



La Vista Times

Beach Resort

New addition to the family



As it views from the beach

La Vista is celebrating. A new extension increasing the resort's capacity more than 30 per cent is now in full operation. True to the character of La Vista the occasion is not marked by solemn speeches and a boisterous party, but rather by sharing in the support of a good cause and in the satisfaction of the achievement itself.

That is vintage La Vista. Run by a family, the resort is experienced by its guests as their extended family. Mind you, we are talking about 2,000 people. People from all over, who share that common experience of "coming home" at their prime choice for vacation.

These days timeshare owners at the charming property in the Pelican Keys arrive to share in the family pride of quite an addition to the existing 32 suites, penthouses and cottages. For that is what all who have come down in recent weeks agree upon: the new building with 18 lovely studios and spacey 2-bedroom suites right on the beach is a great addition, worthy of congratulations. In more than one sense.

For La Vista's extension not only lifts the property up to an even higher level of vacation enjoyment, it has in a very real sense saved the resort's great (if not its greatest) asset of a unique panoramic view of the Car-

ibbean sea. As La Vista's owner and developer Peter Scherzinger says, there was a moment that I was faced with the Shakespearean choice of "to be or not to be," in this case of "La Vista or No Vista." I chose the first.

Short history

That statement asks for an explanation. But, first a little background information. Peter and Renate Scherzinger came to St. Maarten in the late 70s. Having contributed to the development of several projects on the island, Peter decided on the construction of a small hotel in 1986. His motive was of a family nature. Renate was seri-

ously ill and Peter, considering the future of his two daughters, thought building a small hotel might provide

them with a measure of security.

A plot land with unfinished foundations in the Pelican



Andrea and Mario

Keys appeared to be ideal to make his dream become a reality. The view of the Caribbean sea was (and is) phenomenal. That explains the name "La Vista."

In December of that same year the hotel opened its doors. Note that at that time Peter considered the upcoming timeshare industry as a most negative development. By the mid-90s, however, he had changed his mind and embraced the concept to the extent that he initiated a new trend in timeshare selling at his resort (see elsewhere in this supplement).

It is interesting to note that at the actual opening of La Vista Peter realized that he should not involve himself in the daily running of the hotel. His daughter Andrea had been sent off to be trained at the well-known American hospitality school Johnson & Wales.

Although she was hardly three months there, Peter called Andrea back to (help) run the hotel. His argument: here you can learn in practice what your professors talk about in theory. He was proven right, but undoubtedly more by Andrea's energy and perseverance than by any paternal wisdom on his part.

Andrea, joined by her husband Mario and sister Martina, has built up a reliable staff and told her father in 1992 time had come to retire.

He did. He and Renate, who had made a remarkable recovery, returned home to Germany.

No way No Vista

The hotel's panoramic view is due to the slightly elevated location. As those acquainted with the location know a road runs beneath the hotel separating its parking lot from a parcel of land bordering on the beach.

Looking down towards the sea from La Vista one sees buildings to the left and right, but nothing in front obstructing the view.

On several occasions Peter had been offering the land to buy. He nor the members of his family had any interest.

This changed in May 2000, when others showed an interest in the land to build a three storey complex on it. Peter realized that in that case he might as well change the name of his hotel to "No Vista."

More seriously, he realized what such a development would mean to his 2000 timeshare owners. Recognizing his responsibility to all these people, he discussed the matter within the family. In October 2000 it was decided to buy the land themselves and embark on an extension of the hotel.

Retirement interrupted

For Peter and Renate the decision had far-reaching consequences. Unexpectedly he was again involved in financial management, developing the project and facing daily worries, in particular when 9-11 interrupted the hitherto success-

Continued on page 2



Renate and Peter

What makes the difference

SELLING TIMESHARE IS A HARD, aggressive and often unscrupulous business. Hard, because sales people make their money from commissions. Aggressive, because there are so many others trying to sell the same product. And unscrupulous, because many fall for the temptation to dress up their sales pitch with vague promises that will never materialize. It is, moreover, an expensive business. To lure people to resorts all sorts of freebies are given. As on average only 1 in 15 contacts yields a sale, the cost of sales is driven upward rather than downward. Although in many cases haggling over the price of timeshare weeks gives buyers the impression they got away with a good buy, the truth is different.

