

Save the Best for Last!



Nick and Karolin Troubetzkoy with Carol and Bill



Alvin the Water Taxi King and Carol



Jade Mountain at Anse Chjastanet Resort, St Lucia



Mexico with the Crystal Symphony



Cal Stamenov, Chef and Culinary Director, Bernardus Lodge

I must say, I've never had a column where I've had more to talk about--from globe-trotting travels ranging from peaceful Carmel Valley, California; to Buenos Aires, Argentina; to a magnificent Crystal Cruise from Caldera, Costa Rica through the Caribbean sea ending in Tampa, Florida; and a winter retreat to St Lucia with a stay at one of the world's most spectacular new hotels--Jade Mountain. Oh yes, and HarperCollins published my book, "Got What it takes?" this past spring--so it hasn't been all fun in the sun--but mostly. Let's start at the top of the mountain.

Architect-owner Nick Troubetzkoy has added a stunning new addition to his already magnificent Anse Chastanet Hotel in St Lucia. It's Jade Mountain and the spacious suites, some up to 2000 square feet with 15 feet high soaring ceilings, all include large infinity pools and a spectacular panoramic interchange with nature and the environment--all suites have the "fourth wall" missing" (don't worry no one will see you in your underwear). The mighty St Lucia Piton Mountains dominate the setting, and no two suites are alike--with varied color schemes, furniture, wood patterns and even different colored iridescent glass tiles in each pool.

My wife Carol and I had a lovely dinner with Nick and his wife Karolin, who manages the property with a shrewd perfectionist's eye. When we tore ourselves away from the room, there was that spectacular Anse Chastanet beach and the adventure of zooming boat rides to hideaway restaurants for lunch with Alvin, "king of the water taxis."

In B.A., we stayed at the regal Alvear Palace Hotel and enjoyed a week of fine dining, shopping (at least the dollar is still strong there!)

and took plenty of time to sample some fine Argentinian wines. Among our favorites was the Crios Torrontes, a lovely dry white from the low mountain region.

In B.A., the Alvear Palace Hotel is "the" place to stay. It's an elegant old world hotel with echoes of the majestic Hotel Crillon in Paris, and it features a "Relais Gourmand" restaurant, La Bourgogne, with delicacies inspired by the Burgundy tradition of its chef Jean-Paul Bondoux.

Meanwhile, back in Carmel Valley, we discovered the classy, private and romantic Bernardus Lodge, a 57-guestroom resort with its own well respected vineyard. The Bernardus Lodge is just 15 minutes from Carmel-by-the Sea, which means that you can find yourself doing a version of the great American road trip on The Big Sur in just a half-day jaunt, and be back in time for an early dinner at the lodge. And what a dinner it will be, since The Bernardus Lodge is the venue for the award-winning Marinus restaurant, which was voted "Best in California," just a little while back. Executive chef Cal Stamenov is the creative visionary behind Marinus and his food must be sampled on any holiday visit to the San Francisco Bay area.

There's not really room enough here for me to go on about how much I enjoy my time on Crystal Cruises. My last cruise took me to stops like Curacao, Bonaire, Grand Cayman and Cozumel, where I disembarked to try a local Margarita (or two) and snapped a shot of the Crystal Symphony, waiting to sail off to Progreso, Mexico and a couple of peaceful days at sea.