



The Lucileh Suite at  
Hôtel Barrière Le  
Carl Gustaf.

TRAVEL

## Queen of the Hill

A St. Bart's grande dame makes a valiant return in one of the best hotel openings of the year. *by Michael Gross*

**BOTH FAMILIAR AND NEW**, Hôtel Barrière Le Carl Gustaf, a 30-year-old luxury hotel atop a hill in Gustavia, on St. Bart's, reopened late last year, like a dowager emerging from a transformative seven years of slumber.

In January, I walked into the hotel for the first time in even longer; it had been more than a decade since I'd last visited "the Carl." Looking out at the panoramic

sunset view of Gustavia's port from a belvedere-like terrace, I felt like I was meeting the old hotel's debutante daughter on the bow of a sleek new sailboat. It turns out that's exactly what designer Dorothée Boissier of Gilles & Boissier intended with her firm's "facelift," as she calls it, of the property. Boissier had even placed a brass telescope on the terrace to "enjoy the view, the wind, and the sea."

The new Carl has been molded as much by Boissier as by the deft hand of France's Barrière Group, which has come to the western hemisphere for the first time with its takeover of this St. Bart's icon. The old Carl was the creation of a French building-supply entrepreneur—appropriately, the patron of the Vendée Globe quadrennial round-the-world sailboat race; his family owned and ran it until 2013. Two years later, it was sold to a real estate investor with deep roots on the island (I used to go to his saucy nightclub revues at a now-shuttered hotel restaurant called La Banane). He, in turn, gave the Barrière Group a long lease on the property based on a vow to spend at least \$12 million on its restoration. In the end, it likely cost much more: Work began but was halted several times before finally resuming after the devastation caused by Hurricane Irma in 2017.

Today, the Carl has 21 sea-view rooms, including lavish suites, and three rows of hillside bungalows, all with private entrances and terraces and set within a gated garden surrounded by century-old walls. Everything has been re-created to evoke a sense of old St. Bart's: red-peaked roofs, woven bamboo doors, louvered windows, and, inside, caramel-marble bathrooms and handmade Italian glassware.

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### Away We Go

Three more new and noteworthy escapes.

#### Alila Marea Beach Resort Encinitas

The laid-back beach community of Encinitas, California, has found a perfect match in this arrival from Alila, the Asia-based hotel group that first arrived in the U.S. in 2017 with its takeover of Ventura Big Sur on the Central Coast. The 130-room resort opened

in March on a bluff above South Ponto Beach, with an oceanfront pool, holistic spa, surf lessons, and restaurant from rising local chef Claudette Zepeda. *Rooms from \$599; alilahotels.com.*

#### Madeline Hotel & Residences, Auberge Resorts Collection

Colorado's Telluride finally has a hotel worthy of its world-class slopes thanks to the debut of this ski-in, ski-out resort located steps

from the gondola. The Timber Room serves whiskey cocktails in cozy, private nooks; the Black Iron Kitchen and Bar combines hearty dishes like elk chili with seasonal produce; and the heated pool offers incredible views of the San Juan Mountains year-round. *Rooms from \$599; aubegereresorts.com.*

**Necker Island** Four years after Hurricane Irma, Richard Branson's British Virgin

Islands retreat is practically brand-new with a redesigned great house and Balinese-style villas and solar panels and wind turbines that provide most of the island's energy. The resort is available for buyouts, as well as by-the-room bookings during occasional Celebration Weeks—the first this year will take place in July. *Buyouts from \$105,000 per night for up to 40 guests; rooms from \$36,050 per week; neckerisland.com.*

COURTESY HOTEL BARRIÈRE LE CARL GUSTAF



But the hotel has the sheen of modernity too. There's a gym with Pilates machines, plus the Spa Diane Barrière, which gives guests new faces of their own with custom Biologique Recherche treatments. In the rooms, touch pads control everything from the light dimmers to the spritzing Toto toilets, and chilled wine cabinets are stocked with Dom Pérignon and Chassagne-Montrachet, which I drank in my private plunge pool equipped with a lightweight aquabike. On arrival, guests are given sun hats, flip-flops, beach bags, and water bottles (refilled daily with filtered *eau du Carl*). A fleet of electric bicycles isn't just a cute touch—it's a necessity given the Carl's perch above Gustavia. "They go up the hill; we tried them," Emmanuelle Cipriani, the hotel's general manager, assured me.

