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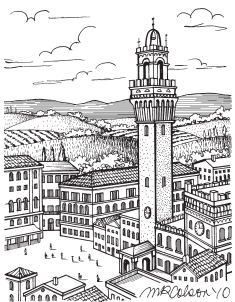
Andrew Harper's Hideaway Report®

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OPINIONATED REVIEWS BY A WRITER WHO TRAVELS INCOGNITO AND ALWAYS PAYS HIS OWN WAY

Tuscany: Surrendering to the Spell Once More



THE ONLY THING WE DON'T like about Tuscany is going there with return tickets. There are few more agreeable ways of spending time than strolling through the great cities of Lucca, Pisa, Siena and Florence. But for us, the supreme pleasure is pattering along country roads through one of the most distinctive and civilized landscapes in the world.

Generally, we choose September for our Tuscan rambles — when the summer crowds have gone home — but this time, we traveled in late spring. Over breakfast, we would watch the mist dissolve to reveal groves of silvery olives stirred by a gentle breeze, and pale green vineyards with newly unfolded leaves. One morning, a row of cypress trees looked like giant feathers on a distant

ridge, below which diminutive scarlet tractors turned the rich soil on farms that have been lovingly nurtured for centuries.

Later that day, as we wandered through the delightful little town of Panzano in Chianti, the delicious smells of baking stopped us in our tracks. Peering through an open window, we saw a woman pulling a tray of homemade biscotti from an oven. We exchanged “*buongornos*,” and then she held up a finger and disappeared, before returning with two freshly baked cookies for us to try. The gesture seemed a perfect cameo of the Tuscan genius for hospitality.

Fortunately, so many other people are besotted by this wonderful Italian province that even in a recession, an impressive constellation of new hotels has recently opened. We began our trip in Florence, the Tuscan capital. On our previous visit, we had stayed at the superb Four Seasons, housed within a 15th-century palazzo and a 16th-century convent. It remains the best choice close to the historic center. On this occasion, however, we decided to try **IL SALVIATINO**, a new property four miles from the city, amid 12 acres of gardens on a winding lane that leads up to the picturesque hill town of Fiesole. The 45-room hotel opened in September 2009 and occupies a historic cream-colored villa that enjoyed a heyday during the 16th

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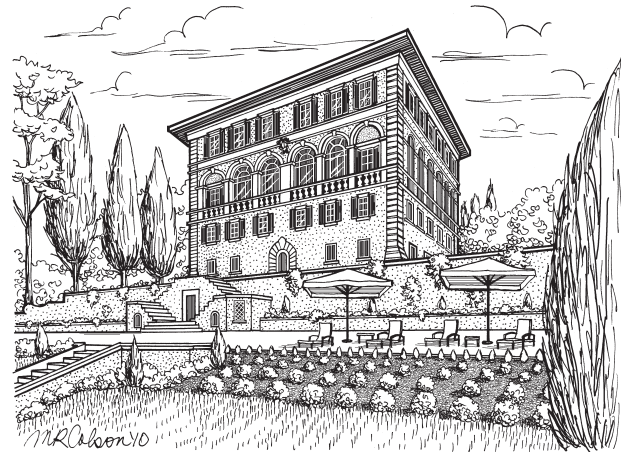
and 17th centuries, when it was home to the powerful Salviati family.

The villa has been subject to a two-year, \$60 million restoration. During the project, remarkable frescoes were discovered beneath a false ceiling in what is now the Affresco Suite (which also contains an ancient sarcophagus converted into a bathtub), and local artisans painstakingly replaced centuries-old mosaics, repainted the library and restored the old glasshouses of a former orangery that had fallen into disrepair. Afterward, well-known Italian architect Luciano Colombo made it a labor of love to discover appropriate furniture and works of art with which to embellish the property.

On arrival, we were straightaway escorted to the terrace, which overlooks the formal gardens and has one of the most extraordinary views of Florence we have ever seen. Framed by cedar trees, Brunelleschi's great cathedral dome is perfectly centered in a panorama of towers and terra-cotta roofs backdrop by wooded hills.

