

**4/15/2008 - FEAST: An award-winning eZine about books, art, food, film, and travel. Printer-friendly, text only format. For full graphic and photo images, plus links to extra material, go to:**

**<http://www.CarstensCommunications.com/FEAST.html>.**

Greetings! And welcome back to FEAST--

First, I'd like to mention that for those who get "hungry" for cultural news between issues, we now have a blog where guests write on our five topics: books, art, food, film, and travel. You might want to visit and sign up for either the RSS feed or to be notified whenever there is a new post, which is about once a week. Here's the link:

<http://carstensFEAST.blogspot.com>

NEXT, at the request of many of our subscribers who have said they'd like to buy their favorites as soon as they read about them in FEAST, we have added links to Amazon to make that possible. Buying your books through our links also helps support FEAST and keep it coming. Let us know how you like this new feature!

FEAST's spring/summer 2008 issue features a great selection of fiction and nonfiction books in a wide-range of topics. Our eight fiction selections have in common compelling stories written by gifted writers who know how to spellbind. We have an especially strong nonfiction section this issue covering topics from adventure travel to immigration, to a fascinating new book on the Works Progress Administration period of US history. In both fiction and nonfiction we have starred some books to be published in the months ahead that you won't want to miss. Those, too, can be preordered.

FEAST celebrates not just the satisfaction of an abundant meal, but also the capacity of the mind to enjoy a soul-satisfying abundance of art, culture, and memories. Each issue strives to introduce our readers to an enticing collection of choices. In addition to fiction and nonfiction generally, our art section suggests new books, museums to explore, and features an ADDED page to learn more about the work and philosophy of two artists we think are pretty special—Mexico City sculptress NAOMI SIEGMANN and Boulder, Colorado, painter DAWN SIEBEL.

Our film section this issue focuses on diversity, ranging from the upcoming Black Lily Film and Music Festival, to Rosie Perez's documentary on her Puerto Rican culture, Eric Clapton and the world's greatest guitar heroes, plus a couple of unique films from Argentina and Iraq. Choosing among these offerings is sure to broaden your perspective and enrich your imaginative life—and that's our highest goal!

FEAST's travel section always suggests something a little different in the way of destinations or things-to-do among tourist sites. This issue is no exception, but we are also featuring some suggestions from award-winning blogger and travel writer CLAIRE WALTER of Boulder, Colorado. We thought you'd enjoy her perspective and a couple of practical tips for European travel.

As always, we love to hear from you, to know if you are discovering new books, artists, film, food, and destinations in our webZine. We also are interested in knowing what parts of the world we reach, what you like best, what you'd like to see more of. So please click on "comments" below and send us your thoughts.

In the meantime, happy reading, happy spring and summer!

-- Rosemary Carstens, Editor

<There is a link to use in the full edition to send comments to the editor>

### **FICTION THAT BLEW MY HAIR BACK:**

**The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears**, Dinaw Mengestu. Riverhead Books 2007. A deeply human story about three African immigrants living in Washington DC and their progression from wide-eyed optimists who have escaped hell in their home countries and believe all dreams are possible in the United States, to bone-aching disillusionment after years of being unable to make progress. That a thirty-something author, himself an Ethiopian immigrant, is able to access this material in such depth is a revelation in itself. His skill as a writer is wonderful to behold. If you have any interest in knowing what has happened to those who dream the "American dream," to understand the reality of the underprivileged in this country whose backbreaking labor underwrites the obscene prosperity at the other end of the spectrum, this is the book for you.

