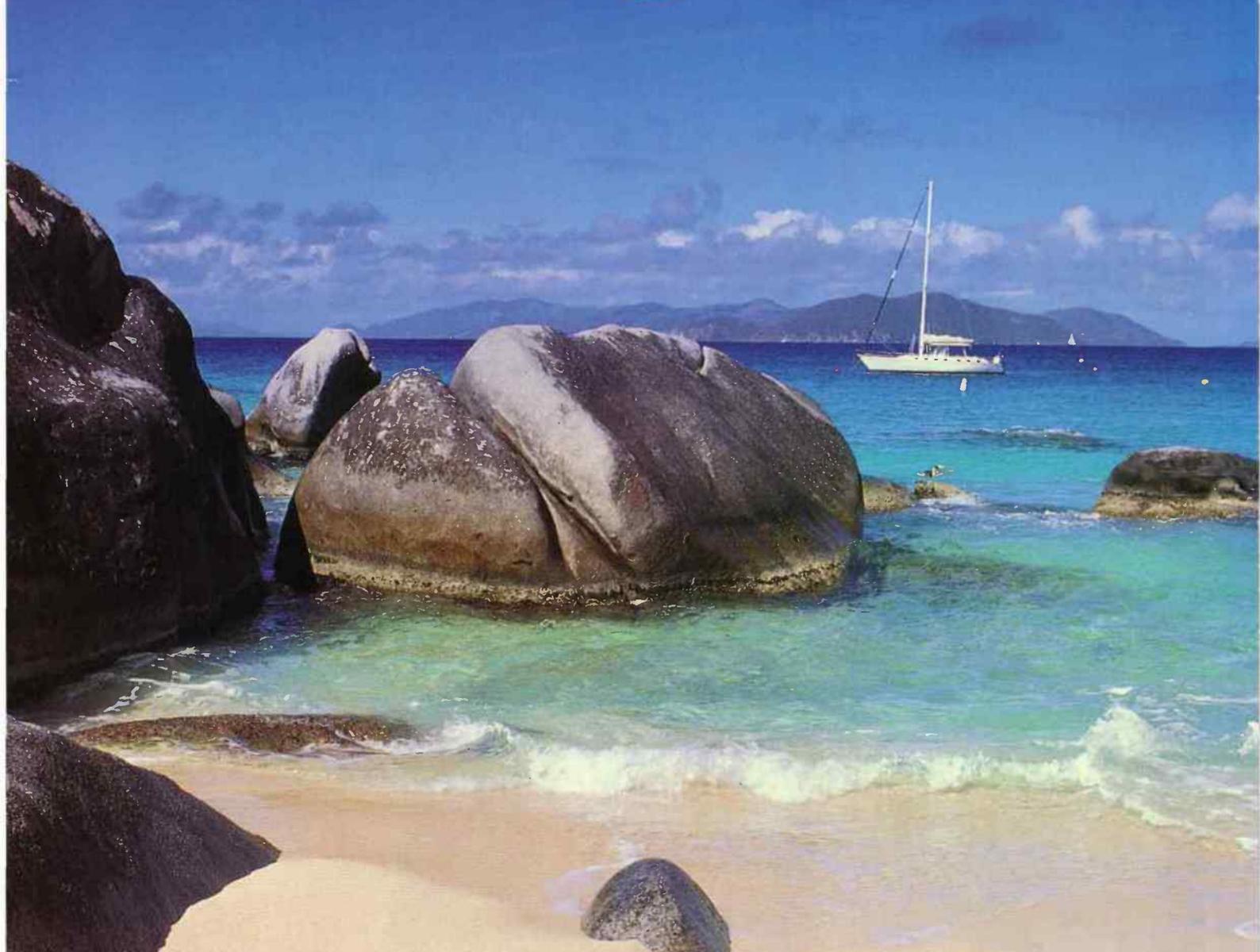


Harpers & Queen *abroad*



Islands in the sun

Beach haunts and hideaways for dreamers and castaways

IN ASSOCIATION WITH LOUIS VUITTON

Best restaurants by Charles Butler



The Table Bay Hotel

Opened in May 1997 by Sun International, this is a big hotel that is determined not to be impersonal, and is strong on service. On the Victoria & Albert Waterfront, with perfect views of Table Mountain or out to Robben Island, it is handy for the lively but safe Victoria Wharf area of shops and cafés. The hotel is a blend of plush Victorian and colonial, with a touch of the Cape Cod:

'evocative of the quiet panache typified by the great cruise-liners', it says in the brochure. What I liked was all the space and airiness, and the fact that the windows open (rare in big hotels, even rarer on cruise-liners). It is also the first hotel to offer an in-city health spa in Africa: there is a marvellous pool, a multitude of treatments, and a personal trainer on hand.

