

The No.1 Island to Move to Now P. 32

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20

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AUGUST 2010

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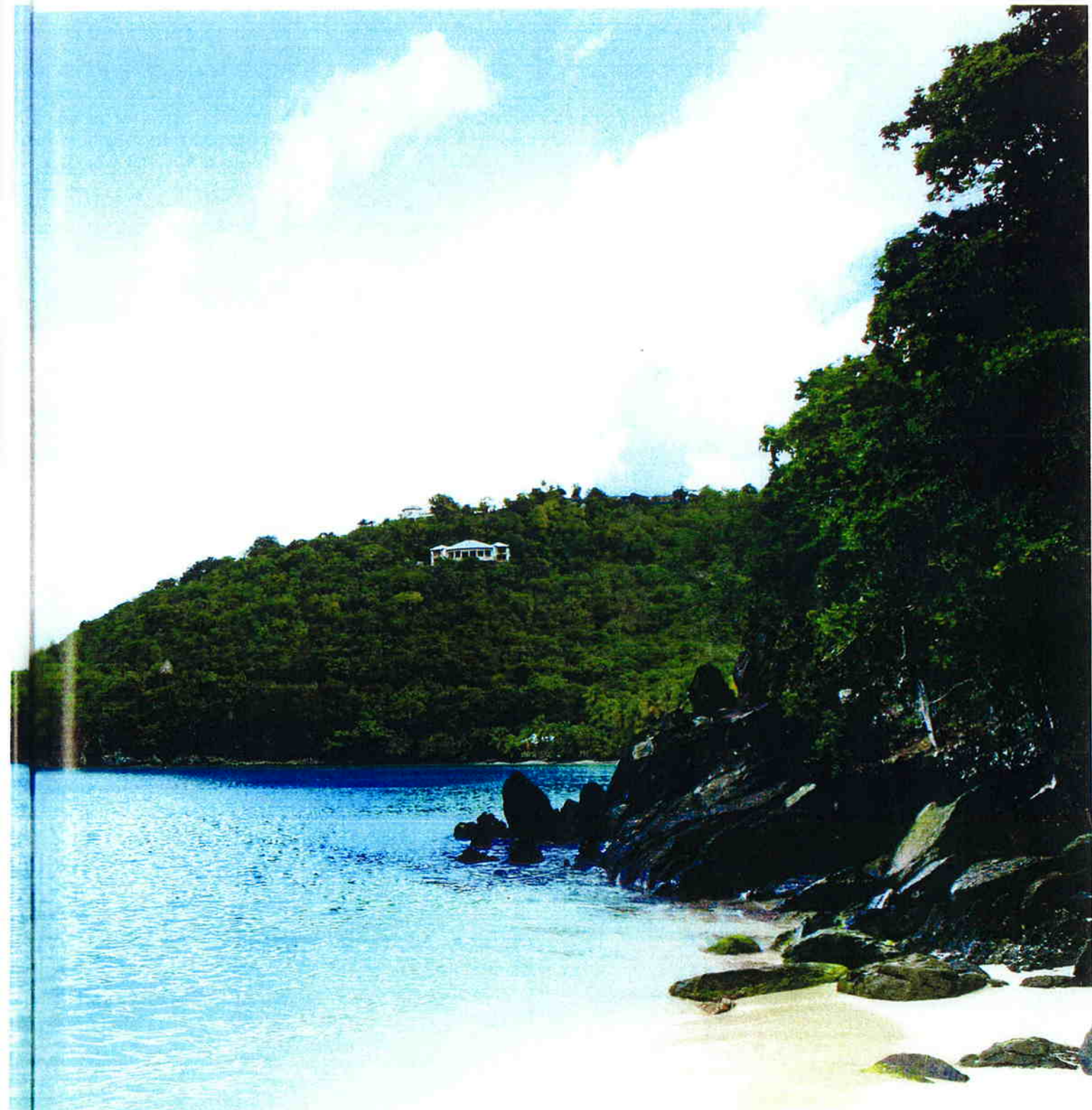


