

The Culture Issue

DEPARTURES

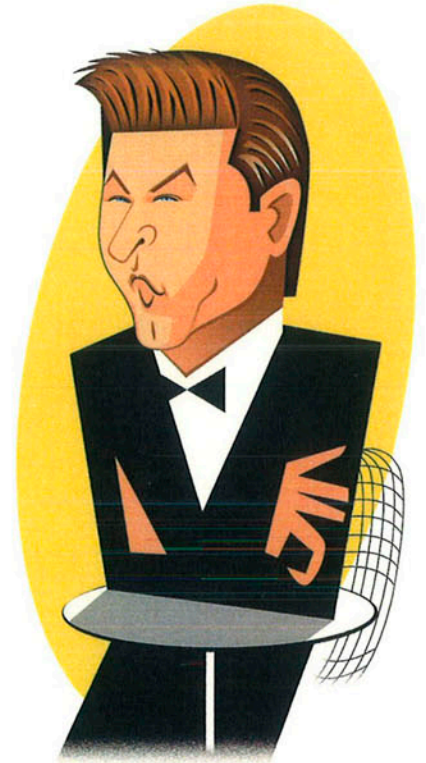
MAY/JUNE 2011



Woody Allen in Cannes



Coco Chanel Strikes Gold



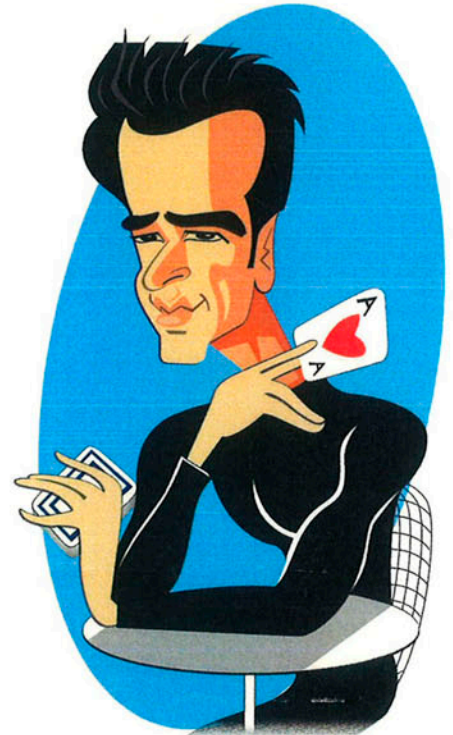
Alec Baldwin Loves NYC



Zaha Hadid's Chinese Opera House



David Hockney's iMasterpieces



David Copperfield's Caribbean Magic...and more ►

Do You Believe in ^{his} Magic?

WHY WOULD THE MOST FAMOUS MAGICIAN IN THE WORLD SPEND MILLIONS OF HIS OWN CASH ON A CARIBBEAN ISLAND? SO THAT THE REST OF US, HE SAYS, ALSO GET A CHANCE AT PARADISE—ALBEIT FOR \$37,500 A NIGHT. *By Richard David Story*

The first time I met David Copperfield was 'round midnight a year ago in Las Vegas. The world's most famous magician, whom I had seen once ten years before at a Broadway matinee with my then-eight-year-old son, had just finished the third of three nightly shows. A white limousine that seemed to run the length of the MGM Grand itself was parked outside, dapper chauffeur at the ready. David and I had been e-troduced by a mutual friend from L.A. "You've gotta meet him, you gotta get to

know him. He's incredibbbble," gushed Lara as fast as her little lacquered fingers could type. "You'll love each other."

Tall, rather touchingly shy for such a megastar and dressed entirely in Prada-black, David shook my hand and politely opened the car door. We headed away from the Strip for some 20 minutes in the dead of night to see another, more private side of David Copperfield.

I'm still not entirely sure who else he allows to visit his museum-cum-warehouse of tricks and treats (which



David Copperfield, photographed on December 8, 2010, at Musha Cay



Copperfield promises a customized experience when you arrive at Musha Cay, with private villas, secluded pools and beaches and gourmet meals.

has an apartment upstairs). But here, in an almost bunker-like fortress surrounded by a tall, unscalable iron fence, are housed some 80,000 “pieces of magic,” including everything from Houdini’s original water torture cabinet to a trove of personal letters from Orson Welles, whom David befriended late in the director’s life (“Mr. Welles was fascinated by magic, and I have always wanted to be a director, so I guess that’s kind of how we bonded,” he tries to explain). We entered through a secret door that Hugh Jackman once joked must give way to “a private sex shop.” Please.

