

JANUARY / FEBRUARY



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FIND A NEW RHYTHM IN JAMAICA

Island Records founder Chris Blackwell reveals the real Jamaica in roadside food stands, the best cup of coffee you've ever had, and the simple beauty of taking the scenic route.

by MARK BYRNE

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BREAKING FREE

Photographer Andy Richter makes sense of Taiwanese culture through his camera lens.

TARA BONNE

CONTRIBUTORS



ANDY RICHTER
Photographer
Breaking Free
p.110

Making new friends: "I have a friend in Taipei who goes by the name Inch, and I went out with her and her friends a lot while I was there. We rode scooters around the massive city and sampled the local food and music." **Too shy:** "People in Taipei are really into karaoke. I didn't join in because I don't trust my voice, but my friends would often rent a room, drink, and sing together." **See through his lens:** on Instagram @andyrichterphoto



CHARISSA FAY
Photographer
Where to Go in 2017
Cover

Her soul city: "Paris is my favorite place to photograph. I first visited when I was 15, and I fell in love with the food, architecture, and effortlessly chic Parisians." **On café culture:** "When I visit, it's usually for work, and I'm too busy to spend much time in cafés. But when I do get to slow down, one of my favorites is La Fontaine de Belleville. It has a cool vibe and serves excellent coffee." **See her next obsession:** on Instagram @charissa_fay



ALEX PASQUARIELLO
Writer
Where to Stay in 2017
p.73

More than a place to stay: "I've been struck by how hotels can rejuvenate a city. The Hotel del Parque in Guayaquil, Ecuador, will transform the gateway city to the Galápagos into a destination in its own right." **His favorite stays:** "As a guy from Colorado who's now based on the East Coast, I've come to cherish ski hotels. Three things a great one needs: powder, easy slope access, and a ski valet." **Do disturb him:** on Twitter @BeingAlexP



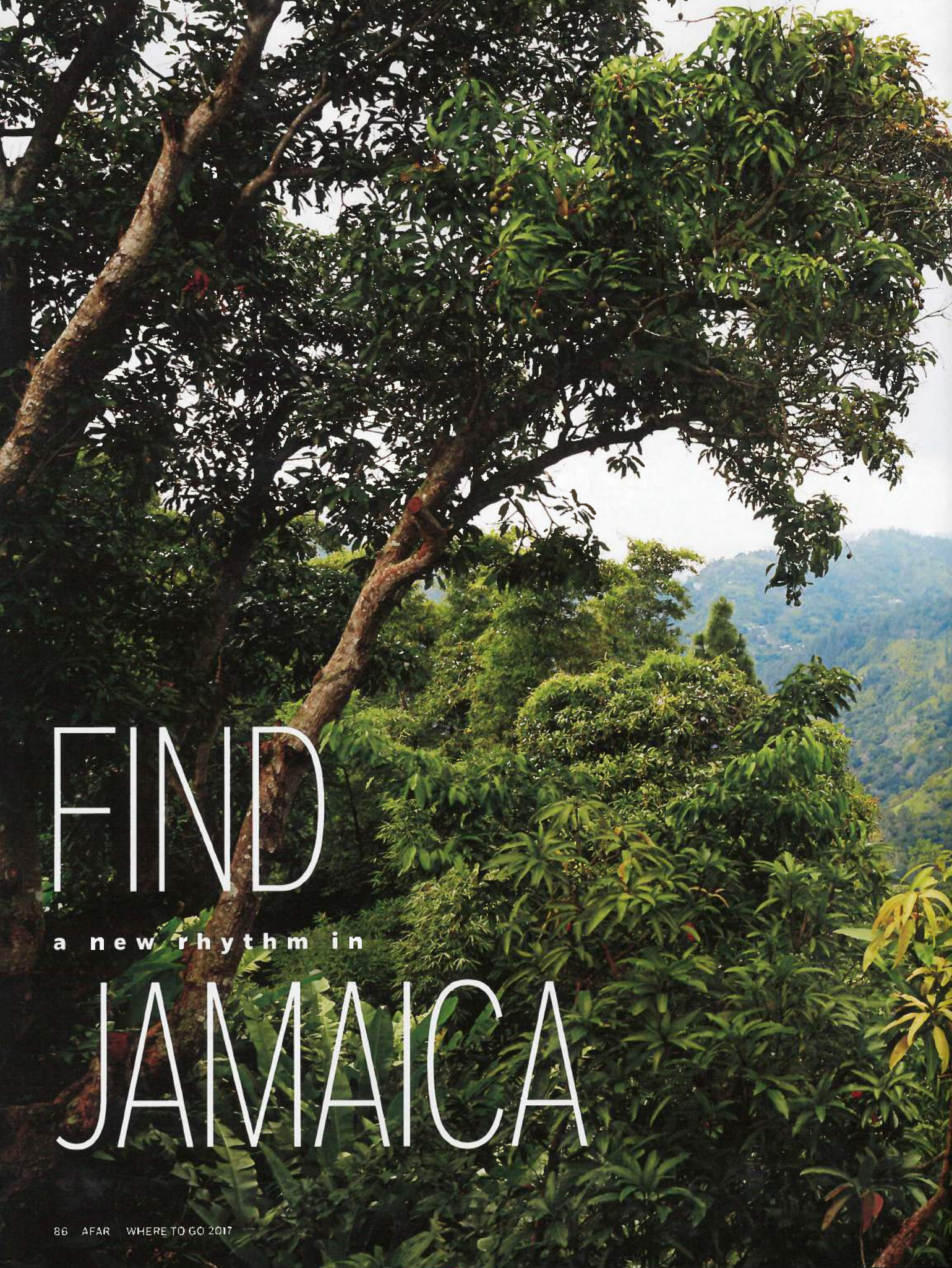
EMMA JOHN
Writer
A Waltz Across the Atlantic p.98

