

Maria Breeze Lots #300-14,18 Submitted by Ebets Wesson Judson 3/23

Sometime in the late 60s- Dr. William Howe came home from a vacation in the USVI the proud owner of three lots in a brand new development above Great Cruz Bay. He immediately went about selling them off to his friends and acquaintances around Rochester New York. I can still hear his booming voice in conversation with my father Rufus Wesson, “Rufus, I’ve got your lot in the Virgin Islands!”

We were stunned when we learned that Pop had indeed acquired a lot as we all knew he was tied to the world of Pony Club and the cooler climates of the north. But it turned out he was intrigued and put down \$10,000. Next his brother-in-law Bill Fuller proposed a week at Caneel to check out Rufus’ lot. So Bill and Bunny and Bets and Rufus made the trek to St. John and after a day or two of luxuriating at Caneel they rented a jeep and fought their way up to the barren top of Maria Bluff to locate the lot. I’m not sure what the chatter was as they gratefully settled in to the buffet luncheon back at Caneel, but before the meal was over the Maitre D’ had told them that he knew the best man on the island to build their house – Irvin Samuel – and the people at the table next to them leaned in to recommend a great architect on St. Croix – John Hammond – and Pop’s happiest retirement project was underway. The former Army Engineer in him was resurrected and with Hammond he designed a home that met the government specifications for cistern size even before anyone else bothered. He was delighted with Irvin Samuel and his island crew and was never disappointed when he visited to check on progress. As the spring of 1971 approached he and Bets went to the PX in Puerto Rico to outfit the home and wonderful touches such as giant hanging globe lights on the wide veranda were put in place. We arrived for the first time at Christmas of ’71 only to watch the Christmas winds smash the globe lights one by one as we drove up the hill. Other accommodations for being on a windy hilltop were made over time – smaller lights flush with the ceiling and the Walter Lewisohn (it was Walter’s suggestion) Memorial Telescoping Glass Doors. Daughter-in-law, Amy Wesson turned the hazard into an attraction by naming the house “Maria Breeze”.

Maria Breeze was not the first house at the top of the hill as Bob and Joyce Leigh had already assembled their much more efficient kit house (also from the PX) next door. Thus began many years of friendship from adjacent homes side by side in the south and next door towns in the north. We admired Bob’s yellow dune buggy, so Morgan Wesson and Rob Gourley created one from scratch in the barn up north and brought her down for at least two people to tool to the beach and back until Tom and I managed to burn her up on the road above Caneel. “Hey you’re on fire!” called our friends in the back of the green Terra that could accommodate a crowd.

Now fifty-two years old, Maria Breeze has risen back from two rounds of hurricanes – Hugo/Marilyn and Irma/Maria – more lovely than ever thanks to the ministrations of Rufus’ and Bets’ children and grandchildren.