Somehow this type of selling did not accord with the ambiance at La Vista. It certainly did not agree with Peter Scherzinger. When the decision was taken to diversify the product of La Vista by introducing timeshare besides regular hotel business, some inventive brainstorming took place to develop different sales policies.

Participants in that exercise were Piet and Nanda Wip. They had known Peter Scherzinger for years and joined La Vista as its sales team in 1996.

Says Piet Wip: "It was a marriage made in heaven."

What they initiated together was a new trend in selling timeshare. They are not only happy with the results, but also proud that others have



Nanda and Piet. Awards in the background.

begun to adopt the same policies.

Trust

The leading principle of the new approach is and was to create a relationship of trust with the buyer.

It was decided not to give any presents, bring the price down accordingly and do away with haggling. It was agreed to give the potential buyer room to make his or her own decision without the feeling of being pressured or harassed.

In the beginning this was not easy, Wip says. People didn't understand. They assumed that gifts came with dealing and that price haggling implied getting a better deal. Nanda says sometimes she advised people to check out other places to find out the difference for themselves.

She and Piet admit that the temptation to throw in a freebie to clinch a sale was often big. But sticking to their new policy of fair prices and a straight, clean approach be-

gan to pay off.

People came back and others came, because they were told about the resort and its approach to selling. Wip says the basis was building a relationship of trust.

Sales have been above expectations. Having largely relied on mouth to mouth promotion, this statement says a lot about customer satisfaction. Judging from the rare customer complaints he knows of, Wip speaks of a satisfaction rate in the high nineties.

Nanda points in this respect at the low percentage (20%) of home owners making use of exchange possibilities, while 50% of La Vista's timeshare owners have termi-

nated their membership of the international exchange organisation. Such a high rate of happy guests derives from an excellent product, a relaxing environment and package options geared to customer wishes.

Piet and Nanda make no secret of their own job satisfaction. The product they sell is well worth the investment. There is no need to dress up their sales talks, making things look better than they are.

Discussing the new studios and 2-bedroom suites, Nanda expresses her great appreciation for having been asked to give her own input and make suggestions what would suit the taste and comfort of clients.

If the straightforwardness of their new sales policy explains much of their success, Piet says, the same applies to the introduction of an element of flexibility with regard to reservations.

What has impressed the sales couple greatly, is the number of people already owning timeshare in La Vista who bought into the new complex without having seen the finished product. "You have my credit card number. Just book me," was a message heard more than once.

We raise the question of spending patterns of their timeshare guests. How important do they rate the impact of the industry on the economy of the island?

we find Wip's observation that more and more (semi) retired people opt for spending part of winter down here. Their contribution to the economy should be rated considerably.

Nanda and Piet Wip were recently joined by Alan Moss, one of the most experienced and as such internationally recognised timeshare salesman around. To keep up with the demand, strengthening of the sale team was a must, they say.

Talking about international recognition, Wip and his wife proudly inform us that as from 1998 La Vista has been awarded the Gold Crown (RCI) for hospitality and ser-



Pool deck with location of new beach bar in the background

NEW ADDITION TO THE FAMILY - CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ful selling of the timeshare weeks.

They did not return to take up residence on St. Maarten, but have since crossed the Atlantic several times.

Sales started soon after the land was acquired in November 2000. With nothing to show but drawings and the reputation of La Vista itself, sales nevertheless were impressive from the

very beginning.

A better compliment one can hardly imagine. As sales accelerated, ground breaking took place in January last year and construction was started.

In order not to impair the broad view from the premises of the existing La Vista, the foundation of the new complex were made as deep as possible. Part of the land, moreover, was kept

open for parking purposes.

