

*Bunny Williams and John Rosselli are renowned for gracious hospitality and high style. Chloe Malle receives a warm welcome at their luxe Punta Cana getaway*



WRITER CHLOE MALLE IN THE ENTRANCE COURT OF LA COLINA, BUNNY WILLIAMS AND JOHN ROSSELLI'S RETREAT IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC. FOR DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES.

# DOMINICAN DREAM





A SOFT HUE DEFINES EACH BEDROOM. THE GREEN ROOM FEATURES AN ANTIQUE FAUX-BAMBOO BED AND VINTAGE WICKER CHAIR, CUSHIONS OF PETER DUNHAM TEXTILES, HAND-PAINTED BERGEN BAG. OPPOSITE RESCUED STRAYS BOB, MARCO, AND BLANCO PLAY IN FRONT OF THE GARAGE.



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reparing for my early February trip to Punta Cana required some foresight: trekking to my building's basement to extract my favorite summer clothes, getting a bikini wax and pedicure, searching for TSA-friendly-sized mosquito repellent and SPF 50 sunblock—and figuring out how to fit into my carry-on the king-size green vinyl mosquito net my husband ordered online and insisted I take with me as a defense against Zika virus.

And I had to do my research. Of course, I knew of Bunny Williams and John Rosselli, design doyenne and revered antiques dealer, but by the time I printed out the endless articles and photo spreads dedicated to them I realized I had a lot to catch up on. After 15 years as business partners in Treillage, their beloved but now shuttered garden-and-home store, and

12 as a couple, John and Bunny, who founded her namesake firm in 1988 following 21 years at Parish-Hadley, decided to get married only after completing construction on their Dominican idyll, a hill-perched house, thus named La Colina. “We built this house and realized we were in this together,” she would later tell me.

I was set to stay at the Westin in Punta Cana, expecting to spend a few hours a day up at the house in formal interview mode, when, a week before the trip, I received an email from Bunny’s assistant alerting me that “Bunny has made arrangements for you to stay at La Colina.” I was giddy and forwarded the email to my mother and husband. Their respective responses—“Duh!” and “Cool, you’re still taking the mosquito net”—did not dampen my enthusiasm as I pored over *A House by the Sea*, Bunny’s recent book on the majestic seaside house, and imagined myself a tropical elf on a shelf perching in different nooks of the Palladian paradise. →



THE LIVING-ROOM FURNITURE, INCLUDING A PUNTA CANA SOFA BY BUNNY WILLIAMS HOME, WEARS SLIPCOVERS OF BLUE DURALEE COTTON. CHINOISERIE PANELS FLANK A CARVED WOOD MIRROR FROM HARRISON & GIL, PAINTED WHITE.



The Delta flight from icy JFK to balmy Punta Cana is practically a mini-charter. Ten of that weekend's 12 guests emerge eagerly into the thatched-roof terminal—winter coats draped over one arm, straw hats poised for use in the other—and are met by Pablo King, the property manager, who whisks us to La Colina.

A master hostess, Bunny quickly rattles off our room assignments. "She's in the green room, she's in the pink, *la verde, la rosa.*" I am led to *la verde*, one of two bedrooms in the Greek temple-style pool house (there are four more in the main house). Each of the six bedrooms was designed around a color, beginning with the watercolor-like shade of Venetian plaster coating the walls and extending to the matching flanges of the sheet sets that Bunny had had made at a tiny linen shop she and John stumbled upon in Ho Chi Minh City.


In my room a pair of mirrored Venetian cabinet doors mounted on the walls reflect the azure of the pool, and the pedimented antique Regency-style shelves are filled with shells collected both locally and online. ("You just Google *shells!*" Bunny exclaims.) The Regency-era faux-bamboo child's canopy bed, like several of the antique beds in the house, was seamlessly enlarged to California King size by a skilled cabinetmaker. The canopy is draped in a sheer linen lined with hand-blockprinted Indian cotton. I decide then that my vinyl mosquito net will not be leaving my suitcase.