Before we left the museum that night, David sat down at his desk and Googled “Musha Cay,” described as an “exclusive private-island resort in the Bahamas with luxurious accommodations for up to 24 guests. 500 acres on four islands, 25 sugar-sand beaches.” Up popped a video, enhanced by lush photography, clever graphics and a soaring, movie-like soundtrack. Until late last year, David had kept his privately owned island pretty much word-of-mouth, though the website, MushaCay.com, had been up and running for a couple of years. “I wasn’t

really ready for the world to know that much about it,” he said.

A few months later, he reached out with an invitation to visit. Musha Cay, one of 11 islands in the Islands of Copperfield Bay, part of the Exuma group of islands in the southern Bahamas, 85 miles southeast of Nassau, was now, it seemed, officially ready for its close-up. “The property is many different things,” he would later explain, “but for me, it’s a most perfect paradise—with the ability to transform itself into each guest’s own idea of perfection as well.”



DAVE'S DRIVE-IN

At Musha Cay’s open-air theater, guests can settle in on big, comfy chaises, with large, cushy pillows and cashmere throws at the ready, to view a film from Copperfield’s vast collection. A candy bar with 20 different varieties is set up for snacking.

Perfect paradise” is, as we know, a tall order, but after spending a long weekend there with David, who otherwise never steps foot on the island when guests are present, Musha Cay comes pretty close: At \$37,500 a night (“It can accommodate up to 24 people,” he says, “so really, if you divide \$37,500 by the number of guests...”), your own private Musha Cay comes with swaying palms, wild monkeys, a “drive-in” movie theater, a 28-foot Nautilus Rib Catamaran, two jet boats, two Boston Whalers and two Hobie Cat sailboats. There are Yamaha Jet Skis, golf

carts for getting around, a water trampoline and a world-class chef (Stephan Kritzinger is, according to David, “a culinary magician”) who whips up dishes like lobster risotto, grilled Kobe beef and sumptuous bamboo platters of handcrafted sushi *kaiseki*. A 37-foot speedboat called *Midnight Express* was replicated from one owned by Colombian drug lord Pablo Escobar. The original was built to outrun the Coast Guard, which considered these waters among the most notorious in the world.

On a three-mile-long sandbar called Heaven on Earth, just a private yacht’s jaunt away from the “big” island (after all, there are 11 in David’s mini-archipelago), Penélope Cruz and Javier Bardem were married in 2010. David goes completely mum on the topic, as well as anything on Johnny Depp, Bill Gates or other celebrities rumored to have stayed there.

It all began when David identified four places of architectural wonder in the world. “I drew a line on the globe from Stonehenge, in England, to Easter Island, in the South Pacific, from the Pyramids of Giza, in Egypt, to the Pyramid of the Sun, in Mexico. Amazingly, these two lines intersect at a very specific point—and that point is Musha Cay.” Admittedly, DEPARTURES hasn’t done its own circumnavigational logistics, but we will vouch that the islands and their location

are just about ideal. "When astronauts were asked what they considered to be the most beautiful place on earth, they pointed to the Exumas in the lower Bahamas because of their vibrantly clear waters." From there, David was determined to find the location for the perfect experience. "I really wanted to finally have a place to relax that was away from everything and everybody else," he says. "I also wanted it to be a new canvas on which to amaze anyone who thought they had already seen it all." David loves telling how he's already had to devise three versions of the Musha Cay "treasure hunt" as return guests keep requesting it, and "I want to make sure they experience new magical clues and wonders on every visit."

On Musha Cay everything is included, including the new Secret Village, which he's building now. According to David, "Guests will enter through a winding antique staircase hidden behind a statue, then journey through an underground tunnel and emerge into an enchanted world of amazingly friendly monkeys who love to interact with people—if the people so choose!"