**Run**, Ann Patchett. Harper 2007. If you enjoyed *Bel Canto*, you'll love this story as much or more. Patchett is a talented storyteller, and this one is about family and the unpredictability of life and love in all its forms. The action takes place over a 24-hour period and, although not a mystery in the usual sense (even if there ARE a couple of dead bodies!), it pulls together threads from more than one family in unexpected ways. Bernard Doyle and his Irish-American wife fulfill their dreams of having more than one child by adopting two African American boys who immediately capture their hearts. This is a story that reveals the complexity of family life after the death of a beloved parent—but don't worry, it's not a tearjerker, it's uplifting and surprising as three families combine and recombine to make a new whole. [www.annpatchett.com](http://www.annpatchett.com)

**Red Rover**, Deirdre McNamer. Viking 2007. I read the first few pages of this book and the writing blew my hair back big time! Here is a writer that understands the essence of a childhood spent in open country in the West—where imagination, along with the sky, is limitless and the future seems without bounds. The opening provides a powerful and hopeful start before life has its way with two brothers, Aidan and Neil, as WWII sucks them in and spits them out, with sometimes heartbreaking results. Again, there's a mystery here, although not in the usual sense. McNamer circles the details of a death in a very unusual manner, moving back and forth from the deep past to the present, skillfully weaving her characters lives together, moving ever closer with shocking inevitability to the truth.

**Songs Without Words**, Ann Packer. Knopf 2007. If you read *The Dive from Clausen's Pier*, you know that Packer is a fine writer. You also know she explores the dark side of tragedy and crisis. She has a deep understanding of how conflicted humans are, how their feelings of love, envy, and friendship can ebb and flow. This is the story of a friendship between two women and what it is like to be viewing life from "within" a family as opposed to always being on the periphery. "Liz and Sarabeth were childhood neighbors in the suburbs of Northern California, brought as close as sisters by the suicide of Sarabeth's mother when the girls were sixteen." As the years pass, the friendship means different things at different times. Each has trouble breaking away from her "assigned" role within the family and within their relationship. Packer's book is insightful, painful, and difficult—and filled with the conflicts of long term love.  
[www.annpacker.com](http://www.annpacker.com)

**Sitting for Klimt**, Carol Bergman. iUniverse 2006. This is a lovely collection of five novellas, each fashioned around a famous artist—Gustav Klimt, Marc Chagall, John Singer Sargent, Maria Izquierdo, and a Sumerian woman working in Egypt during the reign of Akhenaton and Nefertiti more than three thousand years ago. Bergman evokes the essence of a life, embroidering upon what is known to create delightful tales to satisfy those who have wondered. An enchanting exercise in imagination and historical reverie. [www.carolbergman.net](http://www.carolbergman.net)

**The Year of Fog**, Michelle Richmond. Delacourt Press 2007. This is a gem. A soon-to-be stepmother walks on a foggy San Francisco beach with her fiancé's six-year-old girl. Diverted for a few seconds by a dead baby seal, when Abby looks back the child has disappeared! The author juxtaposes what parents go through in these circumstances as days turn into weeks and then into months without recovery, with a deep exploration of what memory is and how reliable or unreliable it may be. This is a wonderful book and, although serious and disturbing in parts, well worth delving into for the writing, the story, the surprising yet realistic conclusion. This writer knows how to build suspense and sustain it! [www.michellerichmond.com](http://www.michellerichmond.com)

**People of the Book**, Geraldine Brooks. Viking 2008. Pulitzer Prize-winning author hits another out of the ballpark! Of course, I loved this story because it's about books and features a rare book expert, a detective of the history left behind by long-ago readers of ancient texts. An Australian, Hanna Heath, is invited to authenticate a copy of an illuminated Hebrew manuscript rescued from destruction in Bosnia during the war. Brooks weaves a fabulous tale of adventure and intrigue as she discovers clues and projects beyond them to imagine the stories each holds. There's a touch of love story, too, just to make it completely appealing.

**The Blood of Flowers**, Anita Amirrezvani. Little Brown 2007. In seventeenth-century Persia a young girl and her mother are forced to leave their familiar village life and live with relatives in the fabled city of the Shah, Isfahan. Her uncle is a wealthy designer of carpets for the Shah's court and his niece is drawn to his design and color expertise, eager to soak up knowledge about the craft. She and her mother are essentially slaves

under the uncle's dominant wife and twists of fate combine with the young woman's impulsive nature to ruin her chances for marriage. This tale is filled with rich detail about life in an almost legendary city and about the carpet trade. It is a story of survival, of tricks fate plays on lovers, and the coming of age of a girl who, against all odds, strives to follow her dreams. [www.bloodofflowers.com/](http://www.bloodofflowers.com/)

