

SEDUCED BY Seabourn

BY SUE WALLACE

Staff have an uncanny knack of producing a cool towel when it's hot by the pool or drawing a bubble bath after a gym workout. Seabourn really is the "caviar of cruising."

All eyes are on the lanky Texan – minus his Stetson hat – as he presents his lady with a blue velvet jewellery box as candles flicker and moonlight dances across the waves. You can hear the hushed ahhs as a “look at me” ruby surrounded by dazzling diamonds tumbles out and is placed around her neck. Impressive? Yes. Out of place? No – after all it's Valentine's Day and the intimate Restaurant 2 aboard *Seabourn Sojourn* is perfect for a romantic dinner.

Content with a perky red rose presented to me by the charming maître d', we embark on a culinary journey with 11 small courses bursting with sensational tastes and flavours that resemble still-life masterpieces.

Dinner starts with a cocktail of crispy foie gras and port wine splash, followed by lobster roll and yoghurt caviar sauce, avocado and tomato salad and seared king salmon with white bean salsa and piquillo coulis.

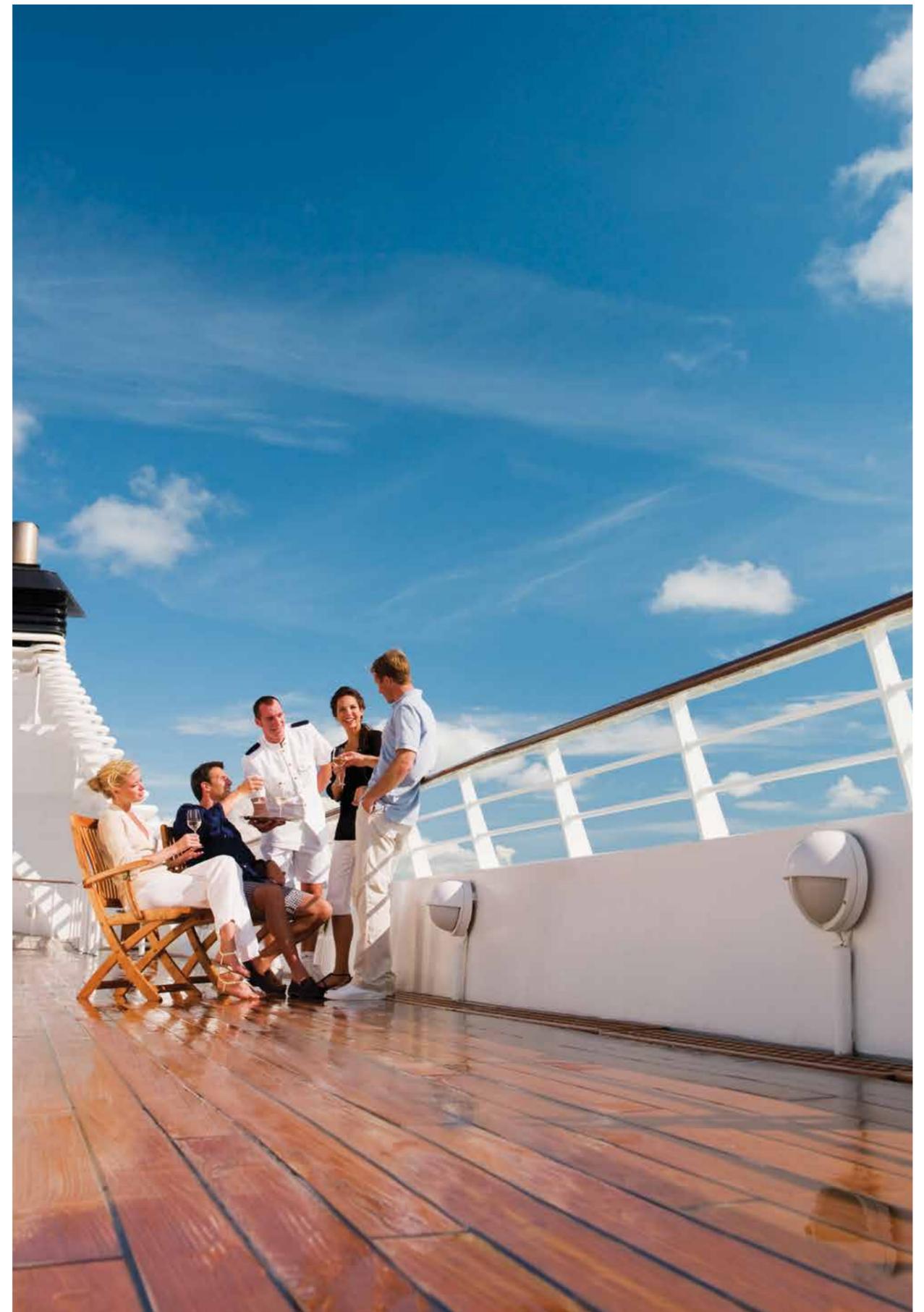
The shiraz-braised oxtail presse, white asparagus with a vanilla cappuccino and

