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CARIBBEAN LUXURY LIFESTYLE, PROPERTY AND DESIGN MAGAZINE

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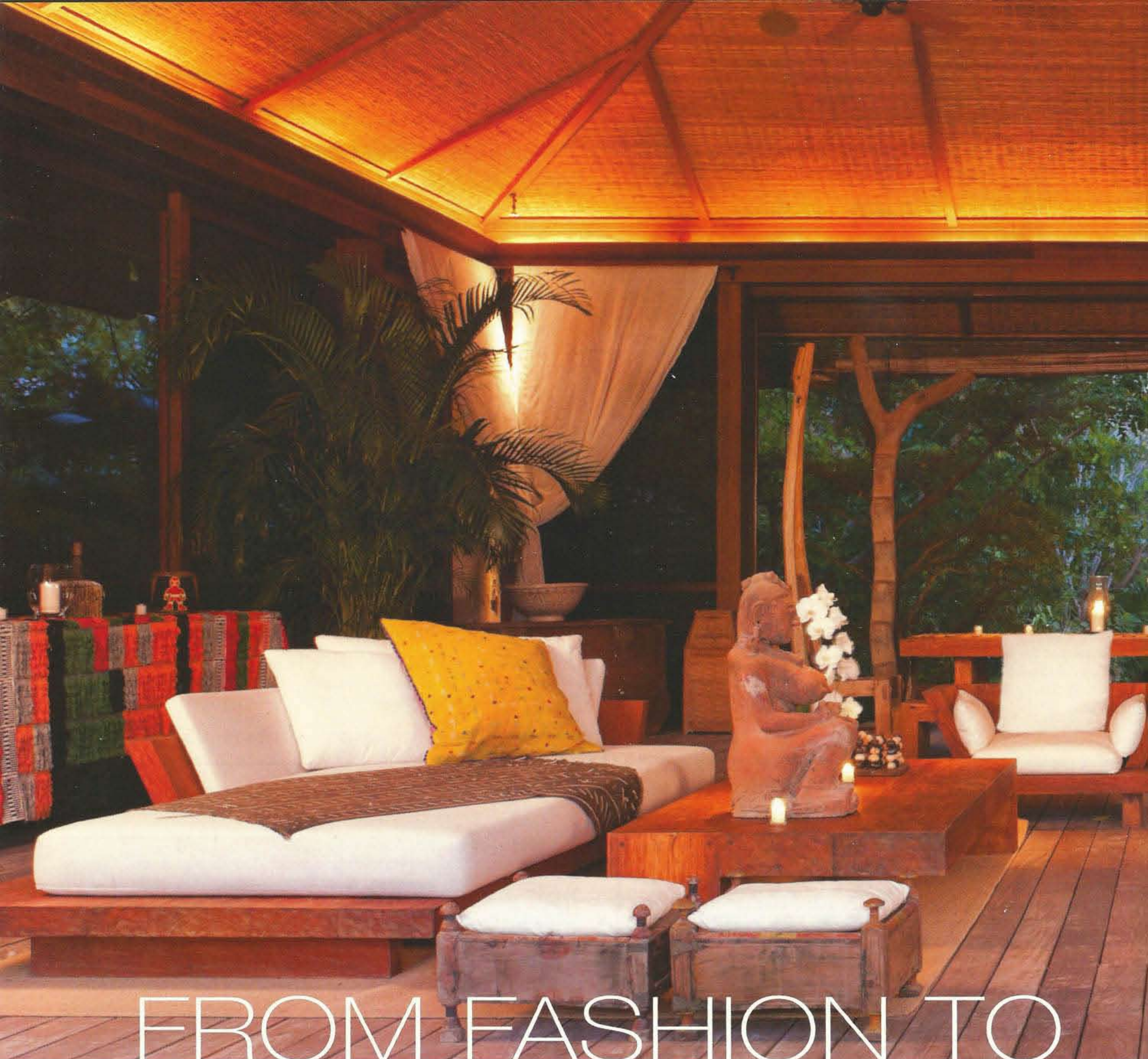
EXCLUSIVE SHOWCASE PROPERTY & PROFILE

DONNA KARAN

A JOURNEY FROM FASHION TO COMPASSION
AND HER TURKS & CAICOS SANCTUARY

SHOWCASE PROPERTY INSIDE

VILLA AZURA – A SIREN'S SONG IN ANTIGUA



FROM FASHION TO COMPASSION

The outside-in story of iconic designer, Donna Karan – her Caribbean cocoon of serenity and her journey from fashion forward.