All in the family

The construction is now over. When we visit the new premises with Peter, we meet several guests visibly happy with the new set-up. What is it, we wonder, that makes people buy into a resort without having seen the new addition, or buy without ever even having visited St. Maarten?

The answer is simple. La Vista is a family affair. It was created by Peter for his children. It is run by his children like it would for friends. It is cared for and well maintained. People are literally welcomed "home" when they arrive and feel like that too! The new extension was conceived when the beauty of La Vista was endangered. The bottom line at La Vista's success is trust.

vice every year. The award is given on recommendation by exchange guests. For a relatively small resort receiving the coveted reward is pretty unique, we understand.

But then, La Vista is pretty unique.

Wip doesn't hesitate: "Timeshare is the backbone of St. Maarten. Most guests dine out. Many do their luxury shopping when on the island. A good percentage of guests never even use their kitchens."

Interesting in this connection



Third generation doing the weekly raffle



Prices starting from:

Studios sleep 4 US \$6,900.-
2 Bedrooms US \$10,900.-

Pelican Key * P.O. Box 2086
St. Maarten * Netherlands Antilles
tel. (599) 544-3003/3008/3018/2650/2652
fax (599) 544-3010 * e-mail: lavista@megatropic.com
web site: www.lavistasort.com

People can buy fixed weeks.



Plenty of parking, lights at night

Home away from home

Ask Andrea Bartlett-Scherzinger what her position is at La Vista. You'll see her eyes grow big, not because she thinks you're a fool for not knowing, but because she clearly doesn't think in terms of titles.

She is the manager alright, but "I do everything, write letters, answer the telephone, problem solving, job control, but—big laugh—I don't use a whip."

She appears a little exasperated. How do you explain to an outsider what it is to run a family hotel? You don't. He can see it for himself. Andrea is everywhere, enjoying every bit of what she is doing up to the hilt. People love her.

She tries to explain. "We are a small operation. Everybody knows everybody. Take the office. Debby has been a personal friend for 15 years. Sabrina has been there for 3 years. Marlene was with the hotel for 9 years and is now back again. Nathalie joined over a year ago. Most of the domestic staff members have been with La Vista for years. All in all staff now numbers 27. Extending the hotel with 18 units up from 32 made it necessary to increase staff, in particular in the laundry and security departments. But, organisation-wise nothing much has changed, Andrea says. Things are running fine.

Andrea tells us that the past year has been a most interesting experience. She sat in on the building meetings and found herself confronted with a host of decisions to take. Choices had to be made about the lay-out of the apartments, about colours and fabrics, cutlery, china, you name it.

She is happy that most of those decisions turned out to be the right ones. Only small adaptations had to be made when all was more or less ready.

What must have helped, is the rather unique relationship between management and guests that marks La Vista.

As mentioned several times in this special report that relationship is of a family character. Not just in the sense that the whole family, from Peter and Renate down, from Andrea and her husband Mario have their own family the nucleus of the extended La Vista family.

Their daughters Janella (10) and Alyssa (7) often come to the hotel. In particular on Tuesday, when the girls are in charge of a raffle, drawing

room numbers and presenting winners with nice surprises.

Mario and Andrea do not live on the premises. Having their own personal life away from the hotel is probably the secret of it all.

It is amazing to hear how many of the timeshare owners take the trouble to call from abroad to hear how everybody is doing, in particular the children. The message often is "we miss you." For many La Vista is "home away from home."

Mario has walked into the office and joins the interview. Like in the case of Andrea, there is no real tie to the work he does. He is more or less everywhere where something has to be done, from repairs to reclaiming a guest's stolen car.

Mario is happy with the new addition. Says he is confident that the building protected by a sea wall, reaching almost 2 meters into the ground, will hold against any hurricane. He is now working on the creation of a beach bar.

