

# FINCH'S QUARTERLY REVIEW

Ecce, mundus est sordidus et olidus, sed etiam habet multas res smashingae



**Tommy Lee Jones**  
*on his moving  
picture p8*

**Isabelle Huppert**  
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*on Princess Grace's  
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**Beware: no matter how tempting the invitation, there's no such thing as a free lunch, let alone a free holiday, says Elisabeth von Thurn und Taxis**

VERY rarely an invitation makes me dither higher and thither, and tingle with temptation. Part of me feels apprehensive about committing, while the other feels absolutely crazy about declining. Not because the hosts are such great friends of mine but, rather, because their invitation seems to be dripping with delights. The thick white paper, the expensive engraving – just like a box of Turkish delight, the invite looks so scrumptious I want to dive right into it. However, the first bite of those saccharin-coated jewels reveals that they might actually look a lot better than they taste. This is exactly what can happen with such an invitation, typically extended in the summer either to a private island or a yacht. The fortunate (or not so fortunate) hosts are faced with a seasonal dilemma: they need to fill their many beds with guests to entertain them and their guests. Hordes of people must be summoned to the island or onto the boat in order to avoid the ambience of a ski resort in midsummer.

This is where I come in. It is also precisely where the problem lies. Nothing in life is free. The price tag on one of those über-exclusive too-perfect-to-be-true holidays is bearing the unpredictable – namely, the other guests and the planned schedule. The issue is one that should not be taken lightly. After all, you are stuck out in the ocean, so you can't suddenly have an important meeting and hop in a cab to the airport. From a private island or a yacht it requires at least a speedboat, if not a helicopter, to get back to mainland. Not that the host would mind you using their expensive toys. What they would mind, however, is losing a person at their dinner table. Remember the ski-resort in midsummer analogy? By accepting an invitation to a stay on an island or a boat, you are under contract for the length of your stay. You are bound to the

The Grand Hotel du Cap Eden Roc, 1933



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# ESCAPE CLAUSE

entertainment on offer and, most importantly, you are bound to the other guests – at least during breakfast, lunch and dinner, not to mention drinks and sunbathing, you must socialise.

ONE summer at such an exclusive private island my fellow guests were a tycoon and his family. The tycoon spent one part of the day standing on the beach shouting into his mobile phone right next to our heads as we sunbathed. The other part he spent shouting at his wife. The hosts were darlings and their island

quite stunning but surviving a dinner stuck next to the tycoon was a huge challenge, to say the least. The topics of conversation ranged from himself, to his wealth, his recent and not-so recent acquisitions – and back to himself.

On the plus side, in my experience, great boats and islands are well stocked with toys. Water-skis, scuba-diving equipment, surfboards, yoga teachers, jet-skis and tennis courts. In case you get bored of all those, cinema screens and treasure hunts should keep you busy. Golf carts are there to

take you around the enormous island without having to exert a muscle. (After all, what's the personal trainer for?) Tiring myself out with activity has become my secret weapon. Being stuck together on an island for a week is not exactly a conversation catalyst – repetitive and dull dinners seem more likely, unfortunately. So utter exhaustion is the perfect antidote, as long as you can keep your eyes open.

Therefore, my humble advice is: don't be a holiday junkie. No matter how scrumptious the invite, if you are not crazy about the hosts or their entourage, just say no! You don't want to leave the island/yacht white-knuckling sanity. If, however, you do decide to go, be considerate. Just remember your poor host's difficulties, summarised by the wise and far too prematurely deceased Notorious BIG: "Mo money, mo problems..."

## A Feather in the Cap

Love for the Hôtel du Cap Eden Roc has rekindled Elisabeth's affection for the Côte d'Azur

THROUGHOUT my childhood we spent most summers sailing along the Côte d'Azur, Nice, Cannes and St Tropez. My father loved his sailing boat and he loved the French Riviera. I too have fond memories of those days swimming in the dark blue, beautiful little bays. In the evenings we would walk along the ports eating crêpes and looking at the other boats, none of which appeared to be as lovely as ours.

