

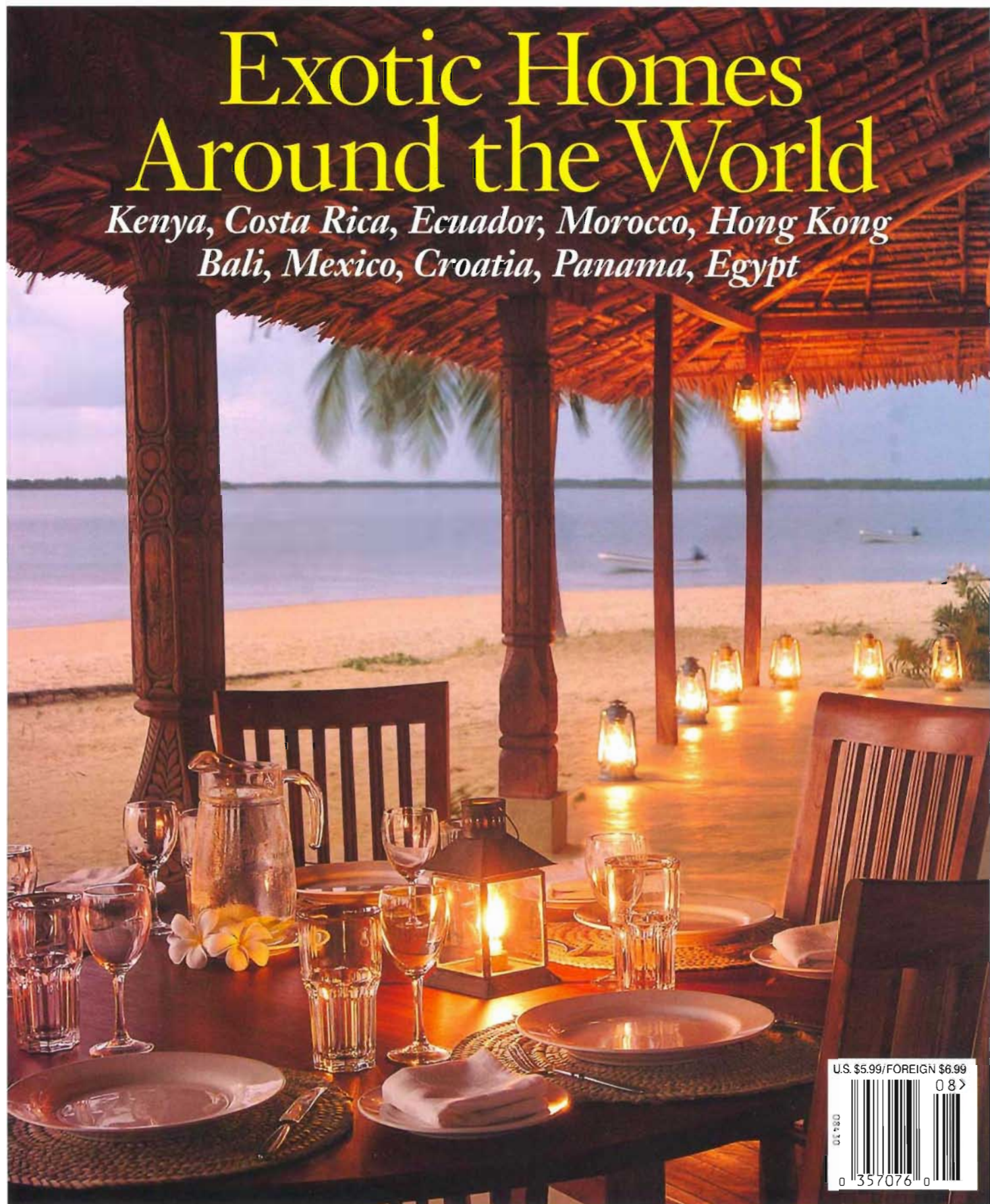
ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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Exotic Homes Around the World

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Es Saadi Gardens & Resort

IN MARRAKECH, 10 VILLAS ILLUMINATE THE GLORIES OF THE EAST

Architecture by Aziz Lamghari/Text by Elizabeth Lambert/Photography by Marina Faust

Beautiful Marrakech is the accessible side of the exotic—the romance and jostle of the faraway made familiar by legacies from the West. The geography is Africa, while the history and political inclinations owe much to Europe. There is the traditional rammed-earth construction of North Africa. There are palaces with the ornament brought by invaders from Andalusia and villas with the Art Déco style brought by administrators of the 20th-century French Protectorate. Marrakech is booming.

Which is good, if challenging, news for hotels. Guests are likely to be young, stressed,

short of time and accustomed to luxury. The Baucher-Bouhlal family, three generations who have owned and shaped the famous Es Saadi Gardens & Resort, have delivered more than luxury with the villas recently constructed on the hotel's grounds. Each of the 10 villas is a different fantasy, a little palace designed to showcase the best of the world's architecture, from India to Rome.

Although each villa has luxurious amenities such as 24-hour butler service and its own heated pool, the real intent is to surprise, to take visitors to other worlds.

Big dreams seem to run in the family. Jean Baucher

brought new life to war-weary Paris by developing the Moulin Rouge and the Casino de Paris. In the early 1950s, after dining with one of his clients, a pasha from Morocco, he followed his new friend's advice and visited Marrakech. That was all it took. He stayed, bought 20 acres of empty land just outside the gates of the walled medina and built a casino. His dancers from Paris came for the opening. Josephine Baker and Maurice Chevalier came too. Word got out: This was the place to be.

