

# WHERE THE PALM TREES *Sway*

SILICON VALLEY ENTREPRENEUR  
CHARLIE TRIMBLE LIKES TO TAKE A  
BREAK FROM SAN FRANCISCO TO  
ENJOY SOME QUALITY TIME ON HIS  
PRIVATE ISLAND IN THE BAHAMAS

Words by Dan Savery, pictures by Nicholas Kane/arcaid.co.uk

**T**here aren't many people in the world that can say they have their own island, but Charlie Trimble is one of them. Nestled among large palm trees and surrounded by turquoise waters, his eco-friendly residence – Channel Cay – is the ultimate escape.

This small private island is in the Bahamas, a balmy archipelago where the Atlantic Ocean blends into the warm waters of the Caribbean. It's certainly a far cry from the hi-tech world of San Francisco's Silicon Valley, where Charlie Trimble, 64, made his millions as an electronics mogul.

"I was a Silicon Valley entrepreneur and I found the pace of life in the Bahamas much slower than the San Francisco Bay area," he says. In the 1970s Charlie started an electronics company which was instrumental in developing navigational products by using GPS – Global Positioning System – satellite technology.

"I stepped down in 1998," he says, "but I'm still on the board of a number of small bio-tech companies."

However, when he's not caught up in the business world, Charlie likes nothing more than spending a week on Channel Cay. "I love the sea and the peaceful sound of the waves," he says. "In many ways, it's a relief from the pressures of the world."

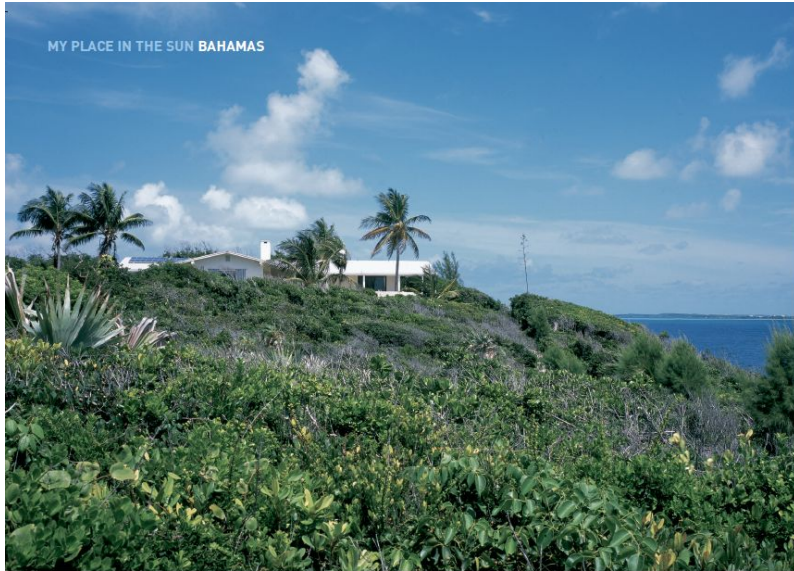
There is something magical about living on your own deserted island – perhaps it's the feeling of being stranded, like a latter-day Robinson Crusoe. Yet Channel Cay isn't completely cut-off from civilisation. The island is just an hour's flight from Florida and 25 minutes by boat from Marsh Harbour on the island of Abaco.

Charlie initially heard about Channel Cay when he was on holiday in the Bahamas with his wife Marcia four years ago. "It was a hot day in June and a taxi driver was showing us around," says Charlie. "He started pointing out properties to us – none of which particularly interested us – and then he told us that there was also an island for sale."

Initially, the Trimbls had no intention of finding a property while they were on holiday, but Charlie was so impressed by the 25-acre island and its 300-metre white sand beach that he decided to buy it.

Channel Cay cost several million dollars but, as Charlie points out, "It was still about two-thirds of the price of a plot in the Los Altos Hills in California."





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After purchasing the island, the Trimbles worked hard to make the old beach house as self-sufficient and sustainable as possible.

Charlie describes some of the work he's done on the island as “Egyptian engineering”. He explains: “We put in a reverse osmosis system, which has doubled the amount of purified water we have. We've now got 80,000 gallons of water – most of it is primarily rainwater catchment from the main house.”

“The electricity is purely solar-driven,” he adds. “We found it was an economical way of going about things – the whole island runs on around six kilowatts a day.”

Marcia was originally interested in increasing the number of flowering plants and shrubs on the island. This has evolved into the idea of turning the whole island into a nature park with a number of trails and plantations.

The main house was in a habitable condition but the Trimbles have done some renovation work,

including putting in a new master bathroom and refitting the kitchen. They have no immediate plans to do any further work on the house – although, as Charlie puts it, “Hurricanes do have a certain way of motivating you to renovate!”

Last year's hurricane season (nicknamed the ‘Season of Fury’) was one of the worst on record as Wilma and Katrina caused severe destruction to places such as New Orleans and Cancun. Fortunately, the Bahamas was comparatively unscathed. Direct hits are only supposed to come to the area every 30 years but the Bahamas was directly hit in 1999 and again in 2004.

Some people say that this rise in extreme weather conditions is down to climate change caused by global warming, although Charlie remains upbeat about the planet's future. “Things aren't as dire as they are made out to be,” he says. “There is an awful lot that can be saved without altering your lifestyle very much.”

“The power and drama of nature is half the fun,” he adds. “The hurricane last year cut off the top of

the foliage – and now we have a 360° view!”

