

THE WORLD OF FINE WINE

Preview THE BEST

QUEEN MARY 2 has largest cellar at sea

The *Queen Mary 2*—built at a cost of £340 million, and launched in January by Cunard, a subsidiary of Carnival Corporation—ranks as the most expensive ship in history. The transatlantic liner is making waves with a host of superlatives. There is over £35 million of artwork on board; a cultural academy is operated by the University of Oxford, and workshops and masterclasses are performed by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts.

It comes as no surprise that the ship also boasts the largest and most extensive wine cellar at sea. British auctioneer and wine writer Michael Broadbent MW is a consultant, and American collector Bob Dickinson, president and CEO of Carnival Cruise Lines (see pp. 40–42) was also consulted on the selection of the wines. Head sommelier Olaf Paulat comments, "We have a very discerning clientele drawn from a large number of nationalities. We therefore have to make sure that our wines are not just of high quality, but that they cover a wide spectrum—including a good choice of New World wines."

The liner has a *Veuve Clicquot* Champagne bar, ten restaurants and two cellars containing 50,000 bottles of 375 different wines. And, just in case your body needs an antidote to all that sybaritic wining and dining, rest assured that you can be revitalised next morning on the longest jogging track at sea. www.cunard.com

Wine and Cookery Holidays at Tuscany's Villa Lucia

Villa Lucia, near Lucca in Tuscany, is the newest and arguably one of the most beautiful venues for a luxury wine and cookery holiday. Located in the pretty village of Vorno, the villa is just reopening after three years of extensive restoration.

Three separate buildings—the main Villa, Casa Cameron and Casa Joshua—are all set within a private 4-acre walled garden. Third-generation members of the local artist's family that created the original frescoes in the 18th century have restored several of the rooms. The kitchens have been renovated with many traditional features



such as wood-fired ovens, open fire rotisserie and an original antique working wine press. A stream runs under Villa Lucia and can be seen through a glass slab in the stone floor of the cellar. The original medieval kitchen used this access to the stream for the *pesceria*, where freshwater fish used to be kept for dinners and banquets.

The Rhodes School of Cuisine—which also runs the acclaimed Bar Liquma cookery school in Marrakesh—is organising tuition weeks at Villa Lucia with Angela Hartnett, head chef at Menu Restaurant at The Connaught in London. Hartnett will also have a hand in designing cookery weeks at the Villa, which will be hosted by resident chef Giancarlo Falerio.

It is possible to book the entire proper-

ty as an exclusive rental—a tempting treat, with swimming pools, walled garden, a stone hot tub and new tennis court.

A stay at the Villa also affords the opportunity to become acquainted with some of the lesser-known but excellent Tuscan Coast wines—Valgiano from Colline Lucchese, Sangervasio from Colline Pisane, and Castello del Terriccio which is situated just north of Bolgheri. The local *Pizzorne* mountains are a renowned source of fine wild mushrooms. And should you feel the need to break away from it all, Florence is just an hour down the *autostrada*.

Bookings: +44 (0)1252 790 222
www.rhodeschoolofcuisine.com
www.luxurypropertyrentals.com

Photography: (left) Conrad Light; (above) Gettyimages.com

Wine Tasting in the Maldives

By Richard Selwyn

With average temperatures ranging from 26 to 33° C all year round, the Maldives needs no introduction as an ideal destination for idling away the days on dazzling white beaches. But with Islam as the official state religion and the consumption of alcohol outside of the tourist resorts strictly forbidden, this tiny republic may seem an unlikely place to go for a gastronomic holiday. Yet hidden among 1200 or so tropical islands amid the turquoise waters of the Indian Ocean are at least three addresses with highly rated wine cellars.

Bangali Island, and its somewhat larger sister island Ranglifinolhu which are run by the Hilton group, are just half an hour from the capital Malé by seaplane. The hotel's Vilu restaurant serves superb Euro-Asian cuisine accompanied by a good selection of fine wines. Just a few steps away, its temperature-controlled wine cellar doubles as a private dining room with seating for up to 12.

A short hop by seaplane from Bangali Island is Soneva Fushi, a Robinson Crusoe-style hideaway on the island of Kufunadhoo in the Baa Atoll. Here too you can arrange for a private dinner party in the well-stocked cellar, including plen-

ty of first-growth Bordeaux and fine Burgundy. For a more intimate experience, a chef will even come and prepare your meal in the garden of your villa. Better still, wine dinners, which are often held over the water on the jetty. Start with the sommeliers' selection of wines that are then matched by a menu from head chef Ashley Goddard.

But it is at Soneva Gili, Soneva Fushi's sister resort, that the wine lover can be really pampered. Here, 160 friendly and highly competent staff look after a maximum of 90 guests. French head chef Lionel Valla oversees a multinational brigade of chefs. The cooking combines vegetables from the island's organic garden with fresh fish brought in daily. Other ingredients are flown in from all over the world to Malé, allowing for the creation of the very best fusion food.

The Maldives' proximity to Sri Lanka brings a very distinct Asian influence to the cuisine and allows Eric Artiere, who used to work at the Oak Room in London under Marco Pierre White, to display his encyclopaedic knowledge by suggesting some stunning combinations. With a chicken and coconut curry, Eric suggested a 2001 Shadowfax Shiraz from McLaren Vale. Winemaker Matt Harrop presides at this Werribee-based winery. The Shadowfax had a deep but bright red cherry colour with hints of fine black

truffles, earth and pepper on the nose. A mix of black cherry and dark chocolate fruit swelled into a spicy palate with medium acidity and firm tannins with substantial weight and structure. A subsequent tasting under the tropical stars featured 2000 Henschke Keyneton Estate, 1998 Tempus Reserva Especial from the Limari Valley and 1978 Chateau Angelus.

The government puts a 33% tax on all wine imports, which in a republic where there is no income tax, is clearly not meant to encourage indulgence in such a far-flung trip for an informal wine tasting. But the faultless, highly personal service offered by all three of these island paradises, together with the serious yet relaxed approach to enjoying good food and wine, make the Maldives a must.

Rangali Island: www.hilton.com
Soneva Fushi & Soneva Gili: www.sixsenses.com

Restaurants

Restaurant Le Meurice

At Hotel Meurice in Paris, acclaimed chef Yannick Alléno now presides over what must be Paris's most beautiful dining room. Replete with ornate gilding, Louis XVI chandeliers and specially commissioned Limoges china, Restaurant Le Meurice now ranks higher than ever. This