Rooms 329 rooms with views. The presidential suite has a grand piano, perfect views, television room, dining room, library, and kitchen.

Clientele Rich businessmen, their wives in jewels and designer labels. The lively, safe neighbourhood also attracts holidaying families.

How to book From £165 for a double room. Ring direct on 0027 21 406 5000; fax 0027 21 406 5686. For UK reservations, ring 01491 574546.

Facilities Two restaurants, 24-hour room service, pool, gym, beauty centre, bar. *C.N.*



Bonthuys Restaurant

You have to have faith, when you first visit. Initial signs are not promising: a car park on semi-derelict land, a pinched entrance that is no more than a slit in the crumbling concrete. But persevere – you will not find food like this anywhere. It is as provocative and outlandish as the décor (all electric-blue paint, shiny metal, and recessed glass).

People swear by the mussels with bananas – a signature dish that gives due warning that you are not going to be offered *insalata tricolore*. The salad of lamb's kidneys, chicken livers, and king prawns is a cholesterol cocktail, whose excesses are dissipated by the fine, fresh leaves.

Alternatively, the trio of *carpaccio*, oysters, and salmon tartare is stunning – juicy, rich, satisfying, with a generous blob of mustard mayonnaise. The starters are approximately £3.50 each.

Kingklip is a glorious fish: chunky and boneless, it is a tastier version of monkfish, on a par with turbot. Etienne Bonthuys prepares it in balsamic vinegar and buttery sauce. It could well be the best fish dish in Cape Town.

The wine list is limited, so take your own. Corkage is readily accepted in Cape Town, making eating out even cheaper when you are bringing in sterling.

Bonthuys, 121 Castle Street (0027 21 262368).



Buitenverwachting

This restaurant is in the old Constantia wine farm of the same name – a tranquil, leafy spot, where life seems safe and peaceful (but for the fact that it was the setting of a truly bizarre accident, when an oak tree fell on a British tourist, and killed him outright).

The place is stark, with the scrubbed air and precise lines of a German gymnasium. But chef Markus Koessler's food makes the ambience take second place: he has genuine flair. His starters include *dim sum* of baby chicken and *foie gras* served with mushrooms; *carpaccio* of kudu (the most flavoursome and delicate of the African buck), apples, and nuts with cardamom vinaigrette (both £4). The lamb loin from the arid Karoo, with rosemary-scented garlic purée, is a celebration of the Cape's finest meat (£7.50).

It would be impertinent to drink anything other than Constantia wines here, and Buitenverwachting's own Buiten Blanc is a superior house wine. Do try the Vin de Constance, in its beautiful bottle – apparently a favourite drink of both Napoleon and Jane Austen, and as good a pudding wine as you will find outside Sauternes. Book well in advance.

Buitenverwachting, Klein Constantia Road (0027 21 794 3522).



Bukhara

Capetonians describe Bukhara as an Indian restaurant; actually, its cuisine is more specifically Kashmiri and Pakistani. This is no Moti Mahal with the kitsch accoutrements expected of the sub-continental eatery in Britain. Rather, like London's Bombay Brasserie, it is a stylish restaurant where the food just happens to be ethnic (its 194-seat capacity is frequently inadequate). There is the odd snatch of Indian music, but you are more likely to hear jazz.

In a local survey last year, Bukhara was the only Cape Town restaurant to be in the top ten in the 'food' and 'atmosphere' categories. Apart from a killer vindaloo, most dishes are subtly flavoured. The kitchen is clearly visible, and it is always bustling, staple fare being the butter chicken, and the lamb cutlets (both around £4 per head).

Instead of conventional napkins, there are rolled-up aprons on the side plates, with knives and forks tucked into the linen folds. This is primarily to encourage people to experience the joy of eating with their fingers, as well as to prevent the Cape Town businessmen who flock here at lunchtime from taking home memories of an exquisite culinary experience – on their ties.

Bukhara, 33 Church Street (0027 21 240000). ▷