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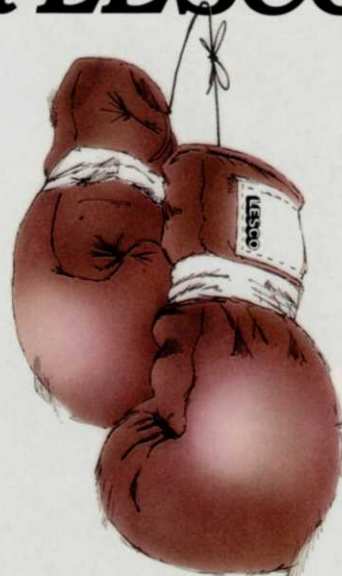
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## ROYAL RESORT

The Bahama islands are a popular vacation spot. For those who escape want to luxury, the Bahama Princess resort is the place to go.

by Heide Aungst, associate editor

**I**t's a world where the paradox rules...

A world of high-rolling casinos and low-rolling tides...poverty-stricken natives and wealth-laden tourists...the local straw market, the imported drug market.

The only constants on Grand Bahama Island are the halcyon, turquoise ocean and the tranquil, emerald-green landscape.

The Bahama Princess Resort—country club, hotels, villas and casino—sports one of the most developed landscapes on the island, including a Japanese garden and two golf courses.

The sophisticated landscape can be credited to superintendent Knox Russell, one of the few Bahamians educated in horticulture. He received his

B.S. from Florida A&M in agriculture and returned to Freeport five years ago to work at the Princess.

He attended A&M on a full scholarship, graduating at 19. "I wasn't the brightest guy who applied for a scholarship, but because I decided to do agriculture, I got it," he says. "If you're fortunate, smart and lucky enough to get a scholarship, you go to college."

But it's tough to find Bahamians educated in any agricultural area. Although food could be grown on the island, Russell says about 90 percent of all goods are imported.

"Kids in school here scorn this kind of work," Russell says. "There's a serious drug problem here. They see a 24-year-old with a Mercedes parked in the driveway as more successful

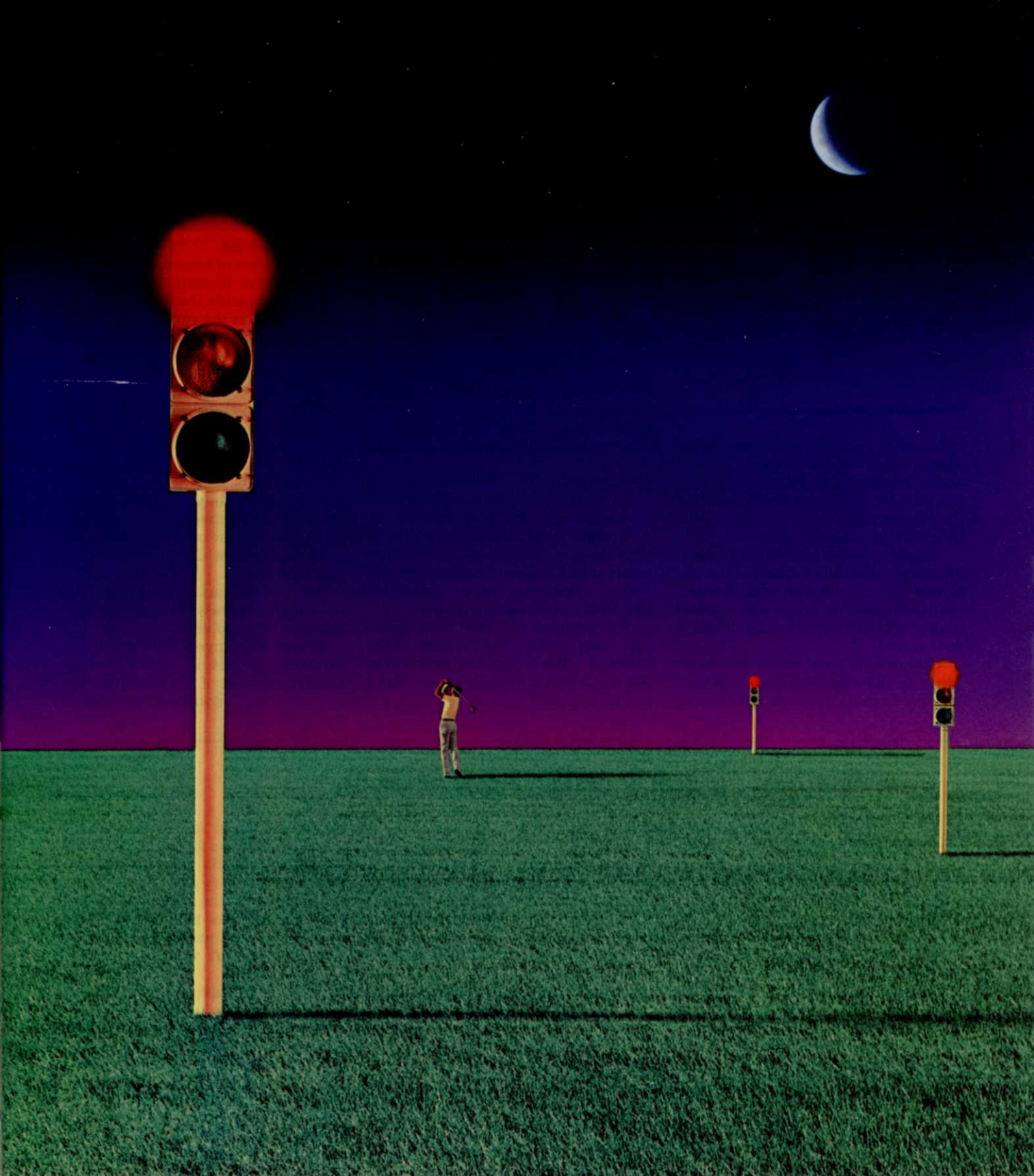
than someone with a master's degree."