THE SIMPLE LIFE

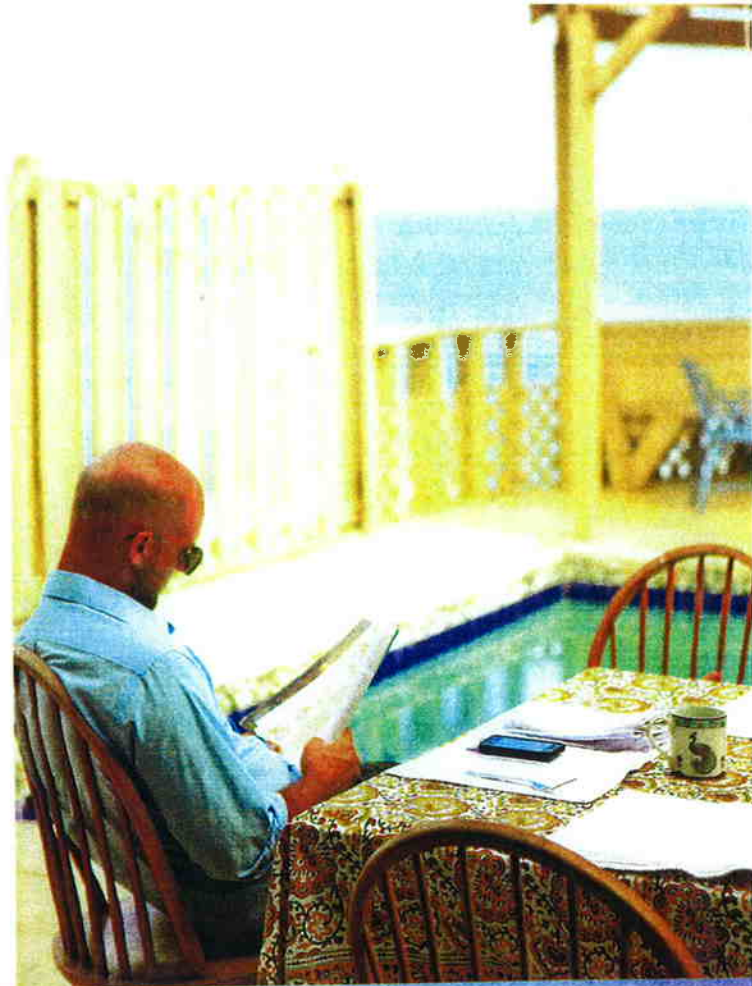
Step in. Stay awhile. Your Caribbean dream life has never been easier than in the U.S.VI.
With no passport, property or language barriers — what are you waiting for?

PHOTOS BY ZACH STOVALL





A house on a hill overlooking a beach on St. Thomas. What more could you want from the U.S. Virgin Islands?





ST. THOMAS Comforts of Home

BY DAVE HERNDON

MAGENS BAY IS HIS DAUGHTER'S SANDBOX. AFTER ALL, this spectacular mile-long stretch of sand is in Corby Parfitt's backyard. Why not wile away this Saturday — or any day — here? It's just a few minutes by boat from the family's airy home atop Tropaco Point on St. Thomas' north coast. And 6-year-old Ava-Jayne loves it. "She's grown gills," Corby says.

The whole Parfitt family has changed since moving to the U.S. Virgin Islands. Corby was once a marketing director cramped in a San Francisco cubicle. Wife Lisa was an occupational therapist who felt stuck too. "We needed more adventure in our daily lives," she says. The USVI offered that — the nature of St. John, the communities of St. Croix, all with the ease of moving to a U.S. territory. But they settled down four years ago on the USVI island closest to the mainland, St. Thomas, because of a unique offering: Home Depot.

That store has been essential for Corby's new business, a real-estate company. With such relatively easy access to materials and under building regulations similar to the U.S. mainland's, Corby has reshaped his career. While a boat ride east is Magens Bay, north is Inner Brass, a 125-acre cove he can see from his house. On the cove, he's supervising the construction of a new solar-powered cottage, that island's sole building. When he's not on site or at home, Corby is at his office in the fishing village of nearby Hull Bay, checking e-mails while

surrounded by lush trees heavy with coconuts, genip and sour sop. Today, Corby can't even remember how to spell "cubicle."

Lisa and Ava-Jayne have blossomed too. Lisa has found meaningful work at the Roy Lester Schneider Hospital, where she helps rehabilitate stroke victims. And St. Thomas has rich opportunities for a little go-getter like Ava-Jayne, who attends Montessori school; takes swimming, guitar and yoga classes; and loves to feed the sharks and rays at Coral World Ocean Park. But her greatest joy is found at home. "I'm lucky to live by the sea and walk to a little beach," she says simply.

