

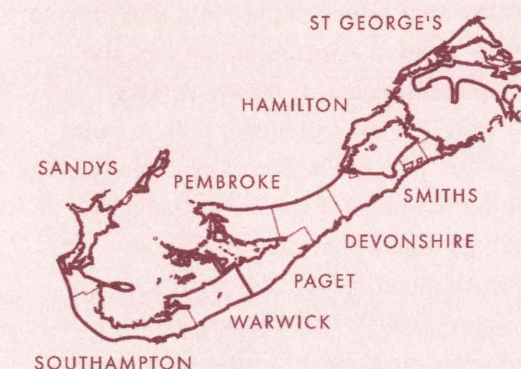
Bermuda

Approaching Bermuda by air or sea, one notices first that the isles are opulently landscaped and impeccably adorned with lush gardens and pastel architecture. For its 300,000 yearly visitors and 60,000 islanders alike it is a land that is small in area but rich in culture. Bermuda is at once a geographic place and cultural space — a creation of human enterprise, artistry, and effort.

by Diana Baird N'Diaye

Bermuda's local culture grew out of the island's strategic location. From its very early settlement this tiny archipelago was a central navigational landmark between the British Isles, mainland America, the Caribbean, and later the Azores. Patterns of travel and exchange have continued to rejuvenate the cultural fabric of the island colony. These patterns have been a source of material goods, population, and culture. People, ideas, and goods, along with music, foods, and other forms of culture, flow out and back from Bermuda with the regularity of the ocean tides. Bermudian folklife is the creative, pragmatic, and unique fusion of these cosmopolitan trends.

The need to survive in a very isolated and limited space, with limited resources, built Bermuda's economy and culture. Finding ways to reconfigure resources both material and cultural has been an enduring fact of Bermudian life and consciousness. Even today, Bermudians look out upon the world with a mariner's sensibility — ever interdependent with their fellow



Bermuda parish map, courtesy the Bermuda Government

islanders and watchful of Atlantic Ocean storms as well as those blown in by the changing winds of fortune.

Bermuda was unoccupied until the time of its settlement by the British. The settlers found themselves in need of help in working to build a viable colony out of the craggy, windswept islands. They soon transported enslaved, indentured, and free individuals of African and