Words by Juliet Austin. Photos by Steve Passmore – Provo Pictures. Styling by Stacie Steensland.

“I’m just getting on the plane,” she interjects. A voice urges passengers to take their seats before the aircraft doors can be closed. *And all electronic devices?* My heart sinks. The line goes dead. Donna Karan is winging her way to Haiti, where her heart lies, as she does every month. “It’s where I go to create awareness,” she states, matter-of-factly – all part of

work of artist, Phillipe Dodard, whose bold lines inspired elements of Karan's 2012 Spring Collection.


Strangely then, in a bizarre way, Karan's childhood dream *has* been realised – her song and dance now resonating on the global stage. In finding ways both to dress and address, Karan strips away outer layers to reveal the value of inner beauty on her journey from fashion to compassion. 



Photo by Russell James



Photo by Krisanne Johnson





her ever-evolving journey into mind, body and spirit. But to me, it all sounds strangely incongruous. Where is the diva I expected? Surely, Ms. DKNY, New York's inimitable 'ball of fashion fire' should be heading to the glamorous catwalks of Paris or Milan to tinker with the warp and weft of some garment, or, at the very least, to her island paradise in Parrot Cay, the Turk and Caicos Islands, not to the runways of quake-stricken Haiti on a crusade to rebuild a

nation? Then again, something tells me – life with the sixty something-year-old Queen of Seventh Avenue is anything but predictable.

Born, fittingly, in Queens, Donna Faske grew up in Long Island, the daughter of a Joan Crawford-esque showroom model and a custom tailor, who died when she was just three. Describing her adolescent self as, "alone, afraid and insecure," like many girls her age, Karan's pocketful of

dreams included becoming a fashion illustrator, singer or dancer. She soon discovered, however, that she was cut from different cloth. Karan notes, "Being raised by a single parent – a working woman – in those days, I always felt different." It is, though, this exact sense of polarity, this empathic penchant for recognising the plight of womankind, which formed the crucible of the fashion mogul's innate design sensibility, shaping her signature style →

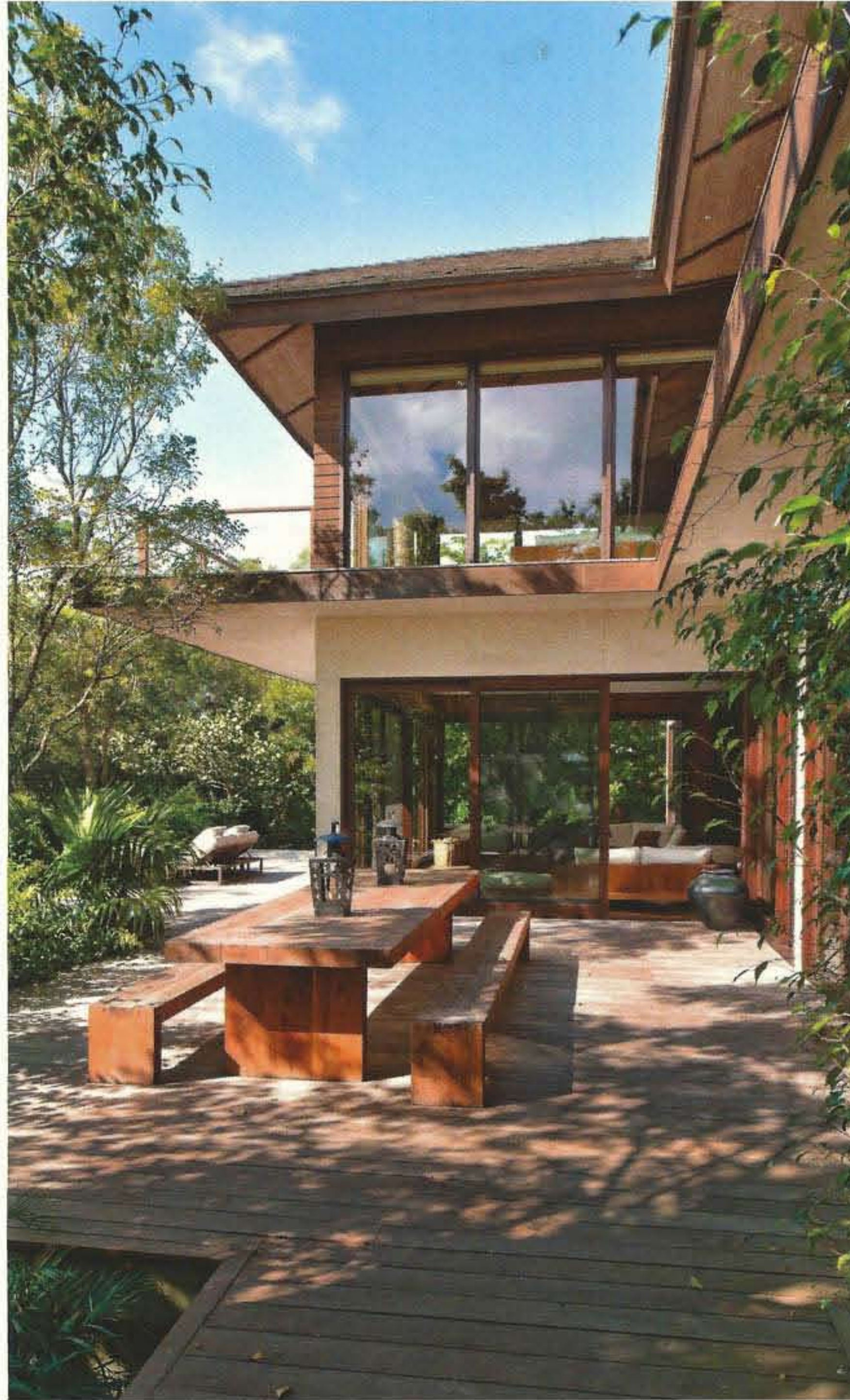
into what has been called the *quintessential Gothamite brand*. “Plus,” she rationalises, glibly, “I’ve been around suits my whole life.”

