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On the *Big Eagle* in the Mediterranean

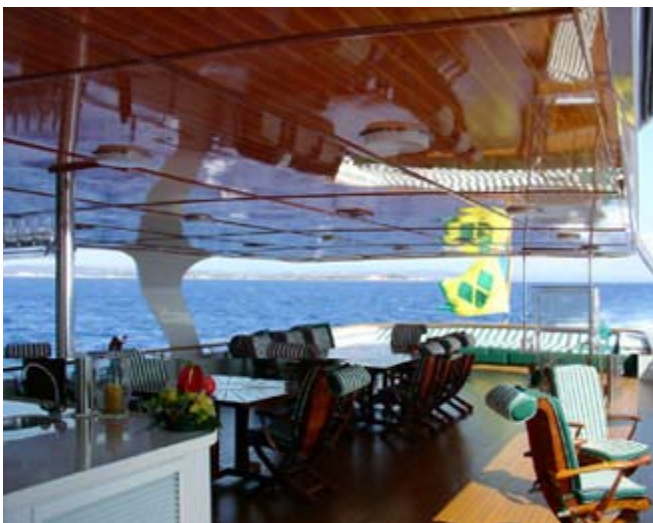


The *Big Eagle* outside of Bonifacio

This is my fourth trip on this beautiful American boat. One hundred seventy-five feet long, it has two main suites and four cabins, all with their own marble baths, and sleeps twelve comfortably while overseen by a captain and crew (including a chef) of ten. Celebrities know it, especially from Cannes where its been tied up during the Film Festival. This year, I was told, **Sharon Stone** was on board, as well as **Alicia Keys, Kevin Bacon and Kyra Sedgewick, Kevin Spacey, Sean Penn and Robin Wright, Roberto Cavalli, Cuba Gooding Jr., Sofia Coppola, Zoey Cassavetes, Benjamin Bratt, Harvey Weinstein, David Carradine Harvey Weinstein, Damon Dash** and after one cocktail party for 150, **Quentin Tarrantino** crashed on a sofa in the main saloon.

Joan Rivers, among others, loves this boat and has chartered it for

her own use (and a host of friends) both here in the Mediterranean and in the Caribbean at Christmastime. Long based in Fort Lauderdale and owned by **Bernie Little**, a major Florida Budweiser distributor - hence the name *Big Eagle* - it was sold after his passing last year to two businessmen from Texas and is now registered in Kingstown, the Grenadines.



The upper deck of the *Big Eagle*

Although I've been at sea very few times in my life, I've loved it since I was a kid reading 19th-century adventure stories of boys who ran off to sea to work on whaling ships. From my port of call on East End Avenue Manhattan, I'm only one block from the river where I can stand all day watching all the boats moving up river and down, wishing I were on any one of them no matter the size, be they sailing or cruisers. So the trip on the *Big Eagle* is a magnificent realization of those daydreams. Not to mention a very luxurious one.



A passing yacht

Last Thursday, flew to Rome, arriving Friday morning. The Rome airport is very quiet at 8 a.m. We were met at the airport and driven to the new marina in Ostia outside Rome where the *Big Eagle* was docked. Once everyone had arrived (our hosts came in from Rome where they'd spent the previous week), we embarked about noontime on a thirteen-hour trip across the

sea to Corsica, a French island that, as you may know, is the birthplace of **Napoleon** and where he spent first exile at Elba.



It was past midnight when the boat dropped anchor in a harbor not far from Porto Vecchio. This is the second time I've traveled to Corsica on the *Big Eagle*. It's a big island although from the sea it looks remote and under populated. I understand that it is a very desirable destination for chic Europeans as well as those travelers looking for a simple bargain holiday. The beaches are usually small and uncrowded. An American looks at the land and thinks it must be an ideal investment since so much of it is undeveloped.



A yacht from Papeete, Tahiti

On Saturday, after a long leisurely breakfast which is served buffet style with lots of homemade croissants, muffins, bagels, fresh cut fruit and yogurt, as well as eggs and bacon to order, and coffees and teas, guests (there are eight of us on board) took to the water. I and one other got on the jetskis to tour the area which was uninhabited save for the occasional stone cottage

tucked in the hillside just above the sea. On this day, the cicada were out and singing so loudly that they could be heard above the noise of the jetski motor fifty yards out in the water.

In the afternoon, we pulled up anchor and cruised down to Porto Vecchio, a village of 15,000 that in summertime increases in population by ten times. Some of us shopped while others toured the streets, bought the newspapers and then sat in one of the cafes in the square.

There is a television on board, although it hasn't been turned on yet. It wasn't until Saturday that we learned that **Martha Stewart** had been sentenced, and there was very little else in the British papers about American life that we call news back home. So there is a strange suspension of what we know as reality back in New York. One is suddenly aware of the lack of anxiety that New Yorkers (at least) live with, out here on the waters of the ancient European and Middle Eastern civilizations. There is a very clear detachment from the New York state of mind.



Cruising along the cliffs outside Bonifacio

After our trip into Porto Vecchio, we traveled farther south and put down anchor of the night. Sunday morning after breakfast, we moved on, cruising about three or four hours down the coast to a quiet spot along the cliffs outside Bonifacio. After swimming and lunch and naps, we took the tender into Bonifacio - an ancient port secreted inside a tall and narrow cove with its main village behind massive walls overlooking the Mediterranean. The trip through the channel leading to the port still has the concrete bunkers built during World War II.

Arriving in port, the visitor is once again enchanted by the simple beauty of a way of life that has undoubtedly changed over the past half century yet still retains a strong sense of life long long ago. There is a long, steep, uphill trek to the fortified village with its spectacular views of the port as well as the Mediterranean, and its narrow ancient streets now populated with cafes, tables set and waiting for sundown when the world comes out to enjoy the end of the day.



Pulling into Bonifacio

One sees - this American anyway - that there is a leisurely, if not entirely carefree, way of life still very much at hand, with a beauty that eludes so many of us in our day to day helter skelter of striving and survival.



L. to r.: Walking uphill towards the fortified village; A cutiepie en route; Looking down at the port of Bonifacio from the fortified village.



L. to r.: Looking out towards the Mediterranean Sea; A street scene; Street flowers.

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