With minimal formalities completed, a polite and friendly young woman showed us to our 700-square-foot Dome View Junior Suite. This comprised a handsome pair of rooms with high ceilings, dark oak floors, a striking Poltrona Frau leather sofa and the same remarkable view of Florence. A bottle of chilled Prosecco awaited us next to a silver vase of white roses. In the peaceful bedroom, an exceptionally comfortable bed with a leather headboard was made up with linen sheets and a mohair throw. An

adjacent marble bath came with a double vanity, rainfall shower and separate whirlpool bathtub. Overall, our suite was a tour de force of traditional Italian good taste.



Il Salviatino and its formal gardens

However, it also came with an impressive array of easy-to-use electronic gadgetry, including a plasma-screen television ingeniously concealed by a wood-framed full-length mirror.

When we went down to dinner that night, we found both the interior and the exterior of the villa bathed in candlelight. Having enjoyed a perfectly made Negroni in the bar, we then strolled to the hotel's gastronomic Italian restaurant, *Le Serre*, overlooking the terraced gardens. In the striking contemporary dining room, we enjoyed an outstanding meal of light, inventive dishes by Tuscan-born chef Saverio Sbaragli, who trained with Alain Ducasse and Paul Bocuse in France. Veal tartare in a tuna sauce was followed by a risotto with goat cheese and an aniseed-flavored carrot purée, sole with *Lardo di Colonnata* (a type of *salume* made by curing strips of pig fat with rosemary and other herbs) over pea custard, and finally, an unusual strawberry, cream and Balsamic vinegar parfait for dessert. Following an after-dinner grappa in the bar, we discovered a pot of fresh linden-flower tea in our bedroom, which provided a perfect last touch to an unforgettable day.

Il Salviatino offers another restaurant, *La Terrazza*, which serves traditional Tuscan dishes. The menu usually includes classics such as Chianina beef, wild boar, lamb shank with Violetta artichokes and a Tyrrhenian fish stew. Otherwise, the principal amenity is the superb Devarana spa, located in the gardens below the terrace. The signature treatment features a milk and roses bath, followed by a rose petal scrub and a Swedish massage.

Since Il Salviatino offers a regular daytime shuttle service to and from central Florence, its location is



scarcely less convenient than that of the Four Seasons, which is a 15-minute walk from the cathedral. Having stayed at these two remarkable hotels within the past 12 months, we were often tempted to make comparisons. Perhaps the essential difference is that the Four Seasons has inescapably North American roots, while Il Salviatino is profoundly Italian. Indeed, it is a little masterpiece of Old World style and hospitality.

Of course, its direct competitor is the Villa San Michele, a five-minute drive away on the outskirts of Fiesole and a longtime favorite of Harper members. Both are extremely distinguished properties, but if urged to be partisan, we would say that Il Salviatino is slightly more convenient to the center of Florence, and its rooms are bright, while those at the Villa San Michele can be rather dark. 🌿🌿 **95** *Dome View De Luxe Room*, \$865; *Dome View Junior Suite*, \$1,085; *Affresco Suite*, \$2,580. *Via del Salviatino 21, Florence. Tel. (39) 55-904-1111. www.salviatino.com*

Leaving Il Salviatino after a stroll in the gardens, we drove south for an hour to Greve in Chianti and there went in search of our next stop, situated in the gray-green hills above town.

The British have long harbored a special affection for Tuscany, and since the mid-19th century there has been a large resident Anglophone community. This historic fascination explains the playful coat of arms of the **VILLA BORDONI**, which twins a vine leaf with a Scottish thistle. Owned by Scotsman David Gardner and his wife, Catherine — who also run two very popular restaurants in Florence, the *Trattoria Baldovino* and the *Ristorante Beccofino* — this intimate 10-room property can boast origins as far back as the 11th century, when it was a fortified tower midway between the perpetually warring cities of Florence and Siena. During the 18th century, Giuseppe Bordoni, a scion of a local landowning family, made the villa his permanent home and invested heavily in the vineyards, producing a renowned Chianti Classico. After a painstaking restoration by Florentine architect André Benaim and veteran interior designer Riccardo Barthel, the villa opened its doors to guests in the spring of 2006.

