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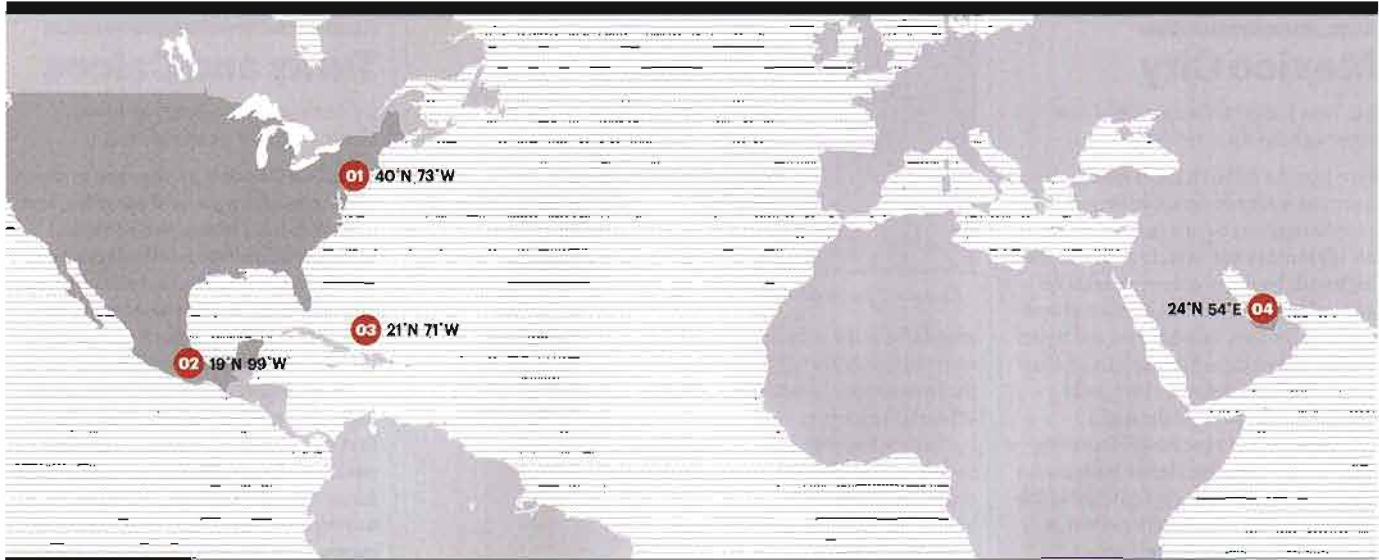
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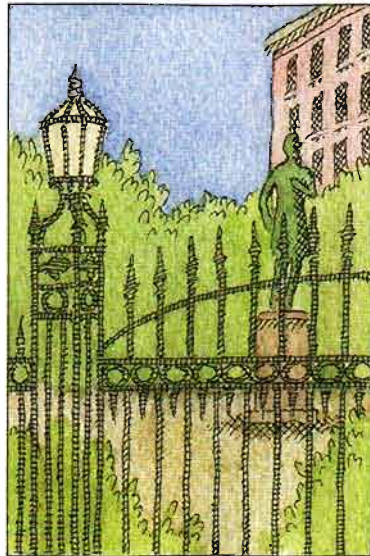
New York

01. Luke Crissel meets the formidable gatekeeper of Manhattan's only private park

The other day Arlene Harrison was strolling through Gramercy Park when she noticed a group of young women with clipboards standing by its centrepiece, a bronze statue of Edwin Booth, the 19th-century American actor who saved Abraham Lincoln's son from falling under a train. (His younger brother, John, was less generous to Big Abe. He shot him.) 'Hang on,' said Harrison, 'they shouldn't be here.' And she quickened her stride along the gravel path. When she reached the women, it turned out they were teachers from a local school doing research for their pupils. Realising Harrison was clearly a person of authority when it came to park matters, one of the group asked, 'Just how does one get a key to this place?' Harrison smiled and said, 'Well, dear, you're asking the right person.'

Tucked between 20th and 21st Street, and Park Avenue South to the west and Third Avenue to the east, Gramercy Park is one of only two private parks left in New York (the other is Sunnyside Gardens in Queens), and it is the centrepiece for the small Gramercy community that immediately surrounds it. When the park was established, by Samuel B Ruggles in 1831, he set up 63 lots of land around it, on which 39 buildings stand today.

For 33 years Arlene Harrison has lived in an apartment in the oldest of these, The Gramercy, an imposing building on the south-east corner that is the oldest structure built as a co-op in Manhattan. Harrison, who won't reveal her age, is the president, and one of five board members, of the Gramercy Park Block Association, which was established early in 1994 as a direct response to an attack on her then 15-year-old son, who was beaten by a 'wilding' gang on his way back from



Gramercy Park

roller-hockey practice. In those days, the area was dangerous, but, since then, Gramercy (which was designated a historic area in 1966) has become one of the most expensive neighbourhoods in New York, populated by a predominantly wealthy, exclusive community of which Harrison, who was a teacher for more than three decades, is the dynamic fulcrum.

