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MANDARIN ORIENTAL, PARIS IS A TRUE LUXURY HOTEL LOCATED ON rue Saint-Honoré just steps from the Louvre and the Place Vendome. With 99 rooms and 39 suites gleaming with Art Deco and Asian details, this is a paragon of style, luxe and warmth. If you seek calm and superior service, you will love it here. The suites are especially dramatic: some have 360-degree-views of Montmartre and are just incredible. There is no more perfect cocoon for honeymooners or high rollers wanting passion in Paris. The spa here is a haven of tranquility spread over two luxurious floors complete with a 46-foot pool. Treatments combine ancient and contemporary techniques with expert knowledge from around the world. The



spa's product line is enhanced by unique scents from French perfume house, *Guerlain*. Hotel guests also have access to a Turkish hammam, and a fitness center. There is haute cuisine dining at *Sur Mesure* (awarded two Michelin stars) and modern cuisine in *Camelia*, all inspired by noted chef *Thierry Marx*. If you long for a pastry, there is Cake Shop, which receives much fanfare. The staff is truly inspired, no doubt due to the talents of the urbane *Philippe Leboeuf* who is in charge of this seamless operation. Mandarin Oriental Paris is the perfect pied-à-terre for discerning travelers who expect the best. We love the interior courtyard garden, one of the most serene spots in Paris. Visit www.mandarin-oriental.com/paris, 251 rue Saint-Honoré, Paris, France, +33 (0)1 70 98 78 88.

THE *RED CARNATION HOTEL COLLECTION* JUMPED AN IMPRESSIVE 47 places from number 71 last year to number 26 in this year's *Sunday London Times Top 100 Companies*. This is impressive. After making its debut on the list just last year the Red Carnation Hotel Collection has every reason to be proud not only to be the highest ranking hotel group in the top 100 but also the only privately-owned, family-run hotel group. The prestigious list is compiled annually and hundreds of companies apply from a huge cross section of industries in the UK. A survey of over 246,000 employee opinion polls and an evaluation of each organization's key statistics, processes and policies yielded the results. With 14 award-winning luxury properties in



London, Dorset, Guernsey, Geneva, South Africa and Florida, Red Carnation is the creation of Mrs. Beatrice Tollman, its president and founder, and the name Red Carnation Hotel Collection is inspired by the flower famously worn in her husband's lapel. A driving passion for genuine hospitality and service and her on-going involvement on the front line

of her hotels is an inspiration to each member of her staff. Investing in staff is given great importance and the highest levels of training and development are provided to ensure employee satisfaction. *Jonathan Raggett*, managing director of Red Carnation Hotel Collection says, "Being a family run hotel collection, our employees are at the heart of our whole operation. Every effort is made, from our wonderful human resources team to all our dedicated managers, to deliver the best training and development for the entire staff, ensuring career progress and objectives are being met and most importantly that they are happy and feel fulfilled in their respective roles. Our staff's satisfaction is what ensures we live up to and embody our guest philosophy of 'no request too large, no detail too small,' and their happiness and motivation is paramount. So, it is with great pride that we have been acknowledged not only by the Sunday Times but also by our loyal staff." Each Red Carnation property has its own individual character and unique location that reflects the local environment, culture and cuisine. They all share the qualities that win Red Carnation so many prestigious awards—splendid luxury, generous hospitality, inventive and traditional cuisine, private art collections, passionate service and loyal staff committed to creating richly rewarding experiences for all their guests. For more information, go to www.redcarnationhotels.com.

WITH THE ECONOMY IMPROVING, MORE AMERICANS ARE LIKELY to consider international destinations for travel, as long as vacation options are within budget, according to a new survey by *Brendan Vacations*. Offering flexible vacation deals and with

