



profile

ISSUE 12, JULY 2008
"INSANITY"

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PROFILE IS PUBLISHED BY MARKSMAN MEDIA
118 MIDDLESEX STREET, LONDON, E1 7HY
T: 020 7492 4950, F: 020 7247 9187

PRINTED BY THE MAGAZINE PRINTING COMPANY
MOLLISON AVENUE, BRIMSDOWN,
ENFIELD, MIDDLESEX EN3 7NT



Certified Distribution

1st July 2007 - 31st December 2007:

20,000 copies delivered throughout the City of London

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OUT OF OFFICE: ATHENS

Were your last business trip highlights the hotel lift and conference food? Let's get down to some other biz.

THE LOWDOWN:

The maxim *meden agan* (nothing in excess) was commonly used in Ancient Greece. If maxims arise from a need to educate a nation, the Greeks most definitely need, and apparently always have needed, a lesson in the art of moderation. Athens is quite unashamedly a city of excess: from immense food servings to extreme partying and uncontrolled spending, there is nothing that comes half-arsed. Athenians live for the moment and pay the consequences afterwards.

I'VE GOT SIX HOURS TO SPEND:

With that afternoon conference over you have some time before flying out. An itinerary then?

16.00 – 17.00: GREAT VIEW

The major site worth seeing is, of course, the Parthenon, atop Acropolis Hill. Make your way up and have your breath taken away. Other stunning viewpoints can be found from Lycabettus Hill and the Pnyx, where the first democratic assemblies were held. Short of time? Don't fret—the magnificence of the Parthenon can be enjoyed from all viewing distances.

17.00 – 18.00: BETTER THAN A KEYCHAIN

The bustling markets below the Acropolis of Plaka and Monastiraki deserve walking time, as does Kolanaki—the upmarket Athenian equivalent of Chelsea. Shop here for designer stores and independent boutiques, whilst people watching at one of the limitless street-side cafes.

18.00 – 19.00:

WHEN HUNGER STRIKES

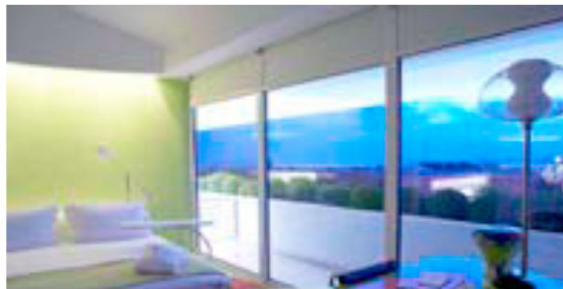
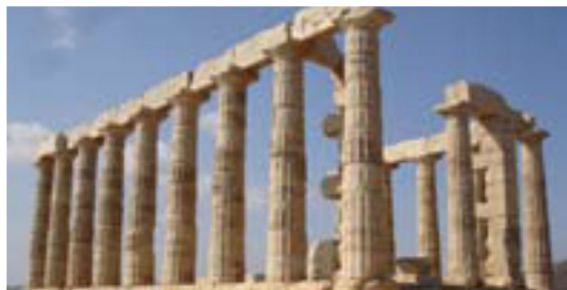
Food is the central focus of Greek culture and some Greeks do indeed live to eat. Expect the quality of food in seemingly standard restaurants to be above average. To be surely impressed, try:

Varoulko, 80 Pireaus Street: Michelin-starred fish restaurant situated next to Eridanous hotel, Keramikos. It's one of Greece's most reputed, where head chef Lefteris Lazarou wows punters with creative dishes. Menu changed accordingly with season and fish.



TIME TO SPARE?

Visit the Zappeion Megaron congress hall building in the National Gardens, The Houses of Parliament in Syntagma Square, or go see a film in one of Athens' many outdoor cinemas.



Spondi, 5 Pyrronos Street, Pangrati: Another Michelin star gem. Award-winning dishes created by French chef Herve Pronzato.

Jimmy and the Fish, Akti Koumoundourou 46, Mikrolimano Harbour: For something less epicurean but just as delicious. Located by the sea at Piraeus.

Dioskouroi, Dioskouron Street: Informal and traditional Greek-café style setting overlooking the ancient forum. Prides itself on having no set menu.

Kotopoulo Valsamakis, Kolanaki Square: Barely ten feet wide with cheap tables, rotisseries and a heater. Come here for the best organic chicken in town—an institution. Be warned though, Greeks typically eat late.



THE LANDSCAPE:

Look anywhere to find lounge clubs, fine dining restaurants, boutique hotels and bars, markets, and galleries. The high level of competition between small businesses can lead to serious remodelling every six months. You can't be certain to find your favourite haunt from last year's trip looking the same. That beaten-up drinking hole could have gotten the interior makeover, favouring televisions in toilet stalls and corridors lined entirely in WKD bottles. That filthy dance club could now be a beach club with huge swimming pools.



