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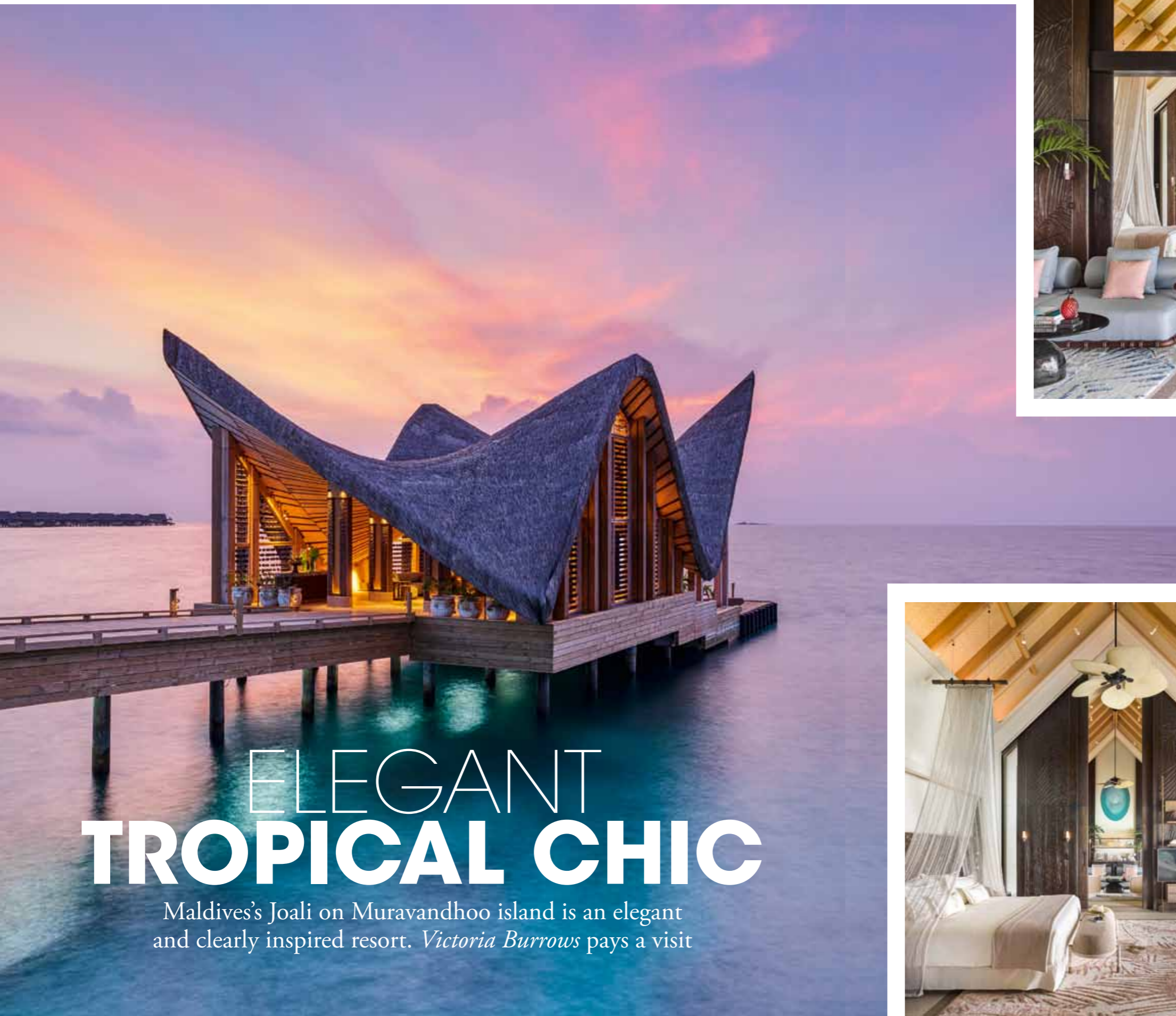
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MANAGEMENT
Focus on F&B

MALDIVES
Resort Vibes

MARKET REPORT
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ELEGANT TROPICAL CHIC

Maldives's Joali on Muravandhoo island is an elegant and clearly inspired resort. *Victoria Burrows* pays a visit



From Left: The sculptural arrival jetty with its undulating roof evoking waves; Three-bedroom Ocean Villa and Sunset Luxury Villa reflect tropical island chic

AT Joali, Maldives, guests can have dinner seated five metres up in the trees in a wood-and-palm manta ray by South African artist Porky Hefer. They can also dive below the waters to see a giant mosaic-covered coral installation by New York artist Misha Kahn or admire a sculpture by Israeli Zemer Peled reminiscent of coral, sea urchin and clams in the spa courtyard. Joali is the first immersive art resort in the archipelago.

Joali just celebrated its first anniversary and announced it is expanding its art collection.

