



millionaire hideaways

This page: Couch (see page 108) is one of five villas at Cayo Espanto, an island off the coast of Belize. Opposite page: More than five nights a year (based on Cayo Espanto, which has been featured on "Top 50" and "The Bachelor")

Legend has it that Greek shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis wanted to buy the Ionian island of Ithaki, Odysseus's homeland, but it wasn't for sale. Instead, he settled for the nearby uninhabited island of Skorpios. When Onassis acquired the land mass in 1963, little did he know that he would start a trend among the jet set. While he wasn't the first person to own an island, Onassis instilled into the public consciousness the idea of a private island as the ultimate retreat. Skorpios became his sanctuary and he and his children, Alexander and Christina, are buried there. ■ Today, many others have followed Onassis's example, including media mogul Ted Turner, actors Nicolas Cage and Brooke

Three private-island owners talk about their unique seaside sanctuaries

BY CARRIE LORANGER GASKA





Cayo Espanto, left, encompasses only three acres, but for owner Jeff Green, right, it's his own version of Gilligan's Island.

Jeff Green Cayo Espanto, Belize

Jeff Green says he was born with the dream of owning an island, but admits that doing like "Gilligan's Island" farked his line. "For me, 'Gilligan's Island'—there's no better. What more do you need than a buddy like Gilligan and Skipper and somebody like Mary Ann, Ginger and Mr. Howell to pay for it," says the 40-year-old Green, who owns the three-acre Cayo Espanto in Belize. "I'm more of a crew between Gilligan and the Professor, and when I need something done, I'm the Skipper."

Green, who started a mail order company called MM Marketing and sold real estate in the 1980s, opened the five-villa luxury resort off the coast of Belize in 1998 and says since that time, private island ownership has gone from a dream to a passion, while at the same time, it's very much a business—a business designed to help others live out their own "Gilligan's Island" fantasies.

"If you give me an island anywhere that I can get diesel fuel [at], you won't know if you're on my island or [at] a five-star hotel anywhere in the world, because if you can get fuel, you can have all the luxuries of life and all the communications you need," he says.

At the moment, feeding his passion is nearly a full-time job. Green is developing another island off the Belizean coast, a 1,200-acre piece of real estate about 35 miles from Cayo Espanto, and is negotiating the purchase of two islands in the British Virgin Islands and one in the Exumas island chain of the Bahamas.

But Green admits that building an island—paying for it and writing the checks—is the easy part. The hard part is offering the luxury and the service required to attract guests of a certain caliber. "The service is the key," says Green, whose villas on Cayo Espanto are all served by a private butler.

Green's enthusiasm for private island ownership is contagious. "I've had people come visit me that leave the island wanting a piece of their own, and they didn't come here with that in mind," says Green.

"There's several little islands there [in the Exumas] that I've just fallen in love with and if I had \$1.5 million in each pocket, I could have ten down there. What I'm hoping is that I'm going to get established with this new island [in the Bahamas], get the infrastructure in place, and then I'll be able to have some of those other people that I know quite well have some of those islands right near mine. We could really have some fun with that," says Green.

Cayo Espanto has been a learning experience for Green. He never thought it would take off as it has with more than 800 visitors a year. In November, the island was featured on "Oprah" and on ABC's reality television hit "The Bachelor," which has caused the phones to ring nonstop.

But for now Green still has one dream unfulfilled: having Gilligan himself visit Cayo Espanto. "I used to travel with pro-sports players as a parasit-manager, and I used to travel with a lot of celebrities and enjoyed my time with them, but the only autograph I've ever asked for is Bob Denver's. So when I bought my island and opened the resort, I e-mailed his wife and I offered him a trip to the island. Of course it would be a dream come true for me, but he hasn't come down yet," says Green. ♦

Cerie Lounger Gaska writes about business and travel from her home in Madison, Wisconsin.