Dreams of grandeur: "I'd always wanted to make the classic transatlantic ship crossing from England to New York, because I'm obsessed with the glamour of the 1930s. So when the *Queen Mary 2* relaunched, I booked its first voyage." **On cruise misconceptions:** "I think people assume that cruises are something you do when you're older and slower, but I found I was always busy on-board." **Set sail with her:** on Twitter @em_john



TARA DONNE
Photographer
Find a New Rhythm in Jamaica p.86

Not your postcard Caribbean: "I love Jamaica because of its unique voice. The island has its own distinct music, art, and food." **Speaking of food:** "When I arrived at Pantrepant, Chris Blackwell's farm-turned-hotel, his cook had a huge meal waiting for me. It was like having your Jamaican grandma make you lunch—super authentic and delicious." **Follow her finds:** on Instagram @taradonnephoto



FIND

a new rhythm in

JAMAICA



Island Records founder, hotelier, and Jamaica evangelist Chris Blackwell knows something too many people don't: The island's best-kept secrets are far from the resorts where most travelers hide away. Writer Mark Byrne was one of those travelers, until he met Chris.

photographs by TARA DONNE

Here is the

BEST

way to get a cup of

COFFEE

in Jamaica:

Drive from a resort along the North Shore, up into the lurid, wild Blue Mountains. The road here looks like a string draped around and through the hills—a thin, wiggling patch of asphalt carved onto ledges, inclining ever higher. About an hour and a half inland, somewhere around 3,000 feet, look for the roof of a shack. You'll rarely see a whole building; houses up here are built below the road, simultaneously elevated and subterranean. Everything is. But you'll see a roof, a landing, and stairs leading down along the hillside. Take the stairs to the house below. Smell the air. Coffee. Smoke. Find the person in charge. Ask for a cup. And then watch him prepare the coffee, right there in front of you, a dozen or so yards from the steep farm where it grew. Pay the man and relax. Enjoy it. There is no ordering it "to go."

I'm ashamed to admit how many trips to Jamaica it took me to discover fresh-from-the-source Blue Mountain coffee. Suffice it to say, I have been a bad traveler here—the kind who flies into Montego Bay, gets into the car that's been dispatched from the resort, checks in, and never leaves the grounds. I didn't mean for it to turn out this way, but you get into a routine. You find a place you like (in my case, Jake's, a little bohemian hotel in Treasure Beach, on the island's southwest side), you note that it fulfills your needs, and then you settle into a rhythm. Don't get me wrong, rhythm is good. Especially on vacation. But when it means never veering from the road between airport and hotel, year after year, on an island like Jamaica, it's a problem. This was not how I wanted to live in the world. I needed to be better.