"We have scheduled artists to visit throughout the year," says resort director Enver Arslan. "Local and international artists create artworks and teach art techniques to interested guests."

For the resort's existing installations by 13 international artists, Esin Gural Argat, vice president at Gürallar Group, the family-owned Turkish tourism, industry and real estate company, and the brains behind the hotel, enlisted Istanbul-based art and design team No Lab to curate the artworks.

"No Lab are a young team who are trying to destroy the 'white wall concept' of art. They understood our brand identity and curated a bespoke portfolio of unique experiences for our guests that are aligned with our aims," says Arslan. "Our vice president is always willing to support young people because she believes that, if they are ready to give their passion and concentrate on becoming successful, then they deserve a chance."

For the overall interior design of the resort, Argat commissioned another Istanbul-based team: the renowned design studio Autoban, the creative talent behind the phenomenal, multi-award-winning airport in Baku, London's Duck + Rice restaurant,



and numerous hotels in their hometown such as the House Hotels and Witt Suites.

Autoban's design at Joali is elegant, yet relaxed, clearly inspired by the natural beauty of surroundings of Muravandhoo island but still glamorous – tropical island chic. Delightful details abound: the outdoor showers in the 73 luxury overwater and beach villas are reminiscent of naval periscopes, while rose-gold bathroom taps resemble giant pebbles. In the dressing rooms, heron-and-palm-leaf printed kimonos by Ardmore hang ready, while and slippers like chubby clouds.

“The atmosphere in the villas captures the confident feminine spirit of the Joali brand, and provides a sensory and multi-layered experience for guests,” says Seyhan Özdemir, co-founder of Autoban. “The interiors are plush and sumptuous, while also reflecting the pristine and paradisiacal natural surroundings. The colour palette is calming and graceful, with neutral tones and blush pinks, as well as bright turquoise that accents the sea outside. The exotic spirit is captured through bamboo-slatted headboards, rattan-lined ceilings and natural woods.”

One of the most captivating aspects of the design greets guests on arrival: the sculptural arrival jetty, its undulating roof evoking waves, the rising and falling tides of the ocean, or the wings of a manta ray.

“This striking structure is a completely new approach to the classic Maldivian roof. The underside of the sloping roof is lined with smooth and contrasting tones of timber. A walkway lined with hand-carved decorative columns leads to a waiting space with custom furnishings,” says Özdemir. “We hope that it sets expectations, and that guests will then embark on a sensory journey through the all-immersive design.”

In contrast to the villas, which maintain and air of privacy and seclusion, the seven F&B outlets and waiting areas of the resort have a warm and welcoming atmosphere, with plenty of space for communal lounging. Bamboo ceiling beams and basket pendant lights, which appear in several different spaces in the resort, create a visual harmony throughout the property.

While most of Joali's interiors are by Autoban, it was Tokyo-based Studio Glitt that designed Saoke, the overwater Japanese restaurant. Here, subtle concealed lighting showcases the rich wood interiors, free-flowing ground-level water channels, and the captivating ceiling of crisscrossed stacks of timber.

Much of the material for the resort was locally sourced, including timber, bamboo and coconut shell, and local craftsmen were employed. Other, rarer materials were sourced further afield, such as the terrazzo flooring and the dramatic swirling verde laponia marble used in the villa bathrooms, which was quarried in Norway.

The Autoban team say they were conscious of the importance of preserving the natural ecosystem from the start of the project. They saved as many of the



From left: Tokyo-based Studio Glitt designed Saoke, the overwater Japanese restaurant – subtle concealed lighting showcases the rich wood interiors; Over-water Joali Villa

Autoban's design at Joali is elegant, yet relaxed, clearly inspired by the natural beauty of surroundings of Muravandhoo island, but still glamorous, tropical island chic



Alongside: The Joali Spa features a unique marble hammam; Exterior of the Beach Villa

3,000 trees as possible, and the pools of the overwater villas are of different sizes so as not to disturb the coral of the lagoon.

The natural environment also brought up its fair share of difficulties.

“Designing a resort on a tropical island presented a whole new range of factors to take into consideration: the particular weather conditions, the winds and the tides,” says Özdemir. “But we really enjoyed the challenge of understanding the island, and its climate and culture through the local teams and expertise.”

This blend of the local and the imported, private and communal, and art and nature is captured by the brand story that underpins the resort design.

“We based our brand on a feminine character who wants to share the joy of living, welcoming guests to her private home in the Maldives. She is a collector and loves to share interest in contemporary art,” says Arslan. “The inspiration comes from Esin Gural Argat. She is enthusiastic about collecting, especially innovative, authentic and unique works of art and design. We believe that art tell stories about life, and we use art as a way of describing nature and her needs. It also describes own definition of joie de vivre.” **AHCT**