



Jody Schmal photos / Houston Chronicle

The Caribbean isle is well-known for its first-rate scuba diving, but for those who aren’t certified, it’s still a slice of heaven

By Jody Schmal

KRALENDIJK, Bonaire — This southern Caribbean island is one of the most highly regarded scuba diving destinations in the world, surrounded by azure water clearer than glass and reefs that stretch out like submerged cities near the shoreline.

Hundreds of species of fish and coral permeate this government-protected marine sanctuary, the lesser-developed of the “ABC islands” that also include Aruba and Curacao. More than 60 diving sites, easily accessible and marked with a painted stone from the shore, wrap around its western coast, with another two dozen or so at uninhabited islet Klein Bonaire, a half-mile boat ride away.

Roving within these waters, I was told by a friend before I left Houston, is akin to dropping into a very large, well-maintained aquarium. Some 70 percent of tourists make the pilgrimage here just to dive.

Thing is, I hadn’t come to Bonaire with a wet suit, steeling to strap a silver tank on my back. I’m not certified to do it anyway. But

ISLAND  
PARADISE

even without a scuba agenda, over the course of a week I discovered that the charming Dutch municipality had plenty to keep me busy.

**Four-legged friends**

On one status-quo sunny, 80-degree day, I found myself nowhere near water — not easy to do on a small island — and surrounded by donkeys.

Donkey Sanctuary Bonaire is home to hundreds of rescued donkeys, animals first brought over by the Spaniards in the 17th century for labor purposes. These days, ironically, transportation — once their livelihood — is a Bonaire donkey’s gravest enemy: There are no stoplights on the car-happy island, and many an errant ass has wandered unsuccessfully into the street before landing in this sanctuary. Open to visitors, it’s similar to a drive-through safari where you cruise around the property, roll down the car windows and take lots of pictures.

My companion and I arrived via rented

*Bonaire continues on L4*



Donkeys at Donkey Sanctuary Bonaire eagerly await carrots during a scooter tour of the property. Above: The beach at Harbour Village resort. Even snorkeling in shallow waters here is excellent.



Miro Dvorscak

“When the vine is green in the notch garden, through the channel window it’s a really cool, almost impressionistic view,” said Palmer Schooley.

## HOME DÉCOR Natural beauty

By Sarah Rufca

Palmer Schooley learned early in life that he liked to build things.

Before he was an architect, creating restaurant spaces for Azuma, Kata Robata and Benjy’s, Schooley worked as a carpenter’s assistant in Ohio.

It was that tactile experience of construction that convinced Schooley to take on the roles of builder and contractor to transform the 90-year-old Heights house that he owns with his wife Merry, the owner of events décor company Art Attack. The small one-bedroom bungalow now serves as just one wing of the 3,000-square-foot house, joined by a modern aluminum and wood structure that expands out from the

side of the bungalow and juts backwards to create an L-shaped structure, wrapping around the large lot and its central courtyard.

The original bungalow structure now holds the large kitchen and a purple-hued bedroom suite for the Schooleys’ tween daughter, Livia. The kitchen boasts bamboo plywood cabinetry and an impressive custom island that holds keepsakes culled from travel. The house is connected to the addition by a floating window-lined hallway that has become a makeshift dining room, with a table made of Brazilian ipe wood and a base by Houston artist/welder Mike Scranton.

“When we floated this space across, we didn’t really know this would

*Schooley continues on L5*

## GEAR Nite Ize Gearline Organization System

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**What we liked:** If there’s a loop on your gear — whether it’s clothing, kitchen utensils or electronics — it can be attached to the webbing.

**Not so much:** If you’re hard on your equipment, you may need to replace the plastic carabiner clips with heavier metal versions.

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*Jill K. Robinson*



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