19.00 – 20.00: FANCY A DRINK

Beautiful outdoor lounge clubs, such as **Balux** 58 Posidonos Avenue, Glyfada and **Galea** 9 Zisimopoulou Street, Glyfada can be found along the beach, but only open during summer months. All year round the best nightlife happens in the city centre. **Soul Evripidou** 65, Psiri, is an excellent two-floor cocktail bar with brilliant DJs and a stunning courtyard, and **Mezzo Art** 3 Leventi Street, Kolanaki, is a funky kitsch-pop art bar and restaurant.

20.00 - ????: I'M

STAYING THE NIGHT!

So that last drink led to an excessive clubbing experience. You have become an unofficial

Athenian, now in need for the perfect crashpad. For classic luxury, **The Grande Bretagne Hotel** Constitution Square is most renowned, extremely plush and centrally located in a former palace. The **St. George Lycabettus Hotel** 2 Kleomenous Street, Kolanaki is chic and modern, set on a hill and offering beautiful city views. Further from the chaos of the city centre is the beautiful boutique **Semiramis Hotel** 48 Chariaou Trikoupi Street, above, in the stylish and well-heeled suburb of Kifissia.

Voila! Back to London, with all business having been taken care of. —AL



A CORKING INVESTMENT

They're just drinking wines like the Chardonnay or Merlot you would buy from your local wine merchant, but they could fatten your pockets quicker than slim.

FINE WINE IS THE 'RELIANT-ROBIN' OF INVESTMENT; THERE IS PRACTICALLY NO RISK INVOLVED. As a product, it is unaffected by recession, interest rate changes and stock market fluctuations. It has survived evolution, revolution, and war. The Premier Crus-managed fine wine cellar has seen annual average returns of 17.64% between 1990 and 2008, beating the FTSE All Share Index, Managed Unit Trusts and Life Assurance Funds, Building Societies, and the Retail Price Index. On top of all of this, it's tax-free.

Wine can be invested-in at different stages of its lifecycle. *En Primeur* is the term used to describe the earliest stage of a wine's life. The release of the wine is always in the spring of the year after the harvest. So, for example, the 2005 crop will be sold in the spring of 2006, and subsequently distributed in 2008. If the vintage is good, it's during the first few years that the wine often makes its significant profit. It will then settle into a steady rise as it matures.

When bought at the *En Primeur* stage, wine can prove to be an astute investment with impressive rates of return. Three strong performers purchased for Premier Cru Fine Wine Investment clients include the Chateau La Mission Haut Brion 2005, The Chateau Margaux 2005, and the Chateau Lafite Rothschild 2000. At this time last year, Brion was priced at £3,900, now sitting at circa £6,000. The Margaux sat at £6,600, now being £9,500. The Lafite was priced at £8,200, now sitting at £11,500. All three have grown by over 40% within a year.



be stable, easily realisable, consumable, low-risk, and portable. Investments have offered a return of more than 21% per annum over the last 25 years. Another advantage in investing through fine wine over shares (or other commodities) lie in its post-mortem valuation; if a Chateaux goes out of business, an investor only stands to gain significantly. No matter what happens, wines that have already been bottled will carry a value. What's that, Enron and Railtrack? The wines of the Bordeaux region have withstood the French Revolution and two world wars—that's a recommendation that's hard to beat.

On top of the fiscal advantages, investing in fine wine can offer an emotional or cultural return. Investment can lead to a developed passion for the wine itself, and to expedite a process requiring time, money, and dedication to mature. The palate needs to be trained to understand the complexity of a wine. Discovering different chateaux and vintages through investment can lead to an understanding of the subtleties that escape many.

There are a few companies that specialise in turning cellars for profit, and as an investor you've got to be careful who you choose for this management. Look for a company that has had the experience of working within the financial services industry for many years.

Trade experience, coupled with expertise in fine wine itself, can lead to a service that selects, stores, and insures wines, while knowing when is the right time to sell for profit.

If you plan to invest in wine, be aware that portfolios can be tailored to meet differing investment criteria. For example, it is possible to accommodate for capital investment plans, income plans, or school fees planning. An experienced wine broker will be able to advise on the most



suitable wines to make the kind of money you are looking to make over a timespan.

While managed fine wine portfolios have seen consistently high returns, the choice of wine, like the choice of stock or commodity, is what makes or breaks an investment.

