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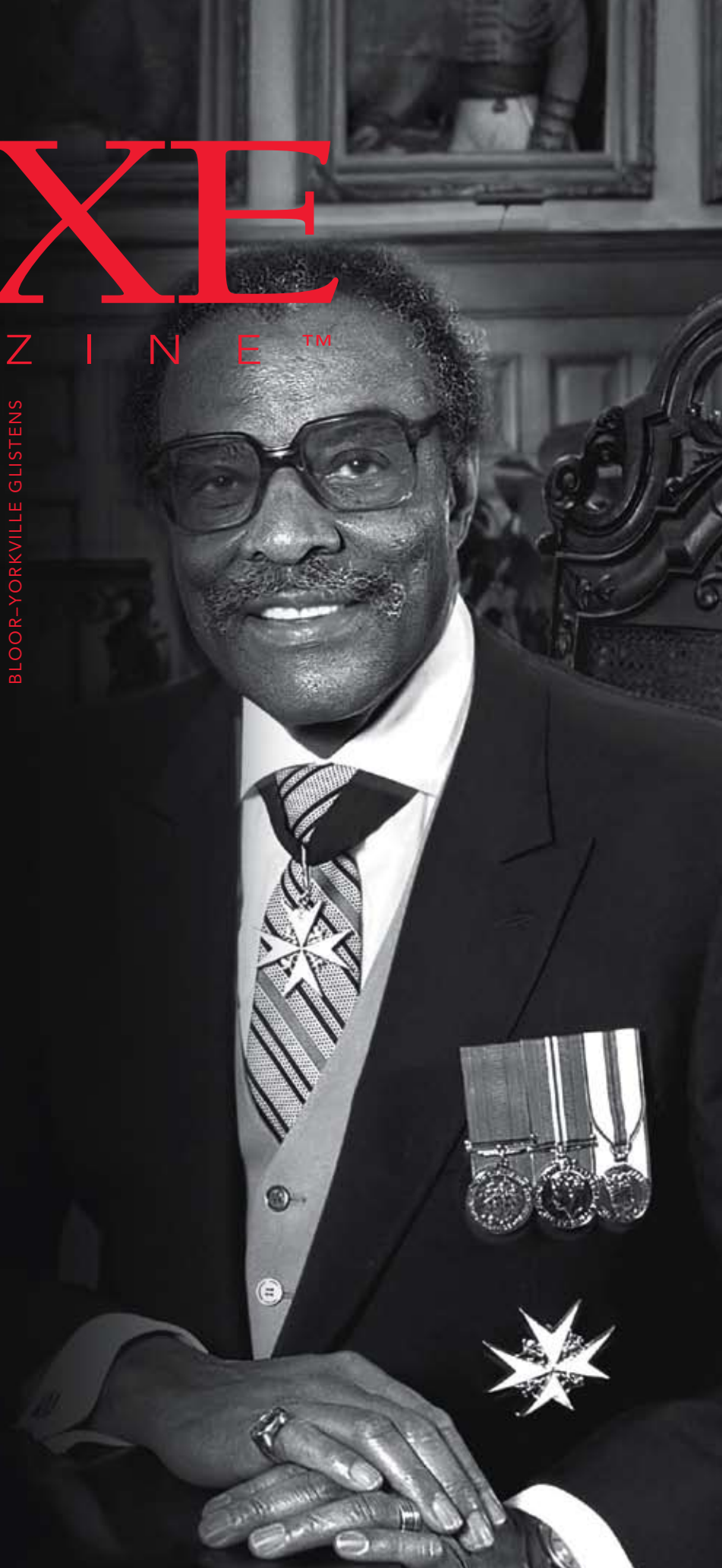
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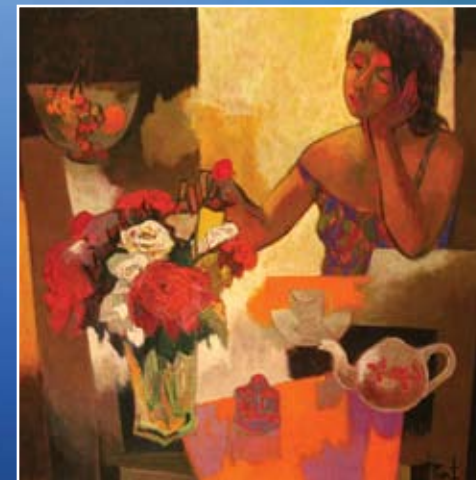
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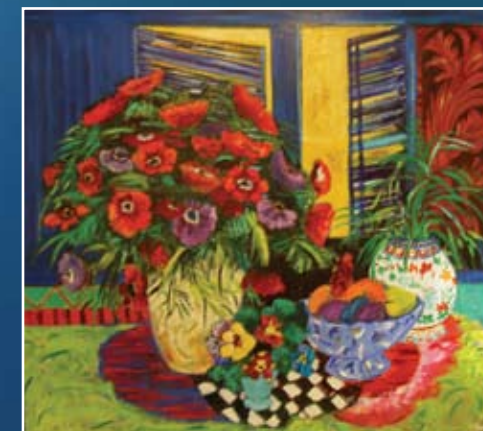
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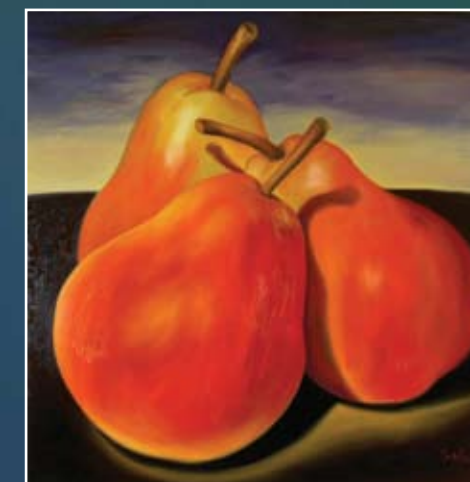
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ANTHONY KENNEDY SHRIVER and his 300,000 Buddies

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ON OUR COVER: The Honourable Lincoln M. Alexander, P.C., C.C., O.Ont., Q.C., photographed by Al Gilbert, C.M., Master Photographer.

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FROM THE PUBLISHER



It is always rewarding when the phone rings and a friendly voice on the other end of the line is congratulating you. I had that experience recently when a person called me from beautiful Vancouver because they had just received and read the inaugural issue of LUXE Magazine. Then someone else at a party recognized me from my grey hair and came over specifically to tell me her mother had read the November “A Point of View” about Canada’s dilemma in Afghanistan. She had tears in her eyes because she identified strongly with it. Then there was the call asking me if Winnipeg was part of Canada. Why we did not distribute LUXE in that city? She has by now received her complimentary copy of the magazine and Winnipeg is indeed on our horizon for the near future.

Then we received the emails. There were some ridiculous ones, but most were positive. There was one, however, that criticized us for choosing American over Canadian spelling. Since LUXE Magazine is intended to have international circulation, we chose American spelling (rightly or wrongly) because it has become the international standard for the English language. Microsoft (an American company) has chosen American as their standard. For Canadians it is a sensitive subject we ask your patience as we address this issue again in a few months.

On October 27th one of our advertisers called just to tell us that a client walked in with their LUXE magazine (a day after circulation) and bought a \$30,000 piece of furniture. A week later, another advertiser called to say she had sold a very expensive painting. The sale originated in Vancouver, although the gallery is in Toronto. Does advertising pay? You bet it does.

As our Editor-in-Chief ramps up future content, our publication received great news from other parts of the world. We will talk about these successes in our January issue. Here is a tease: 2007 starts the new year, so make all your resolutions come true. February is the financial planning and wealth management issue, and March is our green issue. Enjoy!

Tom A. Vachliotis
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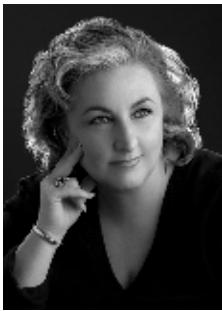


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In the spirit of the season, I'd like to recall a childhood memory. I was a youngster, running around the election office in Hamilton, Ontario, where my mother was a campaign volunteer for Lincoln Alexander. I came to recognize him as a gracious, kind and gentle man, actively contributing to others, and particularly interested in the welfare of youth. My sister Caron wore that campaign straw hat proudly for years. Mr. Alexander served in World War II in the Royal Canadian Air Force. In 1968 he won the 1968 election for Hamilton West, becoming the first Black Member of Parliament, retaining his seat in the next four elections. He served until 1985, including a period as Labour Minister. In 1985 he became Ontario's Lieutenant Governor, the first member of a minority to be so appointed. To commemorate his terms, which held youth and education as its hallmarks, the province established awards in his honor, given to young Ontarians for exemplary guidance in eliminating racial discrimination. This son of a maid and a railway porter had a distinguished career as a lawyer and went on to be named Chancellor of Guelph University. Mr. Alexander's biography, *Go to School, You're a Little Black Boy*, by journalist Herb Shoveller, was just published by Dundurn Press. At this time of giving, we dedicate our cover to the Honourable Lincoln M. Alexander for the leadership standard he has bestowed on us all.

As Mr. Alexander has proven, one person's efforts can have tremendous impact and even change society. Another such inspiration is Anthony Kennedy Shriver, founder of Best Buddies International (p. 48). Being a Kennedy instilled in him the necessity of parents' engaging their children in philanthropic efforts and instilling in them the spirit of giving. "People who volunteer live longer, they have better marriages, they have more self-confidence, they like themselves better," he told us. "When you spend time giving all day long, you don't come home thinking how bad life is!" It's a sentiment worth remembering as we enter the season of gifting.

Our holiday issue offers many ways to give. Bloor-Yorkville glistens with the holiday spirit and wonderful suggestions for the season (pp 25-33). The section called NEXT sparks ideas for that person whose heart's desire has managed so far to elude you (p. 14). Diamonds always work; just ask Barbara Kingstone (p. 18). Sparkling silver table settings (p. 22), the finest cognac (p. 64), golfing at Disney World (p. 68), a shiny new Lexus (p. 76), the prestigious Rolls-Royce Phantom (p. 72) or sporty Bentley Spur (p. 74) are bound to thrill. Cameras make welcome gifts and John Davidson shares his views of Ireland through the lens of his new Nikon (p 41). Travel with much-needed relaxation at the other end can lift the spirits. We trek to Vichy to revivify with the natural curative waters (p. 54). We contemplate spending Christmas in Curaçao (p. 80), soothing away our fatigue at the Mayakoba Spa in Mexico (p. 92), and calming in comfort at the majestic Sandals Royal Plantation in Jamaica (p. 84). Because there may be no greater gift than safety for ourselves and our families, Michael G. Cochrane takes the legal worry out of holiday parties (p. 36). This month we add a handy new horoscope section, by renowned stargazer Susan Miller (p. 94).

As we plan festive menus and joyous gatherings, let's keep both the giving and the getting in perspective. Let's rejoice, honor, reflect and share our best with others. That's the real heart and soul of the holidays.

Let me commend the entire LUXE team for their passion and perseverance. I extend special thanks to our readers for choosing to have LUXE in their lives.

Wishing all a safe, giving and inspiring holiday season with much prosperity in the year ahead.

Beth McBlain

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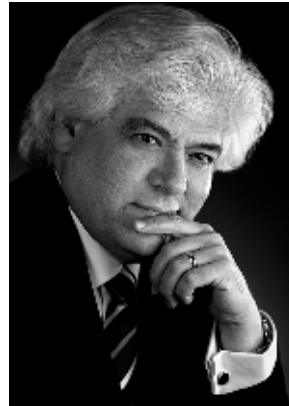
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CANADA, A LEADERLESS SOCIETY?

By Tom A. Vachliotis

On the cover of this, the December issue of LUXE™ Magazine, you will recognize none other than The Honorable Lincoln M. Alexander, P.C., C.C., O.Ont., Q.C. He is one of Canada's best examples of what leadership should be and what leadership is all about. Here is a Black person who has risen to heights that most of us can only dream about. Here is a person who will always exemplify his Life & Legacy by being a leader in anything and everything he ever was involved with. When he was awarded the Order of Canada, he represented the culmination of a life of historic importance. "Motivated by his continuing concern for social justice, he has led an exemplary life as a lawyer, as a businessman, as a politician and as Lieutenant Governor of Ontario. He has broken many barriers in his lifetime. Known for his good judgment, tolerance, compassion and humanity, he has served the citizens of Ontario well, striving to instill these values in young people and working tirelessly for improved race relations." His citation read: "One can categorize leadership as simply the person "who motivates people to work collaboratively to accomplish great things."

As the holidays approach with agonizing speed, I am constantly chased by a horrible thought. Here comes one more year of gluttony in the form of gift buying, gift wrapping, and when the prey is surrounded by the flock of young wolves, a demonstration of uncontrollable paper shredding and gift opening will take place. This yearly observed serenade will take place while the credit

cards are still sizzling in our wallets from the last minute purchases. No, my name is not Scrooge; all I am trying to point out in this "A Point of View" and in this, the holidays of 2006, is that we must try to take some control of our human interests and spend a little more time surrounding ourselves with that same flock of wonderful young wolves and exchanging with them not just presents but also some provoking thoughts about our country, what our country has to bring to us and how we can influence the future by searching for some well-deserved leaders. And when our young wolves look at us as if we are crazy, just grab them, kiss them, tell them you love them and ask them always to remember these days as the days that leaders were formed. And by the way, all that scrap paper must be folded and put away in a Blue Box instead of throwing it in the garbage bag to rot together with the turkey bones and the left-over stuffing. Yes, the holidays are always exciting and full of little gluttonous moments no matter our religion or background. The way we celebrate our holidays is in direct correlation to how we will sculpt our wonderful and tender wolves so that they will become our future leaders.

On November 2, 2006, the media in Toronto announced that Canada and specifically Toronto will not even participate in a bid to host the 2015 World's Fair. One must ask why is Canada refusing the world's coming to cosmopolitan Toronto. The excuses were that no one would step up to pay for a potential billion-dollar shortfall, forgetting that the creation of 250,000 jobs would counter

that. I guess it is worth spending a billion dollars registering guns, but not to position Toronto in the forefront of the "cosmos." Montreal came out of nowhere when it hosted the Expo '67. Montreal is still top of mind over Toronto from an international perspective.

I am perplexed right now because North America has lost any semblance of what I can call political leadership. The future is scary because there are very few individuals who stand out to lead the USA into the next decade. Canada is also a leaderless society. With the exception of good old Mayor Hazel McCallion in the city of Mississauga, the rest of the bunch really has no substance. In the USA after the Bill Clinton era, there has been a "conspiracy of non-existing personalities" capable of leading that great country. Today our southern neighbor has gone back decades in the eyes of the world due to the incredible misapplication of powerful decisions. The worst part of it all is that the existing leaders think and believe they are world leaders. And the scariest leader of them all is the leader who thinks he or she is a good leader when in reality they are blind to their shortcomings. In Canada, I do not see any sign of someone who will come and scoop up this country to lead it into the future.

What makes a good leader? Is it personality, charisma, tenacity, passion, educational background, age, ethnicity, religion, color, profession? Or is it marital status, beliefs, language, height? Maybe a leader should be slim or should a leader be fat, a straight person or a gay person, a kind person or an unkind one, a happy person or a grouch, an understanding person or a stubborn person. Should he or she be democratic or totalitarian? These are very difficult and very intricate questions. I have addressed them without any logical sequence because I personally have no answer. Otherwise I would be a leader.

In countries such as the USA, a leader must have a background that allows him or her to lead a country that has been put together from the offspring of many other nations. Our neighbor to the south is going through the fourth and fifth generations of immigration; the big difference in our country is that we are still in the second and the third generations of immigration. Having said just that, perhaps they will elect Hillary or change their constitution and bring back Bill Clinton as President. What a comedy of circumstances. It is amazing, but cream will always rise to the top. This is the same man Americans almost brought



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down in ridicule after a personal and private misfortune. Now everyone loves him. That is what a leader is all about! We all live in a society that has to live with the reality of yesterday and the questions of tomorrow's world. Today's world is different from yesterday's society and tomorrow is dependent on what we do today. Humans will always be humans and nothing will ever change us. We must always look at the good, and always look past the challenging aspects of an individual. Everyone has some skeletons in their closet.

Canada, my beloved country, is now ready for a leader. Canada needs a leader now! Perhaps we should hire Caldwell Partners and place an ad in The National Post: "Canada, second-largest country in world, seeks leader..." Behind door number one we are trying to choose from politicians who cannot even control their loose tongues with comments coming from both sides of their mouths. Making statements with no authority and with no substance. Ready to lie about anything and everything to get elected. Good people at heart, but are they world leaders? Behind door number two we have radicals. Canada is at war right now, and a few weeks ago we spent more time arguing about the broken love relationship between two high flying opposite party politicians who used to be behind the same door. Flip-flops are footwear human beings wear in order that they do not walk barefoot on the hot sand. Unfortunately flip-flopping in politics means that you say one thing and do the opposite or you change your mind from one day to the other. And then behind door number three, we have a democratically elected party supported by all the taxpayers in Canada. This is a party that has only one underlined mandate—the break-up of Canada. What a novel idea that is. Pay someone to run for politics who has as a mission statement the separation of one of the most astonishing provinces from the rest of this most incredible country. Then we have door number four. These guys exist only to support whatever the other parties do not. What a mess, and there is no one to stand out in the middle of this crowd and yell, "Enough is enough." Let us have some real Canadian politics. Let us stand up and fight for the people of Canada. Let us stand up and yell to all the provinces that we need a leader who will embrace every part of this country as his or her own province. Let us find a person who can bring passion back into our nation. A person who will cry when one of our soldiers dies, a person who will stand next to any American president and say no, but in the next move stand up and stand in front of that same president to protect him or her from a bullet. Let us find a person who will cut all income taxes from the hardworking people, rich and poor, replace these taxes with a user tax and, at the same time, a leader who will, in fair play, close all the loop-holes. Fair taxes for all corporations. Let us find a leader who will acknowledge that we are destroying the environment and do something

about it, today, now, immediately! Let us find a person who will lead this country without a religious agenda. A gay man should be able to partner with another gay man. A gay woman should be able to partner with another gay woman and enjoy the same legal qualities of life as a heterosexual couple. Let us find a leader who understands that a woman should control her own body. Let us find a leader who makes education an inherit right for every single Canadian citizen, free for all our children and young adults. And, yes, with this I mean free higher education. Let us find a leader who brings back mandatory "physical activities" to our high schools in order to start leveling off the roundness that has suddenly appeared in our children. Let us find a leader who will find ways to occupy our teenagers so they can throw hoops, swim lengths, kick a ball, shoot a puck and stop "shining their pieces" because they are bored.

There is definitely a difference between distinct societies and we must accept the fact that Canada is made from many colorful threads, woven together to make a miraculous tapestry and has regions with no borders that deserve special and dedicated attention. Let us find a leader who will accept our First Nations people, who are truly our native sons and daughters. Let us find a leader who will take absolute and total control of the hemorrhaging of guns and violence. Let us find a leader who has the guts to stand up to the violators of today's society by perhaps bringing back some extreme measures to curb this uncontrollable violence that has imprisoned our metropolitan cities. And yes, perhaps the absolute final punishment might be needed, as some individuals do not deserve to be called humans but should be classified as evil and erased from the blackboard. Let us find a leader who will not allow the disintegration of society with this incredible movement of homeless individuals having to sleep on the sidewalks every night and day while the world keeps on spinning and the markets keep on ticking. Let us find a leader who knows what it is to be a soldier on the frontlines, facing the enemy. Let us find a leader who has driven from one corner of this country to the other, one who has sat around a table with grandma and grandpa listening to what their Canada is all about. Let us find a leader who can stand behind the podium and talk to all of us in a passionate voice about his or her beliefs.

I am sure right now you think I am a nut case. That I live in the zoo and, if I am not living in the zoo, I should be arrested and taken there immediately because I am dangerous. Let us find a leader who can listen to what the people and this country really need. Leadership!

Barack Obama titled his recent best seller *Have the Audacity of Hope*. Well, my friends, I am an optimist, and I will have the audacity of hope engaged in my mind at all times from now on. Happy Holidays! ■



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JOYEUX CHRISTMAS OR MERRY NOËL MICHEL BÉRUBÉ HEATS UP THE SEASON

By Janice Kaye

O night divine. Light the fire. Pour a cognac. Michel Bérubé's debut CD, *This Christmas*, arrives just in time for the holiday it celebrates. The Quebec native comes across as sweet as the gospel singer he once was. After singing and performing in cabarets, resorts, dinner theaters and jazz clubs in Montreal, Toronto and New York, he chose to record some of his Christmas favorites for his debut CD. With gentle strings and tinkling percussion, the renditions are softly distinctive and contemporary.

Songbird Jennifer Warnes collaborates on a delightful duet, their harmonies interwoven on *The Little Drummer Boy/Peace on Earth*. Bérubé's versatile voice belts out a spine-tingling finish in French with *Minuit Chrétien/O Holy Night*. Let your heart be light and your hearth be lit. If it's not a white Christmas, it's because Bérubé's voice melted the snow.

Available at Canadian record stores everywhere, including Chapters/Indigo. Get it online at iTunes.com, Archambault.ca, Mymusic.com, HMVAmazon.ca and CDBaby.



GET OUT YOUR FLYING CARPET ALADDIN AND THE GENIE ARE BACK WITH MERRY MISCHIEF

By Isabelle Spreen

Aladdin and the genie are back. Ross Petty's delightful annual pantomime, *Aladdin, The Magical Family Musical*, returns, starring Bret "Hitman" Hart as the genie in the lamp. How did the beefy former pro wrestler ever get in there? Petty himself again leers his way through the role of the villainous Abanazeer in the hilarious family entertainment hitting the Toronto Elgin Theatre stage for a limited Christmas

engagement. Directed by master of the medium Ted Dykstra, this modern-day version of the classic fairy tale by the fictional storyteller Scheherazade takes place in a hip-hop land where a poor young skater boy falls in love with a fresh princess, takes a magic carpet ride, and meets a wise-cracking wizard with some nasty plans.

Executive producer Petty imbues the British-style pantomime with rich political satire and double entendres, lobbed way over the heads of the under-12 set. "What sets Aladdin apart is the ability for audience members to participate in the show, ensuring adults remain as entertained as the kids," he noted.

Encouraged by the musical's successful 2004 season, World Wrestling Federation champ, and Canadian icon Hart, named one of CBC's top 50 Greatest Canadians, recreates his role as the Genie.

The rowdy musical, interactive in nature and peppered with colorful sets and costumes, is filled with magical special effects, contemporary music, and high-energy dance sequences the kids love. Audience members of all ages are encouraged to cheer the heroes, boo the villains and warn the good guys the baddies are behind them.

Talented youngster Jamie McKnight stars in the title role of Aladdin. McKnight appeared last year in Petty's *Snow White and the Group of Seven*. Jennifer Dale plays the beautiful Scheherazade.