Our spacious quarters came with a high ceiling of exposed beams, an antique bureau with a basalt top, and an extremely comfortable bed with Italian linen sheets and a goose-down duvet. The dark gray walls had been handpainted using a water-based lime wash and were complemented by embroidered drapes. A little mezzanine level with an Empire daybed provided a perfect perch for a late-afternoon read. Modern amenities such as a safe

and a DVD player had been artfully concealed to retain the traditional character of the room. Baths at the Villa Bordoni feature floors tiled with antique ceramics made in the tiny town of Vietri sul Mare on the Amalfi Coast. Ours was equipped with a single vanity set in a white-marble counter, a heated towel rail and a shower with both an overhead fixture and wall-mounted hydromassage jets.

The property's English-speaking staff members are uniformly charming, and the quality of chef Francesco Fineo's cooking is exceptional. We loved our supper of charcuterie from the famous Antica Macelleria Falorni in Greve (which dates from 1729); followed by whole-wheat spaghetti with mussels, clams and cherry tomatoes; and fettuccine with an earthy wild boar sauce. Cooking lessons also are available.

Outside among the olive groves, guests will discover an unheated pool and an open-air fitness pavilion. Mountain bikes are provided for the more energetic, and

The property can boast origins as far back as the 11th century, when it was a fortified tower midway between warring Florence and Siena

wine tours and tastings can be arranged at local Chianti Classico estates. Though not especially luxurious, the Villa Bordoni is an enchanting country house hotel and a fine base from which to explore. 🌿 **93** *Deluxe Room*, \$380; *Junior Suite*, \$425. *Via San Cresci 31/32, Greve in Chianti. Tel. (39) 55-854-7453. www.villabordoni.com*

An hour south of Greve, the exquisite city of Siena is, alas, just a day trip for many visitors to Tuscany. Huge parking lots for tourist buses disfigure the outskirts of town. Determined to give Siena its due, we decided to spend a night at the centrally located 51-room **GRAND HOTEL CONTINENTAL**, housed within the 17th-century Palazzo Gori Pannillini. Our arrival was unpropitious, however, owing to a surly young woman at the front desk who preemptorily informed us that we would have to pay €45 (\$58) a day to garage our car, adding archly that we were welcome to search for garage space on our own, something she knew perfectly well would be well-nigh impossible.

Looking around, we couldn't help but notice that the hotel has become rather worn at the edges. And quite why our egregiously overpriced room had been billed

as a junior suite was difficult to fathom. Perhaps it was owing to the presence of a small sofa! On the positive side, we loved the terra-cotta tiled floor, Empire-style crystal chandelier, onyx table lamps and spectacular 17th-century ceiling painted with a motif of golden stars on a pale-blue background. The king-size bed proved very comfortable, but the bath, which came with a single vanity and a tub/shower combination, was in serious need of updating. Housekeeping was also deficient: Going out to dinner one night, we left a dead light bulb on the bed. When we returned, the bulb was sitting on a side table and the socket remained empty.

The hotel's stuffy and overpriced *Sapordivino* restaurant is without interest, and the potentially charming bar in the central atrium is a forlorn space with expensive drinks and poorly trained staff. The Grand Hotel Continental could be a fine property, but it needs a comprehensive renovation and a manager who understands that there is more to hospitality than merely filling beds. Still, for the time being, this is the only game in town for anyone who wants to spend a night in the center of Siena. **83** *Deluxe Double*, \$450; *Junior Suite*, \$580. *Via Banchi di Sopra 85, Siena. Tel. (39) 577-56011. www.royaldemeure.com*

Despite the magnificence of Siena's Piazza del Campo, in truth, we were glad to leave behind the tour guides with their microphones and bright, tightly furled umbrellas and to head back into the countryside. The 11-room **BORGIO SANTO PIETRO** lies 35 minutes southeast of Siena in a relatively unfrequented corner of Tuscany, surrounded by a 13-acre estate. After being buzzed through a wrought-iron gate, we drove up the long cypress-lined lane leading to a converted 13th-century stone farmhouse, built 800 years ago as a resting place for pilgrims en route to Rome.

The property was purchased in 2001 by Jeanette and Claus Thottrup, a London-based Danish couple. The public spaces in the old farmhouse have been dramatically decorated and are, to our taste, a little overtheatrical. Indeed, the part of the hotel that we liked best was its large, warm country kitchen (where breakfast is served), since it felt relaxed and authentically Tuscan.

