

WEEKEND JOURNAL.

EUROPE



DISCREET

Privacy

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DESTINATIONS
for the DISCERNING
TRAVELER

SCOTT WILLIAMS

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Elisabeth Limber ART DIRECTOR
Brian M. Carney BOOKS PAGE EDITOR

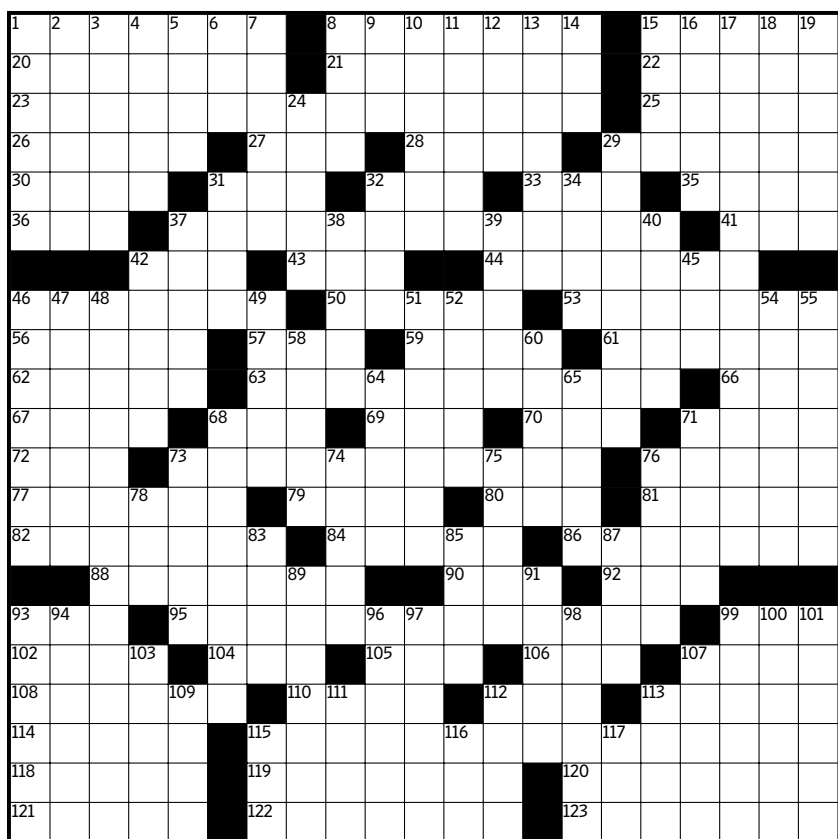
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Last Week's Solution



Time for renewal

Downscaling holiday excess can have luxurious effects on the mind



(C) Paolo Negri/Getty

BY KATHERINE BERGEN

IF ONE IMAGE encapsulates the bling, pre-economic crisis holidaymaker, it is the picture of rap millionaire Sean “Diddy” Combs wafting about St. Tropez in 2001 with a huge full-time entourage, including a butler who followed Diddy around with a parasol.

Whatever the economic climate, some rap millionaires may always dedicate themselves to conspicuous consumption in the sun, but the trend for travel in 2010 is toward more discreet luxury, with a focus on the “transforcation” holiday, where travelers improve or change.

The Hon. Annette Howard, former chatelaine of Castle Howard in Yorkshire where Evelyn Waugh’s “Brideshead Revisited” was filmed, most recently in 2007, is one such transforcation traveler. She has just returned, at age 60, from a six-month round-the-world trip visiting places as diverse as Easter Island and Mongolia, where she lived with nomads for two weeks. “At my age, I knew I would be taking in and appreciating the experiences so much more carefully,” she explains. “People certainly say I have changed.”

While such an adventure is at the far end of the transforcation scale, it is probably no coincidence that I have heard similar stories recently from friends—one of whom has returned from a holiday glacier walking and hiking on a live volcano and another who completed a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain.

There are many paths to self-improvement, however, and not all are arduous. The spa, or beauty clinic, has long occupied a place in this lexicon. “Taking the waters” at smart spas has for centuries been a fashionable form of leisure and the popularity of detox-center holidays continues apace. The following review of a health clinic in Switzerland illustrates how to enjoy physical transformation in discreet luxury.

The philosophy at the 15th-century Il Convento di Santa Maria di

Constantinopoli in Apulia, southern Italy, the hotel owned by Alistair and Athena McAlpine, is that transforcation is about limiting technology while maximizing luxury. “The guests are treated as visiting friends, and with only eight rooms the atmosphere is relaxed and informal,” says Lady McAlpine. “We don’t have Wi-Fi, TVs or phones in the bedrooms and we find people appreciate the difference it makes to the quality of their stay and their mental attitude.”

Far more enticingly, each of the bedrooms reflects the owners’ passions and interests. The walls and floors are covered in rugs, textiles

and pictures from the extensive collection of Lord McAlpine, a former treasurer of the Tory party. Even the bedside books, often first editions, are thoughtfully chosen. There’s a pool, a stunning garden, the food is all regional and the vegetables home-grown. This is luxury, exquisite but low key.

Along with a shift in the type of holiday we are looking for, so too we ought to change our perception of travel, argues the philosopher Alain de Botton. He suggests in his book “The Art of Travel,” having once found himself miserable during an expensive holiday to Barbados, that perceptions actually count more

than destinations. “At the heart of travel is a perceptual shift,” he explains. “And that perceptual shift doesn’t depend on going to an exotic or a faraway place.”

Flaubert amplifies this point, says Mr. de Botton. The 19th-century French novelist spent years in Normandy longing for the sensual splendors of Egypt, then, when he finally reached the pyramids, he promptly lapsed into nostalgia for his rainy hometown of Rouen.

My own holiday recommendations aren’t so much exotic as exemplify the post-economic-crisis trend toward less in-your-face luxury. One hour’s drive due north of Diddy’s be-

loved St. Tropez, into the Haut-Var, will bring you to La Bastide de Tourtour, in the medieval village known as “le village dans la ciel,” or village in the sky. The Bastide, where part of the iconic film “The Day of the Jackal” was filmed in the early ’70s, is set in a park with pine trees and an astounding view over the valley, and has an outdoor swimming pool and tennis court. Just bling enough, it has a cigar cellar and a helicopter landing surface.

For some old-fashioned glamor, go to Lake Como. What’s good enough for George Clooney, who has a villa on the lake, is good enough for the rest of us. The Grand Hotel Villa Serbelloni in Bellagio has Old-World charm, and a modern spa. There’s a private dock from which motor boat trips go to the historic gardens along the lake, famous for the flowering azaleas in the spring. Just bling enough, the restaurant has a Michelin star.

In Morocco, eschew the more showy charms of La Mamounia in Marrakech, beloved of celebrities including actress Sophia Loren and Rolling Stone Mick Jagger, and opt for the quiet luxury of the Gazelle D’Or in Taroudant near Agadir. All the rooms have an open fireplace and private terrace and there is a traditional hamman in the beautiful grounds. Just bling enough, there is a man employed solely to make perfect mint tea.

For travelers who want more out of their holidays than pure relaxation and sight-seeing, the following articles offer further fascinating locations including a walking and eating tour in Piedmont, Italy, and secluded villas in Goa, India.

Finally, whether “transforctating,” or simply reveling in discreet luxury, take this last piece of advice from Mr. de Botton, who says what matters is the ability to “eat a place”—to pay it enough close, unhurried attention to absorb a personal meaning.

—Katherine Bergen is a writer based London.



Top, the tower of Sant Emiliano in Apulia, Italy; clockwise from left: the swimming pool at Il Convento di Santa Maria di Constantinopoli in Apulia; one of the arched corridors around the convent’s courtyard; and the convent viewed from the surrounding fields.



Adam Miller (3)

❖ Travel

The era of the 'transforcation'

From Switzerland to the Serengeti, Jemima Sissons reviews seven retreats to transform body and mind

Many of us charge into the New Year resolving to shift the extra Christmas pounds, take up fly-fishing, finally learn Cantonese, or to help the less fortunate. Now, an increasing number of us are specifically choosing to do so on holiday. One U.K. resort owner has even coined the phrase "transforcation," for a holiday in which you change or transform yourself in some way.

Former management consultant Victoria Wills, who runs boutique weight-loss center NuBeginnings on the picturesque north Devon coast in the U.K., has noticed a real shift in people using their holiday as a life-changing experience. "Over the past six months we've seen a trend toward people looking for a chance to start afresh and to transform not only their bodies but also their approach to life," the 34-year-old says. "2009 was all about the 'staycation' but now people are looking to turn over a new leaf and to really make a

difference to their well-being on holiday. Hence, the transforcation."

One of the highest areas of growth in the travel market is learning holidays, particularly photography, cookery and dance breaks, according to market-research group Mintel International Group Ltd., who ran a U.K.-based study last September titled "Learning from my holiday." The survey found that 27% of those interviewed want to learn a new language on holiday in the future, three times the percentage of those who have done so in

the past three years, and almost a quarter would like to take up a new skill on holiday in the future, compared with 13% who would have done so in the past.

Transforcations aren't just about learning languages or losing weight. "Voluntourism," which combines travel with volunteering has also become popular. This can be anything from helping street children, to mapping climate change or interacting with endangered wildlife. Travel company Responsible Travel saw more than a twofold increase in en-

quiries for volunteering holidays in 2008 compared with 2004.

"There is much more of a need to be socially responsible," says Frances Tuke of the Independent Association of Travel Agents. "People value holidays so much now for things other than relaxing."

We take you on a tour of seven remarkable transforcation destinations from a medical and health spa in Switzerland to a photography retreat in Cambodia to a voluntourism effort monitoring cheetahs in the Serengeti.

The exterior of Clinique La Prairie on Lake Geneva.



Clinique La Prairie Montreux, Switzerland

As is often the way in the land of the truly luxurious, discretion is key. Arrival at Clinique La Prairie is through an anonymous suburb of the Swiss town of Montreux, perched at the edge of Lake Geneva. It is only on entering a red and white barrier, and sweeping through the Mercedes-lined drive to the clinic, that you realize you are in a special place. The long, flat granite and limestone building I am about to enter is where the well-heeled come to transform their lives. The doors open silently and lead me into the complex, where sleek oak-lined tunnels interconnect its three buildings, preserving the anonymity of singers recovering from rhinoplasty and royalty looking to shed some weight.

Started 31 years ago by Dr. Paul Niehans, Clinique La Prairie is most famous for its signature treatment, the Revitalization, which uses cellular therapy to slow the ageing process. So successful is it that the medical and health spa claims that 70% of its clientele returns every 18-24 months for the treatment. Among

the spa's offerings is plastic surgery, hypnotherapy, menopause treatment and dental work.

Weight management is another reason patrons come to transform themselves. The clinic requires a minimum two week stay for the weight-loss course, which starts at €30,721.

I am here on a three-day transforcation break, in order to get a taste of the place, and to educate myself about health and diet. As soon as I am seated for lunch, nutritionist Christine Gogniat swoops down in her white coat and clipboard and asks me which program I would like to be on. She informs me that the light menu (1,200 calories a day) is almost the same as the normal menu. Except that "portions are smaller, desserts are made with artificial sweetener, and there is almost no fat." I gulp, thinking of my usual mid-afternoon sugary snack, and timidly opt for the light version. Reading the menu, I am amazed that its intricate and luxurious dishes, such as brill fillet with morels, roasted guinea fowl, and even desserts such as pear clafoutis, are packed with so few calories. The tiny portions look like masterpieces and I am impressed with

chef Jean-Bernard Muraro's talents for making diet food so delicious.

During my body assessment, I am weighed and then my body fat and visceral fat (the dangerous fat surrounding your organs) are measured. I am quietly glad for having taken up Bikram yoga two months earlier, as my results are, all but one (waist to body ratio), in the green "good" zone.

Next stop is the gym where I am taken through my paces and a regime is devised for me, but nothing like the ones at the usual gyms I have been to. I am told to alternate cardiovascular activity with weight machines every five minutes, and decrease resistance on the machines in order not to get big muscles. My trainer Françoise's top tip of the day is to constantly contract the stomach (breathe in), as if my belt is one notch too tight.

By the second day of my regime I am suffering from slight sugar withdrawals. Admittedly, I have a sweet tooth and I know I consume too much fruit, fruit juice, and without fail, two to three squares of chocolate daily. In order to satisfy my craving, I rather pathetically find myself drinking the remains of the milk that

has come with my afternoon tea.

As the guilt sets in, I seek out the advice of nutritionist Adrian Heini, who will become Clinique La Prairie's medical director in May. He puts me firmly in my place. "You haven't got an addiction. It is just psychological," he tells me. "In the same way, I think that a lot of so-called allergies, such as wheat, are in the head."

Mr. Heini advocates a balanced diet and doesn't believe in cutting out food groups or in detoxing. "Detox programs are just a fashion," he says. "The no-carbohydrate diet is also just wrong. You lose weight and water, but also muscle mass. We want to rebuild physical condition here with diet and exercise. Those faddish diets don't respond to the modern principles of nutrition."

Contact with other patients is virtually nonexistent, and the other families here—mainly Russian, Chinese or Middle Eastern—float like ghosts, from dining table, back to their rooms, never to be seen again. As with a regular hospital, it isn't the place to engage in small talk. Everyone is here for a medical or aesthetic reason.

The clinic preaches a holistic approach to health. For example, in or-

der to tackle eating problems or stress, it will often suggest hypnotherapy and sophrology (dynamic relaxation) to find the root of the problem. "It is not magic," says hypnotherapist Fatima Santos. "It is just about getting close to your feelings."

With its top class cuisine and baroque flourishes in the bedrooms—such as elaborate gilt mirrors and silk cream wallpaper—Clinique La Prairie feels like an upmarket hotel in one respect. Yet the men in white coats and panic buttons in the bathrooms to summon nurses are gentle reminders that it is, in fact, a hospital, where you don't come just to lounge around. The strongest thing in the minibar is a carrot juice.

Although I did Hoover up the odd artful edible flower garnish to up my calorie intake, I found the stay extremely insightful and lost a half kilo and 2% body fat in three days. I also felt wonderfully revived from the treatments such as the Vital O2 facial and the therapeutic Alpine air.

A weekend two-night package, full board, starts at €2,683 per person. (www.laprairie.ch)

—Jemima Sissons is a writer based in London.