Join Aladdin and the Genie for a riotous family affair. Performances December 6 through 24. Tickets can be purchased in person at the Elgin Theatre box office, online at www.ticketmaster.ca or by calling 416.872.5555. Children \$45, Adults \$49-\$69. For more information visit www.rosspetty.com.

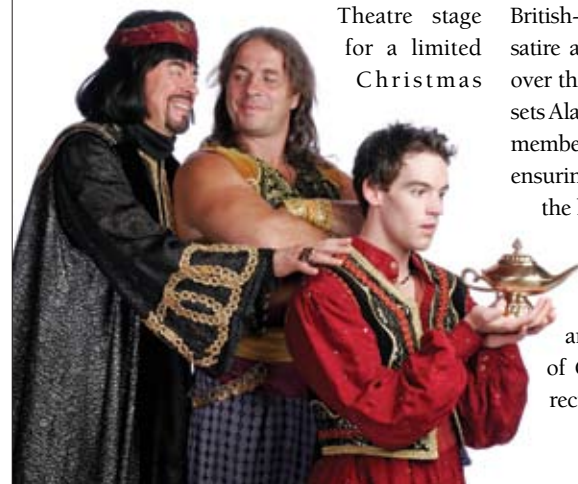


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BEAUTY ITEMIZED

By Catalina Margulis



QUICK—THE “ANTIDOTE” VIKTOR & ROLF HAVE IT

Quirky design duo Viktor Horsting and Rolf Snoeren, of the Dutch label Viktor & Rolf, launched their first men's fragrance, Antidote, this fall with the help of Canadian music star Rufus Wainwright. Following a successful debut into the women's fragrance market with Flowerbomb last spring, the duo took inspiration for the men's fragrance from the classic tuxedo, resulting in a concoction as crisp and clean as a white shirt. Made up of the finest woods — patchouly, sandalwood, cedarwood and gaiac — the perfume contains such spices as black pepper, mint and cinnamon. Accents of amber and leather round out the scent. From its beveled glass bottle, the fragrance glows like a magic potion. Topping it all is a black cap stamped with a seal of inky black wax. Ultra-modern, yet old-school gentlemanly. \$120 for 50ml, \$175 for 100ml at Holt Renfrew



INNER GOLD DONNA KARAN GLOWS

With its golden glow, Donna Karan Gold reflects the confidently sensual woman—soft and vulnerable on the inside, powerfully seductive on the outside. Designed by Karan's longtime jewelry collaborator, Robert Lee Morris, the warm amber-colored glass bottle is encased in a gold hammered metal sleeve, with a warm ebony wood cap. Two favorite scents of the iconic designer comprise the heart of the fragrance: white Casablanca Lily and Fluid Amber, combining femininity and high drama with sensual depth and inner fire. Sparkling acacia and a light dusting of glittering gold pollen, along with White Clove and Jasmine Templar, round out the fragrance. Golden Balsam and East Indian Patchouli finish it off, reflecting Karan's laidback yet worldly luxe charm. \$102 for 50ml, \$130 for 100ml of Eau de Parfum Spray, at Donna Karan Collection stores and Holt Renfrew.



PINK BEAUTY HOLLYWOOD GLAM FOR THE HOLIDAYS

The retro-inspired cosmetics line by Canadian makeup artist April Jacob makes its national debut this season. Featuring Marilyn-Monroe-red lips, Sophia-Loren-bronzed cheeks, Bette Davis lashes and Elizabeth Taylor eyes, Pink Beauty reflects old-school glamour. This season, splurge on '40s Hollywood chic with the Holiday Hatbox collection in Sexy or Glam. Sexy features smoky eyes, nude lips and flushed cheeks, while Glam is all about sophisticated lips, lush lashes and subtle cheeks. Each hatbox includes eye shadow, mascara, rouge and lip gloss, all showcasing the line's signature lace handkerchief motif and silhouette of a woman and her Yorkie. \$99 at Holt Renfrew



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Wining and dining is lovely, but a good man knows another way to his love's heart—a hot stone massage at the spa. Now you can give the gift of a little R&R at the click of a mouse with WaySpa.com, a fast-growing Canadian online spa booking company. Gifters can choose spa treatments from more than 200 North American spas, including Toronto's Spa at the Windsor Arms, Montreal's Away Spa at the W Hotel, and Vancouver's Miraj Hammam. If the selection is overwhelming or you're a spa newbie, the site offers spa concierges to help you make your pick. There's also an entire section on spas and treatments for men. Gift certificates, sent out in a WaySpa.com gift box, can be used to purchase any package or service listed on the site, or in lieu of cash at any participating spas. Sign us up! www.wayspa.com

MENDOCINO THINKS AND RETHINKS WOMEN'S STORES STAND UP TO BE COUNTED

Women's fashion retailer Mendocino is putting a philanthropic spin on holiday gifting with the launch of its 2006 holiday gift card promotion. In support of the innovative Canadian breast cancer charity Rethink Breast Cancer, the campaign is dubbed “It's the ‘Think’ that Counts”. Until December 24th, holiday givers can purchase Mendocino gift cards, with 10 percent of the value donated to helping Rethink further its breast cancer research, education and awareness programs. So not only can you skip the guesswork and mall madness, but you also get to support a worthy cause. Gift cards good at all Mendocino boutiques, which include trendy fashions by designers such as Tara Jarmon, Robert Rodriguez and Mackage. www.mendocino.ca



SUPER-STRESSED OR “SUPPER-STRESSED”? A CHEF TO CALL YOUR OWN

Food-loving friends and busy parents alike will love a “Bistro Dinner at Home for 4” by a personal chef. A chef from the Canadian Alliance will consult and customize a menu for you based on your culinary tastes, provide the ingredients and equipment, prepare appetizer, entrée and dessert, and serve it to you and your guests or family in your own home! Gift card recipients need not worry about cleaning up either—the chef takes care of everything. They may even suggest wine pairings to complement each dish. Once you get the gift card in your hand, you might have trouble giving this one away. LifeExperiences offers gift cards exclusively at Shoppers Drug Mart in four categories—Family Fun, Romance, Adventure and Pamper. This one might be all four! \$299 at Shoppers Drug Mart



GIFT CERTIFICATES

When it comes to buying goodies for your loved ones this holiday, skip the perennial sweaters and slippers and give them the gift of choice! ■

DAZZLING DIAMONDS ARE INDEED FOREVER HALLMARK OF OPULENCE NOW FAVORS COLOR

By Barbara Kingstone



A greeting card shows a young woman exercising. Reaching unsuccessfully for the floor, she says, “If the Lord wanted me to touch my toes, He would have put diamonds on the floor.” Big or small, diamonds scattered at her feet might induce any woman to stretch for the lineoleum, parquet or tile.

Although diamonds were once thought to be only dazzling white, the pickings today are most colorful. If the greeting-card damsel were more agile, she would be scooping up pink, red, yellow, brown and blue sparklers. Diamonds are trumpeting an entirely new palette.

Diamonds and jewelry, among the few true items of opulence, have all the hallmarks of replacing clothes and cars as the favored obsession of the wealthy. Bijoux, however, are not for the meek of heart. These days, jewelry makes a bold statement, reflecting the glamour and color showing up on catwalks and in fashion magazines around the world.

Larger diamonds, meaning those over five carats, are selling extremely well. “Colored diamonds are major,” said Stephen Lindsay of Lindsay Wolf Inc. of Toronto and New

York. “We’re surprised that the smaller stones aren’t grabbing the market as they once were. The finer quality diamond is going up in price because the demand is so strong.” As for styling, Lindsay explained, “There are two concepts that we’re seeing—opulent and simple. Dangling earrings are still popular, but so are big, bold architectural designs.”

Andrea Hopson of Tiffany & Company in Canada still sees strength in the classic diamond designs set in platinum but concurs with Lindsay about color. “The unusual colored diamonds are getting a lot of attention from our clients,” the VP noted. Another aspect to purchasing bling is the right-hand diamond ring. “Although we don’t have statistics, in general women are shopping alone and making their own decisions,” said Hopson. “But fancy colored diamonds from dark yellow to fancy light yellow are certainly gaining in popularity.” Tiffany, never known to rest on its laurels, always presents new designs and concepts. “At Tiffany in general,” said Hopson, “We’ve seen a surge of interest in colored diamonds teamed with precious metal and good design.”

Along with the cutting-edge designers such as artists Paloma Picasso and Elsa Peretti, and the new jewelry collection by architect-par-excellence Frank Gehry, Tiffany is taking a look at the past, basing a fresh approach on their archives. Inspired by the legendary Louis Comfort Tiffany, who established the Tiffany Art Jewelry department in 1902, starbursts and crochet-worked gold have evolved to incorporate many of the colored stones which are a throwback to the Victorian era. Always emphasized is the necessity of durability in jewelry. What gem dealer doesn’t want its clients to enjoy their diamond pieces and then be able to pass them down to future generations?

For almost 20 years, Royal de Versailles on Bloor Street in Toronto has been attracting members of the international social set, who frequently come to the city just to purchase their large and serious gemstones. The company has seen clients’ interests changing, not so much in their choice of jewelry as in their knowledge. Globetrotting consumers come in knowing exactly what they want and are giving more thought to high-end merchandise. It seems they would rather buy one important item than several smaller articles.

The landmark, store with buzzer entry à la Milan, complete with a large security guard inside the doorway, is an anomaly in “Toronto the Good.” The need for security, while a necessity, has not deterred the buyer seeking bold, sleek designs. Simplicity is selling and big is better than ever. Brooches, never a large seller, are now extremely important, the main buyers appearing to be businesswomen who want something noticeable and fashionable on the lapels of their suits.

The *boite*-sized jewelry shop Lilliane’s Fine Jewellery in the Intercontinental Hotel on Bloor Street is owned by perky young Lilliane Moses. It may be small but it welcomes a large roster of who’s who. Some may be guests of the hotel, while others make up the steady stream of regular local clients. Moses keeps an eye on what sells, both in Toronto and internationally. “Pink diamonds are the most requested color,” she said. “They look best set in pink gold and often we accent the item with white diamonds for contrast.”

As in other areas of fashion, diamonds have their stories. There is more elegance to be seen than in previous

years. Diamond-encrusted animals draw inspiration from the fashion world, where animal prints are spread on items from handbags to evening gowns.

In the past there was more emphasis on pavé. Instead of a series of small stones set in a pendant, clients now want full-cut diamonds, especially heart-shaped ones. They are costlier than pavé, but women earn their own money and buy what they want. With high-end clientele, a noticeable demand has arisen for the out-of-the-ordinary. Now pink diamonds with hefty price tags sell as soon as they arrive, with yellow a close second. Both work well for rings, earrings, pendants and necklaces.

A warm and comfortable feeling always awaits at Cartier, a good barometer of what’s hot and what’s not. Diamonds are selling well and here, too, the theme is a colored palette.

One of the oldest jewelers and a landmark in Canada is Henry Birks & Sons, who have been providing gemstones to the public for 120 years. Although

their bestsellers are still white diamond engagement rings set in classic mounts, the demand for colored stones is rising, echoing the experiences of all the above-mentioned jewelers.

It may be a dazzling diamond zoo out there, but the direction is clear—colored diamonds are the sought-after bauble.

And one thing is a sure bet, when it comes to counting your carats—size does matter. ■



COLD HARD FACTS ABOUT DIAMONDS

- Diamonds are the hardest natural known material and can be scratched only by another diamond
- More than 130 million carats are mined annually
- Diamond derives its name from the ancient Greek word *adama*, meaning invincible
- About 44% of mined diamonds originate from Central and South Africa but there are now significant sources in Canada, India, Russia, Australia and Brazil

REMEMBER THE FIVE “C”s of the “D-Word”

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| Color – its color quality | Cut – its proportions |
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CHEF JONATHAN GUSHUE

GLOBE-TROTTING NEWFOUNDLANDER LANDS FIVE MORE DIAMONDS

By Anna Hobbs



He's only 34 years old, but Chef Jonathan Gushue has already led the kitchens of two Five Diamond dining rooms. There are only three Five-Diamond restaurants in Ontario, holding the highest honor of the AAA/CAA organizations: Truffles (in the Four Seasons Hotel in Toronto), Signatures (in the Cordon Bleu cooking academy in Ottawa), and the Dining Room at Langdon Hall Country House Hotel & Spa. After a year at Truffles, Gushue was named executive chef of Langdon Hall, one of North America's leading country house hotels. The gorgeous country estate outside the small town of Cambridge, near Kitchener and Stratford, nestles on 200 acres and caters to a discerning group of guests.

At the inn, which is also a member of the French Relais & Chateau association of hotels and restaurants, sommelier Sylvain Brissonnet complements the divine offerings of Gushue's kitchen with just the right wines.

In his newest prestigious job, Gushue should have no difficulty upholding the lodge's complement of diamonds. The talent and determination of this young Newfoundlander, after his training in hospitality and the culinary arts at Ontario's Georgian College, led to positions at hotels and resorts such as the Four Seasons Hotel and the Wedgewood Hotel, both in Vancouver, the Hotel Novelli Group of restaurants as well as the Berkeley Hotel in London, England, the Swallow Royal Hotel in Bristol, and the Hotel Sun Valley in Japan.

At Langdon Hall, Gushue's culinary creativity thrives on the fresh produce of the bountiful surrounding farmland, rich with the region's Mennonite heritage. Like the best chefs, he insists on the finest ingredients and enjoys experimenting with traditional specialties such as hams, sausages and double-smoked bacon alongside fresh-picked local corn, peaches, cherries and other seasonal produce. The gardens and woodlands of the inn itself shape his menus and he grooms his very own vegetable patch.

LUXE: A Five Diamond award is the epitome of food and service. Is it stressful trying to maintain that standard?

J.G.: It isn't easy. The last thing you want to be is a chef who loses a diamond! You have to be constantly creative, always ahead of the crowd, never get stagnant. But that's exciting. It's a playground for learning.

LUXE: Did you always want to be a chef?

J.G.: Not at all. When I was 16, my father wanted me working and the only job I could get was at a local hotel. My family had always traveled a lot and I loved hotels, especially having room service. After high school, I enrolled in the hotel management course at Georgian College.

At the end of my third year, I went to Minaki Lodge as the assistant breakfast cook. It was part of the co-op program and my first cooking job. I discovered how exciting the kitchen was, how much I loved cooking.

LUXE: What was so exciting?

J.G.: The front of the house was always the same. But the kitchen got my adrenaline pumping. The pace was quicker. Never a dull moment. So I made the switch to the Culinary Management program.

LUXE: It's a quantum leap from Culinary Management at a community college to executive chef at one of the country's most renowned country inns. What path led you here?

J.G.: Right after college, I went to the Delta Meadowvale Hotel [in Mississauga] for a year. The idea of traveling and working in a foreign country really appealed to me and I got a job at an Onsen hot-spring resort hotel near Tokyo for a year. Then I went to the Swallow Royal Hotel in Bristol England, then to the Berkeley Hotel in London.

LUXE: Four jobs in three countries in four years. Is that common practice among young chefs?

J.G.: That's what you do when you start out. It's all about getting lots of different experiences.

LUXE: So what did you learn in each of these very different locations?

J.G.: I had never seen a busier place than the Delta Meadowvale with all-day dining and huge banquets. Japan was totally different because there was a western kitchen, a sushi bar, a tempura bar and three Chinese kitchens. It was incredible exposure to eastern cuisine. The Swallow Royal Hotel [in London] was an amazing experience. They had foie gras truffles, some of the best cheeses I've ever seen and cream like no other. I discovered *fleur du sel* and butter from Normandy. Then in London, working at the Novelli Group of Restaurants, we learned how to eat.

LUXE: You learned how to eat? That comment begs an explanation.

J.G.: Chefs always taste, but Jean-Christophe Novelli was obsessive about not tasting in isolation. We had to eat everything served on the plate, to know that the food went with the sauce, to know when to add herbs to sauces, to understand how all the foods on a plate worked together.

LUXE: Traditionally England had a reputation for stodgy cuisine. That doesn't seem to have been your experience.

J.G.: The food revolution in London happened in 1987, before I was there. In the past five years, there have been more Michelin stars awarded to London restaurants than in all of France.

LUXE: What brought you back to Canada?

J.G.: A job offer in 1998 in my hometown to be sous-chef at the Fairmont Newfoundland Hotel in St. John's. From there I went to Vancouver, then to Truffles Restaurant at the Four Seasons in Toronto, which was also a Five Diamond restaurant.

LUXE: What inspires you?

J.G.: Travel. Eating out in Toronto as much as possible. Last summer I went to California and worked at the French Laundry [restaurant in the Napa Valley] for ten days. This experience reinforced something I've always believed in—the importance of freshness and the best products.

LUXE: What do you see as the big trend in food?

J.G.: Keep it simple. Don't over-complicate. We went through an awful time of fusion when food was being disguised, turning it into something it wasn't. There's a great French expression—*bons produits, bonne cuisine* [good products, good cooking]. We're seeing a huge interest in artisanal food—local products from independent producers who care passionately about what they do. As much as possible, we buy organic.

LUXE: You have always worked in cities. What are the differences working at a country inn?

J.G.: Well, you have to plan further ahead because you don't get deliveries by 8:00 or 9:00 every day. But we're surrounded here by rich farmland, the region's deep Mennonite heritage, local farmers' markets and a network of artisanal producers.

LUXE: What do you like to cook at home?

J.G.: Rustic northern Italian style rather than the hotel's classic French style, which calls for a lot of prep. Things like pork shoulder with fennel seeds, garlic and chili or braised lamb with balsamic vinegar and shallots.

LUXE: Do you have a favorite food?

J.G.: My father's linguine clams. They are one of my earliest memories. My mother could be a very good cook when she wanted to be, but my father loved to cook.

LUXE: And a favorite dessert?

J.G.: I love bold, fresh flavors. For example, pink grapefruit sorbet. Another favorite is fig tart served with Szechuan peppercorn ice cream and Kentucky leaf honey. And I love the hominess of brownies and ice cream.

LUXE: What's your idea of a dream vacation?

J.G.: In winter, going with my family to Florida to visit my parents. My fantasy vacation would be a trip to Spain. As far as food is concerned, Spain is the new France.

LUXE: What would you like to be remembered for?

J.G.: Most of all to be known as a teacher. When people leave my kitchen, I would like them to feel they learned something. ■





SAY IT WITH SILVER PUT A FESTIVE SHINE ON YOUR TABLE

By Laurie Cooper

Something about the feel and heft of a real sterling silver fork in your hand—the balance, the elegance, the rarity, and the art and craft of it—recalls intimate romances, superb dinners, elegant parties and the finer events in life. If the fork is good, you know everything is going to be good. When the festive season rolls around, it also feels right to light up your holiday table with the sparkle of silver.

Famed family silver-making company Robbe & Berking of Germany has been making sterling silver cutlery for five generations. Their designs, however, bear little in common with your grandmother's silver except high quality. Styles update to meet modern design standards. While silver can

also represent memories of not-always-happy hours spent polishing those tarnished tines, now it is also manufactured to make it dishwasher-safe. When used on a regular basis, this kind of silver requires almost no polishing.

Previously squirreled away and brought out only for special occasions, silverware is making a comeback. People are buying casually elegant patterns to be used for all occasions. The current trend sees people steering away from stereotypes and returning to the home to entertain. "In the '90s, people would go out to entertain," says Jesper Langballe, the Canadian representative for Robbe & Berking. "Now if you want to show people you care

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about them, you invite them into your home.”

Furniture styles also tend to reflect a renewed emphasis on home entertaining. Rather than retiring to the “drawing room,” as the living room was called, guests sit longer at the dining table. Dining chairs therefore need to be more comfortable. The dining table also wants to draw more admiring glances. Even furniture tends to be changed more often than silverware.

“People like to change their china every few years, but they will pick a silver style that lasts a lifetime,” said Langballe. “They are willing to make a significant investment in their silverware. Silver actually gets more beautiful as it ages, developing a patina and character that are distinctive.”

The wealthiest people in the world set their tables with silver and Robbe & Berking is a particular favorite of many. “Our silverware is used in some of the most exclusive European hotels and restaurants,” noted Langballe. Their wares are used at the Kremlin, by the Aga Khan, by Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen on his yacht, as well as on the most spacious luxury cruise ship on the market, the MS Europa.

The company, a family-owned business for five generations, insists on first-class designs and unsurpassed silversmithing by master artisans. The *Art Deco* line dates from the 1950s, although the deco style is 1920s. The clean and classic lines make the pattern as relevant today as half-a-century ago or more. The *Martelé* line, created in 1999 for the firm’s 125th anniversary, is from the 1960s and more like jewelry than cutlery, with hammered silver handles and the same perfect balance as the other lines. The handle surface

shimmers like a slightly rippled sea under the light of a pure-silver moon. The *Belvedere*, with its cleanly striated handles, is one of the newest lines, retaining echoes of classic formality. All three are available in both sterling and silverplate. There are nine stainless patterns as well.

While a dozen five-piece place settings in sterling silver might cost \$10,000, many more affordable silver trinkets might bring big smiles. A little something in silver says a lot—a soup ladle or pie server, some tiny sugar tongs for sweet-toothed coffee- or tea-drinkers, or an asparagus server for the lover of that delicate vegetable. In addition to such table-topppers as a cheese-cutter or napkin rings, home and office accessories such as letter opener, nutcracker, pastry tongs, or elegant pot for pouring hot cocoa are available. Thoughtful gifts range from silver-and-ebony chopsticks at \$200 to a nine-branch sterling silver candelabra for \$35,000.

Craftsmanship is not lost. Real silversmiths demand that their flatware also adhere to the same stringent standards as pure silver and silver-plated products. Although champagne is best enjoyed in crystal, if you are really looking to impress someone, you might consider a pair of sterling silver champagne flutes. You can buy them on their own, or packed up with the latest model of opulent German-made Maybach cars. Starting price is \$350,000 U.S. Oh, that includes the flutes.

Silver. It gives your table a radiance that may well be reflected in the shining faces of your guests as they enjoy the best you have to offer. It turns special into essential. ■

Robbe & Berking silverware is available at exclusive retailers across Canada, including Amarynth in Toronto, Desiree in Woodbridge, Linen Chest and Maison Lipari in Montreal, Atkinson’s in Vancouver. www.robbeberking.com

Bloor-Yorkville Celebrates

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Join us as the Bloor-Yorkville area is transformed into a magical holiday wonderland!