The big beach of Magens Bay is their weekend treat, with kid-friendly waters lapping on the sand. It's St. Thomas' version of the town commons. This Saturday, a family with classmates of Ava-Jayne strolls over to the Parfitts. The girls celebrate the impromptu reunion. The grown-ups talk about the group run from earlier in the day and heading to a jazz club tonight. Ava-Jayne flits among everyone. "She's not afraid of strangers," Lisa says, "because down here you don't have to be."

A seaside home, a boat and a beach open up the beauty of St. Thomas for the Parfitt family. Photo: Ben Smith. USVI photo.

The family seems to know everyone on the beach. The Parfitts are locals now. And the only job Corby has to tackle today is a simple one: crack a sandy coconut for his daughter. **LIVE ON ST. CROIX >>**

ST. CROIX

Natural Way

BY ASHLEY FRAXEDAS

BEN JONES RISES AT DAWN. RAINFOREST VIEWS DRIFT IN through kabukalli-wood shutters, which were open all night. Scents of jasmine, holy basil and papaya flowers — Ben's babies — grab his senses next. No snooze button to hit, no shoes, no cell phone, no drive to work — just a *qigong* yoga and meditation session on his wraparound porch as the morning colors change from sleepy to vibrant. When he's done, he blows the conch shell to wake the rest of his friends on the farm. But no big deal. For Ben, it's just another day on St. Croix.

Up the side of a mountain, following a winding two-lane road canopied by mahogany trees and past a beer-drinking pig (nonalcoholic, of course) and 18th-century windmills sits Ben's home — Creque Dam Farm. Here, with his wife, Sylvie, who grew up on St. Croix, he runs the Virgin Islands Sustainable Farm Institute, home to a community of like-minded naturalists.

"I was a lone wolf in Georgia," he admits of his old life on the mainland. "But I don't feel that on St. Croix. Here, you're a small fish surrounded by a big ocean, so you really can see the effects

of your work. You can create a lifestyle that people will be empowered by." A nurturer at heart, Ben seeks to educate people on how humans and nature can work in harmony.

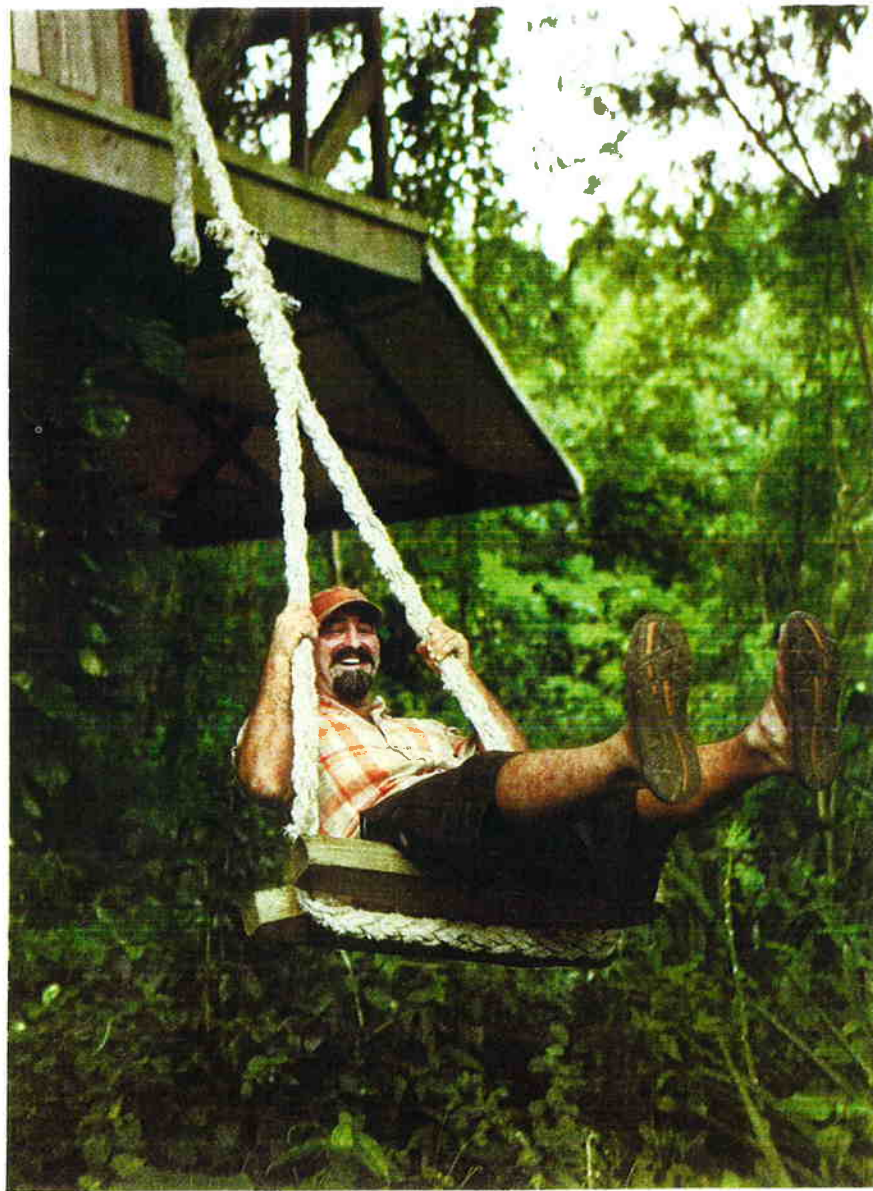
Now Ben's island neighbors include an architect

