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Clockwise from top left: An open-air market in Willemstad; steady ocean breezes make sailboarding a popular sport in Curaçao; Willemstad's colorful waterfront; the annual Carnival Parade.



Low-Profile Paradise

Curaçao's new Santa Barbara Plantation offers a taste of Dutch isle style **BY TERI BORSETI**

CURAÇAO IS THE TYPE OF destination that leaves one torn between wanting to tell everyone all about it and not wanting to tell anyone for fear of having to share the charms of this Dutch Caribbean island. Since being discovered by the Spaniards in 1499, along with popular sister island Aruba, Curaçao has kept a fairly low profile.

Though new developments can indeed be found, they do not come in the form of high-rise hotels dotting a stretch of crowded beach. Instead,

Curaçao offers smaller, cove-like beaches, and the varied landscape makes for a scenic and storybook setting.

Developers at the VIDA Group, N.V. —with their 35 years of experience in developing resorts and communities from Beaver Creek to Pebble Beach—clearly agree. In fact, Jack Marshall was so enamored with Curaçao's setting, particularly the site where his company is developing the Santa Barbara Plantation, he was among the first to build a house there.

The 1,500-acre parcel includes picturesque rolling hills, beachfront and marina access. Originally a cattle breeding, fishing and salt extracting plantation, the protected sea- and harbor-view coastal inlet is currently being transformed into a luxurious residential community.

Phase one of the project, slated to be completed by mid-2009, will include a luxury 350-room Hyatt Regency Curaçao Resort & Spa complete with an 18-hole, Pete Dye-designed championship golf

course. The course will have an 8,000-square-foot clubhouse with a pro shop, locker rooms and a restaurant. Additionally, the hotel will feature the "Pure Spa" with indoor and outdoor full-service treatment rooms, a state-of-the-art fitness center and miles of paved trails for walking and biking.

The residential component, comprising 95 terrace homes, will also debut in 2009. Each of the 3,000-square-foot homes will offer panoramic views of the Caribbean Sea and golf course. Prices start at \$1.1 million. Several custom home sites will also be located throughout the plantation grounds, with vistas of the sea, the fairway and the natural landscape. Lots start at \$450,000.

A 120-slip marina accommodating vessels up to 80 feet is also in the works, as is the Village Marina. It will offer 27 patio homes ranging in size from 1,700 to 2,100 square feet and priced from \$726,000.

No newcomer to luxury real estate development—having been involved with communities and resorts including Elkhorn, a 3,000-acre master planned community in Sun Valley, Idaho; the expansion of the Pebble Beach Lodge and Poppy Hills Golf course in California; and the preliminary master plan for the island of Lanai in Hawaii—VIDA president Marshall now resides in Curaçao, which he refers to as "paradise."

"The whole lifestyle in Curaçao is very easy to get used to," says Marshall, whose Santa Barbara Plantation is just 20 minutes from the capital city of Willemstad where shoppers can enjoy the open-air and floating markets. "It's relaxed and friendly and abundant in natural beauty." For more information visit, santabarbararesort.com.