 million (£2.55 million)

Sundeck, Westmoreland
Chestertons International
(020-3040 8210)
This 8,000sq ft villa overlooks the fairway at Royal Westmoreland. It's almost entirely surrounded by a sun deck and has an entertainment room, gym, study and *koi* pond.



St Barths, €4.95 million

Villa Wide View, Toiny
St Barth Properties
(00 1 508 570 4481)
This brand-new, three-bedroom villa is perched on a hillside. The beach below is just a short stroll away, although the currents are too strong for swimming.