Our Superior Room "Giardin de Fiori" was painted beige and had pickled pine floors, a white-painted beamed ceiling and milk-chocolate-colored velvet drapes with large tiebacks at two windows overlooking the gardens. The room's dimensions were dainty. And some details were irritatingly precious, especially the fussy silk lampshades with rose-embroidered borders. However, the working

woodburning fireplace would have been welcome on a chilly night. And the comfortable bath came with an old-fashioned cast-iron tub, Victorian-style fixtures and a stall shower with Tuscan olive oil toiletries. Amenities included an iPod dock, but the wireless Internet connection was maddeningly unreliable.

Eventually, however, Borgo Santo Pietro began to grow on us. First, we enjoyed a truly magical dinner, which began with delicious hors d'oeuvres in front of

The feast was washed down with a bottle of Cantina Terlano 2007 Quarz Sauvignon Blanc, one of the most elegant whites we've ever had in Italy

a roaring fire on the veranda. We moved to a candlelit table, and while we studied the menu, a plump apricot moon rose through the clouds and eventually lit up the whole night sky. Our chosen meal comprised a delicious codfish mousse, a broccoli *sformato* (little cake) filled with ricotta, an excellent risotto primavera, and roasted baby rabbit. This feast was washed down with a terrific bottle of Cantina Terlano 2007 Quarz Sauvignon Blanc, one of the most elegantly structured and well-balanced whites we've ever had in Italy.

Then, the next morning, we strolled around the property's magnificent gardens, which have obviously been a labor of love. There, amid some 200,000 trees, we found dozens of wicker chairs and chaises longues, extending irresistible invitations to a lazy afternoon with a book. Aside from the atmospheric ruins of the Abbey of San Galgano, there are no major sites in the area. Essentially, you come to Borgo Santo Pietro for a do-nothing interlude, including time spent beneath white umbrellas at the free-form swimming pool or luxuriating in the hotel's small spa. For those who simply must be active, there are tennis and basketball courts. **91** *Superior Room*, \$580; *Junior Suite*, \$710; *Suite*, from \$965. *Localita Palazzetto, 53012 Chiusdino. Tel. (39) 577-75-1222. www.borgosantopietro.com*

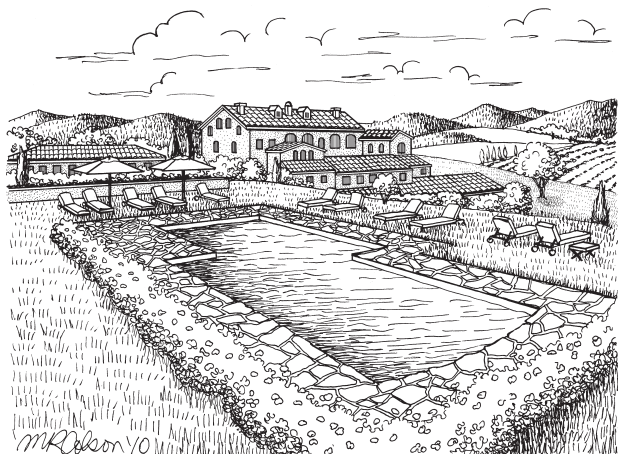
The next day, we enjoyed an utterly memorable drive along back roads through an immemorial landscape from Borgo Santo Pietro to our next stop in Pianella, eight miles east of Siena.

After the extravagance of Borgo Santo Pietro, the understated 25-room **HOTEL LE FONTANELLE** came as a breath of fresh Tuscan air. Built in the 13th century, the

handsome brick-and-stone farmstead is set on a hilltop overlooking miles of rolling countryside.

The welcome was warm, and our Deluxe Double room was authentically Tuscan, with bare wooden beams, cool terra-cotta tiled floors and whitewashed walls. A black wrought-iron four-poster bed was made up in hemstitched linen sheets and fitted with white cotton damask curtains. Screened windows allowed us to be lulled to sleep by the burbling fountain below. The bath was on the small side, with a single vanity and a combined tub and shower, but we found that such shortcomings could readily be overlooked. Doors opened onto a delightful private outdoor terrace.