more than 40 years in the travel business, this trusted vacation planning and travel booking partner, has announced the re-launch of *BrendanVacations.com*. The new website allows travelers to explore many different travel styles and use various planning tools to create the perfect vacation from itinerary to price point to more than 105 destinations worldwide. The redesigned website features intuitive navigation that highlights Brendan Vacations' full product line, which includes the five key offerings of Guided Vacations, Independent Vacations, Ireland Vacations and the new Boutique Journeys and Private Chauffeur Vacations. Throughout the site are large vibrant images featuring the international destinations that Brendan Vacations offers, along with detailed maps and itineraries allowing visitors to research and design a vacation that is specific to what they want to see, visit and experience. Brendan Vacations was the first to charter flights and book vacations to Ireland from the U.S. in the late 1960s and over the past 40 years has grown and expanded to offer vacation options to more than 70 countries and over 800 worldwide cities including more than 50 UNESCO World Heritage and culturally significant sites around the world. Brendan has created more than 1.2 million guest experiences since their beginnings in 1969. A trusted and established travel tour operator, they are constantly customizing and expanding their offerings to meet the expectations of today's savvy traveler. The new website embodies a personal touch and now makes it easier than ever for travelers to explore and book their own vacation with a few simple clicks. Social media has proven to be a key driver for travelers looking for input and guidance on where to take their next vacation. With this in mind, the new "Brendan Community" section features social integration to foster sharing of information, tips, social networking, photos and inspiring conversation. Brendan Vacations also recently launched an optimized mobile site so users can research and book their next vacation no matter what device they are on. With nearly nine in ten Americans, according to the recent Brendan Vacations survey, preferring to have control over their own vacation itinerary, Brendan Vacations' offers the perfect option for travelers looking for guidance coupled with ultimate flexibility in planning their perfect vacation—from Self Drive and Walking Tours in Ireland to culinary adventures in Italy and France, the options and combinations are limitless. With high quality products, friendly service and competitive pricing, Brendan Vacations offers memorable experiences for every client. Headquartered in Los Angeles, the company is a respected brand of The Travel Corporation. Brendan has made Ireland its second home for over 40 years, and a Dublin office contracts product and manages inbound traffic for cruise lines, incentive houses, meeting planners and tour operators.

IN 2012, THE HISTORIC *FEATHERS HOTEL* IN *WOODSTOCK, OXFORDSHIRE, England* won the Guinness World Record for the world's largest gin collection. There are 174 gins currently ready for tipping at the bar of the hotel, but the collection can always get bigger. *The Feathers's Gin Experience* (\$115 per person) is one the most unique tasting menus in the country. Head chef *Kevin Barrett* creates each dish to be specially suited to every hand-picked gin selection. This completes the taste and texture of the experience, and highlights the quality and surprising influence that gin can bring to each plate. Feathers is one of our favorite places and we frequented it on a shamelessly regular basis in our student days at Oxford. Built in the 17th century, it is perfectly situated if one wants to walk to Blenheim Castle after a few too many cocktails to drop in on the Marlboroughs. The antique clock at The Feathers says it's ten to eight...permanently and that's fine with us. Eight o'clock seems a decent time to bed down in one of their pretty rooms or to wake up and head for the bar. Check it out at www.feathers.co.uk.



WE HAVE BEEN DELVING DEEP INTO THE LATEST MICHELIN RED guides, long the cynosure of grand tourists. But what do we find in the newly published red guide to the hotels and restaurants of Italy? Uncharacteristic anomalies worthy of the governance of that delightful, but chaotically-administered country. Take *Naples*, for example. The restaurant section is scanty at a time when the reputation—and execution—of Neapolitan cuisine is higher than in the era of the Bourbon kings. At least there is a listing for our favorite, *La Cantinella*, felicitously sited overlooking the Bay of Naples, and serving the freshest and most exotic of Mediterranean seafood. But why has it lost its former star for cooking that is, if anything, improved? Why is the smoky, unwelcoming *Hotel Vesuvio* accorded a red grand hotel symbol beside its name, signifying an establishment of exceptional charm and merit? Especially when its neighbor, the greatly superior *Excelsior*, been rendered as a black chateau, suggesting that it is merely grand. Yet, after a warm welcome we sleep here in beds of infinite comfort, awakening to a view of the sublime *Castel dell' Ovo* on its island just offshore. The solution to such mysteries, local friends tell us, is that Monsieur Michelin has a long memory: transgress in some manner and demotion is immediate. Reinstatement takes longer, sometimes much longer. Our request to the guide's compilers: report the situation as it is today. Just as ENTREE aims to do. *Hotel Excelsior, Via Paternope, 48. Naples. Italy* www.excelsior.it. *La Cantinella, Via Nazario Sauro, 25, Lungomare di Santa Lucia, +39 081 7648 684. Michelin Guides, www.michelinguide.com.*

