



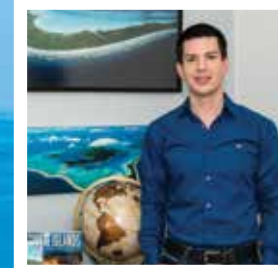
so you want to
BUY AN ISLAND

BY VICTORIA KEENAN

If you drive through any given neighborhood, you're likely to see a For Sale sign perched on someone's front lawn. But how often do you come across an entire island up for purchase? Surrounded by ocean views, miles of land and trees swaying in the breeze and no neighbors, cars or commotion in sight, this is where Chris Krolow, island broker, owner of Toronto-based company Private Islands Inc., and executive producer and host of HGTV's "Island Hunters" comes in.

MANATEE CAYE (FOR SALE), BELIZE

NORTH SADDLE CAYE (FOR SALE), BELIZE



Growing up, Krolow was fascinated with geography, recounting times he would spin the globe and point to destinations he'd love to someday travel to. This passion is something he never lost sight of, and today, it is his reality. "I've

always loved the idea of islands, how they were surrounded by water, or the aerial shot with all the different colors around the water and how the sunlight reflects on different areas, I always thought it looked like a jewelry box," Krolow explained.

This fascination makes Krolow, who has been vacationing on islands since he was a little boy, not your typical real estate agent, just as purchasing and building on an island isn't your typical home buying experience.

Krolow studied international relations in college, starting a tour company in his late teens. Advertising tours on the internet to European travelers, Krolow would take people to small islands along the coast of the St. Lawrence River along the coast of Canada, where they would explore the land. "I was doing these tours, three in the summer, 10 people each, and I would bring them around camping and charge them a lot of money and feed them beans," he said laughing. "I was just a kid! And remember this was the late '90s when the internet was like the Wild West. So we had a website with a really funny domain name, and we'd stay in these parks, and usually you think of a park and think of a massive [area] but here it's an honor system. So we'd pay \$20 and have the whole island to ourselves."

Though Krolow and his team would take the visitors to different sights, when the trip came to an end, they would talk not just about the experience, but what it felt like having the whole island to themselves. That's when Krolow got an idea. "I started going around on a boat to different islands and contacting people with no internet, meeting with island owners. I didn't end up buying one back then, but I had pictures of about 10 beautiful islands with

prices, and very willing owners to sell. I would explain that I wasn't offering to sell it for them, I was just interested in buying one but as I was accumulating all this information, I thought, 'wouldn't it be really nice to have all this information in one place on the website?' The problem was that the islands weren't necessarily for rent, but I put them up on the website, I put all the prices up, and the Toronto Star picked it up and the next thing you know, there's articles that this young guy in Canada is selling islands."

In the beginning, the exciting part for Krolow was just collecting these island images, but over the next few months, both press and website traffic began to skyrocket. One day, Krolow received a call from a man in Panama who wanted Krolow to sell an island he owned in Belize. Though he was hesitant, he put the island on the website anyway and six weeks later, he received a check for \$60,000. "Everyone was like you should go into castles, waterfalls, anything unique, but I wanted to work exclusively with the private islands."

Though Krolow and his company are based in Toronto, their clients and islands could be anywhere around the world. Krolow explained that while it isn't your typical real estate experience, he excels in finding ways to attract buyers, as well as realizing that certain areas are attractive investments, an important trick to the business. "It's not the kind of business that you can just say 'I'm going to open up an island shop,' it takes years," Krolow said. "A lot of the islands we have we've sold multiple times, we've helped rent them out, or I've spent an hour on the phone with an island owner years before it even goes on the market to build trust and make sure everything transparent. If we feel it's not a good time to put an island on the market, we'll tell them that in the hopes that when they're ready, they will come to us. At the end of the day, we're a huge database of knowledge and experience and we just want to get it out there for people so when they're ready to take that leap."

But just as it takes a special kind of person to sell an island, it also takes a special kind of person to buy an island. Of course, though it can seem similar on TV, selling, buying, and developing an island is a little different than dealing with a regular home on the mainland. For many people, it's not their first vacation home, and for most, it's all about the privacy. "There's something also really romantic about having a tiny piece of the planet, it's yours to take care of and there's something appealing to that," Krolow said. On an island, there are no boundaries, your property isn't until the end of the road, and your neighbor isn't there. Though when buying an island, Krolow admits that it is hard to find one that doesn't have neighboring islands. What he does stress is that buyers know what's going to be on those islands in the future, so their view is not one day blocked by buildings and large homes. That's where Krolow's team gets very involved, getting maps from municipalities, finding out what's government or privately owned, what's a park, and so on.

When it comes down to it, there are two types of island buyers: the people who have been bitten by the island bug but don't know what they're getting themselves into, and the people who buy an island because it's close to their hearts, whether they already have ties to the area or already have a home on the mainland. With the island beginners, Krolow and his team many times help them find a region, and once the buyers start to

figure things out, Krolow will set them up with an architect. He explained that it takes years to build on the islands, dredging under the water, getting permits, and hiring staff to help care for the area whether the buyer is there or renting it out.

Over the years, Krolow has learned many things about both the business side of private islands, as well as maintaining and caring for one himself. His own personal island is in Georgian Bay in Ontario, Canada, and is what he describes as a real community, where everyone knows each other and looks out for each others islands. In the office, "you learn pretty quickly what to take with a grain of salt. We get emails all the time, people wanting to start their own countries, kids that see a \$100,000 island on the website and think they're all at that price and can save up and buy one. Sometimes people see a small structure and don't realize that it's probably going to cost three times the price to build on it. It's tricky but we have a good system in place. That's the main reason we came out with our magazine, which has been in publication for almost 10 years. We needed a way to get the islands in front of people. We try very hard to set clients up with islands as rentals because we want them to spend time there first. They need to wake up in the morning and experience the sunrise, they need to be sitting there with a glass of wine watching the sunset, they can't have anyone experience it for them. Then, the islands sell themselves."



**CRESCENT ISLAND
(FOR SALE), FLORIDA**

As for his HGTV show, “Island Hunters,” Krowl explained that it was turned down by several different production companies and networks for years because they thought it would be too much of a handful. “HGTV said they’d pick it up, but I don’t think they thought it was a viable show long term. They were going to run it as a five episode special but when the high ratings came back, they asked what the chances were if we wanted to do another four.” After a while, things got easier, and the show is now being shot for season four, and being broadcasted around the world.

But through the shows, magazines, and business ventures, Krowl still gets the most excited about the islands themselves. “What I really like is when people want to buy an island and they don’t even really care where, it just has to be an island, those are the ones I get really excited about. But there’s two parts to this business: there’s the fantasy and the reality. Most people aren’t in the reality category, and that’s my job. It takes an extra special kind of person to actually make that purchase and if you’ve ever spent time on an island, you know time goes a little slower. You don’t actually get more time, but it feels like it. It’s all about connecting back to nature, having something all your own, and there’s nothing better.”

DEEPWATER ISLAND (RENTAL), ONTARIO