Musha Cay is a project on which David is said to have lavished millions of his own money—and the past four years of his life. He has every intention of making the

place financially self-sufficient, though it's hard to imagine how, even at \$37,500 a night. He proudly walked us through all five villas, each filled with more exotic artifacts than the next. The big house, appropriately named Highview, is stuffed with ancient Burmese temple statues and camel trunks from the Middle East, a few of which have been turned into furniture. This island is, after all, about comfort, not museum-going. The Houdini Room at the Landings, where you dock upon arrival, is filled with artifacts from his hero and muse and includes personal letters from Charlie Chaplin and Arthur Conan Doyle, pieces of Houdini's water torture cell and a fortune-telling machine with clever, customized fortunes for each guest. A gym right on the beach has out front a statue dedicated to heavyweight boxing champ Jack Johnson that was erected at the Eiffel Tower at the turn of the last century.

David boasts that he and his team can do anything you need them to do, that your experience can be customized with

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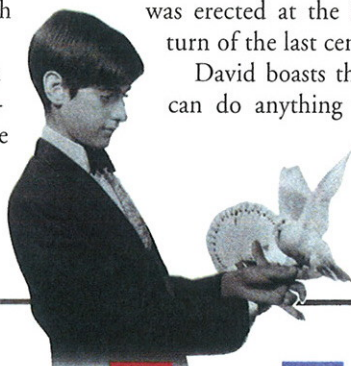
Musha Cay and the Islands of Copperfield Bay are reached by 1) a commercial flight into Exuma International Airport in George Town, Bahamas, then a 15-minute flight or a one-hour boat ride; 2) private jet to Rudder Cut Cay, followed by a five-minute boat transfer to Musha Cay; or 3) a 15-minute helicopter ride from George Town to Musha Cay's helipad.

hairdressers, masseurs, imported Piedmontese truffles, a yoga teacher or a visual arts instructor. But more likely, you'll find yourself at the beach or one of the villa pools, sailboating, yachting or snorkeling. You can paddle over to another little island and hike the route of 19th-century smugglers and pirates, or picnic on that sandbar where Penélope Cruz was said to have arrived, by Jet Ski, in a wedding dress ("I wouldn't know," says David, the consummate privacy consultant). And there's always

after-dinner movies at Dave's Drive-In.

On a particularly starry night, much like that first one when I met David, I camped out with frozen Snickers bars, fistfuls of Swedish Fish, Milk Duds and Junior Mints to watch *Some Like It Hot*, the classic Billy Wilder film starring Marilyn Monroe, Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis. At the end of the movie, when Joe E. Brown turns to Curtis and delivers that famous last line, "Well, nobody's perfect," I could only think of how David Copperfield tries his hardest to prove that's not always the case. ■

For further details, go to mushacay.com.



1956

Born David Kotkin in Metuchen, New Jersey. A naturally shy boy, David quickly discovers that magic helps him build confidence.

1968

His talent shines despite his youth, and at age 12 he becomes the youngest member ever of the Society of American Magicians.

1977

David stars in a highly acclaimed ABC special called *The Magic of ABC* with David Copperfield. Soon after, CBS hires David to create *The Magic of David Copperfield*.



1983

David makes the Statue of Liberty disappear on CBS's *The Magic of David Copperfield*. Since 1981, the yearly special has garnered 38 Emmy nominations and 21 awards.



THE LIFE AND CAREER OF DAVID COPPERFIELD

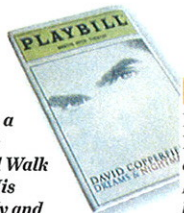
1991

He founds the International Museum and Library of the Conjuring Arts, the largest private collection of magic memorabilia.



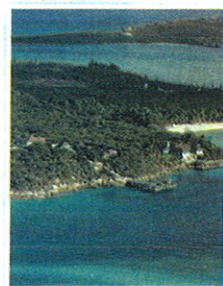
1995

David gets a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. His parents, Hy and Rebecca Kotkin, join him in the celebrations.



1996

Dreams and Nightmares, his collaboration with Francis Ford Coppola, becomes the highest grossing show ever on Broadway.



2006

David purchases the 11 islands of Musha Cay and christens them "The Islands of Copperfield Bay."