connections

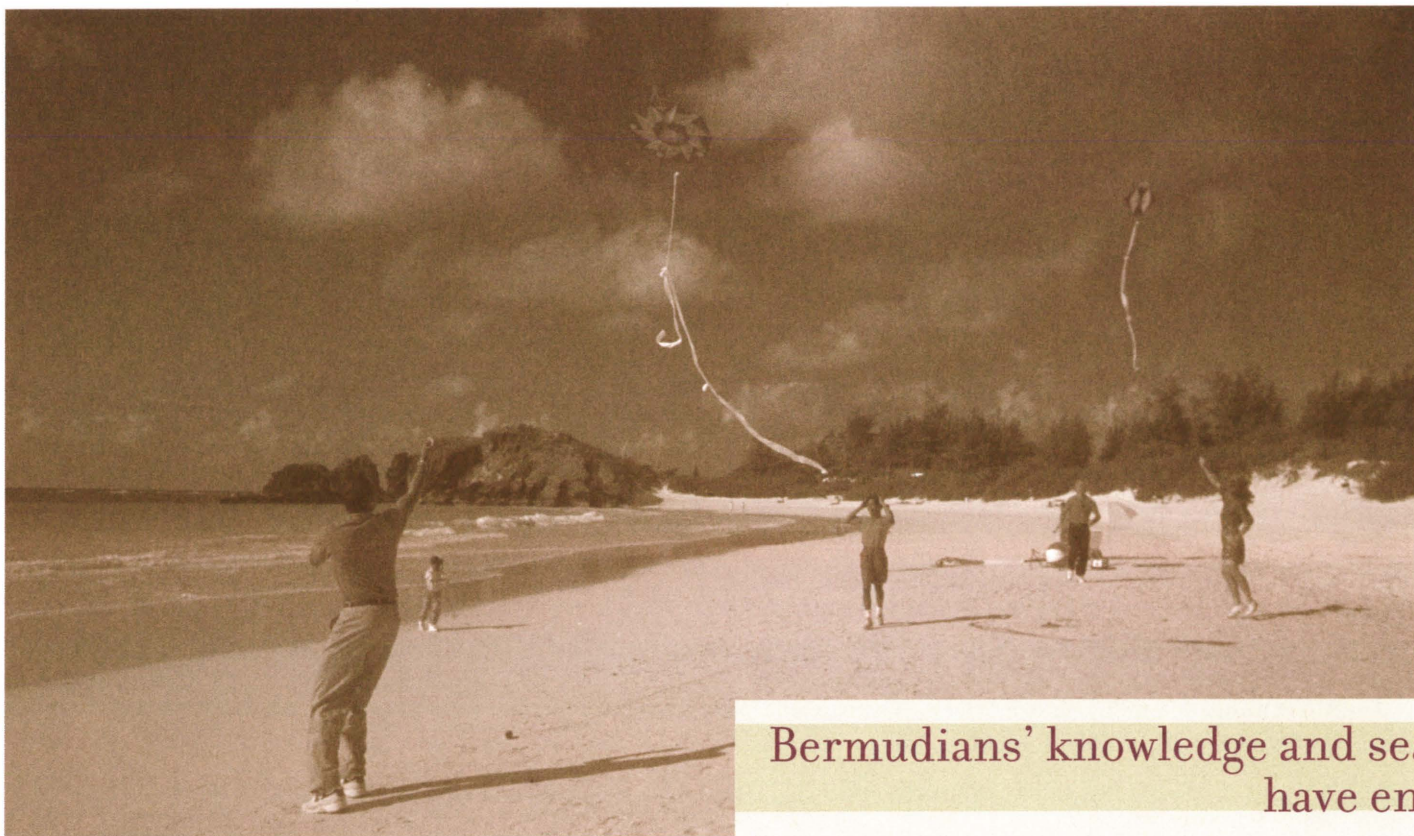


Native American origin to the colony from captured Spanish ships and Caribbean islands. These laborers, whom they engaged as divers, sailors, fishermen, carpenters, cooks, housekeepers, nursemaids, farmers, and as builders of houses and ships, brought expressive traditions and skills to the islands as well. Even in a place as small as Bermuda, the people of St. David's Island retain distinctiveness as a regional fishing community of mixed Pequot, African, and English ancestry and cultures.

In 1847, as Bermuda turned to farming as the basis of its economy, Portuguese from Madeira and in the 1920s from the Azores were recruited to bring their farming know-how to the island. Azoreans have been coming to Bermuda ever since. Recruited as farm workers, though rarely given full status as Bermudians, they brought the culture and foods of their homeland including the onion that would become known as the Bermuda onion. They also brought the Festa Espirito Santo, the annual commemoration of a miracle that

saved the people of Portugal from starving in the 14th century. According to Robert Pires, a Bermudian whose grandfather arrived in Bermuda in the early 1900s, some Portuguese have chosen to downplay their ethnicity, language, and traditions and have not passed these on to their children because of experiences of discrimination. However, today, with renewed pride, other Bermudians of Portuguese descent join recently arrived Azoreans in decorating their homes, attending the Festa procession, and enjoying the special sweet breads and beef soups prepared to mark the occasion.

The Bermudian Gombey tradition of masked and costumed dancers accompanied by musicians, first seen in the streets of Bermuda in the 1800s, is a contribution from the Caribbean. In the early 1900s migrant workers from St. Kitts and Nevis joined earlier Caribbean populations from Barbados and St. Thomas. Caribbean immigrants from Guyana, Barbados, and Jamaica came to fill the demand for educators and also for service



Bermudians' knowledge and season
have enable

workers in hotels, guesthouses, and in construction for the tourism industry, bringing foodways, music, and traditions of political and economic activism as well.