Talking about bars, we are reminded that Mario's father is also heavily involved in the twice weekly evening entertainment in the restaurant. We walk around the grounds and take some photos of outside decorations made by Mario. It dwains on us that maintenance of a family run operation of this nature will always be up to date. Wherever one looks, it is clear that the people in charge of La Vista care. No wonder that customer satisfaction is so high.

Buying into La Vista is definitely a smart thing to do.



Some day in the life of La Vista's manager

Woke up at 6.30 am, got ready for work, prepared kids for school, made breakfast, fed horses. On the way to La Vista dropped kids at school. Wow. 7.55 am at office, made it on time!

Four guests waiting already, early check-outs (hmm, should have known yesterday), started up computer, phone ringing - sorry Dad, no time. Invoices prepared, checking restaurants bills from yesterday, all OK. Have a nice trip, stay in good health, see you next year! Genuine smiles come back at me.

Sales wants to know openings for week 6. Oh, oh, nothing open (nice problem, sold out). Try to sell week 5 or 7. Let's see the e-mails. Piff, more than 100 since yesterday. Reservations, payments, changes of flights, inquiries for timeshare. Phone ringing - sorry Dad, am really busy now.

Hurry to the morning sales meeting. One hour of exchange of ideas, new signs, new ads, change the picture in ad, how is the outlook for the week? Smiles and confidence reassure me. Back to my desk.

Two owners and maintenance chief waiting for me plus message from school. Lysie not feeling well. Phone ringing - sorry Dad, not now, but please get Lysie from school.

Lost data in computer, Debbie, please fix. Sabrina continue with answering e-mails. Marlene please find contract 10268. Shoot, forgot to prepare checks for banks - sorry Dad, please wait a while.

Wine salesman order given, discussed ad with advertising rep, looked at room 31 for strange noise in bathroom...haha, behind toilet battery-operated toy. Cash pan short of USD 7,95 and restaurant cash 15,35 over. Voila, found mistakes. Mario on phone, 1.30pm, want lunch Honey so I can say good morning? My grunting stomach answers for me. Lunch quick and delicious.

20 minutes later back to office. Grouching, sweating, delayed guest checks in. Want a room with view! Huh? Sorry Sir, only view to next building's wall and toilet outside... I show you. Disbelief. 10 minutes later back in office with smile as guest got my sense of humor, cause we only have rooms with view (La Vista, capice?). Became best friends.

Phone ringing (Dad?). No, school - your kids waiting since 20 minutes to be picked up.

How could I have forgotten. Mammì, could you please...? Sure.

Accountant comes to discuss new program, Debbie please help. Room 9 lost key, have a spare one for me. Hurry, two new contracts! Write them, process credit card, greet the new owners. Room 206 phones, tv remote controls don't work. Low Batteries. Janella phones from home, horse is limping. Phone rings. Sorry Dad - have to go home for a while. Manager Cocktail party at 5 pm. All smiles, good ambiance, feel proud.

6.30 pm rush home. Had a great day, at least not as hectic as yesterday. Play with children, prepare dinner, watch tv. 9.30 pm tired and happy to sleep. 10.30 pm phone from security guard. Room 23 can't sleep. Ice machine makes strange noise. Speak to them. They are upset, so I better go. Arriving 10.45 pm. Ice machine working, no unusual noise. Listen Andrea, now. Can't you hear it? All I hear is the wonderful natural noise of crickets near by. That's!!!! Guests a bit embarrassed but happy, me go to sleep again. Such is life in the Caribbean. Don't stop the Carnival!

I love it.

Two words tell the story of La Vista's restaurant Hideaway: romance and quality. Dinner at night is an experience. Chef Gerard, master of the French and Italian cuisine, has been swaying his scepter over the kitchen for more than ten years. The proof in the pudding is the large number of people, residents and guests from outside, that have dinner at La Vista high on their list of best choices. Great live entertainment by Les Hodge and Calvin Bartlett makes Wednesday and Saturday popular nights. But note that the restaurant is also open for breakfast and lunch. Make your day and try the Spanish omelet or great burgers.