**AFTER LUNCH**, served on a loggia that looks out onto an allée of roble amarillo and the tranquil Caribbean beyond, we disperse to our own activities: a walk down to the secluded beach cove, reading turned napping, a few lazy laps in the pool, or a stroll through the tropical gardens that form a circle around the property. "The greatest thing about the house," says John, "is that everyone can get away from each other; there's chaises and little nooks and crannies."

I join Bunny on a pair of sumptuous chaises on the upper veranda facing the sea. "They're perfect for two, or one person and several dogs, which is usually the case," she explains of the oversize lounges designed by Oscar de la Renta for Century. In fact, it was de la Renta who was responsible for La Colina to begin with, having long ago introduced Bunny and John to his enclave on the southeastern tip of the Dominican Republic. His widow, Annette, still owns the house, located just down the road and nestled between Mikhail Baryshnikov and Julio Iglesias, and it was on an annual winter visit in 2003 that the late designer golf-carted his friends over to the three-and-a-half acre plot that architect Ernesto Buch would transform into the Palladio-inspired estate.

Today, Bunny shares her chaise with just one dog, Bob, a terrier mutt whose wiry wheat-colored





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WICKER CHAIRS FROM LLOYD FLANDERS WITH MICHAEL  
TAYLOR INDOOR/OUTDOOR FABRIC CUSHIONS SURROUND AN  
ANTIQUE INDONESIAN TABLE ON THE POOLSIDE TERRACE.  
CHAISE LONGUES FROM COUNTRY CASUAL TEAK.





LEFT BUNNY'S BELOVED DOGS JOIN HER IN HER ANTIQUE MAHOGANY BED. 18TH-CENTURY CARVED GILDED SHELL, WHITE-PAINTED SWEDISH BENCH, OPPOSITE AN ANTIQUE FRENCH PAINTED CANVAS SCREEN ENVELOPS THE KOHLER TUB IN A GUEST BATHROOM.



**“Buy things you love and you’ll have them forever,” says Bunny.**

coat matches the flecked Coralina stone of the terrace. (The three other rescues, Marco, Cleo, and Blanco, are in the kitchen circling Rosa, the chef, like piranhas.) Bob affects a regal air as he gazes over the coconut and date palms.

“It really is heaven, isn’t it?” Bunny notes. “It’s better than medication. I can come down here like this”—she makes a tight fist—“and in a day. . . .” She unclenches her hand and sighs in a yogic exhale. I have to agree. It is hard to imagine that the now lush tropical garden was once a rocky coral outcrop requiring two feet of topsoil to be trucked in.

**AROUND SEVEN O’CLOCK** the group convenes on this same terrace for freshly blended daiquiris before moving through the Monticello-inspired triple-hung windows and across the great room to a loggia overlooking the courtyard. “This is the dining room,” Bunny explains. “When we’re here, we live outside.” She wears an embroidered blue-and-white caftan

that matches the mixed blue-and-white china laid for dinner: antique Kraak salad plates atop candy-striped dinner plates from Pearl River Mart. “John’s a blue-and-white freak,” she explains matter-of-factly. Indeed, the entire house is ornamented with pieces from his collection.

My earlier foray into Bunny’s china room confirms that this table setting for 14 does not make a dent in the designer’s inventory of dinnerware—whether in blue and white or other colors. “I’d rather have too much china than too many clothes,” she says unapologetically, scanning the glass-faced cabinets. “The best way to collect china is to buy by color. Every time I see blue and white, I know I can put it together.” Illustrating her point, she takes a marbled Christopher Spitzmiller pasta bowl, a recent gift from the ceramicist, and sets it on top of a Spode Blue Italian dinner plate. Mismatched sets of green, brown, and white pottery—from new Crate and Barrel to old Wedgwood—fill the rest of the cabinets.

**AFTER DINNER** of pumpkin soup followed by perfectly moist meatloaf and homemade coconut ice cream, the group moves into the main room, where the oversize furniture feels perfectly scaled to the 21-foot-tall ceiling. “With a high ceiling you can’t be afraid of going big,” says Bunny, waving at the enormous elephant ears erupting from the ginger jar on the walnut refectory table that splits the room. “You need a tall arrangement to draw on the height; it actually makes it more intimate.” This logic also applies to the nine-foot-tall Rococo scroll mirrors that Bunny found and had painted white to look like plaster. “Very Dorothy Draper!” she exclaims. On either side of the mirrors hang four-by-eight-foot panels painted by an artist in John’s studio in imitation of 18th-century Chinese designs.

