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## Dining in Napa, jetting to Masqat, and gunning for Scotch. . . .

**WHISKY SHOOTER** \* Ardbeg ([www.ardbeg.com](http://www.ardbeg.com)), the maker of what is considered the smokiest of Islay whiskies, has released examples of its 1974 vintage in a forceful package: a rifle case designed by the London-based gun manufacturer James Purdey & Sons. The company has set a price of \$20,000 for each of the 50 cases. Each hand-stitched leather enclosure includes two numbered bottles of the single-cask Scotch, eight sterling silver cups, an Omas fountain pen, and a leather book to record tasting notes (or shooting scores). . . . The Culinary Institute of America has launched a course for the hands-on epicure. The **CIA Sophisticated Palate** program ([www.ciachef.edu](http://www.ciachef.edu)), held at the institute's Napa Valley campus, provides cooking classes and immerses participants in local dining, farmer's markets, and gourmet food shopping trips.

This being Napa, wine pairings figure prominently in the proceedings. Four-day programs cost about \$4,000 per person, two-day sessions about \$2,000. . . .

**GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES** \* For centuries, determined pilgrims have endured grueling conditions to visit sites such as the lost city of Petra and Easter Island. For a cost of \$77,750, participants in Abercrombie & Kent's **Nine World Wonders by Private Jet** tour ([www.abercrombiekent.com](http://www.abercrombiekent.com)) can reach those destinations while

enjoying flutes of Laurent-Perrier Grand Siècle in the lounge of a Boeing 757 fitted to accommodate 50 passengers. The 25-day trip, which will take place from January 13 to February 6 and again from February 7 to March 2, will feature visits to the two aforementioned sites as well as Machu Picchu, the Sydney Opera House, Angkor Wat, Myanmar's Shwedagon Pagoda, the Taj Mahal, Masqat (Oman's capital), and the pyramids of Giza. . . . For world travelers who prefer the sea over the sky, there is the **Silversea World Cruise 2008** ([www.silversea.com](http://www.silversea.com)). The 610-foot, 382-passenger cruise ship *Silver Shadow* will dock at 51 ports in 27 countries from January 16 through May 6. The vessel's lodgings include 1,264-square-foot owner's suites, each of which has a private teak veranda. Fares begin at about \$65,000. . . .



## FROM THE ROBB CELLAR \* Fine wines & spirits worthy of a place in your private collection.

**T**HOSE WHO have met Richard Geoffroy know they are unlikely to meet anyone more passionate about Champagne than he is. Of course, he is the cellar master for Dom Pérignon, a most

distinguished office first occupied by Pierre Pérignon, who in the late 17th century tended the cellar in Hautvillers Abbey. There he devoted his talents to the perfection of *méthode champenoise*. Geoffroy's passion, like his predecessor's, is as much a vocation as an occupation: He regards each fine wine as a sensory journey. Where some vintages spread out in soft, velvety planes, others plunge into cool crevasses and navigate shifting currents before ascending to a sunlit effervescence. While the 1996 vintage is of the former type, the **Dom Pérignon 1999** presents a more elusive topography—a landscape of earthy shadows and luminous citrus fruit that Geoffroy describes as “chiaroscuro.” On the nose, the scent of angel food cake gives way to cinnamon and mocha. Vibrant acidity enlivens the palate, as do subtle brine, mineral, candied lemon, and licorice. (\$125) [www.domperignon.com](http://www.domperignon.com)

**LIKE COLORS** or cuts of clothing, varietals come in and out of vogue. Most Americans laid Pinot Noir to rest decades ago, except in its red Burgundy form. Only recently has it been resurrected—a phenomenon many attribute to its role in *Sideways*. This 2004 film, while it raised Pinot from the dead, caused Merlot to fall from public grace when one of the characters declared the wine undrinkable. Despite this caprice, the overall quality of Merlot being made in California is extraordinary, as witnessed by the demand for the production of Blackbird Vineyards. In the **Blackbird Vineyards Merlot 2004**, winemaker Sarah Gott has shown once again she is a virtuoso in handling this grape. The 2004 tempers powerful fruit with earth elements of roasted coffee, cocoa, and ginger, all of which are wrapped up in a texture like royal red velvet. (\$80) [www.blackbirdvineyards.com](http://www.blackbirdvineyards.com)



Blackbird Vineyards Merlot 2004 (far left) and Dom Pérignon 1999.