



INTERVIEW

# King of Mustique

Basil Charles is the man behind ***Basil's Bar***, a legendary celebrity watering hole in the Caribbean since the 1980s.

*You were born and grew up on the neighboring island of St. Vincent. What was Mustique like when you started working there?*

When I arrived in 1971, there wasn't much happening on Mustique, it was a very isolated place. No roads, no electricity, no places to go. In the 1980s, things began to improve. People starting spending money and Colin Tennant, a friend of Princess Margaret, bought the island. In the beginning I worked at the Cotton House, which was the only hotel on Mustique at the time. In 1976, when I took over the beach bar, I was the only local on the island who owned their own business. Once the royals starting visiting regularly, lots of other

people followed, and things got much busier. Over the years, the bar became the place to be.

*Which celebrities did you meet there?*

Mick Jagger, Kate Moss, Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta-Jones, Denzel Washington, Morgan Freeman and many, many others. People are happy to be able to leave their yachts, go on land and have a good time. When they come to the bar for a drink they can forget about everything and just have fun. There were many wild nights at the bar back then, people were dancing into the middle of the next day. If you find a place like that you come back again and again. Mustique is a safe place.

*But you never intended for Basil's Bar to be an exclusive celebrity haunt, you wanted locals to feel welcome too. Why was this always so important to you?*

I wanted everyone to feel welcome, from the superstar to the gardener. They all came to the barbecues and danced together afterwards. Excluding certain groups of people wouldn't have worked on a small island like Mustique.

*What characterizes a good host?*

I think you should be able to contribute to making a good party. If you feel comfortable in your skin and are in a good mood, you pass

this feeling on to your guests. It's important to create a place where it's easy to have fun, easy to be happy. Satisfied guests will always come back for more.

*What's your favorite drink?* There were so many. In 1979 we had Hurricane David, it was a very bad storm. I created a drink I called Hurricane David in memory of that. It consisted mainly of dark rum and vodka, and it was very strong – we used to say it was guaranteed to blow you down!

*You sold the bar a couple of years ago.* I had been thinking about it for a while, and in 2017, I sold the bar back to the Mustique Company, of which I'm a shareholder. I still own a general store on Mustique and a villa called Buttercup House. In addition to opening the Basil's Bar Kingstown on St. Vincent, I also founded the Basil Charles Educational Foundation to help young people who didn't have the money to finish high school.

*How often do you go to Basil's Bar?*

Almost every day. Many of my staff still work there. I also run the Mustique Blues Festival for Basil's, just as I've been doing for nearly 30 years.



Would you like to know more?

WORDS: MERLE WILKINSON; PHOTOS: BASIL CHARLES