'I'm the keeper of the keys,' she says as she sinks into a couch in her apartment, her feet on the table. Her walls are covered with photographs of her with local fire crews, NYPD officers, children; more photos and some 100 framed awards are piled up on the floor. Each lot around the park, she explains, is assigned two keys to the park, so Harrison's building, which takes up three lots, has six keys. Residents of lot-owner buildings can also purchase a

GRAMERCY CALL

Only residents of the surrounding buildings are entitled to a key to Gramercy Park and they must adhere to the list of rules, which runs to four pages, at all times

key for \$350. The park locks are changed once a year and ownership of a key comes with responsibilities. The list of rules, which runs to four pages, must be adhered to at all times and is ardently upheld by Harrison and the other residents. 'People want to film or shoot in here all the time,' she says. 'Just this past week I've had Oprah's people call me, Robert de Niro's people and *Vogue*. I said no to all of them.'

Not that Harrison is averse to change. She was critical in getting locals to embrace Ian Schrager's ambitious re-imagining of the Gramercy Park Hotel. 'I had a meeting with him in his office before he came near here,' she says. 'The lines were drawn very clearly. I told him: "Anything inside your hotel is your business, any quality of life issues that impact this community are my business."' After Schrager's team made a few early blunders, including felling a beloved tree, residents sent him letters and e-mails of complaint, most of which recommended he listen more closely to Harrison. 'After that I was out there every morning on site with my hard hat on,' she says. She still meets with the hotel management team twice a week and every morning at 6am visits the hotel to speak to the people on duty that day.

From 7am to 9am she's in and out of the park greeting people and saying bye to school children boarding buses. Then she's in her apartment with her assistant making calls, having meetings and seeing to local matters. On the day we met, she was organising gifts for five new babies born to residents that month and sending Halloween party posters back to the printer (the orange had come out red). 'Also,' she said, 'I've heard Samantha Baker is leaving. I think I'll go talk to her and hear about where she's going.'

Mexico City

02. *Tara Fitzgerald drops in on Latin America's top detective writer*

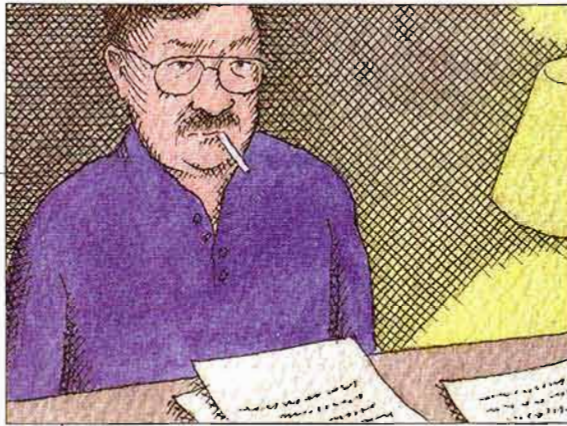
Paco Ignacio Taibo II, Latin America's foremost writer of detective fiction, is exactly how you want a famous writer to be. It's midday and, sitting at a desk piled high with books, overflowing ashtrays and half-finished drinks, he runs a hand through his hair, rubs his eyes and lights another cigarette, while explaining that this is early in the day for him, as he usually works through the night.

The author of nine novels featuring hard-bitten detective Hector Belascoarán Shayne, Ignacio is widely regarded as the inventor of the neo-detective novel in Latin America. He's also written biographies on Che Guevara and Pancho Villa, among others, and, at various times, worked as a political activist, a journalist and a university professor.

He came to Mexico City in 1958, aged eight, his parents fleeing Franco's Spain. His arrival, he recalls, was traumatic. 'My first perception was that it was the end of the world. A journey of 28 days in a boat is like the end of the world for a boy of eight. It was like going to colonise Mars.'

Now he is intimately associated with Mexico City and, in his detective novels in particular, the city is as much a protagonist as his hero. 'Mexico City was a great discovery for me. I have a dual perception of the city as a monster and a lover,' he says. 'I invent a lot in my novels, but I never invent the city, the city is real.'

Ignacio's books have been published in 29 countries and, among other literary



Paco Ignacio Taibo II

awards, he is the only novelist to have won the Hammett Prize, awarded by the International Association of Crime Writers, three times.

'I knew I wanted to be a writer from the age of five,' he says. 'I am a compulsive reader and I was a sickly child who loved literature, especially 19th-century adventure novels.'