Ayurvedic Himalayan spa

Nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas, a short flight from New Delhi, lies Ananda, which combines the spirituality of nearby Rishikesh with the comforts of a five-star hotel. The doctors identify your Ayurvedic type (Vata, Pitta or Kapha), and proscribe a diet and spa treatments. Although you can go just to relax, many treat it more like a clinic. There are Ayurvedic packages on offer such as stress management or detoxification. If you are there just for a short break (as I was) you are encouraged to follow a challenging—but worthwhile—diet, specifically tailored to your Ayurvedic type, and you'll be put on a strict exercise regime.

Cost: Room rates from €341 a night. Packages also available.
www.anandaspa.com



Bikini boot camp in Mexico

Fancy losing weight the Sienna Miller way? The gorgeous Amansala eco-resort—a favorite of the British actress—is situated in Tulum, on the west coast of Mexico. The instructors will have you up at the break of dawn for a jungle power walk, followed by intensive cardio, yoga and pilates. It isn't all a grind though. There are Mayan clay treatments and beachside massages. Lunch and dinner are often that day's catch from the Pacific Ocean. Founder Melissa Perlman says: "Weight loss is really a side benefit as our guests go home so refreshed and rejuvenated and lighter not only in kilos, but in mind and spirit." You can also visit the impressive Mayan temples nearby. *Cost: €1,266 a week for full board and treatments; without flights.*
www.amansala.com



Shedding weight in scenic Devon

Located in a dramatic setting on Britain's Devon coast, NuBeginnings is a boutique weight-loss retreat, which aims to transform the way people approach food.

The boutique combines diet and exercise regimes with hypnotherapy to unroot one's relationship with food and to teach participants methods to cope with their food weaknesses once the course is over.

A typical day comprises power walking, yoga, lectures in positive thinking, spa treatments, circuits and hypnotherapy. NuBeginnings doesn't promote an ultra-low calorie diet.

"I struggled with my weight since I

was 8, mainly through binge eating," says founder Victoria Wills. "It was utterly frustrating. I had gone to American boot camps and would always put the weight back on when I came back. Then I started studying hypnotherapy, and realized the key to losing weight – and keeping it off – was using mind techniques in order to change the way you think about your relationship with food. That is what I am trying to teach here."

Cost: The full-board course runs €2,353 a week for a single occupancy, and €2,128 for a double room. Extras include spa treatments and hypnotherapy.
www.nubeginnings.co.uk

Photography course in Cambodia

This 10-day luxury photography retreat will teach you everything you need to know about accomplishing the perfect shot, in a jaw-dropping location. Enjoy one-to-one guidance with leading photographers, and test your new skills around the stunning temples of Angkor Wat.

The company behind it, Creative Escapes, believes in expanding all horizons, and combines photography with diversions such as a tour of the local food market followed by a cooking lesson in Cambodian delicacies. "It's not all about photography," says founder Jon Cunningham. "We want you to

become fully immersed into the cultural zeitgeist of the area too." Participants can keep up their skills afterward with alumni-only shoots that are held throughout the year.

Cost: A 10-day retreat costs €1,825, without flights.
www.creative-escapes.co.uk



Yoga retreat in Lanzarote

The Life Change retreat situated on the volcanic island of Lanzarote in the Canary Islands offers tailor made yoga and breathing classes but also believes in improving personal awareness.

This means tutorials with life coaches who lecture you in the power of positive thinking and help you evaluate your well being. There is also plenty of time in which to explore the evergreen forests of the island by foot, or to brush up your surfing skills with some lessons taught at the nearby Lavaflo surf center.

"The Life Change retreat was one of the most spiritual and enjoyable experiences of my life," says Rachel Saunders of London, who attended the course in October. "While still having a great time on holiday, the bespoke yoga classes, holistic therapies and stunning environment really led me to reassess my life goals and values."

The retreat is a good choice for single travelers or those who want a solitary escape.

Cost: €799 a week bed and breakfast, without flights.
www.lifechangeretreat.com



Voluntourism

From helping to set up a workshop for disadvantaged women and children in Cairo, to monitoring cheetahs in the Serengeti, tour company Abercrombie & Kent offers philanthropic holidays in interesting locations. The project in Egypt aims to introduce women and children to skills that let them become self-sufficient.

As a cheetah monitor at the luxurious Sanctuary Kusini Camp in Tanzania volunteers will track, monitor and document sightings of the rare cat for research purposes. As part of the Cheetah Watch Campaign, launched in 2000, visitors help collate vital data on reproduction, survival and ranging patterns.

Hands Up Holidays also offer voluntourism trips such as village building in Peru followed by walking the Inca trail, or touring the Galapagos Islands by yacht before helping to clean beaches normally off limits to tourists.

Egypt: €2,250 for seven days, with flights; Tanzania: €5,650 for 13 days, with flights; Peru: €2,150 for 15 days, without flights; Galapagos: €3,650 for 15 days, without flights
www.abercrombiekent.co.uk, www.handsupholidays.com



Clockwise from top left, Ananda spa; Amansala; NuBeginnings; Creative Escapes; Abercrombie & Kent; Stuart Forster, Life Change

Experiencing the real Syria

Boutique hotels in Damascus and Aleppo offer intimate service in the center of town

BY DON DUNCAN
Aleppo, Syria

IN THE PAST few months, the long dried-up Quweiq River that runs through Aleppo has begun to flow anew, thanks to improved relations with neighboring country Turkey, whose dams control much of the water flowing into northern Syria. Changing diplomacy has also helped bring another kind of wave—tourists.

Visitor numbers through Syria's main airport in the capital Damascus have doubled in the past five years to 4.5 million a year, according to the Damascus Chamber of Tourism, and signs of the bump are apparent everywhere. Damascus and Aleppo are the two cities with the most pulling power for tourists. At the core of their appeal are their respective old towns—medieval walled cities replete with religious sites, sprawling souks, miniscule porticos and maze-like alleys.

It is in these ancient quarters that perhaps the clearest indicator of Syria's tourism boom is flourishing—boutique hotels. Run-down or abandoned 17th- and 18th-century "Arabic Houses," similar to riads in Morocco, have become tourism gold for a growing number of hoteliers, who renovate them faithfully into charming, intimate six- to 12-room hotels that cost between €65 and €215 per night.

Common to most of these hotels is a minute, unassuming main doorway that leads to a narrow corridor and then out onto a spacious, verdant courtyard with a central fountain. The hotel rooms are situated around the courtyard, all decorated individually with varying color schemes and crafts. Some hotels name each of their rooms to further distinguish their distinct character, like the Old Vine in Damascus (☎ 963-11-545-0164, www.oldvinehotel.com) with its "Blue," "Apricot" and "Sky Room," located on the hotel's spectacular roof terrace.

The advantage boutique hotels have over international luxury franchise hotels is their size and location. The former are more intimate with staff frequently outnumbering guests.

Their location, in the thick of both city's old towns, gives them unparalleled access to the best historical sites and restaurants Syria has to offer. The Old Vine is minutes from Damascus's Omayyad Mosque and sprawling Al-Hamid-iyeh souk.

Meanwhile, Aleppo's 22-room Martini Hotel (☎ 963-21-363-6100, www.darzamaria.com) is a short walk from the city's 12th-century citadel and is just doors away from some of the best restaurants in Syria, including Sissi (☎ 963-21-212-4362), where for just over €18 you can have an excellent Aleppian meal such as *sujok* (spicy sausage rolled in Arabic bread and fried) or sublime cherry kebab for two with wine.

Beit al Manlouka (www.almamlouka.com, ☎ 963-11-543-0445), Damascus's longest-running boutique hotel, offers much the same experience as the Old Vine but it has one outstanding addition: for



Clockwise from top, Corbis; Manuel Cohen; Tamara Abdul Hadi

€215 a night you can stay in the "Suleiman the Magnificent" suite, a split-level room with its own internal marble fountain, 18th-century ceiling fresco, heavy casting, golden gilding and thick curtains and bedspread.

Opened last year, Hanania hotel (www.hananiahotel.com; ☎ 963-11-543-6990) is among a new breed of boutique hotels—it is driven more by curation, of local emerging artists, than preservation. Each room is decorated around various themes with painting sand artwork from Syria's burgeoning art scene.

As the country's second-largest city, Aleppo has long played second fiddle to Damascus—tourists typically visit for a day and a night as part of a larger trip centered around Damascus. But it is now distinguishing itself as a destination in its own right.

The old city in Aleppo is larger than the one in Damascus and lacks the capital's self-consciousness. No parts of the city feel "made-for-tourists" yet and the streets are refreshingly devoid of the plastic tourist information signs that are common in Damascus. It is also home to some interesting museums. The Bimaristan Arghun al-Kamili, for example, is a 14th-century psychiatric hospital and was the center of medical advancement for centuries, its expertise reaching as far as Moorish Granada in Spain. It is now a museum where visitors can wander through ancient cell-like patient and treatment rooms with mannequins in period garb mocked up for various clinical procedures.

Market shopping is generally excellent in Syria, but the experience in Aleppo's souks stands out, owing to its 14 kilometers of nar-



Clockwise from top: the pillar of Saint Simeon Stylites outside Aleppo; interior of the Baron Hotel; a guest room at the Old Vine hotel, both in Aleppo.

row, covered bazaars. Unlike Damascus with its tall, corrugated iron ceilings, Aleppo's souks have lower brick ceilings that produce a pleasing tunnel effect. The souks open out to the old city at intervals through busy gateways that feel like rabbit holes. Visitors disappear into and resurface somewhere entirely different, laden down with spices, leather goods, fabric or fine metal crafts purchased on the way.

Aleppo is expanding its offer beyond its old city. It has new attractions such as a water park and Syria's largest mall, and the area around the banks of the revived Quweiq River—where sharp boutique and mid-range hotels, bars and restaurants are popping up—is fast becoming the emblem of the edge Aleppo is developing over Damascus.

Hotels like Park Hotel (☎ 963-21-222-3282, [\[telsyria.com\]\(http://telsyria.com\)\), a mid-range city hotel, typify this edge. Its Skybar roof lounge has the best view in the city, a place to watch the sun slide below the ancient minarets, bright red rooftop water tanks and countless rusty satellite dishes.](http://www.parkho-</p>
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Another worthwhile boutique hotel in Aleppo is the Al Mandaloun (www.mandalounhotel.com, ☎ 963-21-22-83-008), which has much of the same luxury as the Martini Hotel but is less well located in the old city.

The five-star Sheraton (☎ 963-21-212-1111) sits at the edge of the old city in view of the towering citadel. Features of the citadel are mimicked in the architecture of the hotel, which opened three years ago. It has a moat and hints of a drawbridge in the design of its entrance. The hotel is also home to several good restaurant options from Italian, to Levantine and east Asian.

A few blocks away is a fallen testament to luxury travel of old. Baron's Hotel (☎ 963-21-211-0880) is a grey, thick-stoned hotel, that feels like something out of an Agatha Christie novel. This could be because Ms. Christie actually stayed here in the 1920s. She now has a room named after her in the hotel, as do other famous erstwhile occupants—Lawrence of Arabia, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Kemal Ataturk. Whether you stay at the hotel or not, a night cap at the Baron's hotel bar is a must. Run by jovial Kikor Mazloumian, its wood panelling, generously upholstered seating, hot port and soft lamplight is, much like the rest of the hotel, a pleasant exercise in time travel.

—Don Duncan is a writer based in Beirut.

► See a video about the emergence of boutique hotels in Damascus at WSJ.com/Lifestyle

Hidden Highland luxuries

BY WILL LYONS

THE SINGLE-TRACK lane that hugs the southern banks of Loch Tay appears to go on forever. It begins at a junction leading from the Highland village of Kenmore and ends in Killin, a settlement nestled behind the mountains of Breadalbane. Half way down, past the tiny hamlets of Acharn and Ardtalnaig lays Ardeonaig Hotel and Restaurant, discreetly tucked away in the deep Perthshire countryside. This is Rob Roy and Campbell Country, where the air is heavy with the sweet, damp smell of fresh water.

But such is the secluded location of Ardeonaig, nearly seven miles from the nearest village; it is easy to think you have navigated around the wrong Loch.

This is luxury on a discreet level, as far removed from the Gothic Revival architecture that gripped the Highlands in the early 19th century as you can get. There are no striking colonnades, crenellated parapets or corner towers. Those in search of kilometer-long drives, grand staircases and drafty castles can look elsewhere.

The Highlands are full of country-house hotels, resorts, inns and sporting lodges that are expensive but don't represent value for money. Ardeonaig is one of a handful of Highland retreats that also include Monachyle Mhor, The Pool House in Nairn, and Kinloch Lodge and The Three Chimneys on Skye tailored to the savvy traveler wanting to escape the obvious Highland trail with all the pitfalls that entails.

These are places that are by no means inexpensive, but offer an exceptional experience, quality of service and outstanding dining—a modern take on the Scottish five-star experience.

That isn't to say Ardeonaig doesn't have its own history. There has been a drovers' inn on this spot since 1649 and much of the 17th-century house, including open log fires, beams and combed walls, remains untouched. The location is as spectacular as any. Surrounded by seven snow-capped Munros, it looks out toward the north shore of Loch Tay where Ben Lawers stands 1,214 meters tall, making it the 10th-highest mountain in the British Isles.

The hotel has recently taken over the neighboring 8,000-acre Ardtalnaig estate where one can enjoy the best the Highlands has to offer, such as Munro-climbing, snow-trekking and photographic stalking for red deer, birds of prey, mountain hare and red squirrels.

January sees the start of the



From top: Knoydart, Scotland; One of the three drawing rooms at Kinloch Lodge; Ardeonaig Hotel.

salmon fishing season, but on the weekend I visited the fishing was cancelled, a victim to the uncommonly cold weather as the boats were frozen to the Loch.

Not that it mattered because inside the warren like inn has been ex-

tended to include an intimate snug bar complete with peat burning fire, a white drawing room and an attic style library overlooking the Loch—a perfect place to wind down in one of its deep leather sofas.

But there is a twist. Ardeonaig was bought by South African couple Pete and Sara Gottgens in 2003 and the influence of the Cape can be found at every corner. There are five specially constructed rondawels (small curved-walled huts normally found at game lodges in Africa). But inside the cottages are 21st-century amenities, including deep, luxury baths and dark-wood beds. The main house has 19 rooms, some with their own private peat fire.

The twists continue. The rooms have no television or radios sets, there is no Wi-Fi and very limited mobile-phone reception. The wine list, currently under the watchful eye of former Champagne Ruinart U.K. sommelier of the year James Payne, is entirely South African while most of the staff speak with South African accents. As well as a formal dining room there is a cellar

dining room where one can eat surrounded by bottles of South African wine. The fusion of Highland tradition with Southern African style is quirky, but it works.

