

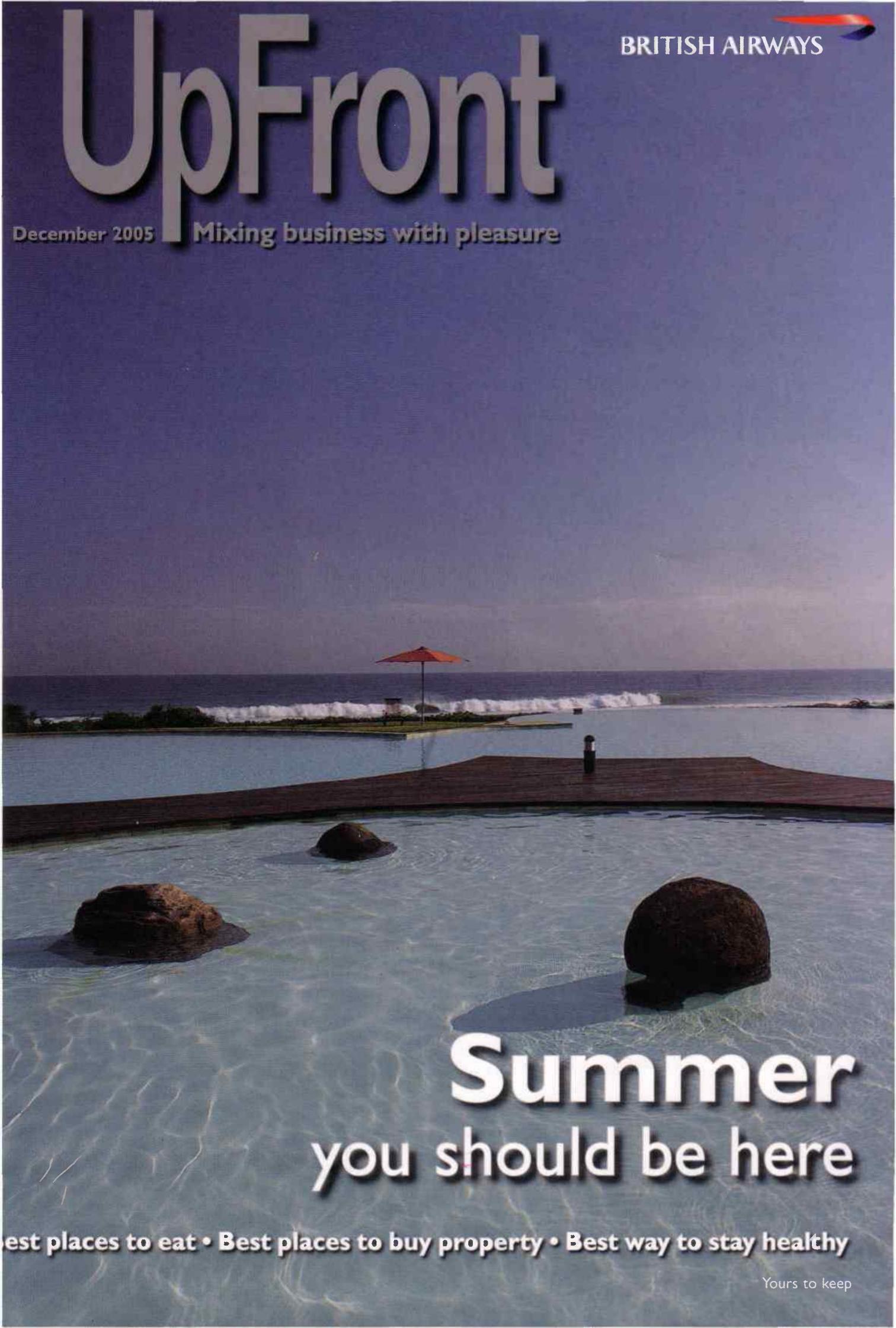


BRITISH AIRWAYS

UpFront

December 2005

Mixing business with pleasure



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Yours to keep

With an eye on the festive season (and his hand on the Prohep bottle), restaurant guru VICTOR STRUGO (aka LE GASTROGNOME) zooms in on 25 of South Africa's most special and upbeat dining destinations.



Belthazar

25 Top Restaurants

South African patriots face the disturbing prospect of a Christmas framed by two cricket tests against arch-rival Australia. Even if the inevitable happens, we should not let it deter us from the yuletide festivities. In this respect, we are one up on Australia already. Christmas in South Africa is like a breath of fresh air: in Australia, it's a non-stop breathalyser.

So where to eat out this month? Asked to pick only 25 attractive dining spots, I decided to focus on the two areas – the Cape and Gauteng – where most of the private and corporate entertainment happens. I've also listed a few destinations in the winelands and other areas that are worth the journey.

