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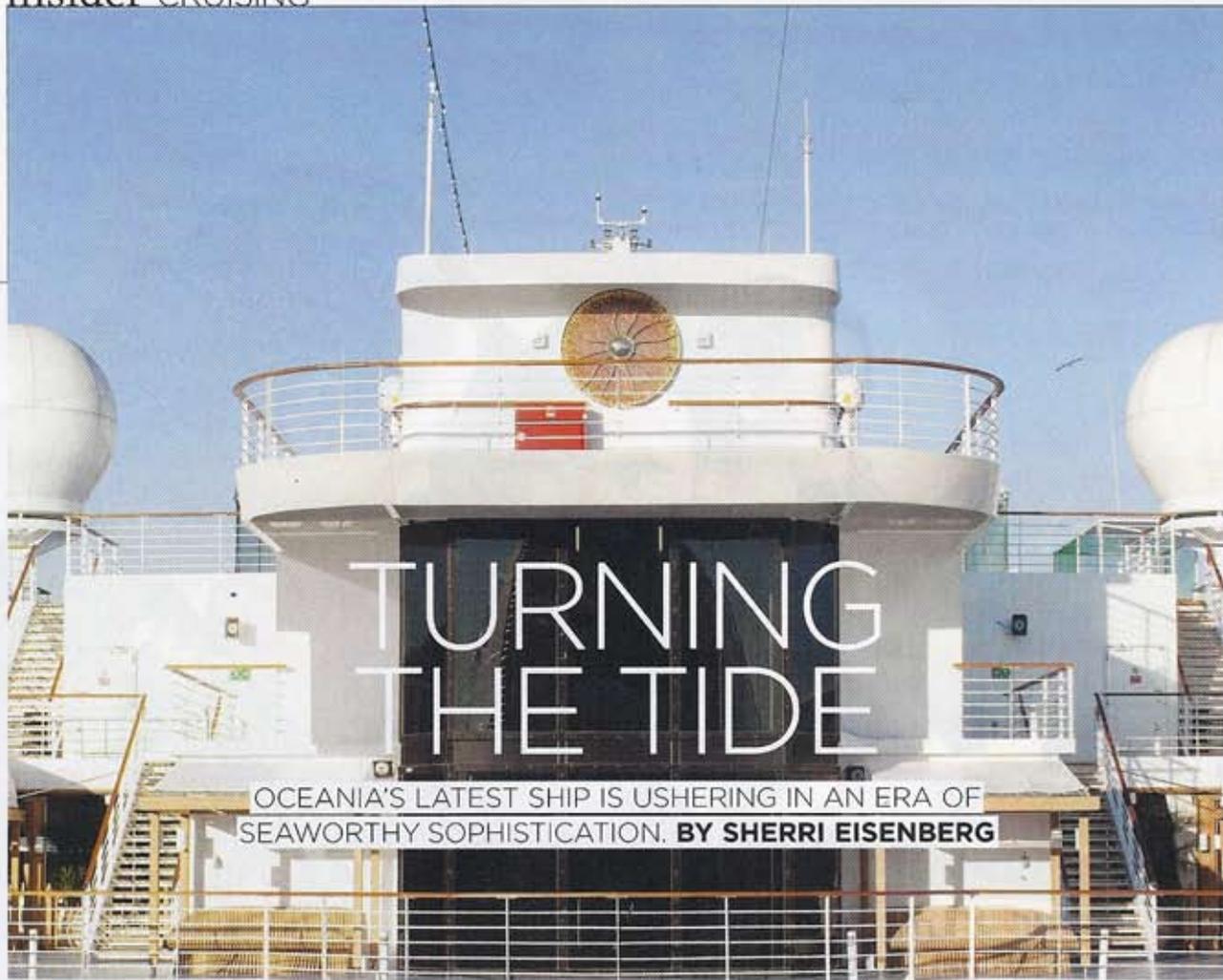
Secret Island Escapes

