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HAPPY
NEW
YEAR

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retreat to an ocean spa,
hide away in a treehouse,
travel like a billionaire,
relax here,

find
bliss

START
NOW
P.6

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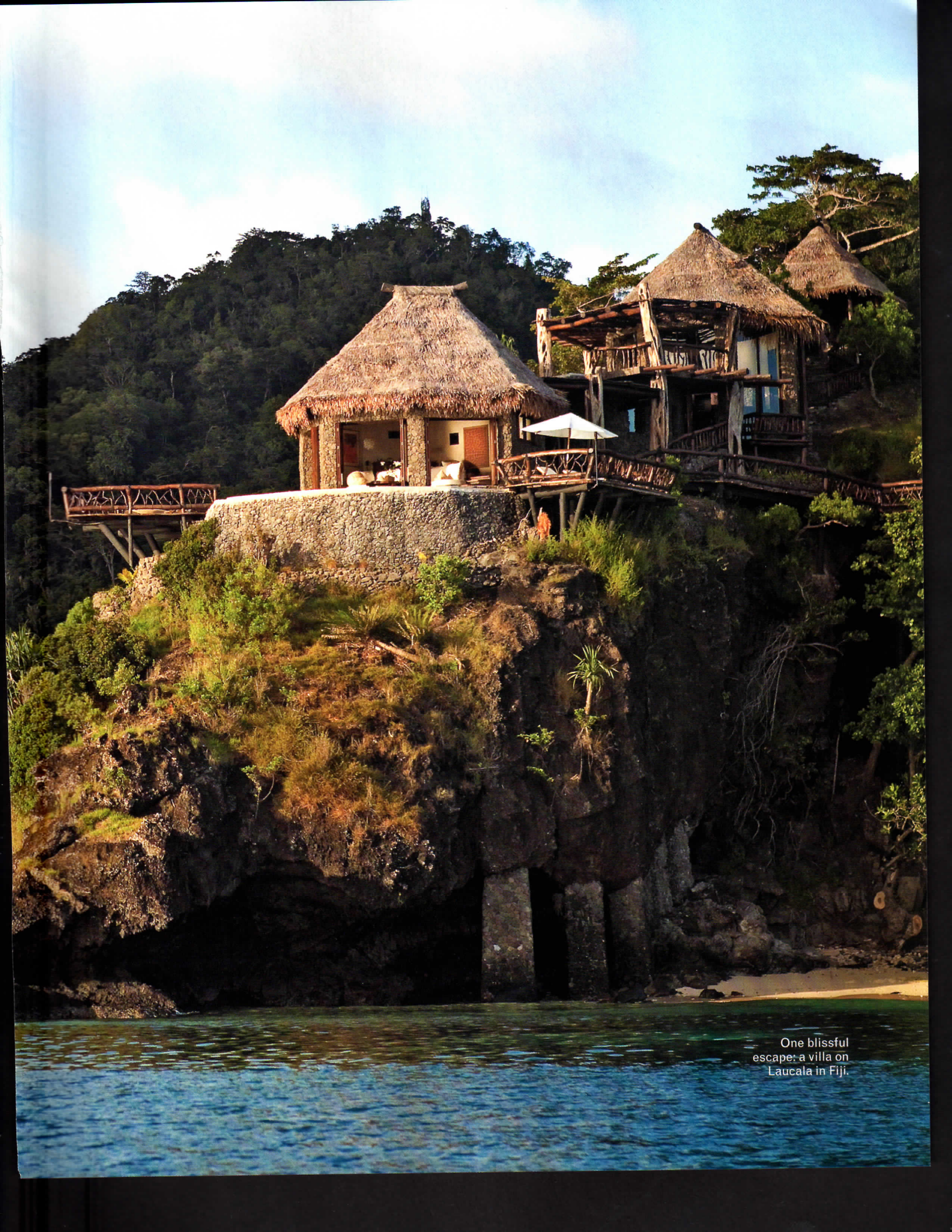




WHERE IS BLISS?

THESE SIX LUXURY GETAWAYS EACH CELEBRATE
REAL EXPERIENCES, DEEPER BONDS AND BETTER LIVING
FOR THE NEW YEAR. GO NOW. BE HAPPY.