**The Senator's Wife**, Sue Miller. Knopf 2008. Miller is an author with a staggering ability to comprehend complex family relationships and the multiplicity of odd entanglements and accommodations that are often present in long-term marriage. Her skillful writing and ability to portray the depth of human emotions is seldom seen. How I wish I had her talent! Two unconventional women at very different stages of life alter each other's path in surprising ways. The older woman, the "Senator's Wife" has a very complicated continuing relationship with her estranged husband, leads an independent life, and keeps unfulfilled longings at bay—until the unexpected happens. The younger woman, Meri, is newly married, pregnant, and at sea in both roles, having had no successful role models in her childhood. She is terrified that she may fail at both. This story is a journey between love and commitment, between the single, career path and the engaged family-focused life. Miller does not just portray women in all their contradictions and struggles—in this book she reveals the complexity of her male characters as well and does an exceptional job of it!

#### **JUST THE CAPTIVATING FACTS - RECOMMENDED NONFICTION:**

**Brother, I'm Dying**, Edwidge Danticat. Knopf 2007. WARNING: this National Book award-winner will break your heart! In 2004, Edwidge Danticat's 84-year-old uncle, fleeing gang threats in their home country of Haiti, left for the US with a fully authorized visa. He was stopped in customs, taken into custody by immigration authorities and jailed. Although he repeatedly tried to tell them he needed his medications, his pleas, his condition, and his age were ignored. Ultimately, he died in custody, alone and frightened. This is our immigration service program. Who does it serve? Is it broken? This heartrending personal story will drive the questions home.

**Four Seasons in Rome**, Anthony Doerr. Scribner 2007. I almost didn't read this book. It came in along with a pile of others and I was going to pass it along, but then came a day when (horrors!) I DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING TO READ! So, I sat down and began and fell in love with what is far from being just another story of an American in Rome. First of all, Anthony Doerr has a wonderful way with words. His metaphors are fresh and alive, a delight to discover. He weaves history throughout a story of a young, new-to-fatherhood, oh-my-god-it's-twins, family man who wins a fellowship to spend nine months in Rome writing a novel about WWII. As the cover describes it, it's a tale of "twins, insomnia, and the biggest funeral in the history of the world." It's a small book, but so special—don't miss it! [www.anthonydoerr.com](http://www.anthonydoerr.com)

**A Sacred Feast: Reflections on Sacred Harp Singing and Dinner on the Ground**, Kathryn Eastman. University of Nebraska Press 2008. I had never heard of either

“shape singing” or “sacred harp singing” before I discovered this book. It always amazes me the parallel universes operating right within sight and yet we go about our daily business completely unaware. Eastman explores the origins and forms of what some have called America’s earliest music. A powerful nondenominational form of religious singing begun in the deep south has caught fire around the country and spread from “sea to shining sea.” People gather for all-day and multi-day sings interspersed with “dinner on the ground”—old fashioned potlucks consisting of everyday, down home cooking. Just the fare to whet a dry throat and spur a singer on to greater effort later in the day! Recipes included.

**Kayaking Alone: Nine Hundred Miles from Idaho’s Mountains to the Pacific Ocean**, Mike Barenti. University of Nebraska Press 2008. On a warm, late-May afternoon, Barenti packs as much gear as possible into an unfamiliar, German-made white-water kayak and sets off from the headwaters of central Idaho’s Salmon River on a solo two-month journey down 900 miles of river to the Pacific Ocean. Here’s an adventure few of us would undertake, but many of us would dream of and enjoy riding along on a fast-moving narrative of nature, environmental consequences, and plain old gut-wrenching athletic endurance. Settle yourself in a comfortable chair with plenty of snacks to the side and mentally head for the rapids! <http://mikebarenti.com>