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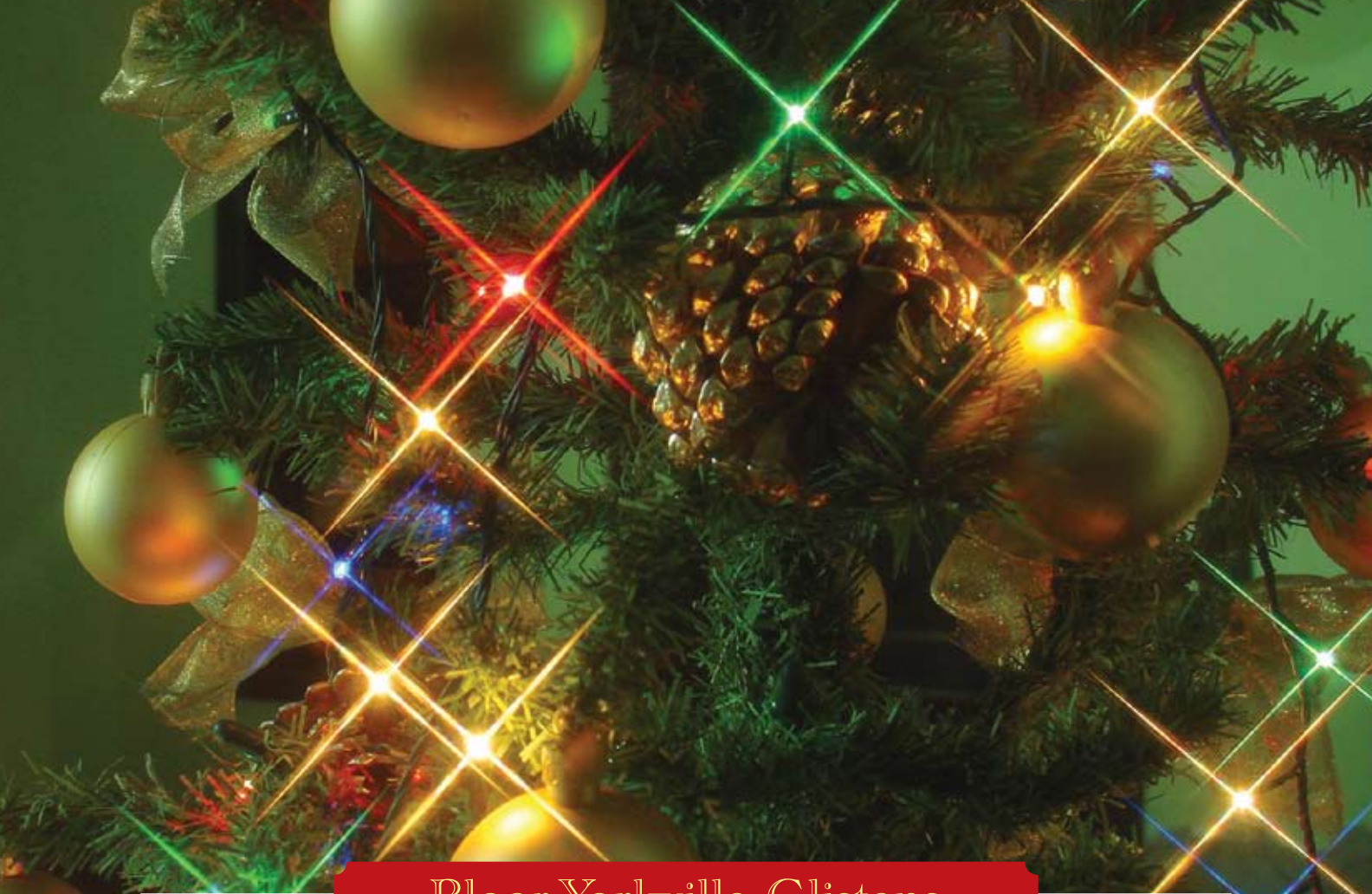
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Bloor-Yorkville Glistens

It's the jewel in Canada's shopping crown, considered one of the ten top avenues in the world, in the illustrious company of the Champs Elysées, Fifth Avenue, the Ginza District and Bond Street. For holiday shopping, the cozy quarter of Toronto's Bloor-Yorkville, home of high-end retail, fabulous restaurants and impeccable services, is a gift in itself.

The vibrant area draws shoppers from around the world to a combination of some of the city's finest culinary destinations and most luxurious hotels. For classic fashions and designer originals, Bloor-Yorkville is a sweet oasis for shoppers prowling such international favorites as Aveda, Plaza Escada, Holt Renfrew, Prada, Louis Vuitton, Crabtree & Evelyn, Hermès, Gucci, Roots, Alan Cherry and Williams-Sonoma.

The neighborhood teems with cultural amenities, including museums and art galleries. Pampering skincare beckons from Clarins Skin Spa, Jie Avenue Salon & Spa, Mira Linder, the Stillwater Spa and Yorkville Skin Care Clinic. No need to fly to New York to find the prestigious Van Cleef and Arpels, Tiffany or Cartier collections of dazzling baubles. Van Cleef, the 100-year-old French jeweler, recently opened an intimate boutique salon inside the venerable Birks store, bringing floral diamond rings and other luscious things just in time for Christmas.

Bloor-Yorkville is a treasure trove of accessible luxury and rare specialty items. After 15 years in the famed Colonnade on Bloor Street, upscale retailer Marina Rinaldi, for the fuller fashioned woman, has launched its newest store in

Hazeltan Lanes. Royal de Versailles has 20 years on Bloor Street under its bejeweled belt. Jasmine's Fine Jewellery holds court on Bay Street. Amarynth is a wonderland of Venetian glass, breathtaking chandeliers and fine sterling. Muti holds an impressive selection of hand-painted ceramics. Ashley China's collection and displays are superb. Sports Mint is sports heaven for the fan who appreciates authentic, signed sports photographs, limited-edition artwork, sports memorabilia or licensed apparel. La Casa Del Habano, with global locations from Berlin to Saudi Arabia, offers 30 brands of the finest authentic Cuban cigars, where size sometimes counts. The 1920s Art Deco setting also features exquisitely crafted humidors and accessories for the aficionado. Whole Foods on Avenue Road is a natural foods emporium that makes healthy shopping and eating a delight.

How and where do Catherine Zeta-Jones, Rod Stewart, Paris Hilton, Shania Twain and Mariah Carey shop? Avec Plaisir — the ultimate lingerie and swimwear boutique. Hailed for the best bra fittings in the world, the shop carries top European lines that marry stunning fashion with high quality.

While celebrity-spotting, a spot of high tea in the Four Seasons would refresh, as would a cocktail or a glass of red atop the Park Hyatt, or a trendy cappuccino at Pusateri's. If day stretches into evening, lean back and enjoy the twinkling white lights that always adorn the bordering trees of the special streets.

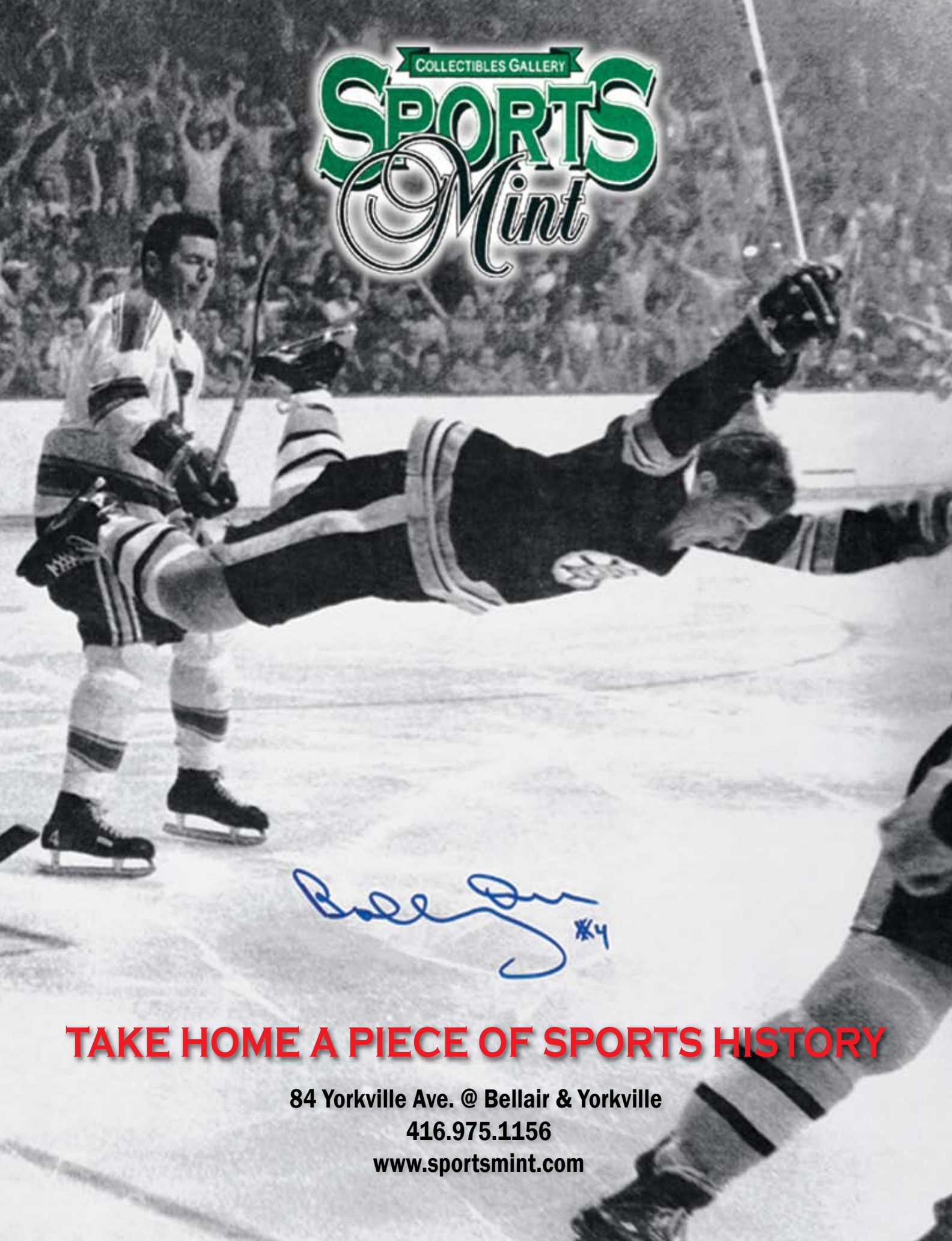
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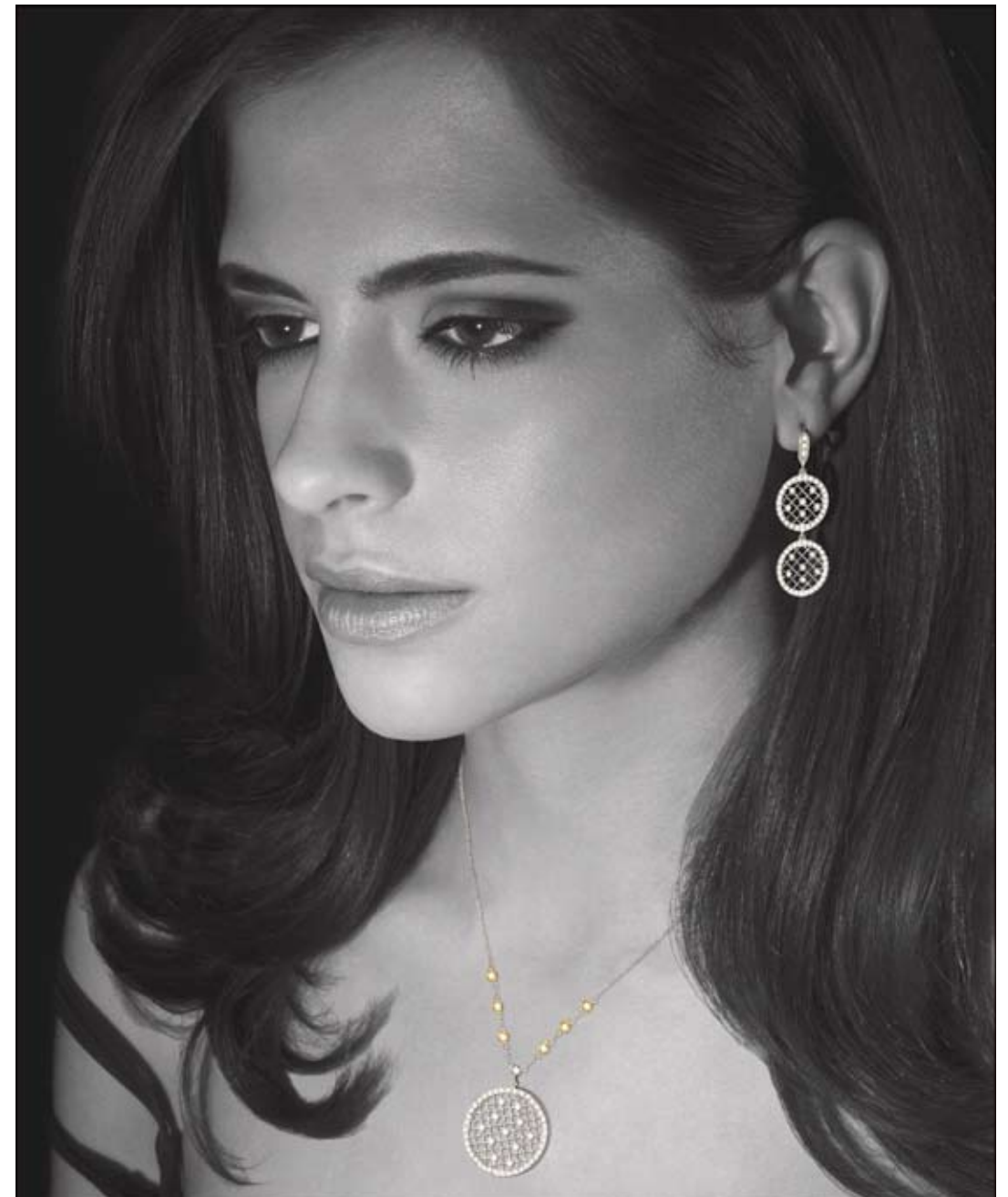
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TORONTO – IT'S UNLIMITED ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

By Penny Shore & Anna Miller



Ask 100 visitors to Toronto what attracts them and you're likely to get 100 different answers. The possibilities are endless in this booming metropolis—world-class museums and galleries, more than 50 ballet and dance companies, a new opera house, hundreds of ethnic restaurants, top-quality theatre, shopping galore. The list goes on.

Experience one of the most multicultural cities in the world in any one of its neighbourhoods. There's Little Italy, Little India, five different Chinatowns, Greektown, even Little Poland. And for the most exclusive retail shopping in Canada, head to Yorkville, Canada's version of L.A.'s Rodeo Drive or Palm Beach's Worth Avenue. There you'll find designer stores such as Chanel, Birks, Harry Rosen, Gucci, Escada, Tiffany's, Cartier's, Guerlain, Hermès and Holt Renfrew, as well as must-see art galleries and exquisite dining. Toronto is even known as "the city of restaurants."

If you have a yen for the arts, Toronto will more than fulfill your every need. As the third-largest English-language theatre center in the world, the city is host to some of the most popular stage productions. *Wicked*, back in Toronto after last year's successful run, is currently playing at the Canon Theatre and *The Phantom of the Opera*, the longest-running show in Broadway history, returns in February, this time to the Princess of Whales Theatre. Museum lovers will never be bored and the changing face of the Royal Ontario Museum promises years of exciting exploration. The Art Gallery of Ontario, the Gardiner Museum of Ceramics, the Bata Shoe Museum, and the Distillery District and other galleries showcase some of the most fascinating history and most innovative art in Canada.

At any time of the year there's likely to be a festival livening up the streets. Toronto's three biggest parades, Gay Pride, Caribana and the Santa Claus Parade, bring

millions out to celebrate. The Toronto International Film Festival is the most acclaimed in the world. Toronto's three major professional sports teams, the Toronto Maple Leafs, the Toronto Raptors and the Toronto Blue Jays, thrill fans whether in the state-of-the-art Air Canada Centre or in the world-famous Rogers Centre.

Take a break from all the shopping, arts, sports and fine dining to relax in one of the city's lush green spaces and gardens. No matter where you are in the city, you are probably within walking distance of one of 1,500 parks, biking trails, ravines or hiking areas. If you prefer to be pampered, fabulous spas all provide wonderful relaxing and rejuvenating therapeutic treatments.

Whatever you're looking for, Toronto is unlimited. Ask any of the 16 million tourists who visit this exceptional city every year. ■

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LEX AND THE CITY BAH, HUMBUG! SHOULD I CANCEL THAT PARTY!?

By Michael G. Cochrane LL.B.

The following are chilling facts from a real-life case about a real drunk at a real party. A man attended a 1998 New Year's Eve bring-your-own-booze, potluck party, hosted by another man and a woman. The guest had been convicted of impaired driving in 1991 and again in 1994. In 1996 he had been convicted of driving while his license was suspended. The night of the party, he arrived, with his "supplies," in an uninsured vehicle. Over the next two-and-a-half hours, he had twelve beers. After getting into a shoving match with another guest, he left the party in his vehicle. While heading down the highway, this fellow crossed the center line and hit an oncoming vehicle, head-on. One of the passengers in that vehicle was killed and another rendered a paraplegic. The drunk's blood-alcohol concentration was more than twice the legal limit. The woman who was disabled sued not only the drunken uninsured driver but also the hosts of the party.

The matter went all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada and the court ruled that claims against private hosts of such parties for injuries caused by drunken guests will only be successful in very limited circumstances. According to the Supreme Court, social hosts of parties where alcohol is served do not owe a duty of care to public users of highways. The court

found that the hosts of this party did not know their guest was impaired. They knew he had a drinking problem and previous convictions, but that did not mean they knew he was drunk that night. Result? Dead passenger and paraplegic passenger get nothing from the hosts of the party.

The most interesting part of the Supreme Court's decision concerns the so-called autonomy of a guest. The host of a party is entitled to respect the autonomy of a guest. The consumption of alcohol is a personal choice. If guests make such lousy personal choices, the court does not think there is a reason to make hosts bear the costs of those decisions. This guest arrived and, in his personal autonomy, got drunk. There was no evidence that anyone was relying on the hosts of the party to monitor each guest's alcohol consumption or that anyone was relying on them to prevent drunk guests from driving. That sound you just heard was a legal hair splitting.

Exactly when will a social host of a party be held responsible for catastrophic consequences of a drunken guest's activity after the party? It appears the host will be responsible if he or she can somehow be implicated in the over-serving of the guests or in a specific failure to stop a knowingly drunk guest from driving. This means

that, while the headlines told us social hosts are not liable for injuries caused by drunken guests, the court left the door open for a future judge to nail a host who continues to serve alcohol to a visibly inebriated person, knowing he or she will be driving home.

Whether you are planning to host a party in your home over the holidays or have been given responsibility by your company to organize a party, your potential liability to guests and other users of the road must be a primary consideration in your planning. Will the event be BYOB or will it be a cash bar? Will tickets be provided for free drinks? Will food be provided? Will liquor be given as prizes? Will guests be able to help themselves to the bar or will experienced servers control the flow of alcohol and other drinks over the course of the evening? What will you do if someone has had too much to drink and is clearly headed for the door, intending to drive home?

These and other challenges are the types of real-life questions the courts consider when trying to determine whether the well-meaning, generous host or the busy restaurant/bar owner should be fixed with the disastrous results of unleashing intoxicated people on the rest of the world. If you are planning a party, whether in your home or some other location, I

strongly recommend visiting the website www.smartserve.ca to learn how to reduce the risks. Some of their tips include:

1. Plan ahead. Consider stationing the bar far away from the door. Hire a professional bartender. Don't have servers circulating around a room refilling glasses.
2. Develop safe serving practices. Don't have an open bar. Close the bar well before the scheduled end of the party.
3. Provide lots of good food throughout the evening.
4. Make sure alternatives to alcohol are available. Place water, pop, juice and other stations around the room. Remember to lead by example. Let people know that alcohol-free drinks are just as acceptable as alcoholic ones.
5. Last, and certainly not least, make sure you investigate alternatives so guests do not have to drive home from an event where there has been drinking. Subsidize the taxis. Enforce a designated driver program or make sure local transit is easily accessible.

The holiday season is supposed to be a time for family, friends and relaxation. A little extra planning will ensure that your attempt to enjoy the holiday season does not destroy someone else's.

There is no need to cancel your party. Just be smart about handling alcohol and your guests. Have a safe and happy holiday. ■

Michael Cochrane is a Toronto lawyer who is a partner with Ricketts, Harris LLP. He is the author of several books, including *Surviving Your Divorce*, published by Wiley & Sons. He is the host of ROBTV's *Strictly Legal*, which airs Thursdays at 8:30pm Eastern time and 5:30pm Pacific time. Mr. Cochrane can be reached at his email mcochrane@rickettsharris.com or at www.michaelcochrane.ca. Mr. Cochrane welcomes questions, comments or suggestions for future columns in LUXE. "Lex and the City" is the copyright of Michael Cochrane.

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HERBED FRESH HAM WITH SAVOURY GRAVY

| | |
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| 6 to 8 lb. boneless fresh ham, tied not netted | 2 Tbsp. chopped fresh rosemary |
| ¾ cup dijon mustard | 1 tsp. salt |
| 1 cup dry breadcrumbs | ¼ tsp. pepper |
| 6 Tbsp. chopped fresh parsley | 2 cups water |
| 3 Tbsp. vegetable oil | 1 ½ cups Merlot |

DIRECTIONS: Preheat the oven to 350°F. Rim any excess oil from the ham. Spread ½ cup of the mustard evenly over the ham. Combine the breadcrumbs, 4 tablespoons of the parsley, oil, rosemary, salt and pepper in a medium bowl. Spread the bread mixture over the mustard, pressing firmly.

Place the ham in a roasting pan and add the water to the pan. Cover loosely with aluminum foil. Bake for 1 ½ hours. Remove the foil and bake until the internal temperature reaches 155°F, about 1 ½ hours. Transfer the ham to a cutting board and cover with foil; let rest 10 to 15 minutes before slicing.

Return the pan to the stove and remove any excess oil. Bring to a boil over medium heat. Add the wine and cook, stirring to loosen any browned bits from the pan. Reduce the heat to low and simmer for 10 minutes. stir in the remaining ¼ cup mustard and 2 tablespoons parsley. Serve with the ham.

Serves 8 as a main course. Serve with Robert Mondavi Private Selection Merlot.





EVEN PARANOIDS HAVE ENEMIES IS THERE A GOLD CONSPIRACY?

By Robert Appel, B.A., B.C.L. L.L.B

In the early 1990s, I recall a front-page story in Canada's *Financial Post* (progenitor to our present *National Post*) featuring interviews with professional traders from the international gold desks. All were of one view. "Unusual activity" was taking place. The gold market was not as it should have been. Something was up.

I wish I had kept that edition in a lock-vault. It would be as significant today to connoisseurs of financial conspiracy as Lee Harvey Oswald's Cuban postcard collection is to presidential assassination buffs. Wait – did I actually use the words "financial" and "conspiracy" in the same sentence? Indeed. And with good reason.

Long before he ever became Chair of the Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan wrote a number of interesting papers, pointing out that the only true "threat" to the ability of sovereign nations to print as much money as they liked, whenever they liked, was gold.

It is possibly no coincidence that, during Greenspan's own tenure at the helm of the Fed, bullion began to act just a little bit wonky. Instead of keeping pace with the Dow, or even with inflation – *de minimis* expectations based on decades of prior behavior – bullion actually began to weaken as other markets and commodities surged ever higher. Some called this counter-intuitive behavior. Others had an even catchier name for it — conspiracy!