The average yearly income on the island is about \$8,000 tax-free, says Russell. The Princess is the largest employer.

The superintendent's job was held by an "expatriate," but the Bahamian government rules that when a native is qualified for a job, the foreigner must surrender the job.

### Colorful creations

Russell's first project at the Princess was to renovate the landscaping at the Bahama Princess Tower, the palace-like hotel adjoining the casino. (The property has two hotels). But as he walks through the property, he coolly criticizes the overwhelming greenery everywhere.



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'Kids see a 24-year-old with a Mercedes parked in the driveway as more successful than someone with a master's degree.'

—Knox Russell  
Bahama Princess Resort



**Landscape superintendent Knox Russell is one of the few Bahamians educated in landscape management.**

"We suffer here on the islands landscape-wise," Russell says. "They accept designs from Florida, and half the time the designers don't even see the property, so there's problems with tree roots or too much greenery."

Annuals are too expensive to plant, except occasionally in front of the entrance sign. So, where he can, Russell plants flowering trees and native plants which provide color almost year-round.

One unique tree, native to the island, is the "powder puff," which blooms fuschia flowers resembling

powder puffs. The "firecracker" is a plant named for its hot-pink buds which literally pop when stepped on.

Crotons used in many of the beds provide eye-catching purplish color, while salvia bursts of red, purple and yellow. Oleanders and bougainvillea also break up the green monotony.

But perhaps the most recognized color surrounding the Princess is the hibiscus. "It's a common practice to use it as a hedge," Russell says, "but I just let it grow."

Hibiscus flowers are often used to decorate tables in the restaurants.

#### **Inside/outside**

Russell's crew of two supervisors and five workers is responsible for all plants used inside the Princess buildings, as well as the surrounding landscape. The country club part of the resort sits on 36 acres, of which about 25 are grounds. It was built in the early 1960s. The Tower, built across the street several years later, has 25 total acres.

Several of the restaurants are only open for dinner, which makes it tough for hanging baskets to survive long. Russell usually buys 40 plants and rotates 20 each between the restaurant and a greenhouse on the property. He uses dracaena which thrive in low-light conditions.

Most of the turf on the property is St. Augustinegrass. Frequent irrigation can be a problem.

Water is pumped from small circulating ponds in the Japanese Garden in front of the country club.

*continued on page 38*

## **AS GOOD AS GOLD**

A vast array of gold and gems is sold throughout the Bahamas. Emeralds are the prize.

That made it easy to name the Princess' two golf courses, which stretch a combined seven miles: just call them the Emerald and the Ruby, and maybe they'll play like jewels.

But jewels often need polishing, as new superintendent Shervin Bastian is finding out. Bastian has been in his position just six months, although he's worked on the crew for 10 years. He inherited his position when the former superintendent couldn't get his work permit renewed by the government.

"It's hard, hard work," he says. The hardest part, he

says, is not having an assistant. When he was promoted from assistant to superintendent, no one was immediately promoted to assistant. So his work schedule averages 12 hours a day, usually every day.

But with a crew of 24 year-round, the courses receive the care of a prized gem. And his new title allows him some special privileges. "Before, I'd just go and work. But now, being in charge I get to work with the people who play the course," Bastian says.

While meeting the guests is his favorite part of the job, the traffic is his biggest challenge.