**The Elephant’s Secret Sense: The Hidden Life of the Wild Herds of Africa**, Caitlin O’Connell. Free Press 2007. Caitlin O’Connell took work as a field scientist in 1992 that led her on an unexpected fourteen-year journey to prove a controversial theory about elephants’ ability to communicate through seismic vibration. At first her three-year study of elephant movements and interactions with humans in Namibia did not seem to be the stuff that a life is built from. But soon she became fascinated as she realized elephants she was observing day after day were sensing and recognizing distant calls through the ground. Now an internationally renowned researcher, Caitlin’s remarkable discovery has gained credence and she is able to speak not only for the elephants, but also for the people in these areas where these magnificent, still little understood animals retain their largest herds. A fascinating story--

**American Made: The Enduring Legacy of the WPA: When FDR Put the Nation to Work**, Nick Taylor. Bantam 2008. When President Roosevelt began the first of what would be his four terms in office, the nation was four years into the most devastating depression ever known. Thirteen million US workers were jobless—counting their families, about 60 million of a 130 million population were without resources of any kind. People wanted work, not handouts. In 1935, Roosevelt signed into law the Works Progress Administration, which would forever change the physical landscape and the social policies of the United States. It lasted for eight years, spent \$11 billion, employed 8.5 million men and women, repaired and created infrastructure still fully functional today: roads, dams, bridges, tunnels, airports, on and on. People pulled together in a way not seen since, with the possible exception of the WWII war effort, and there was an air of gratitude, not entitlement, in the air. This is one of the greatest American stories and should be of interest to anyone who believes there is wisdom to be found in exploring events of the past. [www.nicktaylor.us/](http://www.nicktaylor.us/)

## COMING UP AND NOT TO BE MISSED

**Monster of Florence**, Douglas Preston with Mario Spezi. Grand Central Publishing – due out June 2008. Talk about life being stranger than fiction! Doug Preston is well known as an acclaimed thriller writer, but this is the tale of a true-life adventure that found him suspected of murder and barely escaping life in an Italian prison. In 2000, Preston and his family moved to Italy to live out their dreams of enjoying Tuscany on a day-to-day basis. There the author meets someone who has spent his career trying to find a killer dubbed The Monster of Florence. As he and Doug move closer to solving the mystery, the machinations of Italian politics and police twisted the spotlight of guilt onto the pair. It's an entirely different world when an author's genre becomes his life!

**The Lost Cyclist: The Untold Story of Frank Lenz's Ill-Fated Around the World Journey**, David Herlihy. Houghton Mifflin 2009. The tragic yet inspiring tale of a nineteenth-century adventurer's solo circumnavigation of the globe via bicycle, traveling west from New York City across America, through Asia, and ending in Turkey where he disappears and is presumably murdered. It features Lenz's stunning photographs, which survived the journey. This will be a great read for those who enjoy armchair adventure!

**French Milk**, Lucy Knisley. Touchstone 2009. A graphic travelogue, about the author's six-week stay with her mother in a quirky little flat in Paris's fifth arrondissement, where both celebrate milestone birthdays as they soak up all the sights, sounds, and tastes of a Paris straight out of central casting. A perfect little book for all those Francophiles! Lucy has a fun website that shows her range of talents at [www.stoppayingattention.com/](http://www.stoppayingattention.com/)

## ART

We showcase books on art we think you'd enjoy, and galleries and museums to visit, in this section, plus provide a link to our special page on featured artists NAOMI SIEGMANN and DAWN SIEBEL.

**Born of Fire: The Pottery of Margaret Tafoya**, Charles King. Museum of New Mexico Press. Regarded as one of the great masters of Pueblo ceramics, Margaret Tafoya (1904-2001) is known for her trademark large black polished ceramics, decorated with traditional imagery of rain clouds, water serpents, bear paws, and other symbols. An award-winning artist, she was recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Southwestern Association for Indian Arts and a National Heritage Fellowship. King interviewed many of Tafoya's family members and friends during the writing of this book and presents a sensitive and compelling story of this determined artist's life. More details about Margaret Tafoya's family carrying on tradition can be found at [www.nancyyoungblood.com](http://www.nancyyoungblood.com)

### **Morrison Hotel Gallery. [www.morrisonhotelgallery.com](http://www.morrisonhotelgallery.com)**

Multiple locations in New York, La Jolla, and Los Angeles. Great music, historic bands, iconic musicians—these are the images by fine art photographers showcased in these unique galleries. Often deeply personal glimpses of historic moments in music history, if you replay your special memories to the tunes of the decades since the fifties, you will chill and thrill as you view these exhibitions. Images range from timeless performances by the Stones, the Doors, the Beatles, Frank Sinatra, Bob Marley, and Miles Davis to individual memoir collections such as Pattie Boyd's photographs of her life with George Harrison and Eric Clapton (April 2008). Exhibitions change frequently.