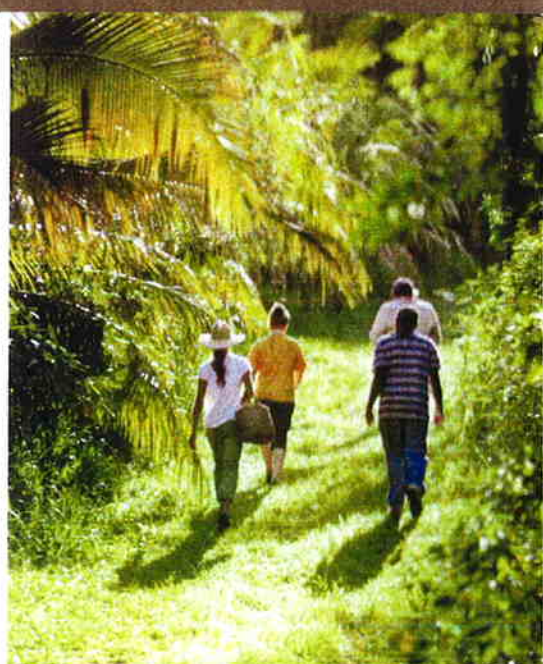
who's building a bicycle path along the coast, a salesman who's making beer-flavored ice cream and a coffee lover who opened a café themed around his bulldog. Because, as locals say, "You move to St. John for luxury and St. Thomas for shopping. You move to St. Croix to live."

Farmer is just one of the many hats St. Croix lets Ben wear. He's a teacher, chef and an underground DJ. "We used to have huge parties on the farm — sweating, dancing all night long," he says. Call it a unique way to use his international business degree (the minor in Russian, not so useful).

When the conch shell blows again for lunch, everyone on Creque Dam Farm meets at the community center, a log cabin built by hand using sustainably harvested wood. The salad was picked from the farm moments ago. Purple mustard greens taste like hot wasabi. There's cranberry hibiscus and *katnik* — the sweetest soup around. Cassava instead of potatoes. And the harvest's prized first pineapple, which took 18 months to mature.

Whispered "Mmmms" and wows — all from the people who planted, watered and harvested the day's lunch — break the rainforest's afternoon silence. Ben sits at a long outdoor picnic table surrounded by appreciative friends. "The island allowed me to build the community — a healthy environment for me, my family, and inspiring others to do the same. To tell the world something you can't put into words: to get home, well." **LIVE ON ST. JOHN**





"The island allowed me to build this community," says Ben Jones. "It's a healthy environment for raising a family and inspiring others to do the same. I can't put it into words. It's just home now."



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U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

GREAT FOR

Shrewd investors. Multiple tax benefits make the USVI perfect for the business savvy. And the Economic Development Authority is here to help.