The building

The building blends in nicely into its immediate surroundings. It is already difficult to recall what it looked like a year ago. Remember the heavily hurricane battered house right on the beach. Not a pretty sight and well out of synch with the new buildings with their blue tiled roofs to the right. The wreckage stood as a reminder of what havoc the sea can wreak upon anything built close to the beach. A message not wasted on contractor of the new project Dennis Goossens. Designed by Jean Pierre Agniel, architect of several buildings on the islands, among which the new government offices in Curaçao, the structure looks strong and sturdy. It is, says Goossens. > From the very beginning it was made clear that there

outside walls. But, Goossens assures us, that will take some time, as the best paint coating available was used.

Hurricane proof

We look down from the main



Dennis Goossens

offices to the new structure. It really is a compilation of concrete blocks. Goossens points out. Even the roof is of

panels are at the same time a welcome protection from anyone considering a break-in!

Practical tips

Regular meetings with management and the sales people yielded a lot helpful and practical tips. Also interesting to note is that remarks by possible buyers visiting the construction site or being shown the drawings were carefully registered.

One clever solution to keep the two bedroom apartments rentable for hotel purposes, was to provide one of the bedrooms with its own exit (front door) thus creating two hotel rooms out of one timeshare unit.

Commenting on the materials used inside the building, Goossens says only materials



Great taste, great comfort.



To dream the day away...



Feel at home, help yourself!



All enjoy ocean view.

were two requirements we had to comply to without making any compromise. The building would have to be hurricane resistant to the highest possible degree. Secondly, it should be as free as possible from maintenance worries, he adds.

Maintenance free

Starting with the last mentioned condition, Goossens says, wherever possible the use of wooden materials was evaded. Instead steel with powder coating was used for railings, gates etc. He explains that no painting job will need to be done in at least 15 to 20 years.

PVC material was used for the window frames. A first for the Netherlands Antilles, Goossens guesses. He says the material comes with a ten year guarantee and is resistant to ultraviolet exposure. The only maintenance job that will come up once in a while is the painting of the

solid concrete. What we see is a slightly tilted roof of shingles. Correct, says Goossens. It is in fact a double roof. The first or top layer covered with shingles prevents the formation of any water pools on the concrete underneath. Such pools exposed to the sun invariably damage the concrete after a while, causing leaking. The double roof construction solves that problem without sacrificing safety (from hurricanes) principles.

As if reading our thoughts about what hurricanes can do with gutters, Goossens says these too are made of concrete. The doors and glass windows are factory guaranteed for withstanding 140 mph winds. The glass is double layered and extra heavy. Even objects flying around during a hurricane such as branches will not be able to do harm, Goossens states. Mind you such strong glass

with longevity have been used. He mentions hard wood, no sheet rock.

Care was also taken to install equipment such as washbasins that can be reentered quickly. Keeping the bathrooms all white should also help replacing items without much difficulty.

Meeting the minimum requirements voiced by the sales people led to the creation of an Internet corner in every unit. The infrastructure for link-up is in place, he says.

Sea wall

Hurricanes not only bring strong winds. They also whip up the seas and without proper protection buildings close to the waterline run an enormous risk.

Goossens has no doubts about the building being able to withstand the worst kind of storms.

It has deep and strong foundations. More importantly, between the beach and the

building proper a wall has been constructed reaching at places three metres deep. "We made sure the wall rests on the rocks underneath and not on the sand," says Goossens.

The structure of the wall is moreover such that waves break back to the sea and not forward over land toward the building. The great lessons

learned from the hurricanes in the second half of the 90s have been diligently applied.

Exceptional

Goossens tells of the high quality sewage treatment plant serving the units and the manner in which air conditioning machines have been kept virtually out of sight. We spare you the details. But

again quality solutions have been given preference and no compromises have been made.

Asked what impressed him most in doing this particular project, Goossens mentions the team spirit in which the respective parties involved in the construction worked together. That was, he says, quite exceptional.