The 25 choices that follow are a mixture of personal and popular favourites, of simplicity and sophistication, of energetic vibe and congenial intimacy. I hope that you find on these pages somewhere to suit your style of celebration; that you drive safely and drink wisely; and that Australia loses both tests.

CAPE TOWN



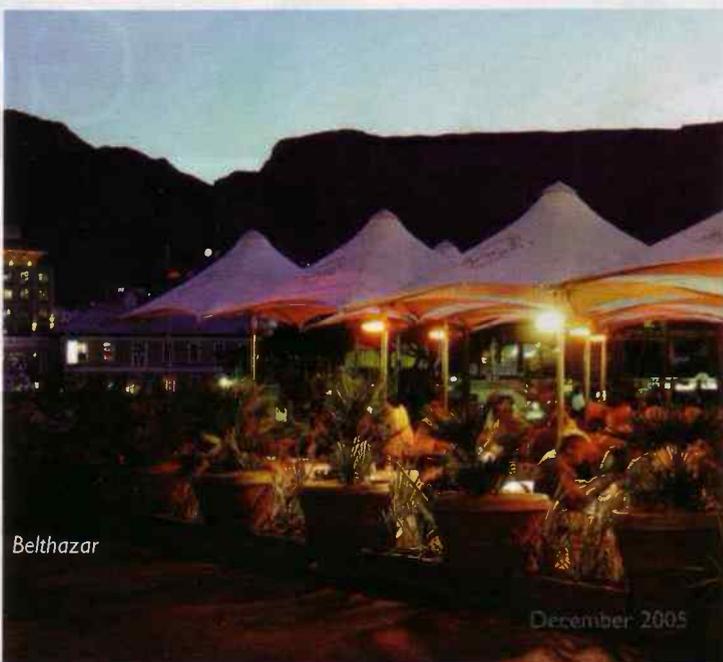
Aubergine

Far more than a purple vegetable, **AUBERGINE** is all that a gourmet wants in a restaurant. Chef-patron Harald Bresselschmidt omits nothing that matters and squanders no

effort on peripheral frills. He has won several top awards for menus that are at once classically rooted and imaginatively contemporary, celebrating the timelessness of true quality. Wine service is the best I've experienced outside Europe. Fine Dining in the stylishly dignified 19th-century home of the first Chief Justice of the Cape, furnished with teak church pews and topped with a sundowner roof terrace for tapas and city views (*City Bowl*, Tel: (021) 465-4909. *Cosmopolitan*).

Unfazed by the fierce competition in Cape Town's favourite playground, **BAIA** has established itself as a pulsating purveyor of pelagic pleasures. Caught on lines and prised from shells, the freshest of fish are all presented simply, on overflowing platters. The intrinsically irresistible comfort food of the bonus-blowing Now generation tastes even better in a setting of breathtaking harbour and mountain views. The buzz is always buoyant and with gas heaters on the terrace, it's possible to eat alfresco in any season, within whiffing distance of the ocean (*Waterfront*, Tel: (021) 421-0935. *Seafood*).

If imitation is flattery, **BELTHAZAR** holds Joburg's best and most innovative grillroom (see below) in high esteem. Done up like a trendy Table Bay wharf warehouse, the restaurant is not merely big, but larger than life and offers the twin pleasures of land and sea. Crustaceans eye you from salt-water tanks, hoping you'll prefer a properly aged, sizzling steak. Named after a tippling Babylonian King, Belthazar's wine bar boasts a vast selection of wines by the glass, including some top names and distinguished vintages. Whatever catches your eye (steak knives, Riedel decanters) can be purchased on your way out (*Waterfront*, Tel: (021) 421-3753. *Grillroom & Wine Bar*).