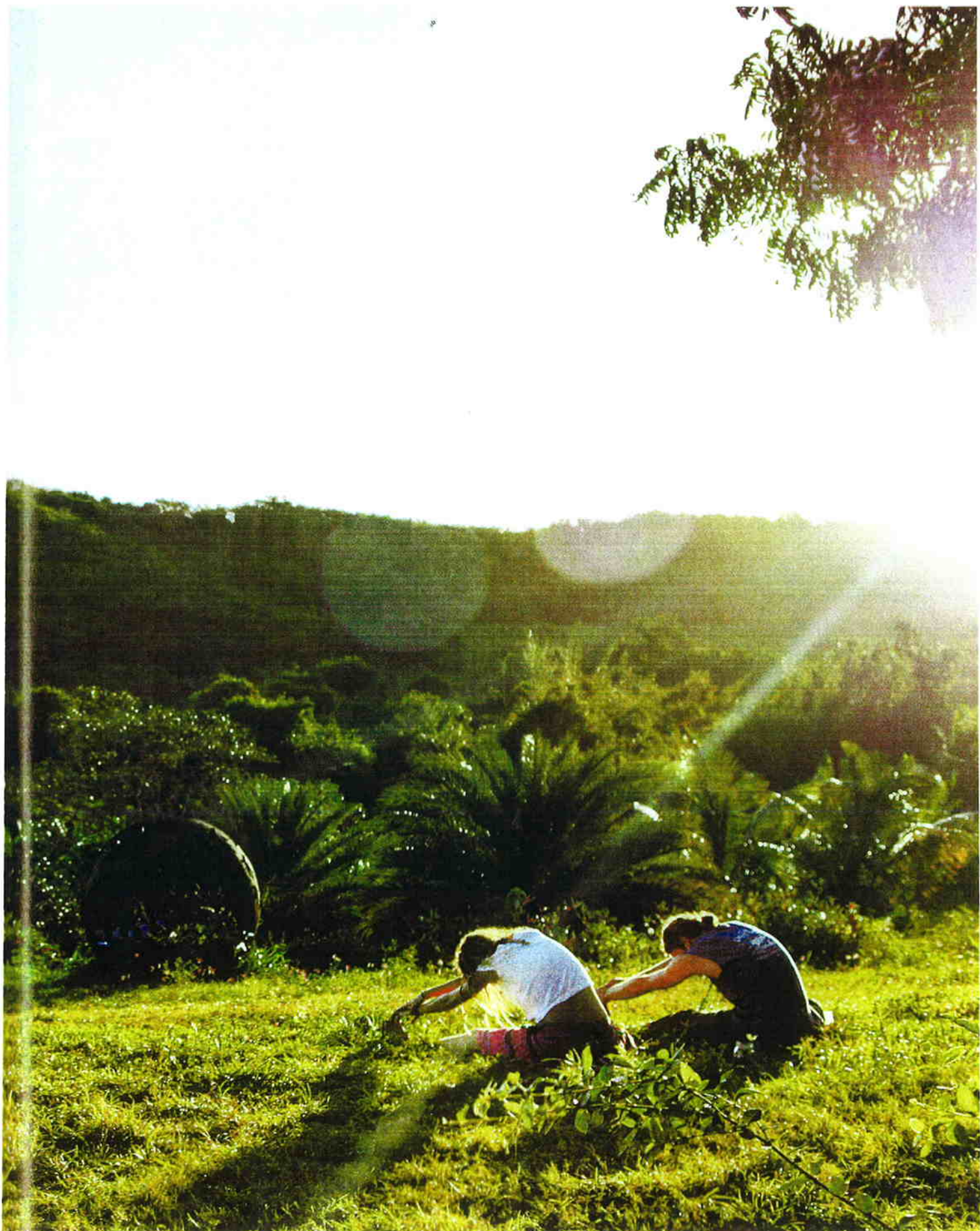
THE FIRST STEP

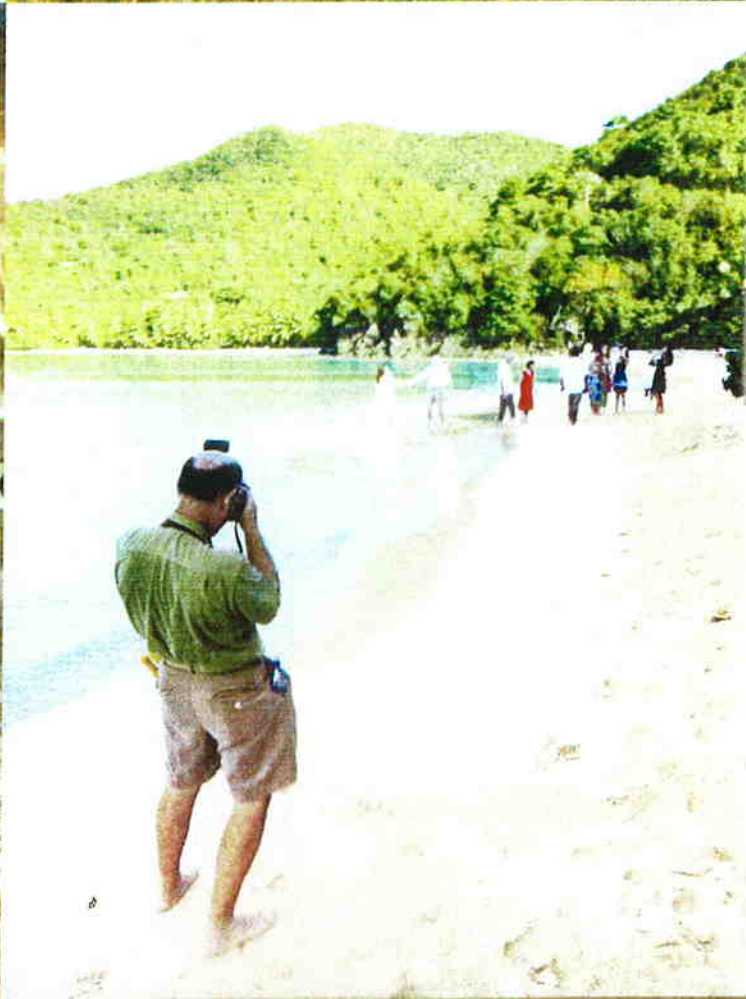
Stay on the islands. Moving to the USVI is like moving from New York to Florida. But if you want to be a resident (and get personal tax breaks), you have to prove that you live here for more than 183 days per year.

REAL ESTATE

Now is the time to buy. St. Croix alone has 84 properties that are \$500,000 to \$1 million and 260 condos from about \$100,000.







ST. JOHN

Fresh Finish

BY DAVE HERNDON

THEY STAND SIDE BY SIDE FOR THE PHOTO. NO AREN'T-WE-GREAT grins or flamboyant poses. They appear to be your ordinary, everyday couple, except for their tropical shirts and bright-yellow house, which seem to celebrate what their humble smiles only hint to: It's February here on St. John. Back in Massachusetts, their friends are shoveling snow. For Karin and Bob Schlesinger, those days are gone.

Today's winter agenda calls for grabbing some water floats, a scoop of mango ice cream and enjoying both, drifting about in world-famous Trunk Bay. As Karin, in a glow that radiates a semiretired life, says, "That's what life is all about."

At least, it is now. Not long ago, the two were (their words) "anal New Englanders." Bob was a physicist with a career in electrical engineering. Karin worked in the high-tech industry. The two fell in love with St. John on vacation, made a 10-year plan to move and promptly started saving. The plan soon shrunk to five years, then three, then — to their friends' dismay — off they went. Karin has since written a book about it all, but adds, "All that planning wasn't necessary. You can just do it."

Doing it these days means following life passions and creating an early (and improved) version of retirement. "Why be idle?" says Bob, who owns and operates a growing photography business. He shoots weddings and vacation photos from St. John's beaches and lush hills, most all of them protected in a picture-perfect state, as more than 60 percent of the island is a national park. Karin helps manage the photo business, writing for their blog and the local newspaper.

