

# HIP-HOP GO THE HAMPTONS

Where does a young man from the projects go when his album hits multi-platinum? The Hamptons, of course (by helicopter). Jay-Z talks about life with his new friends. *By Nancy Jo Sales*

*In the Ferrari and Jaguar switching four lanes, with the top down, screaming out, 'Money ain't a thang.'*

—Jay-Z, "Money Ain't a Thang"

JAY-Z, THE RAPPER WHO LAST YEAR TURNED the theme from *Annie* ("It's a Hard Knock Life") into a ghetto anthem, is leaning back in a barber chair at Milk Studios, talking on his Motorola cell phone: "Yo, you havin' too much fun out there!" He laughs, a great guffaw at odds with his usual demeanor, which is famously subdued, watchful, penetrating,

in keeping with the slick poet he is and successful drug dealer he once was. Today, before a photo shoot for his Roc-A-Fella Records, Jay-Z—lanky, six feet four, and looking beach-ready in khaki shorts, a muscle-T, and luminescent white sneakers—seems relaxed, almost peaceful. Lately, he's been vacationing out in the Hamptons. "I never drive, I take a helicopter," he says. "Everybody says it's murder driving—and you ain't got to tell me twice."

In case you've been concentrating on your Jewel collection, Jay-Z is the top-

selling rapper in the country, considered one of the most lyrically gifted, and the man who made "Can I get a fuck-you?" a handy phrase. This year, with the album *Vol. 2... Hard Knock Life*, he went from hard-core-rap respectability to international superstardom, including an as-told-to account of his life in *Teen People*. ("I was in the fifth grade the first time I saw someone get shot. . . . To see something like that at 11 years old is crazy!")

The record was No. 1 on the *Billboard* charts for five weeks straight (a first for

rap), went platinum five times, and earned Jay-Z his first Grammy (although he boycotted the ceremony in L.A. to protest the Grammy oversight of fellow rapper DMX). Jay-Z's had a busy year; he went on a 56-city tour, made four videos, appeared on eight magazine covers. So when the heat wave hit, it seemed time to chill; and where else for an up-and-coming young man with money to go—when “money ain't a thang”—but the Hamptons?

“I mean, the Hamptons is cool,” says Jay-Z, in his curiously high, thick, melodic voice (when he raps, it booms). “It's very serene, a change of pace, a kind of getaway, you know what I'm saying? But everything is so hard to *find* out there. The first house we rented”—in East Hampton, in June—“was behind these trees, and we'd been playing softball with Russell [Simmons] and Andre [Harrell] and all them over in Wainscott, and I had to get back to the house at six to meet the masseuse; well, we was only fifteen minutes away, but we were rolling back and forth past that house for *one hour*.” The masseuse waited.

When Jay-Z—a.k.a. Jigga, Iceberg Slim, and J-Hovah, and born Shawn Carter, in Brooklyn—decided he wanted to make the Hamptons scene, for the first time, “for real,” Island Def Jam co-president Lyor Cohen offered him and partner Damon Dash guidance through the potentially embarrassing pitfalls of late-summer rental. “Lyor was showing us step-by-step where to go; he got us a Realtor [Bettie Wysor, at Dunemere Associates],” says Dash, CEO of Roc-A-Fella Records. “He wanted to be sure our location was right—we could go in blind and get a house just anywhere and be thinking we're rolling, when we're not even in the right part of town.”

And this was Jay-Z, so it couldn't be just any house; he had a reputation to consider. “Jigga”—more than Puffy, more than Will “Gettin' Jiggy Wit It” Smith—is the rapper most associated with the sublime state of jigginess. His lyrics tell the story of a defiantly ambitious entrepreneur who likes his champagne and cars expensive, his women beautiful, and his freedom unfettered—which doesn't sound too far off from some of the high-rollers laying down \$48 a pound for lobster salad at Loaves and Fishes in Sagaponack these days. “My plot is, stick up the world and split it, 50-50—uh-huh—is take the dough and stay real jiggy,” Jay-Z raps.

“If he says ‘Drive a 4.6 [Range Rover],’ people change their cars,” says Dash. “If he says ‘Rock platinum jewelry,’ people rock platinum.”

“It's a Masterpiece Rolex,” says Jay-Z demurely, allowing an inspection of the diamond-studded watch twinkling on his wrist. “I was, like, the first one in the country with it. I try to stay on top of things. It's a little hobby, know what I'm saying? I read the *Robb Report*, the *duPont Registry*, things like that. I tend not toward expensive—more toward *exclusive*.”