As it happens, Chris Blackwell was willing to help. Letting him give you a tour of Jamaica is a bit like letting the archangel Michael show you around Heaven. He didn't invent the place, but he's its advocate nonpareil. As the founder of Island Records, Blackwell brought the nation's sound to the world. (Have you heard of Bob Marley?) As a financier of *The Harder They Come*, he helped release one of the island's most iconic films. As the founder of Blackwell Rum, based on an old family recipe, he gave Jamaica the craft spirit it deserved. And as the man behind Goldeneye, he created a retreat so well-trammeled by the rich and famous that it seemed, for a time, there was simply nowhere else for celebrities to vacation. Blackwell has lived in Jamaica, on and off, his entire life. His mother's roots on the island date back to the 17th century, and he took his first trip there, from London, at 2 months old. That he was willing to show me around seemed somewhat absurd. But there it was: I'd check into his resort, and then, together, we would explore the country through his eyes.





Growers in Jamaica's Blue Mountains produce some of the world's most sought-after coffee beans. Drink a freshly brewed cup, as writer Mark Byrne did, by visiting James Dennis Coffee. PREVIOUS PAGE: Jungle foliage frames the view from Strawberry Hill.





ABOVE LEFT: Until recently, the rooms at Chris Blackwell's Pantrepant were open only to Blackwell's personal guests. ABOVE RIGHT: Any stay at Goldeneye should include backgammon and a Red Stripe or rum punch. OPPOSITE: Blackwell relaxes at Goldeneye.

GOLDENEYE, TO BE CLEAR, IS NOT AN EASY PLACE TO LEAVE.

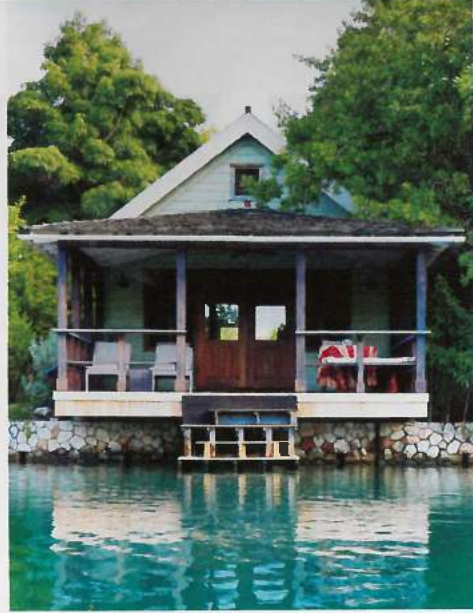
The land—the former home of Ian Fleming, where he wrote each of the 14 James Bond thrillers that would cement his place in literary and cinematic history—sits next to the tiny town of Oracabessa, on the northern coast. A warm, blue-green lagoon curls from the ocean around a small island and then lets out into a bay. You can look one direction and see a jungle, then turn around and see pristine white sand.

Blackwell bought the property in 1976 as a vacation home and a space to entertain family and friends but later he decided to transform it. In 2016, Goldeneye debuted a jumble of new huts, arranged around a small cove, a short walk from Fleming's house and the resort's original villas. The huts vary in height—designed, I'm told, to capture cooling breezes and allow guests to forgo air conditioning. And, crucially, they're much cheaper to book than the villas. Which is key because, up until this point, if you wanted to plan a visit to Goldeneye, you needed to either know Blackwell personally or have the excess capital to shell out potentially five figures on a vacation. (Part of the resort's enduring gravitational pull is that many of the celebrity guests check both boxes.) With the beach huts, Blackwell has expanded, once again, the ambition of his famous resort.