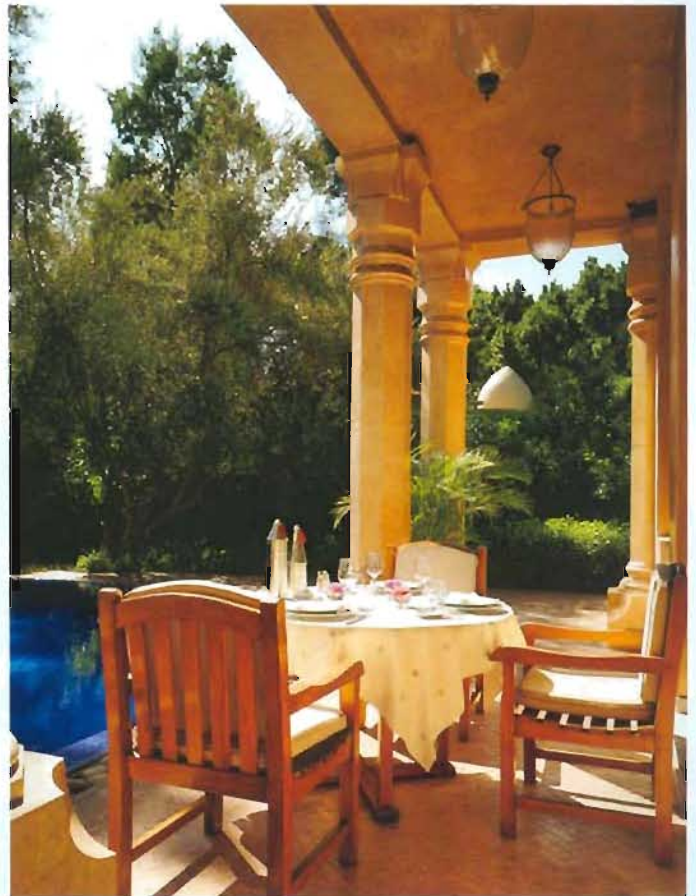
People flew in from Paris for weekends—it was all top hats, black ties and jewels. The glamorous set that went to

ABOVE: Jean Baucher's Es Saadi hotel, completed in 1966 in the heart of Marrakech, was quickly adopted by jet-setters and celebrities. Recently, the Baucher-Bouhlal family added 10 luxury villas to the property, each one showcasing a unique cultural and architectural style.

OPPOSITE: Elisabeth Baucher-Bouhlal designed the interiors of the villas, including the two-story Mahamudja's Villa, a tribute to India. The elephant sculpture, she says, is meant to symbolize the splendors of Hindu art. A copper balustrade gives the center staircase metallic luster.







OPPOSITE: A cupola, one of four, tops the dining area of the Favorite Villa. The grand cupola alone required more than eight months to complete. The dining area leads out to the pool, which was fashioned into a heart shape to avoid removing a stand of palm trees.

ABOVE LEFT: A carved wood canopy bed anchors the Favorite Villa's bedroom. Remote-controlled draperies can close off the space from the living area. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The poolside terrace of the 1001 Nights Villa is surrounded by olive trees.

Deauville and Evian during the summer went to Marrakech for the winter.

A hotel adjacent to Bauchet's casino came next, and he asked the new king, Hassan II, to choose its name. By royal suggestion, the new hotel was called Es Saadi, meaning "the contented one" but also a reference to the Saadian dynasty.

That was 1966. Soon thereafter, Cecil Beaton photographed Mick Jagger beside the pool; Princess Margaret arrived, and so did Pierre Balmain. The rich and the famous followed.

In 1966 Elisabeth Bauchet-Bouhlal joined her father at the hotel, and in 2001 her son, Jean-Alexandre, became part of the family team. They used their collective imaginations to conceive the villas, which Jean-

Alexandre calls "a bit of Oriental craziness, 10 hideaways that take a new generation of guests down a path of dreams."

The architect for the project was a family friend, Aziz Lamghari, a Moroccan well known for palaces around the world. The instructions they gave him? "Have fun."

He did. His only restrictions were that each villa must be very comfortable and no trees were to be cut down. As Elisabeth Bauchet-Bouhlal puts it, "We could all be foolish together. Every day someone had a new idea. We wanted too much of everything, but the architect kept the balance."

She designed the interiors as though they were her own home, using antiques from around the world that she and

her husband had collected. "We had a dream and didn't know what it was," she says, "but when something beautiful comes along, you have to take it."

Moroccan craftsmen are good—very good—and the family knew that if you live in a treasure land, you must take advantage of it. Locals wove fabrics, forged metal and embroidered linens with motifs specific to each villa.

There are indeed treasures of all kinds, but these days it is often the simple luxuries that can be the most difficult to find. Sun in winter, the music of birds, the scent of orange blossom and jasmine, the serenity of the garden after a morning lost in the souk—all are here, but for many, the

greatest luxury is total privacy.

The villas, along with their gardens and pools, are well hidden—only an occasional dome can be seen above dense plantings and mature trees. Guests are driven directly to the door of their villa. Celebrities stay, and nobody knows they are there.

These villas are built for dreams. They are also an unspoken acknowledgment of the rich architectural heritage of Marrakech, right for the place and right for the time. □

Es Saadi Gardens & Resort

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The private pool of the lush Persian Villa, located in the middle of Es Saadi's gardens. The villa's sky-blue walls are covered in *tadelakt*, traditional Moroccan plaster, which reflects light in such a way that the luminosity seems to come from within the walls themselves.