

## BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

- Superyacht moorings
- Sustainable development

# Oil Nut Bay

DAVID JOHNSON'S VISION IS TO CREATE A LUXURY RESORT AND SUPERYACHT MARINA IN THE CARIBBEAN — AND TO BUILD IT WITH ENVIRONMENTAL INTEGRITY

**FRANCES AND MICHAEL HOWORTH REPORT**



**Superyacht captains were consulted for advice on how they would approach the marina on Virgin Gorda**

**After five years** cruising the coastlines of 13 different Caribbean nations in his 39m sailing superyacht *Resolute*, David Johnson concludes: "There's no place on Earth more stunning than the British Virgin Islands." And it's this heart-felt belief that has inspired him to embark on a visionary plan to create a luxury residential complex and superyacht marina — called Oil Nut Bay — on the island of Virgin Gorda.

Johnson is no stranger to ambitious yachting projects.

In the early 1990s he bought an industrially scarred site on the shores of Lake Michigan then demolished its disused factories, filled in its quarries, and created Bay Harbor — a US\$1bn resort set in 1,200 acres along five miles of coastline with deep-water

moorings for yachts up to 60m.

The success of Bay Harbor has helped to set out the blueprint for Johnson's Oil Nut Bay business plan in the BVIs.

Building to exceptionally high environmental standards — and co-operating with local communities — has meant that early opposition to the development quickly dissolved.

### Island acquisition

In 2006, Johnson's investment group — Victor International Corporation — acquired Biras Creek Resort, a Relais & Chateaux hotel property located on the eastern tip of Virgin Gorda. More than a million dollars was spent on upgrades to ensure its status as an eco friendly resort. It now features 31 suites set within a 140-acre preserve that is only reachable



**The resort is set in 300 acres located on top of a secluded peninsula**

by boat or helicopter.

Johnson plans to align the hotel with the development at Oil Nut Bay and the superyacht marina in North Sound.

His on-island management team promotes a philosophy of ecological sustainability that focuses on creating and

maintaining healthy natural environments for residents, hotel guests, visiting yachts, resort staff — and all of the creatures sharing the island.

It is this philosophy that lies at the heart of Johnson's infrastructure developments. Not only does he own the

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Virgin Gorda sites outright, he also lives on-site for several months of the year after having laid down permanent moorings for *Resolute*.

To say Johnson is a hands-on developer is something of an understatement. On our tour of the site he took the wheel of a hybrid-powered four-wheel drive vehicle and answered every question put to him.

He knows the area like the

the berths and how to best use wind to assist, rather than complicate the mooring operations. Based on the outstanding successes of his previous eco-communities, Oil Nut Bay and the superyacht marina are already receiving worldwide attention.

Despite the difficult world economy, potential customers are making serious enquiries with many already signed up.

meetings beginning with a dedication ceremony in March.

Featuring a club house and marina that will be known as YCCS Virgin Gorda it will offer 38 slips for superyachts from 30m-100m, surrounded by a quaint village complete with upscale retail boutiques, fine dining and private villas.

Five berthing agreements have now been signed by superyacht owners eager to use the marina as a winter home base.

The marina will help reduce waste pumped out into North Sound by providing sewage containment facilities. It will also minimise anchoring impact as well as reduce the noise and air pollution associated with the necessity of running generators.

### Constant supervision

"I'm mindful of the responsibility that comes with such an opportunity to develop this land," says Johnson.

"In the past I used to develop sites on a huge scale and often my projects overlapped each other. But having seen Bay Harbor develop so well under my constant supervision, I now prefer to develop one project at a time pooling all my personal and financial resources into that project to ensure the end result is a quality product."

Because the land is the foundation of the community that will ultimately live there, Oil Nut Bay will — like Bay Harbor — be protected and enhanced during redevelopment.

The Oil Nut Bay Community Stewardship Organisation (CSO) has been set up to provide high standards of harmonious integration of both the land and the infrastructure built upon it.

This will encourage environmental stewardship and provide ecological, scientific and educational opportunities for residents, guests and

visiting superyachts.

It will also operate a nature centre offering multi-generational learning about the environment through experiences and adventures on the land and in the sea.

Perhaps the most encouraging of all the rules that Johnson has put in place to ensure that this new infrastructure will be intrinsically sound, is his insistence that everything is achieved using local talent and drawing almost entirely on the assets available within the British Virgin Islands.

It means that the local workforce is kept busy, with building contractors occupied and the land-moving, heavy equipment kept running. All are essential parts of the island economy.

When complete, Johnson's vision of being able to sip coffee and eat a juicy mango as the morning sun rises over the ocean while the scent of sweet frangipani wafts on a soft breeze, will become a reality.

His homes will offer superyacht owners and charter clients the ability to sail in the early morning, swim and dive in the forenoon, laze in the afternoon — and enjoy dinner and dancing in the evening.

It is, as he says, a vision he has, but today the facts prove it is fast becoming a reality. ●



Island developer, David Johnson

back of his hand, and being something of a showman, knows how to present it to visitors in a most favoured light.

At one point on our island tour he drove the vehicle at full speed towards the edge of a cliff, coming to a sudden stop just inches away from a sheer drop into the Caribbean.

"Now isn't that a stunning view?" he asked.

The luxurious island development is now slowly coming to life — 300 acres of dramatic tropical landscape sitting on top of a secluded peninsula, where soaring hills afford sunlit panoramas of the wide open ocean.

Johnson even sought the advice of a group of superyacht captains before committing to the design of the marina docks.

The captains advised him on how they would approach

There are 88 residential sites within Oil Nut Bay, all offered as freehold plots. The type of homes that can be built on them include estate houses (with up to 10 acres of land) and villas. To date 11 of the 88 plots are under contract with three homes already under construction. One is already completed and ready for occupation.

### Regattas to come

Private jetties will help residents with airport transfers by boat while other facilities include a spa, fitness centre, restaurants and bars.

The Sardinia-based Yacht Club Costa Smeralda has agreed to create its Caribbean outpost in Oil Nut Bay.

It has already planned a series of superyacht regattas and other yacht related

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