



THE GALLIVANTER'S GUIDE[®] 25TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

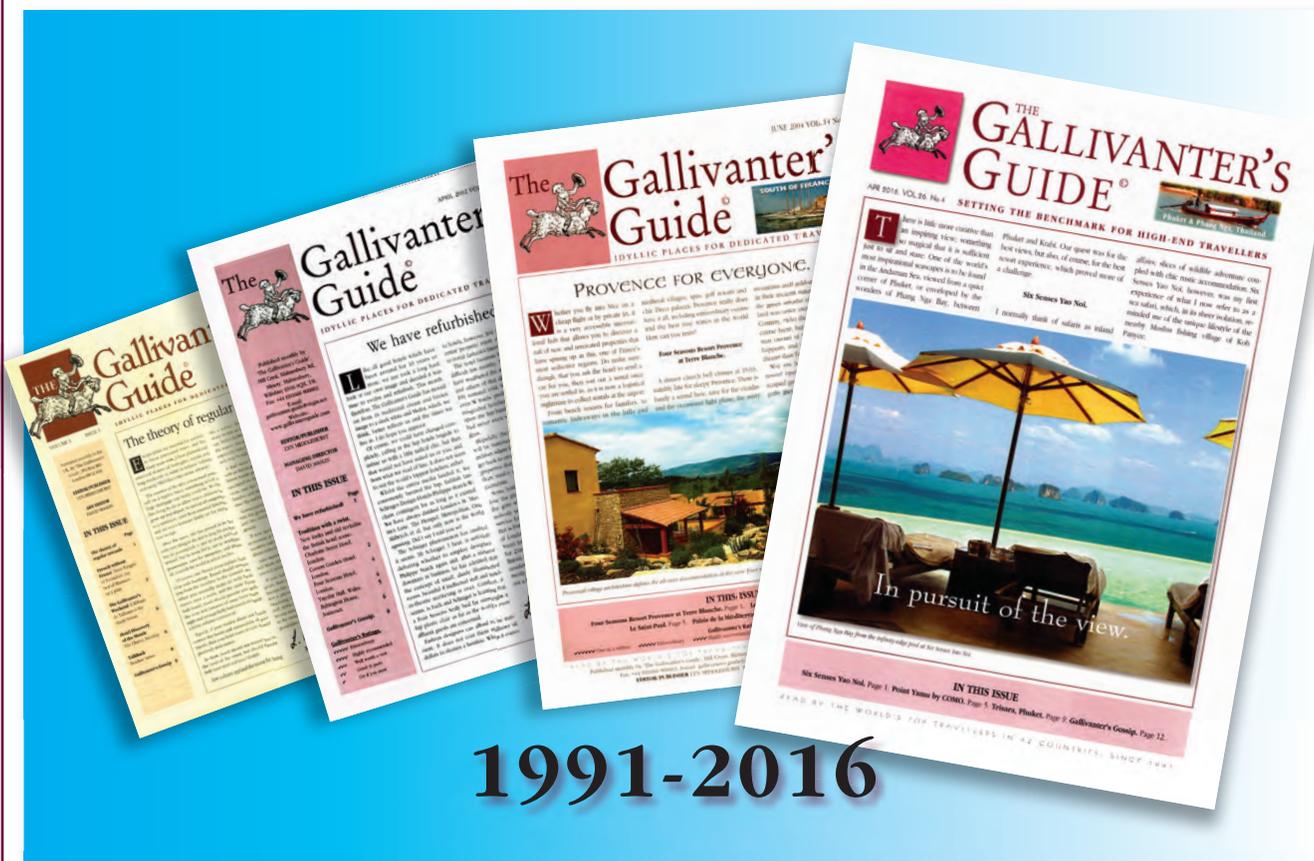
DEC 2016. VOL.26. No.12 **SETTING THE BENCHMARK FOR HIGH-END TRAVELLERS**

25 years of Gallivanting.