Though in past times Bermudians of English, Portuguese, and African-Caribbean descent received separate and unequal treatment and benefits for their labor according to the circumstances under which they came to the islands, Bermudians as a community today benefit from their culturally diverse origins and overseas connections as sources for their shared traditions. According to Bruce Barritt of the Not the Um-Um Players:

I tell people that there's no other place like Bermuda geographically or culturally. Bermuda is still a British colony yet a neighbor of the United States, and it is heavily influenced by West Indian people who come here to live. We pick and choose whatever we like. You will see Bermudians at a cricket match [an English game] wearing sweatshirts from American universities that they've bought because the colors match those of their favorite cricket team here in Bermuda.

Bermudian performance traditions include not only Gombey dancers and musicians, but also a regimental band, community marching bands, a pipe band that plays calypso, an a cappella sacred-song quartet, as well as reggae, calypso, traditional jazz, and other music traditions that Bermudians have made their own.

Bermudians' experience has taught them a healthy respect for the natural environment, an acute consciousness of the delicacy of the ecological balance and of the limits of human abilities in the face of the power of the sea. Since its accidental discovery by shipwreck and its subsequent settlement, the country has survived frequent life-threatening storms, a cedar blight that virtually wiped out a primary building material, and an ever-present dependence on rainwater. As Keith Battersbee, a boat pilot for over 30 years, remarked, "You've got to respect Mother Nature. Anybody who doesn't respect the ocean gets in trouble."

The occupational skills of boat pilots like Mr. Battersbee, boat builders, fishermen, sail makers, undersea divers, and others who work and play in the emerald Atlantic waters around Bermuda are all an indelible part of Bermuda's cultural wealth.



occupational. According to second-generation guest house owner/manager DeLaey Robinson, “When you go to people’s houses, you get that warmth. People have a generosity towards you.... It is helpful to have that as a building block for the hospitality industry.” Bermudians teach their children to say hello and be helpful to guests at home or on the street.

Guests in Bermudian homes are treated to local dishes such as cassava or farine pie, regaled with stories, and often sent home with freshly baked gifts like bread made from Bermuda bananas. Bermudian arts of hospitality also include preparation and presentation of food and drink by cooks, chefs, waiters, bakers, candy makers, and the performance arts of guest house owners, cruise boat cooks, entertainers, other restaurant staff, and others.

Bermudians’ knowledge and seasoned judgment have enabled them to build a prosperous livelihood over several centuries of change. Their occupational traditions

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Occupational folklife in Bermuda also extends to the use of the resources of the land itself. The artistry of Bermuda’s farmers and gardeners, along with builders, carpenters, and other artisans, has been in their creative conservation and tradition-based use of the island’s limited natural resources and space. Furniture maker Fred Phillips makes furniture out of the recycled Bermuda cedar that several of his customers store in their homes. Ronnie Chameau makes ornamental dolls using dried banana leaves from trees on the island. Beekeeper Randy Furbert notes that “during [World War II] sugar was rationed. So folks got together and started a beekeeping club [to] share their information and work together.” Bermudians often mention the value of working in concert — to solve mutual problems of survival and to share knowledge, whether in regard to building a house, sailing a fitted dinghy, or finding a substitute for sugar.

Bermuda is a well-known tourist destination, and Bermudians receive guests in gargantuan proportion relative to the island’s resident population. Bermuda’s Ministry of Tourism estimates that an average of 300,000 people visit each year — 5 visitors per resident. But the arts and values of hospitality are both home-based and

embody this understanding of the island’s possibilities. The same can be said for leisure-time traditions like kite-flying.

Kite maker and flyer Vincent Tuzo is praised as “the Kite King” for his expertise. For weeks before the beginning of the Easter holiday, his workshop is a flurry of activity; under a kaleidoscopic canopy of tissue-paper kites, parents and children place orders in anticipation of the traditional Good Friday kite-flying picnics. In making kites and flying them, Tuzo displays an impressive knowledge of the island’s materials and the wind’s moods. Wading waist deep in Warwick Marsh, he collects pond sticks for making kites that fly when the wind offers only the faintest of breaths. Up on his roof, Tuzo, kite, and wind perform a dance that is both a flirtation and a contest to keep the kite floating above the trees.