One should always seek professional advice before investing, through either a knowledgeable IFA, reputable merchant, wine broker, or auction-house. With expert advice, fine wine can prove to be an exciting and seriously profitable investment. —AL



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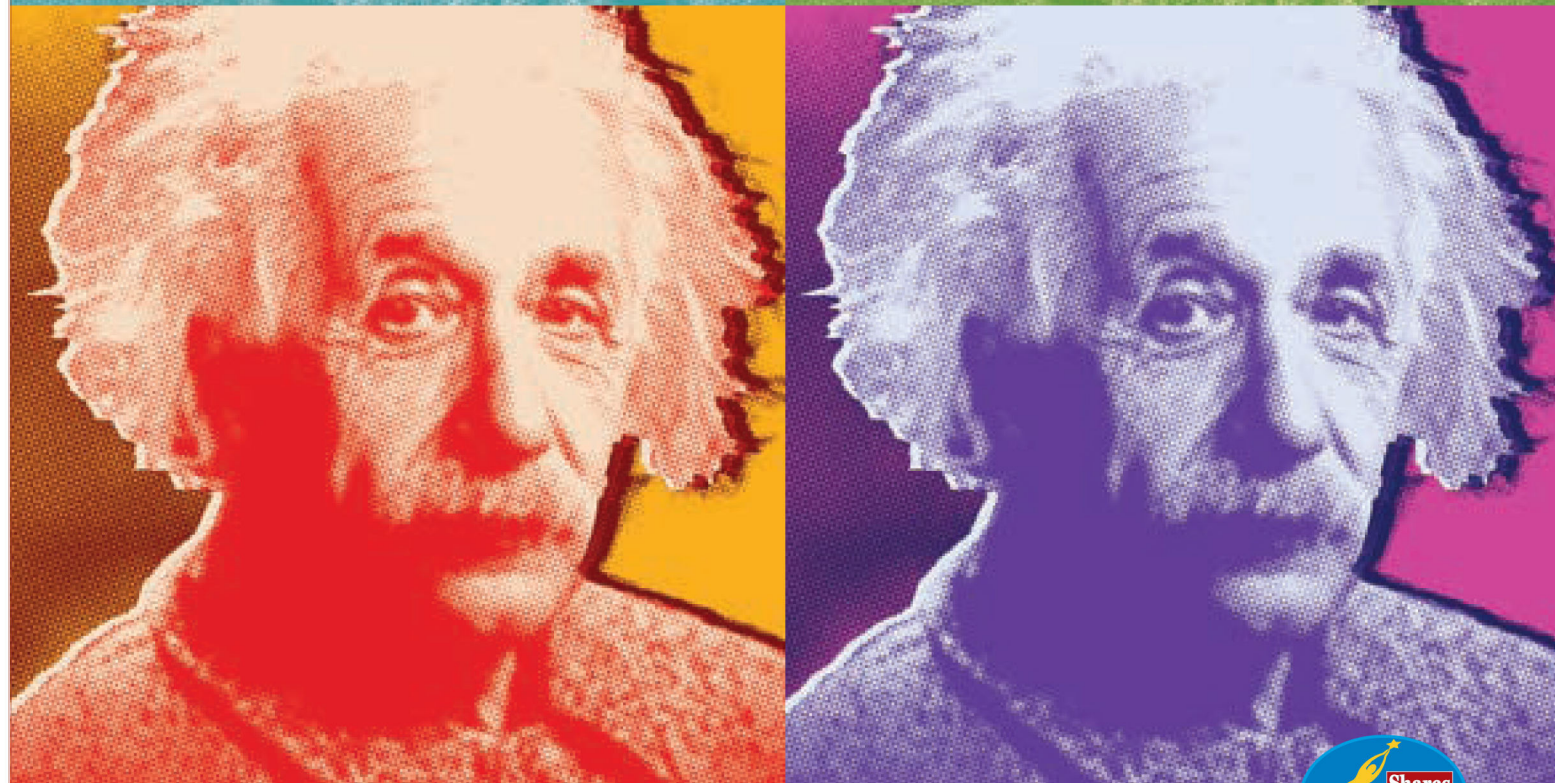
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WHERE HAVE ALL THE EXPLORERS GONE?