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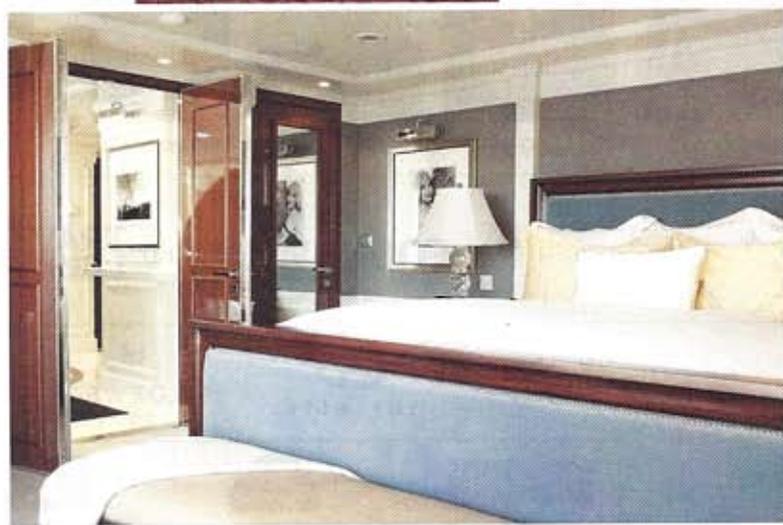
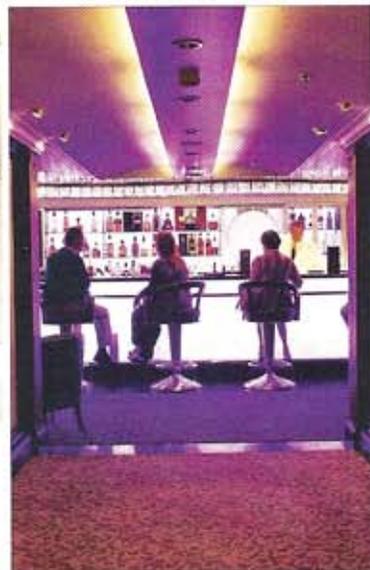
OCEANIA'S LATEST SHIP IS USHERING IN AN ERA OF SEAWORTHY SOPHISTICATION. **BY SHERRI EISENBERG**



The pool deck on Oceania's new *Marina*, with a heated saltwater pool and daybeds built for two.

IT'S A SUNNY AFTERNOON IN BARCELONA, AND the *Marina*—the new launch from Oceania Cruises—is docked in port, awaiting its maiden voyage. Most cruise-line executives would probably be on board right about now, conferring with the captain. But Oceania president Bob Binder and founder Frank Del Rio are combing through bookstores tucked along cobblestoned streets in the Barri Gòtic. Their mission: to buy every English-language art book they can get their hands on. "I wanted the ship to feel more lived-in—so that you can close your eyes," Del Rio says, "and when you open them, not know you're on a ship."

Indeed, this \$600 million vessel is a striking departure from the maritime norm and looking to make a statement—but not with Vegas-style opulence or theme-park flash. Binder and Del Rio have approached this project as though they were creating »



SEA CHANGE
Clockwise from top: The *Marina* docked in Barcelona at dusk; the Casino Bar, where stools are inlaid with Swarovski crystals; one of three Owner's suites; the *Privée* dining room.

their own personal estate. The 625-cabin *Marina* combines such design details as cream-colored suede wallpaper, crown moldings, and recessed lighting with an impressive culinary lineup and activities that aim to teach as much as entertain.

So what's it like to sail on a ship that's built to feel like home? (Well, a megamillion-dollar home?) I get a sneak peek at the long-awaited new build on its inaugural voyage as it explores the coasts of Spain and Morocco. On my first afternoon, as I am sitting in the Casino Bar admiring a Picasso lithograph, I overhear one passenger describe the *Marina* as "fit for an Old Hollywood screen set," which is true—it calls to mind scenes from *An Affair to Remember*. For parts of the ship, Oceania employed two celebrity interior designers: Dakota Jackson, who has done work for Yoko Ono and Jerry Seinfeld, and Susan Bednar Long, formerly of Ralph Lauren. "I've always been fascinated by the streamlined look of old ocean liners," Long says. Using Ralph Lauren Home products, she re-created the feel of an upscale Manhattan apartment in the three 2,500-square-foot Owner's suites. Complete with mahogany walls and vintage black-and-white photographs, they fit her vision to a tee. Meanwhile, Jackson imbued her signature cosmopolitan style into the 20 Vista and Oceania suites and designed a custom ebony Steinway for the ship's Martinis lounge. Binder and Del Rio oversaw the rest of the ship, from the Murano glass sconces in the hallways to the tufted metallic settees in the Casino Bar. The 278 standard cabins stray less from the typical cruise paradigm, but still have luxurious touches such as 1,000-thread-count linens, floor-to-ceiling panoramic windows (many that open onto verandas), granite-and-marble bath-