Mr. Gottgens, who was previously Nelson Mandela's personal chef whenever he visited London, is serious about cuisine. His six-course taster menu is seafood inspired, complete with Orkney scallops, langoustine, turbot and local hare. The menu can change daily pending on the local ingredients of venison, partridge and salmon.

But if food tourism is your thing, then Lady Claire Macdonald's sumptuous retreat on the banks of Loch na Dal in south-east Skye is a must. Kinloch Lodge is the former 17th-century hunting lodge of Lady Claire's husband Godfrey, or to give him his full title, Lord Macdonald of Macdonald, and 34th hereditary chief of the clan.

The intimate house, replete with portraits of Macdonald ancestry, cosy drawing rooms and open log fires, is run by Lady Claire's daugh-

ter, Isabella, with her husband, Tom Eveling. Brazilian-born Marcello Tully, who trained with the Roux brothers at Le Gavroche, has been hired to look after the kitchen. Mr. Tully has just picked up a coveted star from the Michelin guide, one of only 15 awarded in Scotland.

A rather fun innovation introduced by Mr. Eveling is the concept of wine flights. Instead of ordering a bottle, you are served two small glasses of wine with each course. The idea is that one can experience two different styles of wine with the same dish. I tried Chilean Sauvignon Blanc and South African Chenin Blanc, with west coast scallops. It was interesting to see how different flavors were pronounced with each wine.

In the morning we climbed the drover's path, which leads uphill through Kinloch forest offering spectacular views of the Isle of Ornsay, Knoydart and Loch Hourn. After a couple of kilometers, the path drops down to the remains of the now abandoned settlement of Leitir Fura. The inhabitants left the village in the early 19th century, setting sail for Nova Scotia. Walking amid the ruins, overlooking the beauty of the Sound of Sleat, was really quite affecting. The Highlands can do that to you sometimes.

Ardeonaig Hotel
Rooms from £73.50 per person a night;
www.ardeonaighotel.co.uk

Kinloch Lodge
Rooms from £150 per person a night;
www.claire-macdonald.com/kinloch-lodge

Arbitrage

A bottle of Glenfiddich 30-year-old Scotch

City	Local currency	€
Brussels	€205	€205
Paris	€209	€209
New York	\$317	€224
Frankfurt	€232	€232
London	£219	€249
Rome	€279	€279



Note: Prices, plus taxes, as provided by retailers in each city, averaged and converted into euros.

© Harrods

Clockwise from top: Corbis, Kinloch Lodge, Graham Lee

Gastronomy without guilt

Trekking 70 kilometers—and tasting three days of gourmet delights—in Piedmont, Italy

BY SHIVANI VORA

AS THE SUN sets over the lush Italian vineyards of Piedmont, we sit on a balcony overlooking a splendid panorama of steep valleys and tuck into yet another extravagant meal at the restaurant of our hotel, Villa Tiboldi, in Roero.

Grissini—long crispy breadsticks—lead to a neat dome of raw beef, lightly sauced gnocchi with thin slivers of zucchini, a fillet of trout salmon glistening with olive oil and a bottle of 2004 Barbaresco from nearby vintner Gaja. A warm, dark-chocolate cake studded with local hazelnuts and a tray of handmade chocolates and cookies make for a sweet ending.

My husband, Mahir, and I enjoy such gastronomic indulgences without a hint of guilt because our days are spent exploring this part of northwest Italy by walking. That day, we clocked in 18 kilometers, according to my pedometer, and over our five-day stay, we walked somewhere around 70 kilometers. To our pleasant surprise, we returned from our trip a few kilos lighter. Walking to vintners, restaurants, honey producers and chocolate makers more than offset our oenophile and food hedonism.

Piedmont's hilly countryside is prime for combining fitness and food. There are plenty of walks on main roads and paved trails, and the tourist office in nearly every town has maps catering to those traveling by foot. The tourist office can also provide names of cab companies and local guides.

Piedmont's main city is Turin, a two-hour drive from Milan. Surrounding this sophisticated metropolis are hilltop medieval villages with cobblestone streets, grand castles, and wine-producing towns such as Barolo and Barbaresco. Unlike most of Italy, which is well explored by tourists, Piedmont remains relatively undiscovered. Here, English speakers are the exception and menus are mostly in Italian.

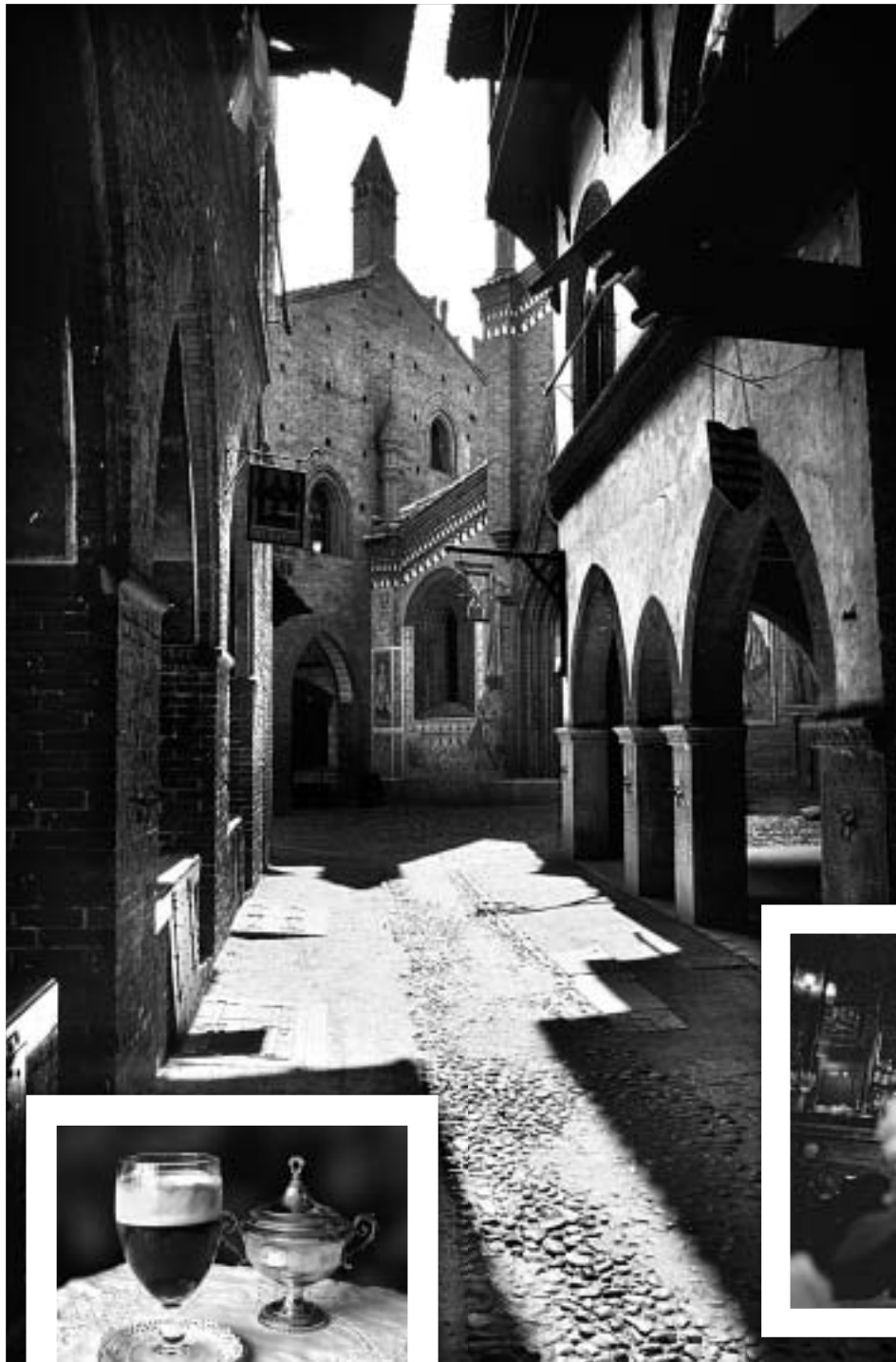
Below are three sample days of walking from the many routes the region holds. While you will need a good pair of hiking shoes and a car to get to most walks, you don't need to be a fitness buff. There are walks of varying levels of difficulty, and if your energy flails halfway through, you can call one of several cab companies that pick you up wherever you are.

Day One: Turin; Villa Tiboldi to Monta partway; 19 kilometers

Most trips to Piedmont begin in Turin before segueing into the countryside. We devote only one night and half a day to take in its sights, but the city is small enough to absorb in a short time. We start at 8:30 a.m. and hit all the major attractions such as the Duomo di San Giovanni, the city's 15th-century cathedral; the Palazzo Madama, a castle turned into a museum; the Palazzo Reale, a 17th-century palace which is the former Savoy royal residence; and several grand piazzas including San Carlo and Castello. Our first stop is chocolatier Caffè Al Bicerin (www.bicerin.it) which has existed since the 18th century and is known for the *bicerin*, Turin's signature beverage of chocolate and coffee topped with cream.

We also visit three of the many chocolate shops. At Baratti & Milano (www.barattimilano.it), we sample the world-renowned Giandujotto, a hazelnut confection that's so creamy it melts on our tongue, leaving behind slightly crunchy hazelnut bits and a coating of the most ethereal chocolate. We also stop at Guido Gobino (www.guidogobino.it) for the equally decadent hazelnut ganache. At Peyrano (www.peyrano.com), another well regarded chocolate maker, we try the milk chocolate bar bulging with crunchy hazelnut pieces.

Three hours later, we walk along the Po River and see the Borgo Medievale, a copy of a Middle Age Piedmont village. Returning into town, we join the long line at Grom, a gelateria that was born here but has since expanded throughout Italy and has outposts in New York, Paris and Tokyo. The ice cream is made with ingredients such as Sicilian almonds and Amalfi lemons.



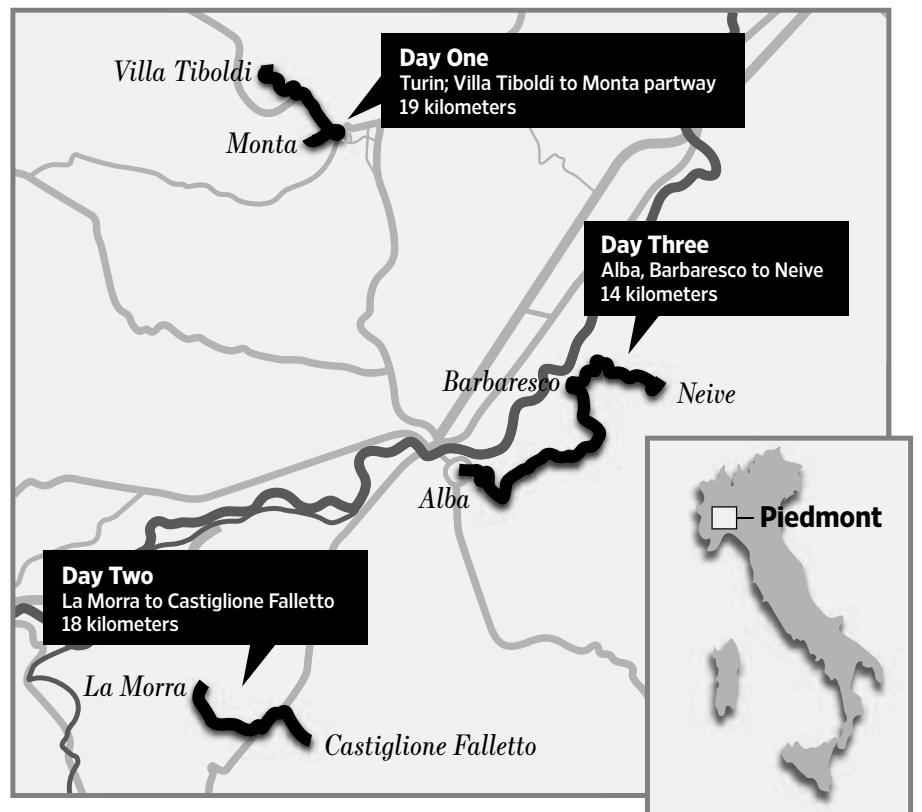
Clockwise from top left, a street in Turin; the former cast iron gate of the 17th-century Palazzo Reale Savoy royal residence; a café in Piazza Castello; and the bicerin, Turin's signature beverage, at chocolatier Caffè Al Bicerin.



So far, we have walked 13 kilometers. At around 2 p.m., we return to the Grand Hotel Sitea to get our bags. The hotel has an eager to please staff, large rooms and baths, and has a prime location in the center of town that makes it possible to walk everywhere, which, of course, is the goal of our trip.

After an hour-long drive, we arrive in Roero and check into a stunning hilltop suite at Villa Tiboldi. It's 4:30 p.m. when we begin the very steep downhill eight-kilometer walk along the Malvira vineyards into the town of Monta to meet with a honey maker. Three kilometers in, however, the heat becomes too strong, and we decide to make the grueling uphill climb back to the hotel and instead drive to visit Cauda Nicola Apicoltura, a honey producer owned by Ugo Cauda and his father, Nicola. Ugo leads us through a tasting of four honeys, including one tinged with chestnut.

Back at the villa, we have an evening wine tasting with Patrizia and Roberto Damonte, Tiboldi's owners, who also manage the vineyards below. Patrizia brings out trays of aged prosciutto while her husband, Roberto, leads a tasting to eight guests of more than 10 labels such as Birbet, a sweet red dessert wine, and the sturdier Langhe Nebbiolo.



Clockwise from upper right, MARCA/Alamy; Adam Eastland / Alamy; Al Bicerin

Day Two: La Morra to Castiglione Falletto; 18 kilometers

We start our hike early when the sun is milder at a piazza in the medieval village of La Morra, located in the heart of the Langhe region and a scenic 20-minute drive from Tivolli. The first half is mainly downhill. We walk between quiet vineyards, through lush forest, amid patches of hazelnut groves, and along fields of red and pink roses in full bloom. While some paths are a bit muddy and slippery after rainfall, it's an easy route to follow.

An hour in, we reach the main road and make the uphill trek to Elio Altare (www.elioaltare.com), a leading Piedmont winery that makes mainly red varietals using Nebbiolo, Dolcetto and Barbera—common grapes in the area. We've only walked 3.5 kilometers, but the hill makes it seem like a longer distance. We're scheduled for a tasting with Silvia Altare, the winemaker's daughter (wineries here are mainly family-run operations and it's not unusual to meet the winemaker during a visit). Ms. Altare pours out five different wines including L'Insieme, a blend of six red grapes, and gives us a peek into what coming vintages will taste like by letting us sample from the barrels where the wines from last year's harvest are aging. Most wineries here require an appointment booked a week in advance, and the visit is free.

