

# THE MAN WITH THE Golden ISLAND

*Rebecca Wallwork* visits Goldeneye, the Jamaican island where Ian Fleming wrote his Bond novels and which Island Records founder Chris Blackwell (left) has transformed into a resort with one hell of a story behind it.

**The water is clear, the sun hot,** the Red Stripe ice cold, and the pace as relaxed as the reggae that wafts from the open-air Bizot Bar. The history of GoldenEye is steeped in the legend of James Bond, but if you're checking into this posh resort on Jamaica's north coast, you can leave the Brioni suits and the Walther PP at home.

The most dangerous pursuit here is riding a jet ski or falling out of your hammock after too many shots of Blackwell Rum.







## 'I'M NOT A PROPER BUSINESS MAN... I'm behind the scenes and under the radar. My role is presenting other people.'

GoldenEye, once the site of a donkey racecourse, began its transformation into an exclusive beach resort when author Ian Fleming purchased the land and built a simple home overlooking the ocean – an almost monastic building that would become the birthplace of James Bond. Fleming had fallen for Jamaica while on a secret mission for Britain's naval intelligence service. He moved to GoldenEye in '46, wrote *Casino Royale* in 1952, and continued conjuring 007 from his perch above the Caribbean Sea for the next 12 years.

Theatrical party-thrower Noel Coward was GoldenEye's first guest, although he was so unimpressed with the rustic amenities, he dubbed it "GoldenEye, nose and throat." He built his own house up the hill, Firefly, triggering a stream of rich and famous guests that continues at GoldenEye to this day.

But the GoldenEye of 2012 is built on more than the roots of Bond – after years as a semi-private guesthouse, frequented by everyone from Willie Nelson to Johnny Depp, GoldenEye is now a world-class if laidback resort we can all visit. And we have reggae to thank for it – reggae, rock 'n' roll, and the GoldenEye's post-Fleming owner, Chris Blackwell.

If you happened to sit next to Blackwell on a plane – and you asked the chap with the thinning gray hair and the white beard what he did for a living, he might reply: "I've worked in music and also in small property development."

He wouldn't be brash enough to tell you that he founded one of the most creative and successful independent record companies in history; that he catapulted Bob Marley to

international fame and made stars out of Grace Jones, Robert Palmer, and a little pub band called U2. He wouldn't mention that he worked on the set of *Dr. No*; grew up attending parties at the homes of Noel Coward and Ian Fleming – or that he eventually bought Fleming's house and turned it into the jewel of his boutique hotel collection.

Nor would he name drop and tell you that Beyonce and Jay-Z like to holiday at GoldenEye or that Bjork and No Doubt have laid down tracks at his Jamaican hotel-recording studio Geejam.

Chris Blackwell wouldn't do any of that because Chris Blackwell is a gentleman. Bono, however, would tell you – as he told the audience during Blackwell's induction speech into the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame – that the Island Records founder deserves his place in that institution... because he built it.

If you're not familiar with Blackwell as a producer and founder of Island Records or, more recently, as a hotelier, it's because the man is almost infuriatingly humble.

"I would not describe myself as a proper business man," he says. "I am much more driven by the creative side of it. I'm behind the scenes and under the radar virtually all the time because my role is presenting other people."

"I am not a Richard Branson. I don't feel comfortable being an up-the-front person."

In fact, the secret of his success seems to be: Make something I love myself and that others might enjoy. Hire talented people to run the show, and nick off for a jet ski before dinner.



Goldeneye's driving force, Island Records founder Chris Blackwell (left); The Fleming Room, aka Goldeneye's reception area (this pic); Ian Fleming at work in his villa (below).



### SHAKEN, NOT STIRRED

Blackwell likes to drink his latest hit, Blackwell Rum, neat, no rocks. But here's how the dark rum with the hint of citrus is served in GoldenEye's signature cocktail:

**3 SHOTS BLACKWELL RUM**  
**1 SHOT LIME JUICE**  
**1 SHOT ORANGE JUICE**  
**1 SHOT PINEAPPLE JUICE**  
**2 SHOTS SIMPLE SYRUP ICE**

Combine all the ingredients in a cocktail shaker and shake. (For a frostier version, throw it all in the blender and blend until smooth.) Garnish with orange or pineapple slices to serve.