### **The Broad Contemporary Art Museum at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.**

The BCAM opened early this year. It is the first new museum built in Los Angeles since the Getty Center opened in 1997. Its inaugural exhibition runs through September 2008 and includes some of the most iconic artworks from the last four decades—most of its 60,000 s.f. of gallery space is devoted to groupings of works by single artists. BCAM showcases such important artists of the last forty years as Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein, Ed Ruscha, Andy Warhol, Ellsworth Kelly, Cindy Sherman, Jean-Michel Basquiat, John Baldessari, Jeff Koons, Chris Burden, Mike Kelley, and Richard Serra. Located at 5905 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90036, (323) 857-6000. [www.lacma.org](http://www.lacma.org) for hours and admission fees.

**The Museum of Latin American Art.** This Long Beach museum has reopened after a three-year, \$10 million expansion. It is considered to be the finest of its type in the US. In addition to doubling its galleries and adding a new 15,000 s.f. sculpture garden, this is THE place to enjoy an incredible collection of works by major and emerging contemporary Latin American artists. These artists are frequently well known in their own countries but little known here and, finally, there is a place to get acquainted with some astounding talent. 628 Alamitos Avenue, Long Beach, CA 90802, (562) 437-1689. [www.molaa.org](http://www.molaa.org)

### **FEATURED ARTISTS**

Art is among the experiences I rely on to alter what I am.

—James Elkins, *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing*, p. 41.

### **MEET NAOMI SIEGMANN**

NAOMI IS AN ELEGANT, WARM, AND WELCOMING WOMAN who has lived and worked in Mexico for more than thirty years. She's petite and energetic—and you'd never suspect that she spends her days creating amazingly realistic and innovative sculptures, many of huge proportions, from wood, stone, marble, bronze, plaster, wax, iron, and acrylic. Many of her pieces also include sketches, engraving, direct photo transfer, and homemade paper. She is seen here in her studio.

I met Naomi when in Mexico City in 2007 conducting interviews for another project. She tells me her work has undergone numerous transformations, including experimentation

with various mediums. Her hyper-realistic wood sculptures have been acquired by museums and are in private collections both in the United States and in Mexico, and her work has been exhibited in galleries across the United States, Mexico, and in Europe. She has been commissioned to design and cast monumental sculptures in materials such as bronze, steel, and fiberglass for parks, plazas, and building lobbies (see Vuelo).

In 2001 Naomi began organizing an ambitious, international collaborative event to raise forest conservation awareness through art. El Bosque/The Forest consists of a “forest of trees” by a range of artists that traveled on a successful eight-city tour in the United States and Mexico. As Naomi says about her piece Portable Forest, “This will be our future forest if we don't stop deforestation. We'll have to bring our own. Portable Forest is on wheels and can be pulled along as one would a pet.”

To see more of Siegmann's work, visit [www.naomisiegmann.com](http://www.naomisiegmann.com) or contact her at [siegmann@att.net.mx](mailto:siegmann@att.net.mx).

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## **MEET DAWN HOWKINSON SIEBEL**

I HAVE ALWAYS LOVED ART WITH THE WHISPER OF A STORY BEHIND IT, figurative art that depicts moments of personal history, wonderful in themselves yet somehow letting you know there is an artist's subtext. The mixed media, oil and collage work of Dawn Howkinson Siebel abounds with subtext that constitutes a discourse between artist and subject.

As Dawn says, “I am interested in stories. They are our foundations, our starting points, our biases. . . They are cultural glue.” Her present work began to evolve when, the year before her father died, he gave her all of the old family photographs—she has used them in her paintings ever since. “Each painting begins with an image scanned, printed in black and white, and collaged onto a wooden panel.” Her goal is to blend the “real” of the photographic image with the “imagined” of the painted surface until it becomes synergistically something beyond either.