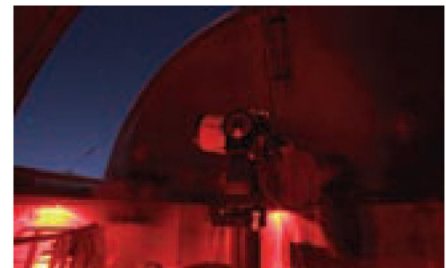
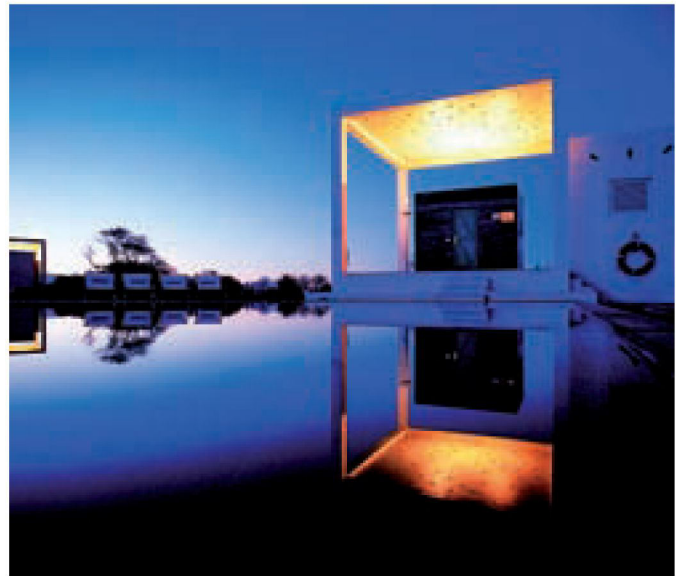
By Ally Lee

LOST SOMEWHERE IN A SEA OF PSP, REALITY TV AND PINA COLADA HOLIDAYS, I'VE BEEN ASKING MYSELF WHERE HAVE ALL THE EXPLORERS GONE? I mean the men (usually) who take pangas to inhospitable jungles and navigate treacherous seas by quill pen and starlight simply to see something new, to witness something so breathtaking it makes them write books and erect monuments and grow shameless beards. Perhaps it's better to ask the question: 'Where has the art of exploration gone?' Have we mislaid it in the attics of our itineraries, somewhere between letter-writing and the afternoon nap?

For most people, the answer is probably yes, and Sat Nav is as far as we get. But fortunately, some intrepid thinkers in Chile are shaking the dust off exploration. The Chilean



(sorry Francis). This is one the world's largest 'afficionado' telescopes, which means one actually gets to see the wondrousness of star explosions and galactic waltzing as opposed to simply reading the co-ordinates of infrared activity on little more than a dot-matrix print out. As for capturing the skies *in flagrante*, the Meade also comes equipped with a piggyback



bracket which allows one to mount digital cameras onto the back of the telescope. This is astrophotography, David Attenborough style.

Throughout history, explorers have looked to the stars for direction,

for some sort of clue why we're all here, where we're going next, and what on earth we should be doing right now. And whether the answer is simply bear left for nearest bar/bandit/bounty or bear right to find a new faith, the mere act of gazing upon the brightly lit abyss above seems to gather scattered thoughts, fragmented lives, and fractured paths, knitting

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them together into a plan, a peace or at least an acceptable level of generalised anxiety and inner-city stress. Its simple playground top trumps: this comet is bigger than my blackberry. And it's

far more magnificent than a therapist's couch.

By day, Explora's Hotel Larache, host of the observatory, offers explorers high altitude mountain treks, horseback riding and hiking through the lunar-esque landscape of the Atacama. This desert is one of the driest places on earth and, as a result, its terrain has remained virtually unchanged over the last 20 million years. The Andes and the Pacific stand guard over its pre-historic salt basins, sandy plains, and lava flows. Apparently, it gives one a taste of life on Mars, only here one can actually breathe, loll in a horizon view swimming pool, and sip on some of Chile's premium wines at the same time—slightly more comfortable than a Livingstone-inspired two-pole tent (and to my mind, slightly better for inspiring inner peace and quiet epiphanies).

So when next staring dumbfounded at a sea of dusty brochures of the same woman frolicking in the same tropical waters sipping on the same cocktail she was sipping on in the same company's 1987 brochure, kick them aside and try some old school exploring in the Atacama. The heavens and all that they see await your gaze, your walking boots and your testimony. 🌍

APPARENTLY, IT GIVES ONE A TASTE OF LIFE ON MARS, ONLY HERE ONE CAN ACTUALLY BREATHE, LOLL IN A HORIZON VIEW SWIMMING POOL, AND SIP ON SOME OF CHILE'S PREMIUM WINES

adventure company Explora have just built a recreational observatory in the middle of the Atacama desert and opened their doors to those of us with a penchant for wonder, but without an astrophysics degree in our sturdy backpacks. Here, beneath an observation dome spanning five metres across, one can witness the nightly operatics of an ensemble cast of constellations, planets, stars and galaxies lying thousands of light years away.

The Atacama's skies are some of the clearest in the world, allowing for a virtual uninterrupted canvas of cosmos; the self same cosmos that the ancient Incans and Francis Drake alike looked to for guidance. The self same cosmos that inspired the blueprints for the pyramids, only this time around, said cosmos having gone high-tech courtesy of the Meade LX200R