From the veranda Charlie can gaze on the nearby Pelican Cays and the Atlantic, with its gentle waves. It's hard to believe that this is the same ocean that pounds the west coast of Ireland so violently.

Charlie grew up on the Pacific coast, between Los Angeles and Santiago, so has always lived near the ocean. “I absolutely have to have a horizon,” he says, describing the Bahamian water he looks out on as “swimming pool-clear, with all shades of greens and blues.”

The main house is situated 49 feet above sea level at the highest point of the island. This modest looking white building has thick concrete block interior and exterior walls. The house is surrounded by smooth wooden floor decking and enjoys cool breezes from all directions, so there are very few occasions when the ceiling fan is required.

Inside, the house comprises four bedrooms, three bathrooms and a 1960s-style kitchen, with a small maid's room. The centre of the house is dominated by the main room, which is a massive 40-feet long and 16-feet wide. It encompasses an open-plan living room and dining area, and leads out onto the porch on one side and onto a patio on another.

Charlie describes the interior decor as “a little bit minimalist”. Most rooms have white walls and ceramic floor tiles. The bathrooms have slightly different tile patterns, with blue and green aquatic themes.

Many of the paintings that hang on the walls are by local artists. The dining room table was designed by a man called Bill Fuller who spotted the mahogany tree, had it cut down and then seasoned the wood himself.



The beautiful cedar chest was carved by a local sculptor and houses all manner of videos, music and books. Charlie has a large collection of books and says that he spends a fair amount of his time on the island reading.

There are a number of small outbuildings on the island, including a small boathouse on the dock, a hut for the generator, a thatched beach cabana and a caretaker's house. The substantial gardens feature a range of fruit trees, a vegetable patch and a coconut grove. Channel Cay is too small to have a road but there are pathways that lead right around the island.

Today, the Trimbles use Channel Cay as a holiday home but they also rent it out when they're not there. “I promised myself that if I renovated the house then I'd use it,” says Charlie. “I tend to go down there for a week around ten times a year. That works well for me.”

Charlie doesn't really need the rental income. In fact, he says: “My motivation for sharing the island is that it adds interest for me as the caretaker”.

People come from all over North America to spend a week on Channel Cay. “Some visitors have been coming back here for years,” Charlie says. “There have been several European couples that have rented and last year there was a group from Britain.”

**Opening pages** The main house, nestled among palm trees; its concrete block exterior helps to protect it from hurricane damage

**Facing page** The east-facing house is almost 50 feet above sea level

**Above** The terrace is a perfect place to take it easy and enjoy the superb view

**Left top** Bedroom with patio doors – the terrace wraps around this room, allowing access from each side

**Left bottom** The main living space is enormous and leads onto both the porch and the terrace

## BAHAMAS MY PLACE IN THE SUN



### Clockwise from above

The beach hut is set among trees; view of the bay and beach from the beach hut; main bay and beach, with jetty – all ships visiting the island dock here; the master bedroom is one of four bedrooms in the property



If, by some remote chance, a visitor gets bored of relaxing and exploring on Channel Cay, there are plenty of other activities in the Bahamas, such as swimming, boating, taking day trips to other deserted islands and water sports of all descriptions.

The third largest barrier reef in the world surrounds the nearby island of Abaco, creating a superb spot for diving and snorkelling, offering outstanding visibility.

These waters are also a fisherman's paradise, home to many of the big 'sports' fish such as marlin, sailfin, snapper and tuna.

The islands of the Bahamas have restaurants to satisfy all palettes. Most menus have an emphasis on seafood. Favourite local dishes include conch (large marine snail), lobster, boiled fish, chicken souse and the classic West Indian combination of rice 'n' peas. Refreshing coconut and guava dishes complete the feast.

The Bahamas is as close to paradise as it gets, but living there is no longer the sole preserve of the rich and famous. Although it will cost around two to four million US dollars to buy your own desert island home, you can still find three-bedroom townhouses for as little as \$150,000 (£85,163) on Abaco.

However, despite all that the region has to offer, Charlie still isn't ready to make the big jump and live in the Bahamas full-time. "I'm not quite ready to completely kick back," he says. "If I were there full-time I would miss the opera and the orchestras."

Charlie maintains strong links to the San Francisco Bay Area. He met his wife Marcia there in 1971 after he graduated from university. They have one daughter, who now works for a theatre group in the city, and Charlie is still involved with universities and hi-tech businesses in California.

Over the past few decades Charlie has seen his home city go through many changes. He sums it up by saying: "We've gone through everything in San Francisco –



from the flower children to the dot-com boom."

Ultimately, Charlie says the most important thing in life is "self-actualisation". He explains that this is at the top of Dr Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of human needs. Maslow – an esteemed psychologist – wrote: "A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be at peace with himself. What a man can be, he must be." It's a way of looking at things that Charlie has tried to embrace.

"Self-actualisation means you are finding what is important to you and following it," adds Charlie. After setting up a major electronics business and buying his very own fantasy island, it seems that Charlie Trimble has been able to achieve what he wanted to in his life. His advice for others who are trying to live out their dreams is to simply: "Enjoy the journey." 🌴

*If you want to find out more about the island, including rental information, go to [www.channelcay.com](http://www.channelcay.com).*

There are plenty of activities in the Bahamas to keep people busy, such as taking day trips to neighbouring islands, swimming, boating and all kinds of water sports