But it wasn't until 1969 that he began to write. 'It was following [Mexico's student] movement of 1968 that I started to write in the long nights spent hidden waiting for the police to come,' he says. 'I wrote my first novel inspired by Max Frisch [the Swiss architect and novelist] and it was a failure. But I kept the manuscript and years later I re-wrote it as *Héroes Convocados* [*Calling All Heroes*] and it won the Grijalbo Prize for Fiction.'

It's hard to believe this straight-talking man would ever have trouble freely expressing himself, but he says one reason he chose the detective genre is it allows him to write social novels without fear of penning social commentary. 'Detective novels are reality tinged with magic, the grotesque and a strong social burden, which is inevitable, because in Latin America the essence of crime is the state.'

CRIME PAYS

The Mexican crime writer, for whom Mexico City is both a monster and a lover

Turks and Caicos

03. *Marisa Mazria-Katz checks out the new spot for an upscale bolthole*

Turks and Caicos is an easy sell to those looking to own a piece of paradise. Just 575 miles from Miami, this 40-island British protectorate has the looks and, thanks to premier Michael Misick's open-door policy on foreign ownership, the legal hospitality to make it the perfect spot for an upscale development.

Grace Bay Club's villas (www.estateatgracebayclub.com) is the islands' first development to accentuate their positives. Its condominium-style homes target 'smart investors... attracted to buying the Grace Bay dream', says co-owner Mark Durlilat. The 'dream' (costing from \$1.25m to \$3.6m) being all the amenities of a five-star home, personal concierge services and unrivalled views. Dells Cay (www.dells cay.com), a multi-million dollar development of hotel, spa, marina and residences (\$2m to \$6.9m), is throwing big-name architects – Zaha Hadid, Shigeru Ban – into the mix. Meanwhile, the most exclusive project so far, the Turks & Caicos Sporting Club (www.tcsportingclub.com), will offer all its amenities – equestrian centre, marina, nature reserve – on a members-only basis. And it will have its own jet strip.

With most of the projects still at CAD stage, the million-dollar price tags seem daunting, but Turks & Caicos Sporting Club's Peter Poljak has a selling point hard to resist. Buying property here, he says, is comparable to why 'Frick started the Frick – it's an immortality purchase'.

Abu Dhabi

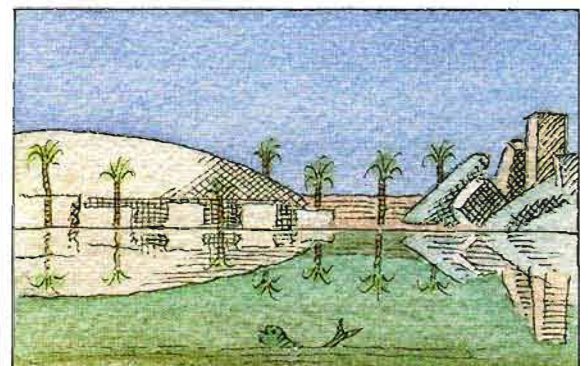
04. *Marisa Mazria-Katz sizes up the emerging art scene in the Middle East*

World records break on a daily basis in the Middle East, but some of the recent precedent-busting figures to emerge have little to do with the height of a building or the cost of a barrel of oil. When gavels in auction houses slammed across the world last November, sales of Arab and Iranian art broke over 60 world records. Auction powerhouses Christie's and Sotheby's declared totals to be the highest ever for sales of their kind. 'The first Dubai auction in 2005 took \$2.2m,' says William Lawrie, Christie's specialist in Islamic and contemporary Middle Eastern art. 'The last one took \$12.6m in Iranian and Arab art alone.'

Claudia Cellini, co-owner of Dubai's The Third Line Gallery, says this new interest in the Middle East, boosted by the imminent arrival of branches of both the Louvre and the Guggenheim in the

UAE, means the area's artists are finally getting a fairer price for their work. This shift also bodes well for the future of galleries like Callini's, some of whose artists fetched more than ten times their estimate in the last round of auctions.

Antonla Carver, a Dubai-based editor for the Middle Eastern arts and culture magazine *Bidoun*, was actively engaged in the region's art scene long before the auction houses sniffed out the potential of the area. 'When *Bidoun* was set up [in 2003] many people in the region and beyond thought we were crazy, that contemporary Middle Eastern art would never break out internationally. But, since then, magazine sales have tripled and artists that were little known when we began are now international stars. It's all happened in a short time, and it can only grow from here.'



Middle East art

ART OASIS

Jean Nouvel's disc design for a branch of the Louvre (left) will complement Frank Gehry's Guggenheim jumble in Abu Dhabi's new cultural district. Charles Saatchi is also said to be planning an Abu Dhabi outpost