



AT MY CHATEAU
VILLETTE NEAR PARIS

“IN EARLY SEPTEMBER, THE SAN FRANCISCO OPERA GUILD KICKS OFF THE SOCIAL SEASON WITH THE MOST GLAMOROUS EVENT IN THE CITY BY THE BAY—THE OPERA BALL.”

By Olivia Hsu Decker

LUXURY EVENTS AND TRAVEL

While the opening nights of the San Francisco Opera and Symphony in early September officially mark the beginning of our social season, all summer my calendar has been packed with events and globetrotting adventures. I am happy to share details with you from my travels, as well as offer a preview of the two magical evenings that will usher in the beginning of the four-month period when high-society itineraries will be laden with fabulous gatherings benefitting worthy causes.

Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance

PEBBLE BEACH, CALIFORNIA
WWW.PEBBLEBEACHCONCOURS.NET

For the past 59 years, the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance has served as a Mecca for car aficionados the world over. The annual vintage car show is held on the beautiful 18th hole of the prestigious Pebble Beach Golf Links at the Pebble Beach Lodge, with the blue sea and green fairway serving as a picturesque backdrop for the fine autos. Car collectors and dealers from around the world come to exhibit their vintage cars and participate in competitions with proceeds going to various local charities. In recent years, new deluxe models from the likes of Bentley, Rolls-Royce, Bugatti, Spyker, and Maybach have added to the side events, which also include several vintage car auctions.

I was first introduced to this event in 1979 by my client and world-class vintage car collector Arturo Keller, and I have been paying an annual visit ever since. It's not easy to resist falling in love with the amazingly elegant driving machines that, for the most part, are hand-made works of art from a bygone era.



ARTURO KELLER'S 1929 BENTLEY SPEED SIX
VANDEN PLAS DUAL COWL TOURER WON THE
MOST ELEGANT CAR OF THE SHOW



A 1930 BENTLEY SPEED SIX GURNEY NUTTING
WEYMAN SPORTMAN'S COUPE

This year, I also attended the Gooding & Company Pebble Beach Auction on Saturday evening, August 15, and had to wonder, “What recession?” as I watched more than \$100 million worth of vintage cars being sold in one evening. A fellow spectator gasped, “They don't even drive these cars!” Indeed, these prized vintage autos are mostly for display as if in an art museum, never taken out on the roads. But just like works of art, fine wines, or luxury homes, fine vintage cars appreciate in value, making them a sound investment.



SYMPHONY OPENING NIGHT GALA, 2008

Opening Night of the Symphony

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA
WWW.SFSYMPHONY.ORG

On September 9, San Francisco Symphony Music Director Michael Tilson Thomas' 15th-anniversary season opens with classical music sensation Lang Lang. This 27-year-old piano virtuoso electrifies audiences around the globe, and on this night will bring his mastery to the stage of Davies Symphony Hall. My niece Kimberly, who “dated” Lang Lang when she studied at Harvard, remains good friends with him. I am looking forward to meeting him off stage.

The celebration starts with a pre-concert Champagne Promenade amidst the sparkle and glow of the Davies Symphony Hall's grand lobbies. Following the concert, the party will continue with cocktails, savories, live entertainment, and dancing at the post-concert party open to all ticketholders. This is the biggest fundraising event for the San Francisco Symphony. All proceeds benefit the Orchestra's education and community programs, providing music education to more than 75,000 Bay Area children each year. The Opening Night Gala Chair, Jessa Wu, is also profiled in this issue where she discusses the programs' impact in more detail.



ASHLEY JUDD JOINED MY BOX AT OPERA BALL 2002



OPERA BALL 2008

Opera Ball

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA
WWW.SFOPERA.ORG

Once a year in early September, the San Francisco Opera Guild kicks off the social season with the Opera Ball, the Bay Area's most glamorous yearly event. The guests dress in their finest black-ties and evening gowns to celebrate a good cause; 100 percent of Opera Ball proceeds benefit much-needed music education for more than 50,000 Bay Area children each year.

On September 11, Opera Ball 2009 will open the San Francisco Opera's 87th season and honor the incoming music director, Nicola Luiotti, with a magical evening of fine dining, dancing, and world-class opera. The festivities start at 5 p.m. with a welcome reception of savory hors d'oeuvres, cocktails, and wines, at the historic Veterans Memorial Opera House. Immediately following the performance of Verdi's *Il Trovatore*, guests will adjourn to the stunning grandeur of City Hall, which will be lavishly decorated by former Haute Ambassador Stanlee Gatti for this special occasion.

This year's Opera Ball is co-chaired by Teresa Medearis and Adrianna Pope Sullivan, who are profiled in this edition. I was co-chair of Opera Ball 2002, following the 9/11 tragedy and recession in 2001 when nobody was in the mood for partying and spending. To this day, it remains the most unforgettable event I have ever organized. With the help of the Opera Guild staff and fellow members of the board of directors, co-chair Marie Massocca and I worked tirelessly for nearly 10 months to accomplish the goal of a "sold out" Ball, despite ticket prices that ranged from \$850 to \$2,500 each.



THE PICTURESQUE SKRADIN HARBOR



KORNATI ISLANDS

Cruising the Croatian Coast

The Croatian Coast has developed into a major attraction for the yachting world and global tourists in recent years. The long and scenic seaboard and the dozens of beautiful islands teeming with Dalmatian culture were the focus of my August trip to the region. I was invited by a client as guest on one of his three yachts he took out for this trip, the 176-foot *Sea Force One* (www.SeaForceOneYacht.com).

I began the journey in the historic Dubrovnik (www.Dubrovnik.hr), one of the most beautiful and best-preserved medieval cities in Europe. I was impressed by how clean and well kept this 1,400-year-old city is, and how friendly residents are, with most also able to speak English! The entire city, as well as the splendid walls surrounding it, is made of ancient stones that blessedly received no damages over the centuries during various wars.

Our next stop was Split, the second largest city in Croatia and the main harbor for boats en route to the most popular island Hvar, a high-life party resort often referred to as the Saint-Tropez of Croatia. We bypassed Hvar and headed north to Kornati Islands National Park, where most of the islands are barren, with only rocks and simple tiny villages on small bays. We anchored out in a peaceful bay, and discovered the next morning that we were the "scandal" on the front page of the local newspaper. Our three yachts were



KRKA WATERFALL

blamed for disturbing the sheep, which were hesitant to drink the bay water due to our presence.

My final stop was in the region of Sibenik and Skradin (www.nprka.hr). We docked at the picturesque Skradin Marina and explored the charming village and the Krka National Park, home to the Krka Waterfalls. There are seven falls in all, with a total drop of nearly 800 feet. The seventh and the longest of these at Skradinski Buk has a network of walkways, bridges, and raised viewing points to help visitors appreciate one of Croatia's most breathtaking natural beauties. Local boats leave from the Skradin Marina for the park every half-hour. Visitors are not only allowed to walk up to the top of the waterfall, but also to swim right underneath the cascading waters. One week is certainly not enough time to enjoy and fully appreciate this beautiful country. I regretted I didn't accept my client's eight-week invitation!

Happy Travels,

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