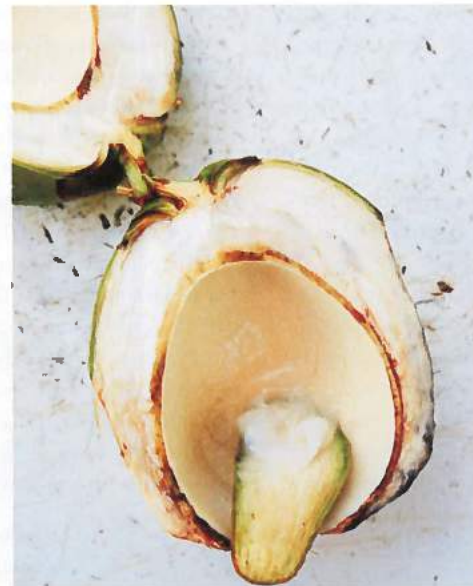
Blackwell is a handsome man just shy of 80. His blond hair has gone white. He's in good shape. I watched him, again and again, leaping up

stairs two at a time. He's a quiet speaker; you have to lean in a little to hear the gentle British accent, sculpted at an upper-crust school in England. It's worth it for what comes out. His stories feature a cast of characters that span nearly a century of gossip pages—Marley, Bono, Grace Jones, Errol Flynn, and Noël Coward in lead roles, Bill and Hillary Clinton in the endless list of supporting cast. (Blackwell once went on a hike with the Clintons while they were staying at the resort; I'll let you guess which Clinton made it all the way to the end and which one turned back.)

I arrived at Goldeneye in mid-August, the night Usain Bolt was to win his first of three gold medals at the 2016 Olympic Games. A small crowd had gathered to watch the race, projected on a screen set up against the ocean, so that the runners, at times, seemed to be sprinting across the darkening horizon. Blackwell arrived just before the race started, having ordered a round of cocktails for the guests. We talked. We drank. We had dinner at a long table, joined by 12 others. The night ended at Blackwell's private, lagoon-side bar. Blackwell lowered a lamp from the ceiling so that it hovered just a few feet above a card table. It was nearly midnight. A small group of friends—some old, some new, and then me—drank rum punch and passed around a spliff. Blackwell disappeared for a moment and then emerged again with backgammon and a large, freshly rolled joint. He played backgammon deep into the night.



LEFT TO RIGHT FROM TOP: James Dennis Coffee serves java straight from the source. The lagoon at Goldeneye resort. Everything is fresh at a roadside "cook shop" near Moneague. Goldeneye's Bizot Bar. Pantrepant's on-site farm grows produce for the kitchen. Lunch at Scotchie's means jerk chicken and breadfruit. Blackwell's Oracabessa Foundation supports local young people through sports and training programs. The soft, jelly-like flesh of a young coconut is an island delicacy. A roadside shop sells snacks in Oracabessa. OPPOSITE: The main pool at Goldeneye.





ABOVE: Blackwell's Pantrepant is spread across 800 acres in Jamaica's Cockpit Country, about 20 miles from Montego Bay. **OPPOSITE:** A feast at Goldeneye often includes saltfish prepared with ackee, a lychee-like local fruit.

HERE IS THE BEST WAY TO GET LUNCH IN JAMAICA:

Not all that far from the airport in Montego Bay, in a smoky complex of open kitchens arranged around a courtyard, is Scotchie's. It's highway-side; if you're heading east along the main coastal road, no GPS should be required to find it. I had been welcomed at the airport by a man who goes by McGyver, Blackwell's friend and driver for 20 years. As soon as I got into the car, he handed me a Red Stripe. Fifteen minutes later, he announced, "We're going to try something," and then veered sharply onto a side road and parked. This was Scotchie's. McGyver instructed me to have another beer at the courtyard bar, then he disappeared for a moment and returned with a breast and thigh of charred, crisp jerk chicken and a side of hot, buttery breadfruit. I'd never had breadfruit before; some describe it as bland, but, like many pale beige foods, it has the ability to become a vehicle for flavor—in this case, a slab of fresh, melting butter. Scotchie's is very good. Go to Scotchie's.

The next day, after one night at Goldeneye, we're in the car again. McGyver, Blackwell, and I are heading south from Goldeneye to Strawberry Hill, another hotel he owns outside of Kingston. We're taking the long way, up through coffee country in the Blue Mountains. It's almost impossible to get Blue Mountain coffee in the United States these days. Much of the land is owned by Japanese investors, and most of the available beans end up in Tokyo. But there are still local operations.

