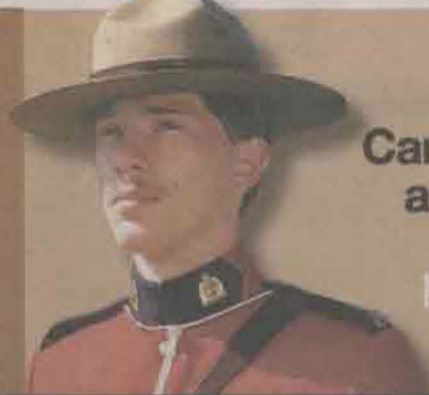


The Sunday Telegraph

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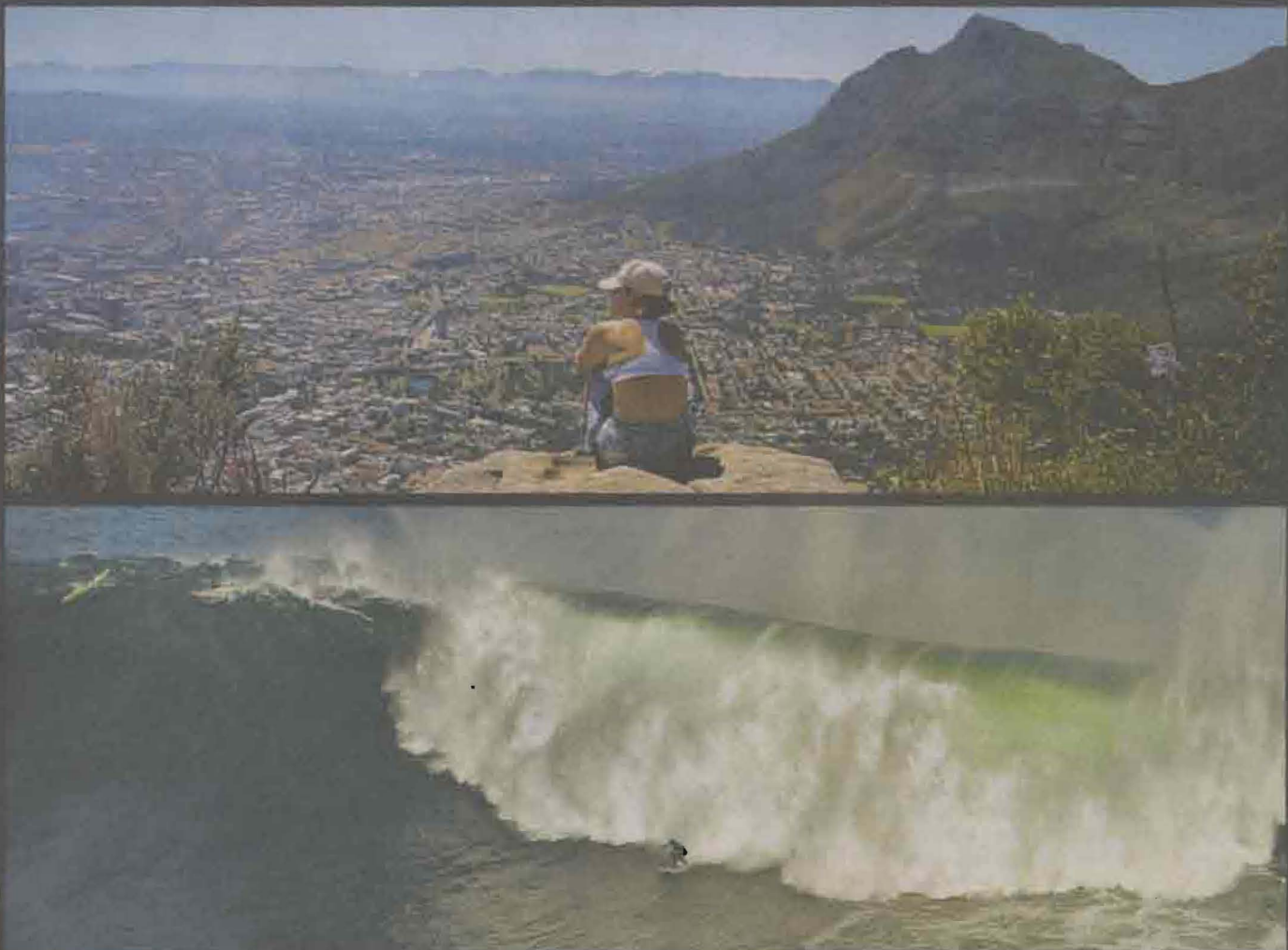