Goose Creek, the Wainscott mansion Dash and Jay-Z settled on for a two-weekend rental in July, isn't exactly the Maidstone Club—“It's the Hilton of the Hamptons,” sniffs one society *macher*—but it is . . . big. “I walked in and said, ‘Damn, this'll be fun for a few weeks,’ ” says Dash. “I felt like a little kid in a big haunted house in there,” says Jay-Z, laughing.

The \$20 million, 30,000-square-foot, Italianate stucco house sits on eight-and-a-half acres of land and is equipped with an indoor-outdoor pool, tennis courts, a spa, a 120-seat screening room, and a canoe and rowboat to tool around Georgica Pond (which is shared by Steven Spielberg, among other players). Former renters include Madonna, Warren Beatty, and Kevin

## In his \$20 million, 30,000-square-foot mansion, “I felt like a little kid in a big haunted

Costner (when *he* was hot). Meg Ryan and Ed Burns were neighbors this summer, and Sandra Bullock was next door in the estate's smaller farmhouse, known as Main Street.

Another renter actually had dibs on the cottage before Bullock, says Bob Felner, who co-owns Goose Creek with film and fashion impresario Bryan Bantry, but the client backed out upon hearing of the arrival of a rap brigade—“for reasons I would not like to characterize,” Felner says with pronounced delicacy. “We always just thought it would be a lot of fun to have [Jay-Z and his people] in the house”—so to speak. “Like any newly successful entertainer, of course he wants to be in the Hamptons; I think it's sweet that they all want to be here.”

It was no doubt equally sweet to receive Jay-Z and Dash's \$30,000-a-week rent check—a widely reported figure which Felner calls inaccurate, although

he admits the rental's “a lot.” So much that some of Jay-Z and Dash's friends, Simmons and Cohen included, complained that they thought the Roc-A-Fella crew was being taken. “They all said they were overpaying,” says Felner, sounding a bit miffed, “but Russell was here every day and so was Puffy. This is a bigger house than Puffy's—and in a better neighborhood.” (Puffy lives near Donna Karan in a Charles Gwathmey steel-and-chrome monolith in East Hampton.)

It was Puffy who represented hip-hop in the Hamptons last year—his July 4 barbecue attracted Mike Tyson and featured a Mister Softee truck—but this summer, Puffy was lying low (his album is about to drop, and he may not have wanted an occasion to remind everyone that three months earlier, he was arrested for allegedly attacking Interscope Records executive Steve Stoute with a telephone and a champagne bottle).

## ion on Georgica house," says Jay-Z.

This summer, the more stylistically hard-core but lawsuit-free Jay-Z has been the member of the hip-hoperati to cause a stir; it was his Fourth of July party—more than fêtes thrown by Jerry Della Femina, Allen Grubman, Claudia Cohen, or even a breast-baring Carmen Electra—that headed the gossip columns the next day. Mitchell Fink at the *Daily News* announced with a swoon that it was "Jay-Z's coming-out party." "Oh, my God, the whole weekend was the biggest nightmare of my life," says Katie MacIntosh, a publicist with Lizzie Grubman Public Relations, which represents the rapper. "It was a great party—but oh . . . my . . . God."

Apparently, Jay-Z's Independence Day soirée, held on Sunday night, was a somewhat last-minute affair. "It went from a small, intimate barbecue," says MacIntosh, to a full-scale event, with a \$10,000 tent rental, dance floor, D.J. (the beautiful Mark Ronson, of course; like the

Hamptons, hip-hop has its own *rigueur*), catering (by East Hampton's Brent Newsome), and—depending on who you talk to—between 300 and 800 guests. "I told those girls [at Lizzie Grubman] it wasn't going to be 125 people," says Felner. "Jay-Z's going to have a party on July 4 weekend in the Hamptons with 125 people?" He snorts.

The 300 or 800 people who arrived wanted to get into the house so badly, some bypassed security and tore the handles off the outside doors, "all the way around," says Felner with a cluck. But other than that, no permanent damage occurred. "We know people are expecting us to cut up and bug out," says Dash, "but we got no wilder than anyone else. There's an expectation that we're gonna come in there and fuck shit up, but nothing bad happened. It was a big time, it was ill."