Public rooms included a lounge, library and bar, all furnished with refined simplicity. The *La Colonna* restaurant derives its name from an ancient stone pillar at the center of the room. There, we enjoyed excellent contemporary Tuscan cooking as we gazed through panoramic windows at the majestic landscape. Meals can also be taken beside the large outdoor swimming pool or on the *Belvedere* scenic terrace. The amenities at the Hotel Le Fontanelle include an impressive indoor leisure center with a large heated pool, hydrojet pool,



Hotel Le Fontanelle and its panoramic swimming pool

sauna, steam room, gymnasium and spa. Wine tastings can be arranged by the sommelier, and guests may visit the property's Wine Shop, which sells the estate's extra virgin olive oil as well as its "Sole di Sesta" Chianti Classico. This is a hotel with a profound sense of place and one to which we would happily return for an entire week. 🌿🌿 **95** *Deluxe Double*, \$695; *Junior Suite*, \$865; *Suite*, \$1,210. *Localita Fontanelle di Pianella, Castelnuovo Berardenga*. Tel. (39) 577-35751. www.hotelfontanelle.com

Preferring to spend the last night of our trip in the countryside, we opted for the 26-room

VILLA MANGIACANE in San Casciano in Val di Pesa, an easy 45-minute drive from the Florence airport. However, we were also intrigued by the prospect of staying on an estate that had once belonged to the famous Machiavelli family. (Niccolò wrote "The Prince" in a building beside the grand villa built by Giorgio Vasari for his uncle, Cardinal Francesco Maria Machiavelli.)

The property creates a powerful first impression. Two stone Neapolitan mastiffs crown the gateposts at the beginning of a gravel drive that leads up to the imposing pink 15th-century villa, surrounded by the vineyards and olive groves of the working 600-acre estate. Alas, our warm feelings quickly evaporated, owing to a tetchy welcome from the front desk, staffed, like the rest of the property, by non-Italians.

Things got rapidly worse when we were led to our Junior Suite in the "Vineyard Villa" annex. The room smelled stale, its narrow garden was poorly maintained, and the plunge pool appeared not to have been cleaned in some while. The bedroom was dominated by a crystal chandelier and a huge wood-framed four-poster bed that could only be ascended with the aid of a footstool. Curiously furnished in a mix of bright chintzes and decorative objects from Bali and southern Africa, the suite conveyed no sense whatever of being in Tuscany. (Public rooms in the main villa are also furnished with the same bizarre mix of mostly African and Asian artifacts, and the grounds are dotted with abstract Zimbabwean stone sculptures. Owner Glynn Cohen is originally from Zimbabwe.) The white-marble bath featured a round tub big enough to bathe a baby whale in, and although we've never enjoyed Hugh Hefner's hospitality, we wouldn't be at all surprised to find a similar object in the Playboy Mansion.

A decent meal and a glass of wine seemed an attractive prospect, but glancing at the menu of the hotel's restaurant, we found it expensive and unappealing, so we asked a receptionist to book a table at a nearby trattoria, *Mamma Rosa* in Bargino. He obliged, but failed to inform us that this well-known spot recently changed hands and now serves very ordinary food.

Foreign investment in Tuscany occasionally produces deracinated properties such as the Villa Mangiacane, which are more a reflection of deep pockets than aesthetic sensibility. But the experience did not greatly detract from our trip, and once again, we found ourselves lamenting our return ticket and discussing our next Tuscan itinerary as we stepped aboard the airplane home. **79** *Deluxe Room*, \$740; *Junior Suite*, \$865. *Via Faltignano 4, San Casciano in Val di Pesa*. Tel. (39) 55-829-0123. www.villamangiacane.com

Toronto Evolves Into a City of Style and Sophistication



COSMOPOLITAN TORONTO has matured to take its place among the leading cities of North America. Just outside of the business district, it offers a fine array of restaurants, galleries,

boutiques and bars, most notably in the emerging Queen Street West neighborhood and the ever-stylish Yorkville section.

On our recent trip, we also enjoyed exploring the Distillery District, with its many striking Victorian structures. The city boasts superb museums, most notably the Royal Ontario Museum, with its startling Daniel Libeskind “crystal” housing the main entrance and seven new galleries; and the Art Gallery of Ontario, recently renovated by Toronto native Frank Gehry. Toronto has the largest English-speaking theater district in the world after London and New York.

