



SPECIAL EDITION

GRAND AWARDS
2009

Andrew Harper's Hideaway Report®

January 2009 | www.AndrewHarper.com*Opinionated reviews by a writer who travels incognito and always pays his own way*

2009 Grand Award Winners

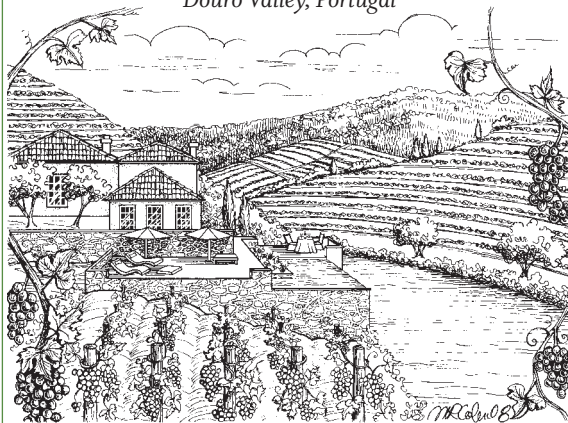
EACH YEAR, WE HAVE THE PLEASURE of recalling our travel experiences over the past 12 months and singling out a number of particularly enchanting hotels and resorts for special recognition.

To be considered for our annual awards, properties must be relatively small in size and possess strong individual personalities. They are also required to have relaxing atmospheres and to demonstrate a consistent devotion to personal service. We do not evaluate hotels solely by means of a checklist. Rather, we rely on our decades of experience and that intangible summary impression that separates the good from the truly enchanting. Some of our award winners are more lavish than others and provide a wider range of facilities. However, all offer the traveler comfort, warmth and charm, as well as a spirit of sincere hospitality.

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HIDEAWAY of the YEAR

Romaneira

Douro Valley, Portugal

ROMANEIRA HAS LONG BEEN one of Portugal's great wine estates. Now it is also one of the most magical new hotels in Europe. An exquisite setting high above the Douro River is complemented by a visually intriguing mixture of fine antiques and contemporary furniture. All of the 19 suites display distinctive characters. Our simple but luxurious stone bungalow had both a working fireplace and a blissful private terrace. The outstanding cuisine is under the supervision of Miguel Castro e Silva, one of the best chefs in Portugal. An initial lunch of shiitake mushroom cappuccino, pork cheeks poached in red wine, stuffed quail with broad beans, and sublime orange tartlets set the standard for our entire stay. The accompanying Romaneira wines are invariably superb. Service is perfectly calibrated, and staff members seem able to anticipate the merest whim. Romaneira is a place we will never forget. Suite for two, \$1,555, all meals, drinks and spa treatments included. Tel. (351) 25-473-2432. Email: resa@maisonsdesreves.com For further information and photography, please visit the Andrew Harper member web site.



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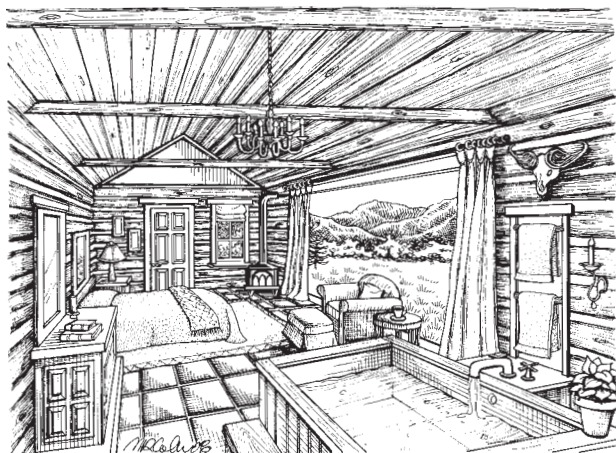
UNITED STATES/CANADA

Dunton Hot Springs

Dolores, Colorado

THE MAN RESPONSIBLE for this idiosyncratic place is entrepreneur Christoph Henkel, founder of the Canyon Group, a company that owns a number of well-known properties, including Amangani in Jackson Hole. While on a ski trip to nearby Telluride, Henkel discovered Dunton Hot Springs in a state of almost complete dilapidation. Enraptured by the beauty of its setting, he was struck by the idea of turning this once-busy little community of gold miners and fur trappers into an upscale getaway.

Situated at 8,600 feet in the San Juan Mountains, the cabins can accommodate from two to eight people. Having been taken apart and modernized, they were then painstakingly reassembled. The original character of the structures has been retained, and their inherent charm augmented by extremely imaginative décor. For



example, “Major Ross,” which was built in the mid-1800s, is filled with the accoutrements of a famed local trapper such as old rifles and snowshoes, plus appropriate touches like a bison-skin rug and a buckskin bedspread. In the well-appointed baths, modernity and comfort trump all other considerations.

The center of life is the Saloon. Meals are served at a communal table, and the atmosphere is informal. The food, however, is invariably first-rate. Much of the produce comes either from the resort’s own farm or from local sources. From around 7 p.m., a selection of tasty hors d’oeuvres is set out on the bar, along with some surprisingly good wine from Sutcliffe Vineyards, located just 30 miles away in McElmo Canyon.

In the summer, fishermen will find it hard to resist the trout in the Dolores River, on which Dunton has nine

miles of exclusive rights. Horseback riding, hiking and mountain biking are also easily arranged. Throughout the year, guests can bathe in the hot mineral springs from which the property derives its name.

Dunton Hot Springs attempts a delicate balancing act between the rustic and the luxurious. In our view, it is triumphantly successful.

“Major Ross” cabin (sleeps two) for a two-night minimum stay, \$1,800, all meals included. “Vertical Log” (sleeps four), \$2,000. Tel. (970) 882-4800. Email: info@duntonhotsprings.com

Clayoquot Wilderness Resort

Tofino, British Columbia

SITUATED ABOUT HALF AN HOUR by boat from Tofino at the mouth of the Bedwell River (or 45 minutes from Vancouver by floatplane), this idyllic spot combines civilized pleasures with the best of the great outdoors. It is serenity and simplicity itself.

The extensive grounds contain a cluster of log cabin-style buildings and guest accommodations in 11 luxurious tents, connected by cedar boardwalks. Rest assured, these are not tents from your youth. Large, white-canvas living spaces, they come with thick rugs, antique furniture, Adirondack-style beds with proper duvets, electric lighting and propane “woodstoves.” Each tent has a dedicated dressing room/shower in a central bathhouse. There are no phones except at the office for emergencies, but a Wi-Fi area functions more than adequately.

The focal point of Clayoquot is the cookhouse, a stylish post-and-beam building with a double-sided fieldstone fireplace, an open kitchen and a wraparound deck. Chef Timothy May presents a menu of memorable “modern natural cuisine.”