Free of their old careers and those bitter-cold Nor'easter winters, the couple can enjoy an afternoon on St. John by sipping Bailey's Banana Colodas with friends, listening to classical music or joining their wine club for tasting and grazing at an alfresco restaurant. The life is what they make it.

Karin claims none of this requires lavish wealth. "We've heard people actually call St. John the Beverly Hills of the U.S. Virgin Islands, which is funny because many of us have no money."

For the Schlesingers, the basic charms resonate: their



St. John's quiet hills, quaint homes and small communities lured the Schlesingers from New England to a brighter life.

modest yellow house near Cruz Bay on the island's west coast, the twin rocking chairs on their front porch, balcony seating for watching the sun dip behind nearby St. Thomas, their spa tub out back for stargazing, and of course, those ice-cream float parties at the beach.

But their love for the island goes well beyond this laid-back life they've found. Bob, a former introvert, has become a people person thanks to his new career, and together they have become joiners. Karin sits on the board of the Animal Care Center of St. John, and Bob is the secretary of the island's Rotary Club. "We have never been as involved in our community before," Karin says. "But on this tiny island, we realize how valuable it is and how much we grow as a result."

Bob, the once-shy physicist-turned-wedding-photographer, says seizing the island life in the USVI is a simpler matter: "You just need to have faith and confidence in yourself." What you don't need? A snow shovel. ISLANDS.COM/live

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"We've heard people actually call St. John the Beverly Hills of the U.S. Virgin Islands," says Karin Schlesinger, "which is funny because many of us have no money."