SCOT'S IS AN HOMAGE TO SCOTCH AND HOLY WATER AND WE'RE NOT talking about the Biblical sense. This is *Israel's* only non-Kosher hotel which means tender pork roast can be found in their *Torrance Restaurant's* buffet. This 50-room resort hotel, set on four acres in *Tiberias*, resembles an upscale college campus in Edinburgh with 19th century basalt buildings reflecting the vision of founder, Dr. David Watt Torrance, a Scottish surgeon with a healing touch. The original hospital opened in January of 1894 when he began the first hospital Tiberias, under the owners, the Church of Scotland. What would the physician say or pray if he walked into the Scot's Wine cellar 120 years later where thousands of bottles of wine from boutique wineries that stud the hills of the Galilee are stored? He might just sit down to dinner at the Knight's table in the wine cellar to toast the good news. The option is the miraculous array of Scotch, in the upstairs bar, heavenly if you want a refined nightcap. Paradise is around the corner at the Scot's new L'Occitane spa where rare extracts from yellow "Immortelle" flowers cultivated in Corsica escalate spa culture to a regal religious ritual. We love that feeling of mingling mind, body and spirit, a true blessing for mere mortals. This is the spa we have been praying for. Looking toward the Golan Heights, "The Scot's" is a testament to a peaceful coexistence. World class hospitality is evident from moment we arrived. "Tiberias has been blessed by three things, the lake, the hot springs and David Torrance" said the booklet left in our suite, one of 18 we recommend. The blending of cultures, fresh-from-the-kibbutz fruits and



vegetables, home-baked bread for breakfast, lunch and dinner accompanied by a block of French butter, desserts like tiramisu and a lavish dark, dense chocolate cake were two of 20 on show at the dinner buffet. Displayed with care, the still life resembled a Flemish painting. Getting here was another chapter and verse, the rental car we picked up in Tel Aviv resulted in a bill of biblical proportions to which was added petrol pumped at \$8 a gallon. *Eldan* car rental wasn't exactly a godsend with service charges and mystical add-ons that could add a chapter to both the new and old testament. However, the Mazda 3 was immaculate and managed the narrow, twisting streets of Tiberias like a chariot driven by an ancient expert. Amen. Visit www.scotshotels.co.il.

ENTREE'S RECENT VERY COOL FINDS: *BELLE CHEVRE* MAKES exceptional hand-crafted goat cheeses at their brilliant Alabama-based creamery. Belle Chevre sells all sorts of products including artisan goat cheese, cookies, clothing and even cheesecake. Our favorite: their Original Spreadable Goat Cheese. Prices are rather reasonable and delivery is within just a few days. Visit www.bellechevre.com.

THE RIO NEGRO OF *URUGUAY* IS ONE OF THE TWO PLACES IN THE world with the best ecological conditions for the production of sturgeon for caviar. And it is here that *Black River Caviar* of *Breckenridge, Colorado* sources their excellent caviar. Their *Select Desired Black Oscietra Malossol River Russia Caviar* is the best farmed Siberian sturgeon caviar we have ever tasted. Offered in 30 gram (\$142.50), 50 gram (\$237.50), 100 gram (\$475) and larger tins up to 1000 grams (\$4750). They do not store caviar at Black River Caviar, they produce it according to the needs of their clients, therefore ensuring the freshest of caviar which arrives overnight. You can count on the highest quality caviar always when you deal with them, www.blackrivercaviar.com, (970) 547-1542.

ARCOPEDICO'S *FLOWER FLATS*. THESE ARE AN IDEAL "GO-TO" TRAVEL shoe for women; light and easy to pack, stylish and versatile. Dressier than a sneaker, lightweight, easy to transport and so much more comfortable than "flat" flats. Order from www.zappos.com.

