



SPLendor IN BARTHELEMY

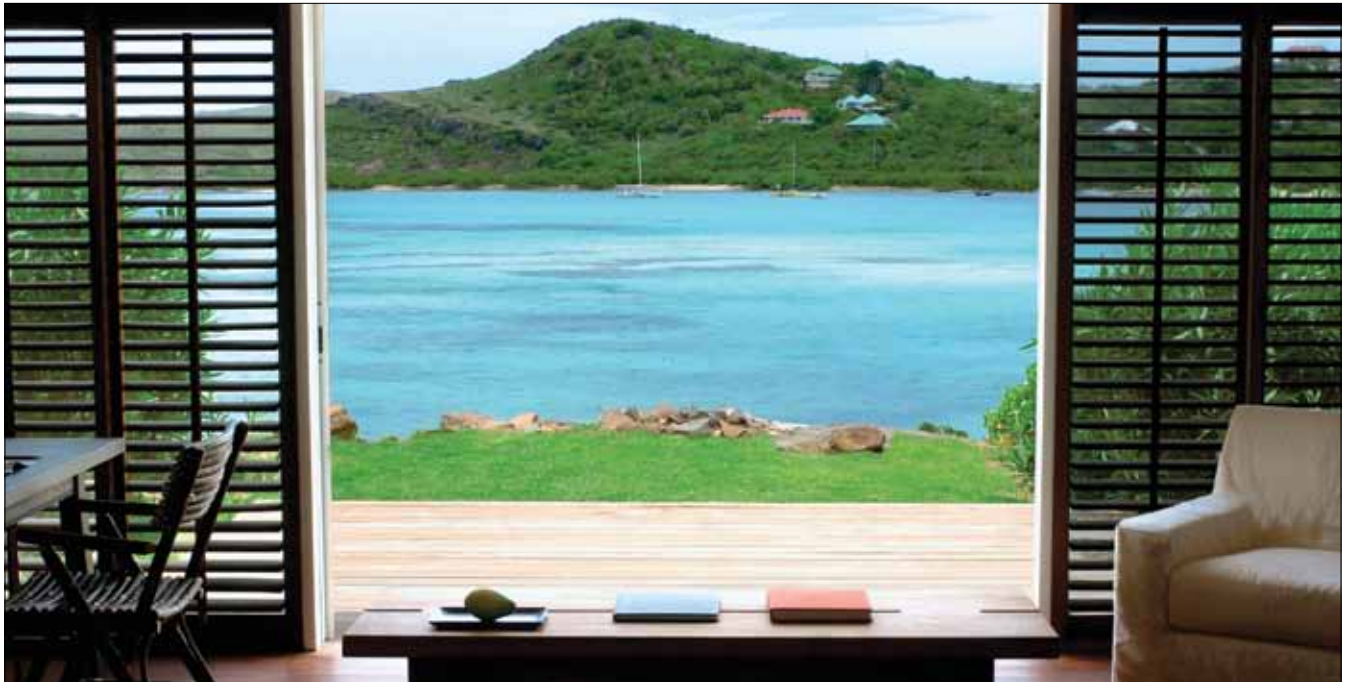
St. Barthélemy, a.k.a. St. Barth, isn't like all the other islands in the Caribbean. Common spaces are well manicured, hotels are always tasteful, shops close down from noon to three and everyone drinks rosé at lunch. In other words, it's French territory. The island is a perfect hybrid, taking the best of what France and the southern Caribbean have to offer. A trip to St. Barths is like two vacations for the price of one and a half. Prices are steep, but nowhere is the adage "you get what you pay for" more applicable. In fact, the place is so civilized that if it weren't for the occasional goat in the road and the Japanese 4x4's (the preferred method of

transportation throughout the islands), it could very easily be mistaken for the Cote d'Azur.

Just as it is in St. Tropez, the most popular places in St. Barth tend to be the same year after year, with new additions making big waves before settling in the ranks of the classics. One hotel doing just that is **Le Sereno**, a serene collection of picturesque villas and Creole huts located on the eastern edge of the island, on the Petit Cul-de-Sac. Opened by Ignacio Contreras and his multitalented children Luis, Manuel and Gabriela, Le Sereno is easily the most beautifully designed hotel on the island. The hotel is simultaneously

luxurious and streamlined, reworked by Christian Liaigre (famous for New York's Mercer Hotel) who employed a California-modern aesthetic using local materials. The grounds aren't too shabby either, lushly swathed with climate-appropriate flora by landscape architect Fernando Tabora.

Individual rooms are freestanding, with each one afforded a private deck and view of the bay. The rooms are a study in Caribbean minimalism, complete with iPod docks, flat-screens and cushy beds outfitted with mosquito nets. Each one features tropical hardwoods, natural stones and deep tubs outfitted with top-of-the-line fixtures and Ex Voto bath products.



Le Sereno's high-end canteen **Le Restaurant des Pêcheurs** is in the center of the hotel. There's always plenty of fresh fish on the menu, prepared Mediterranean-style. The chef keeps his European clientele happy with gourmet takes on bouillabaisse, risotto with grilled scallops and whole salt-crusted Atlantic or Mediterranean fish. And of course, there are continental land-based classics like *côte de boeuf* and roasted lamb. Other exquisite dining options on the island include **L'Isola**, an Italian restaurant on par with the best on the mainland, and **Bonito**, featuring spectacular views of Gustavia

harbor and cuisine by master chef Laurent Cantineaux, who prepares Latino-Caribbean eats with a French touch.

Gustavia, the capital, is the place to go shopping. Hermès, Dior and all the big names in haute couture are there. A skilled shopper who takes a little extra time can also find smaller, less pricey boutiques carrying French lines generally not available in the U.S. Another destination for shopping is **St. Jean**, where better-priced finds are easy to find at the little boutiques that line the thoroughfare. St. Jean also has the famous **Eden Rock** hotel, along with trendy

beachside bar/restos **Le Ti** and **Casa Nikki** (a Nikki Beach outpost).

Snorkeling might not be as popular of a St. Barth pastime as shopping or drinking rosé, but there is good snorkeling all over the island, especially in the barrier reef at the mouth of the Petit Cul-de-Sac, on the beach of Le Sereno. Sea turtles can be found at the **Baie de Saint-Jean**. **Colombier Beach** is quiet with still, turquoise waters, accessible only after a 20-minute hike around a formidable mountain.

Visit 944.com/lesereno for Hadley's vacation photos