Bermudian recreational traditions such as dinghy races and Seagull races arose from pragmatic origins. In the past, Bermudians of African, English, or Portuguese-Azorean descent all were involved in maritime trades. Ships were built at Bermuda dockyards for the British Navy. Fishing was a local occupation. Today, boats with Seagull engines, guided by skilled pilots, are used both for fishing and for racing. Bermuda’s boat builders

developed some of the smallest and fastest, most efficient seagoing vessels, the fitted dinghy and the Bermuda sloop, but now they have dwindled to an alarming few. It has been fashionable in recent years to import boats from New England and even from Britain. Some organizations have vowed to change this, for example the Bermuda Sloop Foundation, which has commissioned the construction of a Bermuda sloop.

Belonging to the island — being born and bred in Bermuda — is a valued status. Bermudians meeting for the first time ask immediately, “What’s your ‘title’ (your surname)?” followed by “Who’s your Momma?” Further inquiry may be needed to place individuals in their larger families; so the next question may be something like, “Are you from the Pembroke Dills (or Pearmans, or Outterbridges) or from the Warwick (or Devonshire, or Flatts) Dills?” Finally, “What school (or church) did you attend as a child?” With a mariner’s precision, Bermudians calculate social longitudes and latitudes to orient the conversation.

All Bermudians see family as the foundation of society. Genealogy and family history structure many social relations. Bermudians extend kin and kinlike affiliations into the formation of clubs, lodges, government, schools, businesses, and institutions of worship. Most Bermudian businesses are family businesses, from the smallest shop to the largest Bermuda-owned law firm. As in communities around the world, family and community bonds in Bermuda are reaffirmed and strengthened



Traditions of Bermudian friendly societies have had a central role in supporting families and community-building in Bermuda. Members of one Bermuda lodge gather to celebrate an anniversary. Photo courtesy Joy Wilson Tucker

through play such as cricket, celebrations such as Cup Match and the Easter holiday, and collective work such as house-building.

The ball game of cricket has special significance for Bermudians. Generations of cricketers in the same family tend to belong to the same clubs. Bermudians living or traveling abroad tend to come home in late July for the annual celebration of Cup Match, a cricket tournament that commemorates and celebrates the emancipation from slavery of Bermudians of African descent in 1834. Bermudian Cup Match also illuminates the complexity of the island’s history and society. Cricket was a segregated sport, like many other public activities in Bermuda before the 1970s civil rights protests and popular uprisings in Bermuda.

NOTES ON BERMUDEAN LANGUAGE

from a report by Ruth Thomas

The English language that Bermuda’s first settlers brought with them has evolved into two main forms — a standard English and a local vernacular. Many Bermudians switch back and forth between them at will, depending on the situation. For example, standard English is used in professional settings and in writing, while vernacular Bermudian English is spoken on more casual occasions. Some people who always use the vernacular orally write in perfect standard English.

As much as any other aspect of culture, Bermudian speech reflects the islanders’ connections with neighbors around the Atlantic. Early settlers to Bermuda came from various places in England and brought their various local accents and vocabularies with them. Bermudian speech also echoes influences from the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean.

Portuguese-speakers immigrated to Bermuda in the mid-1800s, mainly from the Azores. Most came without knowledge of English. Eventually, they added a different accent, rhythm, cadence, and even vocabulary to the English spoken on the islands. Some young Bermudians try to emulate the English of the Rastafarian community in Jamaica, reggae dub poets, or American rap artists.

In spite of evolutionary change in Bermudian English and the effects of frequent contact with other English-speaking countries, some elements from the past still linger. An example is the way Bermudian English sometimes interchanges the sounds /v/ and /w/: for example, “Vere is Villiam’s violin?” for “Where is William’s violin?”

Other characteristically Bermudian words and expressions include nicknames. Many people in Bermuda,



The Cup Match holiday is a cricket match, a time of family reunion, and an annual celebration of the end of slavery in Bermuda.

Photo by John Zuill, courtesy the Bermuda Government

particularly men, have nicknames. For example, the name "Bus Stop" was given to the owner of an old taxi who picked up his clients at bus stops rather than at the usual taxi stands. A boy who could not afford his own shoes once wore his mother's shoes to a party; the nickname "Mama's Shoes" followed him through his adult life. Sometimes all the male members of a family will share the same name. The eyes of members of one such family, all called "Cat," were thought to have a feline appearance. Nicknames are so frequently used that a person's given name is often forgotten. Nicknames appear in the telephone directory and also in death notices.