The first one we pull into is a small farm run by a grower named Dennis. His father, grandfather, and great-grandfather all made coffee exactly this way, and Dennis is proud of his joe. It's not cheap at \$20 a pound. But here's the thing: You can see it growing out the window of the hut where it's prepared. Dennis grinds the beans in a big hollowed-out stump, using a blunt, rounded club as a pestle. The water is heated over an open fire on the floor. He serves it to you in mismatched ceramic mugs.

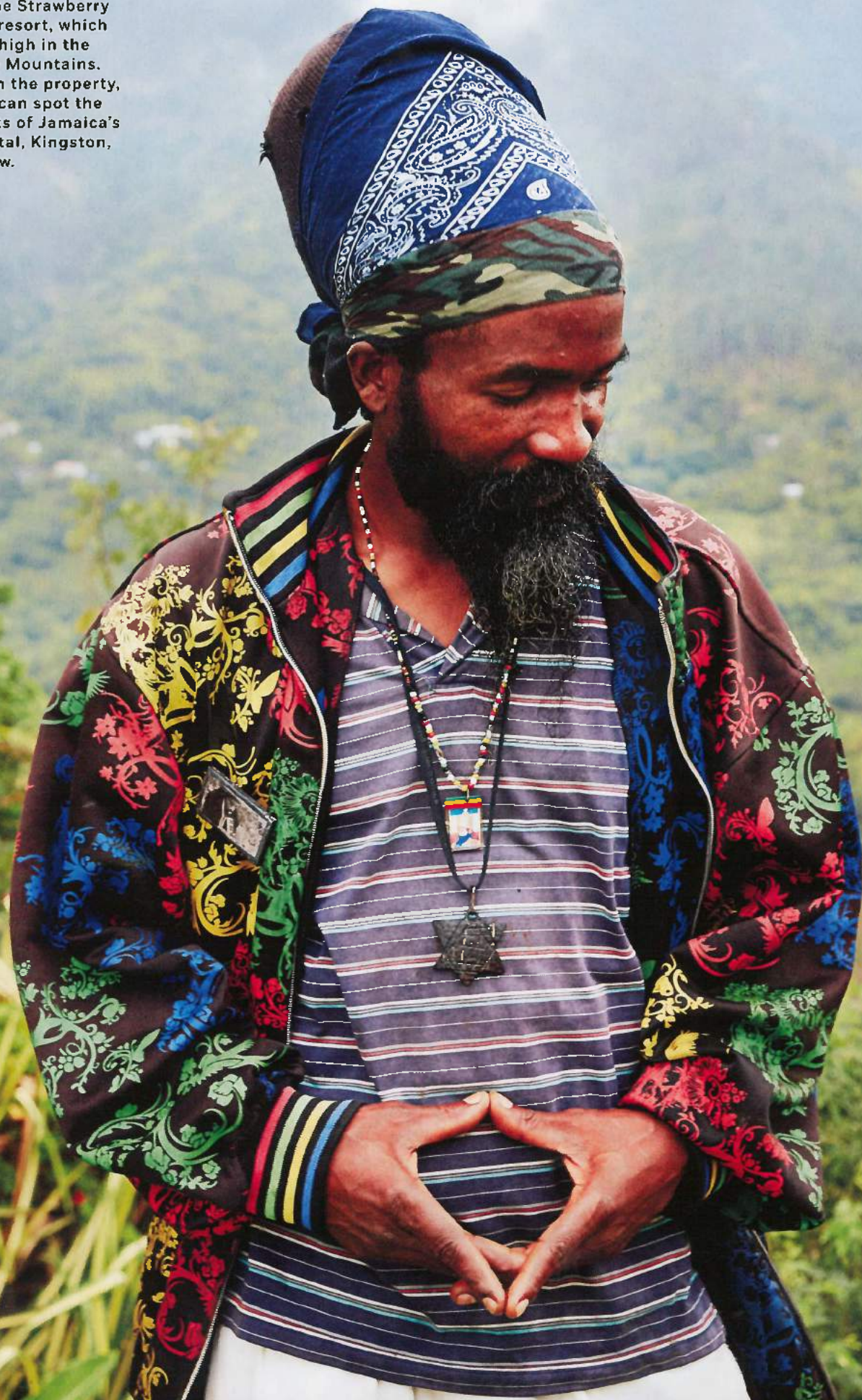
This—exposing strangers to a piece of Jamaica they might otherwise have missed—is what Blackwell has done his whole life. In his early 20s, working as a water-ski instructor at a hotel near Montego Bay, having barely graduated from Harrow School, Blackwell heard a band playing at the hotel, a Bermudian jazz quartet with a blind pianist. For reasons that escape him now, he told the band that he'd like to record them. He'd never done anything of the sort. But the next day he figured out how.

