

ESCAPE

*PLACES AND SPACES
TO GET LOST IN*

PHOTOGRAPHY: NICOLE GORMLEY: @GROMLET ZANDER PRICE: @ZANDERPRICE EMILY WINIKER: @EMILYWINIKERPHOTOGRAPHY





Matt Dickinson

Many of us dream of owning a beach house on some exotic shore, where we can live out our palm-fringed, pineapple-flavoured fantasies of perpetual summer. Toronto native Matt 'Dickie' Dickinson, 34, was no exception. Until he actually made it happen, and invited all his friends to join in.

"I always wanted to have a place that felt like home in paradise, in a setting that was close to surf, that had great weather 12 months a year, and that was kind of an antithesis to my life in Toronto," says Matt.

In January 2012, with the help of founding partners Dave Grossman, Anthony Hermans and Michael Chmielewski, Matt opened a bohemian surf lodge named Maderas Village near San Juan del Sur, on the south-west coast of Nicaragua. Matt, Dave and Anthony had met two years prior at the site of the current property, then known as The Dreamcatcher House, and quickly arrived at the same conclusion: it was time to quit their jobs – in commercial real estate, law

and construction, respectively – and buy the place. They rounded out the team with Michael, who brought his expertise in health and wellness to the proverbial table.

Not only was Nicaragua a vacation destination on the rise, where foreigners could buy property with almost no restrictions, it had an equal dose of good waves and good vibes. Plus, there's a collection of mystical volcanoes sure to captivate soul-searching wanderers. "It's like the womb of Mother Nature," says Matt, "like Mother Earth's belly."

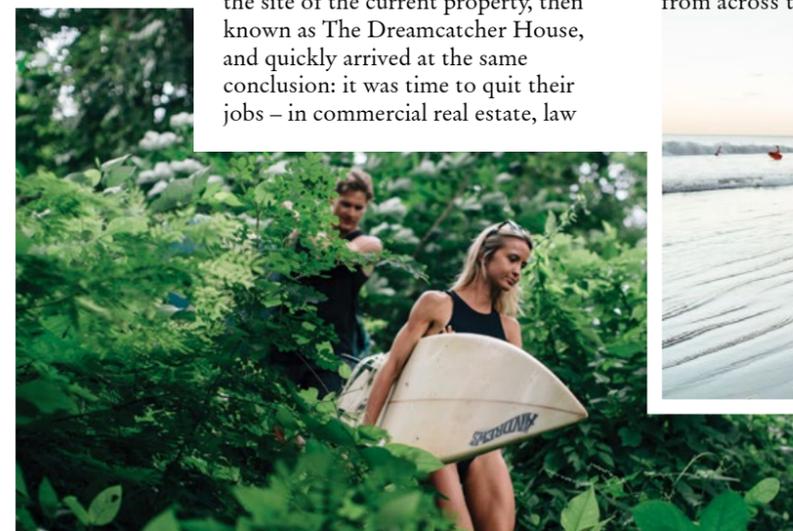
The vision was to build a jungle home where like-minded creatives were free to be themselves and indulge their passions. For US\$30 to US\$200 a night, depending on which of the 18 rooms they book, travelling artists, musicians and entrepreneurs can swing in woven hammocks, surf Maderas Beach and gather under the pitched roof of the main lobby to discuss big ideas with kindred spirits from across the globe. >

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THE VILLAGE PEOPLE

What do you get when three BURNT-OUT 27-YEAR-OLDS meet in a NICARAGUAN SURF TOWN? A COMMUNITY paradise where guests are encouraged to pursue their PASSIONS.

WORDS SERENA RENNER





While the clientele skews towards young and stylish – and sometimes a little insular, as the occasional TripAdvisor review points out – tattoos and Jackie O sunnies are optional.

“The only thing we ask is that people are open to being themselves,” says Matt. “The best version of who [you] are always gets along with everybody else.”

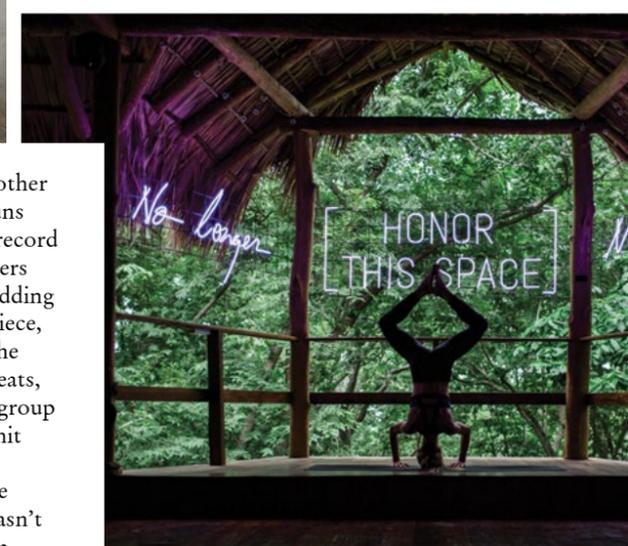
Through a beautiful yet simple range of accommodation built of wood and bamboo, Maderas aims to facilitate authenticity, connecting guests with nature. That means forgoing some creature comforts, including air conditioning and hot water, so you can immerse yourself in the environment and listen to the surrounding wildlife, including the local howler monkeys.

“I think whenever people are put in a simpler situation, when they have what they need and nothing more, they become more aware of the elements in their lives that actually make them happy versus the elements that just distract them,” says Matt. “When you strip some of that away, you get this amazing conversation. You get intellectual discourse and debate and fuel for your fire. You get epiphanies that help shape the next quarter or the next year of your life.”

The staff has also adapted and expanded the experience over time. They added a music studio in early 2015, in part due to encouragement from artist guests Orpheo McCord, the drummer from Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeros, and his wife Rachel

Kolar, from the band He’s My Brother She’s My Sister. The lodge now runs songwriting camps during which record labels like Neon Gold and producers such as Paul Adams work with budding rock stars to work on 20 songs apiece, many of which land on albums. The lodge now hosts yoga and art retreats, plus entrepreneurship camps and group events. It’s “a sort of jungle Summit Series,” concluded *T Magazine*.

“[The music studio] sparked the concept of creating a place that wasn’t just a destination for drinking piña coladas on the beach; it could be an extension of people’s lives,” says Matt. “If you want to go away and work for a week on whatever, just with a way nicer backdrop, you can do that.” >





Beyond its guests, Maderas Village strives to support the local community and be a leader in responsible tourism. The owners constructed the first casitas and cabañas using timber from naturally felled trees, established a microfinance fund to assist their 28 local workers and started a manufacturing facility that preserves age-old Nicaraguan carpentry traditions through crafting high-end furniture for such clients as Ace Hotel New Orleans, Mast Brothers and Vice Media.

“When the Nicaraguan carpenters who made all this furniture see it placed in some of the most influential and idiosyncratic locations around the world, they get a real sense of pride,” says Matt.

Going forward, the team hopes to translate the Maderas Village concept into several additional properties with possible locations ranging from a former castle in the south of France to a residence in downtown Los Angeles. Maderas Village itself will debut an expansion of 8100 square metres in the next year or two.

“We look at this as a 50-year project,” says Matt. “One that we’re not in a rush for. It’s just so exciting to see people realise the potential they have. Being able to play a role in helping that happen is something I’d love to continue for the rest of my life.”

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