From there, we begin a six-kilometer trek to Castiglione Falletto, another hilltop village. To get there, we work our way downhill through more vineyards before traveling along a main road and venturing again uphill through a final set of vineyards. It's a serene walk, and except for a few other hikers we see at the start of our trip and a harmless snake that slithers in front of my feet, we are mostly alone.

By now it's 1:30 p.m. The sun is stronger, and the last half-hour tests our stamina. We reach the enchanting village four hours from when we started. Our reward is a sumptuous lunch at Locanda del Centro (www.locandadelcentro.it), a typical Piedmont osteria. We feast on antipasti including marinated zucchini and peppers, salame crudo, minced and seasoned pork stuffed into a casing, gnocchi, salted cod on a bed of polenta and radicchio puree, a large green salad and a glass of cold white wine.

A cab takes us back to our car in La Morra, and we drive to Asti. After walking along the main street, Corso Vittorio Alfieri, and viewing the 14th-century Gothic church Duomo, San Secondo and Torre Troyana, one of the town's several towers, we refuel on a plate of hazelnut cookies at Enoteca, one of the most popular cafés here. Of course, we can't resist sharing a chilled glass of Asti Spumante, the sparkling wine for which the region is known.

Although our main exercise was walking from La Morra to Castiglione Falletto, sightseeing within the towns added on another eight kilometers that day.

Day Three: Alba, Barbaresco to Neive; 14 kilometers

You won't go wrong by staying in one hotel in Piedmont, but it's better to hang your hat at two properties in different areas to absorb the breath of the region without spending too much of the day driving. On our last two nights, we move an hour from Tivolli to the Relais San Maurizio, a luxury Relais & Chateaux hotel that was a 17th-century monastery and features a spa, which we take full advantage of to massage our swollen calves and stiff backs.

Mahir and I spend the morning in Alba, the base of the Langhe region and a town known for its truffle production. While you can see the Cathedral of San Lorenzo, Gothic church San Domenico and the 13th-century Palazzo Comunale (town hall) in an hour, we take a more leisurely pace as our local guide Roberta Gatti points out notable spots and explains their history during a two-kilometer walk.

We then drive 20 minutes to Barbaresco where we have a relatively light lunch of a marinated tomato, chicken and mozzarella chunks salad at Antica Torre (☎ 39-0173-635-170), the town's most popular osteria. Happily full, we walk the five kilometers on the main road alongside vineyards to Neive, one of the oldest hilltop villages that has houses with windows lined with colorful flowers and brightly painted shutters. Marya Dumont, a local guide who charts walking trips for adventure company Butterfield & Robinson, says that what makes Piedmont different than Tuscany or any other wine-producing region is its intimate scale. "As you journey between villages, you can see the town you began from and the one you're heading toward," she says. "You're not among anonymous vines."

With exception to the climb into Neive, our trek this day was on fairly flat roads and the easiest of the three. We sneak in plenty of bonus kilometers. Between exploring Alba, Neive and Barbaresco, we've walked another four kilometers.

Our appetite is well preserved for dinner at the San Maurizio's Michelin-starred restaurant Da Guido (www.relaisanmaurizio.info/eng/food_wine.htm). Situated in the cellars of the monastery, its walls and ceiling are made of exposed stone. Sauteed duck, zucchini stuffed with ricotta and thin slivers of beef are the precursor to five kinds of breads, chestnut filled pasta in a shrimp and artichoke sauce, John Dory in a red sauce of mussels and clams, grilled vegetables, and a bottle of 1996 Barolo Monfortino chosen after a discussion with the sommelier. A chocolate tart with chilled pears and a tray of petit fours filled with fruit gelees, mini lemon tarts and dark chocolate truffles finish us off.

Indulgent? Perhaps. But with the amount of physical activity we did, there is no guilt. We have earned every bite.

—Shivani Vora is a writer based in New York.



Above, the medieval hilltop village of Castiglione Falletto; at right, a truffles hunter shows a find; below, Vinter Elio Altare; bottom, Malvira vineyards.



WHERE TO STAY

Grand Hotel Sitea

A 120-room four-star hotel, the Grand Hotel Sitea is situated in the heart of the city of Turin near the Piazza San Carlo and is an ideal base to walk everywhere. Rates start at €135 a night and include buffet breakfast. www.sitea.thi-hotels.com; ☎ 39-01151-51911

Villa Tivolli

This 13-room property is perched high on a hilltop in Roero and has a panoramic view of the surrounding vineyards. The owners produce Malvira wines and lead daily tastings on the outdoor terrace. Many good walks are less than a half-hour drive. Rooms start at a €110 a night. www.villativolli.it; ☎ 39-01739-59233

Relais San Maurizio

A former monastery converted into a 31-room hotel, this Relais & Chateaux property is the most luxurious in the area. Though many walks are more than a half-hour drive, the setting overlooking the Piedmont valley is stunning. The restaurant, Guido da Castiglione, has one Michelin star and a spa opened last year. Rooms start at €280 a night. www.relaisanmaurizio.info; ☎ 39-01418-41900

The newest addition to Piedmont's hotel scene, this 38-room property situated in Serralunga d'Alba has views of the vineyards from practically every direction. The spacious accommodations, the Aveda spa and the La Rei restaurant courtesy of two Michelin-star chef Gianpiero Vivalda make this a self-encompassing retreat. Rooms start at €280 a night and include breakfast. www.ilboscaretoresort.com; ☎ 39-01736-13036

Vigne del Barolo Golf Resort & Spa

Scheduled to open in May, this 36-room retreat will have an 18-hole golf course, a rarity in the region, as well as a spa that uses fresh sea algae in many of its treatments. It's located in the heart of the Roero near Barolo. Room rates will start at €180 and include buffet breakfast. www.barologolfresort.com; ☎ 39-01737-76893

LOCAL WALKING RESOURCES

www.winetrekking.it
Trekking in Langa ☎ 39-01733-66734)

A different side of Goa

Upscale and untouched, a new breed of villas emerge for travelers seeking seclusion



Clockwise from left, Vagator Beach is located between Villa Aashyana Lakhapal and Elsewhere; the simple white churches in Old Goa, a 20-minute drive southeast of Candolim, serve as an interesting reminder that Goa was a Portuguese colony until as late as 1961; a local bird feeds; a hallway at villa Vivenda dos Palhaços.



BY JEMIMA SISSONS

AS THE SPEEDBOAT turns the corner on India's moss-green river Chapora and shoots past muddy water buffalo basking in the mid-day heat on the banks, Casa Colvale emerges majestically into sight. We could be forgiven for thinking that Doctor No or Odd Job are about to pop out of the chic cream and glass villa flanking the hill, and we have to remind ourselves that we aren't on a secret James Bond mission.

Englishman James Foster, the warm, convivial property manager, greets us with a fresh lime soda as the boat glides smoothly to the pier. "Watch out for the crocodiles," he chirps, only half-joking, as he helps us off the boat.

We have come to Goa seeking solitude and comfort. If we have gone looking for discreet luxury in India, it doesn't come better than this.

Casa Colvale was built by clothing magnate Sheila Dhody, who used to come to Goa with her children during the holidays to escape the oppressive heat of New Delhi. "It is a simple love story," Mrs. Dhody says. "When we were shown this place by the agent there were no footpaths and we had to hack our way through the thick undergrowth. Then, suddenly before my eyes, was the most incredible view I had ever seen in my life."

The property was originally intended for her sister-in-law, who, upon its completion in 2007, found it too secluded. Instead, Mrs. Dhody turned it into a boutique hotel. It had already been a hit with Mrs. Dhody's jet set

and Bollywood friends who came to stay, and they immediately started renting it for private holidays, and for film and fashion shoots (Bollywood hit "Kaminey" was shot there). "There is a fair amount of glamour here, and it is popular as a hideout," Mrs. Dhody says.

Divided into upper and lower villas, there are 11 beautifully thought out rooms. Each has their own private terrace with a daybed, offering stunning views of the verdant, snaking river and the vast jungle beyond. The walls are covered with colorful paintings by local artist Pradeep Naik, depicting abstract scenes of everyday Goan life; the furniture is sleek and modern. Bathrooms have cool limestone floors and huge walk-in showers.

Goa has brushed up its image and is reinventing itself as a luxurious destination.

Teak sun loungers surround its two swimming pools, into which swoop brightly colored kingfisher and Jungle Mynas birds, eager to catch bugs in the afternoon sun. The lower pool has a waterfall running into it from above, providing a constant watery lull; the upper infinity pool is more secluded, and has access to a massage room. With its sandalwood-scented candles and huge open windows this is the perfect spot for a sunset Shiatsu massage administered by the in-house masseur.

As the sun sets and the pashminas come out

along with the cacophonous crickets, the lower deck comes into its own. Here, from behind the curved gray and white bar resplendent with jars of birds of paradise flowers, the resident barman keeps us refreshed with the in-house specialty, vodka fresh lime soda. Meanwhile, chefs Raju and Brandon crank up the outdoor grill.

An array of delicacies is handed around by the white and beige-clad staff. We feast on tandoori paneer (Indian cheese), grilled snapper and huge salads. A continental breakfast is included in the room rate, and lunch and dinner cost extra.

Further dining options are available a car-ride away. A 20-minute cab drive from the hotel, at beachside restaurant La Plage, celebrity

sightings aren't uncommon. (At a table near us sat Mick Jagger's daughter, Jade, who owns a house down the road). Perched on simple, white wooden tables nestling in the sand, we sip Piña Coladas while devouring lobster salad and a zingy tuna ceviche, followed by goat cheese dripping with honey that is for the gods.

Back at the hotel, 20 or so polite staff are on hand to cater to every whim—be it a fresh towel, an afternoon snack of a club sandwich, or just help finding the backgammon set for the afternoon's entertainment. For more adventurous travelers, the staff can arrange a speedboat trip to the sea for a spot of barramundi fishing or dolphin watching, or a sunset tour around

the nearby backwaters. Guided riverside walks are also offered. Although there is no gym, private yoga lessons are available from a qualified yoga teacher, as are four types of massage.

Playing a quiet game of backgammon in a luxurious villa as you get your shoulders expertly massaged is the antithesis of the typical stereotype of Goa, long the haven of students and hippies who came in droves to the coast to take advantage of the relaxed attitudes—a hangover from its time as a Portuguese colony. The influx of cheap, package tourist holidays in some areas had brought problems that had given Goa a black eye.

Recently, Goa has brushed up its image and is reinventing itself as a luxurious destination. "Over the past few three or four years a lot of high-end accommodation has come up, and this has given a lot of boost to luxury tourism in Goa," says Joao Xavier Miranda of Goan travel company Cicerone Air Transport Services. "The image has now improved tremendously and we are still trying our best to do so even more."

Raj Sunani, assistant director of the government-owned India Tourist Office in London, adds that measures have been taken to improve safety. "In the last year the Goa government has tightened the law and order in the state, and police have been deployed all over Goa for the safety of the tourists."

Simon Hayward is one man who has put luxury on the map here with his boutique hotel Vivenda dos Palhaços, near the stunning Majorda beach. Half Kiwi half Brit, his family owned Haywards brewery in India, made famous for its gin



Left, enjoying the sunset in Goa; below, the lower deck at the Casa Colvale.



(C) Image Source (L); Casa Colvale (R)

during World War II. Although he was sent away to boarding school in England, Mr. Hayward would often return to spend the holidays in the hill station of Ooty, where his grandfather was a master of foxhounds.

In 2003, after quitting the rat race in Mumbai, where he was creative director for an advertising company, Mr. Hayward bought the villa, which he runs with his sister, Charlotte.

Remnants of his colonial past are very much on display in the villa. There's an old jackal paw on the wall, booty from his grandfather's hunt, and planter's chairs flank the swimming pool. Vivenda dos Palhaços is so discreet that there is no sign on the road; the villa is located at the end of a dusty lane, with a vintage white Ambassador car parked outside—the villa's "limo."

Although the Park Hyatt—one of Goa's glitziest hotels—is a mere 10 minutes away, we prefer the villa's intimate style, charm and eccentric touches, such as the Indian matrimonial ads covering the walls in one of the bathrooms.

"We have tried to make it feel like a private home here. Some parts of Goa have a reputation as 'Ghastly Goa,' but if you can get a bit off the beaten track, it is really quite special," Mr. Hayward says.

The seven modern rooms are each named after locations in India. Ours—Alipore—features a sleek slate-grey bathroom, a huge, comfortable bed and ancestral pictures on the wall with giant ceiling fans to keep us cool. Dinners, if you wish, are communal, and if gastronomy is your thing, the cook will be more than happy to give you a lesson in Goan cook-

ing. We devour a juicy flank steak with pepper sauce—a welcome treat after traveling around the rest of India, where the largely Hindu population doesn't eat beef (Goa is mostly Catholic). The evening is spent relaxing by the villa's colorful lorry back bar, sipping on powerful Haywards 5000 ale.

The following day, Mr. Hayward asks us if we want to try horse riding, go-karting or scuba diving nearby, but instead, we head by bicycle (a five-minute ride away) to Utorda beach. Here we find one of the best restaurants (well, shacks) in Goa, Zeebop by the Sea. It is famed for its fresh seafood, and we order wriggling mini lobster, a clear-eyed pomfret and a giant crab, which comes smothered in a buttery garlic sauce. Washed down with Kingfisher beer, the meal comes to a paltry 600 Indian rupees a head (about €9).

Next, we make a short drive up the coast to Candolim to see a different side of Goa. Set in acres of perfectly manicured lawns, sweet smelling bougainvillea and swaying coconut groves, Villa Aashyana Lakhnapal is one of the largest rental villas in Goa, sleeping 10 (or 22 if you include its smaller three adjoining cottages, which have access to the pool but not the gardens). There is a 25-meter infinity pool and private access to the beach outside, although it can get rather crowded and the sea isn't as pristine as in the far north or south of Goa.

While at Aashyana, we feast on local dishes such as delicately spiced pork Vindaloo and coconut-infused Goan prawn curry, before hitting the town. One of Goa's most famed restaurants

is Bomra's, a five-minute cab ride away. Here Bawmra Jap cooks up mouth-watering pan-Asian fusion delicacies from his native Burma, such as squid with spicy papaya salad and roasted black pomfret with black bean paste.