It all started in the late 1980s, when David and I both had highly pressurised careers. To escape, we regularly got on a plane and went in search of hotel nirvana; always choosing an hotel or resort, rather than a destination. We became the people who all our friends turned to for hotel advice and gradually, some of those friends urged, insisted and nagged me to write a book about the world's best hotels. The prob-

lem was that as soon as I wrote about an hotel, something always seemed to change, so one day, David suggested we start a monthly hotel newsletter that would keep up with events in the hotel world. They say that the best time to do something is when you are really busy, and by 1991, we were certainly stretched; but equally, they also say that you should do what you love. We both loved the intricacies of hotels; the varying suite and room cate-

gories, the staff, the design elements, so although our Bank Manager thought we were mad, we went ahead and formed The Gallivanter's Guide on October 1, 1991. We spent the next couple of months designing it, having decided that, to maintain total objectivity, we would not take advertising or sponsorship. Once again, our Bank Manager thought we were crazy, as we proceeded to invest the profits from our other company into The Gall-



1991-2016

From the first issue, that appeared in January 1992, to today's full-colour publication, The Gallivanter's Guide has always told it like it was.

IN THIS ISSUE

25th Anniversary issue, from 1991 to 2016. Page 1. Gallivanter's Gossip. Page 8.

READ BY THE WORLD'S TOP TRAVELLERS IN 42 COUNTRIES, SINCE 1991.



The Gullivanter's Guide was the first publication to recognise the importance of Adrian Zecha's first resort, Amanpuri, which opened in 1988.

ivanter's Guide. They, whoever they are, also say that to make a small fortune, you need to start with a large one, and this was certainly the case with The Guide. It took us six years to break even.

Amanresorts and Rafael Hotels; the first chapter.

In December 1987, we were talking to a pool attendant at The Phuket Yacht Club in Thailand and, pointing to the horizon, he told us that 'they are building a resort for millionaires over there'. It was Amanpuri, and in December 1988 we were amongst its first guests. It was one of those defining moments in hotelkeeping, as Amanpuri was a game-changer. We were so entranced that we returned the following year, and from then on, we tracked every Amanresorts opening; staying at Amandari, Bali, and Carcosa Seri Negara in Kuala Lumpur, when they opened in 1989, then Amankila and Amanusa in 1992, and so on and so on.

In those days, the travel media did not know about or understand Amanresorts and we were often criticised for extolling the virtues of this fledgling high-end group. In one early review, I coined the phrase Aman-

junkies, just because we kept meeting the same guests across the world. It sort of stuck.

Our insights into the high-end hotel market were soon embraced by the travel industry and one afternoon, whilst we were having a light lunch at Adrian Zecha's

discerning guests, but a real force to be reckoned with, as unlike most, we always told it like it was and, to this day, never pull our punches.

The first issue of GG, as it is affectionately known, appeared in January 1992



Adrian Zecha's Mabakua Hacienda de San Antonio, opened by Henry & Char Gray, in 2000.