By the late 1990s, several western central banks and key international gold mining firms suddenly, and oddly, discovered common ground. The Central Banks, led by the U.K., ostentatiously dumped gold onto the open market, protesting all the while that it was a "non-productive asset"

taking up otherwise valuable space in their vaults.

Some of the world's largest mining firms simultaneously began to "sell forward" future supplies of gold at ever-lower prices, i.e., prices constantly being depressed by the forward-selling process itself. The firms claimed they were altruistically concerned about the future price of gold, and were merely introducing stability into their business models by forced forward-selling. To appreciate this argument, think of a baker concerned that the market for his bread and rolls might weaken, so he decides to ingest his entire inventory...by himself. Seem a tad counter-intuitive? Good. You are starting to catch on.

Speaking of "catching on," one of the first groups to do so was an organization formed in 1999 called GATA or the Gold Anti-Trust Action Committee. They were considered complete crackpots by the traditional financial establishment. Until this year, that is.

A new and spanking-fresh report from Credit Agricole, the largest commercial bank in France, not only seemed to validate everything GATA had ever said, but specifically opined in writing that Britain's ill-conceived, aggressive and subversive dumping of gold into a sodden market during the late '90s likely caused a "current loss to UK taxpayers of about \$2bn."

So, gold conspiracy? Yea or nay?

Do the research and decide for yourself. If nay, at least offer Oliver Stone the screen rights? It's a gosh-darned interesting tale. If yea, then seriously consider backing up the truck in '07 for gold-related assets, because that pretty, perky yellow metal may yet have a whole lot of catching up to do! ■



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IT'S NOT HOW YOU LOOK IT'S HOW YOU FEEL

By David Patchell-Evans

Most people start exercising because they don't like the way they look. Few of us are completely happy with our bodies. There is nothing wrong with wanting to look good. If you include exercise in your life, however, the motivator that will keep you doing it will be how you feel.

Let's talk first about looking good, since it is on so many minds. Looking good involves several factors. One is feeling good about yourself just for participating in any kind of physical activity. Another is congratulating yourself for every improvement you make. When you see yourself in the mirror, you know your exercise program is moving you toward higher levels of vitality.

The second aspect of looking good happens when you are on the receiving end of compliments because of your hard work. People start saying, "Hey, you look good!" You have built the strength to have good posture. Your cardiovascular capacity helps you look vital and refreshed. You have gained flexibility in your joints and muscles so you don't look or feel old before your time. Exercising creates energy. As you create energy, you give your body vitality. Conversely, if you have vitality, you look good!

You start to exercise and your body says, "Hey, this doesn't feel so bad." You begin to feel the effect of endorphins—those brain chemicals that make you feel good. After you break the cycle of inactivity, between six weeks and six months, your body will be feeling the pleasure of exercise and will tell you, "Hey, I feel really good!"

The big challenge in looking good for your own body type is realizing you must be a participant in your own fitness. Thinking about it won't work. Only doing it works. Don't get caught on the treadmill of the perfect body image. You'll drive yourself crazy and you'll quit. If you want to be on a treadmill, make it an exercise treadmill, not a psychological one.

Your body is an absolutely phenomenal machine. It can do wonders for you. Most people can achieve a fitness level they would never dream possible. And they can do it more easily than they might think. One half-hour three times a week is all it takes, combining strength training and cardiovascular exercise.

Self-awareness, fitness and self-acceptance are a circle. When that circle is complete and you're moving around every day with a light, fit step, people will come up to you and say, "Wow, you look good!" And they'll be right. ■

DINGLE DANGLED, A PHOTOGRAPHER'S DREAM I WAS TOLD, "GO TO DINGLE!"

By John Davidson



While on a month-long quest to add to my portfolio of images, I discovered, among other places, Dingle.

Lured by some romantic vision of Scotland and a desire to trace my ancestral roots, I began my journey by landing in Glasgow. But that's not where Dingle is. The intent was to spend a week in Scotland and the next 10 days in England and Wales. At the airport, I "hired," as they say in the U.K., a new Volvo 850 X-Country, took my newly acquired and soon-to-be-trusty D200 Nikon camera, and headed off to the Aberdeenshire coast. After many hours of acclimatizing myself to driving on the "wrong" side of the road, from the "wrong" side of the car, as well as negotiating something called roundabouts, I eventually managed to get to Aberdeen.

Scotland is a magical place, full of mountains and valleys. Spectacular vistas await the traveler at each new bend in the road. It is, however, a challenge to the photographer who wishes merely to stop the car and shoot one of these scenes. Why? Well, one cannot simply pull over and stop the car.

Many of the roads are narrow and, as in much of the UK, the secondary roads in Scotland have no shoulders and few lay-bys. By the time I reached the Isle of Skye, I had learned how to circumvent this seemingly formidable obstacle. In order to take photos in Scotland, you must leave your car at one of the rare parking areas along the way and walk quite a distance to reach the desired destination.

The location of *Local Hero* (one of my favorite films) is Pennan Bay, just outside the Aberdeen town of Stonehaven. What a pleasant surprise to find the village intact and looking almost exactly as it did in Bill Forsyth's 1983 charming comedy starring Burt Lancaster and Peter Riegert. What a surprise also to meet characters associated with the film. It is because of *Local Hero* that Pennan is home to the most famous phone booth in Scotland. Those of you who share a love of this movie will remember it as the one phone for the whole village. The iconic booth was part of the movie set, but the village finally installed one for the many tourists intent on finding it.

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Pennan was not the only treat awaiting me in Aberdeenshire. It was pure accident that I also located Dunnator Castle. The castle in Stonehaven was shrouded in mist as I approached. When I returned the next day, I explored the castle and the rocky outcrop of shoreline on which it sits. Ominous indeed, Dunnator was perhaps the perfect location for Franco Zeffereilli's 1990 version of *Hamlet* with Mel Gibson. Dingle, however, was yet to come.

For the next leg of my journey I headed west, through the rain, all the way to the Isle of Skye. Regardless of the weather (had I expected otherwise? It is Scotland, after all!), the highlands were worth it. Would this spectacular scenery ever end? Skye offered many photo opportunities and I did indeed get out and walk. On one occasion this was in the mountains, just outside the main town of Portree, near the center of the Isle.

Days later, I found myself in Wales, exploring the villages of Dolgellau, Ffestiniog and Betws-y-Coed, a popular place set in a beautiful valley in the Snowdonia Forest Park. The countryside of northern and central Wales especially is lined with mountain passes and dotted with sheep, not unlike Scotland. The Welsh do indeed sing a great deal, even when they speak. I enjoyed one day in particular when I happened upon a sheep auction in Dolgellau. I was free to shoot images of all the participants, many of whom were men whose faces showed years of wear from living and working on the sheep-laden hillsides.

Ah, but I digress. On to Dingle.

It is impossible to describe, in words alone, this marvelous, archaeologically rich, mountainous finger of land and do it justice. The Dingle Peninsula dangles into the Atlantic from Ireland's west coast. It does so at the most westerly part of Europe. What a treasure I had found. Dingle is not without tourists. Loch Ness, Killarney, Glendalough and many other areas draw a large number of visitors, attracted by the beauty. Yet the many tourists in Dingle seem to get swallowed up in the hills and countryside. You can find solitude and serenity in this endless space.

Scotland and Wales were indeed picturesque. I was able to capture many beautiful landscapes during my adventures in these exquisite regions. Nothing, however, could have prepared me for the splendor of the rugged Irish coastline. Ireland is so lush that in many places the moss covers the tree bark and rocks. Neither was I prepared for the charm and wit of the people, I witnessed them at every turn—in the B&B's where I stayed, the pubs where I drank Guinness, as I listened to traditional and non-traditional Irish music, and the countryside where I walked for hours on end.

Were it not for a chance meeting with my flight companion, a Dubliner called Keith, en route from Birmingham to his hometown, I may not have arrived in this out-of-the-way region in County Kerry. Keith, who reminded me of a younger Bob Geldof, had only one suggestion for my travels: "Go to Dingle!" he said emphatically. Thank you, Keith, wherever you may be! Dingle did not disappoint.



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ALL PHOTOS IN THIS ARTICLE BY JOHN DAVIDSON

D200 IN PRACTICE

No, words alone cannot describe the beauty of Dingle. Nor could they describe the beauty of Scotland, England, Wales or Ireland proper. Thanks to my Nikon D200 DSLR (digital single lens reflex) and an assortment of Nikon lenses, however, I am able to create a perfect “picture” of my travels and share my journey with others.

What makes the D200 such a special camera on a trip like this? It is a high-resolution (10 mega-pixel), extremely well built, heavy camera (while perhaps too heavy for some, in my hands, it fit like a glove). It is practically indestructible and, because of a rubberized covered magnesium weather-sealed body, largely weatherproof. In a climate such as that of the British Isles, that sturdiness proved invaluable. Did I mention it rains a lot over there? Each time the camera became wet, I just wiped it down and all was well.

The camera reminds me of the well-established Nikon F100 film camera in its design and build. I frankly cannot think of a compelling reason to purchase the more expensive, slightly higher resolution (12 mega-pixel) D2xs when the D200 offers so much reliability and many of the D2xs's professional features at nearly half the cost.

Like all Nikon DSLR cameras, and I have been a longtime Nikon user, it accepts all my Nikon SLR lenses. I did carry a back-up D70 (6 mega-pixel), but found no need to pull it out of my camera bag. The reproduction of color,

even when I had to choose Auto, rather than taking the time to adjust carefully for the correct white balance, is nothing short of astonishing and very easy to review on the large (2.5 inch) and extremely vivid LCD panel offering a 170-degree viewing angle. The Auto White Balance setting itself is so reliable that one rarely needs to adjust it for varying light conditions. Yet if one chooses, it can be done quite easily and with amazing accuracy.

The camera does eat battery power. The published info from Nikon suggests that a whopping 2,500 images per charge may be had from the provided lithium battery. They do point out that this can be done with the camera set to a basic JPEG mode. Yet I'm puzzled as to who would buy such a high-quality camera and shoot in anything but the highest resolution, so this number is somewhat misleading. I was able to get at least 250 exposures per battery charge using a combination of RAW and JPEG fine settings. Under most circumstances one battery would be adequate, but I recommend carrying several spares. As an option, the MB-D200 battery pack is available, adding size to the camera. The pack is not manufactured to the same standards as the camera itself.

Those who shoot sports will be happy to hear that the D200 is up to the task. It will shoot quick sequences of almost anything, capable of up to five frames per second and exposures that can be made with shutter speeds of 30 to

1/8,000th of a second. The shutter itself sounds more solid than on the D50 or D70 series cameras. Speaking of speed, the D200 (as one might expect in a DSLR of this category) is turned on and ready to shoot instantly (0.15 seconds) and does not suffer from the “shutter lag” exhibited by point-and-shoot (non-DSLR) cameras.

As with most Nikon film and digital cameras, Spot, Center-Weighted and 3D Color Matrix Metering options are available. One of the best reasons to purchase a Nikon over other brands has always been the superiority of their built-in metering system. The D200 continues this fine tradition and works beautifully with Programmed Auto, Aperture-Priority, Shutter-Priority and fully Manual modes. I really appreciated the extended ISO range which now begins at 100 and goes to 1,600 with an option to “push” even more. I would have liked to see this brought down to ISO 50 (as its chief competitor has done in some models). This would allow for longer exposures without the aid of a neutral density filter. But this is perhaps asking too much of such an already well-featured, and quality-laden camera.

As with the D70s, D50, the new D80 and the more expensive DX series cameras, the D200 works marvelously with Nikon's speed lights. Yes, the camera has a built-in flash, which typically pops up when needed. Some photographers don't like this feature, arguing that it gives the camera a non-pro feel. I disagree. The camera may be used to “command”

several Nikon flash heads with through-the-lens as well as other modes of exposure automation. I won't go into how this all works, but suffice it to say the exposure control and accuracy with the Nikon flash system is nothing short of astonishing. I use two Nikon SB800s with mine and they work like magic. In addition, for the photographer who owns older flash units or wishes to use the camera with studio lights, there is a PC connector.

So how good are the results from the Nikon D200? On screen, as you might expect, the photos look fantastic. When printed, either from my Epson 2200, or onto a Fuji Crystal Archival paper from the lab, the resulting images look as though they came from a larger, medium-format negative. I was impressed with the 8 x 10 prints and even more with the 12 x 18s. Overall, the D200 has exceptional image quality.

It is not a camera for everyone. It is big, fairly pricy and its multitude of controls can be a challenge for those who possess only the fundamentals of photography. If, on the other hand, you love photography and want a reliable, tough camera that will work with your existing Nikon lenses and simply feel great in your hands, the D200 is worth serious consideration. In the right hands, the camera will yield gorgeous results. While carrying it around the U.K. and Ireland, I felt confident each time I pressed the shutter and snapped a new image. The results, I am pleased to say, are nothing short of spectacular. ■



NIKON D200 DIGITAL SLR BASIC CAMERA SPECIFICATIONS

- CANADIAN PRICE:** \$1899.95
- IMAGE SENSOR:** RGB CCD, 23.6 x 15.8mm; total pixels: 10.92 million pixels
- ISO SENSITIVITY:** 100 to 1600 in steps of 1/3, 1/2 or 1 EV with additional settings up to 1 EV over 1600
- STORAGE MEDIA:** CompactFlash™ (CF) Card (Type I and II) and Microdrive™
- STORAGE SYSTEM:** Compressed NEF (RAW): 12-bit compression, JPEG: JPEG baseline-compliant
- WHITE BALANCE:** Auto (TTL white balance with 1,005-pixel RGB sensor), six manual modes with fine-tuning, color temperature setting, preset white balance, white balance bracketing possible (2 to 9 frames in increments of 1, 2 or 3)
- LCD MONITOR:** 2.5-inch, 230,000-dot, LCD with brightness adjustment
- COMPATIBLE LENSES:** Nikon F mount
- PICTURE ANGLE:** Equivalent in 35mm format is approx. 1.5 times lens focal length
- AF AREA MODE:** 1) Single Area AF 2) Dynamic Area AF 3) Group Dynamic AF 4) Dynamic area AF with closest subject priority
- EXPOSURE METERING SYSTEM:** Three-mode through-the-lens (TTL) exposure metering
1) 3D Color Matrix Metering II (type G and D lenses)
2) Center-weighted: Weight of 75% given to 6, 8, 10, or 13mm dia. circle in center of frame
3) Spot: Meters 3mm dia. circle (about 2.0% of frame)
- EXPOSURE MODES:** Programmed Auto [P] with flexible program; Shutter-Priority Auto [S]; Aperture Priority Auto [A]; Manual [M]
- SHOOTING MODES:** 1) Single frame shooting mode 2) Continuous low speed (CL) shooting mode: 1- 4 frames/sec
3) Continuous high-speed shooting mode: 5 frames per second
4) Self-timer shooting mode 5) Mirror-up mode
- SHUTTER:** Electronically-controlled vertical-travel focal plane shutter, 30 to 1/8000 sec. in steps of 1/3, 1/2 or 1 EV, bulb
- SYNC CONTACT:** X-contact only; flash synchronization at up to 1/250 sec.
- FLASH CONTROL:** 1) TTL: TTL flash control by 1,005-pixel RGB sensor, Built-in Speedlight: i-TTL balanced fill-flash or standard i-TTL flash (spot metering or mode dial set to [M])
2) Auto aperture: Available with SB-800 with CPU lens
3) Non-TTL Auto: Available with Speedlights such as SB-800, 80DX, 28DX, 28, 27, and 22s
4) Range-priority manual; available with SB-800
- FLASH SYNC MODE:** 1) Front-curtain Sync (normal sync) 2) Red-eye Reduction
3) Red-eye Reduction with Slow Sync 4) Slow Sync 5) Rear-curtain Sync
- BUILT-IN FLASH:** Manual pop-up with button release, Guide number (ISO 100 at m/ft and 20°C/68°F): approx. 12/39 (manual 13/42)
- DEPTH OF FIELD PREVIEW:** When CPU lens is attached, lens aperture can be stopped down to value selected by user (A and M modes) or value selected by camera (P and S modes)
- DIMENSIONS (W x H x D):** Approx. 147 x 113 x 74mm (5.8 x 4.4 x 2.9 in.)
- WEIGHT:** Approx. 830g (1 lbs 13 oz) without battery, memory card, body cap, or monitor cover
- SUPPLIED ACCESSORIES:** Rechargeable Li-ion Battery EN-EL3e, Quick Charger MH-18a, Video Cable, USB Cable UC-E4, Strap, Body cap, Eyepiece Cap DK-5, Rubber Eyecup DK-21, LCD monitor cover BM-6, PictureProject CD-ROM
- OPTIONAL ACCESSORIES:** Multi-Power Battery pack MB-D200, Wireless Transmitter WT-3, Semi-soft case D200, Magnifying Eyepiece DK-21M, Remote cord MC-36/30, GPS Adapter Cord MC-35, AC Adapter EH-6, Speedlight SB-800/SB-600/SB-R200, Nikon Capture 4 (Ver. 4.4), CompactFlash card

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HOW TO LIVE A HAPPY LIFE ANTHONY KENNEDY SHRIVER HAS AN ANSWER

By Janice Kaye and Beth McBlain

If the traditional Kennedy career track was any indication, then Anthony Kennedy Shriver was destined to go to law school. Today, however, he is glad he was inspired to take a completely different road, and one to which he has developed a lifelong commitment. It was a decision that not only fulfilled him, but also resulted in a great deal of happiness for others. That's he ended up with 300,000 Buddies.

The 41-year-old offspring of the Kennedy clan is the founder of Best Buddies International, the organization he founded in 1988, when he was just 24, and officially incorporated in 1989. It started small, with some Georgetown University college pals forging one-on-one friendships with people with intellectual disabilities. The name soon changed from the original "Big" Buddies to Best Buddies. "It was the Buddies who showed us the way," remembered Shriver. "It evolved into Best Buddies because the name was mutually interactive and respectful; it kept to the spirit." The not-for-profit organization, which works toward integrated employment for its challenged members, has expanded to 1,300 chapters in 30 countries and Shriver aims for 50 countries and the participation of half-a-million people by January 1st, 2011. Best Buddies envisions a world where all are recognized for their abilities, embraced by the workplace, and treated as valued members of society. It was Shriver's way of giving back.

Young Anthony had plenty of experience in the charitable world and has been volunteering since he was six years old. "I was influenced throughout my life by the concept and power of friendship to create change," he said. "It all began in my mother's living room."

And some living room it was. His grandmother Rose, who

lived to be 104, was well known for her philanthropy, even leading the Special Olympics grandparents' parade at the age of 90. His mother, the indefatigable Eunice Kennedy Shriver, now 87 and the fifth of the nine Kennedy children of Joseph and Rose, founded the Special Olympics in 1968. She is the only living woman whose image appears on a U.S. coin — the 1995 commemorative Special Olympics Silver Dollar. Among his uncles were President John F. Kennedy and presidential

candidate and former Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy. His Uncle Ted is Senator Edward Kennedy. His sister is Maria Shriver Schwarzenegger. The man has pedigrees upon pedigrees. "One person can have a tremendous impact — my mother taught me that," said Anthony. His father, R. Sargent Shriver, Jr., is a former U.S. Ambassador to France, the 1972 Democratic vice-presidential candidate, the driving force behind the creation of the Peace Corps,

and a lifelong social activist. Sargent Shriver first worked with Eunice Kennedy in 1947 on juvenile delinquency issues, and they married in 1953. "My parents loved what they did," explained Anthony. "They had a partnership, a successful marriage of friendship and teamwork. They fed off each other." The conversation around the dinner table led naturally to the younger Shriver's community involvement. His other siblings are Robert (Bobby) Sargent Shriver III, a Santa Monica City councilor who founded Debt AIDS Trade in Africa (DATA) and launched the recent Product RED initiative with Bono; Dr. Timothy Perry Shriver, a Ph.D. in education and chairman of the board of the Special Olympics; and Mark Kennedy Shriver, who served as a member of the Maryland House of Delegates. The children, engaged in the spirit of giving by their parents,



(TOP) Anthony Kennedy Shriver, wife Alina, their children Teddy, Francesca and Eunice, and Anthony's Aunt Rosemary Kennedy, an inspiration for Best Buddies. Taken on Rosemary's last visit to Miami. She died in January 2005 FACING PAGE: (TOP) Anthony with Best Buddies representatives from 25 countries (BOTTOM LEFT) David Caruso with Annie Totah, co-chairs of the Tzedekah Ball (BOTTOM MIDDLE) Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, Chief Rabbi of Israel (BOTTOM RIGHT) Anthony Shriver with his e-Buddy John David Craig

PHOTOS BY BILL LAUTH, LARRY LEVIN AND BEST BUDDIES



have more than lived up to a legacy of public service.

In 2005, Eunice became the oldest surviving child when her older sister Rosemary died at the age of 86. Of the nine extraordinary siblings, the first Kennedy daughter was perhaps even more special than the others. She was intellectually disabled, then called "retarded," and spent most of her life in an institution. "Aunt Rosemary was a big part of my life," recalled Anthony. "She is responsible for giving me an appreciation of the talents of intellectually challenged people. She spent two months of each year with our family." His aunt's life served as a powerful motivator in getting people

to the table to give the intellectually challenged the opportunity to have a non-disabled friend — and vice versa.

Does Shriver have a Buddy himself? "Lots of them," he responded. He and his Buddy of 13 years, 32-year-old Jorge Morilla, completed a tandem bicycle event together. Alone, George rode 90 miles to raise \$3,000 for the inaugural Volvo Hearst Castle Challenge, a 100-mile bike ride along the Pacific Coast Highway. "Even though he landed in the hospital at one point," Shriver recalled proudly. "He crossed the finish line. They all celebrated and danced and jumped in the pool at Hearst Castle." The event was chaired by California First Lady

and “first sister” Maria Shriver. As the “official vehicle” of Best Buddies, Volvo will sponsor the Hearst ride as well as the Volvo Hyannis Port Challenge through 2009.

Finding employment for Buddies is a key component of the program. Jorge works at the Hyatt Hotel in Miami, managing the pool and health club. Two Buddies work at the Best Buddies Miami office. Katie Mead “transcends the difference,” said Shriver. “She just happens to have Down Syndrome.” Joyce on the switchboard is also a Buddy. ““She’s an office assistant,” said Shriver. “She does data entry, picks up and delivers the mail, and deals with T-shirt merchandise.” Other Buddies hold down such positions as law firm messengers, clerks, mechanics, drivers, showroom workers, and Nike retail employees. “The Miami Visitors’ Bureau has put many Buddies in hotels — front and center,” noted Shriver.