A sampling of more general Bermudian terms referring to people includes:

- sparrow:** local woman. This bird never leaves the island, hence the comparison with Bermudian women.
- longtail:** female tourist. The longtail is a seasonal bird that comes to Bermuda in the spring. That is when the tourists usually begin to visit.
- diddly bops:** teenagers on motorized bikes.
- Onion:** Bermudian. The island was known for growing onions.

Ruth Thomas, BA, MSC, worked in education for many years before joining the Department of Community Services, where she founded the Department of Cultural Affairs (now the Department of Community and Cultural Affairs). She is co-founder of the spoken-word group Mosaic.

"MY GIRL verna"

Bermudian Vernacular Architecture in the 21st Century

by James Tucker

There are two contradictory currents within Bermudian vernacular architecture today. One is the original building tradition of the 17th century, and the other is "21st-century Bermudian Vernacular."

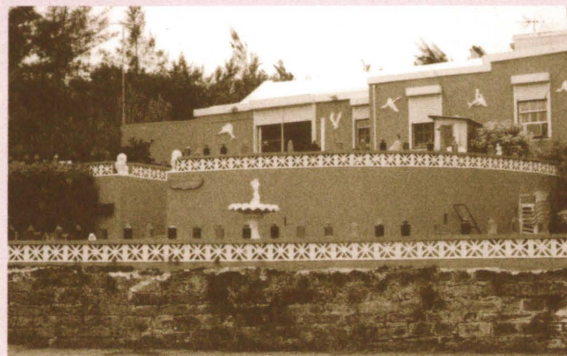


Vernacular architecture is defined as the building tradition of a local people. It is a pattern language or dialect of construction that is particular to a group of people.

The earlier form of Bermudian construction can be described as simple, quiet, and understandable. Consisting of timeless forms, it is clearly defined and beautiful in its "fit for purpose."

The 21st-century vernacular, however, seems to present a dynamic, unpredictable landscape. Today's buildings appear as a chaotic clash of form, color, and style. Architectural elements are interpreted and executed by the builder in a naïve style. The decoration is often based on memory and individual caprice, not on scaled architectural plans.

This is the paradox: How can both of these worlds have been drawn into the gravitational orbit of Bermudian vernacular architecture? Part of the answer is really quite simple: The practitioners have changed. The earlier architecture was built by English colonists adapting their building knowledge to the climate and materials of their new home. The 21st-century vernacular is a building style born out of a multicultural hodgepodge. As a people we combine many cultural influences, which still somehow make us uniquely Bermudian.



Above, left: Archetypal Bermudian vernacular consists of simple, quiet, understandable, and timeless forms from a previous idealized life. Photo courtesy the Bermuda Government

Above: These bottles, while not strictly architecture, nonetheless represent the spirit of what is 21st-century vernacular and represent Bermudians' need to celebrate the everyday.

Photo by Kristen Fernekas, © Smithsonian Institution

As one people we need to accept each other's stylistic ways of "celebrating" shelter, both when we share values in particular architectural forms and when we don't. We need to be able to accept — if not entirely understand — each other's styles to come together as one society.

We can start by being less critical of our built environment; such criticism is only divisive. We can stop trying to "interpret" all of what we see and try to be less "educated" in our judgments. We should recognize that putting up a building is art — only keeping it from falling down is science.

James Tucker is a Bermudian architect and building arts researcher who is currently working on a book about 21st-century Bermudian vernacular architecture.

Because "Black" Bermudians could not play cricket in the games sponsored by the British clubs, friendly societies and lodges run by Bermudians of African descent created and sponsored the Somerset and St. George's cricket teams. The teams eventually generated their own social clubs that remain active today, when Cup Match brings all Bermudians together. Cup Match regalia and dress are art forms in their own right, and the verbal art of Cup Match commentary is a relished performance. Today, Cup Match is still much more than a sporting event — it is an occasion for Bermudian artistry and performance.