Activities at the resort are overseen by an exceptional staff of friendly, enthusiastic, well-informed young people. Guests may hike, kayak or go horseback riding. Alternatively, they may try whale-watching, bear-viewing or fishing for salmon, steelhead and cutthroat trout.

When you return to your tent at the end of the day, you will find the beds turned down and the interior aglow with candlelight. It is an extraordinarily warming and welcoming sight. And as you nod off to sleep, all you are likely to hear is the sound of a gentle wind rustling through the trees.

Deluxe Guest Tent, \$4,570 per person for a three-night minimum stay. The rate includes all meals, house wines, all outdoor activities, a one-hour tent massage and a return floatplane transfer from Vancouver. Tel. (888) 333-5405 or (250) 726-8235. Email: info@wildretreat.com



GRAND AWARDS
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CARIBBEAN/CENTRAL AMERICA

Hermitage Bay

Antigua

SET IN A GLORIOUS LOCATION on the west coast of Antigua, south of the capital, St. John's, Hermitage Bay overlooks translucent turquoise waters and more than 1,200 feet of perfect white sand. Flanking hills provide a wonderful sense of seclusion.

The resort consists of a main lodge and 25 Cottage Suites, surrounded by well-groomed tropical grounds. The pavilions have hardwood floors and shingled roofs, and in general, they represent a skillful updating of the colonial style of architecture. Eight are set in two rows beside the beach, while the remaining 17 have been constructed on the terraced hillside and come with plunge pools. The large bedrooms are separated from the outdoor spaces with shuttered doors that can be fully opened to admit memorable views of the bay or securely closed to allow effective air-conditioning. Spacious baths have egg-shaped tubs, double vanities and wonderful outdoor showers.

Food in the lovely tiered dining room is consistently excellent and made with fresh ingredients that are locally sourced whenever possible. The menu combines Caribbean dishes with modern-European cuisine.

Sailing, windsurfing and the usual (non-motorized) water sports are available, and a small spa offers facials, body treatments, hot-stone massages and reflexology.

Overall, Hermitage Bay struck us as a distinguished addition to the Caribbean scene.

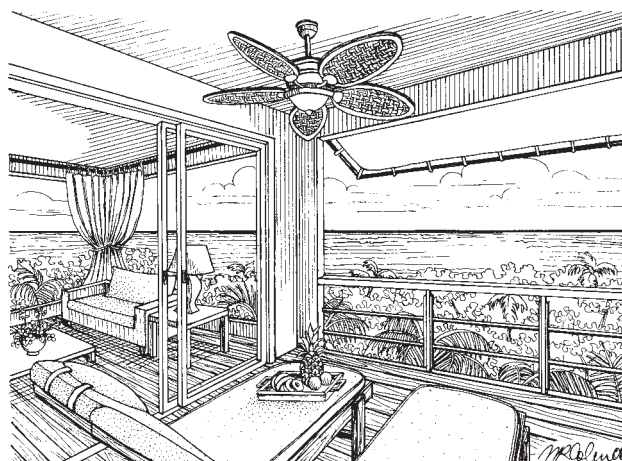
Beach Front Cottage Suite, \$1,500 (winter high season); Hillside Cottage Suite, \$1,600. Tel. (268) 562-5500. Email: info@hermitagebay.com

Gaia Hotel & Reserve

Manuel Antonio, Costa Rica

THE GAIA HOTEL & RESERVE opened in 2005 and is located on a 12-acre nature preserve. Its architecture is modern and uncompromising. Inside, however, all is seamless luxury. The 17 air-conditioned rooms have polished dark wood floors, pale pastel walls and expanses of glass that let the sunlight flood in. The king-size beds are dressed with 500-count linens; sitting areas are appointed with stylish rattan furniture with plump white cushions; and the communications package includes flat-screen TVs, cordless phones and wireless Internet. Baths make lavish use of roughly finished green granite and provide separate walk-in showers. Each room comes with a dedicated concierge. The most remarkable of the resort's

accommodations is the sensational 1,100-square-foot "Gaia Suite." This offers 15-foot cathedral ceilings, stone floors and natural wood appointments, a spacious living/dining room, an equally generous bedroom, a state-of-the-art bath equipped with a four-person Jacuzzi, a private 18-foot-by-12-foot swimming pool and an enclosed garden with magnificent views of the Pacific. The property also



offers a 2,000-square-foot two-bedroom villa with a huge private roof terrace.

Those not resident in the Gaia Suite have to make do with a dramatic, multilevel swimming pool. Water cascades down the hillside, linking a series of small furnished sundecks. Halfway down, there is a pool bar where you can sit contentedly submerged while the bartender concocts some frothy tropical potion. Nearby, the Terra Spa is a tranquil sanctuary with a full complement of treatments for men and women, including mud packs, Vichy showers and sauna/steam rooms.

Gaia's restaurant, *La Luna*, is a stylish aerie on the second floor of the clubhouse with wide-screen views of mountains, rain forest and Pacific Ocean. The menu is ambitious but successful. The wine list is exceptionally good, with a notable South American selection that includes the remarkable El Fin del Mundo wines from faraway Patagonia.

Gaia's only real deficiency is the lack of its own beach (though there is a regular shuttle to the one at Manuel Antonio). Overall, the property demonstrates that a contemporary boutique resort can be efficient, friendly and devoid of the pretension that is often associated with the genre.

Suite for one or two, \$440; Deluxe Suite, \$495; Gaia Suite, \$840; Two-bedroom Villa, \$920. Tel. (800) 226-2515 or (506) 2-777-9797. Email: reservations@gaiahr.com.



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BRITAIN/IRELAND

Haymarket Hotel

London, England

THE HAYMARKET HOTEL opened in September 2007 and combines high levels of comfort and service with an offbeat and contemporary take on time-honored English interior design. One of its principal virtues is a location just a few minutes' walk from the stylish shops of Jermyn Street and the theaters of St. Martin's Lane and Shaftesbury Avenue.

The 50-room hotel is housed within a block of white-stuccoed neoclassical townhouses. Inside, however, public areas are flamboyantly decorated with modern paintings and sculpture. Despite a slightly disconcerting feeling that we had strayed into an art gallery by mistake, we found the warmth of our reception and the efficiency of check-in instantly reassuring.

In general, accommodations at the Haymarket are light (thanks to huge windows) and unusually spacious. Even though our Deluxe Junior Suite wasn't divided into two separate rooms, it never felt cramped. The exceptionally large granite-faced bath came with a separate shower and sizeable tub, two pedestal sinks, excellent lighting and shelves deep enough to accommodate two toiletry bags.