The Princess is the island's largest resort, and though no one seems to keep statistics, the rounds of golf played during the prime winter months is overwhelming.

"It doesn't always look good under all that traffic, but there's nothing you can do about it," Bastian says. "Once we had 177 carts out and that was not enough. Guests had to wait to go back out."

Bastian treats the two par-72 courses the same. The biggest difference between the two is the water. Lakes affect five holes on the Ruby and only two on the Emerald. But, Bastian says, the Emerald has some tougher holes.

The crew rebuilt the greens three years ago, doing one course at a time in the summer off-season. "There

*continued on page 38*

**Superintendent Shervin Bastian says working with the guests is his favorite part of the job.**



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Continued from page 36

The water is treated with copper sulfate and Aquashade to control weeds and enhance color.

The front system is somewhat antiquated with heads which must be manually operated. The system at the back of the property is automatic. When the water has been used in back, the pond is too low to draw water for the front.

"The hardest part is keeping the lawn green with all the shade," Russell says. In heavily shaded areas and where weeds are a problem, Russell either clears the bed and lays peat rock or uses a drought-tolerant groundcover, such as wedelia, which grows naturally on the beaches.

The numerous trees on the property range from towering grand old ficuses to lanky palms of every variety, including coconut, royal and the traveler's palm, brought to the island by Christopher Columbus. Even cold climate trees like the podocarpus grow on the property.

It's not uncommon for workers or guests to pick coconuts and drink the juice, or to nibble on exotic fruits like papaya, mango, Japanese plum (loquat) and Barbados cherry. In fact, the Chinese restaurant at the Interna-



The picturesque 13th hole on the Ruby sports native royal palms.

## GOOD AS GOLD

continued from page 36

was a lot of common bermuda in the greens, and that was hard to maintain," Bastian explains. "When you cut low, you'd get a lot of brown spots."

During the summer, Bastian mows greens daily at  $\frac{3}{16}$  of an inch, but raises the height to  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch during the winter, when turf growth slows.

He fertilizes frequently using Milorganite and slow-release sulfur-coated products. Fairways usually receive a 16-4-8 fertilizer.

With four Jacobsen greensmowers, Bastian says the crew can finish the greens on both courses in 75 minutes.

Other major equipment includes two Jacobsen fairway mowers and a Toro Sand Pro sandtrap rake.

The crew mows fairways only once a week in the winter, but every day in the summer. It's important to note, however, that summer in the Bahamas runs from May to December.

During hot, dry summers, the courses are watered

daily. Temperatures in the winter can still get into the 80s, so the courses are watered at least every other day then.

The Princess has its own sewage treatment plant, so the courses are irrigated with effluent water. The manual irrigation system on the Emerald is labor intensive, but the Ruby has pop-up sprinkler heads.

Despite frequent watering, disease is rare on the Bahamian courses. "I haven't seen a case of disease in the 10 years," Bastian says. He credits the former superintendent with knowing how to prevent it.

Bastian's decade of experience has kept the courses in prime shape during the transition. "It's not only experience, but you need an education about turf, too," Bastian says. He plans to take a short course in Florida, where conditions are similar to the islands.

With the right combination of education and experience Bastian will certainly keep Freeport's royal resort courses looking as good as gold.

—Heide Aungst



## A FLORAL TRIBUTE

In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue... and discovered America. Right? Well, despite recent controversy on the subject, it is at least a fact that he discovered the Bahamas.

Freeport and Lucaya, the two cities on Grand Bahama Island, are rich in history, but most of it doesn't date back as far as Columbus' voyage.

In 1960 two Americans, Wallace and Georgette Groves, envisioned the island as a modern city, like those in the states. Wallace Groves set up an agreement with England that the island would be developed and remain tax-free until 1999.

That year, the Supplement Agreement, broadened the scope of the island's Hawksbill Creek Agreement to allow the Bahama Port Authority to expand the island into a resort and residential development. In less than a decade the island's population surged from 2,000 to 25,000.

On July 19, 1973, the Bahamas declared their independence from Britain.

Although 1973 will be captured in history books for the freedom from England's rule, it will be remembered among nature lovers as the year the Garden of the Groves opened.

The fact that both happened the same year is sheer coincidence. The Grand Bahama Development Company actually began building the gardens three years earlier as a living tribute to the Groves' contribution to Freeport.

Although Georgette Groves died early this year, Wallace Groves still occasionally enjoys the serenity of his gardens.

"I used to like it when he was active here. He took a great interest in the place," says Wesley Saunders, superintendent of the gardens.

Saunders oversees the crew of five which maintains the 12 acre gardens. He received an associates degree in landscape and design from Lake City Junior College in Florida and has managed the gardens for seven years.