rooms, and that all-too-rare extra: actual bathtubs. "The cabins feel more like bedrooms than state-rooms," Binder says.

Sitting at a table made from a 400-year-old walnut tree trunk at La Reserve, a restaurant with crystal decanters lining the walls, I felt like I could be in a Napa Valley wine-tasting room. And the menu is anything but ordinary—bay scallops with black lava salt and chives; lobster-and-mascarpone pancakes. Binder has conceived the *Marina* as "the foodiest ship in the world," as much to fill a void that he saw in the cruise market as to reflect »

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his own passions (a self-professed Chowhound groupie, he is also starting a Napa winery). While many cruise lines stick to conventional dishes with mild flavors, Binder took some chances. For his homage to the East, the pan-Asian Red Ginger, he hired Ricky Pang from Nobu London. Together they developed a menu reminiscent of the Slanted Door, in San Francisco, one of Binder's favorite restaurants: duck-and-watermelon salad laced with bright mint; chocolate-lemongrass crème brûlée. "People at Oceania were giving it six months and saying it would be replaced by a seafood restaurant," Binder says, looking around at the packed room.

Just across the deck, Jacques is an equally ambitious concept: it's the first restaurant for star chef Jacques Pépin. Fittingly, the space is filled with all things Jacques—from one of his 11 James Beard Awards to his bowling trophies—and the oak floors were inspired by barns near his Provençal hometown. Pépin is even serving a childhood favorite, Lyonnaise sausage with pistachios. "The sausages are specially packed and delivered by air," Pépin marvels. "It is a herculean



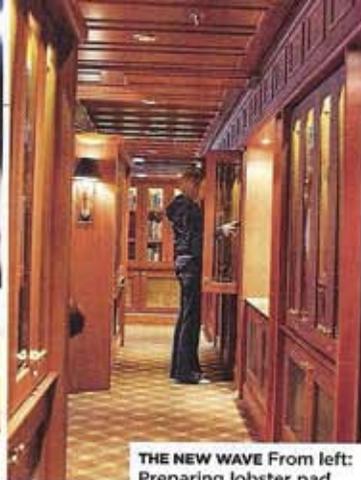
miles away from the nearest dot

task, and I do not know of any other team that would be willing to do this on a regular basis."

Activities on board also go a step beyond. On other lines, cooking classes are typically "stand and stir"—a teacher demonstrating the dish, with the ingredients already made. But on the *Marina*, I am surprised to see that the 24-station school has induction cooktops, real chef's knives, and teachers from the Culinary Institute of America (on later sailings, master chefs, including P  pin, are scheduled to lead the class). There are also market tours and opportunities to meet local artisanal producers on shore excursions.

In addition to art courses (line drawing; photography), the *Marina* has made a serious investment in painting and sculpture, all handpicked by Binder and Del Rio. Look for works by Joan Mir   and Picasso in the Casino Bar and a Damien Hirst in the Canyon Ranch spa lobby (a 10,000-square-foot space with ocean-inspired treatments and private decks overlooking the sea).