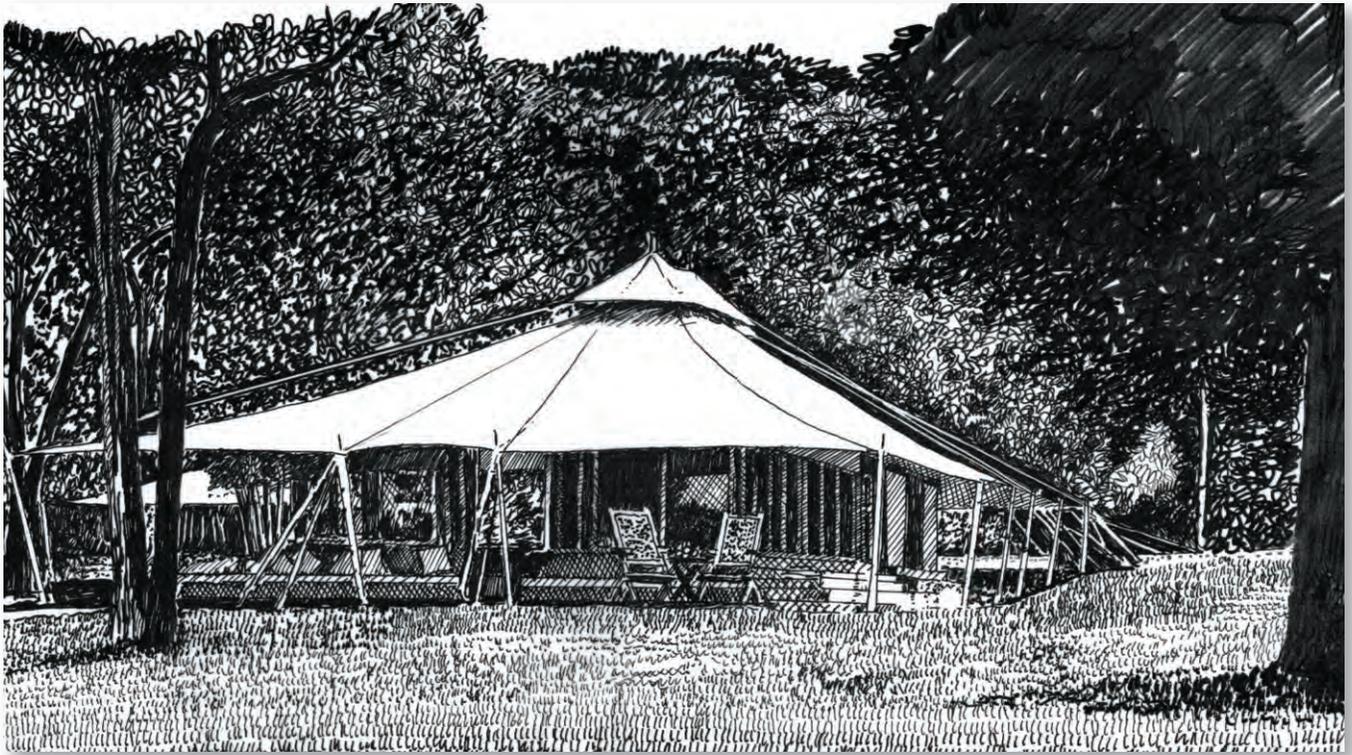
barely opened Hacienda de San Antonio in Mexico, the great man joined us. He called us the 'travel advisor's travel advisor', and I guess that is what we had become; not just a very personal one-to-one advisory for

and detailed our findings in Morocco. In those days, The Guide was in black and white, on heavy cream paper. I wrote the reviews and David did intricate black and white illustrations that aimed to show as-



The rooftop terrace of the Mont Blanc Suite, at Georg Rafael's Hôtel du Rhône, which is now Mandarin Oriental Geneva.

All photography and illustrations by David Maslin ©



Amanwana, when it first opened on Moyo Island, Indonesia, in 1993.

pects of each property that a camera could not capture.

It was a lot less pressurised in those days, as new high-end hotel openings were few and far between. There would be a smattering of elegant Relais & Châteaux hotels mixed in with the usual Grandes Dames, and it was only when the ex-Regent International partners, Georg Rafael and Adrian Zecha created Rafael Hotels and Amanresorts in the late 1980s, that hotelkeeping felt the wind of change.

In 1993, I remember staying in Georg

Rafael's Hôtel du Rhône in Geneva (now Mandarin Oriental Geneva) and marvelling at the thoughtfulness of the guest experience, especially the hatch to deposit your shoes and laundry, accessed by staff without disturbing the guest. From there, we drove down to Beaujolais in France, checking into the just-opened Château de Bagnols, which was managed impeccably by Amanresorts. We had lunch under the trees, ordering a glass of local white wine. It was so delicious that I asked where it was from. 'Just over there' said our waiter, pointing to

the vineyards beyond.

There was magic in the air in those days. Great hotelkeeping came from people with passion rather than investors with calculators. Looking back, it was a golden age.

Also in 1993, we journeyed to the just-opened Amanwana on Moyo Island in Indonesia. Princess Diana had stayed the previous week and, despite various boatloads of photographers and journalists attempting to land on the beach, privacy, as with all Amanresorts, was perfectly maintained. Despite this, however, we were critical of Amanwana, mainly because its ex-safari-lodge opening GM did not, we felt, have Aman DNA. Of course, the resort improved over the years; perhaps at its best when Kevin Brooke was GM.

We never had an issue with Amanpulo in the Philippines. It was always the best beach resort in the world from the day it opened, and that, of course, brings me to The Gallivanter's Awards for Excellence, which we first published in 1993.

The Gallivanter's Awards for Excellence.

After a year of publishing our discoveries, from The Oberoi Bombay in India, Las Hadas in Mexico, Cala di Volpe in Sardinia, to The Hassler Rome, The Regent Beverly Wilshire, Furnace Creek Inn in Death Valley, Amandari in Bali and The Oriental



Château de Bagnols in 1993; in those days managed by Amanresorts.