The most remarkable of the hotel's amenities is a 60-foot indoor swimming pool, located just a few steps beneath the main lobby. This is partly illuminated by purple, yellow and fuchsia neon lighting that creates an otherworldly effect. Nearby, a delightful brasserie, *Brumus*, serves delicious appetizers such as Dorset crab with saffron aioli, plus simple, well-prepared main dishes like wing of skate with capers, and that English classic, steak and kidney pudding.

Overall, the Haymarket is an excellent choice for anyone in search of an ideal location and who is comfortable with colorful modern design.

Luxury Double, \$445; Deluxe Double, \$505; Junior Suite, \$615-\$705. Tel. (44) 20-7470-4000. Email: haymarket@firmdale.com

Gregans Castle

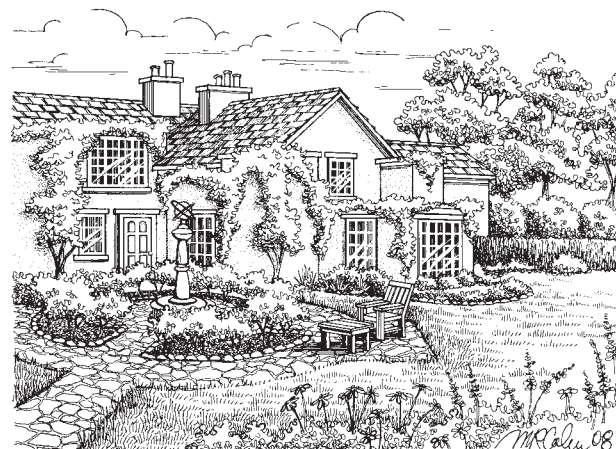
Ballyvaughan, Co. Clare, Ireland

GREGANS CASTLE IS LOCATED in the Burren, a mysterious coastal region with a surreal landscape of eroded and fissured limestone. Adding to its atmosphere are several massive dolmen, megalithic tombs, dating from more than 5,000 years ago. Gregans is not really a castle at all, but

a gracious country house dating from the 1750s that has been gently updated by the Haden family over the past 32 years. Wide bow windows look out across 13 acres of flower gardens to the expanse of Galway Bay.

Walk into the foyer, and you immediately catch the sweet, earthy smell of a peat-burning fire. The public areas are filled with light, and despite the intricate architectural detailing and array of imposing portraits, their atmosphere is delightfully informal.

Each of the 22 guest rooms has its own individual décor. Much of the furniture is antique and is complemented by muted fabrics, as well as more colorful toile-like prints. Baths are on the small side, but are attractively presented. It is undoubtedly worth paying a little more for one of the splendid suites. The "Galway Bay Suite" has a king bed and magnificent views of the gardens and the



sea. The "O'Loughlen Suite" is on the ground floor and offers two queen-size beds and a door that leads directly out into the gardens. And the "Martyn Suite" provides a four-poster bed, a stone fireplace and its own private courtyard garden.

The dining room serves food that is delicious and scrupulously sourced from local producers. (One of Ireland's best fish smokeries, the Burren Smokehouse, is just a short drive away.) The surrounding region offers innumerable leisure activities and breathtaking scenery. And golfers will wish to play world-famous Lahinch (known as Ireland's St. Andrews), a classic MacKenzie course that incorporates two holes by Old Tom Morris.

In many ways, Gregans Castle is the embodiment of the perfect Irish hideaway.

Superior Room, \$455; Junior Suite, \$515; Premier Suite, \$635. Tel. (353) 65-707-7005. Email: stay@gregans.ie



GRAND AWARDS
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SCANDINAVIA/BALTIC STATES

Hotel Nimb

Copenhagen, Denmark

OCCUPYING A FANCIFUL MOORISH-INSPIRED 1901 building on the southern edge of Copenhagen's enchanting Tivoli Gardens, the 13-room Nimb instantly became the city's preeminent hotel when it opened in May 2008.

After minimal formalities, we were escorted to our room, where we found two complimentary flutes of Champagne and a lively log fire burning cheerily on a chilly winter afternoon. Augmenting the bare oak parquet floor was a sophisticated mix of antiques and contemporary furniture. A large wooden armoire and a beautiful cherry-wood secretary desk with marquetry drawers were complemented by a sleek four-poster chrome-framed bed topped by Danish goose-down comforters and pillows. A freestanding Bang & Olufsen TV/CD player, heavy damask curtains and several handsome oil paintings further extended the subtle contrast between tradition and modernity. A spacious bath provided an egg-shaped ivory-colored tub, a heated marble floor, a spacious stall shower with a rain-forest showerhead, and high-quality Tromborg toiletries.

Though Danish cooking has evolved considerably during the last decade, nothing prepared us for the feast at *Herman*. The six-course menu began with a delicious chestnut bisque, garnished with a plump salted scallop, tiny mushrooms and a dollop of caviar. Turbot with Danish bacon and bread crumbs was followed by foie gras with cherry sauce and beet purée, smoked duck with brined walnuts and red cabbage, a generous sampling of Danish farmhouse cheeses and, finally, a delicious crumb cake. With each course the delightful sommelier presented appropriate wines by the glass. Throughout, the service was impeccable.

Copenhagen has long been without a first-rate hotel. The deficiency has been splendidly remedied.

Double Room, \$745; Deluxe Double, \$935; Junior Suite, \$1,315. Tel. (45) 88-70-0000. Email: info@nimb.dk

Padaste Manor

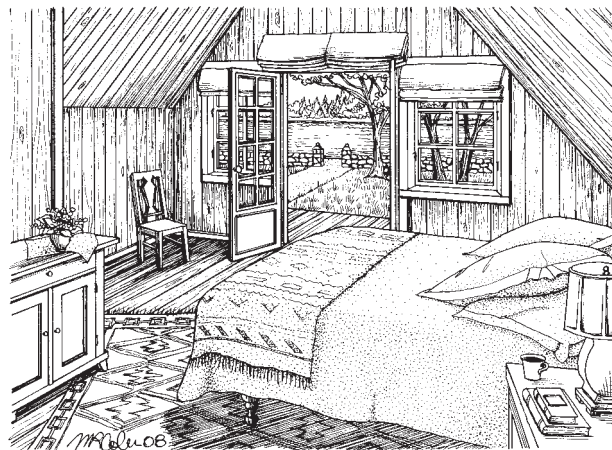
Muhu Island, Estonia

IT IS A PLEASANT TWO-HOUR DRIVE from the Estonian capital Tallinn to the port of Virtsu, where you board a ferry for the hourlong crossing to the island of Muhu.

Once the seat of German aristocrats, Padaste Manor has been lovingly restored. Set right at the edge of the

Baltic, it comprises an original 18th-century manor house and two wings of fieldstone outbuildings. Bordering the sea is a marsh where swans may be seen gliding gracefully through the reeds.