Photos by Jen Judge, Jon Whittle and Lori Barbely



One blissful
escape: a villa on
Laucaia in Fiji.

FIJI 🌺 LAUCALA ISLAND

Escaping Like a Billionaire

By Tony Perrottet

 WHEN THE CONCIERGE ADMITS me into a beachfront villa 10 times the size of a “villa” as I know it, gesturing to light shades made from hundreds of snow-white butterfly cocoons and bathtubs carved from polished slabs of granite, I try to feign a billionaire’s nonchalance. Here on Fiji’s private Laucala Island, she shows me how the villa — which took the tradition of the Fijian *bure*, a wood and thatch hut, to glamorous new heights — opens theatrically onto my own swimming pool and a quiet golden-sand beach. She reveals a designer wine chiller stocked with complimentary Champagne. Yes, with a capital “C.” I remain calm.

Then the moment I’m alone, I let out a whoop of proletarian joy. I pop open the bottle of bubbly, jump in the pool, jump back out of the pool, dash down to the beach and throw myself into my personal piece of the South Pacific. Everything has to be enjoyed at once. I run back to the villa and devour an amuse-bouche of spiced Thai shrimp and fresh cashews, turn on both flat-screen TVs, blast myself with Bach on the iPod sound system and then rush from room to room taking hundreds of photos. At last, I sink in a jet-lagged stupor onto a daybed under coconut trees.

Adjusting my watch to Fiji time, I find it’s only 8:30 a.m. Malcolm Forbes once owned this succulent green piece of Fiji, now a new, no-expense-spared luxury resort. But for the next 122 hours and 35 minutes, it is mine, all mine. And I mean to revel in every second.

Most people might be happy to spend days, even weeks, lounging in their villas on Laucala. But seductive as that is, I know it wouldn’t be long before I was itching to explore the 7-mile-long island, which from the air had seemed mysterious and wild, ringed by a halo of pale-blue reef. After all, Laucala isn’t just any billionaire’s refuge.

If a history of private islands is ever written, Laucala will feature prominently. Forbes, then the planet’s richest man, purchased it for \$1 million in 1972, and its otherworldly beauty became part of pop mythology. The world watched with envy every winter as he flew his jet, the *Capitalist Tool*, to Fiji’s main airport, Nadi, then changed to his light plane, the *Capitalist Tool II*, to reach Laucala’s airstrip. Forbes kept the facilities rustic: a basic house for himself, plus seven guest bungalows. Yet Hollywood stars such as Elizabeth Taylor arrived frequently for fabulous

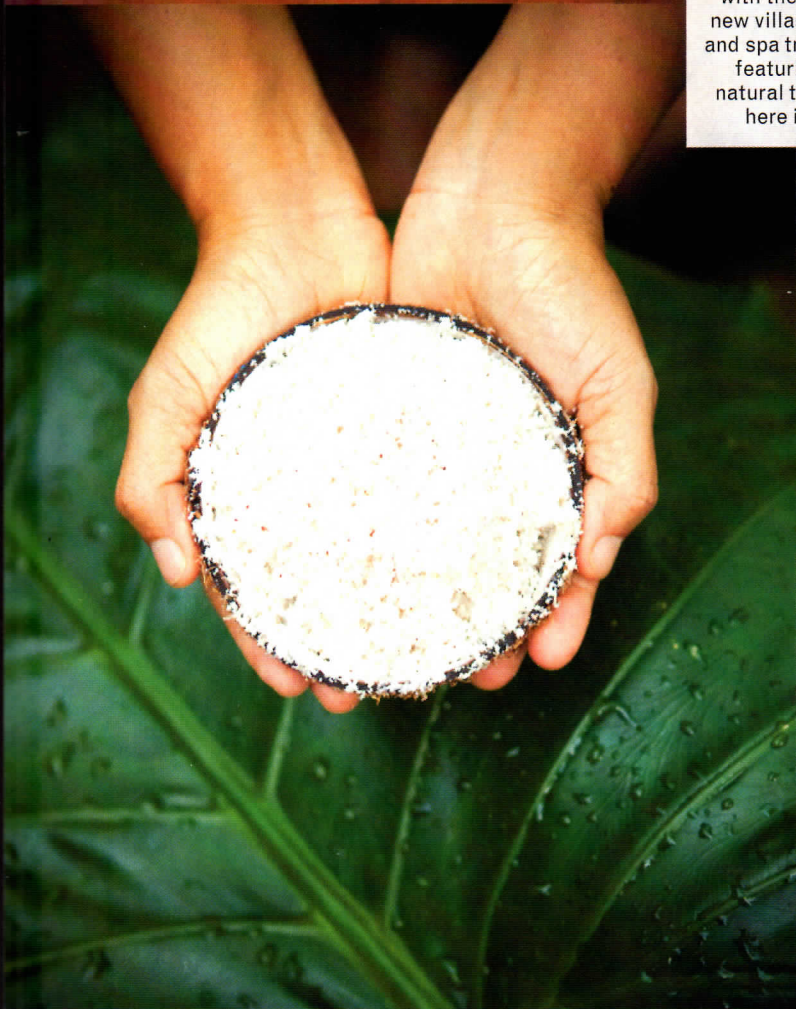
With a history of billionaire owners, this newly updated private island has perhaps the best scenery and service that money can buy.