Bangkok, we devoted our January 1993 issue to our own personal Golliver's Awards for Excellence.

The Best Hotel Worldwide was Aman-dari, Bali, and the Highest Standards World-wide went to Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group. Best North American Hotel Group was The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company. Most Innovative Hotel Group was Amanresorts, with Best Beach Resort Worldwide going to Amanpuri. The Regent Beverly Wilshire was Best in North America and the Best European City Hotel was Rafael Group's Breidenbacher Hof in Düsseldorf. How things have changed! There was not a single Four Seasons in our first Awards issue because, in those days, we felt that the group was a tad 'beige on beige', whilst Ritz-Carlton positively shone with outstanding service and by far the best cuisine.



Sarab Townsend's unique restoration, Palazzo Terranova, opened in Umbria in the summer of 1999.



The monolithic lobby of Four Seasons New York.

January 1994 saw the first readers' awards published. Oriental Bangkok was Best Hotel Worldwide, and Amanresorts swept the board, along with the likes of Rafael Hotels'

The Mark in New York. You also voted for The Ritz, Paris, Le Saint-Paul in Provence and Hunter's Country House in Cape Province. Still no sight of Four Seasons, though!

In 1994, we stayed at the just-opened Four Seasons New York, which blew our socks off. Why? Four Seasons had bought Regent International, absorbing their hotels and ongoing projects, which included New York and other notables, such as Jimbaran Bay and Four Seasons Sultanahmet. Very cleverly, Four Seasons did not ignore the obvious chutzpah of Regent, but learned from it. Suddenly, they understood about exciting design and great cuisine and, from that point on, Four Seasons were unstoppable.

In our January 1994 Awards issue, Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts were voted Best North American Hotel Group, together with



Amano'i in Vietnam, as it opened in 2013.

Four Seasons Milan as best in Europe and Four Seasons New York for best new hotel. Amanresorts continued to sparkle, but Best Hotel Worldwide was The Oriental Bangkok and Best Service was Mandarin Oriental.

In 1995, Peninsula came onto the high-end scene with the refurbishment of its Hong Kong property. The Datai in Langkawi emerged as a new, extraordinary option in Malaysia, along with The Regent Chiang Mai (later renamed Four Seasons); both eschewing the concrete block resort model for low-rise, of-the-place design, à la Amanresorts.

Amanresorts dominated the January 1996 Awards issue, whilst The Oriental Bangkok



The Ritz-Carlton San Francisco, back in 1991, was a culinary temple to excellence.

and the Peninsulas of Hong Kong and Beverly Hills shone alongside a couple of Four Seasons winners; Four Seasons Mexico City and Chiang Mai.

By 1996, we had discovered Firmdale's Covent Garden Hotel and love it to this day, and in between writing about Denmark, Sweden, France, Bora Bora, Hawaii and all points between, we moved our office from London to Wiltshire and jetted off to Jamaica.

In 1996, Peninsula Hong Kong led our Reader Awards, and by then, we had readers in 21 countries worldwide; most of whom appeared to be Amanjunkies. By 1997, the Awards consisted almost entirely of Amanresorts, from the much-loved Aman-



The Oberoi Rajvilas set a whole new standard in India when it opened in 1998, with Vikram Oberoi as GM. hotel world.

By 1998, the importance of a good hotel bed was firmly fixed and we all began to complain about hard mattresses and foam pillows. Four Seasons set the standard with their Sealy beds and lightweight duvets; the only group at that time that seemed to care whether or not we had a good night's sleep.

Anassa in Cyprus showed that it was not just the high-end groups who could tick all the boxes, but they remained the exception to the norm, and still do, even today.

By 1999, Amanresorts and Four Seasons dominated our reader Awards, and this

was to continue for many years to come.

During this time, India popped up on the high-end resort map, as Oberoi led the way with Rajvilas in Jaipur, whilst in Mexico, Rosewood astounded us all with Las Ventanas al Paraiso in Cabo San Lucas.

Independently owned and operated hotels seemed to be on the decline. Sarah Townsend's extraordinary Palazzo Terranova in Perugia, Italy, was, I suspect, entirely filled with Gallivanter's readers after we reviewed it in 1999, but sadly, the hotel was sold a few years later and I have never found anything to replace it.



