



# KEEPING IT

*Stevie King puts Christian Marshall of Gillespie and Steel in the design hot seat and discovers what influences will be shaping future living environments in the Caribbean*

# Real

With over 45 years' experience designing homes in the Caribbean - what changes have you witnessed in terms of clients' expectations?

A lot has changed. What used to be achieved through sketches and drawings produced with pen and ink on a drawing board, has evolved into a complex digital world of computer graphics, CAD and more recently BIM (Building Information Management). Clients now expect realistic high quality renderings depicting exactly how the room or building will look, complete with furniture and landscaping, and, when not satisfied, or simply curious, instant amendments. Whilst these demands can be met, time frames are often unrealistic. Digital tools at our disposal enable us to accurately and completely communicate the project details to a client before a single brick is laid. Whilst currently not in the fore, the future will see 3D printing and Virtual Reality become indispensable.



**What baseline essentials do G&S take into account when designing for a tropical climate?**

The primary aspects of a tropical design that are often overlooked are the all-important concepts of natural ventilation and shade. With the advent of the internet, we are bombarded with social and cultural influences born of foreign environments. Clients are sometimes tempted to transplant a contemporary temperate design to their new home in the tropics complete with mechanical cooling systems that prove to be expensive and unsustainable. That's not to say that modern design has no place in the tropics, but that the design must address the basics of tropical design. A successful design comes down to understanding the tropical lifestyle that embraces natural ventilation and shade and will blur the line between interior and exterior making nature a fundamental aspect of the design solution.

**What, in your opinion, defines contemporary Caribbean Architectural style?**

Contemporary Caribbean Architectural style draws influences from the varied cultural histories of the islands and moulds this into new forms, whilst staying true to the climatic needs of the region. The strictest definition will vary by location taking into consideration specific indigenous and traditional materials. The litmus test, is that in the end, the design is fully compatible with its environment.

**Tell us about the Green Building Design Movement**

The Green Building Design Movement is an important reality of our time and for the Caribbean, seeks to correct the mind shift of the latter part of the 20th century away from sustainable design and toward resource hungry and energy consuming solutions. The most important factors of green design in the Caribbean relate to water and energy management. Water management is particularly important in Barbados as the island is designated as being water scarce, and energy management simply because of the excessive cost. Thirty years ago, we were designing naturally ventilated offices and this is now a thing of the past, whilst still being absolutely feasible. Significant strides will be made in energy conservation in the Caribbean when we can guide the human psyche back toward the appreciation of the natural environment.



**What are the hallmark features of a Gillespie and Steel design?**

At the risk of sounding narcissistic, our hallmark features are inspired design diversity, design quality and attention to materials and details. We provide a lead role in the design process for a cross section of projects in the industry including mid and high-end luxury villa development, commercial, institutional, hospitality, and local residential. We do not portray a specific style, but rather feed on the client's vision to deliver unique design solutions for the project's needs. In the event the client is a blank page, we will employ design images to determine the design direction for that particular project. Our approach to design holds the clients vision and needs above our own. We view our role as being a conduit for the client to explore design to their own end. Our varied portfolio is testament to our success in this regard.

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