Siebel's work is beautifully rendered and compels the viewer to “read” its story. To me, her work is not only story, it is history evolving, transforming the past into a compelling present, foreshadowing an even more dynamic future.

Dawn works with clients on commissioned pieces created from their own photographs and stories to develop unique heirlooms. To see more of her story paintings, as well as a selection of her assemblages, lightboxes, and murals, visit [www.dawnsiebel.com](http://www.dawnsiebel.com) or contact her at [info@dawnsiebel.com](mailto:info@dawnsiebel.com) for information on commissions and galleries where her work can be viewed.

## **FILM**

Diversity is our theme for films this issue. If you usually see only Hollywood or European productions, you've been missing out. Try one of these and discover the thrill of a different viewpoint, cutting edge innovation, or just plain fun entertainment.

**Black Lily Film & Music Festival, May 1-4, 2008**, International House and World Café Live, Philadelphia. Black Lily's roots began as a showcase for Black women musicians in 1999; it has received international recognition and events have been held in London, Paris, Japan, San Francisco, Washington DC, Boston, and Los Angeles. In 2006, the organization shifted toward producing an annual film and music festival and, in May of 2007 the first annual Black Lily Film & Music Festival took place. This year's events look like a great opportunity to see and hear talented women musicians and filmmakers present their innovative achievements. Well worth considering if you're in the neighborhood. <http://blacklilyorg.wordpress.com/> for more information.

**Yo Soy Boricua, Pa'Que Tu Lo Sepas!** 2006. Actress Rosie Pérez makes her directorial debut in this heartfelt tribute to Puerto Rican pride. She takes an in-depth look at the complex and often controversial history of Puerto Rico-US relations. By turns shocking and celebratory, this wide-ranging documentary examines such rich themes of the PR experience as family, language, and racism, all with careful consideration of historical context. Along the way you are invited into the warmth and affection of this culture and the innovative ways in which its members surmount the challenges they face.

**Eric Clapton: Crossroads Guitar Festival 2004.** Two Disks. Held at the Cotton Bowl in Dallas, Texas, this fabulous gathering of many of the world's best guitar wizards benefits Eric Clapton's nonprofit drug treatment facility in Antigua, Crossroads Center. The audience is a field of fans that goes on forever—and why not? In addition to plenty of stage time for Clapton, you hear and see such greats as BB King, James Taylor, Carlos Santana, Joe Walsh, Jimmie Vaughn, John Mayer, Robert Cray—and on and on. These boys make their instruments scream, cry, lament, and just plain get on down. And do NOT look away when Robert Randolph comes on stage to light the world on fire with his 13-string pedal steel guitar—the energy he generates is incredible—it's jazz, blues, rock, and church music fused into one giant pulse. If you still love old-time blues and forevermore rock and roll, as I do, you will love this concert. It's fantastic!

**NOTE:** I watched the 2004 DVD, which is available through Netflix, but the new 2007 DVD of the Guitar Festival is now available through Amazon.

**Lili's Apron.** 2003. After Ramón loses his job as a restaurant cook during Argentina's economic crisis, his wife Lili suffers a nervous breakdown; they will lose their house unless something drastic is done. Desperate, Ramón accepts a job in Lili's name—and clothing—to serve as maid to a rich family. Think "Señora Doubtfire"!

**Kilometre Zero.** 2005. The first Iraqi film to be chosen to compete in the Palme d'Or competition at Cannes. A Kurdish soldier and an Iraqi taxi driver join together to return

the body of a fallen soldier to his family on the other side of the country. Hostility and mistrust dominate between the two men as they struggle to make sense of their country and each other.