“The nucleus of the furniture in Punta Cana is the residue of houses and things that I really, truly love and that mean something to me,” says John. Not long before they broke ground at La Colina, John had sold a family farmhouse in New Jersey that was packed to the rafters with 50 years of inveterate collecting. “It was like, *What are we going to do with all this furniture?*,” so I said, “Let’s build a house in the Dominican Republic!” jokes the lady of the house. Perched on the high-backed Sicilian sofa slipcovered in blue cotton duck, she swirls her after-dinner drink and scratches Marco’s tummy. “Buy things you love and you’ll have them forever,” she advises. Outside, the palms rustle and the surf echoes. Inside, the stereo is switched on and one couple begins to dance, gently twirling over the striped dhurrie to the Temptations’ “My Girl.” There’s not a mosquito in sight. ▲



BOB, A TERRIER MIX, STOPS IN FRONT OF AN ANTIQUE ANGLO-INDIAN BENCH IN THE BREEZEWAY. BRIGITTE SINGH PILLOWS, OPPOSITE ON THE DINING LOGGIA, AN ANTIQUE WROUGHT-IRON LANTERN ILLUMINATES A FRENCH LIMESTONE TABLE SURROUNDED BY WICKER CHAIRS.





CATAMARAN-STRIPE INDOOR AND OUTDOOR RUG IN CORAL AND WHITE BY DASH & ALBERT; \$338 FOR 6' X 9'. ANNIESELKE.COM

“I like to keep things simple,” says *John*. “Furniture decorates the room, so you don’t need a lot of colorful fabrics.”



BIRD FRAME PRINT BY BUNNY WILLIAMS; FROM \$449. BALLARDDESIGNS.COM



BUNNY'S TABLE FEATURES A HARMONIOUS MIX OF BLUE AND WHITE.

HAND-MARBLED DINNER PLATE; \$125. CHRISTOPHER SPITZMILLER.COM



RAHI CORAL SETTEE; \$3,500. JOHN ROBshaw.COM



“I get so upset when people ask, ‘What’s new in decorating?’” says *Bunny*. “Just take what you have and make it look new.”

LILY MIRROR; \$2,400. OLYSTUDIO.COM



SCALLOP-SHELL SCONCE; TO THE TRADE. PORTAROMANA.COM



WRITER CHLOE MALLE'S LOUIS VUITTON DUFFEL WAS DECORATED BY HER MOTHER, CANDICE BERGEN. BERGENBAGS.COM



A HOUSE BY THE SEA, BY BUNNY WILLIAMS; \$60. ABRAMSBOOKS.COM



52 STRIPES TEA TOWEL BY STUDIOPATRÓ; \$24. FOOD52.COM



CHARLOTTE EURO SHAM IN LAVENDER BY LULU DK; \$135. MATOUK.COM



BLUE ITALIAN DINNER PLATE; \$130 FOR SET OF FOUR. SPODE.COM

MELANGE FLATWARE FIVE-PIECE SET BY BUNNY WILLIAMS; \$79. BALLARDDESIGNS.COM



PAINTED WHITE, A ROCOCO MIRROR ADDS A SUBTLE FLOURISH IN THE LIVING ROOM.



INTERIOR AND FINISHES BY LILIAN WALKER. BOOK AND DUFFEL: LIAM GOODMAN; ALL OTHERS COURTESY OF RESPECTIVE COMPANIES



THREE-PANEL SUN & MOON SCREEN; TO THE TRADE. JOHNROSSELLI.COM



BUNGALOW CHAIR IN PETAL-COTTON CANVAS; FROM \$1,198. SERENAANDLILY.COM

# DESIGN NOTES

At home in the Dominican Republic, *Bunny Williams* and *John Rosselli* put a Caribbean spin on classic style