If total seclusion is your desire, then Elsewhere, on the north coast, is unparalleled. The project of Mumbai-based fashion photographer Denzil Sequeira, whose great grandfather bought the land in 1886, is so secret that the hotel won't give out its address until you have made a reservation. Access is via a 21-meter wooden footbridge across a creek.

A favorite destination of the Indian fashion pack, it is divided into exquisitely decked-out individual beach houses or tents, each with antique chairs on the veranda, rustic bathroom fittings rough-hewn out of local wood, and four-poster beds, with white muslin nets to keep the mosquitoes away. When the tide comes in, the creek on either side of the property becomes impassable to others, giving you your own private beach. Breakfast is included, and other meals are taken at a simple shack, where the day's catch, such as mackerel and giant prawns, are grilled. For nature lovers, Mr. Sequeira will impart his knowledge on early morning jungle treks through cardamom and cinnamon scented woods.

"This is a property with an identity," says Mr. Sequeira. "People just want to park themselves here, sometimes for a whole month, and cut themselves off completely from the outside world."

—Jemima Sissons is a writer based in London.

WHERE TO STAY

Unless a weekly rental, prices quoted are per night for a double room (two people) for high-season (roughly Jan. 6-May 31). Prices during peak season (Christmas and New Year) can cost twice as much, whereas prices during monsoon season (June 1 to Sept. 30) will be considerably lower.

Casa Colvale Rooms cost from €92 a night, including breakfast. If you want to rent the whole house you can do so by paying for every room. www.casacolvale.com; 91-99606-05416/91-83224-16737

Vivenda dos Palhaços Rooms from €80, including breakfast. The entire house can be rented from €5,116 a week. www.vivendagoa.com; 91-98817-20221

Villa Aashyana Lakhnapal €6,063 a week including breakfast (sleeps 10). Shorter rentals available. There are also smaller cottages that can be rented on the property. www.aashyanalakhnapal.com www.luxurygoavillas.com; U.K.: 44-20-3287-4827 India: 91-83222-74050

Elsewhere Minimum rental one week, but some flexibility depending on demand. There are four beach houses, sleeping two to six people. Beach house prices start at €900; Otter Creek tents from €494 a week. www.aseascape.com; for bookings email: gaze@aseascape.com; for last-minute bookings only: 91-93260-20701

WHERE TO EAT

Bomra's is a pan-Asian fusion restaurant run by Burmese chef Bawmra Jap, located in Candolim town. www.bomras.com; 91-98221-06236

La Plage serves up French-inspired food and barbecue specialities. Located on Asvem beach. 91-98221-21712

Zeebop by the Sea is a simple open-air restaurant serving the freshest seafood located on Utorda beach. www.zeebopbythesea.com; 91-83227-55333

Packing the right look

From slick sunglasses to the perfect hat, here are a few items you won't want to forget

Compiled by Paul Sonme

Brent Black Panama Hats (Men and Women) ▶

Based in Hawaii, the Panama Hat Company of the Pacific makes some of the world's most intricate hand-woven panama hats—an obligatory item for any traveler setting off to warmer climes. €338-€3,556; www.brentblack.com



Tom Ford Sunglasses ▲

When the discerning traveler takes to the pool, his or her eyes should be protected by none other than former Gucci designer Tom Ford. Mr. Ford's sunglasses, a favorite of the celebrity set, unite modern style and retro simplicity. €299; www.tomford.com



Nikon D700 Digital SLR ▲

To capture the moments of a holiday, the traveler needs the perfect camera. Though the Nikon D700 is a bit heavy, its 12.1-megapixel capability will bring your memories home in hi-def. €1,706; www.nikon.co.uk



iPad ▶

Apple tends to set the standard in portable chic—and the forthcoming iPad is no exception. Surf the web in your bed; read books by the pool; watch movies on the beach. You can't go wrong. €355; www.apple.com



Eres Red Swimsuit ▶

Since the bikini hit French beaches in 1947, it has been a staple of the jet set. Stand out from the crowd in this red hot number from French label Eres. Catalina €161, Amalia €149; www.eresparis.com



Bose QuietComfort 3 Acoustic Noise Cancelling Headphones ▲

Though some complain that these headphones need power to operate, they are still the best bet for travelers who want to be one with the music—and look great too. €249; www.bose.co.uk



Aspinal of London Women's Classic Vanity Case ▶

It looks like it was made in the early 20th century, but this rectangular crocodile-patterned traveling case is a modern gem, with gold or silver rivets and a box-full of old-world charm. €862; www.aspinaloflondon.com



Burberry Women's Trench Coat ▲

Though travelers intend to sip pina colodas, many get caught in the rain. Burberry can arm the sophisticated woman with a trench coat that can be dressed up or down—for a night at the opera or a Jimmy Buffet gig. €833; www.burberry.com



Aspinal of London Portofino Rolling Cabin Bag

Aspinal of London is known for its leather goods, and this rolling carry-on bag, which combines calf-skin leather with calf-hide leather, is a mix of understated elegance and sophisticated style. €891; www.aspinaloflondon.com

Henk Travelfriend Suitcase ▶

It may be the most expensive travel bag in the world, but the linear Henk suitcase is a feat of engineering and style. Introduced by Dutch businessman Henk van de Meene after 10 years of experimentation, the suitcase is pure James Bond. From €21,000

Henk Attache Case ▶

Those uncertain about splurging for the Henk suitcase can settle for the Dutch company's sleek attaché case. From €3,000; www.henk.com





Eirin Kunkel for The Wall Street Journal

A star is sparkling in Oakland

BY RAYMOND SOKOLOV

Oakland, Calif.
IN A MOVE that rivaled the headlong speed of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee's choice of President Barack Obama, the Michelin Guide folks in Paris awarded a star to Commis in their 2010 San Francisco guide less than four months after the storefront bistro opened in June.

Food-alert friends had been sending me even earlier warnings that something exciting was afoot in a yeasty block in this famously mocked East Bay city across the water from overpraised, aggressively self-satisfied San Francisco. Gertrude Stein fled Oakland for Paris in the 1890s, later sneering that there was "no there there." Undeterred, Michelin's American inspectors found plenty of "there" at Commis, the palate-child of James Syhabout, a Thai-Chinese prodigy who gave his little place a name that means apprentice in French restaurant jargon (www.commisrestaurant.com). This was commendably modest on his part, since Mr. Syhabout's qualifications for our attention, apart from the red-guide puff, were stints at several of the world's premiere eateries and journeyman chef jobs at two leading Bay Area addresses.

Commis seats a mere 31 in an awkwardly arranged dining area split at the center by a counter and open kitchen. We were seated in front in a window alcove, which my wife found claustrophobic, until she walked through the larger, oppressively convivial dining area in back. Mr. Syhabout invents a new fixed-price, \$59 (€42) three-course menu every day, Wednesday through Sunday, dinner only. Competition for reservations is intense. We were glad for a table at 6 p.m. And the staff seemed glad to see us. They share the excitement of people working at the cutting edge, acting out new ideas under a talented leader.

So what is the transcontinental buzz about?

At first glance, you'd think this was just another frantically kaleidoscopic set of chef's finger paintings with locavore ingredients. The first sign you are quite wrong is the "amuse" (as annoying an anglicization of amuse-bouche as any franglais grotesque such as "footing" for a jog in the park), a small fizzy glass of herbal soda extracted from an unusual pink variety of the Japanese shiso plant. Palate-cleansing, yes, but palate-galvanizing would a better description of the experience.

Don't imagine, however, that the rest of the meal was a series of tongue-tingling melodramas. Commis is an austere place where a plain-



Eirin Kunkel for The Wall Street Journal

Top, Commis diners watch as the chef prepares the prix fixe dinner. Above, braised cardoon, oyster emulsion, local Dungeness crab and dill weed.

looking "chowder" of charred kale, gigante beans and red-pepper paste adds up to something quietly stunning, and not just a collection of hitherto never-combined ingredients. In most of today's clever, original restaurants, there's always a reference to historically established dishes; the new dish is a kind of extension of tradition. At Commis, we are in the hands of a self-contained imagination.

Take the squid and puntarelle salad. Yes, the chef has combined previously unassociated seafood and a chicory-like green traditionally served in Italy with anchovies or other strong-flavored fish capable of matching puntarelle's bitter crunch. But, chopped fine, it offers a magical contrast of texture with the velvety squid sections and blends into the powerful anise-and-sorrel-accented lemon vinaigrette. This dish is not nuova cucina; it is just plain new and enlarges the world's list of successful recipes.

Similar counterpoints of texture made me even happier. I ordered the slow-roasted pork loin and belly paired with chewy wheat berries and al dente sunchokes. And I was delighted to put my fork into the so-called chicken terrine, which looks like a slab of chicken breast but is in fact a layered affair that will change your idea of white meat. Yes, it tastes like chicken, but so does alligator tail. This "terrine" is a physical deconstruction of chicken that transforms the bird's natural texture into something with—how to put it—a fine structure created by the cook. Then he adds slippery ceps, radishes

and creamed escarole.

Michelin's rush to judgment with Commis paid off, but some of its other choices had closed before the announcements for the 2010 guide were made in October. We took the opportunity of a late November visit to try two other newly starred restaurants that did survive, at least through that month.

Luce is a luxurious room in the mausoleal hulk of the Intercontinental Hotel, featuring the new-American culinary handiwork of Dominique Crenn (www.lucewinerestaurant.com). Although there was almost no one else eating there when we did, service was insultingly inattentive and the food was a disconcerting mix of successful renditions of pasta and risotto, a bland treatment of chicken and a Vietnamese pork belly sandwich we suspect is surpassed in interest at dozens of ethnic lunch counters around town. Desserts included four fairly similar puddings, one of them saponified with jasmine.

A surer hand is running Quince, which just moved to a glam new location and has generally taken flight (www.quincerestaurant.com). It's a fine example of a new kind of Italian restaurant in which local ingredients and a light hand update and respectfully personalize traditional culinary ideas.

So we found Dungeness crab, the signature local shellfish, at the start of its season and porcini mushrooms prepared three ways, each as delicious as the next. The gnocchi were as seductively smooth as the porcini. Meats were all impeccably prepared. A flatiron steak was charred outside and red but not raw straight through. Desserts were of the baroque kind, dabs and balls edible antennae of intricate artistry.

So we thank Michelin for leading us, at last, to a restaurant we really liked in the city of San Francisco proper. But we still prefer the Bay Area's periphery, even its humbler venues. The unstarred and informal Parkside Cafe adjoining Stinson Beach up the coast was also greeting the season with Dungeness crab, combined with corn in quesadillas, delectable and worth a star (www.parksidecafe.com). One morning, we forgot gifted chefs and surrendered ourselves to a dozen oysters fresh from their beds at the Drakes Bay farm on Point Reyes. This is an organic facility operating on leased National Park land. For the lucky person eating its bivalves at a table outside while the Pacific fog rolls in, Drakes is a national treasure, and we hope it extricates itself from a bureaucratic and legal morass that threatens its survival, along with its oysters.

What's in a name?

THE NEWS THAT an Australian tribunal has blocked a French winemaker's attempt to register a name that gives the impression its wine was from New Zealand would have raised a few chortles to anyone who has fallen foul of Europe's system of geographical indications. As readers of this column will no

Wine

WILL LYONS

doubt know, France pioneered the system of Appellation d'origine contrôlée (AOC) that protects food and drink by geographic indicators. Anyone found naming their sparkling wine outside of Champagne should expect a letter from the legal authorities politely, but firmly, asking them to remove the protected name. So it came as some surprise when a Loire-based winemaker, Lacheteau, labeled its Sauvignon Blanc "Kiwi Cuvee" in order, one presumes, to promote sales.

Even more surprising is the fact that the wine is sold under the Kiwi Cuvee label across continental Europe and in some supermarkets in the U.K. It was only when the French winemaker attempted to register the name in Australia that the New Zealand Winegrowers association successfully opposed it, arguing that the description was likely to lead customers to believe the wine came from New Zealand.

Amid all the arguments and counter arguments over trademarks and protectionism, it's worth taking stock and seeing just how far, in little over 30 years, New Zealand wine has come. If anyone had raised the very idea that wine, let alone world-class Sauvignon Blanc, could be grown in New Zealand in 1973, they would have been well and truly laughed out of the cellar.

It was in the late '70s that a handful of winemakers began exploring the possibility of growing Sauvignon Blanc in New Zealand. At the time their benchmark was the vineyards planted within the villages of Pouilly-Fume and Sancerre in France's Loire Valley. There the Sauvignon Blanc is searingly dry, taking on a full-bodied, rich, mineral character from the stonier, limestone heavy soil.

What the New Zealand winemak-

ers found, especially in the vineyards of Marlborough near the top end of the South Island, was that the cool sea breezes and stable climate ripened the grapes to near-perfect levels. The result was an explosion of flavors such as green peppers, lychees, apricots and lime all underpinned by an intense waft of gooseberry. Wine critics had never tasted anything like it and New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc went on to win a slew of awards. Driving the success was a Marlborough winery founded by winemaker David Hohnen. Mr. Hohnen had been busy making a name for himself in Western Australia with Cape Mentelle. It wasn't until he tasted one of the first vintages of New Zealand-produced Sauvignon that he saw the enormous potential. After scouring the north island he found his plot on Rapaura in the Wairau Valley and named his new winery Cloudy Bay.

Such was his success that Cloudy Bay and New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc are now brands in their own right, in many ways replacing Chardonnay as the wine consumers' favorite. Babich, Dashwood, Felton Road, Jackson Estate, Hunter's, Palliser Estate, Trinity Hill and Staete Landt are all estates to look out for.

But the more I taste of New Zealand wines the more I firmly believe that the country has so much more to offer than just Sauvignon. One of my favorite regions is Martinborough, which sits on the southern end of the North Island. The first vineyards were planted in 1979 and it now boasts a trio of exceptional wineries in Ata Rangī, Dry River and Palliser. It's famous for its Chardonnay, Riesling and Pinot Noir.

Neil McCallum at Dry River makes wines in a distinctly Old-World style—he attempts to reflect the character of where the wines are made. I have tasted his wines on many occasions and they possess restraint, retain pure fruit and offer complexity. They are as far removed from the branded Sauvignons coming out of Marlborough as you can get. In that sense they reflect the Pinot Noir made in the ribbon of villages that constitute the Côte de Nuits. I'm not sure the vignerons of Burgundy will be labeling their wines Martinborough blend just yet, but you never know.