Amanpulo's legendary Beach Club.

dari, to Amanpulo and Amanjiwo. Bali, which, in those days, was still relatively undeveloped, really was the Island of the Gods and you flocked there, adding architect, John Heah's remarkable Four Seasons Resort Bali at Sayan to your wonders of the



Anassa, in Cyprus, showed how independent hoteliers could trounce the big names, when it opened in the summer of 1998.

At the end of 1999, after disagreements with his investors, Adrian Zecha quit Amanresorts and began a new company called Maha Resorts, opening Mahakua Hacienda de San Antonio in Mexico in October 2000. As its first guests, we loved it.

By this point, Four Seasons were Best Hotel Group Worldwide, Amanresorts were everywhere, and Peninsula was wowing us all with its Hong Kong Grande Dame. The Oriental Bangkok, however, never ceased to be your favourite for service.

The Maldives and Mauritius emerged as hot new high-end destinations, as did Marrakech, with the opening of Amanjena. In Mexico, GHM struggled with its beautiful but underfunded Tamarindo and Careyes resorts, and in the UK, the extraordinary Chewton Glen, just got better and better each year.

By 2001, Amanpulo was Best Hotel Worldwide, followed by Amanjiwo, whilst Adrian Zecha's Mahakua was Best Resort in the Americas.

A new era.

April 2002, saw a new look to The Gallivanter's Guide, with glossy white paper and



The Oriental Bangkok, now Mandarin Oriental Bangkok, has always been your favourite for service.

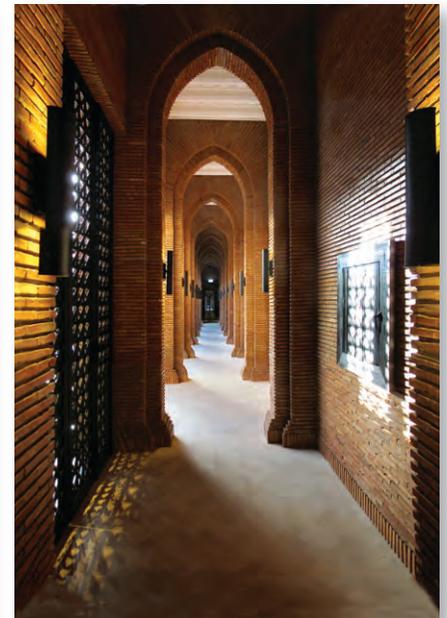
2-colour printing, but it was in March 2003 that we suddenly went into colour, mainly due to a very tight deadline!

After returning from India, David was still working on his drawings, having taken a stack of reference photographs on his new

digital camera. Looking at Oberoi's new Udaivilas in Udaipur, the images were so beautiful that I said, 'Let's just do one full-colour issue and use the photos instead of drawings'. We never looked back. Suddenly, we could show you the cuisine, the



From 1995, we published a series of books entitled The Ultimate Hotel Guide, which sadly, with a worldwide decline in book buying, ceased in 2013.



Mandarin Oriental Marrakech, Spa corridor.

GMs, the colours, and because David, very cleverly, can stitch several photographs together, we could also show you hotel suites as the eye sees them, rather than the camera. We also began to produce 12-page and sometimes 16-page issues rather than our usual 8-pagers.

We were the first to stay at many new



Our suite at The Peninsula Hong Kong, after its spectacular refurbishment.

hotels and even went to Damascus in Syria when Four Seasons opened there in 2006. We were the first to truly address the problem of food intolerances in restaurants and chemically-infused skincare in Spas. As one hotelier said, having heard it was our 25th Anniversary, 'The Gallivanter's Guide is the most influential voice on hotels', and maybe we are.

The digital age crept up on the hotel world stealthily, and even I was persuaded to 'tweet' in 2010. Suddenly, there was a slew of travel blogs and Social Media advisors on the hotel scene; many paid to write

glowing reviews. Honesty, it seemed, was becoming a dying concept, and as everyone was now taking striking photos on their smart phones, the image became king and words were replaced by emoticons.

High-end hotelkeeping changes by the day. Amanresorts is now Aman; no longer run by Adrian Zecha and his team of much-loved, if eclectic GMs. Four Seasons is busy re-flagging hotels to satisfy its investors; Airbnb is luring guests away from hotels, and the other high-end groups either get it spectacularly right or disastrously wrong.

