



BREAKBEAT

Few destinations are evolving as quickly as Cuba. The Caribbean island is opening up to the world with a fresh entrepreneurial spirit and a home-grown art scene with a global reach



Can Cuba get any hotter? Spurred on by the December 2014 political détente with the USA, travellers from around the world have been rushing to book trips here, to 'see it before it changes'. Now celebrities have their eyes on the Caribbean isle too (Mick Jagger, Sting and Stevie Wonder all want to perform in the country this year) and Chanel couture will strut into Havana in May when Karl Lagerfeld shows his 2017 cruise collection in the city. But there has also been a shift on the home-grown cultural scene, and ever since President Raúl Castro rubber-stamped a private business law five years ago, a new breed of restaurants, art spaces and places to stay have emerged.

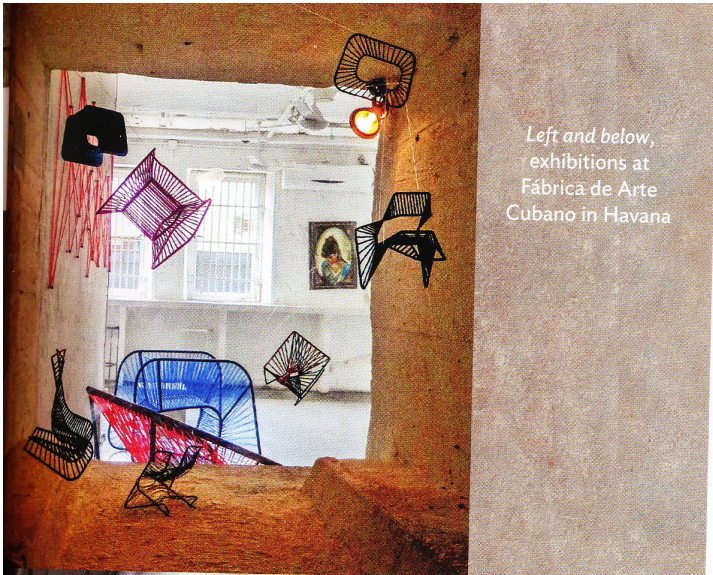
Havana, once a culinary backwater, is growing its foodie credentials: top chefs Massimo Bottura (of the second best restaurant in the world, Osteria Francescana), Andoni Luis Aduriz (of number six, Mugaritz), and Enrique Olvera (of number 16, Mexico City's Pujol) are scouting Havana for suitable locations.

Meanwhile, artists enjoying the profile-raising and profits of 2015's Havana Biennial are rolling out projects across town. Sculpting trio the Merger opened La Lavandería, a converted laundrette, which used to wash Fidel Castro's clothes, and artist Sandra Pérez's Arsenal space showcases local talent in

an apartment block. Art collector Christian Gundín converted the fifth floor of a 1950s high-rise into an independent gallery, El Apartamento, exhibiting young painter Miguel Alejandro Machado and conceptual artist Wilfredo Prieto. In November, global Galleria Continua launched Arte Continua in Havana's Chinatown. At Fábrica de Arte Cubano, the city's hit cultural hub in a converted peanut-oil warehouse, a new cinema will screen films in a shipping container from this month. And in early 2016, well-known artist Esterio Segura debuts a new sculpture space in the beachside Playa neighbourhood; the villa, set in a lush garden, will later become a small hotel.

Other creatives are also unveiling smart little properties. Orlandito Mengual Abreu, conga drummer with timba band Charanga Habanera, and his French wife Sandra Expósito will open Malecón 663, a boutique hostel on a seaside esplanade, in May. Renovated by the young architects' collective HrG arquitectura, it will offer revolution tours, taking in Castro hotspots in an old Chaika car. Another design hostel, Residencia Santa Clara, is due in the spring with textiles by the designers behind interiors store Píscolabis, and in gorgeous sorbet-tinted Trinidad, Mansion Alameda will be relaunched as a peaceful urban hideaway by British-Cuban team Jonathan and Kendra Ashton. CLAIRE BOOBYER

PHOTOGRAPHS: GALA DERRONISSE; SOUTHERN FOX; DAVID IEMKE; RICK LEWIS; MARK LUSCOMBE; MUYETE; MICHAEL ANASTAS



Left and below, exhibitions at Fábrica de Arte Cubano in Havana



Piscolabis shop and café in Old Havana. Opposite, from bottom left: Fábrica de Arte Cubano; artwork by the Merger group; typical terracotta roofs; Fábrica de Arte Cubano; a street in Havana



My favourite island is... Newfoundland

MARGARET ATWOOD

Booker Prize-winning author of *The Blind Assassin*

'Many will invoke palm trees and beaches for their dream island, but if blazing sun and sand in your bikini are no longer your ultimate joy, the more vigorous Newfoundland appeals. What's it got, in addition to spectacular scenery and hiking, numerous lobsters, unmistakable mittens, cod cheeks, and Screech, a form of rum that produces a sound effect when you drink it? Very funny people, with their own traditional music and unique Newfoundlandish vocabulary. Two genial web-footed water dogs: the Newfoundland and the Labrador. Fascinating geology: Newfoundland was once located at the South Pole, and acquired bits of Africa and North America through the magic of plate tectonics – a theory proven at Gros Morne National Park, where a huge lump of orange, toxic mantle stone bulges up through the earth's crust. Long, long history: 9,000 years of indigenous habitation, and that was before the Vikings built a trading base camp at L'Anse aux Meadows 500 years before Columbus. But – and this is the astonishing part – the Vikings are still there, sitting inside their longhouses, wearing their medieval clothing, and telling yarns, in Newfoundlandish, oddly enough. They'll tell you one, if you go there. Beats sand in your bikini, most days.'