DRINKING NOW

Pinot Noir Dry River

Martinborough, New Zealand

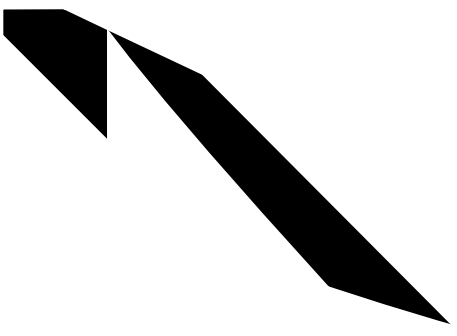
Vintage: 2006

Price: about £41.50 or €48

Alcohol content: 13%

Hugely concentrated, this is very Burgundian in character. The nose is fantastically complex with notes of baked cherries, ripe sloes and a slightly perfumed twang. The palate is long with vegetal and mushroom notes and big, ripe tannins.







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CROTON-ON-HUDSON, NY



New construction in an executive subdivision. Privately set on 2.78 beautiful acres with upscale amenities, a gourmet kitchen and a master bedroom suite with gas fireplace. MLS# 2933444. **\$1,395,000.** Phyllis Weydig.

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914.238.2090 | jbfsir.com

MAMARONECK, NY



Prestigious Orienta Point waterfront on 1+ acre with private pool, beach, pier and dock. This 5,700± sf contemporary has 5 BR and 6 baths. 30 minutes to NYC. MLS: 2912988. **\$4,900,000.** Cary Sleeper & Christy Murphy.

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NEW YORK, NY



House in the sky. Elegant, classic 5 BR triplex penthouse, E. 70's/Park Ave. One-of-a-kind pre-war co-op with 4 fireplaces and lovely architectural details. WEB: 0015765. **\$22,000,000.** Bunny Goodwin.

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NEW YORK, NY



162 East 63rd Street. Exceptional 5-story home with south facing private planted garden. 5 BR, 5.5 baths, 5 fireplaces, terraces. Impeccably renovated. WEB: 0016674. **\$8,250,000.** Olga Neulist.

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212.606.7707 | sothebyshomes.com/nyc

NEW YORK, NY



1 West 67th Street. The Hotel Des Artistes. Opulent 12-room duplex with dramatic 18'+ ceiling great room, 2,500 volume library, wine cave. WEB: 0016682. **\$7,900,000.** Nikki Field & Pat Wheatley.

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NEW YORK, NY



Sprawling space and high ceilings define this loft at a premier full-service condo in Chelsea. Bright, open kitchen with top-of-the-line appliances. Views from the roof deck. WEB: WJ0135029. **\$1,275,000.** Tom Cooper.

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212.431.2474 | sothebyshomes.com/nyc

NEW YORK, NY



Greenwich Village. Spacious 1 BR w/large dining area in this full-service condop, Georgetown Plaza. Hdwd flrs, ample storage space, and 9' ceilings. Roof deck and pool. WEB: WJ0134993. Price upon request. Yvonne DeNigris.

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PURCHASE, NY



An NBA regulation basketball court is just one of the special features within this country estate situated on 3 acres overlooking the 3rd and 7th holes on the Country Club of Purchase. **\$8,995,000.** WEB: 2711790. Pat Hirsch.

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914.967.4600 | jbfsir.com

SAGAPONACK, NY



Views of reserves & ocean. 5 BR home with pool on 1.5± acres & adjoining renovated 19th century barn residence w/3 BR plus 3 add'l summer BR & pool on 1.4± acres. WEB: CP0035373. **\$14,250,000.** Beate Moore.

Sotheby's International Realty Bridgehampton Brokerage
631.537.6000 x7328 | sothebyshomes.com

SAG HARBOR, NY



3 story residence, 2 BR on the second floor, and transformed third-floor entertainment room. Backyard garden, 3rd floor terrace with views over Sag Harbor's roof tops. WEB: 0054647. **\$3,495,000.** Deborah Srb.

Sotheby's International Realty Southampton Brokerage
631.283.0600 x26 | sothebyshomes.com

SCARSDALE, NY



Prestigious estate area in Scarsdale with gated entry to 4+ exquisite park-like acres with pool, pool house, tennis. Luxurious 12,000 sf with 20 rooms, 8 BR, 4 fireplaces, exercise, & spa. **\$14,250,000.** Caroline Freidfertig.

Julia B. Fee Sotheby's International Realty
914.725.3305 | jbfsir.com

SOUTHAMPTON, NY



Water Mill South. Waterfront pool. 1st floor master suite & elevator. 3 en-suite guest BR. Sunken, all-weather tennis ct & cabana. 3-car gar, dock, & 1 mile to ocean beaches. WEB: 0054665. **\$9,950,000.** Harald Grant.

Sotheby's International Realty Southampton Brokerage
631.283.0600 x13 | sothebyshomes.com

SOUTHAMPTON, NY



7,000 sf, 6 ensuite BR, covered porch, heated pool, pool house, spa and tennis court. 3-car garage, full gym, sauna, and wine cellar. WEB: 0053941. **\$8,900,000.** Pat Petrillo.

Sotheby's International Realty Southampton Brokerage
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TUXEDO PARK, NY



This beautiful 6500 sf country estate is located on 6.35 private mountaintop acres directly overlooking pristine Tuxedo Lake. Features acres of century old stone walls & ruins, pathways, & specimen trees. Seven fireplaces, intricate architectural details, breathtaking views. **\$4,950,000.** Cindy Booth.

Towne & Country Properties Sotheby's International Realty
845.351.4503 | townecountryinc.com

AUSTIN, TX



Nestled in the Texas Hill Country close to "The Live Music Capital of the World." 6 BR, 6 bath, 8,538 sf residence includes private guest suite. 1.86 acre lot features indoor/outdoor entertaining areas & 5 car garage. Exemplary schools. **\$3,200,000.** Janet Burgess.

Capital City Sotheby's International Realty
512.328.0058 | 9001MarlyCove.com

ARLINGTON, VA



Views of the Potomac from this gorgeous end unit 5,700 sf town home, built in 2005. 5 levels with high ceils, hdwd/limestone floors & gourmet kitchen. Huge rooftop terrace, great for entertaining. MLS: AR7129128. **\$2,600,000.** Deborah Shapiro.

TTR Sotheby's International Realty
703.407.1600 | ttrsir.com

MCLEAN, VA



Stately colonial in prestigious Langley Forest only mins to Washington DC. Gated entry, 5 BR, 5 baths, + nanny/in-law suite, 3 car garage, gracious outdoor entertaining space. **\$2,275,000.** Stephanie White. stephanie.white@sothebysrealty.com

TTR Sotheby's International Realty
703.489.5045 | ttrsir.com

DORSET, VT



Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, c.1820 country estate built from marble quarried on-site with gardens, stonework, tea house, formal pool with fountain, & outbuildings. 14 acres, 8 BR & 6.5 baths. **\$2,250,000.**

Vermont Country Properties Sotheby's International Realty
802.362.5040 | vermontcountryproperties.com

The fine art of custom-fitting

Why taking the measure of your clubs is worth the effort

JUST AS THERE are people who still don't believe men walked on the moon (the Apollo "landings" supposedly took place on sound stages), so there are people, I'm told, who still don't believe that getting fit for golf clubs is worth the effort. They visit a retail store, perhaps inspired by a television ad, and plop down \$300 to \$1,200 for a set of irons, untested. "If these are good enough for Sergio Garcia, they're good enough for me," they tell them-

Golf

JOHN PAUL NEWPORT

selves. Well, the clubs are good enough, but the main reason they work so well for Mr. Garcia is that they fit him like a second skin.

I have a strong anti-complexity bias when it comes to golf. The game is meant to be fun, not a source of stress, which clubfitting—daunting and incomprehensible for some people—clearly can be. I also hate to nag. But if you're going to buy clubs anyway (which need not be as often as the "new and improved" storylines of most golf-equipment marketing suggests), you really ought to be properly fit. The process is not onerous, and it benefits higher handicappers as much as low handicappers. Most importantly, it makes playing golf less frustrating because well-fit clubs promote a more efficient swing. Poorly fit clubs promote bad shots. It's possible to compensate and hit the ball straighter with bad sticks, but usually only by

making a swing that is less efficient and overly complicated, and thus less powerful and harder to repeat.

There are, of course, degrees of poorly-fit clubs. The standard clubs in pro shops and retail stores are the manufacturers' time-proven calculation of clubs that work the best for the largest number of people. But, to put things in fashion terms, if those clubs fit you and your swing perfectly without adjustments, its only because you're a perfect clothing size.

Even the most rudimentarily-trained sales clerk at a sporting-goods store will direct golfers to models with generally appropriate characteristics, such as stiffer shafts for fast-swingers and whippier shafts for slower swingers. They will also nudge higher handicap players toward irons with bigger, more forgiving clubheads and drivers that get the ball airborne easily. In slightly more advanced sessions, the fitter will watch customers hit balls, either outdoors at a range or indoors in a hitting bay, and custom order clubs with just the right length, grip size, shaft flexibility and angle between the clubhead and the shaft. The cost of such basic fittings are usually deducted from the price of the clubs purchased.

"Any fitting is better than no fitting," John Screen, the director of sales for Titleist, said Wednesday at the PGA Merchandise Show in Florida. Titleist, like all the major club-makers, provides a fitting cart, with sample heads and shafts, to golf pros who sell its clubs and trains them in how the system works. "Getting fit outdoors is always better

than getting fit indoors," Mr. Screen said. Using only the naked eye to observe ball flight patterns, fitters with extensive experience can come close to finding the best clubs for a player. "But fine-tuning the fit with a launch monitor can still sometimes get you an additional five to 10 yards in distance with the driver," he said.

Electronic launch monitors collect data about spin, ball speed and trajectory and feed them into a computer for processing. For maximum distance with modern balls, drives should climb quickly at between 12 degrees and 15 degrees, spin at less than 3,000 revolutions per second, flatten out at 125 yards to 150 yards from the tee and continue on a piercing, line-drive trajectory until they run out of steam. The ideal numbers vary depending on a player's clubhead speed and other factors, but launch monitors can help dial in the best club for any swing.

Over the last few years, I've been fit for clubs many times in several circumstances, and had cobbled together a set that I felt fit pretty well. My iron specifications came from a fitting at a super high-tech Taylor-Made facility. My driver recommendation, the third iteration after an initial launch monitor fitting, came from an experienced fitter using his naked eye at a "demo" day at a local range. My putter was the result of constant personal tinkering. But in early December I put my arsenal to the ultimate test in a three and a half hour, \$795 "Game Fit" session at the Hot Stix Golf outdoor facility in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Hot Stix offers "agnostic" fittings, meaning it has independently robot analyzed clubs, shafts and balls from all the major manufacturers and recommends only those products it feels best suit an individual player's needs—including, when indicated, that a player stick with what he or she already has. After a fitting, the company will assemble and sell any of the clubs it recommends, but that's a separate deal. Fittings include a detailed printout of the results, and customers are free to buy the clubs anywhere they want.

My fitter, Chris Ferguson, played college golf at Arizona State and briefly on the Canadian Tour (where his roommate was subsequent PGA Tour winner Pat Perez). He has been in the club business for a dozen years, and knows the technology inside and out. He watched me hit balls on a grass range, to get a sense of my tendencies; put me through a short game circuit on a practice green and in bunkers; machine tested my current clubs, including checking the frequency response of every shaft; and had me try about a dozen new irons and woods while monitoring the results on a Trackman radar monitor.

The upshot? My driver and three wood were near perfect and he made no alternative recommendations. My two hybrids were acceptable but we found an Adams Golf hybrid model with an expensive Japanese shaft that I liked better and would like to put into my bag some day. My irons were also good, but he discovered a significant distance gap between my seven iron and six iron, which he corrected by tweaking the loft of my seven iron. The all-



Kyle T. Webster

important loft on my putter was just right for my stroke but the shaft needed to be an inch and a half longer to improve my setup posture and help me see the line better. (This, he said, I could accomplish with an inexpensive extension beneath the grip.)

The big change was in my wedges. First, the lofts and lies of my current wedges were off, possibly from getting banged around over the two years I've played them. Second, he recommended I take the

seldom-used four iron out of my bag and replace it with a third sand wedge, to increase the distance accuracy of my approach shots from inside 120 yards.

I offer these details not because they are relevant to anyone else's particular fitting needs, but to illustrate the types of issues a good fitting can address. "One of the main benefits we provide is peace of mind," Mr. Ferguson told me afterward. Because golf above all is a game of confidence.



Hot Stix

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Top: Warner Bros.; middle: Bottom: © CBS FILMS INC.

Touching raw emotions

MEL GIBSON IS a cop trying to avenge his beloved daughter's violent death in "Edge of Darkness," an action thriller based on a 1985 miniseries produced by the BBC. In fairness, the film is what its Hollywood producers meant it to be, a serviceable star vehicle for Mr. Gibson,

Film

JOE MORGENSTERN

who hasn't had a starring role since the 2002 "Signs," and an efficient machine for emotional arousal; you can't watch the father's desperate quest without sharing some measure of his grief. For those who've seen the miniseries, however, being completely fair to this relentless, by-the-numbers conflation is probably impossible: "Edge of Darkness" was one of the most enthralling, intricate and genuinely thrilling productions in the history of the small screen. At the same time, the big-screen version—directed by Martin Campbell, who did the original—offers an example of why the studio's numbers may well add up, and why so many of today's Hollywood productions leave us cool if not downright cold.

The story remains roughly the same, though the setting is now Boston and its environs, rather than London and the English countryside. Thomas Craven, a veteran homicide detective and a widower living alone, welcomes Emma, his only child, home for a brief vacation. When she's shot to death in his presence outside his house—I'm not revealing anything that isn't highlighted in the trailer—he first assumes that the lone gunman meant to kill him, then finds reason to think otherwise.

As before, Craven carries on extensive conversations with Emma after her death. In the original, those visions of her as a child and a young woman were tender and affecting; here they're cloying and manipulative. As before, Craven's investigations lead him to discover a labyrinth of political intrigue, shadowy alliances and a sinister, planet-threatening plot. Yet specifics have been smudged in the interest of simplicity. In the

original, which took place during the turbulent tenure of Margaret Thatcher, Emma was part of a sizable movement protesting the spread of nuclear power. In the film, she's a young physicist and a whistle-blower at a giant corporation that's ostensibly working on fusion power, yet the update feels perfunctory and unconvincing. (Are we really supposed to believe, as someone on TV says, that a sizable movement is trying to ban all military research in Massachusetts?)