We particularly recommend the duplex Junior Suites with private balconies overlooking the main lawn. These are comfortably furnished, with beds topped by feather duvets under linen coverlets. Baths are spacious and



well-lit. If you're traveling with a group of friends or as a family, book the private three-bedroom farmhouse, which has a woodburning fireplace and is appointed with a delightful mixture of contemporary furniture and Estonian antiques.

At dusk, the grounds of the estate are lit with flaming torches, and dinner is served in a charming stone building beside the sea. During good weather, it is an almost indescribable pleasure to settle into one of the wicker tub chairs, to listen to the nightingales and to sample such delicious dishes such as Estonian mushroom soup, goat cheese-stuffed ravioli in pumpkin sauce, and steamed turbot with peas. Martin Breuer has assembled one of the best wine lists in the Baltics, and service is prompt and charming.

The hotel's principal amenity is a wonderful spa, which offers a variety of indigenous treatments, including wraps employing local mud (the natives have been daubing themselves with the stuff for centuries to cure rheumatism, arthritis and other ailments), "baths" in newly mown hay and a relaxing soak in seawater heated by a woodburning stove. Essentially, however, Padaste is an ideal place in which to do nothing.

Superior Double, \$465; Superior Junior Suite, \$615. Private Farmhouse, \$1,375 for two, plus \$80 each for up to six additional people. Tel. (372) 454-8800. Email: info@padaste.ee

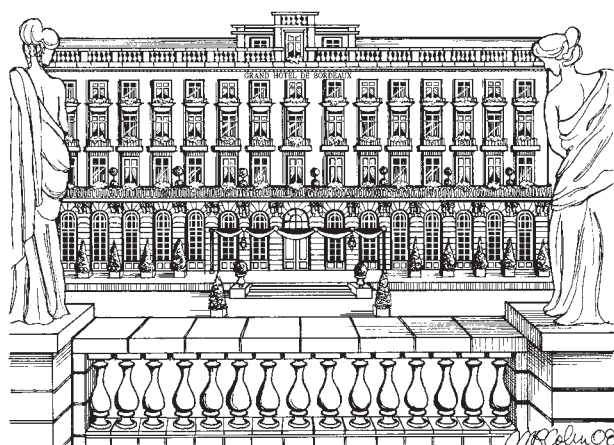


GRAND AWARDS
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FRANCE

Grand Hotel Bordeaux

Bordeaux



BORDEAUX, ONE OF FRANCE'S LOVELIEST CITIES, finally has the luxurious address it has been so sorely lacking. Parisian designer Jacques Garcia has succeeded brilliantly with his floor-to-ceiling renovation of the Grand Hotel, which opened in 1904 within a building dating to 1776. Behind an elegant limestone façade, his voluptuous interiors recall the glamour of the era of Napoleon III. A discreet reception area illuminated by black wrought-iron lamps with pleated silk shades and velvet club chairs immediately sets the tone for a hotel that is quintessentially French, but decidedly modern.

We instantly fell in love with our exceptionally pretty and comfortable junior suite. "Junior suite" is a much-abused term, but this one delivered the goods with its generous layout. A cozy little salon came with floral fabric wallcoverings, a cut-velvet sofa and French doors framed by heavy silk damask curtains with elaborate tasseled tiebacks. Three step-up teak-decked balconies provided intimate little viewing spaces from which we could gaze across the whole of the center of Bordeaux. The bedroom had a king-size bed with a striking lyre-shaped headboard, and a well-lit bath provided a large soaking tub, a separate shower and a striking red-marble counter stocked with toiletries by the renowned Parisian beautician Anne Semonin.

The *Pressoir d'Argent* restaurant is run by chef Yves Mattagne (formerly of the famous *Sea Grill* in Brussels), and we enjoyed a memorable dinner in its lavish dining room decorated with rocaille moldings studded with real seashells. Langoustines with cucumbers and Aquitaine caviar were followed by a sublime roast turbot that was expertly boned tableside and served with an oyster-flecked

béarnaise sauce. A variety of excellent Bordeaux is served by the glass and service is gracious, prompt and friendly. This is exactly the distinguished hotel that this wonderful city has long deserved.

Superior Room, \$495; Deluxe Room, \$595; Junior Suite, \$750. Tel. (33) 5-5730-4444. Email: info.bordeaux@rezidorregent.com

Hotel Particulier

Paris

MANY REGULAR VISITORS TO PARIS probably haven't set foot in Montmartre for years. Even though the views from the Sacré Coeur Basilica are wonderful, the once-famous hilltop neighborhood is frequently dismissed as hopelessly touristy due to the buses that clog the Place du Tertre, and faded nightlife venues such as the Moulin Rouge.

This is why the new Hotel Particulier comes as such a delightful surprise. The handsome late 18th-century house, now a five-room hotel, is hidden away in a little-known part of Montmartre that is every bit as elegant and worldly as better-known districts such as the 7th and 16th arrondissements.

The Hotel Particulier is not easy to find. Nothing indicates that it is located at the end of a small cobbled lane, and there is no signboard on the wrought-iron fence that surrounds its glorious private gardens. "We deliberately didn't put up a sign in order to protect the privacy of our guests," explained charming Frédéric Comtet, one of the two owners.

Working with partner Morgane Rousseau, he has made the house a showcase of modern design, with furniture in the salon by Mies van der Rohe, Alvar Aalto and Arne Jacobsen. Upstairs, each of the spacious rooms has been decorated by a different contemporary artist. Our favorite is the aptly named "Vegetale" suite on the second floor, decorated with green-and-fuchsia wallpaper by New York-born Martine Aballéa. (This large and very comfortable room also has a wonderful bath with limestone tiles and a Jacuzzi tub.) All rooms have lovely views over the surrounding gardens, shaded by ancient spreading chestnut trees.

Though it has no restaurant, the hotel is happy to arrange a light meal, or to make reservations at local restaurants. We will never forget the serenity and discreet hospitality of the Hotel Particulier. And reading quietly in its exquisite garden was pure bliss.