As the U.S. chapter of Best Buddies continued to thrive, “We got into Canada,” explained Shriver. “It’s a friendship thing.” He met Torontonian and philanthropist Penny Shore through her friend Arij Gasiunasen. “Penny was the first Canadian I met with,” said Shriver. “She got the ball rolling.” The Canadian group elicited the help of the Toronto International Film Festival, whose celebrity connections took the organization to a new level. Shriver reminded, “You need that one leader with passion,” citing Shore, who coined the term “social entrepreneur,” and her 12-year commitment to the organization. Now operating in 30 countries, Shriver aims for 50 international success stories by the year 2010. In the Colombia branch, a single supermarket in Bogota, called Cosca, has hired 60 Buddies to work in the store. “And business is up!” enthused Shriver. The Colombia Best Buddies program has also produced a celebrity-filled calendar in support of the endeavor.

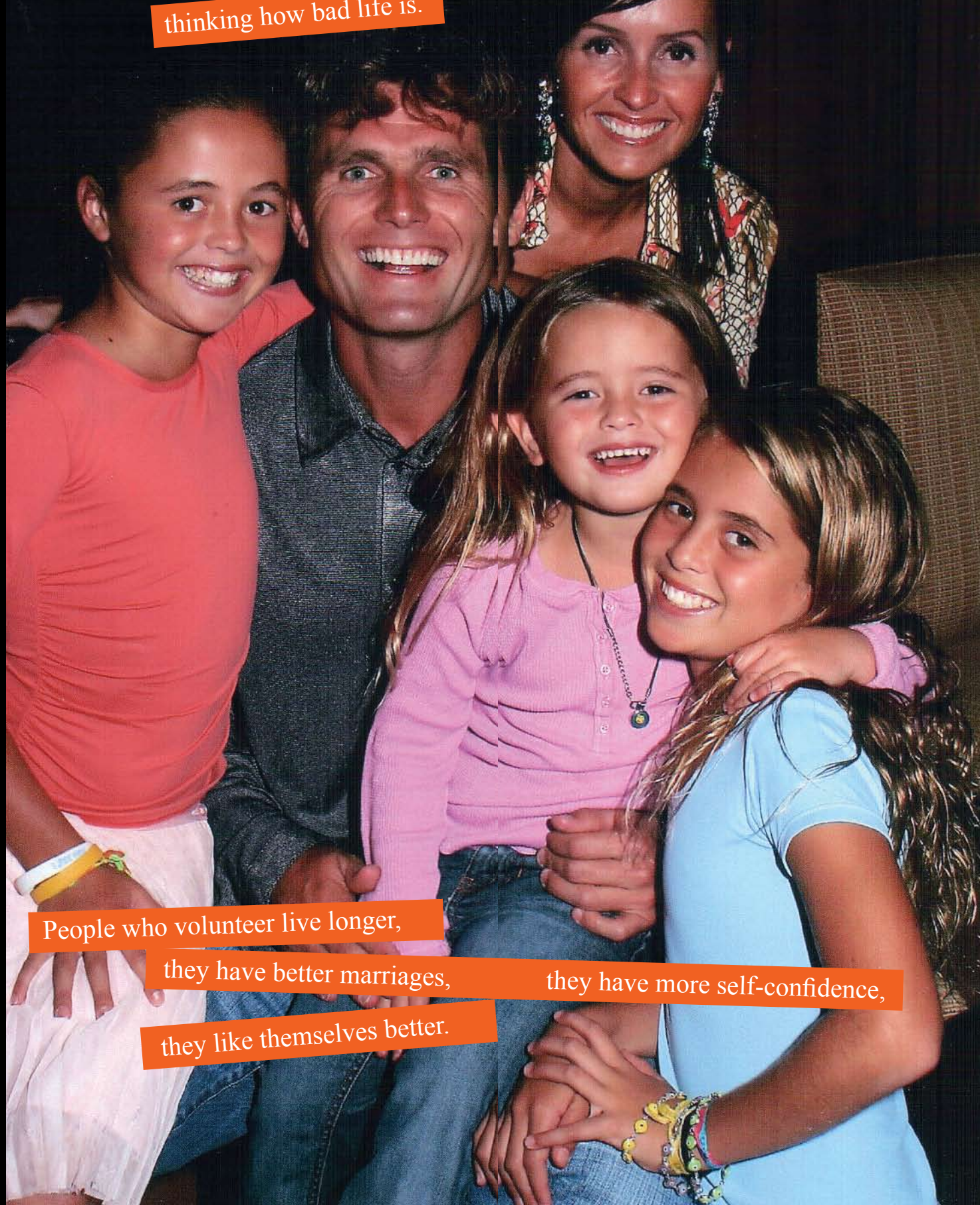
Eunice Shriver’s living room was pressed into willing service yet again in October with the Eighteenth Annual Best Buddies Ball. At the spectacular star-studded black-tie gala that launched Best Buddies International in Israel, David Caruso, star of CSI Miami, was honored with the Spirit of Leadership Award. A star with Best Buddies as well, Caruso not only participates actively with his own Buddy, but also serves on the Board of Directors. Other special guests at the Tzedakah Ball (tzedakah means charity in Hebrew) included Rabbi Israel Muir Lau, the Chief Rabbi of Israel; the Honorable Dalia Itzik, the Speaker of the Knesset; Prince Reza Pahlavi of Iran; Olympic gold medallist Carl Lewis; singing stars Cindy Lauper and Debbie Harry; New York architect Campion Platt and his wife, AOL executive and Best Buddies board member Tatiana Platt; Brazilian-born Florida artist Romero Britto; and AOL vice-chairman Ted Leonsis. “The need in Israel is great,” explained Shriver about the decision to underwrite a Best Buddies program there. “And they have an enormous sense of philanthropy. There is a separation of people with disabilities there and few opportunities for employment. We want to change that.” He met with President Ehud Olmert and other dignitaries, with encouraging results. Shriver looks

When you spend time giving all day long,

you don’t come home

thinking how bad life is.

Anthony and Alina Shriver
with daughters
Francesca, Carolina and Eunice
(2005)



People who volunteer live longer,

they have better marriages,

they like themselves better.

they have more self-confidence,

forward to initiating Greece as well.

In 2006, the Miss Universe Organization, which runs the Donald Trump-NBC Universal-produced Miss Universe, Miss USA and Miss Teen USA competitions, added Best Buddies to its list of charitable alliances. Each of the 51 Miss USA contestants was paired with a Buddy for an evening tour of Baltimore where the pageant took place. “The vision, long term,” said Shriver, “Is to go out of business in 25 years,” foreseeing a time when people with intellectual disabilities become naturally integrated. “We hope that’ll happen.” The Miami Beach Gala in December will welcome leading sports figures, celebrities, artists, philanthropists and power brokers at a 500-seat formal dinner featuring glittering entertainment to raise funds and awareness for Best Buddies.

The newest initiative on the horizon is www.e-Buddies.com, a cutting-edge online friendship program, ensuring that Buddies do not land “on the wrong side of the digital divide,” as Shriver put it. The organization needs more people, more resources, and more recruiting and training of staff. Governor Jeb Bush and Senator John Kerry are just two of the high-profile e-Buddies who can offer the hand of friendship right from their offices. With 156 million people in the world — 3 percent of the population — with intellectual disabilities, the Internet could prove a key tool in avoiding marginalization and facilitating inclusion.

The family of Joseph and Rose Kennedy that spanned most of the 20th century now continues the legacy with their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Now married to his Cuban-born wife, former ballerina Alina, and the father of four, ages 18, 12, 11 and 5, Shriver continues to pass the philanthropic torch. “My five-year-old is volunteering with me,” he said. “We clean up and plant gardens. She has her very own little shovel. Everybody can do something.” At least three generations of purpose-driven lives have taken hold in the fourth.

“Kids – you never know what they’ll end up doing,” mused Shriver. “My mother made me go to the Special Olympics events- no option. You knew you were doing the right thing. It means something in another person’s life. I remember once my friends were having a keg party, but this meant so much more. Kids get what an impact that has and they’ll become social entrepreneurs, too.” He encourages more parents to engage their children and instill in them the spirit of giving of themselves.

Volunteering has been proven to be good for the health. Said Shriver, “People who volunteer live longer, they have better marriages, they have more self-confidence, they like themselves better. When you spend time giving all day long, you don’t come home thinking how bad life is.”

Although he chose not to go to law school, Anthony Kennedy Shriver discovered a universal law that he claims is the key to happiness. “Volunteer!” exhorted Shriver. “It’s the ticket to a really great life.” And he’s got 300,000 Best Buddies to prove it. ■

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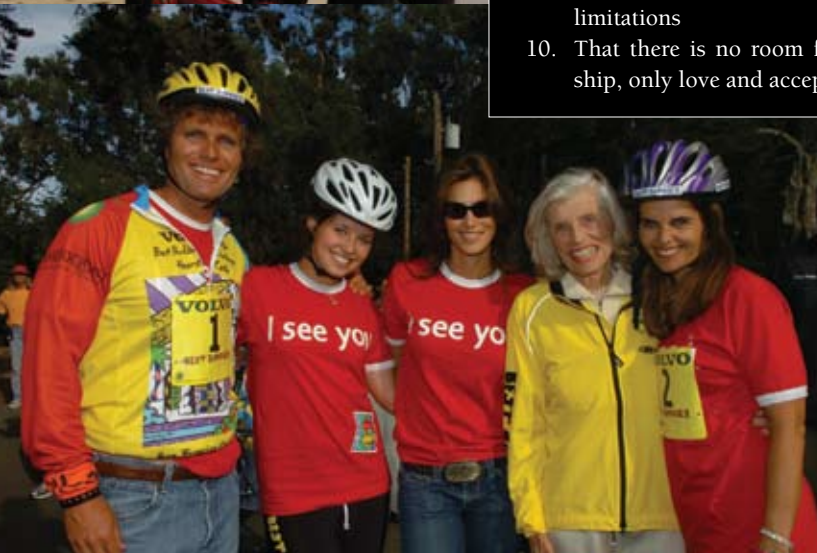
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FROM BUDDY TO BUDDY: A PERSONAL JOURNEY

Best Buddies Eliza Moyer and Julie Henshaw compiled the following list of things they learned from one another:

1. That it's more than OK to smile at strangers
2. That you don't need a special occasion to get together and have a good meal. Spending time together is reason enough (our group had a great time together at Swiss Chalet!)
3. That it's okay to paint outside the lines (as a group social event, we painted our own beautiful pottery!)
4. That there's more to me than what I see in the mirror
5. That a genuine smile from a special friend will always be enough to brighten the worst of days
6. That to really enjoy the moment, I need to slow down and take life a little less seriously
7. If someone can't accept me for who I am, just around the corner I know I'll find someone who can and does
8. That you can always pig-out in front of a true friend (I think we all wished that we had worn elastic-waist pants for all the cookie-consumption at our Christmas party!)
9. To appreciate my abilities and to challenge my limitations
10. That there is no room for judgment in friendship, only love and acceptance.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Rabbi Israel Meir Lau (Chief Rabbi of Israel), The Honorable Dalia Itzik (Speaker of the Knesset, Israel), Penny Shore and Tom A. Vachliotis; Artist Romero Britto, Alina Shriver and Prince Reza Pahlavi of Iran; Honorary Chairperson Tedy Bruschi of the New England Patriots, rider Syd Lea and Anthony K. Shriver at the 2006 Volvo Best Buddies Challenge; Hyannis Port; Anthony K. Shriver, Best Buddies participant Katie Meade, Maria Shriver, tandem bike buddy Julie Remillard at 2006 Volvo Best Buddies Challenge; Hearst Castle; Ken Holden and his e-Buddy, Best Buddies board member and AOL Vice Chairman Ted Leonsis, with Anthony Kennedy Shriver; Anthony K. Shriver, Katherine Schwarzenegger, Cindy Crawford, Eunice Kennedy Shriver and Maria Shriver at 2005 Volvo Best Buddies Challenge; Hearst Castle; Anthony K. Shriver and long standing Best Buddy Jorge Morilla at 2005 Volvo Best Buddies Challenge; Hyannis Port.



VICHY'S WONDROUS WATERS HEALING MINERAL SPRINGS DRAW VISITORS

By Jacqueline Swartz

A quartet of hands massages my travel-knotted limbs as I lie face-down on the table. Then a monsoon of water pours from a shower bar above. In the spa world it is known as a Vichy shower. But this is the real town of Vichy, where healing waters flow from the renowned local springs. Since Roman times, the main draw of this jewel box of a French town has been its wondrously curative waters.

For centuries, Vichy was synonymous with restorative waters, drawing *curistes*, or those who take the waters, to its eleven underground hot and cold mineral springs. The Marquise de Sévigné, the celebrated letter-writer, wrote in 1676, "There is no doubt that the waters here are miraculous." Relieved of her arthritis, she was able to take up her pen once again. At six o'clock in the evening, the *curistes* would congregate at the springs. "Everybody meets there," the Marquise noted.

Situated in the Auvergne region, Vichy offers visits to medieval castles and churches and is close enough to the Alps to allow for easy skiing and. This university town of 13,000, I discover, is easily walkable. The mineral-rich springs are in the town's center, the Parc des Sources, a rectangular park bordered by hotels, churches shops and heritage buildings. At one end of the park is the restored Art Nouveau Opera House, which now seats more than 1,400 and houses convention

facilities on the lower level. From there it's just a walk through the park to the Rue de Belgique, with its 19th-century houses, from Venetian neo-Gothic to neo-Renaissance, that seem to compete in grandiosity. On another side of the park is the blue and gold Centre Thermal des Domes, built in the 19th century and restored in the 21st. This full-service spa is a fin-de-siècle fantasy, featuring a 35-degree pool of healing waters. Under the azure dome, it's easy to slip into a dreamy time-traveling reverie. Like the *curistes* of a century ago, today's Vichy spa-goers take the waters in surroundings that delight the eye. From impressive townhouses to an exquisitely planned park, it all seems to contribute to the cure.

Inside the park, most of the springs have been diverted into faucets in the Hall des Sources, a graceful 1903 structure with ironwork fashioned by noted Art Nouveau artist Emile Robert.

Plastic cup in hand, visitors select the desired labeled water and open the tap. "They drink," wrote the Marquise, "And all of them make a face because the water is almost boiling and has a very disagreeable taste." True enough, the hot spring I try, *Hôpital*, has a sulphurous taste. It might be my imagination, but after I drink it I feel better. Others, such as the cool, naturally sparkling Vichy Celestin, taste so pure that they make every other carbonated water taste industrial.



PHOTO COURTESY OF VILLE DE VICHY



In France, water is considered a living thing, and certain mineral springs designated “in the public interest,” meaning they remain free of charge. Some of the *curistes* come with doctors’ prescriptions, stay for three weeks, and drink specific waters said to benefit the liver, digestion or skin. In 1973 the hot springs or *les thermes* of Vichy were accredited by the French ministry of health for the treatment of rheumatism and arthritis. Recent studies in France found the waters useful in lowering cholesterol and reducing cellulite.

SLIMMING THE VICHY WAY

In October, an ambitious program was announced called *Maigrir à Vichy*, or Lose Weight in Vichy. Its goal is nothing less than to make Vichy the weight-loss center of Europe. Involving nine hotels, various restaurants and three large spas, this is more like an army mobilized against overweight and its associated health problems. The war fronts are diet, exercise, psychology and follow-up. Among the experts are doctors, personal trainers, dieticians and chefs. One of the guiding lights is Chef Pierre-Yves Lorgeoux, noted for his creative light cuisine. Chef Lorgeoux has teamed up with the director of the program, Dr. Thierry Hanh, an expert in nutritional medicine. Together they have developed low-calorie cooking techniques

called *Saveurs et Santé*. For a restaurant to merit the *Saveurs et Santé* label, the chef must complete a training course.

The nerve center of *Maigrir à Vichy* is the *Centre Nutritionnel*, where experts discuss the latest research, and the slimming *curistes* discuss their food habits with dieticians and take cooking classes with Chef Lorgeoux.

The nutrition center is located in the Spa Vichy Les Celestins, adjacent to the four-star Sofitel. When I trundled over to the spa, in my terrycloth robe, from Sofitel’s covered walkway, I did not expect to find one of the largest spas in Europe. In this pristine, light-filled, three-storey building, the levels are connected by a curved wooden staircase. You can get some exercise by going from a treatment room on one floor to the *hammam* on another. This steam room is lavishly tiled in turquoise and redolent with eucalyptus. There are unexpected pleasures at every turn. During a vigorous salt scrub with apricot oil, I gaze out at a view of the park. The treatment rooms, like everything else, are larger than usual. Yet the size of the spa does not make it impersonal. The staff, highly professional, treats clients with a kind of easygoing pleasantness that I attribute to living in a small town—a small town with big spas.

Treatments are those of a world-class spa, but there are local specialties. One is the Vichy shower, others are wraps prepared with local mud. In France, beauty treatments are considered an essential part of a healthy life. Many treatments use the products, still made nearby, that carry the Vichy name. As the company’s slogan reminds, health also passes through the skin. I was pleased to find one of their creams, the anti-aging skin treatment Neovadiol, in my large bathroom at the Sofitel.

CENTURIES OF HISTORY

Vichy’s history is dramatic, replete with both upbeat opulence and unforeseen tragedy. In the mid-1800s, Napoleon III discovered the waters and announced his intention to return regularly. Instead of merely building a palace where he could enjoy the summer months while taking the waters, he built himself a town with acres of green space.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF VICHY SPA



MAIGRIR À VICHY

Those who planned the new weight-loss program at Vichy seem to have thought of everything.

Slimming *curistes* meet with a dietician and eat at designated restaurants carrying the *Saveurs et Santé* label. Each has a personal trainer and use of fitness facilities ranging from the spa gym to the kayaking center at the nearby Omnisport Park. In small groups they take cooking lessons, and also meet with a psychologist to discuss the emotional aspects of eating. For relaxation, there are spa facilities offering dozens of treatments, from massage to wraps to facials. With Vichy’s healing waters, surely in a week or two one could see results. But what happens afterwards?

“It’s not just a week, it’s a start,” emphasized Jean Guirard de Nadon, general manager of Accor Thalassia Vichy. The goal is not only a lower number on the scale but also new and better habits. Backsliding is to be expected, which is why there is a six-month program of follow-up. *Curistes* can contact food and exercise experts by phone or email.

M. de Nadon explained the system in the lovely setting of Sofitel’s Restaurant #3, where light cuisine master Chef Largeoux works his magic, serving low-calorie food with haute cuisine taste.

I start my meal with vichyssoise – the name of the soup and the name of the people of Vichy. How could vichyssoise be delicate? This one is, because of the use of non-fat milk and *fromage blanc*, a kind of ricotta. On top is a dollop of caviar. On the menu, the calories for each dish are listed. This one contains 143. Then come the scallops topped by artichoke hearts. Succulent, at 287 calories. For dessert, a delectable strawberry meringue comes in at 49 calories. Of course such a lunch deserves a glass of wine. Is this how the *curistes* eat?

M de Nadon seemed to anticipate my question. “We deliberately chose 1,300 calories a day instead of 800, which you’d expect to find in North America,” he said. “In France, we want losing weight to be associated with *plaisir*.”

USEFUL INFORMATION

Some packages include hotels, meals and spa services, as well as thermal treatments. www.destinationvichy.com
Sofitel les Celestins Hotel 011334 7030 8200 www.sofitel.com
Air France flies daily from Toronto to Paris. From there, it is a 45-minute flight to Clermont-Auvergne, near Vichy, or a two-and-a-half hour train ride. www.airfrance.com

In Napoleon’s time, people came to take the waters and stayed to enjoy the social scene. By the turn of the century, Vichy had become a place to shop, promenade, and attend the Opera and Casino. “It was a little Paris,” remarked the dynamic Vichy tourist board director, Jérôme Joannet. Parisians arrived on one of France’s first railway lines. Royalty came from all over Europe and North Africa. Sultans rented entire floors of hotels for their concubines. Before the First World War, Vichy drew 100,000 *curistes* a year. Soon after, the town’s fortunes changed, not only because of world events, but also on account of local fashion.

“In the 1920s, seaside vacation spots like St Tropez and Biarritz became fashionable,” explained Joannet. Because of its inland location, Vichy lost some of its allure, despite its 250 hotels. In 1940, those hotels, plus a top-notch telephone system, made it the choice of the collaborationist government of Marshall Pétain. It was the worst thing that ever happened to the town. Even today, more than 60 years after the war, some French people see Vichy as branded with the mark of shame for caving in to the German enemy. That condemnation comes with a certain curiosity from visitors. “Of all our walking tours,” said Jacques Crouzat, an erudite guide who conveys his fascination with the town, “The most popular one is about the war years.”

Joannet of the tourist board sees justification for a museum to those dark years. “A lot of people want a museum,” he explained. “It will be the hot issue during next year’s mayoral elections.” Such an attraction would show visitors, particularly those from France, that the town has indeed faced that part of its past. If the museum is built, it will be part of a series of developments restoring the town to prominence, keeping alive the charm and elegance of the Belle Epoque glory years, while moving it into the forefront of 21st-century wellness.

Madame de Sévigné came for her arthritis in the late 1600s and the waters are used for the same ailment today. During the Second Empire in the mid-1800s, the thermal waters treated those with digestion and weight problems. A century-and-a-half later, Vichy is focusing on the role stress and weight play in the diseases of today. Both for Vichy’s still-raw history and for our 21st-century maladies, let the healing continue. ■

WORTH ITS SEA SALT A COLORFUL KALEIDOSCOPE OF FLAVOR AND PURITY

By Michele Peterson



POSH (PRIMORDIAL OCEAN SALT HIMALAYA)

As far back as pagan times, people have revered salt. For Celts, an important New Year tradition included exchanging gifts of coal, cake and salt, symbolizing warmth, food and wealth. Ancient scriptures recounted how kings and other nobility traveled long distances to the Black Sea seeking the curative powers of its pink salt crystals. The mineral was so precious that, in early Rome, soldiers were actually paid with salt.

Fortunately, these rare salts of seas and oceans, as well as of riverbeds and mountains, are becoming more available and today's consumers don't have to journey ancient trade routes to experience some of the world's most intriguing varieties. Today, any chef "worth his salt" knows that selecting the right salt can enhance the flavors and presentation of a special dish. There is also a growing awareness of the health benefits offered by natural salts as opposed to the processed kind. The two most surprising qualities about natural salts are the difference in taste and the fact that they come in colors.