Belthazar



Bread and Wine

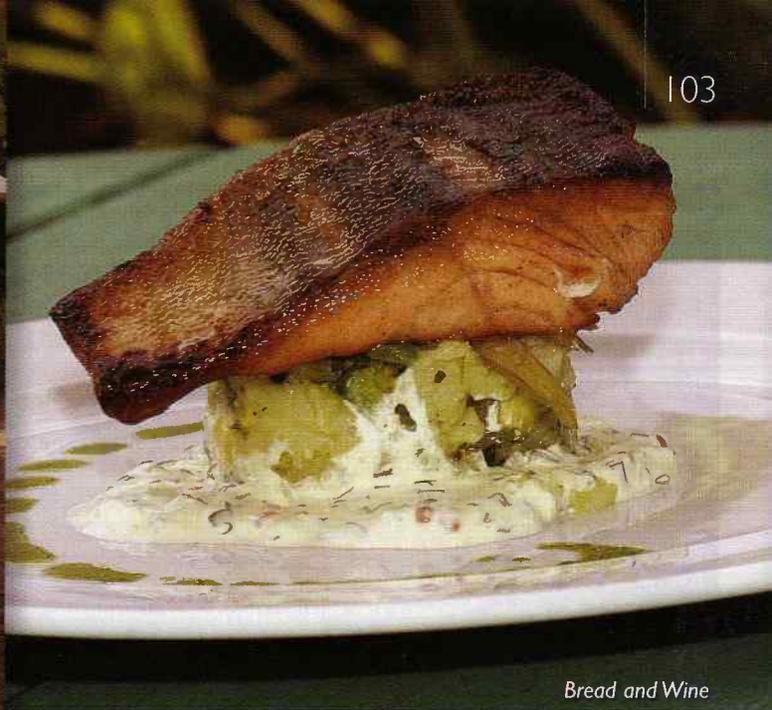
The new brainchild of the (I kid you not) nuclear physicist responsible for the formidable Bukhara brand is **HAIKU**. A concept restaurant that offers a broad range of exotic oriental cuisine, Haiku lost no time in becoming Cape Town's newest hot-spot. In a sleek, minimalist setting, opulently gleaming with impossible amounts of polished granite, selections of Cantonese dim sum circulate, while woks and barbecues sizzle in a space-age open kitchen where professionals turn cooking into theatre. From Japan comes sushi and robata grill fare. Everything is served tapas-style and there's a sophisticated cocktail bar. Elegant, refined and memorable (*City Centre, Tel: (021) 424-7000. Asian Tapas*).

Once inside **MORTON'S ON THE WHARF**, only the view through the window reminds you that you're not in New Orleans. With the sounds of jazz, a French Quarter décor and a long menu of gumbos, étouffés, Caesar salad, lobster bisque, Creole Crab, blackened steaks, jerked chicken, alligator with rouille, and of course Mississippi Mud Pie, the Louisiana recreation is as detailed as Disneyland, only much tastier. Jelly Roll isn't on the dessert menu, but he would have been in his element here.

Morton's is a fun place for a special cajun! (*Waterfront, Tel: (021) 418-3633. Creole*).

Would it surprise you to find **NANDO'S** among the recommendations of a restaurant critic? Their Portuguese-style mild or peri-peri grilled chicken has always been superior to fast food, and recently they've started moving toward the 'fast casual' eatery concept (casual meals at fast food prices in a more pleasant setting). Nando's newest store in Camps Bay has moved into overdrive with a hip design, live music and super-cool cocktail bar. Plus an open façade directly opposite the beach and swaying palms. The 'in' place to chilli out this summer (Camps Bay, don't phone – just rock up. Chicks Rule).

I chose to be taken to **ONE.WATERFRONT** on my last birthday, and given half a chance I'd repeat the treat. Chef Bruce Robertson's imaginative food defies description and breaks boundaries. He does not



Bread and Wine

posture as an iconoclast, but explores as an enthusiast. The ideas are always fresh and unexpected (where else would you find a quail crème brûlée?) but they never get out of control. African ingredients merge marvellously with European idioms (waterblommetjie cannelloni) and dishes are as individualistic in preparation as they are in taste. Best of all, this Cape Conqueror is a Joburg boy. (*Cape Grace Hotel, Tel: (021) 418-0520. Contemporary*).

CAPE WINELANDS

Countless traditionalists love to celebrate the festive season on 320-year-old **BOSCHENDAL**, once Cecil Rhodes's farm. A venerable wine estate, its white-washed original cellar houses a bounteous Cape Huguenot/Malay buffet, a gastronomic journey from snoek pâté to malva pudding, with countless tasty stopovers. Lighter fare is served at the Café (once the slave quarters). Most enchanting of all is Le Pique-Nique – hampers of home-cured meats, baguettes, crisp salads and farmhouse cheeses, eaten on manicured lawns at the foot of the Simonsberg, shaded by pines, gums and oaks. Waiters are on hand for wine, dessert and coffee. Escapist bliss (*Groot Drakenstein, Tel: (021) 870-4274. Cape Buffet*).

The alfresco theme is further enhanced among the lemon orchards and vineyards of the Môreson wine estate. **BREAD & WINE** is run by a couple of gems – Tina and Neil Jewell, to be precise – who bake all the breads (sourdough, foccaccia, olive, ciabatta), make sauces, chutneys, terrines and pickles, and cure all their own charcuterie (from Welsh lamb ham to game sausages) right here. Tip-top rustic fare (dishes like pap gnocchi, gemsbok with pumpkin spring rolls, pot au feu of veal tongue & chicken), and very relaxing – particularly while sipping estate wine while the kids play in the orchards (*Franschhoek, Tel: (021) 876-3692. Farmstyle*).

The vibrant **MOYO** brand may be spreading, but it certainly isn't repetitive. Quite unlike the über-chic Melrose Arch flagship or the mellow Zoo Lake café, their Cape offshoot brings an African bush extravaganza into the gracious (and slightly startled) winelands. A large



Moya