And yet, the classic activities remain, and they have their place, too. My last morning at breakfast in the main dining room, two women at the next



THE NEW WAVE From left: Preparing lobster pad thai at Red Ginger; the 2,000-volume library. Opposite: The grand staircase, with etched Lalique crystal details.

table are going over the day's activities. "Ooh, there's trivia!" one exclaims. "There's no bridge today," says the other, clearly disappointed. For all of its innovations, one can't forget that this is still a cruise ship, as comfortable in charted waters as it is speeding full steam ahead. ♣

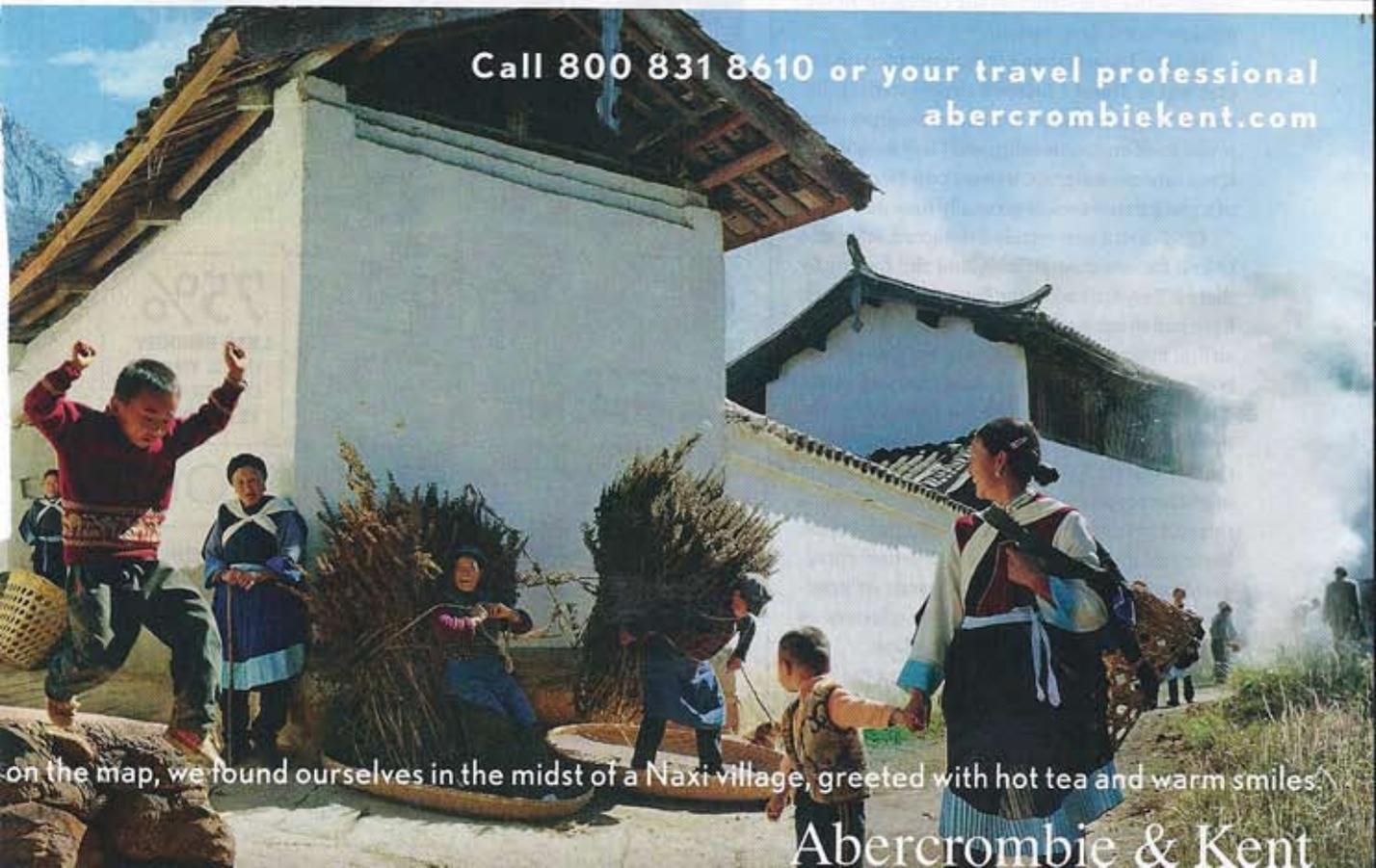
The Marina sails Northern Europe this June–August, the Mediterranean in fall, and the Caribbean in winter. 800/531-5658; oceaniacruises.com; 10-day itineraries from \$1,499 per person, double, including airfare.



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on the map, we found ourselves in the midst of a Naxi village, greeted with hot tea and warm smiles

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