The gardens feature plants from throughout the world, like the crown of thorns from Madagascar, the Chinese snow queen hibiscus and the Manila palm of the Phillipines. Plants are marked for the education of garden visitors.

"Most plants have to be tough, hardy plants because we cut them back often," Saunders says. "We don't do too much with annuals."

Despite the lack of annuals, color explodes in the garden with red hibiscus, red bougainvillea and flowering trees like the Powder Puff. "During June we have spectacular color when the Royal Poinciana trees bloom," Saunders says.

The gardens offer a variety of features, including a home for pink West Indian flamingos, the bird of the Bahamas, and an authentic replica of a Bahamian church which served the island's original logging town, Pine Ridge.

The gardens' design allows visitors to wander over several wooden bridges into specialty areas, such as the unique cactus garden and the fern garden.

"We dug out a gully with a tractor and put boulders along the sides to create humidity for the ferns," Sau-

nders explains. Water from a natural spring is pumped through the fern garden.

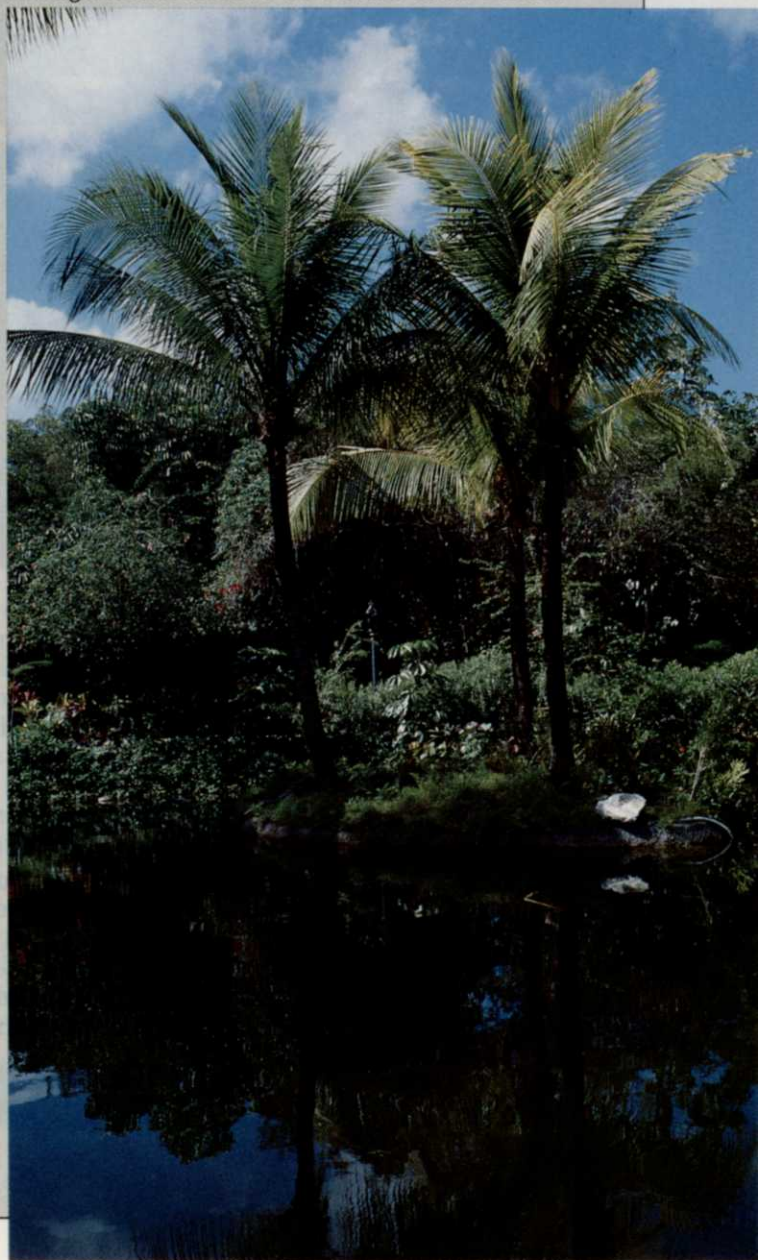
Most of the water in the gardens is circulated throughout the gardens and used as irrigation. Saunders treats the water with Aquashade and copper sulfate. He also tried a weed-eating fish, but he says it caused more problems than it helped.

Since Georgette Groves died, the gardens have been going through a renovation.

The water system, which creates numerous waterfalls throughout the garden, has been shut down for repair. Saunders also expects to get two trailers of new plants shipped in from Florida.

The crew usually changes beds completely every

**Native palm trees stand out among plants from throughout the world at the Garden of the Groves.**



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