

# FTWEEKEND

SATURDAY APRIL 21 / SUNDAY APRIL 22 2007

## TRAVEL

# Fast cars and coats mink die for

Her feelings are ambivalent but **Carolyn Reynier** can't help being amused by Monte Carlo

I loathe Monte Carlo. I first went to the principality when I was 13. I was staying with one of our French wine suppliers on the Cap Ferrat peninsula. Not many vineyards there, I hear you say. No, but there are in Alsace where the villa owner, René Dopff, and son Guy made wine.

We drove to the principality of Monaco on a windy day to visit the Museum of Oceanography. I remember nothing about it. Normally, when the sea was too rough, we swam in the Grand Hôtel du Cap Ferrat pool. I had a serious crush on Pierre, the tanned, blond *maitre nageur*. Given the choice - which I wasn't - I knew where I'd rather be. Forty years on, the museum is still there and so, I've discovered, is Pierre.

The best place to get an idea of how deeply unattractive Monte Carlo is - more a concrete copse than a jungle, the whole place is no more than 1.5 sq km - is from the Vista Palace. Up by La Turbie, where the Monegasque football team works out, the hotel is precariously perched on a cliff top with terraced accommodation cut into the hillside - vertigo sufferers please note. The views are spectacular. An enormous blue neon V rises up from the hotel roof, visible for miles. The building reminds me of the astonishing feat of architecture that is King Herod's palace at Masada in Israel. Except Masada no longer has a roof, and if it did, presumably it would be topped with a blue neon H.

Monte Carlo has style, I grant you. During the winter months, the local fur-wearing female Monegasque population is considerably swelled by elegant Italian signoras swinging by in swirling

full-length mink coats to die for - as indeed many mink did. Then there's the Formula One Grand Prix. It gives me a certain *frisson*, I admit, to see the yellow starting grids painted on the road down by the Port Hercule. And the race itself - well, it's like watching a Test match at Lords (which I've done) or attending an opera at La Scala (which I haven't). Everyone should do it at least once.

We watched it from a room in the Casino de Paris that year when rain stopped play in the 32nd or 33rd lap - the champagne was flowing like the downpour drenching the track - just after Alain Prost had taken the lead from Nigel Mansell. The best way to actually follow the race is on television. The cheapest way to experience the ambiance is from the lawns on the side of the Rocher - the synonym for Monaco, in reality the rock on which the palace and Monaco-Ville are located. Organised spectators go equipped with tables, chairs and cool boxes.

Last May, the Thursday before race day, I drove through Monte Carlo on my way to Italy to the Bordighera market. The drivers were doing timed laps. I didn't see a single car - but oh, the throaty roar of F1 engines below us and the smell of petrol and scorching rubber... Prince Albert II hosts a football match before race day, a Palace 11 against the F1 drivers. Probably wisely - he's knocking 50 - he delegated his team place last year to his nephew.

The Place du Casino is always beautiful, always buzzing. Lunching in the sun at the Café de Paris last autumn, I watched a nun walking eagerly up the casino steps. God meets Mam-



Men in uniform: the changing of the guard at the Palais du Prince

Corbis

mon. I like that. A short stroll round the corner, set back from the scrum (relatively speaking, of course - there are scrums, and scrums), brings you into the elegant Square Beaumarchais and the Hermitage Hotel. Believe me when I tell you, the set lunch menu at the Vistamar, overlooking the bay, takes some beating.

On my way to the principality, we had passed several Ferraris heading west along the Basse Corniche. I now know where they come from. My niece Caroline was visiting last month with her parents. We went to Monte Carlo to meet Gabriel Cavallari and look over his stupendous array of Ferraris in his rue Prin-

cesse Florestine premises. He showed us his own F40, F50, 288 GTO, Barchetta and Ferrari Enzo. He garages others owned by various Monegasque residents. The cars are "exercised" every few weeks.

At Christmas, there's a magical full-size nativity scene down at the port Hercule. Also, last June, they moved the Jumping International there from Fontvieille. Perilously close to the water, in my view, but apparently it went off without incident.

Then there are the handsome palace policemen. Approach one to ask a question and he'll salute you. If any female tells you she's impervious to being saluted by a

man in uniform, she's lying. Ideally, you ask a different policeman a different question, thus guaranteeing the maximum number of salutes. Here are a couple to start (with answers, in case you're too overwhelmed to take them in). Can you visit the palace apartments? (Yes, some are open to the public some of the time). There are bilingual street signs. Is there a Monegasque language? (Yes, it's taught in schools - a sort of Italian/Niçois melange as far as I can make out).

And, of course, we have the colourful Grimaldis. To date, the bachelor prince has acknowledged paternity of two children.

I love Monte Carlo.

## THE WALLPAPER\* CITY GUIDE TO ...

### Cape Town's hotels

#### Alta Bay

With just seven suites, the emphasis is on personal service, while its lofty position on the slopes of Table Mountain, with views of the city and ocean, adds to the sense that this is a retreat. But the city centre is just a five-minute drive. 12 Invermark Crescent, tel: +27 21-487 8300, [www.altabay.com](http://www.altabay.com)

#### Metropole

If you really must be in the heart of the city's frenzied bar action, the 29-room Metropole offers modern boutique style in a renovated Victorian building. 38 Long Street, tel: +27 21-424 7247, [www.metropolehotel.co.za](http://www.metropolehotel.co.za)

#### Kensington Place

This eight-room hotel, located in smart, quiet Higgovale (pictured), has the intimate appeal of a bed-and-breakfast and will delight romantics. Comfort as well as elegance in the contemporary interiors, there is original artwork from mostly African artists. 33 Kensington Crescent, tel: +27 21-424 4744, [www.kensingtonplace.co.za](http://www.kensingtonplace.co.za)

#### Hippo Boutique Hotel

This is stripped-down hotel living at its best. The 20 well-finished en-suite rooms are large, sleek and modern, with king-size beds, cherry-wood floors, neat kitchen units and a computer-based entertainment system. (tel: +27 21-422 4415), all sharing a terrace. 5-9 Park Road, tel: +27 21-423 2500, [www.hippoboutique.co.za](http://www.hippoboutique.co.za)

#### The Twelve Apostles

This 70-room hotel offers splendid isolation and views of the ocean out front, and the string of mountains after which it is named to the



rear. It's a car journey to get anywhere, but you may helicopter in from the airport and stay for some serious R&R. Victoria Road, Oudekraal, tel: +27 21-437 9000, [www.12apostleshotel.com](http://www.12apostleshotel.com)

#### Mount Nelson Hotel

Celebrated local designer Graham Viney has been successfully updating this grand old hotel without throwing away its history. It is still pink on the outside, but it's rather less chintzy within. 76 Orange Street, tel: +27 21-483 1000, [www.mountnelson.co.za](http://www.mountnelson.co.za)

#### Lion's View

One of the first boutique Cape Town villas, designed by local architect Greg Wright, Lion's View is a luxurious residence. Rent out either the five-bedroom main house or the two-bedroom penthouse, both of which come with a lounge, kitchen, pool, internet and all mod-cons. The main house's master bedroom, with its raised bath behind the bed and wall-to-wall view of the rim-flow pool and Camps Bay Beach beyond, comes with a telescope. The penthouse has a terrace with a heated plunge pool to watch sunsets. 4 First Crescent, tel: +27 21-38 1239, [www.lionsview.co.za](http://www.lionsview.co.za)

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