The annual *Central Coast Wine Classic*, celebrating the remarkable wine and cuisine of the California's Central Coast and Napa Valley, will be held this year July 11-14. One of the country's most spectacular wine events, we went to this extravaganza of tastings, erudite symposia, auction and dinner at *Hearst Castle* last year and found it exhilarating, fun and informative. This is California wine and cuisine at its finest, four days of barrel tastings, talks, dancing, and winemaker dinners. The incomparable black tie feast at Hearst Castle is a glamorous evening to long remember. Besides the opportunity to taste fine and rare wines, the Wine Classic holds a remarkable auction of wines and lifestyle events. For more information go to www.centralcoastwineclassic.org.



SWEET TOOTH: *ELAINE'S TOFFEE*, DISTINCTIVELY DELICIOUS GOURMET English toffee. Buttery with the perfect crunch, Elaine's also makes scrumptious almond toffee, peanut toffee, chocolate toffee and peppermint bark. Visit www.elainestoffee.com.

KOHLER'S ORIGINAL BUTTERY TERRAPINS ARE JUST ABOUT THE BEST thing we have ever eaten. Delightfully crafted, these "Turtles" offer the perfect blend of chocolate, nuts and caramel. Kohler Original Recipe Chocolates started with this turtle. Or lack thereof. Herb Kohler felt the world, and chocolate lovers specifically, deserved a better take on the iconic chocolate treat. So he challenged the renowned chefs of *The American Club Resort* to create the finest version in the world. Hundreds of samples later, the turtle evolved into Kohler's very first unparalleled batch of signature Terrapins, and Kohler Original Recipe Chocolates were unleashed on the world's waists. A 10-piece box of Terrapins is \$29.95. Visit www.kohlerathome.com.

NOBU RESTAURANTS AROUND THE WORLD CONTINUE TO DAZZLE customers with their exquisite Japanese fusion cuisine, incredible atmosphere and five star dining experiences on a daily basis. *Nobu Matsuhisa*, star owner and executive chef, says that these customers are the driving force behind his newest cookbook—NOBU'S VEGETARIAN COOKBOOK, \$39.95. After receiving multiple requests for more vegetarian dishes on Nobu menus, Matsuhisa decided to accept what he called an "exciting challenge" of not only satisfying his customer's requests, but giving common garden vegetables the culinary credit they deserve. Drawing from the principle of umami—the fifth "savory" taste after sweet, salty, sour and bitter, vegetables take center stage in ways that will surprise and delight even the most cynical of taste buds. Amidst pages of beautiful full color photographs, you will find appetizers, main dishes, desserts and even cocktails and veggie "steaks." No dish is left untouched in this new book. It promises to quickly become one of the most beloved cookbooks in the Nobu collection.

MICHE BACHER'S COOKING WITH FLOWERS: SWEET AND Savory Recipes with Rose Petals, Lilacs, Lavenders, and Other Edible Flowers, *Quirk Books*, \$24.95 is a deliciously beautiful, engaging and informative cookbook. Miche—an herbalist, chef, and owner of the custom confectionery studio *Mali B Sweets* in *Greenport, New York*—really knows her stuff when it comes to cooking with flowers which comes through in this well-organized cookbook. And a piece focusing on cooking with flowers—whether it be focused on sweet dishes like candied flowers and flowerfetti cake or savory recipes like an herb flower pesto—could be gorgeous and unique.

ADMIRERS OF FINE HOTELS AND EXTRAORDINARY TRAVEL EXPERIENCES plus exemplary lives will like reading *James B. Sherwood's* ORIENT EXPRESS A Personal Journey, The Robson Press, \$25 from amazon.com. We have been a devoted fan of Mr. Sherwood for years since he re-launched the legendary Orient Express train, bought the Cipriani Hotel in Venice and built a collection of hotels that are unequalled for their excellence (the Copacabana Palace in Rio de Janeiro, the Grand Hotel Europe in St. Petersburg, the Hotel Ritz in Madrid, Charleston Place in South Carolina, "21" Club in Manhattan and the Mount Nelson in Cape Town.) Mr. Sherwood, known as the "Father of Container Leasing," opened up the Far Eastern market with the launch of the cruise ship *Road to Mandalay* on the Irrawaddy River in Burma, and the Eastern & Oriental Express tourist train which operates between Singapore and Bangkok. He also led the way into Peru where Orient-Express Hotels now operates five of the country's leading hotels as well as the railways serving the 'lost city' of Machu Picchu, Lake Titicaca and down to the sea. Sherwood's personal journey has been a remarkable and incident-packed one, and is told here with a dry and self-deprecating wit and an astonishing eye for detail. It took him through Yale to the Far East, where as a young lieutenant in the U.S. Navy he supported American efforts to hold back the tide of Communism which was spreading through Southeast Asia. An extraordinary book from an extraordinary man with a coda detailing his own personal list of what makes a great hotel. He, above all others, knows more about it than any man we know.