ROSE PINK

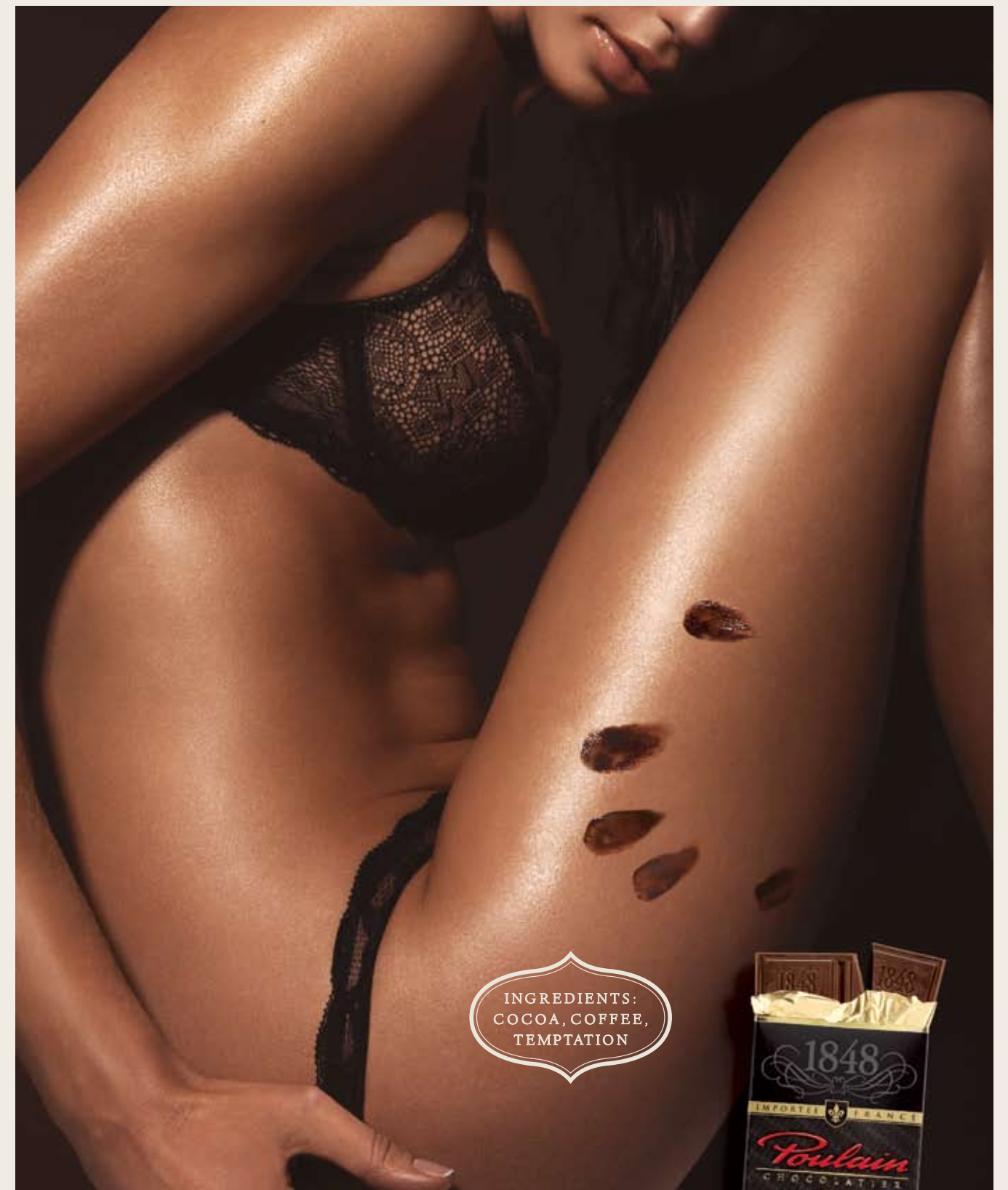
First discovered by Alexander the Great in 327 BC, Himalayan salt has been rediscovered. It has become a

favorite among North America's top chefs and restaurateurs who value its purity, rich mineral content and clean taste. Available in natural pink, white and black crystals, it is extracted by hand from deep within the Himalayan Mountains.

Hand-harvesting is also used to gather natural pink salt from the Black Sea. In addition to keeping the crystals chemical-free and high in mineral content, traditional techniques also help retain the pink coloration created by halophytic bacteria within the water. These striking salts offer bursts of flavor and a dramatic presentation when sprinkled on food.

GOLDEN BRONZE

Prehistoric riverbeds in Australia are the source for Horizon Crystal Salt Flakes, created when salt water is pumped from the depths of the North Victoria countryside. Once the water evaporates, the brine forms crystals the color of fine cognac. This award-winning gourmet salt is best suited as a finishing salt but can be used for cooking. According to Kristina Bliss of Toronto's Kristina Bliss Goodwin Catering, "Smoked salt makes a perfect meat rub and can add a taste of native Australia to your next grilling experience."



INGREDIENTS:
COCOA, COFFEE,
TEMPTATION

~ ENCOURAGE LA SÉDUCTION DEPUIS 1848 ~



MIDNIGHT BLACK

For drama, nothing is more impressive in the salt world than the deep charcoal tones from Cyprus or the volcanic island of Santorini. This beautiful salt can be used to accentuate flavor and boost the look of a dish. Salt Traders, an on-line salt emporium, recommends featuring it on the rim of a mango margarita or on any white fish. Or combine the black with white sea-salt flakes to create what Chef Paul Wade of Montagna Restaurant in Aspen, Colorado calls “zebra salt.”

VOLCANIC RED

In ancient Hawaii, on the island of Kauai, red volcanic clay called “alaea” seeped into the ocean and became trapped in tidal pools. When the water evaporated, Hawaiian Red Sea Salt remained. While Hawaiians often used the salt in sacred rituals, it was also utilized to preserve food. Today, the salt enhances traditional Hawaiian dishes, such as Kalua Pork, while discerning restaurateurs and home chefs appreciate the salt’s unique pedigree, taste and striking appearance.

LAVENDER GREY SALT

Harvested by hand in Brittany, France, from clay found in the salt flats, Celtic Gray Sea Salt is considered by many culinary professionals to be the finest for both cooking and finishing. It has consistently fine flavor, texture and quality. “I love the way it tastes like minerals of the sea and gives a beautiful texture,” said Christine Cushing, cookbook author and TV personality. Health professionals praise its unrefined purity and naturally occurring minerals. Keep it on hand in a salt-cellar or salt tray.

CRYSTAL WHITE

“Natural sea salt has always been very important in the Mexican culture,” said Chef Juan Salinas of the Food Network. “Uixtochihuatl, the Aztec fertility goddess of salt, protected families from running out of salt because it was important for so many activities, including medicinal, food preparation, and as an offering in Day of the Dead ceremonies. Today, this sparkling white salt continues to be hand-harvested in the marshes of Cuyutlan, south of Manzanillo on Mexico’s Pacific Coast.

Another gleaming white salt with a clean fresh taste is Mediterranean Sea Salt. More than 3,000 years ago, Phoenicians settling on the southern tip of the Spanish peninsula first produced salt in the region. Today, this coarse grain salt continues to be harvested in Andalucía and is ideal for finishing or in a salt mill.

In Bali, artisans employ age-old techniques to create Balinese salt crystals. Each small batch requires weeks of hand-panning and grading to extract the perfect grain. The salt is drawn from remote sandy beaches in northern Bali. Big Tree Farms offers these rare artisanal salts in coconut serving shells.

When selecting exotic salts, it is important to understand their unique character. Although pure mineral salts, whether sea or rock, are necessary to healthful cooking and living, the fancy salts are not meant to disappear within a vast pot of boiling water. In order to experience fully their distinctive flavors and textures, use them for finishing or as a garnish. No matter which you choose from a kaleidoscope of colors, it is guaranteed to transform an ordinary meal into something extraordinary. Their purity is a gift from nature. ■



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: PINK NATURAL TOP HIMALAYA SALT PLATE; MEXICO SALT DUNES; PINK HIMALAYA SALT ASSORTMENT

PHOTOS COURTESY OF POSH (PRIMORDIAL OCEAN SALT HIMALAYA)

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DAY 04 LUCCA Enjoy the leisurely drive to Lucca followed by lunch and a stroll through the town. Return to Siena via Pisa, stopping to admire the Leaning Tower. Dinner in the hotel.

DAY 05 COOKING CLASS Depart for Castellina in Chianti to meet Laura, our master chef. Our cooking class will go shopping for fresh vegetables and meats and learn how to prepare typical Tuscan cuisine. A sumptuous lunch follows the class. Later depart for Greve in Chianti and visit the wine cellars at Castello di Fonterutoli. Dinner in the hotel.

DAY 06 PIENZA & MONTALCINO Today you'll visit Pienza, beautifully redesigned by Pope Pius II in the classic Renaissance style. It is popular for its delicious Pecorino cheese. Gather for a tasting in a local cheese factory. Have a leisurely lunch. Later, visit a local winery and enjoy a tasting. Then carry on to the medieval fortress town of Montalcino, well known by wine lovers for "Brunello di Montalcino". Return to the hotel for dinner.

DAY 07 CORTONA & AREZZO In the morning we visit Cortona, the movie set for "Under the Tuscan Sun." After lunch depart for Arezzo and visit this historic town including the Chapel of Piero della Francesca. In the evening, gather for an elegant dinner at the exquisite Villa Casalecchi.

DAY 08 FLORENCE Florence, the cradle of the Renaissance, is our destination today. Lunch at your leisure. Then meet your private English-speaking guide for a walking tour of the city, including Santa Croce, Piazza Signoria, the Cathedral & the Baptistery. Enjoy your Florentine evening with dinner in a typical trattoria. Overnight in our centrally located hotel.

DAY 09 FLORENCE A full day at leisure for more sightseeing, shopping, cappuccino at a sidewalk café. Optional visits to the Uffizi Gallery and the Academy of Fine Arts may be arranged on request.

DAY 10 CIAO FIRENZE! After breakfast, say goodbye to newfound friends and depart for the Florence airport.

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COGNAC SPIRIT OF THE ANGELS

By Margaret Swaine

They call it the angels' share. Of the liquid gold that is cognac, about three percent mysteriously disappears from the slumbering oak barrels every year. The equivalent of 23 million bottles evaporates into the air. The angels are thirsty. The evidence is said to be the black that licks upward around the windowsills of cognac warehouses. The buildings look as though the devil has set them on fire. The earthly reality, however, is that a black fungus lives off cognac vapours.

It's a point of pride — that black residue. No one cleans it off. The phenomenon also partly accounts for the high price of the aged brandy. While it mellows away in oaken casks, the angels sip. The cognac houses, however, see no return until bottling time. Fifty years is generally thought to be the optimum time in wood, although few cognacs are actually aged that long. Furthermore, most cognacs are blends of many different vintages. Are the older cognacs worth their

exalted prices? Louis XIII, Rémy Martin's top product, costs nearly a hundred dollars an ounce. While it does come in a beautiful baccarat crystal bottle, that alone fails to justify the expense.

I have had the pleasure of tasting some extremely old cognacs while visiting chateau cellars in Cognac. The town lies north of Bordeaux on the banks of the Charente River. Some of its citizens attribute their longevity to the cognac vapours in the air. Certainly the town is a sleepy hollow, more remarkable for its history, first as a center of salt commerce in the Middle Ages and later as a supplier of superior brandy from the 17th century onwards, than for anything modern. South of the town limits lie the most highly regarded districts for growing the grapes that make Grande Champagne and the Petite Champagne cognac. The chalky contoured hills and calcareous soils in these crus are best for the cultivation

PHOTO COURTESY OF RÉMY MARTIN

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of *ugni blanc*, the grape varietal that comprises 98 percent of all cognac today.

The third most important *cru* is Borderies, whose brandies often have a spiced perfume. Lesser crus surrounding Cognac in wide bands are Fins Bois, Bons Bois and Bois Ordinaires. The area has had four centuries to recognize the prowess of different *crus* and the price paid for the grapes varies accordingly. Rémy Martin uses only Grande Champagne and Petite Champagne (collectively called Fine Champagne) in their blends. Others such as Courvoisier often include Borderies and Fins Bois which their master blenders say contribute to the flavor portrait. Each cognac house has its own style, assessed and savored by the *cognoscenti*.

The grapes are made into wine and then distilled twice in copper-pot stills. Master distillers put their stamp on the spirit by cutting the “heads” and “tails” of the distillate at exact points to optimize flavors while cutting out undesirable odors. Fresh from the stills, the grape spirit is fiery with floral, fruity aromas. Oak from French forests, toasted by fire when the barrels are made, add their aromas of vanilla, brioche and cinnamon. Then slow oxidation in these *barriques* puts the final touches of mushroom, Roquefort cheese and leathery/nutty “rancio” flavor to the mix. The legal minimum aging for VS category cognacs is two years, though actual products tend more towards four to seven years in barrel. VSOP and Reserve cognac need a four-year minimum but generally are aged from five to twelve years. XO, Extra, Hors d’Age and other old cognacs will have seven-to-forty-year-olds in their blend. A cognac reaches its peak after about fifty years in casks and at that point is transferred into glass demijohns. The precious liquid is protected in these sealed inert containers awaiting the call

of the master blender. Cognac houses call the locked cellar holding these most ancient of spirits *Le Paradis*.

The Paradis cellars can have cognacs from the 1800s or, at Courvoisier, as far back as 1789. In the Paradis of Martell I have sipped on 1848 cognac, aged in barrels 65 years, then put in demi-johns on May 30, 1913. Its taste was very spicy, long and dry, with wood overtones. The 1875 I tried which spent 49 years in oak was even more intense — pungent and powerful, with rich, thick sweet tastes. What these rarities offer is an exceptional sip of history rather than the ultimate taste experience.

Louis XIII Grand Champagne Cognac, a blend of cognacs from 40 years to more than century in age, is being offered this Christmas in a 1.5 litre version for \$4,399.95 in Ontario. Those less flush in cash can try a 50ml miniature for about \$500. The Rémy Martin XO Excellence, a blend of 10- to 37-year-old *eaux-de-vie* rings in at around \$200. New this year is Rémy Martin 1738 Accord Royal, a Fine Champagne Cognac with a unique mellow, rich taste, a grade up from VSOP while more affordable than XO (\$124.95 in Ontario and about \$82 in Alberta).

Courvoisier has its own range of VS, VSOP and XO, plus the ultimate L’Esprit de Courvoisier which includes cognac dating back to 1803. Succession J.S., an all Grande Champagne blend of vintages from a single estate, was created to honor Napoleon, who is said to have preferred Courvoisier. The XO costs about \$180 while J.S. Succession, blending vintages from 1900 to 1950, sells for about \$3,000. L’Esprit housed in Lalique crystal is about \$5,000.

Are the aged cognacs sold today worth the price? I’d say the price is justified. It’s up to you to decide how much value you place on craftsmanship, history and angels. ■



PHOTOS COURTESY OF COURVOISIER

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TEED OFF IN ORLANDO PLAYING GOLF AND HOOKY AT DISNEY WORLD

By Ian Cruickshank

I have an admission to make and it's not pretty. Not long ago, I made my first pilgrimage to Disney World and I didn't take the kids. I know, I know, my picture should be pasted in post offices continent-wide as a crummy parent. But I have an excuse. Really. Instead of joining my daughter on her maiden Voyage of the Little Mermaid or my son on the Pirates of the Caribbean, I came to Disney and the Orlando area to tee up. Disney World alone boasts 99 holes of golf—five championship 18s and a 9-hole loop—plus more than a dozen great tracks sprinkled in and around Orlando. So you can't blame me for my parenting faux pas. Even parents need a break.

Disney World originally opened the gates to the Magic Kingdom in 1971. At the same time, it unveiled its Magnolia

and Palm courses, with the Lake Buena Vista layout added a year later. All three were designed by veteran American architect Joe Lee and are classic Florida courses, which means mostly tight and heavy on the hazards. The toughest is the Magnolia, the perfect place to walk in the footsteps of the legends. For more than 30 years, the course has hosted the final round of the PGA tournament held at Disney World in October where past winners have included Jack Nicklaus and Tiger Woods. The Lake Buena Vista course is the easiest, a little shorter and more forgiving off the tee. I witnessed some Disney magic at Lake Buena Vista's 17th hole when my partner sliced an approach shot into the adjoining condos. The homeowner immediately leapt out on the balcony but, instead of screaming, actually led the rescue mission to find the lost ball.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WALT DISNEY PARKS AND RESORTS

Disney's Palm Course Beauty is evident at the par 3 No. 3. It's 165 yards from the tips and is not a good place for a slice! The Palm course, a Joe Lee design, is a great opportunity to test a course the pros play: it is played annually by PGA TOUR players during the FUNAI Classic at Walt Disney World Resort.



VISITORS MIGHT CATCH ARNOLD PALMER GRABBING A BITE IN THE GRILL OR TEEING OFF WITH HIS BUDDIES

The top two courses at Disney are the neighboring layouts of Osprey Ridge and Eagle Pines, the work of architectural superstars Tom Fazio and Pete Dye. I'm happy to report that this is a pure golf project. Disney hasn't tried to squeeze extra cash out of the property by wedging houses or hotels along the fairways. The designs of the two courses cover the yin and yang of golf-course architecture. Pete Dye is the acknowledged maestro of the earth-moving machine. He can make mountains out of molehills—literally. His courses consequently require heroic golf shots. Tom Fazio is better known for his subtlety and contouring. At Disney World, however, the two have switched personas. At Eagle Pines, Dye has crafted a low-profile layout with a wonderful flow. It is memorable, not titanic. Fazio's Osprey Ridge, on the

other hand, is a much more muscular course with dramatic swings in elevation and heavy-duty carries over marshes. There is also an appealing remoteness about Osprey Ridge. It curls through the backwoods and wetlands, seeming to belie the fact that just a couple of kilometres away lies one of the planet's busiest tourist destinations.

For newer golfers or those good parents who brought along their kids, Disney World offers a couple of fun options. Oak Trail is a 9-hole course tucked away in a 40-acre stretch between the Palm and Magnolia layouts. Playing 2,913 yards from the tips, Oak Trail is a walking-only facility and, even better, encourages family golf.

That brings us finally to a couple of Disney's true Mickey Mouse courses—there, I finally said it. Fantasia Gardens

A family enjoys a game of miniature golf at Fantasia Gardens at Walt Disney World Resort, where whimsical tees pay tribute to *Fantasia*. Fantasia Gardens is one of two miniature golf courses at Walt Disney World Resort.

at Epcot features 36 holes of classic miniature golf (okay, maybe an oxymoron). The first 18 were inspired by the film *Fantasia*. The holes wind past dancing mushrooms, a hippo in a tutu and Mickey dressed as the Sorcerer's Apprentice, complete with his troop of crazed broomsticks. The second 18 is for serious mini-putt aficionados. The holes are booby-trapped with real sand and water hazards.

Although Disney World is famous for its make-believe characters, for the chance to see a real king in action, try the Bay Hill Club and Lodge. For the last 30 years, Bay Hill has been the winter home of Arnold Palmer, the game's reigning monarch. Arnie owns the resort. Visitors might see him grabbing a bite in the grill or teeing off with his buddies. Most of the PGA's top stars head to Bay Hill every spring to pay homage to the king and to play in the Arnold Palmer Invitational, running from March 12th to March 18th. The tournament ultimately comes down to the 18th hole, a skinny, 441-yard par 4 that features a nasty boomerang-shaped green fronted by water and backed by a trio of bunkers.

While Greg Norman still looks as though he could crush golf balls on his abs, the "Shark" is spending less time playing courses and more time designing them. Two of his

best known layouts are the national and international courses at ChampionsGate Golf Club. Located just ten minutes from Disney World, the courses run along the edge of the Omni-Orlando Resort. The international is a links-style treat, while the national is a more traditional, country club course. Well known for its service, ChampionsGate features everything from iced towels to the GPS Caddy system. It is also home to a David Leadbetter Academy. Leadbetter is one of golf's top teachers, with pupils ranging from Ernie Els to Michele Wie.

Every golf trip must finally include at least one little-known gem. My favorite is Timacuan Golf & Country Club, just off the I-4, about 15 minutes northeast of downtown Orlando. A 2005 U.S. Open qualifying course, Timacuan sports two distinct looks. The front 9 is Old World, heavy on the fescue and pot bunkers while the second loop has a real Carolina feel, with towering pines and lots of water. Ranked as Florida's 14th-best golf course by *Golfweek* magazine, Timacuan is also one of the sunshine state's best values for money. ■

For more information, go to disneyworld.disney.go.com, www.bayhill.com, www.championsgategolf.com, www.golftimacuan.com



TOP: The par 3 No. 16 is one of the prettiest holes on Disney's Palm course. The Palm course is among five championship 18-hole courses available to guests at Walt Disney World Resort in Lake Buena Vista, Fla. **BOTTOM:** A place to reflect, and a place to stay clear of the peaceful water hugging the left side of the fairway is the No. 17 hole of Disney's Eagle Pines course. The Pete Dye-designed par 4 hole plays right-to-left in this panoramic image. Eagle Pines is among five championship 18-hole golf courses available to guests at Walt Disney World Resort in Lake Buena Vista, Fla.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WALT DISNEY PARKS AND RESORTS

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KING OF THE ULTRA-LUXE SEDANS ROLLS-ROYCE PHANTOM TAKES PRIDE IN PINNACLE POSITION

By Miguel Costa



The blue-velvet-colored Rolls-Royce Phantom glistened majestically as it waited patiently outside the headquarters of BMW Group Canada. As I made my presence known, the receptionist made a quick call to the car's corporate chaperone: "Mr. Dexter, there's a *customer* here to see you." If only...

This rolling temple to decadence starts at \$479,000 Canadian, although the extras on this particular example boosted the tally to \$502,325. This luxury sedan is the most expensive "mass-produced" four-door on the planet, although the Maybach 57S and 62 sedans come awful close. Depending on where you live in North America, the sales tax on that tab alone could buy you a very respectable BMW 5 Series sedan.

Open the Phantom's front doors and you're invited into a palace of leather seats, lambs' wool rugs, jeweled chrome accents and a headliner that comes standard in a wool and cashmere blend, but can be ordered in full leather to match the seats.

Place yourself behind the wheel and the first thing you notice is the dainty thickness of the steering wheel, imparting an old-world English touch. The wheel is quick to twirl with minimal digit movement, juxtaposing the humungous size and weight of the Phantom with its whippet-quick steering feel at low speeds. The Phantom will tell you its speed, but not how hard its big 6.75-litre V12 works, only how much power reserve remains, which declines the harder you work the accelerator.

The famous Rolls-Royce ability to waft down the road in unperturbed fashion remains, although there's a touch more road rumble than expected. This is perhaps because of the huge 21-inch run-flat tires. Those wheels always feature the exclusive double R logo in its proper position, thanks to self-balancing wheel centers that can be easily read, even at highway speeds.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ROLLS-ROYCE

PHOTOS BY MIGUEL COSTA

The rear seat would seem to be the true home for the Phantom owner, even though most North American Rolls owners prefer to drive themselves. The rear leather throne features acres of room for weary legs, as well as a caressingly curved seatback that includes naturally placed outboard armrests that draw your elbow into place. The optional veneered wood picnic tables that retract from the front seatbacks shine brightly enough to provide a detailed reflection, while two umbrellas are integrated into the back, rearward-opening doors. Although Rolls-Royce might make more money selling the umbrellas embossed with the official logo than by selling cars, they will not. Said North America communications boss Bob Austin, "These buyers demand the best in everything they do and exclusivity comes right along with that." ■

BENTLEY BUILDS ON LEGACY BLENDS LAVISHNESS WITH SPORTY PERFORMANCE

By Mark Hacking



Since its 1998 resurrection, the Bentley brand has fast become a preferred ride for celebrities. From rock stars to Internet business tycoons, the flying B attracts those with the wherewithal to meet the price of admission.