Toronto is home to Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, and its flagship property has long been our favored place to stay. On this visit, however, we decided to check in to **THE HAZELTON HOTEL**, just across Yorkville Avenue from the Four Seasons. The Hazelton opened in 2007, and with just 77 rooms and suites, is a much more intimate property than its 380-room neighbor.

The Hazelton styles itself as a “contemporary boutique hotel,” but the usual deficiencies of the genre are not in evidence here. At the front desk, a charming young woman handled our check-in with warm efficiency, and throughout our stay, the prowess of concierge Ronaldo Breton particularly impressed us.

The interior design is contemporary, with dark wood accents and earth tones balanced by large windows that admit generous washes of natural light. Guest rooms are larger than usual, averaging 600 square feet. The décor is soothingly understated, with cream walls and original works by Canadian artists. Beds come with leather headboards, easy-to-reach reading lights, convenient switches for opening the motorized curtains, and Tivoli clock radios. The furniture is modern and elegant and includes leather reading chairs and spacious desks. Baths have beautiful deep-green polished granite walls, heated

floors, separate showers with overhead rainfall fixtures, soaking tubs and LCD televisions set into the mirrors above the vanities.

The hotel’s excellent *One Restaurant* is under the direction of chef Mark McEwan, who is the guiding light of another Toronto favorite, *North 44*. Its high-ceilinged dining room has towering windows looking out onto a terrace which, in favorable weather, has some of the most sought-after tables in town. The dinner menu offers a fine selection of oysters, plus simple but delicious appetizers such as seared foie gras with rhubarb compote and toasted brioche, and crostini with garlic mushrooms, poached egg and watercress. So-called “Composed” main courses include dishes such as lightly smoked day-boat scallops with mussels, clams and baby vegetable ragout, and grilled lamb chops with merguez sausage, olives and minted couscous salad. The menu also has a “Simply Cooked” section, with an extensive list of steaks, fish and seafood.

Among the hotel’s amenities are a health club featuring a lap pool lined with striking mosaic tiles, and a lovely small spa. The Hazelton has a contemporary aesthetic that may not appeal to everyone, but it has been designed with intelligence and taste and is staffed with professionals of high caliber. We highly recommend it to those who prefer smaller hotels and are comfortable with modern design. ✈️ **94** *Luxury Room*, \$510; *Junior Suite*, \$630; *Executive Suite*, \$850. 118 Yorkville Avenue. Tel. (866) 473-6301. www.thehazeltonhotel.com

Much closer to the business center of Toronto, **HOTEL LE GERMAIN** is another relatively small property (122 rooms), tucked away on a somewhat unpromising side street. Like The Hazelton, it is a contemporary boutique hotel, but it is not at the same elevated level. The young staff members, though well intentioned, were not always as professional as we might have expected. (Why, in such places, do we often have the feeling that we’ve interrupted a game of “Let’s play hotel”?)

The lobby is an impressive two-story space with soaring glass windows. Rooms come with dark patterned carpets, light walls and clever built-in drawers and cupboards. Large desks can be pivoted to whatever position you find most conducive for working, and high-speed Wi-Fi is provided free of charge. Attractive modern baths have slate floors, single glass-topped vanities with

polished metal bowls and glass-tiled shower stalls. (Less expensive rooms have shower/bath combinations.)

The hotel's admirable restaurant, *Victor*, serves contemporary Canadian food by chef David Chrystian, widely regarded as one of Toronto's leading culinary talents. The menu is market-driven, but look for dishes such as bison tartare with soft fried egg, perfectly cooked lamb with a rich leek bread pudding, and poached duck breast and game pie with juniper and baby potatoes.

Other amenities include a small health center and a pleasant roof terrace with a putting green. The chief merits of Hôtel Le Germain are its convenient downtown location and rates significantly lower than those at The Hazelton. **87** *Deluxe Room*, \$320; *Luxury Room*, \$370; *Executive Suite*, from \$405. 30 Mercer Street. Tel. (866) 345-9501. www.germaintoronto.com

A Taste of Toronto

NOWADAYS, CANADA HAS AN EXCEPTIONALLY LIVELY dining scene, thanks in part to a cornucopia of fine ingredients. Nowhere will you see this more clearly than at the **ST. LAWRENCE MARKET** (92 Front Street East), which is set in a large brick building covering an entire block. Inside, on two levels, you can amble among the displays of more than 120 vendors selling charcuterie, cheeses, caviar, seafood, meats, condiments, baked goods and fresh vegetables.