NAPA VALLEY ICONIC WINERIES, \$50, *PANACHE PUBLISHING*, www.panache.com, contains vibrant photography along with fascinating descriptions and anecdotes from the noteworthy wineries and artisan vintners of Napa. Gourmet pairings from experts, history and techniques of the winemakers make this large format book a perfect gift.

WE CANNOT IGNORE THE EASE AND CONVENIENCE OF AUDIO BOOKS. *Random House* produces the finest under their *RandomHouse Audio* label. Four we just enjoyed hearing while in our motor car: JUMPSTART TO SKINNY, a simple three-week plan for supercharged weight loss by *Bob Harper*; THE DISPENSIBLE NATION, American Policy in Retreat by *Vali Nasr*, a compelling case that argues how White House pivoted away from the complex problems of the Middle East; THE WOMAN UPSTAIRS by *Claire Messud*, a novel that explores the thrill, intensity and cost

of embracing an authentic life; PARIS by *Edward Rutherford*, a richly detailed, thrilling and breathtaking saga of love, war and art across the centuries in the magnificent French capital.

FINK FAMILY ESTATE VINEYARDS IS A TINY 1.2 ACRE PINOT NOIR Vineyard now in its eleventh leaf. The clay soil, full of Carmel Valley chalk rock, produces grapes of intense multi-dimensional flavors. The vineyard is planted to 10 different Pinot Noir clones with tight spacing on terraced hillsides. Only 52 cases of the 2010 vintage were produced and it is highly prized at \$65 a bottle in lots of six. Deep purple-garnet color, to mid garnet edge, brilliant. The aromatics exhibit spice, floral notes, violets, and ripe blackberry. On the palate there is a dense and pure raspberry, some spice, and sweet medium oak. The finish is very full and rich with a long length, with a balance of berry and acidity and firm oak tannins. The 2009 Fink Family Estate Pinot Noir production was smaller—only 49 cases—and it is superb, a bright deep ruby to a mid ruby edge. Aromas sing of spice, floral, sweet cherry, violets, wild strawberry liqueur with wet stones and mineral. On the palate super pure and bright—black cherry, strawberry, spice, cola, sweet oak tannins, fresh acidity and long finish. Available in six packs at \$65 a bottle. Only 73 cases of Fink's 2009 *Les Jumelles Pinot Noir* were produced, a blend of several favorite vineyards, including Fink Family in Carmel Valley, Solomon Hills Vineyard in Santa Maria Valley, and Rio Vista Vineyard in Santa Rita Hills. The color of this wine is mid ruby, to a brilliant ruby edge. The bouquet is of black cherry juice, cola, white, floral, violets, fresh red plum, wild strawberry and some spice. On the palate—bright fruit, cherry, spice, light tannins, good medium length, wild strawberry and medium fresh acidity. *Les Jumelles* is delicious now and we feel like it will age at least seven years. To order contact David Fink at dfink@mirabelgroup.com or visit www.mirabelgroup.com/finkfamilywines.

AS WE CONSIDER OPENING ANOTHER BOTTLE, WE URGE YOU TO TRY 2010 *Blackbird Vineyards Arise*, 2011 *Recuerdo Wines Malbec* and 2011 *Recuerdo Wines Torrontés*, all as good as a visit to *Ma(i)sonry Napa Valley*—their wine, art and design gallery in *Yountville*.