Secondary characters have either been turned into caricatures (a lizardly U.S. senator, an oily CEO) or trivialized into genre stereotypes. Darius Jedburgh, the wondrously flamboyant CIA operative played in 1985 by Joe Don Baker (a proud Texan, Jedburgh wore a Stetson hat and drove a white Rolls Royce), has become a self-enchanted British whisperer played monotonously by Ray Winstone. It took time to understand which side the first Jedburgh was on, but the miniseries had the luxury of five hours in which to sort everything out, and the rationale for his shifting loyalties proved to be a chilling lesson in the vagaries of foreign policy. The loyalties of the current Jedburgh are as bewildering as the man himself is banal. You're more than willing to believe him when he tells Craven, with a wink and a nod, that he's "been making things unintelligible for 30 years."

Still, secondary characters don't matter much to industrial enterprises like this new "Edge of Darkness." They're only there for the hero to push against in what amounts to monodrama—one man against the world. And this anguished cop does push—remorselessly and violently, in the spirit of a classic Clint Eastwood vigilante. (An encounter with Emma's bleak boyfriend is the definition of gratuitous violence.)

The new Craven, as written by William Monahan and Andrew Bovell, is nowhere near as smart as the old one written by the late Troy Kennedy Martin. Here again, though, a good mind doesn't matter as much as single-mindedness, since the monodrama's governing principle is monomania. Mr. Gibson's performance is notable for its intensity, but the dazzling en-

ergy he once brought to such hits as "Lethal Weapon"—or even to "Conspiracy Theory," an excellent flop—has turned toxic, and his somber scourge is no fun at all. (Though I did enjoy Craven telling the despicable senator, "You better decide whether you're hangin' on the cross or bangin' in the nails.")

In further fairness, there's no way that this film could have risen to the level of its source material. For one thing, a lot's got to give when five hours are telescoped into two. For another, every medium has its own imperatives. Unlike Craven, who refuses to play by the rules of society, the filmmakers have subscribed to the increasingly rigid rules of an expensive studio feature in a global market: Don't compromise conflict with nuance; don't risk losing the audience's attention for a single moment; don't risk alienating the audience with substance that may offend, don't dwell on substance of any kind at the expense of raw emotions. Craven's emotions were grief and rage. Mine were regret and dismay.

'Extraordinary Measures'

"Extraordinary Measures" requires extraordinary tolerance for bathos, bombast and plain old unpleasantness. It's a fictionalized—and sadly trivialized—adaptation of a nonfiction book, "The Cure," which was written by my Wall Street Journal colleague Geeta Anand. The essence of the story was indicated by the book's subtitle: "How a Father Raised \$100 million—And Bucked the Medical Establishment—In a Quest to Save His Children." The father, John Crowley (Brendan Fraser), seeks out a brilliant but eccentric research biologist—in the movie he's called Dr. Robert Stonehill, and played by Harrison Ford—to help find a cure for his young daughter and one of his sons, both of whom are afflicted by a rare and inevitably fatal disorder called Pompe disease. (Another son is free of the genetic defect.) Eventually the two men join forces and produce an effective drug, but not before being frustrated at every turn by the forces of Big Pharma and the demands of medical protocols.

If there was ever a way to dra-



Top, Ray Winstone as Darius Jedburgh and Mel Gibson as Thomas Craven in 'Edge of Darkness.' Above, Harrison Ford as Dr. Robert Stonehill and Brendan Fraser as John Crowley in 'Extraordinary Measures.'

matize the complexities of the real-life events, the filmmakers didn't find it. Robert Nelson Jacobs's script wallows in sentiment, wanders from clichés to contrived crises (a power failure, a couple of car chases) to exceedingly nasty confrontations. The cast's principal poison pill is Mr. Ford—if yelling were acting he'd walk away with an Oscar—but Jared Harris is no slouch in the department of arch nastiness; he plays a doctor and pharmaceutical executive who becomes Stonehill's nemesis. Mr. Fraser is often stuck with looking bereft, while the usually endearing Keri Russell gets pitifully little to do as Crowley's wife and the anguished mother of their gravely ill but still grating kids. The director was Tom Vaughan, who, like everyone else connected with this ponderous botch, has done much, much better in the past.

'The Book of Eli'

Religious overtones slowly grow into the dominant tone of "The Book of Eli," a bizarre and sententious pastiche—part Samurai legend, part postapocalyptic western with a surprise ending—starring Denzel Washington as a wanderer heading westward with a Bible in his dusty backpack. It's not just any Bible, but the last one on earth; and Eli isn't just any wanderer, but a master swordsman/archer/gunslinger who'll do anything that's required to protect his book. The story requires a greater leap of faith than I was willing or able

to muster, since Eli is also a saintly pilgrim on a God-given mission to save a ruined world.

Worse movies than this one have been taken seriously, and "The Book of Eli," which is being marketed heavily though not exclusively to Christian audiences, has the virtue of audacity; it's "The Road" with a message of hope. The directors were the Hughes brothers, Allen and Albert (the twins' last film, shot almost a decade ago, was the Jack the Ripper thriller "From Hell"), working from a script by Gary Whitta, and the elaborate production was given a distinctive sepia look by the cinematographer Don Burgess. Mr. Washington manages to sustain a heroic aura in the face of some serious silliness. Gary Oldman is scruffily impressive—and, praise be, occasionally funny—as Carnegie, an outlaw turned local despot who's determined to separate Eli from his book because, in a perverse way, he recognizes the Bible's power: "It's a weapon," Carnegie says, "aimed right at the weak and the desperate."

But the movie is aimed at two targets moving in different directions—people of faith and fans of violence. While the religious content makes itself felt, sometimes strongly, the heavy action quotient—the story of Eli the slasher—tears feelings to tatters. Jennifer Beals is Carnegie's blind wife, Claudia, and Mila Kunis is Solara, his sexy stepdaughter. In the midst of a veritable valley of death, Solara looks and sounds like a Valley Girl.

❖ Top Picks

Effective Pinter play revival in London



Jonathan Pryce (left) as Davies and Peter McDonald as Aston in 'The Caretaker.'

LONDON: There's Pinter-mania in England, as the Nobel Prize-winning playwright's widow has just published her controversial memoir of their marriage, and Trafalgar Studios has revived his first successful play, "The Caretaker" (1960). The enigmatic plot of this three-hander gives each of the actors an opportunity to shine, and in director Christopher Morahan's production, each of them seizes it. As Aston, the inadequate, psychologically damaged young man who invites a tramp to share his claustrophobically cluttered digs, but throws him out after a few days, Peter McDonald triumphs, making his long monologue as moving as it is scary. Sam Spruell plays his snake-hipped brother, Mick, flashing his leather jacket and bared-teeth smiles.

As Davies, the play's mystifying center, the virtuoso actor Jonathan Pryce surpasses himself—he makes the old vagabond's personal hygiene void almost visible. You sense the holes in his socks even before he reveals them. Mr. Pryce takes the hint in Harold Pinter's text and plays his character as deeply Welsh; though you can't help but feel that the underlying mystery of the drama is this homeless hobo's personal identity, as Mick points out, all the aliases are Welsh. Pinter, a connoisseur of casual conversation, often noted down sentences and

turned them into dialogue, as evident in the construction of "The Caretaker." The art is in transforming these into the stuff of both tragedy and comedy.

London is also Chekhov obsessed: Jan. 29 is the Russian playwright's 150th birthday. Lyric Hammersmith artistic director Sean Holmes kicks off the celebration, joining with the drama troupe "Filter" to produce Anton Chekhov's most miserable play, "Three Sisters."

As soon as I saw the stage, with the military characters in proper period uniform but the women in Soviet-era dress, and the stage managers visible stage-left, I knew we were in trouble. The actors disfigure Christopher Hampton's brilliant script—several of them including the Baron Tuzenbach (Jonathan Broadbent) actually use the illiterate phrase "I/they was/were sat there," and he's not alone in mangling the English language. The accents adopted by the characters—Irina's Irish twang, for example—are inexplicable and muddle the social class differences. Still, there are some fine, role-rethinking performances by Romola Garai, John Lightbody and Gemma Saunders.

—Paul Levy

Caretaker until April 17
www.trafalgar-studios.co.uk
Three Sisters until Feb. 20
www.lyric.co.uk



CHRISTIE'S IMAGES LTD. 2010

'Marilyn' (2009)
by Joana Vasconcelos;
estimate: £100,000 to £150,000.

Auctioning steel stilettos

LONDON'S FEBRUARY contemporary-art sales will cover a wide spectrum of paintings, sculpture, mixed media and photo art from the 1950s to the present day.

Lucien Freud's "Self-Portrait with a Black Eye" (circa 1978), featuring the British

Collecting MARGARET STUDER

painter with an impressive shiner, will be one of the highlights during the sales from Feb. 10-13. At Sotheby's on Feb. 10, the painting is estimated at £3-£4 million.

The million-pound punch was delivered by an angry taxi driver. Mr. Freud can't remember the exact reason for the altercation, but admits to having a short and combative temper at the time, says Sotheby's contemporary-art specialist Oliver Barker. The swollen eye inspired what Sotheby's describes in its catalog as a painting with "extraordinary depths of self-analysis" executed with "the meticulous exactitude of a surgical dissection."

Born in 1922, Mr. Freud has produced only a handful of paintings each year in his career as he "tirelessly" reworks paintings to achieve the result he wants, says Cheyenne Westphal, Sotheby's chairman of contemporary art Europe. Self-portraits are particularly rare at auction.

Despite a 15-month correction to downsize volume of works and their estimates in the contemporary-art sector, Mr. Barker says many artists are holding their own. Among them is British artist Peter Doig (born 1959), who emerged in the boom years. At Christie's on Feb. 11 his "Concrete Cabin West Side" (1993), an urban edifice overshadowed by encroaching trees, is estimated at £2 million-£3 million.

An exciting new work at Christie's is Portuguese artist Joana Vasconcelos' "Marilyn" (2009) estimated at £100,000-£150,000, which features two monumental stiletto shoes sculpted from stainless steel pans and lids.

An historic piece at Sotheby's will be German photo artist Andreas Gursky's "For Madonna." The panoramic work shows Madonna in a dress representing the American flag at the Staples Center in Los Angeles on Sept. 15, 2001—a concert that was postponed following the Sept. 11 attacks (estimate: £900,000-£1.3 million).

French soprano brings 'La Sonnambula' home

PARIS: Rumors swirled for 48 hours before the opening night of Vincenzo Bellini's "La Sonnambula" that French soprano Natalie Dessay was ailing and would be replaced by an understudy. That possibility spelled disaster for first-night fans, especially because this production at the Opéra Bastille marks the first time Ms. Dessay, renowned worldwide for the leading role of Amina, has sung it on her home turf in Paris. But, after a brief announcement that she wasn't at her best, both star and show went on as scheduled, proving—from her first graceful aria to her triumphant kitsch finale as a diva draped in crimson velvet and diamonds—that even a little under par La Dessay is still sensational.

First performed in 1831, Bellini's "melodrama" is in fact a semi-comic bit of fluff whose featherweight plot is an excuse to showcase elegant romantic music and some impressive bel canto fireworks. Set in a pastoral Swiss village, orphan Amina is about to

marry her true love Elvino—much to the fury of jealous innkeeper Lisa—when the long-absent count Rodolfo reappears. The gallant count flirts with both women, but when a sleepwalking Amina mistakes him for Elvino, much ado ensues on the tearful way to a happy ending.

If Ms. Dessay is the uncontested reigning Amina of the moment, here she has a worthy new partner in young Mexican tenor Javier Camarena, who brings to Elvino a full, rich timbre and a lilting Latin musicality. Towering Italian bass Michele Pertusi is a commanding presence as the count, and the rest of the cast is equally admirable, especially French soprano Marie-Adeline Henry as the spiteful Lisa. Staged by Swiss director Marco Arturo Marelli, the production is handsome and effective, with a single setting in a grand early 20th-century Swiss sanatorium hotel.

—Judy Fayard

Until Feb. 23
www.operadeparis.fr



Scene from 'La Sonnambula' at Opéra Bastille.

Berlin exhibit dissects, replicates and analyzes World Cup fever

BERLIN: With his 2007 installation "The Saints," now at the Hamburger Bahnhof, American artist Paul Pfeiffer deconstructs and restages a sports event with near-mythical status: the 1966 World Cup



Paul Pfeiffer

football final between England and West Germany. The match would result in England's first and only World Cup championship, and nearly every second of its action has been analyzed and discussed ad infinitum in the four decades since. By forcing a new perspective onto such a well-known subject, Mr. Pfeiffer aims to redefine hero worship, crowd dynamics and the spectacle of history. He mostly succeeds.

The sound of a cheering crowd fills another otherwise empty, 500-square-meter gallery space. As you walk

through the cavernous, blindingly white room, sing-song chanting rises and falls in response to some yet-unseen stimulus. At the gallery's far end there appears a tiny, iPod-size LCD screen showing black-and-white TV footage from the match. But Mr. Pfeiffer has altered it by removing every player except Geoff Hurst, whose goal in overtime spurred England to victory.

Behind a partition is a larger screen showing the source of the cheering: not the 98,000 fans in Wembley Stadium in 1966, but 1,000 Filipino men in a Manila movie theater in 2007. Mr. Pfeiffer showed the men footage of the match and or-

chestrated the chanting.

Two other works by Mr. Pfeiffer exploring the nature of crowds help set the mood as you enter the exhibition: "Empire" (2004) is a real-time video of wasps building a nest; "Vitruvian Figure" (2009) is a large cross-section of an empty sports stadium rendered in laminated wood and enclosed in glass.

Is Mr. Pfeiffer preparing your mind to equate sports fans with buzzing insects? Don't spend too long trying to figure it all out: The wasp video has a running time of three months. —Craig Winneker

Until May 2
www.hamburgerbahnhof.de

Plenty of Blame to Go Around

The bursting of every speculative mania has invariably been followed by the search for scapegoats. After the Mississippi Scheme collapsed in 1720, share certificates in the Compagnie des Indes were publicly incinerated in Paris. When the contemporaneous South Sea bubble imploded, leading members of the government were sent to the Tower of London, and profiteers were forced by an extraordinary retroactive Act of Parliament to disgorge their ill-gotten gains.

Over the past couple of years, there has been a frantic search to identify those responsible for the recent financial collapse. British novelist John Lanchester joined the hunt with a number of essays for the London Review of Books that provide the groundwork for "Whoops!: Why Everyone Owes Everyone and No One Can Pay." His list of culprits is reminiscent of the denouement of Agatha Christie's "Murder on the Orient Express." No single individual or institution murdered the credit system. Everyone turns out to be guilty.