The resort itself feels like an adult playground. When you first arrive at the gazebo, you look across the fairy light-strung footbridge towards the beach dotted with one and two-bedroom beach cottages and think, Robinson Crusoe. You see a small boat, Glass Eye, waiting to take you for a spin out on the reef, and a host of snorkel and kayak gear poking out of a cave by the lagoon. There's even a little island in the middle of the beach that you can swim or wade over to, drink in hand, for a little quiet time. (The barbie and built-in picnic table is a cue that it sees more festive uses as well.) Cottages are stocked with

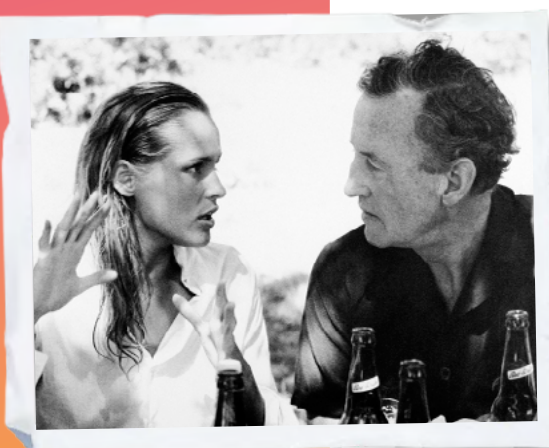
luxurious details (batik bathrobes and Jamaican bath products), including a daybed for naps and a freestanding tub. The prize for best amenity, however, is a toss-up between the hammock and outdoor shower, the in-room music system and the retro-style Smeg fridge stocked with cold ones. As for that music – with Blackwell behind the scenes, you know it's gotta be good. The MySqueezebox.com system has a playlist of 1,557 different artists, making it the mother of all streaming iPod libraries. Not surprisingly, it's heavy on the reggae but is also filled with solid alternatives like Lil Kim, Louis Armstrong, and non-annoying jazz and world music.

Prices up at the Bizot Bar are as reasonable as the minibar, and the food, while not cheap, is somewhat less than what you'd pay at other ritzy resorts. Plus, it's delicious: jerk chicken instead of boring club sandwiches, local fish, steamed callaloo (a leafy green that actually tastes good), and, for breakfast, slowly cooked ackee and salt fish.

Most guests come here for the isolation, but for anyone bored by sitting in a pool, drink in hand, the town of Ocho Rios is a short



A tree planted by Willie Nelson, one of many celebs to do so at Goldeneye (top right); the Gazebo dining room (this pic); Fleming with Ursula Andress on the set of *Dr. No* (below left); Blackwell with Andress, Sean Connery and *Dr. No* director Terence Young (above right).



### CHRIS BLACKWELL'S ALL-TIME TOP 5 TRACKS

**MOZART:** "Anything."  
**MAHALIA:** "Move On Up A Little Higher."  
**MILES DAVIS:** "In A Silent Way."  
**BOB MARLEY:** "So Much Trouble In The World."  
**MARVIN GAYE:** "Inner City Blues."

Courtesy/GoldenEye: Rebecca Walkowiak

### STORIED LUXURY

From the driver who picked us up and handed us a Red Stripe out of the esky in the back of the car at Montego Bay airport to our favourite bartender at the hotel's Bizot Bar, the staff are one of the best things about GoldenEye. They'll chat with you about the woeful state of West Indies cricket and their pride in Usain Bolt. They'll tell you about their kid, who has mountains of homework, even at nine, and once you're buzzed on the house specialty – the GoldenEye cocktail – and you stumble back to your cottage for a quick kip before dinner, they'll call you to let you know that the sun is about to set and since you were talking about it up at the bar, perhaps you'd like to see it.

Jamaicans are a proud people, and it's a pleasure to stay somewhere where you can

chat to the bloke who cooked your dinner and the lady who picked up your towels, and not feel weirded out by that whole concept of servitude. Liberal use of the phrase 'yeah, mon', especially from the handsome twins who run the 'wata sports' activities, only enhances the relaxed, we're-all-mates-here vibe.

"I started working with people from the same economic level in the music business, so I view my staff as individuals, not as a mass of people," says Blackwell. "I encourage them to be themselves because you can't get that sort of Eastern service from Jamaicans. You know, where you take off your shirt and the next thing it's washed and ironed and put in your closet and you never saw anyone do it. That's great in a way but it's a bit too cold for my taste. I like to communicate with people."

## THE VERY HOUSE WHERE FLEMING WROTE ALL 14 BOND NOVELS

is now available to rent out as a three-bedroom pad.



drive away – and resort staff can arrange any number of excursions off-property. Can't tell you much about those, however, as the furthest we ventured was to take a stroll through the trees planted by famous visitors and into the backyard of the unoccupied Fleming Villa.