Easter is another occasion for family and community celebration all over the island. On Good Friday,

Bermudians fly kites, play marbles, and eat traditional foods such as hot cross buns with codfish cakes. Gombey (costumed dancers) appear in the streets and at the doorsteps of friendly families. Members of church congregations across the islands dress their churches with devotional offerings of lilies and other fresh flowers from their home gardens for Easter Sunday, and island families place new flowers in the pots and urns at the gravesites of cherished relatives. Such Bermudian traditions reflect shared values.

Nowadays most building in Bermuda is done entirely by hired contractors; however, Delaey Robinson recalls that in his childhood "when building went on...you might

hire a skilled person, be it carpenter or mason, if you needed those additional skills. But by and large, the labor was home-grown – neighbors, friends, and family. It was very much a swap situation. Nobody had houses built by contractors, so you always had [help], and of course you reciprocated and helped people who helped you.... I remember at Sandy Hill, weekends were devoted to building. It was a long process to build a house. It took months and months.” Ruth Thomas describes the celebration at the end of the process: wetting the roof with black rum demonstrates closure and expresses good wishes for the house’s inhabitants. Although many fewer homes are built collectively, Robinson, a member of Parliament, has suggested that revitalizing this tradition may help to make homes affordable to more people on the island, reinforce family and community bonds, and pass on valuable cultural skills and knowledge.

Bermudians are often at a loss to describe what is unique about their culture because of all the influences from various surrounding lands. They sometimes mistakenly conclude that Bermudians have no culture, that all Bermudian culture is imported from England, the United States, the Caribbean, and Portugal. But push them a little harder, and Bermudians will remember their love of the sea, travel, and enterprise; the values of civility and hospitality; and their artful way with words.

Bermudians value the resourcefulness with which they turn circumstances to their own use. In keeping with their perception of constant risk yet relative good fortune, they are realists, opportunists, and yet careful to acknowledge divine providence (there are more local religious establishments per person than most places in the world). They endeavor to use every resource; to watch what and who enters and leaves the island; to foster, nurture, and manage connections between family and community. They maintain clear borders between insiders and outsiders. These values permeate Bermudian experience. Bermudian culture shapes the island, and the island shape Bermudian culture.

I am proud of my own Bermuda connections. Bermuda was my home for much of my early childhood, and it was a pleasure to return. The island remains for me a place of entrancing beauty, nurturing family, friends, and enriching cultural experiences. I hope that the Festival program and research that has supported it



A farm worker examines a crop of lilies. The flower is traditionally grown at Easter in Bermuda, for export and home and church decoration.
Photo courtesy the Bermuda Government

contribute to the conversations through which islanders are inclusively defining and affirming Bermudian culture.

Suggested Reading

The Bermudian, a monthly magazine on Bermudian history and culture now in its 71st year, is an excellent source for more information about the island's traditions and heritage. Here are a few other publications that may be helpful in understanding the history and scope of Bermuda's occupational and cultural traditions and the everyday life of the island's residents.

- Emery, Llewellyn. 1996. *Nothing but a Pond Dog*. Hamilton: Bermuda Publishing Company.
- _____. 1999. *The Fires of Pembroke*. Hamilton: Bermuda Publishing Company.
- Jones, Elizabeth. 1999. *Bermudian Recollections*. Hamilton: Bermuda Ministry of Community, Culture & Information.
- McDowall, Duncan. 1999. *Another World: Bermuda and the Rise of Modern Tourism*. London: MacMillan Education Limited.
- Robinson, Marlee, ed. 2000. *Made In Bermuda: Bermudian silver, furniture, art & design*. Hamilton: Bermuda National Gallery.
- Watson, Judith. 1997. *Bermuda: Traditions & Tastes*. Portsmouth, R.I.: Onion Skin Press.
- Ziral, James, and Elizabeth Jones. 1999. *Insiders Guide to Bermuda*. 2d ed. Hamilton: Royal Gazette.
- Zuill, William S. 1999. *The Story of Bermuda and her People*. 3d ed. London: MacMillan Education Ltd.

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