The 2006 Bentley Continental Flying Spur continues the trend established by the reinvigorated Arnage and, to a greater extent, the fantastic Continental GT. It's a luxury car with some seriously sporty underpinnings.

If nothing else, the Flying Spur is a model for how a large automobile manufacturer should be sharing resources and technical expertise with its subsidiaries and partners. Parent company Volkswagen has given the Bentley its 6.0-litre W12 engine. The Flying Spur's permanent all-wheel

drive, meanwhile, is derived from the Audi quattro system. Its Tiptronic semi-automatic transmission was first developed by Porsche. Thus you have a luxury sedan imbued with the latest technology, none of which cost the Bentley division any development dollars. Brilliant.

Still, the Flying Spur is far more than the sum of its magnificent parts. Motivated by the twin-turbocharged, 552-horsepower engine, the big sedan sprints from 0-100 km/h in just 5.2 seconds. Not only that, the Bentley possesses a top speed of 312 km/h, making it the fastest four-door production sedan in the world.

Statistics aside, the Flying Spur is simply a joy to drive. The engine, of course, responds to the slightest hint from your

right foot. The 6-speed transmission, when operated manually via the gear lever or steering wheel mounted paddle shifters, is slick and involving. And the all-wheel drive system offers a high level of traction and grip, aided by sticky Yokohama Advan Sport 275/35 tires mounted on 20-inch rims.

The Bentley's handling, for a limousine-sized sedan, is surprisingly nimble. The computer-controlled suspension, when placed in "sport" mode, strikes the proper balance between compliance and control. In "comfort" mode, however, the ride was a bit bouncy for my liking. The suspension system also automatically lowers the car when you reach speeds in excess of 250 km/h to keep you more glued to the road. Nice touch.

In terms of design, the Bentley is an eye-catcher, a rolling

piece of sculpture that pays homage to the 1957 Continental Flying Spur and draws further inspiration from the modern Continental GT. Sleek and refined on the outside, the Bentley is absolutely stunning on the inside. Immaculate touches include the burr walnut trim, matched so that one side of the car is an exact reflection of the other; massaging lumbar support for the 16-way power front seats; and leather interior that employs no fewer than 11 hides.

All told, the Continental Flying Spur is a tremendous addition to the revitalized Bentley line-up, a sleek sedan offering a near-perfect blend of performance and luxury. When you consider all that, the base price of \$222,990 seems a relative bargain. ■

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BENTLEY

LEXUS COMPOSES A MECHANICAL SYMPHONY IN MOZART'S HOMETOWN NEW SEDANS ROCK SALZBURG

By Mark Hacking



At the global launch of the newest Lexus in Austria, the executive brass equated the creation of a brand new vehicle to the composition of a piece of music. It was a fitting comparison, given that the setting for this momentous occasion was the beautiful city of Salzburg, historic home of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Even more appropriate was that the city has been celebrating the 200th anniversary of the great composer's birth. Many of the shops, nestled among the stunning baroque churches and buildings of the Altstadt, or "old town," paid homage to Salzburg's favorite son with custom chocolates, figurines and T-shirts bearing the phrase, "Rock me, Amadeus."

Would the new 2007 Lexus LS 460 and LS 460L be able to rock the establishment the same way? Could a Japanese executive sedan gain a greater foothold in a segment dominated by German autobahn-burners from Audi, BMW and Mercedes-Benz? If first impressions are any indication, the 460 is a significant accomplishment and a strong signal that Lexus is serious about taking on the established players.

The 460 is the fourth generation of the manufacturer's largest sedan, which first appeared in North America in 1990. The first LS won many awards and struck a chord with buyers, offering similar amenities to those of a Mercedes for a fraction of the cost.

Since its debut, the LS has maintained a strong share of the market in North America, despite garnering less attention than the flashier entries in the executive sedan segment. With its new iteration, the sense is that Lexus aims to extend its reach beyond North America and into Europe. Ergo, Salzburg.

For the driving experience, we tested two versions of the LS — the "standard" LS 460 and the long-wheelbase LS 460L, the latter being the company's first true, limousine-style sedan. (Next year, the hybrid LS 600h joins the fleet.) The various drive routes comprised winding roads that nudged up against the foothills of the Alps, slower-speed jaunts through picturesque lakeside towns and full-throttle blasts on the autobahn that propelled us, briefly, into Germany. No matter the circumstances or the characteristics of the road in question, the Lexus performed very well.

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Both versions of the LS are powered by a 4.6-litre V8 engine that develops 380 horsepower and 367 lb-ft of torque. Linked to the world's first 8-speed automatic transmission, this power is always at hand; estimates place the short-wheelbase version's 0-100 km/h time at just 5.7 seconds. The engine's variable valve timing also helps deliver surprisingly good fuel economy and an ultra-low emissions vehicle rating.

The Lexus has always been a remarkably quiet and composed sedan. The new version is no exception: the V8 is extremely well balanced, the transmission is slick, and the isolation from road and wind noise is among the very best. With all these refinements, it's very easy to drive the LS with a smooth touch.



In terms of handling, the Lexus – particularly the LS 460L – still feels a bit softer than its German competitors and its electric power steering is a bit less direct. An option on both cars is an air-suspension system with sportier and more comfortable settings. In the sport mode, the Lexus displayed greater handling skills, but still fell short of true “performance-sedan” levels.

Aside from its dynamic performance, the new LS has been designed to wow potential customers with an immense number of hi-tech and luxury features. The LS 460 is available in three different trim levels, while the 460L boasts no fewer than five distinct option packages. Both versions are available with some truly cool touches, notably the radar-guided adaptive cruise control, pre-collision system and advanced parking guidance system.

Adaptive cruise control automatically maintains a pre-set gap from the car in front of you, regardless of the original speed selected. The pre-collision system employs radar and two

cameras to detect objects in your path and automatically activate the brakes if the driver is distracted. Meanwhile, the parking system uses sonar to guide the steering wheel (while the driver controls the speed with the brakes), ensuring that every parallel parking task is a complete success the first time around.

The long-wheelbase LS comes with a few other choice features, including a rear-seat DVD entertainment system, and a retractable ottoman and massaging seat for the right-side rear seat passenger. Sit in the back of the LS 460L, set the massaging seat to “shiatsu,” watch a film on the 9-inch LCD screen and just listen to the soundtrack pour through the optional, 19-speaker Mark Levinson audio system. If you're like me, this thought will cross your mind: the drive-in is so passé.

A few notes on styling: past versions of the LS have been criticized for not being unique; some have been considered copies of other manufacturers' designs. The new LS is no copy, but its exterior styling is not that involving. The front grille seems outdated compared to what other manufacturers are doing and the overall impression is not particularly memorable.

On the inside, however, the company's sterling reputation for quality shines through. Lexus consistently works wonders with wood and leather, setting standards that only ultra-exclusive manufacturers can match, and the LS is the perfect rolling showroom for that expertise. Inside the LS 460 is simply a great place to spend time.

Mozart once said, “Without travel, one really is a poor creature.” With the twin Lexus LS models, the world now has a new way of traveling in lavish comfort and high style. Prices for the LS 460 and LS 460L begin at \$86,400 and \$98,700, respectively. ■

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THE EDIBLE ISLE CHRISTMAS IN CURAÇAO

By Alan Luke & Jacquie Durand

I know many believe it just is not Christmas without a wintry blanket of snow on the ground. Then there are those who would prefer a blanket of white sand. For the latter category, Christmas in Curaçao may be your festive choice, for several reasons.

This Netherlands Antillean island, the former Dutch colony not far north of Venezuela, celebrates Christmas on December 25th. The earlier and more important occasion, however, may be the eve of St. Nicholas Day on December 6th. Some children leave out a shoe filled with carrots and hay, as well as a bucket of water for St. Nick's white horse. Upon awakening, if they were good all year they find the carrots and hay replaced with gifts.

On December 10th, a children's Christmas Parade wends its way through the streets of Willemstad, the island's capital. One may see the Dutch "Sinterklaas" and his helpers called "zwarte pieten." Black Pete was a name for the devil in the Middle Ages, the dark evil one over whom St. Nick triumphed. Racial references came later, but the current popular explanation is that the helpers have been down so many chimneys delivering gifts that they cannot wash off the soot.

Traditional holiday foods are cured hams, smoked mackerel, pickled salmon, and local poultry with hot peppers—a key ingredient in most dishes. The turkey is usually prepared with garlic powder, curry powder, and a Dutch "Maggi" sauce. A typical dessert is a pound cake.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF KURA HULANDA

Like many North Americans, I have invariably looked forward to consuming a big bird at Christmas dinner. A sun-baked seaside yuletide was an anomaly for me, yet an affair I could grow to appreciate. I was, however, about to encounter a big bird of an altogether different kind.

I headed to the local ostrich farm to meet and eat the residents. Situated in the northeastern section of the island, the Ostrich and Game Farm has operated on a 200-acre property since 1995. Boarding a zebra-striped jeep with wooden benches, we toured the grounds in a group. The ostriches gathered and stretched their necks over the fences to eat food pellets from bowls we held for them. Our feathered friends did so in a frenetically funny fashion. Holding the pellets in my hand, I felt something like a rubber mallet pounding my palm as they voraciously devoured the food in nano-seconds. Adult ostriches can weigh between 200 and 300 pounds with only 37 percent of their weight usable for consumption. Their massive eggs average four pounds (under two kilos) and the shells are an inches (3mm) thick. These durable orbs can even withstand the weight of an average person. "Go ahead," said the jovial guide. "Stand on these two eggs and I'll balance you." One mammoth omelet coming up, I thought. To my surprise these sturdy spheroids endured my modest girth.

At the open-air Zambezi Restaurant we were offered a sampling of ostrich carpaccio. Appearing as a reddish-brown meat with a beef-like texture, it had a rich heavy flavor. I decided it was an acquired taste. Their menu features ostrich steak, stew, stir-fry and soup. Also available is ostrich egg quiche, grilled ostrich liver and smoked carpaccio in pesto sauce.

Strolling along the Willemstad's waterfront, I passed by the "Floating Market" where Venezuelan vendors supply fresh fish, fruit and vegetables to the public. Farther along I arrived at the "Old Market" to enjoy a genuine Curaçaoan culinary experience. Here the locals congregate for hearty portions of traditional specialties. *Kadushi stopi* (cactus soup), *kabritu stoba* (goat stew), *piska hasa* (an island-style red snapper), and *funchi* (a corn-meal-style side dish) are all provided to satiate the appetite.

One must consume Curaçao both gastronomically and visually to experience what it has to offer. Alfresco dining abounds in bistros, sidewalk cafés and restaurant terraces. The ever-present Dutch colonial architecture provides a pretty pastel-painted promenade along St. Anna Bay. An alluring logo beckoned me to the Iguana Café where I ordered a few local libations. Amstel Bright, served with a lime wedge in the bottleneck, is a refreshing brew. The Amstel Brewery located on the island is the only one in the world to produce its beer from desalinated seawater.

While many residents bottle a rum punch in November to age prior to festive consumption, the island's signature drink is the delicious Curaçao of Curaçao liqueur. Senior & Company's Curaçao Liqueur Distillery produces the authentic namesake potable, made from the dried peels of the Laraha bitter orange indigenous to the island. The original liqueur is clear, but colored versions are now available in green, madarine orange, blue and red. Drinking the liqueur in their native country can serve as the first introduction to, and inducement of many to visit, the island itself.

Driving to Westpunt on the west end, I passed through





LINKS

CURAÇAO TOURIST BOARD www.curaçao-tourism.com
 OSTRICH & GAME FARM & ZAMBEZI RESTAURANT
www.ostrichfarm.net
 ANGELICA'S KITCHEN www.angelicas-kitchen.com

HOTELS

KURA HULANDA HOTEL AND MUSEUM
www.kurahulanda.com
 AVILA BEACH HOTEL www.avilahotel.com
 CURAÇAO HILTON www.hiltoncaribbean.com

RESTAURANTS

FORT NASSAU www.fortnassau.com
 BISTRO LE CLOCHARD www.bistroleclochard.com

the *cunucu* (countryside) to a popular spot featuring local and Caribbean fare. A fixture, Jaanchie's Restaurant has been serving locals and tourists alike for more than 60 years. When I inquired about a menu, the congenial restaurateur replied, "Anything is possible." There is no official written menu. "The selections are all upstairs," he said, tapping his head with his finger. Complete with animal sounds and assorted gestures, he conveys his offerings to his patrons. Consequently, a cornucopia of culinary creations arrives conga-style at the table.

Accompanied by red beans and brown rice were samplings of iguana, goat, barracuda, mahi mahi and red snapper. The iguana is slightly bony and similar to pork while the goat was reminiscent of a very tender beef. All were perfectly prepared and pleasing to the palate.

For one of the island's specialties, you may want to visit the Avila Beach Hotel. At their Belle Terrace restaurant, they reputedly prepare Curaçao's premier *keshi yena* (stuffed cheese). "This dish is twice my age," said the server with a grin, noting it has been on their non-existent menu since 1960. It appeared as a cheesy yellow mound topped with plantain slices and circled by a green pesto sauce. Inside the shell of Edam cheese nestle olives, peppers, cucumbers, raisins and spiced chicken. Considering the eclectic content of the *keshi yena*, it is a surprisingly appetizing amalgam. The combination of items varies depending on the recipes and locations on the island.

Following my marvelous mélange of meals, I decided I should at least attempt to rival the preparation and cooking of one such dinner. So I headed for a kitchen—Angelica's Kitchen, to be precise. Since 2002, native Curaçaoan Angelique Shoop has been inviting the public into her kitchen to cook. "All you require is an appetite and apron to play the roles of chef and gourmand," she told me. The food is based primarily on French or Italian cuisine with local influences. A group of ten people will generally prepare a four-course meal in her large kitchen with its twin preparation islands.

Divided into smaller groups to create separate courses, a friendly competition developed among the teams to see which could create the most delectable dish for the evening's dinner. Cajoling and cooking, our collective group prepared a fine meal, including salsa, codfish salad, beef with Caribbean vegetables and *funchi*. All were washed down with some fine Chilean wine and followed by pumpkin pancakes with Curaçao liqueur sauce, a natural choice for dessert topping. This savory socializing session was just one of the several dining options available on the diversely edible isle of Curaçao.

In the end I made at least two important discoveries. First, the best way to experience Curaçao is to "view 'n' chew" your way through it. Secondly, a hot Caribbean yuletide can wash away frosty feelings. You can definitely warm up to this tropical Dutch treat. ■

PHOTOS COURTESY OF KURA HULANDA

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THE ROYAL PLANTATION TREATMENT DENY YOURSELF NOTHING, INDULGE IN EVERYTHING

By Tin Thomas

Twenty-five years ago, at the birth of the all-inclusive resort, the term “luxury all-inclusive” may well have been an oxymoron. In recent years, the better resorts in the Caribbean, where the product now dominates the market, have been pushing the envelope to the point where all-inclusive resorts, at their best, take luxury to a new level.

No one can reasonably deny the quality of the Royal Plantation, a true gem of a resort on the dazzling Ocho Rios coastline of Jamaica. It is one of the Sandals and Beaches group whose recovered pre-eminence on the Jamaican scene is a tribute to the widespread upgrading of standards throughout the largest group of all-inclusives in the Caribbean.

This is not your usual all-inclusive — not by a luxurious country mile. From arrival at one of Jamaica’s two international airports to departure, it’s no-holds-barred luxury all the way. Every guest is met by name at the airport and transferred by private car with a driver hand-picked by the hotel’s general manager. It’s a place, said sales executive Mandy Chomat, where guests should “make every effort to deny yourself nothing.” Built in the ’50s to evoke the plantation-house lifestyle, when Jamaica was the most glamorous and romantic island in the Caribbean, Royal Plantation has been restored to its former sumptuousness and is the island’s first and only member of Leading Hotels of the World.

Society, celebrity and nobility all flocked here in the ’50s and ’60s before low-cost jet travel flooded the island with tourists. Members of the British Royal Family, Sir Winston Churchill, Richard Nixon, Eartha Kitt, Ian Fleming — they all stayed at what was then Plantation Inn. Noel Coward, who kept a home in Jamaica, was a frequent visitor. “Mr. Coward would still be comfortable here, very comfortable,” said managing director Jaime Stewart.

At the handsome British Colonial-style building with 17 acres of lush, tropical landscaping, guests are handed cold towels and a mangosa, a refreshing cocktail of champagne and mango juice, as they admire the stunning view of the Caribbean through the open-style lobby and reception area. Check-in formalities are completed at leisure in the guest’s suite.

The hotel was originally constructed as a luxury property for a long-stay clientele that used to spend several weeks in the Caribbean rather than the week or two popular today. The result is large rooms and balconies, all opening to the ocean, as does every public room here.

The rooms are furnished to a level of luxury commensurate with the purpose for which the hotel was built and to which Sandals has restored it. The bright, bold Sandals colors were avoided in favor of soft and mellow tones, handsome wood trim, the finest of fabrics and linens and massive four-poster beds of rich red mahogany. Satellite television, VCRs and CD players are standard.

Bathrooms are similarly generously designed. Those in the resort’s honeymoon suites—the staff has dubbed them “playrooms”—have deep tubs, separate showers, daybeds, and two windows opening to the Caribbean.

The resort has two excellent beaches, one of them with beach-butler service. Just raise the blue flag beside your lounge and the butler brings you the cocktail of your choice, lunch, or even a little something from the resort’s unique C-Bar, the Caribbean’s only champagne and caviar bar.

Naturally enough, meals are a highlight. The only buffet meal is the Monday evening beach party; otherwise it’s strictly à la carte. Royal Plantation prides itself on a fine English tea daily at 4:00pm—a fragrant Earl Grey or smoky Lapsang Souchong served in fine bone china. There are preserves and clotted cream, salmon and cucumber sandwiches, fresh pastries and always a little Jamaican touch, such as a sinful rum cake or coconut cookies, all presented by a hostess in colorful national dress.

Dinner is a casual affair in Le Papillon, where jackets for men are appreciated, but not required. The menu might include cold, smoked marlin wrapped in puff pastry with dill butter sauce; Dover sole meunière, filleted tableside, with baby shrimp and capers; or roast Caribbean lobster with annatto oil and sofrito sauce.

Master sommelier Vincenzo Calcerano has assembled a notable wine list and decants all reds before serving. You can select a lavish Petrus, a Chateau Margaux 1982, or the hard-to-find 1989 magnum of Chateau Lafite Rothschild. Dinner can also be served, course by course, on the guests’ balcony.



Another unique Royal Plantation touch provides guests with an extravagant dinner devised around the art of *sabrage*. Stand clear while a skillful wine steward wields a wicked-looking saber and cleanly chops the neck off a bottle of Veuve Clicquot. Very Clever. “This exciting new addition to our dining repertoire combines customs from Napoleonic times with contemporary gourmet cuisine,” said Calcerano. Legend has it that *sabrage* began when French Army cavalry officers leaving the parties of the legendary Madame Clicquot could not open bottles of her magnificent champagne while on horseback. They drew their swords and beheaded the bottles with one swift, sharp stroke of the blade. Or so they say.

A guest may choose to sample three different and delicious bottles of champagne paired with five courses of fine cuisine by chef Basil Dean in the luxurious Drawing Room, adjacent to the chic C-Bar and Le Papillon. Guests enjoying this treat are entertained by the hotel’s resident pianist, who draws magical tones from the hundred-year-old Steinway Grand, the oldest in Jamaica.

A charge of US\$185 per person applies for these extraordinary dinners and, for couples who cherish privacy, the tour de force meal can be served en suite, on the beach, or even on one of the hotel’s two piers on the water. Alternative dining venues include Flambé on the Terrace, Royal Café on the Beach, and the Bayside Restaurant & Terrace.

Guests who choose to spend time on the beach can indulge in a wide variety of water sports, from kayaking to diving on colorful reefs. On Fridays, there’s an opportunity to sample another Jamaican tradition, which may seem an odd choice for a hot day on the sands, but which has been a local staple for years—hot chocolate. Royal Plantation staffers prepare every step in the process, choosing the finest cocoa pods grown in Jamaica’s Blue Mountains, extracting, fermenting, roasting and drying the seeds, then grating them and boiling with water and coconut milk. Add a dash of locally grown cinnamon and enjoy a genuine cup of Jamaican culture.

Inclusives have come a long way from buffet dinners, “local beers and liquors included,” house wine, and “everyone in the pool for bingo.” Those days are gone. Welcome to the royal treatment. ■

IT’S YOUR CHOICE

Guests paying Royal Plantation rates can indulge themselves with the full run of the house, including all meals, complimentary house wines and in-room bar set-up; unlimited green fees and transfers to Sandals Golf & Country Club in Ocho Rios; unlimited water sports and equipment; and daily afternoon tea. Unlike other Sandals and Beaches resorts, they can opt for Extra Person rates, which include just accommodation and room taxes.

The all-inclusive Royal Plan costs US \$287.14 per person per night for a deluxe oceanfront suite or \$308.57 for a luxury

double oceanfront suite. That includes meals, a selection of house wines, in-suite bar set-up, unlimited water sports and afternoon tea.

The alternative is Extra Person pricing at \$137.14 and \$158.57, respectively, pay as-you-go. All guests get airport transfers, welcome drinks, early riser’s continental breakfast, mangos and fruit, chilled towels and hot chocolate on the beach; weekly general manager’s open-bar party; use of 24-hour fitness center; complimentary pillow menu, and DVD library and board games.

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BAJA BLISS SCINTILLATING SEA OF CORTÉS CRUISES

By Ilona Kauremszky

Beneath sun-kissed azure waters, schools of iridescent angelfish, damselfish, and rainbow wrasses glide through the priceless coral reefs that teem with clusters of anemones and sea cucumbers. Above the speckled blue sea, piercing squeals from an enthusiastic pod of dolphins constitute the early morning wake-up call. In a New York minute, the entire boatload of passengers arrives on deck to discover a bluenose capering on the bow wake. Welcome to the Sea of Cortés, otherwise dubbed the Galapagos of Mexico because of its isolated islands and plethora of wildlife.

Mexico's newest state, California Baja Sur ("baja" means lower and "sur" means south in Spanish), is putting a whole new spin on adventure travel. Million-dollar resorts, golf courses, and the untamed wilderness have meshed around the area, newly designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.

An exciting way to experience the marine life and awesome views is to splurge for passage on a boutique vessel with American Safari Cruises, which offers an eight-night, all-inclusive trip. The U.S.-based company, in existence since 1996, has been delivering exclusive groups of up to 22 persons into the lap of luxury aboard its 120-foot *Safari Quest*. The ship, constructed in 1992 and totally refurbished in 2000, offers individual and private group tours. A smaller boat, the 105-foot *Safari Spirit*, is also available, to scoot into the smaller corners of the sea.