LAST MONTH WE EXTOLLED THE VIRTUES OF THREE SUPERIOR *NEW YORK* hotels (*The Pierre*, *The Lowell* and *The Chatwal*), a trio that effortlessly expresses the *sine qua non* of excellence. For those looking for a Gotham hotel that will be easier on the wallet but still deliver quality,

we recommend *The Benjamin* and *The Roger*. The Benjamin is located in Midtown Manhattan and has a respected place among New York hotels of the twenties. Guests enter the front doors of this 1927 building and step into a lobby that has been restored to its original



glow and grandeur. This experience is more like coming home to your private apartment in Midtown than just checking in to a hotel. Famed architect Emery Roth was responsible for creating the timeless design of the 29-floor building that inspired legendary artist Georgia O’Keeffe to paint it from her apartment a few blocks away. Located at the crossroads of culture and commerce in New York, The Benjamin remains a beloved Midtown fixture that continues to exude modern elegance. The luxury boutique hotel excels at providing the personal attention of a neighborhood Park Avenue club to ensure its guests make the most of every New York minute. Each of the 209 suites and guestrooms is elegantly appointed with a signature Benjamin bed, luxurious Anichini bedding, an executive work station, 42” HD flat screen TV, a fully-equipped galley kitchen with refrigerator and microwave, mini bar, and sleep menu. Terrace Suites and a VIP Suite give way to inspiring views of Manhattan and a closer peek at the craftsmanship of Roth’s architectural design. Iron Chef *Geoffrey Zakarian* brings his style, passion and culinary expertise to The Benjamin with his James Beard Award-winning restaurant, *The National*. His modern bistro menu delights as a result of his philosophy to use only fresh, perfectly sourced ingredients set into unexpected combinations that draw out their essential flavors. Rooms start at \$444 this time of year and that’s a bargain. Visit www.thebenjamin.com. *Roger New York* is a sophisticated new boutique hotel at 31st Street and Madison Avenue, offering modern accommodations near Madison Square Park. Located a short stroll from



the Flatiron District, Roger is a marriage of chic design and old world comfort where an unyielding commitment to superior service is the hallmark. Expect a fresh aesthetic and lush custom pieces to naturally complement the historic building’s unique rooms and suites. Décor is enhanced by classic moldings and Gotham murals. The Roger’s chic *Parlour Lounge* and bistro-style restaurant are chic and casual with contemporary American cuisine cooked by chef *Peter Goldklang*. We went for the corn chowder, King salmon, and crisp fried chicken. Famed mixologist *Johnny Swet* creates artisanal cocktails daily. In the morning, the pantry table was groaning under silver trays loaded with smoked salmon, pastries and scrambled eggs. Rooms can start as low as a \$229 at Roger if you pick the right date but most dates are in the \$300s and \$400s. A most genial place, Visit www.therogernewyork.com.

ONE OF THE MOST TALENTED YOUNG CHEFS IN AMERICA IS CREATING unforgettable dining for lucky food lovers at *Aubergine* in *L'Auberge Carmel Relais & Chateaux*. Aubergine is the intimate 42-seat restaurant of the deluxe L'Auberge Carmel, run by owner *David Fink*. Its warm European country mood is an extension of the hotel with a smooth mix of treasured antiques, soft lighting, cool stone walls and good original paintings. The supremely gifted chef, *Justin Cogley*, learned a few tricks while at Charlie Trotter's, but today his cooking is one-of-a-kind, a modern celebration of the biodiversity of California's Coastal Cuisine. Cogley, who was most recently named one of *Food & Wine's* Best New Chefs of 2013, is an artist who uses pure, fresh products like paints on a palette, with skill, restraint, finesse and patient understanding. He is not one for big plates of jumbled food, rather for him the objective is getting at the essence of taste. Diners are actually presented with two menu choices: either the four-course menu (\$98 per person) with an additional option to sample artisan cheeses, or the Chef's Tasting Menu (\$125 per person). The four-course menu offers choices within each course, allowing diners to create a menu from a variety of dishes. The Chef's Tasting Menu, which changes daily, is designed by the chef and is drawn from a list of up to 20 ultra-seasonal ingredients that may appear as either a main component of a dish or as an accompaniment. Integral to the Chef's Tasting Menu are elements of surprise and spontaneity—each dish is a natural progression in flavor and reflects the chef's imaginative artistry and ability to create a gastronomic. For a supplement, wine pairings are chosen specifically for each course. Cogley is irrepressibly spontaneous and he has a true talent for finding unusual ingredients and combining them in new and harmonious ways. We encountered smoked marrow, pickled maitake, and broth of burnt vegetables, then we attacked young coconut, Dungeness crab, geranium and rose water. Monterey bay abalone followed, caressed by umeboshi, sea grapes, and Alba mushroom. We were delirious with Maine diver scallop, Meyer lemon, nori and toasted spices. A dish of Japanese hamachi, date, saffron, vanilla and smoked roe hit high notes as did a bit of Maine lobster, curry, puffed rice, and seaweed. A ribeye with yellow beet, tonka bean and black garlic was divine. His "Garden Salad" perched on a moist "Miso" crumbled cake looked like a mini-garden in bloom. Abalone was stuffed with fava beans and bacon then served on sea lettuce from Monterey. A dish of braised lamb tongue & shoulder with scallions and elephant garlic was intense. Nutty Ossau Iraty sheep's cheese melted over a brioche with cherries sang with spring. For Cogley, each plate has a purpose; his goal is to inspire