April 22 2007

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MY KIND OF TOWN

CAPE TOWN



'When I climb to the top of Table Mountain and look down on the world, I realise how lucky I am'



Novelist Wilbur Smith has lived in Cape Town for more than 40 years. His latest book, *The Quest*, is published by Macmillan (£18.99)

Why Cape Town? I have lived here, on and off, since 1964. Before that I lived in what was then called Rhodesia but life there was a little rustic and dull. With some money in my pocket and the exuberance of youth driving me, I wanted stimulation and excitement. I thought of England, but when I got there it was so small. I moved on to America, but it was so foreign. I tried Denmark, but the girls were not as hot as they were cracked up to be and they didn't speak English. So I went back to Africa and settled in Cape Town. This turned out to be a decision I have never regretted.

What do you miss most when you're away? I miss Table Mountain and Table Bay, with the south-easter whipping up the surf. I miss the wine and the fruit and the people. I miss the wide open roads and the fact that you don't get points on your licence for speeding.

What is the first thing you do when you return? I make the effort to climb up Skeleton Gorge to the top of Table Mountain and look down on the world. Then I realise how lucky I am to be where I am, and to be doing what I do.

Where is the best place to stay?

The Cellars-Hohenort Hotel, 15 Spaanschermat Road, Constantia (0027 21 794 2137; www.cellars-hohenort.com; doubles around £200 per night), under the lee of Table Mountain. It's an exquisitely restored old Cape Dutch farm house set amid lovely gardens cherished and run by a very special lady, Liz MacGrath. It serves delicious food in two restaurants – you must try the baboetie (a sort of spicy meatloaf) in its Cape Malay Restaurant.

Where would you meet friends for a drink?

At the main bar or poolside at the Mount Nelson Hotel (483 1000; www.mountnelson.co.za), set on the lower slopes of Table Mountain, overlooking the city. The Nellie, as it is affectionately known, was the Cape stopover for the likes of Winston Churchill on his way to win the Boer War, Lord Horatio Kitchener on his way to do the job really and for Rudyard Kipling and every other Victorian on his way to India. It is a lovely and gracious old building redolent of South African history.

Which are your favourite places for lunch? I go to Willoughby's (418 6116; no

website) at the Victoria and Albert Waterfront. It's one of the finest seafood restaurants in the world. The waterfront is the hub of Cape Town, and the hum of the crowd is exciting. When we fancy Japanese, we go to Wasabi (794 6546), in the Constantia Mall, for the sushi and sashimi. If you would like a big juicy steak go to Theo's Grill and Steakhouse, also in Constantia Village.

And for dinner? My wife is the best cook I know. Most evenings we dine on our terrace with Table Mountain as the backdrop and I tend the barbecue. We eat a great deal of game: springbuck and eland are our favourites. My wife makes a spicy sausage of springbuck fillet, or an eland burger from our game ranch in the Karoo. This must be washed down with therapeutic draughts of good red Cape wine, such as Engelbrecht and Els or De Toren Z. Sorry, we don't take in diners. If we eat out, we go to Magica Roma (531 1489; no website) in Pinelands. This is where the in-crowd go, so booking is essential. I think Franco and Enzo serve the best Italian food and pasta outside of Milan or Rome.

Where would you send a first-time visitor?

To take the wine-route tour, only an hour or so from central Cape Town. Many of the wineries have their own restaurants where you can take lunch looking out across the verdant Paarl and Stellenbosch valleys to the backdrop of the Hottentots Holland Mountains.

What would you tell them to avoid?

I can think of nothing in Cape Town which is not worth at least a nod.

Public transport or taxi?

Forget about public transport unless you enjoy being mugged. Order a taxi or chauffeur-driven car from the hotel, or rent a car.

Handbag or moneybelt?

Leave all your valuables and passports in the hotel safe. Take only sufficient cash for the day. Do not wander around after dark. Be aware at all times that you are in an extremely high-risk city.

What should I take home? You will find a vast selection of African crafts and curios on offer in the town squares and along the roadside. Some of the carvings are beautiful. Haggle!