This, the very house where Fleming wrote all 14 Bond novels, is now available to rent out as a three-bedroom pad, each room with its own outdoor garden bath and rain shower. The villa has been maintained in a spartan, Fleming-esque style – now with modern amenities – and has a private pool and well-kept clifftop garden overlooking Fleming's own private beach. Since no-one was home as we rambled about, we popped down to said beach for an exploratory dip. Lush green trees overhanging clear, green-blue water, and a perfect little slice of sandy beach – it's easy to see why Fleming chose this particular part of the property as his own. The only other being we saw while in the water and popping in and out of rocky caves here was the local fishermen rowing by out on the ocean.

## EARLY BONDING

The connection between Fleming and Blackwell goes deeper than the fact that both were pioneers in their professions, with famously creative friends. Blackwell spent his first 10 years on Jamaica, and frequently went to lunches at Goldeneye with his mother, Blanche Lindo – who, by all accounts was, in the parlance of the time, a close confidante of Fleming's. (Some even say she was the inspiration for the character Pussy Galore.)

In 1961, when the filming of the first Bond film *Dr. No* began on the island, Fleming recommended Blackwell for the job of location scout. He loved the work but it wasn't enough to pull him away from the fledgling record company he had started a couple of years earlier, with a \$1,000 investment and a name taken from the Alec Waugh novel *Island In The Sun*. Back then, he was a waterski instructor at the Half Moon Resort in Montego Bay, and had no inkling that his little label would become so large that he could sell it to Polygram in 1989, or that after retiring from the label in 1997, he would establish Palm Pictures and Island Outpost, the hotel group created to showcase Blackwell's beloved Jamaica to the world.

He had taken ownership of Goldeneye in 1976, when he first tried to convince Bob Marley to buy the property. "He [Marley] said he would always let my mother swim there," says Blackwell. "But then he got cold feet, said it was too posh, so the next year, when I was flush again, I bought it myself. The original sale document said 'Bob Marley' and we crossed that out and wrote in 'Chris Blackwell'." I thought of living there, but I never did – I just went there sometimes, swam there sometimes, let friends and family stay there sometimes. You could say it was a house I used as an entertaining place."

Some of those people he entertained left behind a little something for the regular folks to gawk at – trees, planted in the garden in front of the villas and

## EXTRA HOMEWORK

### *The Story Of Island Records: Keep On Running*

Preface by Chris Blackwell, Edited by Suzette Newman and Chris Salewicz [Rizzoli, USA].

This hardcover book, published in 2010 to mark Island's 50th anniversary is a feast of album art, artist portraits and essays that chart the success of Blackwell's label and Island's legendary acts such as Bob Marley, U2, Steve Winwood, Tom Waits, Eric B & Rakim, Tricky and Amy Winehouse.



Chris Blackwell at GoldenEye (top). 1. With Joe Cocker. 2. And a youthful U2. 3. With Bob Marley and some Wailers. 4. Bono, Blackwell and Neil Portnow at the Rock 'n' Roll Hall Of Fame. 5. Blackwell and Grace Jones.



resort's main office. The tradition began with Sir Anthony Eden, and a slew of stars have since planted a tree to support the Oracabessa Foundation, which Blackwell started so that GoldenEye could help its neighbours. Wandering the mango, ackee, guava and star apple trees is like panning the crowd at the Oscars or Grammys: plaques bearing the names of planters such as Harrison Ford, Quincy Jones, Harry Belafonte, Jim Carrey, Johnny Depp, Dennis Hopper, Fatboy Slim, Kate Moss, Naomi Campbell, Gwyneth Paltrow and River Phoenix.

## HANGING STARS

Despite the A-list guestbook, Goldeneye is far from intimidating. That's all part of Blackwell's master plan – which is to say, his non-plan.

"I called my hotel company Island Outpost because an outpost doesn't promise anything," he says. "You might have a roof over your head and a working loo. But that means we can always try to give you more than you expected." The simplicity of Blackwell's strategy in the hotel world echoes the one he used to create hits for Island: "In the record industry, you want to turn people onto new music," he says, "In the hotel business you want to turn people onto a view or a beautiful beach. Both jobs are about trying to inspire people."

As we drink our three-dollar Red Stripe and doze off on the porch of our cottage, watching the sky darken over Goldeneye's beach, there is only one thing to say about Blackwell's unique, chilled-out idea of hospitality. Just two words: Yeah, mon. ♣