This pianist was Lance Hayward. It was the late 1950s. That record became Island Records' first release. A few years later, he heard a recording of a young Jamaican singer named Millie Small. He recorded her, too. Her cover of "My Boy Lollipop" sold 6 million records.

"I'm not a great salesman," Blackwell reflects now. "I've never really been able to sell anything I wouldn't buy." Driving around Jamaica with Blackwell, sampling its coffee, talking about its music, watching him take in the landscape like it's his first time on the island, you get the sense



Jahourka works at the Strawberry Hill resort, which sits high in the Blue Mountains. From the property, you can spot the lights of Jamaica's capital, Kingston, below.



he would buy every last inch of it if he could. It explains why, for nearly six decades, he's been its No. 1 salesman.

HERE IS THE BEST WAY TO GET A SNACK IN JAMAICA:

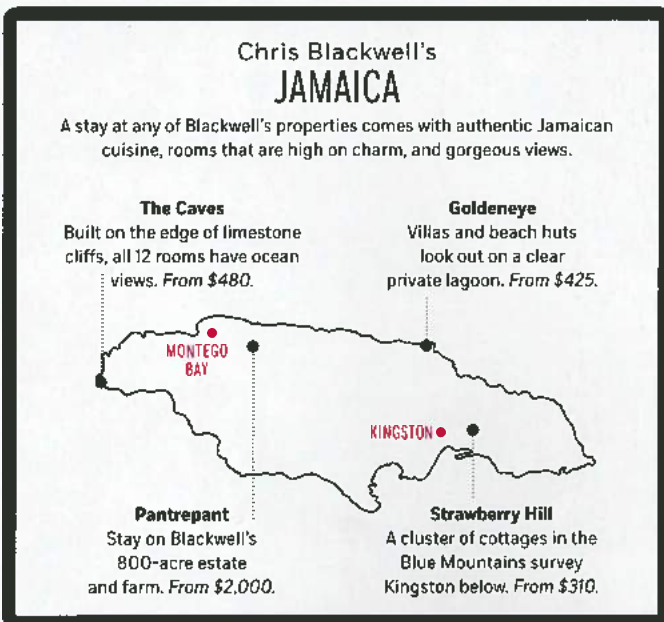
Drive anywhere, smell the air, and be prepared to stop. Having spent the night at Strawberry Hill and the morning in Kingston, we are now making our way north, back to Goldeneye via the main island-bisecting artery, A1. For lunch, we pull off near a tiny town called Moneague. On the side of a road labeled only "Boulevard," a woman runs a small, open-air food stop. Call it a restaurant. (Why not? What defines a restaurant? A roof? Walls?) The woman who manages the place has been doing it for 30 years, right here, and she has plenty to work with: a couple of stock pots over an open fire, a cooler full of ice, tinfoil to wrap food for the road. We eat boiled corn, slices of fresh avocado, more buttery breadfruit, and chunks of rich, salty fish skin. We each grab a beer from the cooler McGyver keeps stocked in the car. Then Blackwell lays it out for me.

"What I love doing is turning people on to something," he says. "It used to be turning people on to Jimmy Smith. He was my favorite jazz artist. But also, before that, when I was really young, I loved to take people into the mountains and show them the views. I loved that. I think of myself as a kind of guide." I can verify that he still does this—that there was no reason for us to drive three hours out of our way yesterday for a cup of coffee, to take the twisting, nausea-inducing mountain road instead of this flawless new highway, no reason other than that Blackwell wanted to show off the scenery and bask in its glories himself.