## **FOOD**

**The Zen of Fish: The Story of Sushi, from Samurai to Supermarket**, Trevor Corson. HarperCollins 2007. What a great nonfiction read! Corson takes history and weaves it into a narrative about the development in ancient Indo-China and then nineteenth-century Tokyo of what today is among America's favorite foods: sushi and sashimi. Throughout, the text is interspersed with the lives and progress of a small group of students attending the first US sushi-chef training academy in Los Angeles, focusing mainly on one young woman. They learn about which fish were used for these dishes in the past and how they have evolved to include other seafood in the present, and why. Look over their shoulders as they discover the tricks of the trade in their preparation and what to watch for to avoid sudden death. This is food science and entertainment in a California roll! For some surprising sushi facts:

**[www.trevorcorson.com/sushi/facts.html](http://www.trevorcorson.com/sushi/facts.html)**

**Alice Waters and Chez Panisse: The Romantic, impractical, often eccentric, ultimately brilliant making of a food revolution**, Thomas McNamee. Penguin 2007. Think running a restaurant is dull? Alice Waters made sure it was never so. This authorized biography of the founding of the Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California, and the profound impact it had on serving the freshest of food throughout the nation and beyond, is entertaining and runs far contrary to the usual business success story. It was the day of the hippie, and the group that surrounded Alice lived that to the fullest. Talk about drugs, sex, and rock and roll! But beneath all that lies Alice's passion for the kind of dining experience she had encountered in France in her early years—a place where the food was local, fresh as could be, mixed and prepared to the highest degree, and where people could come to talk, laugh, love, and never be hurried or rushed away in order to fill the table once again. A remarkable story of a business that grew in spite of itself. **[www.chezpanisse.com/](http://www.chezpanisse.com/)**

## **TRAVEL/ROAD RASH**

**BE CREATIVE, EXPLORE WHAT YOU KNOW**—and then explore what you don't know about what you know –

Often, we think that every trip has to be a grand vacation. But with the dollar drooping and values hard to find, we have to look around and consider other options. Perhaps that means exploring the United States on shorter, driving trips. Even with the price of fuel, it may be cheaper to drive somewhere for a long weekend than to pay the fuel surcharges for a flight somewhere more exotic. Draw a circle a day's drive out from your

hometown and do some research online to see what can be discovered—you might be surprised. For example, if you live in the Midwest, a fun family trip might include:

**Heritage Farm** headquarters of the Seed Savers Exchange, is six miles north of Decorah, Iowa. Located in a beautiful natural setting, the 890-acre farm is a living museum of thousands of heirloom varieties grown in certified organic fields. Here's just a snapshot of what you'll find.

- Preservation Gardens where more than 24,000 vegetable varieties, including 4,000 traditional varieties from Eastern Europe and Russia are maintained and grown rotationally each summer.
- An historic orchard—the most diverse, public orchard in the United States, where 700 different varieties of nineteenth-century apples are on display
- Ancient White Park Cattle, a rare species that roamed the British Isles before the time of Christ. There are only about 800 of these extremely rare, wild cattle surviving worldwide, and about 80 of them reside at Heritage Farm.
- Buildings crafted by Amish carpenters
- A unique visitors' center and gift shop that offers a wide selection of heirloom seeds, horticultural books, and garden gifts.

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**THE ALLURE OF EUROPE IS AS GREAT AS EVER FOR MANY.** The thought of looming bankruptcy over the weakness of the dollar is holding many of us back from visiting Europe this year, but some just can't wait. In view of that, FEAST wants to share with you a couple of posts by award-winning journalist and blogger **Claire Walter**. Two in particular struck me as worth a second look, both about unusual digs in Europe. These have been abridged and reprinted here in case you missed them on the blog. But do visit her blog at <http://travel-babel.blogspot.com> if you enjoy them because its a great source of travel inspiration and practical tips!

**Minimalist Hotels in Europe** - <http://travel-babel.blogspot.com/2007/10/minimalist-hotels-in-europe.html> © Claire Walter 2007

A few days ago, I posted an item about the ultra-modern Jeronimos 8 Hotel where I recently stayed in Lisbon. Everything in this hotel is pared-down, clean-lined, and hyper-modern, even the bathrooms. It is part of a trend in European cities, where such hotels and restaurants are 21st-century islands of design and technology surrounded by the weight of centuries and the opulence of traditional architecture. Most are four-star properties, so not cheap—but they represent an excellent value.