our guests to enjoy a broader combination of flavors and textures, foods that pair well with wines. A diner may discover a vegetable prepared three ways on his plate, but each of the flavors will be unique and pure. His style of cooking is based upon the philosophy of not masking ingredients but delivering purity. As we reveled in the tastes and textures, we sipped delicious wine from David Fink's own winery "*Les Jumelles*," a very elegant Pinot Noir. Aubergine has a proper underground wine cellar beneath the inn's courtyard to house the restaurant's 4,500 bottle collection. And a new cheese room assures *fromages* will be kept and served perfectly. Executive Pastry Chef *Ron Mendoza's* desserts are in perfect harmony with Cogley's expressive style. A calm, professionalism defines the staff who manage to be both efficient with no display of effort or stuffiness, friendly and relaxed, unobtrusive yet always at hand. This in itself is an art usually only found in France or, say at a great place like L'Manoir aux QuatSaisons. After a memorable lunch or dinner here you could make no better decision to drift upstairs and enjoy a nap or overnight in one of the relais's heavenly rooms. *Restaurant Aubergine, L'Auberge Carmel, (831) 624-8578, www.laubergecarmel.com*. Cogley is a big admirer of the great *Pierre Gagnaire* and will often quote him: "A craftsman is someone who does well, what they already know. An artist is someone who does things that they do not yet know." Cogley should know. He is the real deal, an artist in the kitchen at the height of his talents. Another worthy choice in Carmel would be *Grasings Restaurant* where wonderful Coastal Cuisine is the order of the day. Chef Kurt Grasing has developed a menu that reflects stylish simplicity by using ultra fresh ingredients harvested from California's coast and Central Valley. Dishes are displayed in modest fashion that belie an intense combination of textures and flavors. We tried an assiette de charcuterie et fromages of seasonal artisan cheeses, fresh and dried fruits, assorted cured meats and cornichons, then an Ahi tuna tartare, lightly seasoned with wasabi and soy sauce with capers and red onions. Grasing's paella of tender prawns, clams, mussels, Italian sausage, fennel and saffron orzo is delicious as is lobster mac and cheese made with fresh cold water lobster with leeks, toasted breadcrumbs and fresh herbs. Clams a la minute came with Yukon gold potatoes with leeks and bacon. Steaks, abalone, scallops, duck, lamb—it's all spellbinding. An award-winning wine list shows off a variety of California wines at reasonable prices. If the sun is shining, sit on the pet-friendly patio for a true Carmel experience. Visit *www.grasings.com, 6th Street & Mission*, across from the Fire Station on 6th, (831) 624-6562.

