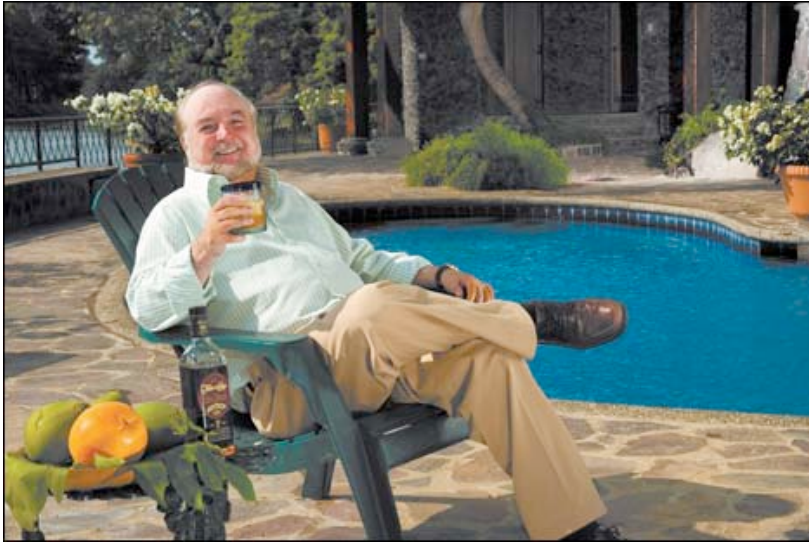


A family 'resting place'

By Julie Earle-Levine

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Carlos Pellas by the pool at his family weekender on one of Lake Nicaragua's 'isletas'

Carlos Pellas owns Nicaragua's Flor de Caña rum distilleries, Toyota and Suzuki motor dealerships, an energy company and banks. The head of one of the country's wealthiest families, he is descended from Italians who immigrated from the US in the 19th century. A frequent traveller, he has six homes dotted around the world in locations mostly close to the sea, to accommodate his love of fishing. He counts a family weekender in Lake Nicaragua's "isletas", reached only by boat with views of lush mountains, as his favourite.

Have you always lived in Nicaragua?

Yes, I was born here. During my early childhood I lived with my parents at our coffee plantation in San Marcos, about a 45-minute drive from Managua. The house was built in 1952 and it resembled the traditional Spanish haciendas. I have the best recollections of those times as there were 16 of us – between my brothers, my sister and cousins – who lived together. There was no TV then, so we rode bicycles and horses, and played board and card games. The home still serves as a weekend retreat for my cousins.

Then you moved to the city?

Yes, we moved to Managua when I was 10. My father built a beautiful house with lacquered Japanese-style doors and gardens with lakes with fish and oriental plants. In 1972 an earthquake destroyed it. I was at a party with my girlfriend, who would later become my wife. The house we were at caught fire. I told her my house was earthquake-proof. She was very concerned for her parents' home. But it was my house that was destroyed. My parents and sister survived, miraculously. My girlfriend's parents' home was intact.

What about school?

I went to prep school in Woodside, California. It was my first time away from Nicaragua in a whole new world where I didn't even understand the language. It was a great experience. Later, I attended Stanford [University], where I obtained my bachelor degree in economics and later on my MBA. During all these years I would come home to Nicaragua at Christmas and in summer, when I would go to the sugar plantation and the Flor de Caña distillery to work. Ironically, summer vacation was harder work than college.

Why is the isletas home your favourite?

MY FAVOURITE THINGS

Old cards and ancient pots

My **boat** is customised to make it the perfect fishing machine. It has underwater fishing cameras. I never get tired of looking at the sea. I can spend hours just sitting in the mezzanine waiting for the fish to show.

A coin from Aristotle's era

It's beautiful and peaceful. My family owns an island called *Abuela Nena's Island* [Grandmother Nena's Island]. There are mango and coconut trees, a domesticated white heron and two native parrots. My parents built a home that blends with nature in a very special way. It is a ranch that is made from local wood. It's nice to sit on locally made, wood rocking chairs and hammocks right by the pool. We have another house there, too, which is two storeys with a balcony that overlooks the lake. The island has belonged to us since the early 1930s but it was confiscated by the Sandinistas in the mid-1980s. It was not until the mid-1990s that we got it back and began our building plans. My mother's idea was to build a place where she and my dad could spend time with their children and grandchildren and enjoy the serenity of the lake and the beautiful view of the colonial city of Granada. That's what eventually got her to rename the island El Descanso, which means "the resting place". The views are amazing. On one side of the island you can see the Mombacho volcano and the city. On the other side is Lake Nicaragua, with its two volcanoes that are islands in the middle of it. The lake is so big that in some parts you cannot see where it ends and land begins.

How do you buy one of these islands?

Often by word of mouth. There are more than 360 islands, so sometimes there will be one for sale.

How often do you go to your island?

I try to go whenever I can. It is my favourite place to entertain my most important guests and closest friends who visit from other countries. I also love to spend time there with my children, brothers and nephews.

What about your main residence?

My home in Managua is where I have lived since 1978. It was meant to be a "transition" home while I built my permanent home. But the Sandinista revolution changed those plans. As our family gradually grew, my wife and I decided not to move. I would best characterise it as a home in the city that makes you feel you are in a private resort in the countryside. It's full of open spaces and has a pool, a *cabana* and a tennis court. Many trees are now close to 30 years old, which provide an ambience difficult to duplicate. I also have a beach home in San Juan del Sur, where I love to go on weekends when I am not fishing from my home in Tulemar, Costa Rica. The seven-bedroom house is right on the beach and it has a Caribbean feeling.

And your other homes?

My home in Manuel Antonio, Costa Rica, is in the middle of a lush rainforest that serves as habitat to three different families of monkeys. The terrace is as high as the top of the trees, which makes you feel like you are flying on top of them. It is secluded and close to the best billfish action in the world. Deep sea fishing has been my passion since I was 13 years old. I have released over 1,500 sailfish and more than 300 marlin. I own a home on the San Juan river, close to an orange plantation where I am a partner. It's more like a lodge, with great views of the river. My son Eduardo, 22, is the one who enjoys it the most as he is a keen tarpon fisherman. I also have an apartment at the Four Season Residences in Miami. It's on the 55th floor and has a spectacular view of the port of Miami, the bay and Key Biscayne. My wife Vivian loves it for the privacy – no maids, no drivers, just us.

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given to me by my good friend Mike Wood, my roommate at Stanford, as a token of our 35-year friendship.

My top drawer in my closet, where I keep all the **cards and notes** sent to me by my kids. Frequently I open one and read it again. It brightens the day.

My hammock. I love to lay on it while watching the sunset and enjoying a 12-year old Flor de Caña Centenario.

My Nicaraguan stamp collection. I bought my first stamp 47 years ago, for \$1. I own 18 of the first 20 stamps printed in Nicaragua. My collection is probably the only one of its kind in the world.

My pre-Colombian Indian artefact collection. I have more than 100 pieces of ceramic, dating back 1,200-2,000 years.

My wife's picture when I first met her. Vivian still looks like that first day. It's an inspiration. We have had three beautiful children together.