Junior Suite, \$550; Deluxe Suite, \$835. Tel. (33) 1-53-41-81-40. Email: hotelparticulier@orange.fr



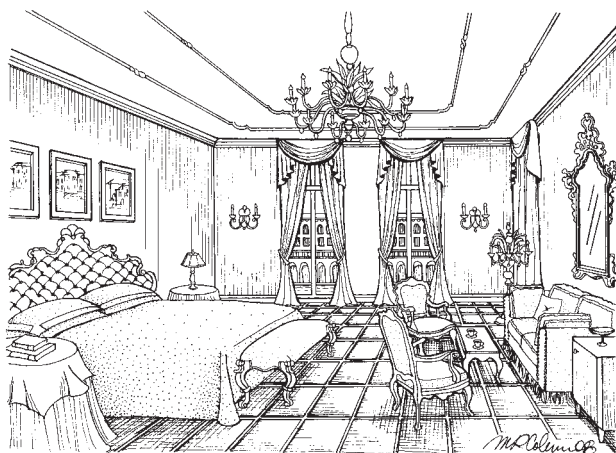
ITALY

Ca' Sagredo

Venice

OVERLOOKING THE GRAND CANAL between the Ca' d'Oro and the Rialto Bridge, Ca' Sagredo dates to the 13th century, when it was built by the renowned Morosini family (four of whose members were elected Doge). It was acquired and rebuilt by the Sagredo family 200 years later and then extensively remodeled during the 18th century, when a grand staircase was added, leading to the gloriously redecorated salons of the piano nobile. Today, it is these sublime public spaces, adorned with works by the most important Venetian painters of the 17th and 18th centuries, including Giambattista Tiepolo, Sebastiano Ricci and Pietro Longhi, that make a stay here such an extraordinary experience.

On arrival, guests are offered a brief tour of the hotel's public spaces before being shown to their rooms. Since the quality of the décor and furnishings varies widely according to category, we suggest booking at least a "Grand Canal View Junior Suite." Though we feared that *vaporetto* (motorboat) traffic on the Grand Canal might make our suite noisy, the three Gothic leaded windows were double-glazed, so that it proved light and relatively quiet. Warm eucalyptus wood parquet and sponge-painted yellow walls created a pleasing setting for a gold damask-upholstered sofa and a bed with a large gilt-wood



headboard. A smallish white marble bath came with double vanities and a combination tub and shower.

Like most of Venice's boutique properties, Ca' Sagredo has a restaurant but no workout facilities or any of the other amenities that you might expect at a large hotel. Service, however, is excellent, and the experience of staying in what is effectively a living museum is unforgettable. This

is an ideal address for visitors who have been to Venice several times, couples of romantic inclination, and lovers of Venetian art.

Double Room, from \$350; Junior Suite, from \$680; Suite, from \$1,065. Rates fluctuate greatly according to availability and the time of year. Tel. (39) 41-241-3111. Email: info@casagredohotel.com

Four Seasons Florence

AFTER A SEVEN-YEAR RESTORATION, Four Seasons has created a magnificent hotel from the 15th-century Palazzo della Gherardesca and the Conventino, a 16th-century convent. Both are enclosed within a gloriously romantic 11-acre private garden.

The 117-room hotel is located at the edge of the historic center of Florence, around 15 minutes' walk from most of the city's principal attractions. Stepping inside, we were overwhelmed by the extraordinary beauty of the Palazzo, which was commissioned in 1490 by Bartolomeo Scala, the chancellor of Lorenzo the Magnificent. The entire building is filled with museum-quality art.

The interior of the guest accommodations is the work of Pierre-Yves Rochon, who was previously responsible for the décor of the Four Seasons George V in Paris. Our junior suite had a parquet floor, a walk-in dressing room and a high-ceilinged bedroom with gilt trim, a gold-and-white damask sofa and a magnificent Murano glass chandelier. An exceptionally comfortable bed was made up with Pedersoli cotton sheets. Walls painted a striking shade of yellow were hung with Piranesi-style etchings of 18th-century Florence. A huge bath provided an extra-long tub, and a gilt Empire chandelier hung overhead. The floor was a checkerboard of caramel and white marble tiles, and a spacious walk-in shower came with a rain-shower head. Toiletries were specially created for the hotel by the renowned Florence-based perfumer, Lorenzo Villoresi.

After an agreeable lunch in the hotel's *Il Palagio* restaurant, we took a stroll in the wonderful garden. There, a 60-foot lap pool is shielded by a low hedge. Nearby, the hotel's superlative spa offers treatments using the products of Florence's famous 13th-century pharmacy, Officina Profumo-Farmaceutica di Santa Maria Novella.

Although the 15-minute walk to the center of town might be problematic for some, the Four Seasons is now easily Florence's best address.

Deluxe Room, \$850; Premier Room, \$990; Junior Suite, \$1,200. Tel. (800) 819-5053 or (39) 55-26261. www.fourseasons.com/florence



CROATIA

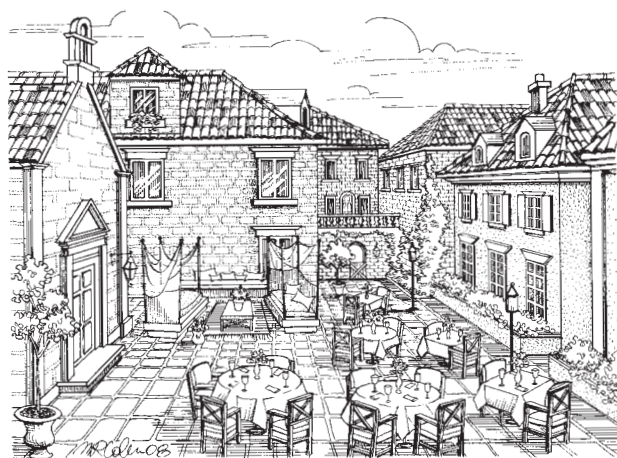
Pucić Palace

Dubrovnik

OVERLOOKING DUBROVNIK'S stone-paved Gundulić Square, the 19-room Pucić Palace is an imposing 17th-century building of oatmeal-colored stone. Originally constructed as a private residence, it has been a hotel since 1859 and was completely modernized in 2002. No other property within the Old Town's walls offers such gracious hospitality and refined comfort, along with an excellent location.

The reception and lobby are tiny, but elsewhere, stone columns, expanses of marble and a baroque staircase all contribute to an atmosphere of patrician splendor. In general, the interior design is traditional. Our Junior Suite had a high beamed ceiling, heavy brocade curtains and oak parquet floors with hand-woven rugs. The mosaic-floored bath provided a walk-in shower and a deep tub with a striking copper surround that was ideal for a prolonged soak with a guidebook. Bulgari toiletries and aromatherapy oils arrived in copious quantities.

Despite its small size, the property has three dining venues. In fine weather, the tables of the *Café Royal* spill out onto the square. The menu offers Mediterranean brasserie cuisine, including a surprising local specialty, "stone soup," flavored with "minerals from the pebbles of the Adriatic Sea." *Defne* (open in summer only) has a



delightful roof-terrace setting and a nightly piano player, but the food seemed indistinguishable from the fare you find at Dubrovnik's many *konobas* (casual restaurants that are a cross between a tavern and a bistro), only at three times the price. Finally, *Razonoda* is a lively wine bar that also serves snacks such as homemade cheese and *prsut*, a renowned Dalmatian smoked ham.

The hotel has no pool or spa. It does, however, possess a private yacht for cruising in the Dalmatian archipelago, and the reception staff is adept at arranging guided excursions of all kinds.

Deluxe Double, \$805; Junior Suite, \$1,210. Tel. (385) 20-326-222. Email: info@thepucicpalace.com

Adriana

Hvar

AS LONG AS YOU AVOID the frenetic high-season months of July and August, the island of Hvar, an hour from Split by ferry, offers a perfect Mediterranean-style holiday, with fine hotels, delicious food and secluded beaches.

Returning after a six-year absence, we were amazed by the transformation that has been wrought by the Suncani Hvar hotel group. Unlovely piles from the '60s and '70s have been ingeniously converted into a set of stylish and comfortable properties. Collectively, they explain why Hvar is regularly, and plausibly, referred to as the new St. Tropez.

The group has four principal hotels, among which our favorite is the Adriana, located on a quiet promenade facing the old town, with its Cathedral, Arsenal and Venetian piazza. On our previous trip, the Adriana had been a dull bird, which is why we were so impressed by the dazzling makeover of this 59-room property.

To be sure, the rooms are a little on the small side (you must book one of the nine Spa Suites, which come with whirlpool tubs, if you really want some space), but they are as shrewdly designed as cabins on a luxury yacht. Our room had a perfect picture-postcard view of the port, and a modern bath that proved to be a study in efficient design.

Public areas of the hotel include a blissful rooftop terrace and a saltwater pool. Dining options include the *Val Marina* seafood restaurant on the ground floor overlooking the harbor. The hotel's Sensori spa is first-rate, with an extensive menu of treatments featuring the wonderful local lavender oil. And the concierge will swiftly arrange the rental of a cabana at the charming '30s-vintage Bonj "Les Bains" beach club.

Even if you do not arrive in Hvar by private yacht, the staff at Adriana will arrange for your ferry tickets and a porter to carry your bags, so the process is neither arduous nor inconvenient.

Superior Seaview Room, \$450; Spa Suite, from \$595. Tel. (385) 21-750-200. Email: reservations@suncanihvar.com



GRAND AWARDS
2009

INDIAN OCEAN/MIDDLE EAST

Cocoa Island

Maldives

SCATTERED ACROSS THE WARM WATERS of the Indian Ocean, the atolls of the Maldives now comprise one of the world's most glamorous destinations. Many of the newer resorts strive to outdo one another with ever more extravagant facilities. Cocoa Island, however, takes a different approach and seeks to prove that real luxury can be found in simplicity: from fewer but better choices.

Arriving after a 45-minute speedboat ride from the Maldivian capital, Malé, it didn't take us long to fall in love. Cocoa Island is a tiny speck of coral edged with powdery white sand and azure waters, populated by smiling, soft-spoken staff.

All of the island's 33 suites resemble *dhonis*, or traditional Maldivian boats, and stand on pilings over the sea. Inside, you will find teak floors and steeply pitched roofs lined with golden coconut palm matting. Amenities include air-conditioning and large, white-cotton daybeds. Despite the remoteness of the location, Wi-Fi is also available. Baths come with double vanities, large soaking tubs and separate showers.

In the dining room, a young chef produces outstanding contemporary menus that might include Vietnamese spring rolls, pizzas topped with locally caught prawns, and sublime local lobster served South Indian style. There is also an extensive, if predictably pricey, wine list.

The island promotes a mood of profound indolence, but for those who are feeling energetic, the surrounding waters offer some of the world's finest scuba diving. (Water visibility is at its best during the dry season, from January through April.) The resort promotes a "wellness" lifestyle of exercise, healthy food and yoga. And an excellent spa offers an appealing menu of therapies.

Cocoa Island succeeds brilliantly with low-key luxury that leaves the Robinson Crusoe fantasy intact.

Dhoni Suite, \$880 (January–April); Dhoni Loft Suite, \$990; One-bedroom Villa, \$1,440. Tel. (960) 664-1818. Email: res@cocoaisland.com.bz

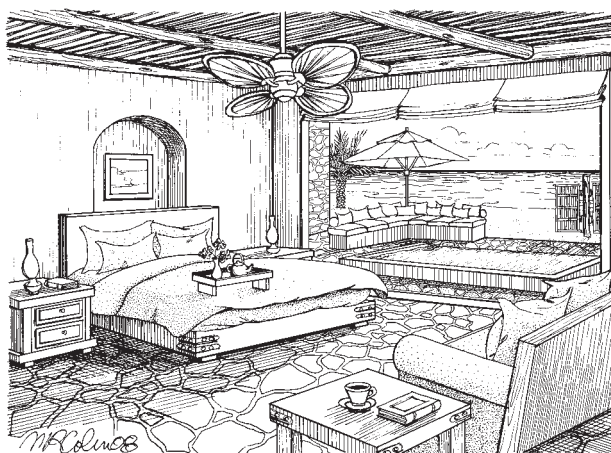
Six Senses Zighy Bay

Oman

SET AGAINST A BREATHTAKING backdrop of sheer mountains, the 82-villa Six Senses Zighy Bay nestles at the edge of a mile-long crescent of powdery white sand. Despite the hotel's location in Oman, the nearest airport is in Dubai, 90 minutes away. The resort is an intimate

seaside village of rosy stone bungalows, with a design that is scrupulously indigenous and intended to have a minimal environmental impact. In every way, it provides a welcome respite from the big-is-best philosophy that now dominates the Persian Gulf.

The property offers four types of villa, all built of rough local stone, the most expensive and desirable being those with direct access to the beach. All come with butler service. Our Pool Villa was set a row back from the sand and provided views of the sea from its terrace, as well as from a window in the bedroom. The stone floors, traditional Omani cane-and-beam ceilings, whitewashed



walls and dark wooden furniture were appropriate and visually appealing. A couch piled high with pumpkin and saffron pillows invited languor. Our open bath provided an extra-long terrazzo tub, while the outdoor shower was shaded by a majestic palm tree.

Zighy Bay's signature restaurant is *Dining on the Edge*, which offers international cuisine and extraordinary views of the Arabian Sea. Other options include the casual *Dining on the Sand*, which serves Middle Eastern and pan-Asian food in a setting of rustic simplicity.

Activities include diving and snorkeling, trekking, rock-climbing, dhow excursions and paragliding. There is also an extremely impressive spa. We especially recommend the two-hour "Wonders of Oman" that includes a detoxifying bath with lemongrass and geranium oil, a body scrub with spices and honey, a Rasul clay treatment and finally a first-rate massage.

Overall, this is a fine new resort in a setting of extraordinary scenic splendor.

Pool Villa, \$855; Spa Pool Villa, \$1,065. Tel. (800) 591-7480. Email: reservations-zighy@sixsenses.com



GRAND AWARDS
2009

SOUTH AFRICA/MOZAMBIQUE

The Owner's Cottage

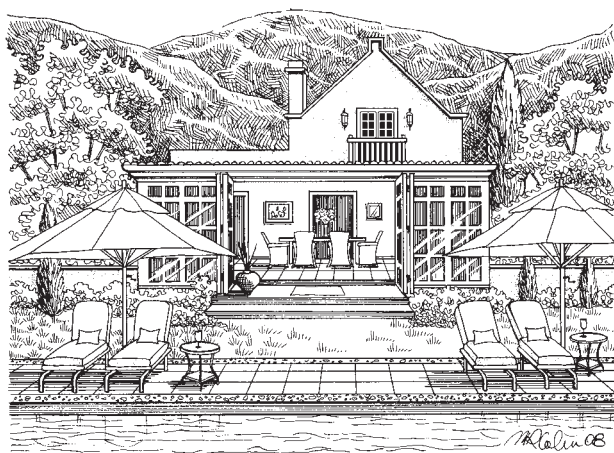
Franschhoek, South Africa

ONE OF THE DELIGHTS OF CAPE TOWN is its remarkable proximity to the Winelands. Often, it takes little more than 45 minutes to drive to Franschhoek, a pretty town with a sprinkling of 17th-century buildings set amid neatly groomed vineyards and surrounded by jagged 5,000-foot mountains.

The 65-acre Grande Provence estate produces some of the most highly rated wines in South Africa and is also the location of the charming Owner's Cottage. Since it opened in 2006, this whitewashed thatch-roofed Cape Dutch house (dating to 1694) has become a much-sought-after lodging for people in search of absolute privacy in a unique and beautiful setting.

Flanked by vineyards and lovely gardens, the five-bedroom property charms its guests with a décor that is both indigenous and quietly contemporary. The spacious lounge has a woodburning fireplace and plump plaid sofas, while the adjacent conservatory-style dining room overlooks a private garden with a pool and an open-air Jacuzzi. The cottage also includes a fully equipped kitchen. All of the bedrooms have sea-grass carpeting, white-painted beamed ceilings and wooden shutters. Spacious, well-lit baths come with tubs and walk-in showers.

Although *The Restaurant* is highly rated, the cooking struck us as rather subdued, almost as though the chef



were holding back to let the estate's wines star at the table. After a pleasant appetizer of corn chowder with sautéed shrimp, we had a main course of cassoulet that was oddly bland compared with the authentic French dish. Simpler meals such as grills, pasta and salads can be cooked by a private chef and served either outdoors or

in the privacy of the cottage dining room. The daily rate includes a four-glass tasting in the estate's winery.

In essence, The Owner's Cottage is a cozy home away from home, augmented by an alert and gentle staff. We left with a pang of real regret.

The Owner's Cottage accommodates a maximum of 10 people, and rates vary depending on the number of rooms occupied. One couple, one room, \$1,505, breakfast, dinner and estate wines included; three couples, three rooms, \$2,060. Tel. (27) 21-876-8600. Email: enquiries@grandeprovence.co.za.

Quilála

Quirimbas Archipelago, Mozambique

AS SOON AS WE STEPPED ASHORE on Quilála Island, we knew we would be very sorry to leave. A smiling young Mozambican offered us a cold towel and then escorted us to our villa, one of just nine at this very special and intimate resort. En route, he explained that Quilála means "place to rest" in Swahili, the language that for centuries was the lingua franca of the whole East African coast.

Constructed of white coral stone and roofed with local *makuti* thatch, our villa proved to be spacious and appealingly simple, with lime-washed walls, pastel throw pillows and teak and mahogany furniture made by local carpenters. Mosquito nets billowed in the breeze off the sea and veiled a king-size bed made up with Egyptian cotton sheets. Although air-conditioning was available, we never found a need for it. Louvered doors from the indoor/outdoor shower opened onto a verandah with a view of the Indian Ocean.

Among the guests, we discovered a contingent of enthusiastic Americans who had just completed a safari in Botswana. Not surprisingly, given the privacy that it offers, Quilála is also a popular destination for famous faces, Prince Harry and Leonardo DiCaprio among them. Though the resort has a PADI dive center — the snorkeling here is some of the best in the world — island life is wonderfully lazy and tends to revolve around three delicious meals a day. (During our all-too-brief stay, we enjoyed terrific grilled lobster, succulent Swaziland beef, an array of multicolored tropical fruit and Portuguese-style cheeses, all served with excellent South African and Portuguese wines). Otherwise, we took a leisurely 45-minute stroll around the island each morning, stopping periodically for a dip in the Indian Ocean.

Luxury Villa, \$595 per person, all meals, house wines and use of non-motorized boats included. Minimum stay required. Tel. (258) 82-326-3900. Email: quirimbasm@plexusmoz.com



GRAND AWARDS
2009

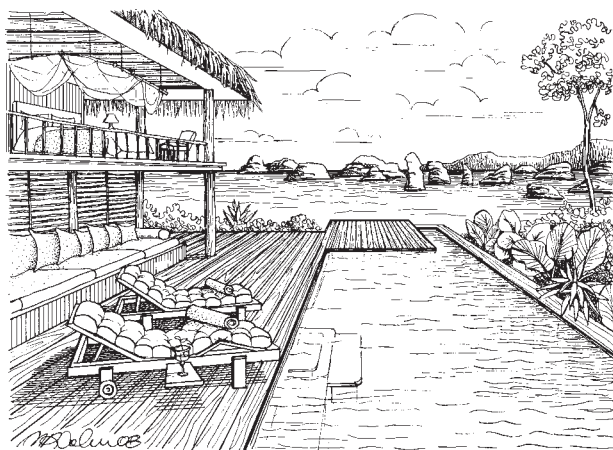
ASIA

Six Senses Yao Noi

Thailand

THIS MAGICAL ISLAND RESORT is reached by a 45-minute speedboat ride from Phuket. At the airport, we were greeted by a phalanx of charming silk-clad staff members who relieved us of our luggage and escorted us to a BMW sedan that whisked us across to the marina.

The resort is located on idyllic Yao Noi Island in spectacular Phang Nga Bay, renowned for its extraordinary vertiginous limestone rock formations. Nestled on 24



verdant acres that were once part of a rubber plantation, it comprises a Main House, two restaurants, an extensive spa with treatment rooms placed among the jungle foliage, and 54 villas situated to ensure maximum privacy.