At the head of the culprit list are, unsurprisingly, the bankers. Most inglorious among them is Fred "the Shred" Goodwin, former chief of the venerable Royal Bank of Scotland, who grew his bank to the point where its balance sheet exceeded the size of Britain's national income. If the government had not bailed out RBS in October 2008, it's likely that ATMs would have stopped disgorging cash and

checks wouldn't have cleared.

Why did the bankers lend so wildly? Mr. Lanchester, whose father worked for that once-staid colonial enterprise, the Hong Kong & Shanghai Banking Corp., observes that banking is, or at least should be, a rather a simple business. Bankers ought to know whom they are lending to and build in a margin of safety against the risk of default.

But modern finance changed the game. Financial innovation allowed loans to be passed on with no individual or institution concerned for their repayment. Risk assessment was no longer a matter of personal judgment but instead the burden of mathematical models. But the models, Mr. Lanchester says, were "philosophically flawed." They determined, for instance, that a sudden national collapse in American housing prices was a near-impossibility.

The weaknesses of quantitative risk models have been well-known for years. In 2007, the Royal Bank's own chief risk officer even wrote a powerful critique of the value-at-risk models used to gauge banking exposures. Yet bankers persisted in using their faulty models because they generated profits, in the short run at least. Given over to a collective bout of wishful thinking, the bankers ignored the numerous "funny smells" emanating from the financial system.

Mr. Lanchester compares the shift in finance over recent decades to the rise of modernism in the arts. It constituted a "break with common sense, a turn towards self-referentiality and abstraction, and notions that couldn't be displayed in workaday English." Finance had become as rotten as modern literary criticism. The bookish Mr.

Lanchester senses a "weird familiarity about the current crisis: value, in the realm

of finance capital, parallels the elusive nature of meaning in deconstructionism."

Other villains of the piece include "Maestro" Alan Greenspan, the longtime chairman of the Federal Reserve, for keeping interest rates too low after the tech bubble burst in 2000; credit-ratings agencies for their flawed ratings; regulators for failing to regulate; and academic economists for failing to warn of impending troubles. Mr. Lanchester cites an American university provost who complains of having "an entire department of economists who can provide a brilliant ex post facto explanation of what happened—and not a single one of them saw it coming." The dominant paradigm of efficient markets and rational expectations had left them intellectually disinclined and theoretically ill-equipped to predict a catastrophe.

Mr. Lanchester claims that the

"ideological hegemony" of capitalism after the fall of the Soviet Union became a source of weakness. There was simply too little skepticism about dubious financial practices. Politicians everywhere now lead the jeering mob against the wretched "banksters," but during the boom years politicians were fellow travelers. In the U.S., legislators pushed the mortgage behemoths Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac into subprime lending because increasing homeownership among the poor was seen as politically desirable.

The authorities relaxed banking regulations because the endless flow of credit was popular with their constituents. No wonder Mr. Greenspan was the most lauded central banker in history. Never mind that average incomes had stagnated for decades. People could always borrow. It was pleasant to acquire a home without having saved any money and consume beyond one's income. Innovative mortgages, Mr. Lanchester writes, "came into existence because the market set out to find ways to let us fulfill our heart's deepest desire, to own property. The appetite created the products, not the other way round."

"Whoops!" is not without its faults. Mr. Lanchester sometimes adopts an overly sneering tone toward the wretched financiers. His potted history of finance—from double-entry bookkeeping to the credit default swap—will satisfy only those who are new to the subject.

There are also a few niggling errors. It's wrong to say, for instance, that low interest rates in the past decade were bad for the bond market; in fact, declining yields created a strong bond market, setting the stage for the credit bubble. And although he was a keen exponent, Ben Ber-

nanke didn't come up with the idea of "the Great Moderation"—the claim that rising debt levels were justified by a more benign economic cycle. Still, "Whoops!" provides a fine introduction to the latest financial frenzy, with a suitable degree of outrage. Ultimately Mr. Lanchester directs the vengeful public's gaze upon its own activities. After all, but for the madness of crowds, there would be no manias.

Mr. Chancellor is the author of "Devil Take the Hindmost: A History of Financial Speculation."



Lonely Hearts, Of Like Minds

If you like piña coladas and getting caught in the rain . . . then you're probably stuck in 1979. That's when songwriter Rupert Holmes released "Escape (The Piña Colada Song)"—about a guy who's so bored with his "lady" that he answers a newspaper personal ad, only to discover that he has arranged an assignation—with his lady!

Sexually, I'm More of a Switzerland

Edited by David Rose
(Scribner, 180 pages, £9.99)

Radio stations played the laid-back anthem of incompetent philanderers with such maddening frequency that "Escape" soon imprisoned us all. The song might have been a commercial success, but in its pop-awfulness it also marked what seemed to be the nadir in the long history of what used to be called lonely-hearts advertisements. But no, it took the emergence of Craigslist for that.

Then again, most personal ads have never been particularly edifying. They've taken a variety of forms, from the trolling by fetishists 'n' freaks in free weeklies to the dead-letter overtures in more high-minded publications. (If you like Pinot Grigio and getting caught trying to sneak into a Noam Chomsky lecture . . .) But regardless of the venue, the ads have shared a few common

themes. One is epic self-regard—the typical personals column promises the beautiful, sensitive, brilliant, soulful and their synonyms.

Another common theme is a thicket of initials (SWM for single white male, WLTM for would like to meet, etc.) meant to conserve classified-ad expenses but also lending a sense of grim efficiency to the project—not so much affairs of the heart as affairs of 75-characters- or-less shorthand. And then there is that hallmark of the personal-ad columns: utter humorlessness, notwithstanding all the SWF protestations about looking for someone "who makes me laugh."

Hallelujah, then, for the arrival on these shores of "Sexually, I'm More of a Switzerland," a collection of personal ads written by true artists—well, satirists, anyway—of the form. Those would be the readers of the London Review of Books, who for years seem to have been locked in a competition to see who can come up with the most self-deprecating, eccentric, romantically heedless self-advertisements, apparently in the belief that there's no stronger aphrodisiac than the vaguely interested potential love-interest.

"England's best hope for Olym-

pic gold if ever there was an Olympic event for wearing plaid and brogues. Man, 56," reads an entry that shouldn't be regarded as typical because one of the collection's joys is the staggering variety of ways that people find to solicit human connection without appearing to.

"Think of every sexual partner you've ever had. I'm nothing like them. Unless you've ever slept with a bulimic German cellist named Elsa. Elsa: bulimic German cellist (F, 37)."

"English lecturer, 44. Modelling himself on The Fonz in an entirely non-ironic way since 1979."

"When life gives you lemons, don't make lemonade—instead squeeze it into the face of your cheating arse of a husband then cut the legs off every pair of trousers he owns. Sensitive F, 45."

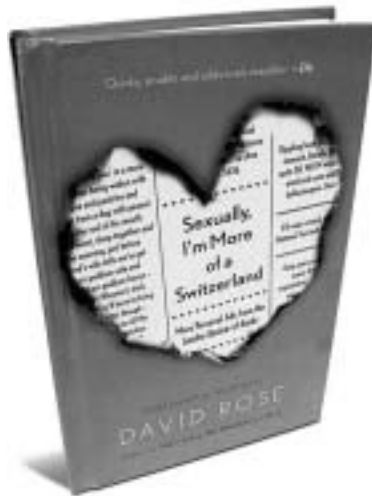
"Straight line. Straight line. Funny line. Sucker punch. Busy man, 36."

Still, certain patterns in the LRB's classifieds do emerge, and

there's no better man to detect them than editor David Rose. He was working in advertising sales at the publication in 1998 when it occurred to him that a personals column might drum up some business from "Britain's most romanti-

cally awkward eggheads," as he says in his introduction. The personal ads soon became an LRB mainstay, a sort of fortnightly writing contest with an enthusiastic following. This book is the second collection of the review's personal ads, following "They Call Me Naughty Lola" (2006).

In the present volume, Mr. Rose provides themed chapters, using a piquant quote from one of the ads to signal what's ahead. The chapters include "A time capsule of despair"; "The usual hyperbole and a whiff of playful narcissism"; and "Only love is catching" (a section of ads mentioning diseases, as in "Love me, love my fungal skin complaint. Man, 37, charmless and flaky"). One chapter, called "You know who you are," is devoted en-



tirely to ads employing that slightly menacing phrase. ("Woman, 38: WLTM man to 40 who doesn't try to high-five her after sex. You know who you are.")

Another chapter, "Further evidence of the Banach-Tarski paradox," features ads that are egg-headed even by LRB standards. Luckily, Mr. Rose is a deft and unobtrusive annotator. When we encounter the ad "Apparently the Three Symmedians aren't a novelty Bosnian folk troupe. Rubbish mathematician (M, 37)," Mr. Rose is at the ready with a footnote explaining that "symmedians" is a reference to three geometrical lines intersecting in a single point on a triangle.

You may or may not need to be reminded that A Flock of Seagulls was "a 1980s New Wave band from Liverpool," but you'll certainly be grateful for the footnote translating an ad that consists entirely of 1s and 0s (more than half a page), ending with the phrase ". . . and must have been knowledge of binary systems." The numbers, deciphered by Mr. Rose: "32-year-old computing geek seeks open-minded blonde twin sisters with very large breasts. Own mansion with pool an advantage." Waiter, fetch those nice young ladies a couple of piña coladas.

Mr. Lasswell is the Journal's deputy books editor.

time off

Amsterdam photography

"Foam:3h: Mylou Oord—It would be so nice" exhibits images by Dutch fashion and portrait photographer Mylou Oord. Foam Museum Amsterdam
Until March 24
☎ 31-20-5516-500
www.foam.nl

Antwerp art

"Embracing the Moon: Mirror of the Tang Dynasty" documents life at the Chinese court during the Tang Dynasty (690 A.D.-907 A.D.) Provinciehuis Antwerpen
Until March 14
☎ 32-3-2406-411
www.tangexpo.be

Berlin art

"Auto-Kino!" lets British artist and Turner Prize nominee Phil Collins transform the

Temporäre Kunsthalle into an indoor drive-in cinema with second-hand cars in front of art videos and film classics.

Temporäre Kunsthalle Berlin
Feb. 5-March 14
☎ 49-30-2576-2040
www.kunsthalle-berlin.com

Bonn art

"Between Studio and Stage: Egon Wilden 1894-1931" showcases 120 works of watercolors, pastels and set pieces by the German artist.

August Macke Haus
Jan. 29-April 25
☎ 49-228-6555-31
www.august-macke-haus.de

Bruges art

"From labaster to inc" offers precious tapestries, silver and ceramics in a renovated wing in the Gruuthuse Palace. Bruggemuseum-Gruuthuse

Until Dec. 31, 2011
☎ 32-50-4487-11
www.brugge.be

Cologne art

"Kazimir Malevich and Suprematism in the Ludwig collection" shows paintings, sculptures and graphic prints from the Kazimir Malevich collection.

Museum Ludwig
Feb. 5-Aug. 22
☎ 49-221-221-26165
www.museenkoeln.de

Geneva jewelry

"Man-Made Jewels, Jewels of the Earth" presents ethnic jewelry made from iron, bronze, ivory, shells and semi-precious stones.

Musee Barbier-Mueller
Until May 15
☎ 41-22-3120-270
www.musee-barbier-mueller.org



The Hague art

"Kandinsky and Der Blaue Reiter" is a retrospective of the Russian artist Wassily Kandinsky and his Blaue Reiter artists movement.

Gemeentemuseum The Hague
Feb. 6-May 24
☎ 31-70-3381-111
www.gemeentemuseum.nl

Hamburg design

"Fenomen IKEA" showcases 250 household objects in an examination of design for mass-produced goods since 1929.

Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe
Until Feb. 26
☎ 49-40-4281-3427-32
www.mkg-hamburg.de

Leipzig art

"Drawn to Rage—Ernst Ludwig Kirchner" shows drawings by the German Expressionist artist, one of the founders of the group Die Brücke.

Museum der Bildenden Künste
Until April 5
☎ 49-341-2169-9928
www.mdbk.de

Liverpool art

"Aubrey Williams: Atlantic Fire" presents paintings by the Guyanese-born artist, often inspired by abstract Expressionist painters Jackson Pollock and Arshile Gorky.

Walker Art Gallery
Until April 11
☎ 44-1514-7841-99
www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk

London art

"Swimming reindeer: an Ice Age masterpiece" displays a 13,000-year-old carved tusk of a mammoth depicting two reindeer, found in central-southern France.

The British Museum
Feb. 11-April 11
☎ 44 -20-7323-8000
www.britishmuseum.org

art

"The Empire Strikes Back: Indian Art Today" shows works by 26 emerging and established Indian artists.

The Saatchi Gallery
Jan. 29-May 7
☎ 44-20-7823-2363
www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk

Milan art

"Roy Lichtenstein Meditations on Art" is a retrospective of about 100 works dedicated to the American artist.

Triennale Design Museum
Until May 30
☎ 39-02-7243-41
www.triennale.it

Oslo art

"Stir Heart: Women who move Art I" shows works by contemporary female artists from the National Museum's collection, including Vanessa Baird, Nathalie Djurberg and Lotte Konow Lund.

The Museum of Contemporary Art
Until April 18
☎ 47-21-9820-00
www.nationalmuseum.no

Paris art

"Elaine Sturtevant: The Razzle Dazzle of Thinking" presents the work of the American-born conceptual artist.

Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris
Feb. 5-April 25
☎ 33-1-5367-4000
www.mam.paris.fr

photography

"The Impossible Photograph—Parisian Prisons (1851-2010)" exhibits 350 photographs of different prisons in Paris.

Musée Carnavalet
Feb. 10 to July 4
☎ 33-1-4459-5858
www.carnavalet.paris.fr

Vienna art

"Sitting Bull and his World" explores the life and times of the Native American leader.

Museum für Völkerkunde
Until March 15
☎ 43-1-5252-40
www.khm.at

art

"Vermeer: The Art of Painting" analyzes the Vermeer painting, kept by the Dutch painter in his studio at all times as a showpiece for potential buyers.

Kunsthistorisches Museum
Until April 25
☎ 43-1-5252-4403-1
www.khm.at

Zurich art

"Pleasure and Intoxication in Indian Painting" showcases Indian miniature paintings.

Museum Rietberg—Park-Villa Rietberg
Until May 2
☎ 41-1-2063-131
www.rietberg.ch



Above, Kazimir Malevich's 'Supremos Nr. 38' (1916) in Cologne; top, IKEA chair at Hamburg's Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe.