

# A CARIBBEAN MYSTERY

Bajan fashion designers Simon/Peter have been peddling their glitzy kaftans and diaphanous beachwear to Sandy Lane's society clientele – including Ladies Bamford and Green – for years. But behind the bold prints and catwalks shows lies a shocking tale of obsession, sex and murder. **Peter Colville** uncovers evil under the sun

In Agatha Christie's 1964 whodunit, *A Caribbean Mystery*, that quintessentially sedate Englishwoman Miss Marple is packed off on a subtropical holiday by her progressive author nephew, who arranges for her St Mary Mead house to be looked after by a gay writer friend. In a startling departure from Christie's earlier canon, the swinging nephew reflects in the argot of the time: 'Surely even dear old Aunt Jane must have heard of queers.' But, of course, the beady-eyed old dear has always been more au fait with life's sexual gamut than any mere youth in a cravat. Inevitably, soon after arriving amid the palm trees and white-sand beaches, she finds herself embroiled in murder and a lurid love triangle.

Miss Marple would no doubt have got to grips with a real-life and very bloody murder mystery that is gripping the glitterati of the most glittering district of that still most English Caribbean island of Barbados. It has a jealous *ménage à trois* of gay creatives, a lovely location, a circle of personally interested, super-wealthy British sybarites – and, of course, a corpse.

The upshot is that this morning, Peter Bowen, one half of the former colony's internationally celebrated fashion design team, will wake up again in Dodds prison in St Philip with the threat of the death penalty hanging over his meagre breakfast table.

Why is he there? Because on the morning of Saturday 27 September a locally born landscape gardener, Reynold Grazette, was found in a welter of blood on the terrace of one of the high-end

residences, close to the world-famous Sandy Lane hotel. Highbury House, the place of the alleged murder, was shared not only by Grazette and Bowen but by Simon Foster. It was Foster who alerted the police to the death.

Sixty-two-year-old Foster, who owns the property, is said to have been, at different times in the past, both Bajan-born Bowen and Grazette's boyfriend, although the latter is mere rumour. Certainly, the 'flamboyant' Foster and Bowen had once been in a long-term relationship. That had ended, but Foster and Bowen's hugely successful business partnership survived the split.

For the past 18 years, the pair have run the fashion label Simon/Peter from a former chattel house in ludicrously fashionable Paynes Bay. Foster, who has been designing on Barbados for more than 30 years and practises interior design, too, oversees the cut; Bowen's role is the fabric design.

Surf the net and you get a welter of tributes to their skill. One says: 'For one-of-a-kind clothing, from cocktail dresses to beach cover-ups, you must visit Simon/Peter, across from Daphne's [the Caribbean branch of the über-Sloane, Brompton Cross hang-out]. Another fan writes in a similar vein: 'Simon is famous. He has designed clothes for some of the best-known women in the world. His clothes reflect his philosophy of charm, comfort and chic...

Simon uses a variety of fabrics that are usually of cotton voile, linen or silk chiffon... his brilliance lies in his cutting on the bias, which creates garments of such delicacy that his customers feel lighter, thinner, cooler. To Simon, all women are goddesses.'

Certainly, Foster is a favourite designer to such jet-set Barbados figures as the model Jodie Kidd, JCB supremo Sir Anthony Bamford's wife Carole (founder of Daylesford Organic), Susan Sangster, Sir Philip Green's wife Tina, and betting shop owner Michael Tabor's wife Doreen.

Every year, Simon/Peter showed their latest designs on a catwalk at Sandy Lane. The Kidd sisters, Jodie and Jemma, sometimes modelled

for them. So the interest in the death was inevitably intense among the international Caribbean set. 'I have had calls from all over the world about this,' Foster said last month. 'People have heard all kinds of stories – some of them have heard I was killed or that both myself and Peter were murdered. I didn't see exactly what happened. All I can say is that it wasn't murder. It wasn't deliberate.'

Neither the Bajan police, nor Grazette's family who live in Brooklyn, New York, agree.

To get some kind of context for the death, you have to understand what goes on in Barbados, and St James in particular. There are 11 parishes on the island of Barbados, but St James is pretty much at the top of the celestial stairway. It used to be part of

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