THE COSMOPOLITAN HOTEL IN LAS VEGAS HAS SUCCESSFULLY redefined the city for glamorous excitement. We were there recently to check out three restaurants and were dazzled by The Cosmopolitan's standards of excellence plus the buzz created by a young and sexy crowd who parades around nightly. If you want to see long-legged beauties in short skirts accompanied by their muscled swains, The Cosmopolitan is the spot. But there is more to this hotel than this glitzy show of hormones. The Cosmopolitan is a first rate hotel that operates very smoothly. The rooms, suites, spa, casino, nightclub, day club, three pools, bars and shops are all top notch. But it is in their restaurant collection that we found nirvana. There are thirteen restaurants on site, among them *Comme Ça*, *Scarpetta*, *STK*, *Jaleo*, *Holstein's* and *China Poblano*, all blue chip names. We tried *Estiatorio Milos*, *Wicked Spoon* and *The Overlook Grill*. The Overlook Grill serves casual fare with hints of Riviera chic. Adjacent to the Boulevard Pool, it's an indoor/outdoor dining scene that's laidback and relaxed. Offering signature breakfast items, the menu features re-imagined American staples including uniquely curated options such as red velvet waffles, griddled corn beef hash and Scotch eggs. With its strong house-blend coffee, handcrafted Bloody Marys, fresh squeezed juices, and house made pastries, it's the perfect breakfast destination with extraordinary people-watching. Wicked Spoon is a bustling culinary buffet food hall delivering well-crafted original selections for every appetite. With an extensive mix of top quality, familiar staples, in addition to imaginative and seasonal dishes, this is a place to satisfy every craving and invite discovery. But it was when we walked into Estiatorio that we got a true feel for The Cosmopolitan's commitment to excellence. Touted as one of North America's



finest Greek restaurants, Estiatorio Milos, by restaurateur *Costas Spiliadis*, features the finest Mediterranean cuisine and has a longstanding reputation for serving the freshest seafood imported daily. Featuring a one-of-a-kind terrace dining experience, guests can enjoy authentic tastes of Greece. The chefs spare no effort in sourcing the most delicious fish from around the world that they then prepare in the subtlest, most flavorful ways. The terrace at Estiatorio Milos is a unique restaurant experience on The Strip with a stylish glass-enclosed ambience complemented by elegant lanterns and a unique misting system. With seating up to 75, it's perfect for small private celebrations and rehearsal dinners, and can enhance any dining experience with breathtaking views of Las Vegas's lights and skyline. There is a selection of excellent Greek wines and the service is warm, friendly and professional. Visit www.cosmopolitanlasvegas.com.

FORBES TRAVEL GUIDE UNVEILED ITS 55TH ANNUAL LISTING OF STAR Award-winning hospitality establishments worldwide, and named *L'Ermitage Beverly Hills* to this prestigious list. This rating category joins Forbes Travel Guide's Five-Star and Four-Star ratings designations, which since the company's founding in 1958 as Mobil Travel Guide, have been the gold standard for hospitality excellence. L'Ermitage Beverly Hills is one of LA's finest luxury hotels, embodying the spirit of a sophisticated private club and a gracious urban residence. Serenely situated on a tree-lined residential street, the hotel is a short stroll from the bustle of Rodeo Drive. Renowned for its legendary elegance and uncompromised privacy—drawing discriminating clients from the world over—L'Ermitage guests enjoy quick access to the area's many cultural attractions, prime entertainment centers, shopping destinations and celebrated beach towns. Impeccable service combined with acclaimed dining and lounges, a rooftop pool retreat, an intimate spa, and spacious guest rooms featuring French doors to step-out balconies, complete this exceptional experience for which guests return often. We tip our high silk hat to *Sal Abaunza*, the very talented general manager of L'Ermitage Beverly Hills, who should get the keys to the city for assembling such a crack team whose effort, experience and dedication is the essence of a satisfying guest experience. Visit *L'Ermitage Beverly Hills*, telephone (877) 235-7582 or visit www.lermitagebb.com.



Our Favorite Travel Agent: Vivian Taylor

Reports about the demise of travel agents have been greatly exaggerated. Sure, anyone today can look online for simple travel plans. But for those of you with travel experience who yearn for more exotic locales and complex itineraries, there is nothing like a tried and true travel professional to sort out complicated arrangements and be there when things go wrong. For these reasons we strongly endorse Vivian Taylor who has over 35 years in the biz and can be proud of her reputation to make travel perfect always. Vivian cares and is well traveled. She makes her home in Delaware and Cape Town and enjoys valuable contacts throughout the world. She can make almost anything happen effortlessly and there is not a place on the globe she is not comfortable booking. Her approach is personal and that's just not a word to her. Because of her intimate knowledge, Vivian Taylor has a special knack to create very special opportunities and experiences for her lucky clients. Contact her at (302) 945-7255, (310) 497-2650 or e-mail Vivian@viviantaylor.com.