In my late teens I returned to St Tropez, this time without my father and his boat, in search of fun and madness. I felt deeply disappointed. I hated how crowded the little village had become. Even the nightclubs were a disappointment. Desperate to imitate Ibiza's eccentricity, they appeared stuck in a time warp somewhere in the early Nineties. I hated the beaches where people went to see and be seen rather than to sunbathe and relax. All in all, to me St Tropez had become the headquarters of the naff.

One day my friend Josephine invited me on her yearly family holiday to the Hôtel du Cap in Cap d'Antibes. Once again, my perception of the Côte d'Azur changed. A smell of pine trees, sophistication and elegance from a bygone era hit me as I walked down the long white-stone staircase from the hotel's terrace and along the promenade towards the ocean. Here time must stand still because the world seemed perfect, I thought.

WAITERS addressed each family member by their correct names and, before we even knew what we wanted, we found it, cool and neatly wrapped in a starched white linen napkin, in our hands. With my friend Josephine, the Eden Roc felt like visiting a ridiculously sophisticated great aunt. Each morning, freshly squeezed raspberry juice and a basket of freshly baked mini pains au chocolat and croissants were brought to our room. Our days were spent in a little stripy cabana by the ocean where we did not hear or see any other guests unless we decided to venture to the pool for lunch. In the evenings the family would meet on the terrace for drinks before dinner. The common assumption that Cipriani's/Harry's Bar make the best Bellinis in the world came to an abrupt ending for me here. The deliciously thickish, sweet peach pulp juxtaposed with the tingly sour champagne chosen at the Eden Roc make for an unmatched rival in my book.

There is something pristine and refreshingly démodé about the place, a far cry from what the fashionistas flock to St Tropez for. The ultimate reason why I love the Cap, however, is that it smells and feels just like my early childhood memories of the French Riviera.

Elisabeth von Thurn und Taxis is Finch's Quarterly Review editor at large



**Maya Schonburg adores her high heels, but even she has to lower her sights occasionally**

TWO things happened to me yesterday. I was asked to write 500 words on high heels. Five hundred words?! I could write a whole book on them – my whole autobiography is about high heels. Then at dinner, a girl had a self-help book (yes another one!) lying by her plate and I thought, "Who wants to read another self-help book? I'd much rather read a book on high heels" – wouldn't you? You may not want to read either, but high heels are not as trivial a subject as you might think. Heels are actually a subject that defines the essence of the female species. We definitely fall into two categories: the siletto brigade and the sensible-shoe wearers (I love the expression "sensible shoes" – only in England!). The high-heel woman wants to be tall, slender-looking (yes, a few inches do make a difference) and sexy. It seems to me that women who favour flats think vanity is a piece of furniture. They're practical types, who are often to be found at horse shows. (Now, please don't be picky – of course there are some women who seamlessly wonder through both categories.) Naturally, I classify myself well within the heels category. I started wearing them at 15. In those days I was so conscious of being petite that I always wore them. And I mean always! I wore them for muddy walks in the country as much as on the dancefloor. Did people take the piss? Yes! Did I mind? No!

Take the Eighties: a trip to New York, styled to the nines in shoulder pads and, of course, you take to the streets in your high heels. Boy, you get punished for it. You walk a block, then three – all – you need only five more, no need for a cab...and, before you know it, you've walked 25 blocks and, on the way back, somehow the same thing happens. In the evening your feet have morphed into big, red, swollen, painful monsters – very much changed from when you last looked at them.

Take a cultural outing in any city in "old" Europe – Prague, Vienna or the likes. You start in a smart hotel, with smart friends in a smart minibus – so you dress smart and wear high heels. The size of the museums, the sheer mileage you cover, the length of the guide's boring speeches, the cobbled streets – you know what I'm getting at.

BUT even shopping sprees in central London are tricky. You just want to nip into Topshop but can't find a flipping parking space so settle for Park Lane – and then? Walking all the way there and back you recognise, "Yes, I want to be sexy. I want to be perceived as tall and slender, I want to look smart – and I don't want to be classified as a woman wearing 'sensible shoes' but this goes too far!"

And so with growing age, self-confidence and hard-won experience I started to make exceptions and wear flats, but only in extreme situations.

Now, aged 50, I wear flats – if I must – and hope that passers-by can recognise which category I really fall into by the rest of the stuff I'm wearing. Or am I kidding myself?

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