The fragrant chowder at the market's *Buster's Sea Cove* was sorely tempting, but we had purposely timed our morning visit so that we would be primed for lunch at **STARFISH OYSTER BED & GRILL** (100 Adelaide Street East). Its genial owner, Patrick McMurray, holds the Guinness World Record for most oysters (33) shucked in a single minute. At his small and lively restaurant, the menu changes frequently, so it is best to put yourself in the hands of the knowledgeable staff. Thereafter, you might find yourself feasting on Hardy's Malpeques from Prince Edward Island, Beau Soleils from New Brunswick or even Clarenbridges from Ireland. We continued with crisp, golden fish cakes made from house-smoked haddock and accompanied by onion marmalade, pickled mushrooms and haricots verts. These were followed by a superb soft-shell crab BLT, served on toasted brioche with tomato, smoked bacon and a wild-leek tartar sauce. Helped down by a chilled glass of Sauvignon Blanc, it was a truly memorable meal. This is a casual restaurant with serious food.

Later in our stay, we enjoyed another excellent seafood meal at **CHIADO** (864 College Street), a Portuguese

restaurant located about 10 minutes by taxi from the center of town. It is a charming space with warm ochre walls, bright contemporary paintings and staff who could not be more amiable. We began with perfectly grilled sardines, which had been marinated in a mix of lemon, coriander, garlic and olive oil. These were accompanied by a forgotten pleasure: a glass of chilled white Port. For the main course, we opted for the special of scabbard fish on a bed of risotto with seasonal vegetables. This unusual fish is only found in the Atlantic in the waters off Madeira, but it proved flaky, moist and delicious.

Tucked away on a Yorkville side street, **OPUS** (37 Prince Arthur Avenue) is a small, charming restaurant with dark gray walls and pin-spot lighting that give it a sophisticated air. Chef Jason Cox has devised an impressive menu that takes full advantage of the ample Canadian larder. We began with gently seared sea scallops served with bone marrow in an apple beurre blanc. Our main course was rack of lamb, cooked just as we had asked — pink at the center — with a side of red beet barley and a delicious chanterelle purée. *Opus* boasts one of the finest wine lists in Canada, with a cellar of 50,000 bottles and 2,300 wines. Place yourself with confidence in the hands of sommelier Tony Amaro. We were delighted with the 2007 Tandem Auction Block Pinot Noir from Sonoma that he recommended for our lamb.

Ontario Ice Wines

WINE IS NOW BEING PRODUCED IN ONTARIO WITH increasing success. Many of the restaurants we visited had lengthy by-the-glass lists, which meant that it was easy to sample a wide variety of bottlings. However, Ontario has a longstanding tradition of producing superb ice wines. These delicious dessert wines are made by leaving grapes to freeze on the vines, which concentrates the sugars. When the frozen grapes are pressed, the water content remains as ice crystals in the skin. The Niagara region of Ontario has almost ideal conditions for producing ice wines: warm summers with early, cold winters. (Excellent ice wines are also being made in the Okanagan region of British Columbia). Among the grapes employed are Riesling, Vidal, Gewurztraminer and Ehrenfelser. The best ice wines we sampled on this trip seemed to rival more eminent sweet wines, including Sauternes. Among the leading producers in Ontario are Inniskillin, which was one of the pioneers in the field; Magnotta; Konzelmann; and Pillitteri. For the first time, we tasted an intriguing red ice wine, made from Cabernet Franc grapes by the artisans at Inniskillin. We found it delicious.