The Forbes era has led to an even richer present, with the resort's new villas, cuisine and spa treatments featuring the natural treasures here in Fiji.



beach parties. The flashy billionaire kept a yacht for circumnavigating the island and a Harley-Davidson for touring the rough roads at high speed. He grew to love Laucala so much that he asked his family to bury his ashes here. When he died in 1990, Forbes' family did as he wished.

Since then, the island's ownership has passed to another billionaire, Dietrich Mateschitz, creator of Red Bull. Dated Forbes-era buildings were razed. "For me, privacy is quality," the publicity-shy Mateschitz once explained. He turned Laucala into the ultimate South Pacific retreat: 25 luxury villas, five restaurants, a spa, a horse stable and an 18-hole golf course. Opened just a year ago, the resort is a self-contained world, with an organic farm, a grandiose working jetty, air hangars and more. Once revived, an old coconut plantation will produce oil and cosmetics. Laucala boasts the biggest swimming pool in the Southern Hemisphere, with a glass, above-ground lap pool that lets passers-by view swimmers gliding back and forth as if in an aquarium. Crafted from native wood, thatch and twine, Laucala's unique, sometimes mildly eccentric structures echo the surrounding landscape.

"Money is not an issue at Laucala," says Maja Kilgore, a German who now manages the resort with husband Thomas. "If something needs to be done, we do it."

Luckily for me, that principle extends to helping guests responsibly delve into nature. One day, I hop on a Jet Ski that belongs in New York's Museum of Modern Art and bob around the island, watching turtles skim the coral alongside me. The next day, I board a dive boat that sports the curved seats of a 1930s pleasure craft on Italy's Lake Como and polished tanks like gleaming silver



The resort is a self-contained world that echoes the surrounding landscape. Laucala has seduced me.

bullets. It carries me to an underwater world that seems to have been tended by a celestial gardener. I explore the coral-encrusted rim of a shelf that drops into an eerie darkness 1,800 feet deep while brilliant tropical fish, white-tipped reef sharks and barracuda idly nose by.

Laucala has seduced me. I love this new world in which light aircraft carry guests from Fiji's main island and shiny Land Rovers whisk them to their villas. But surely some relic survives

from the wild and crazy 1970s. "No, there's nothing left from the Forbes days," Maja says with a shrug. Then she ponders. "Well, almost nothing."

After a bit of cajoling, Maja drives me up a steep, meandering laneway into the rainforest. We pull up in front of a plush double villa with 360-degree views of the voluptuous island. Far below, the South Pacific seems so clear you can almost see the turtles nosing their way through the reef's coral canyons. "This was the site of Forbes' house," she says. "They say it was the view from this spot that convinced Mr. Forbes he should buy Laucala." The original structure has vanished, but we stroll over to a grove of coconut trees and a cracked marble memorial embedded in the earth. Below the name Malcolm Stevenson Forbes and the dates of his birth and death, it reads, "While Alive He Lived."

I carry that sentiment back down to my villa, where more Champagne is already there on ice. **LAUCALA.COM**