My focus, right now, is on Six Senses,

where some exceptional ex-Four Seasons people, along with ex-Amanresorts visionary, Henry Gray, are attempting to create a new and very relevant standard of excellence in high-end hotels. Let us hope that the next 25 years are in safe hands!

Finally, The Gallivanter's Guide would not be what it is but for you, our Subscribers; many of whom have supported us for almost as long as 25 years. I continue to love our email interactions, where I often learn as much from you as you do from me. Thank you for your loyalty and for all your kind words.



When Six Senses Douro Valley opened in 2015, it was another game-changer. Could this be the new vanguard in the high-end hotel world?

GALLIVANTER'S Gossip



THE CONCLUSION OF THE MASSIVE REFURBISHMENT at **Trisara**, Phuket, unveiled its spectacular new Jara Spa, built around the ancient Ficus tree at the heart of the resort. Also new is PRU; a farm-to-table restaurant concept that means Plant, Raise & Understand, with produce from Trisara's own farm, under the very capable direction of talented Chef, Jim Ophorst. Also worth checking out are the fabulously refashioned entry-level Pool Suites at the top of the resort, with some of the most spectacular views.

APPARENTLY, WORK HAS JUST STARTED on **Four Seasons Hotel Madrid**; a splendid conversion of an historic corner-set building. No opening date as yet. **Four Seasons Maui**, meanwhile, has unveiled its floor-to-ceiling redesign of rooms, suites and public spaces, under clever GM, Jean Claude Wietzel. GM of **Four Seasons Toronto** and Regional VP, **Dimitri Zarikos** is leaving Toronto for the Regional VP role based in Cairo's Four Seasons Nile Plaza. Excitingly, he will also oversee the development of Four Seasons hotels in **Athens** and on the Greek island of **Mykonos**.

AFTER THE ANNOUNCEMENT that **Six Senses** was developing a New York hotel, rumours were rife that the group was also in talks regarding the development of a new ski resort in **Powder Mountain**, Utah.

OPENED IN 2014, **Domaine de Manville** is a refreshingly high-end operation, with just 30 rooms and suites in Baux de Provence, close to France's idyllic Luberon. Owners, Edith and Patrick Saut appear to have thought of everything, from beautiful, airy rooms and suites (opt at least for a Junior Suite with Terrace) to gastronomic cuisine, indoor and outdoor pools, a striking Spa, Kid's Club and even an 18-hole golf course, designed to be at one with its natural surroundings. domainedemanville.fr/

IRARELY EQUATE **New Zealand** with beach hotels, so the new **Helena Bay Lodge** on the North Island was a real surprise. Imagine 3km of unspoilt coastline and no less than 4 private beaches. Then add a restaurant created by southern Italian scion, Ristorante Don Alfonso 1890, with an estate-to-plate menu by Italian Chef, Michele Martino, plus a serious wine cellar to complement it. Then add a 25-metre outdoor heated pool and, amazingly, just 3 Junior Suites and 2 1,450 sq ft Villa Suites. The quality of everything is very high indeed, although the design can, at times, be a little parochial, I think. helenabay.com Coming to New Zealand in 2019 is **The Ritz-Carlton Auckland**, on the waterfront, providing us, finally (I hope!) with a high-end option there.

HONG KONG IS TO HAVE A NEW HOTEL in 2018; **Rosewood Hong Kong** on the Victoria Harbour waterfront, with 398 rooms and suites, designed by Tony Chi. No less than eight dining options will be included. In Myanmar (Burma) **The Strand Yangon** has now reopened after a major refurbishment of public areas and its 31 rooms and suites; something we have been waiting for since its initial renovation under Amanresorts in 1994! hotelstrand.com In **Koh Samui** Thailand, Ritz-Carlton are taking on the island, creating what looks to be a spectacularly original **Ritz-Carlton**, although with 187 rooms and suites, it is, perhaps a little too large for a true high-end resort. ritzcarlton.com/en/hotels/koh-samui

IN ROME, THE REOPENING of Dorchester Collection's **The Eden** is set for April 2017. Happily, they have reduced the number of rooms to 98, but have increased staff to 220, which is what true luxury is about these days. dorchestercollection.com **Sending you all our warmest Seasonal Greetings! Lyn & David.**

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