Yet, it would be a life altering date with fate – an interview for a summer internship with fashion guru, Anne Klein – that would set the trajectory for Karan’s life. Rocking up in a pinstripe suit and white fedora, Klein was drawn by Karan’s bodacious style and determination. A demanding perfectionist, Klein nurtured her protégé, grooming the young designer for greatness. But, once again, the universe interceded. The events that followed are not only the fodder of fashion industry folklore; they represent the recurring motif of death and rebirth so central to Karan’s psyche.

In 1974, receiving the devastating news of her mentor, Anne Klein’s death, as she cradled her newborn in her hospital bed, the twenty-six year old was presented with a choice: succeed as head designer at Klein or fulfil her dream of becoming the stay-at-home mother she never had. Moving the entire staff into her maternity room, Karan recalls how her first collection was stitched and sewn while caring for her daughter. “Sometimes the universe puts things on our plate and we simply have no choice,” she states, philosophically.

Ten years later, having left Klein, divorced, and remarried sculptor and soul mate, Stephan Weiss, Karan bit the bullet and launched her eponymously named design company, Donna Karan New York (DKNY). Received rapturously, her first solo collection “answered a need,” for which the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) awarded her Designer of the Year. Revolutionising the wardrobe of working women with her layered,

seven-easy-pieces power dressing system, Karan’s clothing was concept-driven, eschewing the often quixotic, or uncomfortable designs of the day in favour of classic elegance and comfort. Says Karan, “As a designer, I realise there’s more to our lives than what we wear on the outside. The body talks, telling what it wants to hide and



what it wants to show. It’s all about the body and the fabric.” Or, as fellow collaborator, Robert Lee Morris asserts, “Donna is very blatant about body language... It’s all about this sexual power – the drape, the swagger.”

With the rhythm of her life punctuated by collection deadlines and runway shows, the material girl’s astute business sense built the multi-million dollar global powerhouse,

Donna Karan International. “Gifted with passion,” and with flagship stores in every fashion mecca from London to LA, Karan was a woman on the rise. Sadly, her life was to be, once again, touched by tragedy. Diagnosed with lung cancer in 1994, her husband responded to the restorative energy of Parrot Cay, a private island in

Turks and Caicos owned by friends, Christina and B.S. Ong. Surrounded by family, it is here the couple renewed their wedding vows in a barefoot beach ceremony; here, during their final Christmas, that Karan promised to build her beloved a compound where the entire family could gather for years to come.