**2010
READERS'
CHOICE**

Top 20 Hideaways

Your favorite hotels and resorts with 75 or fewer rooms

United States

- 1 **Post Ranch Inn**
Big Sur, California
- 2 **Blackberry Farm**
Walland, Tennessee
- 3 **Triple Creek Ranch**
Darby, Montana
- 4 **San Ysidro Ranch**
Montecito, California
- 5 **Auberge du Soleil**
Rutherford, California
- 6 **The Lowell**
New York City, New York
- 7 **The Inn at Palmetto Bluff**
Bluffton, South Carolina
- 8 **Twin Farms**
near Woodstock, Vermont
- 9 **The Inn at Little Washington**
Washington, Virginia
- 10 **Amangani**
Jackson Hole, Wyoming
- 11 **Ventana Inn**
Big Sur, California
- 12 **Little Palm Island**
The Keys, Florida
- 13 **Rancho Valencia**
Rancho Santa Fe, California
- 14 **Bernardus Lodge**
Carmel Valley, California
- 15 **Amangiri**
near Lake Powell, Utah
- 16 **Blantyre**
Lenox, Massachusetts
- 17 **Wheatleigh**
Lenox, Massachusetts
- 18 **The Wauwinet**
Nantucket, Massachusetts
- 19 **Bardessono**
Yountville, California
- 20 **Mayflower Inn**
Washington, Connecticut

International

- 1 **Hotel Splendido**
Portofino, Italy
- 2 **Las Ventanas al Paraíso**
Los Cabos, Mexico
- 3 **Il San Pietro**
Positano, Italy
- 4 **Esperanza**
Los Cabos, Mexico
- 5 **La Casa Que Canta**
Zihuatanejo, Mexico
- 6 **Blanket Bay**
South Island, New Zealand
- 7 **Grand-Hôtel du Cap-Ferrat**
Côte d'Azur, France
- 8 **Le Sirenuse**
Positano, Italy
- 9 **Hôtel San Régis**
Paris, France
- 10 **Villa Feltrinelli**
Lake Garda, Italy
- 11 **The Wickaninnish Inn**
Tofino, British Columbia, Canada
- 12 **Amansara**
Siem Reap (Angkor Wat), Cambodia
- 13 **Buckland Manor**
The Cotswolds, England
- 14 **The Meridian Club**
Pine Cay, Turks & Caicos
- 15 **Villa San Michele**
Florence, Italy
- 16 **Huka Lodge**
North Island, New Zealand
- 17 **Maroma**
Riviera Maya, Mexico
- 18 **The Farm, Cape Kidnappers**
North Island, New Zealand
- 19 **Palazzo Sasso**
Ravello, Italy
- 20 **Amankila**
Bali, Indonesia

2010 Reader Survey

MUCH OF THE PLEASURE I DERIVE from editing *Hideaway Report* stems from the knowledge that my audience is composed of active and sophisticated travelers, people with both the inclination and the financial means to accept my advice and to follow in my footsteps.

Each year in our long-running Reader Survey, we ask our members to tell us about their travel plans. Despite generally unfavorable economic conditions, I am delighted to report that recent respondents vacation an average of 32 days a year, and no fewer than 87 percent — 17 percent more than in 2009 — say that they plan to travel the same amount or *more* in the coming 12 months.

Although we frequently review larger hotels and resorts, our primary focus remains on smaller properties, those that offer both distinctive charm and a high level of personal service. Harper members are in search of unique experiences and expect to be treated as individuals. On this page, we list your Top 20 U.S. and International Hideaways, properties with 75 or fewer rooms. In this month's *Hideaway Report Online*, you will also find your Top 20 Beach Resorts worldwide.

Certain hotels are perennial favorites, and California's Post Ranch Inn, a magical sanctuary atop the cliffs of Big Sur, takes first place in the contest for No. 1 U.S. Hideaway for the third year in a row. However, I note the abrupt arrival of Utah's Amangiri at No. 15, a resort that opened as recently as October last year. No fewer than four Amanresorts feature in the combined lists, illustrating the enduring appeal of this admirable hotel group to Harper members. And the remarkable popularity of New Zealand (with three properties among the Top 20 International Hideaways) clearly illustrates that your enthusiasm for globe-trotting remains undiminished — recession or no recession!

— Andrew Harper

✦ For an explanation of ratings and hummingbird symbols, check the *Hideaway Report Online*.

Rates provided are published nightly room rates and are subject to change. Call the Andrew Harper Travel Office for the best available rates, (800) 375-4685.

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