The Jeronimos 8 belongs to a consortium of 150 hip DESIGN HOTELS that are a reaction to the formal-style accommodations we associate with Europe. Hallmarks of this trendy breed of hotels are spare, unadorned lines, sculptural furnishings, interesting and/or vibrant colors, and such technological features as high-speed Internet or WiFi in each room, i-Pod docking stations, flat-screen TVs, and bathroom faucets that

sometimes require an engineering degree to operate. They tend to include good breakfasts with many lighter, healthier choices, and many have workout rooms/mini-gyms too. All of the Design Hotels are hi-tech wonders, but there are other such hotels that don't belong to the group.

The first I encountered was Le Meridien in Vienna, where I stayed in 2005. Little did I know then that I would be staying in properties with similar design philosophies in two distant countries two years later. Le Meridien is an edgy but stylish haute-21st-century hotel contained within the shells of adjacent 19th-century buildings. It displays specially commissioned art and sophisticated minimalist furnishings. All 261 rooms and 33 suites have 42-inch plasma TV, free-standing tower shower and several computer ports. The theme is Art + Tech. Opernring 13, 1010 Vienna. Phone: 1-800-543-4300 (reservations, U.S.), +43 (0) 1-588-90-0 (local).

In Madrid, I stayed at the recently opened Hotel Óscar, which belongs to the ROOM MATE group. There are currently eight Room Mate hotels in Spain (four in Madrid, three in Granada, two in Málaga and one in Valencia). Each bears a different first name, the implication being that he or she is your roommate when you stay there.

All Room Mate Hotels are also different in design. Óscar is a tall, slim 75-room hotel with a spectacular location on a small plaza two short blocks from the Gran Via and a short walk from the metro and to all sorts of other places you might want to be. To reach my room, I walked down a dimly lit, darkly painted and carpeted corridor where lights snapped on when a room door or elevator door opened. My room was green and white, quite a contrast to the dark purple corridor. Some of the furniture was built in. One decorative wow was a floor lamp that looked like a Brobdingnagian table lamp, so tall that it almost reached the ceiling. Room Mate Óscar Plaza Vázquez de Mella 12, 28004; +34 (0) 91 701 11 73.

I can't say that any of these hotels give me the warm fuzzies, but I admire the creativity that went into the design. I do love having free WiFi. And I also love the tubs and showers once I figure out how to use them.

**Sleeping Over? New Concept in Airport Hotels** - <http://travel-babel.blogspot.com/2008/03/third-micromini-room-yotel-opens.html> © Claire Walter 2008

Inspired by Japan's "capsule hotels," an English group operates YOTEL facilities at London Heathrow's Terminal 4 and at Gatwick and has a new one at Amsterdam's Schiphol. Designed for a short rest or an overnight between flights, YOTEL "rooms" are a cross between an old-fashioned railroad sleeper cabin and a first-class sleeper seat on a top international airline. All are non-smoking, soundproofed, and offer individual climate control. Guests check themselves in using a kiosk not unlike an ATM.

Each 7-square-meter (a bit over 75 square feet) standard little room includes everything necessary for a good rest. The large single bed (which the YOTEL people say is also

“large enough for a cosy 2,” spelled the British way) is outfitted with a comfortable hand-layered mattress, quality cotton percale sheets, pillows, and a duvet. The bathroom includes a shower, revitalizing all-in-one-body wash, heated mirror, and soft towels. A fold-out work/dining table and stool, and a complete range of power and connectivity including free WiFi and wired Internet access, complete the room. The table also serves for unpacking space, and there is overhead hand luggage stowage, suit-bag hanging and storage areas for small pieces. The flat-screen TV was made for tiny spaces. In standard accommodations, it is a 20-incher with a choice of films, TV, radio and games, and Internet. Food is available 24 hours a day. Guests can order from an on-screen menu or visit the galley. The premium cabin features a double bed that converts into a couch at the push of a button, additional storage space, a 23-inch TV and an overhead rain shower in the bathroom area.

**SLEEP TIGHT, TRAVELERS!**