Unable to fight any longer, Weiss passed away in June, 2001, but not before brokering a record-shattering, \$450 million sale of the signature clothing line to French fashion titans, Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy. Devastated and, inevitably, in the throes of a collection, Karan’s search for deeper meaning took another radical turn after the events of 9/11. Forever altering her physical and emotional landscape, Karan could have simply unravelled. Instead, she saw a new era, “An opportunity to look at life differently.”

Over the course of the next nine years, working alongside architects and interior designers,

Singapore-based Cheong Yew Kuan, English-born Dominic Kozerski and Italian Enrico Bonetti, Karan made good on her promise. The result? The Sanctuary: a modular, made-to-measure estate encompassing the couple’s favourite things in the world; a place of renewal, where heart, body, mind and spirit are free to be. “The kind of place,” she adds, “that inspires you to make memories.” →







Channelling twenty-first century minimalism, the intelligent design blurs any distinction between outside and in. Carefully lit exterior gardens extend spaces outward at night, just as oiled Ipe decking blends with interiors by day. Answering the call of nature, inspiration drew from Karan's love of Bali's Begawan Giri Resort. "There, harmony – between man and man, man and surroundings, man and god – is enshrined in life," explains Kuan. "In Parrot Cay, synchronicity with landscape was paramount. Every element is visually and experientially heightened." Co-existing with nature, the home unequivocally leaves an impression, "but paradoxically, no trace," says Kuan. "Buildings are strong, filled with wind, light, air and rain; open to the elements, yet conversely, able to disappear amidst a cocoon of green."



Carefully proportioned on ten acres of land and connected via a labyrinth of walkways, the six buildings become an "abstraction of the forest" at the interface between land and sea. A fusion of local coral stone, lustrous cedar cladding and glass sets the scene for the ethereal splendour of an

elevated infinity pool – an enchanting looking glass reflecting the ever-changing hues of the heavens above. Cleverly orchestrated to unfurl before the eye, an authentic 2,000 square foot Indonesian bale of ruddy bangkirai wood forms the main house. Positioned atop a monolithic stone-clad base, it provides dramatic vertical shift and movement. "Almost an artisanal artefact, the breezeway functions as a dining area and pool lounge,

while giving spectacular views over the bay and open ocean above," Kozerski observes. →



Inside, cross-cut white travertine, its natural imperfections brushed to soften edges and maintain tactile connection with the outdoors, contrasts with dark stained European walnut flooring, which is weathered to add texture. Balancing openness with intimacy, "Entire window walls can be slid or hinged open to bring in large amounts of light, whereas ceilings, lined with chunky rattan, follow the dramatic rooflines. Uplit from coves at the eaves, they bestow an ambient glow to rooms at night."

Judicious use of natural materials accentuates the organic vibe, while an earthy, matt palette unifies the interior scheme, "allowing us to use materials in large gestures that define spaces," explains Kozerski. Dotted around, gnarly armchairs, hewn from knotted tree trunks, deliver raw contours and sensuous forms, contrasting starkly with crisp linens, clean lines and polished surfaces. Large canopy beds, draped in voile, anchor bedrooms, while oversized daybeds, mountainous poufs and enormous hanging sofas provide endless places to laze under Buddha's ever watchful gaze.

Lazing, however, is evidently not high on Karan's agenda. Her desire to memorialise her husband, raise awareness of heartfelt issues like healthcare and education and introduce conscious consumerism metamorphosed into Urban Zen. Run from Weiss' former Manhattan studio,

the organisation seeks to bring together philanthropy and commerce to, "advance wellness, preserve culture and empower children." Thus, when a catastrophic earthquake struck Haiti in 2010, in her husband's honour, Karan rolled up her sleeves and headed into the lion's den. Her visits would signal a turning point in the designer's life. She reflects, "Stephan was a beautiful person. His heart would have been in Haiti too." Never could she have imagined the profound gift she would receive in return.





Attuned to the creativity around her, and inspired by the against-all-odds spirit of entrepreneurship, Karan began to formulate a means of empowering Haitians to forge the fabric of a new society. Having seen her friend, jewellery designer, John Hardy's work with bamboo in Bali, she applied the same principles to Haiti, using her clout to connect the dots between people and places previously worlds apart. "This is my legacy to my children and grandchildren. The world is in crisis – in need like never before. If we've been gifted, there is no time to say we don't care." From sculpted stone figures, sinuous tobacco leaf pots, cow horn jewellery, hammered metalwork and even crystal chandeliers, the designer fine-tunes products for the global market, among them the →





*"...a place of renewal,
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and spirit are free to be."*