The latter are spacious, pavilion-like structures with an abundance of dark wood, thatched roofs, large windows and a full complement of modern amenities, including Bose stereo systems with iPod docking stations, and well-stocked wine refrigerators. All come with airy, open living rooms and spacious bedrooms that can be completely enclosed and air-conditioned. Large baths have double sinks, inviting tubs and outdoor showers screened with bamboo. Private pools and expansive decks provide irresistible focal points for languorous days. A dedicated butler is on call to ensure that everything is in order and to help with dining reservations, activities and anything else that guests may need.

The Main House is also decorated in the local style, with open sides, heavy wood beams and thatched roofs. It houses a library, a concierge desk and a congenial split-level bar. The two restaurants are steps away. *The Living Room* offers a Thai menu that features the country's complex curries, while *The Dining Room* specializes in

Italian cuisine. There is a full range of water activities that includes kayaking, canoeing and windsurfing. Excursions to outlying islands, many with spectacular white-sand beaches, can easily be arranged. However, most guests seem to find it hard to stir from the decks of their private pools.

Pool Villa, from \$965; Deluxe Pool Villa Sea View, \$1,370. Tel. (800) 591-7480. Email: reservations-yaonoi@sixsenses.com.

La Residence de Hue

Vietnam

ANYONE MAKING THE JOURNEY to Vietnam and passing on Hue would be making a serious mistake. Roughly equidistant from Saigon and Hanoi and approximately five miles inland from the South China Sea, it is a charming small city with bustling streets that run along a multi-bridged canal. As well as one of the liveliest and most colorful markets in Southeast Asia, Hue contains an array of handsome French Colonial architecture.

La Residence is housed within the former governor's mansion and is now a superb small hotel. Set beside the Perfume River, it is a handsome white structure, with two new wings embracing a central garden and exceptionally inviting pool. The interior of the hotel has been refurbished in an art deco style. Many of the 122 rooms and suites offer fine views of the river. All have large windows and are filled with beautiful custom-made furniture. Baths come with deep tubs and are spacious and well-equipped.

The main building houses a delightful bar, and the outdoor terrace is a fine prelude to dinner in the airy, high-ceilinged dining room. There, the extensive menu focuses on fine Vietnamese cuisine. The service proved engaging and efficient.

Hue is rich in historic sights, having once been Vietnam's capital. Right in town, the remains of the ancient citadel are impressive and extensive. Much of the city was destroyed during the Tet Offensive, but extensive restoration is under way. Farther out in the jungle, the tombs of Vietnam's kings are haunting and melancholy monuments, filled with exquisite art, statuary, wood carving and stonework.

After a day in the humid jungle, the enormous saltwater pool, lined with an intricate patchwork of blue tiles, is pure bliss. The hotel also has a full-service spa and a tennis court.

Deluxe King, \$340. Tel. (84) 54-3837-475. Email: resa@la-residence-hue.com.



RESTAURANTS of the YEAR

Dovetail *New York* — This is a real standout in a year that has seen numerous new Manhattan restaurants, but few of real distinction. The look is understated: soft gray carpeting, exposed brick columns and muslin-covered walls. And the atmosphere is restrained, so conversation can be enjoyed at a reasonable level, not that of a grade-school playground. Overseeing the kitchen is John Fraser, who creates imaginative and flavorful dishes such as crab ravioli with chorizo and soybeans, and braised oxtail with egg noodles and marjoram. The menu is seasonal, but main courses might include pork loin with spaghetti squash, and cod with clams, bacon and polenta.

Union *Seattle* — Located just opposite the Seattle Art Museum, this is a warm and lively place which, unlike so many loft spaces, has the acoustics just right. Chef Ethan Stowell places particular emphasis on superb fresh ingredients from the Pacific Northwest. On an ever-changing menu you might find starters such as the paper-thin duck prosciutto with a fingerling potato salad and a soft-boiled egg, all dressed in a mustard vinaigrette. Split one of the superb pastas before the main course, the one we liked best being the potato gnocchi with prawns, bacon and rosemary. Main courses could include the veal sweetbreads with morels, baby turnips and a mustard vinaigrette; and ocean trout with beets and radishes.

Scott's *London* — A legendary seafood restaurant since 1851, *Scott's* has recently been revived by new owners. (Allegedly it was where 007 creator Ian Fleming discovered that martinis were better “shaken, not stirred.”) The dramatic new interior features oak paneling, burgundy leather banquettes, a floor inlaid with chartreuse marble, and a glamorous bar topped with green onyx and fronted by stingray skin! A 10-foot-long display of crustacea includes a wonderful selection of oysters. For main courses, watch for delicious dishes such as fillet of halibut with buttered sea kale, and pan-fried slip soles with cockles, shrimps and chervil butter.

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Le Cinq, Four Seasons George V *Paris* — Chef Eric Briffard took over this spectacular dining room last spring, and he is now responsible for truly remarkable Escoffier-inspired (i.e., traditional) haute cuisine. A perfect example: his *Pithivier* (puff pastry pie) filled with wild duck and pheasant, cooked in chestnut honey with autumn fruits. Polished service and one of the most interesting wine lists in France make any meal here a special occasion.

Ma Tim Raue *Berlin* — Anyone wanting a night off from sturdy German cooking shouldn't miss this elegant and popular new restaurant at the Hotel Adlon Kempinski. Tim Raue's reinterpretation of Chinese cuisine includes dishes such as tuna tartare in wasabi-spiked cucumber juice, halibut with a “jade” sauce made from nectarines, bell peppers, coriander, shallots and roasted cashews, and raspberry tapioca with goat's milk ice cream.

Osteria alle Testiere *Venice* — This tiny, charming place has only about 20 seats and is very popular with the Venetians themselves. You must therefore book well in advance to sample treats such as grilled razor-shell clams, ravioli filled with robiola cheese and swordfish, gnocci with baby squid, and shrimp *bussara* (a typically Venetian dish of shrimp cooked in a tomato sauce seasoned with cinnamon). Engaging service and an excellent wine list add to the pleasure of a meal.

Savoy Cabbage *Cape Town* — Chef Peter Pankhurst's delightful mezzanine restaurant downtown is the ideal place to sample the accelerating culinary evolution of Cape Town. Try dishes like goat cheese salad with masala-roasted macadamia nuts and fruit, and sweetbreads with mushrooms and watercress sauce.

Club de l'Oriental *Hanoi* — Just a short walk from the Opera House and the Metropole Hotel, this sophisticated three-story space has a main dining room centered on a fascinating and hyperactive open kitchen. Among the dishes we especially liked were the spicy grilled chicken with lemongrass, delicious braised pork with sticky rice, and crisp spring rolls filled with crab.

For a slide show of our Grand Award Winners, additional recognition awards (including best beach, pool, view, spa, bar and suite), more notable restaurants and a list of recently visited hotels that we definitely don't recommend, please visit the member web site.