Later, as we drove through Oracabessa toward Goldeneye, he expanded. "I want to get people out of the resorts," he said. I mentioned to him how heretical this sounded coming from a hotel owner. For decades, the prevailing economic principle of hoteliers with island properties has been to keep vacationers on resorts, so they can spend their money there and only there. But Blackwell isn't so much a hotelier. He's a host. Which is why, just before we parted ways that day, he invited me to his stay at his home, a farm called Pantrepant.

HERE IS THE BEST WAY TO GET ORANGE JUICE IN JAMAICA:

Go to Pantrepant. I hadn't planned on going there, but Blackwell insisted. "It's worth it just to see the tree," he said. "The tree is so good."



The drive from Goldeneye to Pantrepant is almost two hours: an hour or so on a coastal highway, and 30 minutes on roads decreasingly worthy of a name. Eventually, the road fades into a rock-strewn trail. At the top of a hill, a Georgian farmhouse sits under the shade of a giant guango tree—the tree—a great, low cloud of branches, vines dangling gently to the ground. It's about 300 years old, and possibly Jamaica's largest. "I bought the property because of the tree," Blackwell says.

If Goldeneye is Blackwell's roman à clef—his friends and himself superimposed on Fleming's swinging estate—then Pantrepant is his memoir. It may be his most personal project to date. Here is Chris's life in Jamaica, almost exactly as he lives it. And here is what it looks like: Orange groves. Thickly wooded hills. Roaming white Brahman cattle. Galloping horses. Coconuts, a variety that hasn't grown widely on the island in centuries. That majestic Georgian farmhouse. Unpainted wooden fences and low stone walls. It looks like Jamaica.

Blackwell has been hosting friends and family at Pantrepant since he bought the property, all 800 acres of it, in 1990. But until very recently, no part of it has ever been available for strangers to book. That Blackwell now, at nearly 80 years old, has finally begun opening up his home to guests may strike observers as proof he's gone off his rocker. He deserves both the privacy and the idleness offered by a retirement on his farm. His contributions to Jamaican tourism are already extensive, perhaps unparalleled. But to Blackwell, the properties he's opened have never been about simply giving foreigners a place to stay. They've been part of his lifelong pursuit as hype-man for the island he loves. Observed through that lens, he had to eventually welcome visitors to Pantrepant. Here, in the lush Jamaican mountains, is the island at its finest—the freshest food, the most picturesque vistas, the tallest trees and clearest water. Blackwell's mission is to lead people beyond the resorts, and Pantrepant is the pièce de résistance: a place where the resorts seem to not even exist, seem to never have existed at all.

On my final day in Jamaica, I had breakfast on the veranda of Pantrepant's single-bedroom home, built a couple of decades before the U.S. revolutionary war. The spread before us had been sourced, that morning, entirely from the farm. Callaloo greens picked from its fields. Poached eggs laid by roaming hens just hours earlier. The orange juice, Chris explained, is some of the world's best, but Jamaican oranges sell terribly in America because their rinds are green—Americans don't trust green oranges. We paused to contemplate the kind of baseless cultural fear that causes millions of people to reject a good, ripe fruit because its natural color isn't the color they're used to. Then we took another sip.

After breakfast, a few minutes before I was scheduled to depart for the airport, I hopped in the back of a truck and rode down the hill to the swimming hole. I took my shirt off, set my shoes on a stone near the edge, and jumped in. It was 10 in the morning; the sun was high but the water still brisk from the night. It was some of the cleanest-feeling water I'd ever swum in, sparkling and cool, fed by a white, misting waterfall just a dozen yards upriver. I floated into the current and swam against it for a moment, then gave up, turned on my back, drifted. I could have let the Martha Brae River carry me from there, down along the pastures, through the orange groves, eventually out into the roiling ocean. Instead, I got out, packed my bag, and went home. On the plane, I had a glass of orange juice—Minute Maid, bright orange, from a can. Here is my final piece of advice: If you do all of this, or even a portion of it, do not end your trip with airplane orange juice. ☹️

Mark Byrne wrote about a Kenyan safari experience in the July/August 2016 issue of AFAR. Photographer Tara Donne is profiled on page 18.