The posh and spacious staterooms open with sliding glass doors onto balconies. Some suites feature a decadent private Jacuzzi. If you prefer, the deck is a lively place. There parched sundowners meet you with toasts of champagne from a hot tub overlooking the secluded aquatic wilderness. Perhaps a pod of whales might even breach to greet you.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF AMERICAN SAFARI CRUISES

When the cruise company started, this part of Mexico was virtually unknown. That, however, was not always the case. First discovered by Spanish conquistador Hernan Cortés, who was in search of the North Passage, and later by Jesuits who set up missions in the seaside villages of La Paz, Loreto, and Cabo San Lucas, the Baja was deemed a sanctuary. In the 1940s, author John Steinbeck took a 400-mile journey aboard a 76-foot sardine boat and defined the Sea of Cortés as "reality changing with the moment." In 1948, John Wayne, Bing Crosby, Desi Arnaz and other celebrities were so captivated by the unsung wild beauty of La Paz that they set up the region's first resort, members only, in Cabo.

The Sea of Cortés, long hailed as a fishing capital, became even more popular after American World War II pilots flying across the desolate peninsula spotted hundreds of schools of jumping marlin. Today the sea has been declared a whale sanctuary and is considered the Marlin Capital of the World, and with good reason.

Fifteen million years ago, a fracture on the San Andreas Fault formed the Sea of Cortés. It's the youngest sea in the world and the land around it still largely undeveloped. The pristine ecosystem receives churning sediments from the Colorado River. The mixing with fresh seawater has created an astonishing array of life. The entire sea and its islands are designated a special Biosphere Reserve to protect the extraordinary bio-diversity found few other places on earth. For exclusive adventure cruise buffs, this is Shangri-La.

After the captain's welcome, everyone gets acquainted over flutes of champagne, toasting into the magenta sunset as the boat pushes forth from La Paz harbor. It's off to the Sea

of Cortés in search of whales and dolphins rendered iconic by such cartoon characters as Nemo and Flipper.

Guests adopt an on-board casualness as soon as they discover the voyage demands a barefoot elegance. On deck they pick up some binoculars, scan the horizon as Captain Tom Voss narrates stories, and hear first-hand accounts from seasoned naturalists such as expedition leader Heather Peterson. She knows everything about the place.

On the first day at sea, guests can choose from hiking, sea kayaking, water skiing and exploring desolate red mangrove lagoons. Most of the passengers are American and for many it's their first trip here despite the meager 100-mile distance from the southwestern American border. Now a haven for such A-listers as Jennifer Aniston, Jessica Simpson, Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes, the stars have discovered the luxurious estates and exclusive spa treatments.

On a mission to provide island-hopping for its guests, the boat diligently plies the blue waters on its voyage to Isla Coyote, the smallest village in the Sea of Cortés and the only one with permanent residents. At Isla San Jose, guests can snorkel among the large colony of 300 sea lions calling the small rocky isle home. Here the largest of them scamper while pods of dolphins playfully charge the waves in front of the ship.

Each day brings new discoveries. The captain summons everyone to the deck for the view of a lifetime. In the distance, a large blue whale spurts water high in the air. Of the 11,000 blues known to exist in the world, hundreds of them visit the Sea of Cortés in February and March.

The Sea of Cortés contains more than 800 species



of fish. The surrounding desert possesses its own unique ecosystem where native flora and fauna flourish. Strange-looking valleys of sentinel-like cardon cactus, the largest in the world, primitive citrus and elephant trees are some of the 4,000 different plants forming the spiny green carpet on the sandy earth.

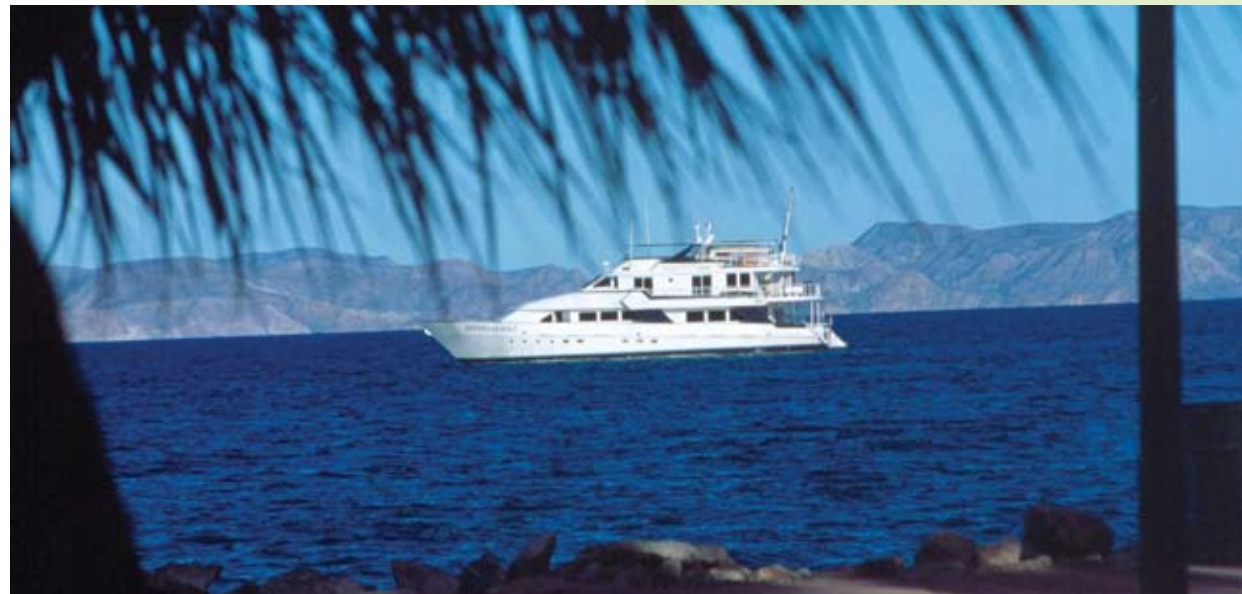
Beneath the sapphire sea, tufts of dense plankton meet pods of filter-feeding whales, giant mantas, hammerhead sharks and whale sharks meandering around the vessel. All of a sudden, the water pops like flying popcorn as dolphins explode out of the water in a marine chorus line. Twenty leap on the port side and 30 on starboard, dozens more playing in the pressure wave made by the yacht's bow. It's impossible to know where to aim the camera – they're everywhere. No wonder this aquatic paradise was once described by legendary oceanographer Jacques Cousteau as the "aquarium of the world."

For hungry sailors, it's al fresco dining. The chef prepares exquisite dishes of his own classic creation, blending southwestern U.S. and Mexican flavors. High on the menu are coconut shrimp tempura with curry sauce and tamarind-glazed game hen.

There's no need for fancier entertainment when you have a natural aquatic theater group performing hourly or at will. Yet it is a more intimate experience on the smaller vessel. You can go into the shallow craggy waters or the vast open sea, wherever the action happens to be.

Blue sea. Blue whales. The quest for Cortés is pure Baja bliss. ■

Ilona Kauremszky is editor of the travel ezine www.mycompass.ca, and is an accomplished travel writer, columnist and guide-book author. She has written for numerous publications across North America, including *World of Cruising Magazine*, *Toro*, *Boston Herald*, *Dallas Morning News* and more.



TO KNOW:

American Safari Cruises specializes in elegant, adventurous cruises on exclusive boutique-style luxury yachts that whisk passengers off to areas not accessible to larger cruise liners.

Sea of Cortés cruises currently offered December through April.

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- Kayaking, snorkeling and small-boat excursions
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- Trail ride into the mountains with a local ranchero
 - Viewing sea-life from the lounge on an underwater camera
 - Swimming with sea lions
- Special visit to Isla Coyote, the smallest village in the Sea of Cortés

Prices: A week's cruise ranges from \$3,995 to \$5,995 per person and includes all tours, transfers, meals, wine and cocktails. For private yacht leasing, the cruise starts from \$98,795 per week.

GETTING THERE:

- The Baja California peninsula is easily reached by direct flights on Delta Airlines and other airline carriers.
- For travel information on Los Cabos, visit www.visitcabo.com
- For reservations and more information call toll-free 1.888.862.8881 or visit www.amsafari.com.



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MAGNIFICENT MAYAKOBA MAGICAL MANGROVES AND LAVISH LIVING IN THE MAYAN RIVIERA

By Anne Dimon



While the endangered tropical plant community, vital for healthy coastal ecosystems, often has taken a back seat to tourism development, in some places the mangrove is still king. The lavish surroundings of the Mexican eco-resort of Mayakoba are both natural and manufactured.

About 40 minutes from Cancun and ten minutes from the village of Playa del Carmen I see for myself how the new Fairmont Mayakoba Hotel and its pro-level golf course were painstakingly sculpted around a protected environment. At the wheel of one of the resort's electrical *lanchas*, Fernando maneuvers this sleek, canvas-covered boat along manmade lagoons fed with natural underwater springs. We breeze under curved wooden bridges, past villas with balconies hugging the shoreline, along sections with wild greenery on one side, golf greens on the other. Within minutes we're totally embraced by mangrove forests, the trees and shrubs that grow in natural oceanic coastal regions.

The ocean water is the color of Spanish olives, deep and green. Fernando explains that the hue is caused by mangrove

pigmentation. Cormorants, also called "diver ducks," dart out of the bush and I think, for a moment, that I'm in the Florida Everglades. An iguana basks on a rock. Storks, long legs dangling, dash out from the reeds. We turn a curve and a sweep of manicured greens comes into view. Around another bend, the mangrove forest envelopes us once again. It acts as a natural buffer between the resort and its glorious, sugar-sand beach.

Further along the lagoon, the topography changes. Thick, tangled mangrove forests are replaced by high limestone walls, natural caves, clear and inviting turquoise waters, lush jungle vegetation on riverbanks, and more wildlife. Fernando points out a baby alligator sunning itself on a limestone rock. In this age of eco-consciousness, this is a new breed of luxury resort.

Beyond the bounty of nature, there's the luxury of civilization as well. It is evident in the design, décor, service, quality of food and attention to detail. The spa, Willow Stream, is one of the more highly respected spa brands in the



world, and this one lives up to expectation. One walk through the two levels, the spacious lounge and the rooftop pools, and you'll want to spend the entire day. The spa is open every day until 8:00pm, the facilities free to anyone who books a treatment. Staff is genuinely helpful and welcoming and, when hunger strikes, nourishment is offered from a Bento Box Spa Menu.

For those who, like me, tend to be partial to services that are locally inspired, the many choices include tantalizing treatments incorporating Mayan clay, cacao and honey. After indulging in the chocolate treatment, I topped it off with a mini chocolate muffin offered with other treats, fresh juices and teas in the Serenity Salon. The extensive menu of spa services also includes customized massage experiences, signature golf treatments and salon services. Before long, you feel totally relaxed and re-energized.

Other ways to refresh, as well as to work off chocolate treats, is to bicycle around the property, run along the pristine beach or work out in the gym where top-flight fitness

equipment is complemented by regular fitness classes. Guests can enjoy guided yoga and Pilates, as well as an activity relatively new to the spa scene called Capoeira. This blend of African/Brazilian martial arts disguised as dance is not only mesmerizing to watch but also feeds the soul.

In fact, almost everything here is good for body, mind and spirit—a stunningly designed environment, a superior spa, healthy food selections in all three restaurants, scheduled fitness workshops, and comfortable beds that invite guests to catch up on much-needed sleep. Just beyond guestroom doors is the chance to take deep breaths of fresh, sea-salty air and listen to the sounds emanating from the mangrove community. Naturally magical. ■

For more information, go to www.mayakoba.com or www.fairmont.com/mayakoba

Anne Dimon is a spa and wellness travel writer and founder/editor of www.traveltowellness.com.

ARIES (MARCH 21-APRIL 19)

The world is opening up to you, dear Aries. With a packed house of foreign travel, it appears nothing can keep you from spinning your compass and hopping a plane. Key travel days are near December 5th and 20th.

The media in general are ruled by the same brilliantly lit part of your chart. You may sign a book deal, be interviewed on TV or even get a radio show. Planets are stacking up in Sagittarius, and it will be many years before you see this again! If you think you can, you really can!

When your ruler Mars moves into Sagittarius, December 5th, your magnetism reaches new highs. A new attraction may have a different ethnic or religious background, and you will groove together beautifully.

A key love weekend may be December 9th and 10th, when the Sun and Neptune cooperate in a way that promotes warmth with friends. Mars reaches out to poetic Neptune, and they weave a lovely tapestry as a romantic backdrop for a New Year's Eve party.

TAURUS (APRIL 20-MAY 20)

This month you'll wheel and deal and set your life in a new direction. A big endeavor moves forward, requiring a hefty cash outlay. Nothing will intimidate you in this magical month.

Planets in Sagittarius suggest you'll drive a hard bargain. For financially savvy Taurus, no dream will be too big for you to find sponsorship. Being passionate helps you find a way. A middleman or representative will be pivotal. Pay a big invoice near the December 4th full moon.

Your relationship will be warm and close, especially the first week of the month, when your love planet Mercury visits the exclusive relationship part of your chart. With your ruler, Venus, in lovely angle to Saturn, you'll lose the rollercoaster feeling. If single, the moment the Sun moves into fellow Earth sign Capricorn, you sparkle. December 21st on will be your best for fun and love. When Mercury joins the Sun on December 27th, you amp up even more. A New Year's Eve party invitation seems assured.

GEMINI (MAY 21-JUNE 21)

This month dazzles with glittering planetary energy. One of the most earth-shattering features of December is that you may make a commitment to one special person. Your chart is practically screaming "Unite!" Your best chance of commitment in more than a decade is now.

Already attached? Your spouse will do exceptionally well and you'll soon benefit.

Although an independent soul, you quickly see the business benefits of combining and tackling bigger goals, with better results. Sign on or just after the new moon, December 20th.

Friends and coworkers have amazing ideas December 11th, thanks to the team-up of Mars and Jupiter. If you get invited to a holiday party, be sure to go.

Make New Year's Eve plans. The moon will glide into Gemini, putting you in the spotlight. With Mars sending good signals to Neptune, it's sure to be romantic and happy and may involve travel.

CANCER (JUNE 22-JULY 22)

Coworkers are jovial. You may get new equipment or an assistant.



By Susan Miller

You stay motivated and may be in line for a spring promotion. If self-employed, business will be good.

Additional opportunities come on the new moon, December 20th. Even though you'd probably rather take time off, you could clean up financially. Remind yourself it's nice to have a job — the gift that keeps on giving.

The December 20th new moon will be your best in the next 12 months for kicking off your new workout and nutrition plan. In astrology, it's when you begin that counts, so take small steps toward your fitness goal. In just a few sessions, you'll rock out on the New Year's Eve dance floor.

The moon in poetic fellow water sign Pisces makes Christmas Day the most romantic of the month. Dress up and enjoy festivities and friends.

LEO (JULY 23-AUGUST 22)

You've had precious few pleasures in the past year, but that's about to change. Jupiter, planet of happiness, recently moved into your house of true love and fun for a full year's stay.

With six planets stirring up commotion, you'll be as sought-after for appearances as a red-carpet celebrity. Planets stack up in Sagittarius, a fellow fire sign known to impart a broadening, adventuresome influence. If single, your prospects increase! If attached, your partner may surprise you with ballet or concert tickets. Or you might sneak away for an exciting vacation.

If conceiving a baby is on your wish list, this month you may hear the stork. Never have your chances been better. Not ready? Be careful, because Jupiter is guessing you'd be thrilled. At work, you'll dazzle clients and higher-ups with exceptional creativity. Your ability with color and design is normally sophisticated, but now you'll be able to display the full force of your talent. What a month!

VIRGO (AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22)

Your home life will be a hub of activity and might even become your driving obsession. If you have been hoping to buy or sell a home, you could see success now. Six planets stack up in your home sector. Parents' needs may be a focus, too.

Your career will be popping. Watch the full moon on the 4th, when a major promotion or new position could come your way. Concern about having to relocate or family needs may cause you to pass on it, but keep an open mind.

Love brings unexpected developments. Saturn will begin to retrograde on the 5th, however, so if you are dating, you may suddenly decide to put on the brakes. Saturn won't regulate its orbit until late April, so take your time. In your case, even business alliances may hit snags and require special discussions.

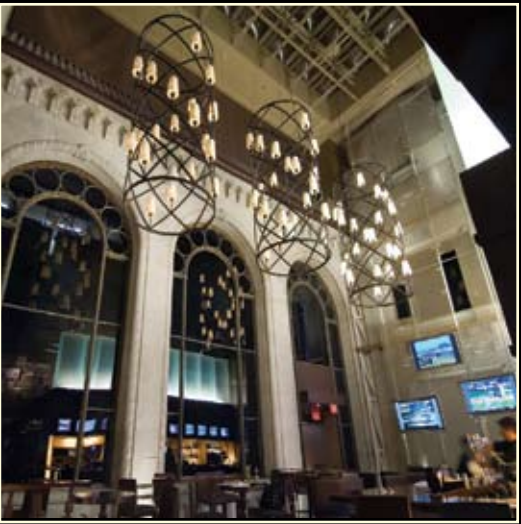
By time the Sun moves into your romantic sector on the 20th, your social life picks up.

For New Year's Eve, with so many friendly planets beaming loving energy to your residential sector, see if you can give a party. Mars and Neptune will cooperate beautifully, making the evening all the more lyrical.

LIBRA (SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22)

Travel forms a large part of the picture now. The full moon on the 4th allows you to conclude a matter with certain individuals overseas. If you can't get out of town, others may come to you, either in person

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or through increased communication.

A massive piece of news appears to be developing in the life of your sister or brother after the new moon on the 20th.

With six planets brightening short distance travel, you may be on the road to see friends, shop, enjoy parties or even ski. Planets in Sagittarius will make you extra sports-minded!

By the 21st, planets migrating to your home sector center you more on family, a trend increasing in January. You encircle yourself with those who love you dearly and unconditionally. You may blend your romantic life into family life this month.

The moon in Gemini is perfect for creating a New Year's night of moonlight and magic. Don't stay home. Mars and Neptune combine energies to create a special night.

SCORPIO (OCTOBER 23-NOVEMEBR 21)

You Scorpio ability to make money multiply is so strong this month, friends will swear you're printing cash in your basement. Your fortunes swell from the 20th onward. You feel confident of your hard work and superb qualifications.

Settle a financial obligation near the full moon on the 4th. Your financial bounty may not be in your hands yet. Pay the piper but rest assured, when the new moon arrives two weeks later, the money will, too.

Resist putting too much emphasis on being with someone in the "right" profession, with the "right" clothes, house or car. You'll be at your most intriguing December 1-5, when Mars will still be moving through Scorpio. The weekend of December 16th the moon will glide in Scorpio, putting a lovely spotlight on you and all your wishes.

The last week dazzles with activities, and Christmas Day could turn out to be especially romantic.

SAGITTARIUS (NOVEMEBR 22-DECEMBER 21)

With the Sun, Jupiter, Venus, Mercury, Mars, Pluto and the new moon all moving through Sagittarius, this month could be monumental, marking the start of one of the most important and beneficial astrological cycles of your life. It is set to last a full year.

You've always had talent, but now you'll have luck on your side too—a potent combination! Dream big and bold.

Venus tours your sign until December 10th, so buy a few new things for yourself, too. Make the right impression.

Romantically, you'll be on fire. Near the December 4th full moon, you fully express your feelings for your partner. If not, you may decide to split. Others will swarm you like bees to honey.

On December 11th, your ruling planet, Jupiter, links up with Mars, and sends brilliant beams to your house of true love.

For New Year's Eve, let your partner choose. Dear Sagittarius, the world is now your oyster!

CAPRICORN (DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19)

You'll be pushing to complete a job at work due on or shortly after December 4th. You'll be vulnerable to colds during December, so rest and eat well. Delegate if possible. Once the new moon arrives on the 20th, you may be selected to work on an ultra-secret project. You could easily dazzle higher-ups and co-workers with your ideas and insights.

You'll soon take more of an off-stage role, but it will suit you. You are about to make a name for yourself, and pump up your bank account in the process.

Romantic Venus tours your sign from December 10th to January, so your charms will twinkle brighter than a thousand holiday tree

lights. You will bewitch the object of your affections. Your growing confidence acts as an aphrodisiac.

December 16th could be a standout date night, as the Sun and your ruler, Saturn, will be sweetly angled. If you need to talk over something important with your sweetie, this weekend is the time.

December 21st, the day the Sun enters your birth sign, is another romantic time.

AQUARIUS (JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18)

With more than half the planets in our solar system moving through Sagittarius, a sign highly supportive of yours, and all squeezed into your party sector, you'll be one of the most sought-after zodiac signs! New faces, friends and events prove not only refreshing but possibly help you develop a new path.

The full moon, December 4th, heats up your love and party life. You might fall for someone extremely well-read and intelligent, qualities attractive to an Aquarius. While Venus tours Sagittarius until December 10th, circulate as much as possible.

You know your partner hasn't always liked your friends or partying with you. This year brings a more accommodating and appreciated attitude. If your relationship is strong but a little stale, you can now reestablish that silly fun. Go out, party wildy and don't come home until you've watched the sun come up over the city.

New Year's Eve, with the moon in Gemini, should be lively. Dear Aquarius, you're finally emerging from a long, dark cycle.

PISCES (FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20)

This month will be so powerful for your career you may wonder if you've wandered into a parallel universe where a celebrity portrays you in a made-for-television movie.

The Sun, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, Mercury, Pluto, and the new moon on December 20th all crowd into your professional honors sector. Hold on to your hat.

You get an inkling something is afoot. Watch December 11th, when Mars beams Jupiter, translating into salary and praise. You're unstoppable December 18th. A VIP takes special interest and helps you achieve a dream. After the 20th, things amp up even more!

Socializing will require some organization. You might host a holiday trim-a-tree party at your home over the weekend of December 2-3, thanks to the approaching full moon on the 4th.

Friends gather 'round after the Sun moves into Capricorn on the 21st. With Saturn retrograde this month, you reconnect with old pals. December 24th and 25th bring the moon in Pisces. A special someone may surprise you with a carefully chosen gift. With Uranus linked to the moon, things are different—and better! Another stellar night could be New Year's Eve, when Mars, planet of energy, meets your ruler Neptune. Dance the night away, dear Pisces.

ABOUT SUSAN MILLER: *New York Daily News* astrological advice columnist Susan Miller is an internationally known and accredited professional astrologer, bestselling author, successful web publisher, popular columnist, and sought-after lecturer and teacher. She writes a monthly horoscope column for *Self* magazine. She contributes to a wide variety of consumer magazines, both in the United States and abroad, has guested on *20/20*, *The Early Show* and *The View*, and been interviewed by Barbara Walters, John Stossel, Paula Zahn, Harry Smith and Dick Clark, among others. Launched in 1995, Miller's website, with 500 pages of original content and a popular message board, draws an astounding six million readers and 15 million page views per month. She has written a series of annual astrology books called *The Year Ahead* as well as the bestselling *Planets and Possibilities*. Second-generation astrologer Miller has a degree in business from New York University and lives in her native New York.



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