Jay-Z, who wore a No. 2 Knicks Jersey (Larry Johnson's number, the rapper's choice only after Sprewell's sold out), greeted guests in an informal receiving line, "almost like a wedding," one guest says. With Ivana Trump and Sandra Bullock mixing and mingling with Puff Daddy, Q-Tip, and Nas, it was the powerfully eclectic type of crowd associated with hip-hop celebrations ever since Puffy's Cipriani Wall Street birthday bash last November (a milestone event that attracted characters as diverse as Donald Trump and Lil' Kim). "Lil' Kim was there," at Jay-Z's party, "in a blonde wig," says another

guest. "But no one was talking to her because they were all white and no one knew who she was."

There are, of course, going to be those in the lilywhite Hamptons who continue to look upon the encampment of the hip-hop community as proof of the approach of the apocalypse. "People were heartbroken when Jews took over; they have no idea what's going to happen out here with this," says one Island dweller. "These rap stars are part of the new Hamptons-as-circus," another goose-steppin' Hamptonite says. "These people are going to be bored here. This isn't the South of France, you know, there aren't girls with leopard-skin bikinis and chains on the beach"—yet.

But as for Jay-Z, he chooses to focus on the positive, even the beautiful. "It was beautiful," he says of his party. "We had a very nice

gathering. We've all come a long way." Dash characterizes the guest list as "peers, but in different games. A lot of rich people are intrigued by the lifestyle of hip-hop, and vice versa," he adds. "If I hear someone's jetting around on a private jet, I want to experience that. I've seen someone get his brains blasted out."

"It was cool to see Ivana Trump at the same table with Busta Rhymes," says Jay-Z. "They were exchanging pleasantries. I don't know if Ivana is a hip-hop fan. You gotta ask Ivana about that."

As the guests nibbled on an equally diverse menu—fresh-shucked oysters, filet mignon, shrimp, and hamburgers (meanwhile, a guest at Puffy's barbecue complained that the high-roller served *only* burgers this year)—and drank Roc-A-Tinis, specially crafted martinis à la Roc-A-Fella, with blueberries and curaçao, Jay-Z says he sat back, looked around and enjoyed the view. And how did it feel to see himself, a kid from Marcy Projects, becoming a Hamptons socialite overnight?

"That's hilarious to me," he says.

But he had other things on his mind besides feeding these people meatballs. "Meeting new people is very important—that's how you network," he says. "Maybe I can help you in my field; maybe you can help me in your field. And relationships is way more important than money, because if you got relationships, you can always get money. You can progress." (continued on page 69)

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Progress, hip-hop-style, is the clothing line Jay-Z and Dash are working on—Roc-A-Wear, due out this fall—and the movie company they're developing. "I want to make films," says Jay-Z. "An action flick with a good narrative." Dash says that whatever they do, it will, like Jay-Z's music, reflect the experience they both had coming up on the streets. Dash had a back-and-forth look at both Harlem and the Hamptons, where as a teenager he hung out with more affluent friends (he was a scholarship student at the South Kent School in Connecticut). "I saw that people are having fun—and they're doing it legally and shit," Dash says. "And I wanted to be able to have that, to dictate my own destiny."

"I feel like I'm that person that's bridging a whole gap," says Jay-Z. "I'm coming back to Marcy and saying, yeah, you know, Ivana Trump, she's talking like *this*, and Sandra Bullock, she's crazy cool. I'm sharing my experience."

The night of his July 4 party, however, the neighbors around Goose Creek got tired of sharing the air space and, at around midnight, called the police. "I didn't speak to the officers," says Jay-Z, "but I heard they were pretty cool about everything." As the party didn't have a permit, the music was ordered off, but people stayed on for another hour. "They didn't want to go home," says Dash.

After that, it was a screening of Queen Latifah's *Set It Off* in the house's movie theater. Around 30 people remained, including Bullock, Puffy (sticking close to Bullock), Lil' Kim, and Adrien Brody, the sloe-eyed actor in *Summer of Sam*. The reveling continued into the wee hours. "Ally b."—or Bernstein, another Lizzie Grubman flack—"was buggin' out," Dash says. "She was runnin' around like, 'Omigod, omigod, what are you doing?'" He laughs. "She thought we were gonna rip up the joint."

"We sent her into the kitchen," says Jay-Z, "and gave her some cornflakes."

All in all, Jay-Z's first foray into the Hamptons sounds like a success. "It was real laid-back," says Jay-Z, whose permanent digs are in Fort Lee, New Jersey. "I might have to get me a permanent place out there."

But not like Goose Creek. "We ain't ready for no \$20 million mansion," says Dash. "Not yet. But we're definitely going back." In a way, it's what they've always dreamed of. "Do I want to see someone get shot in his ass, or do I want to get on a private helicopter and fly to the Hamptons?" he adds. "It's not a tough question." ■