High up as it may be, the hotel is a short walk to the center of town, where, after a bit of shopping, I lunched at Shel-lona, the Carl's seafood-centric *estiatorio* and beach club on yacht-friendly Shell Beach. Back at the top of the hill, the hotel has also opened a branch of Barrière's grand Champs-Élysées gourmet brasserie, Fouquet's, supervised by noted toque Pierre Gagnaire. While at dinner one evening, I sent snaps of the megayachts down below to a friend—a boat broker—who identified them as the toys of Bill Gates, Roman Abramovich, and others. Dining on my foie gras, wahoo carpaccio, and sole normande, I felt, literally and figuratively, above them all. Just as the Carl intended. **■ Rooms from \$1,065; [hotel.sbarriere.com](http://hotel.sbarriere.com).**

#### SKY'S THE LIMIT

In the past year, flying private has, for some, been more than a luxury—it's become a must for worry-free travel. Companies like **Wheels Up**

and **VistaJet** saw a wave of new members, while upstart **Aero** introduced an innovative model with semi-private charter flights (currently between Los Angeles and

Aspen). Hotels also took flight to offer safe and seamless travel: **Four Seasons** partnered with **NetJets**, **MGM Resorts** brought guests to Vegas via **JSX**, and, in the

Bahamas, **Kamalame Cay** launched its own aviation company, **COCO Bahama Seaplanes**, connecting the private-isle resort with major sites throughout the country.



The *Oceania Riviera* sails the Caribbean Sea.

**Back at Sea** While cruise companies have been in dry dock, they've been putting finishing touches on these standout itineraries for 2022 and 2023.

**Island Hopper** A sleek new ship plus a compelling pair of island nations make **Celebrity Cruises'** 12-night Iceland & Ireland itinerary on the *Celebrity Apex* a perfect summer escape. Three sailings in 2022 travel round-trip from Amsterdam with overnights in Reykjavik and Akureyri, Iceland—allowing time for adventure under the midnight sun—and full days in Belfast, Dublin, and Cork. *From \$2,700 per person; [celebritycruises.com](http://celebritycruises.com).*

**Culinary Journey** Small-ship cruising and elevated cuisine come together as never before on *Silver Moon*, the first ship to offer **Silversea's** S.A.L.T. (Sea and Land Taste) culinary program. Book January 2022's 14-night Hong-Kong-to-Singapore itinerary for curated excursions, like cooking classes in Hoi An, Vietnam, and street-food tours in Ho

Chi Minh City. Then return aboard for tastings and demonstrations in the S.A.L.T. Lab. *From \$6,210 per person; [silversea.com](http://silversea.com).*

**Ultimate Europe** Regent Seven Seas Cruises' 65-night Grand European Sojourn on the new *Seven Seas Splendor* is an immersive tour of the continent's greatest cities. The sailing, on which only five days are spent at sea, visits 47 ports in 22 countries as it travels from Stockholm to Rome, with stops in nearly every metropolis in Europe (including some surprising little-known ones), and promises overnights in St. Petersburg and Venice. *From \$55,000 per person; [rssc.com](http://rssc.com).*

**Incredible Expedition** Ocean meets river aboard Seabourn's new expedition ship, *Venture*, on the 19-day Brazilian

Highlights & The Amazon itinerary, sailing from Buenos Aires to Manaus, Brazil, in March 2023. The adventure blends urban exploration in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo with the golden beaches of Brazil's Ilha Grande, then crosses the equator to venture up the Amazon through the Instagram-worthy phenomenon known as the Meeting of Waters. *From \$12,300 per person; [seabournexpeditions.com](http://seabournexpeditions.com).*

**Tropical Retreat** Next January, **Oceania Cruises'** 14-night Caribbean Charms will take passengers on the *Oceania Riviera* from Miami to all the classic island escapes—Puerto Rico, St. Bart's, Barbados—adding in secret gems like the bat cave of Martinique and Wallilabou Bay on St. Vincent. *From \$2,950 per person; [oceaniacruises.com](http://oceaniacruises.com).*  
— Donna Heiderstadt

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