mushroom toast is superb and the drunken John Dory, porcini with Swiss chard and hazelnut vinaigrette, Tuscan veal and mascarpone mashed potato are even more impressive. The sweet finale of dark chocolate ganache, espresso citrus panna cotta and ice-cream brings just as many “oohs” and “aahs” from satisfied diners as that ruby.

Andreas, the charming sommelier from Buenos Aires, offers his expertise in choosing the perfect wine to accompany each course.

It's been an early start on board the 225-suite ship that's home for four nights as it hugs the coast from Melbourne to Adelaide with port stops and excursions at Geelong and picturesque Kangaroo Island. The US\$300 million ship, one of five in the Seabourn fleet, is in Australian waters for its second trip down under, stopping at 11 ports and giving many Australian passengers a taste of what's called the “caviar of cruising”.

It's an apt description, as from the minute you step aboard, you are thoroughly spoilt



and made to feel special. Our beaming steward, Maria, greets us with glasses of bubbles as she shows us our spacious suite followed with offers to assist whenever she can.

The suite is impressive and comes with a marble bathroom with full-size bath, separate shower and twin basins. "Just let me know if you want me to draw a bubble bath and I can stock the fridge with Champagne and anything else you would like," Maria says.

"After a quick dip in one of two pools, we head to the bow of the ship and plunge into a warm Jacuzzi"

There's plenty of room in our suite with a separate dressing room with loads of hanging space and drawers, especially handy if you are on board for a long trip. The king-size bed is super comfortable and there's a sitting area with a sofa, table and chairs and plasma television with an at-call movie channel. Extras such as fluffy robes, slippers, fresh fruit and turndown service all add a personalised touch.

But it's the verandah that catches my eye, it is perfect for lounging back and ocean gazing however with only a few days on board we have a busy schedule. After a quick dip in one of two pools, we head to the bow of the ship and plunge into a



warm Jacuzzi watching the shoreline disappear into the sunset.

Where to have pre-dinner drinks is the next pressing question but we settle on the elegant Observatory Bar, where a talented pianist taps out a familiar love song. It is just one of four open bars where Champagne, spirits, beer and cocktails are flowing without a docket in sight.

Talk is lively and accents vary as we chat to fellow passengers who obviously love cruising. There's Fred, from Brisbane, who confides he's been on 12 Seabourn cruises and Helen from London, who is a veteran cruiser and a Seabourn devotee. She and her husband Samuel, who has just retired, are doing the 116-day world cruise from Los Angeles to Venice. Helen assures they never tire of the ship routine but have to watch their weight due to all the on-board temptations, hence her daily gym visit.

"It's a wonderful way to see the world. You unpack once and that's it, plus the service is amazing and all drinks are inclusive so you can always shout the bar!" she says.

GLOBAL DINING

At the large elegant dining room, known as The Restaurant, we are presented with an excellent menu by Scottish chef Graeme Cockburn. For starters it is braised chicken confit terrine with mixed greens and sesame seed dressing, duck consommé, warm shrimp fritters or raw apple and celery salad.

For mains there's lobster and shrimp-studded calamari with English pea puree and tarragon jus, oven-baked chicken breast wrapped in Parma ham with tarragon and summer vegetables, and a firm favourite called Seabourn Chateaubriand, which is roasted fillet of beef tenderloin with glazed vegetables, bordelaise potatoes and sauce béarnaise. There's also a vegetarian menu option. But that's not all - tonight passengers can enjoy a Swedish dinner at The Colonnade restaurant, an al



fresco dinner at the Patio Grill or order room service from the restaurant menu on their private verandah.

Coffee and tea lovers are also well catered for and there's a constant line up at the Café in Seabourn Square, home to a 24-hour manned concierge desk for tour bookings and information, a library and computer centre.

For those wanting extra pampering, the Spa at Seabourn where the scent of rosewood oil lingers, offers a variety of experiences and treatments including Chinese reflexology, aromatherapy and Thai massages.

Even though it's a full ship you wouldn't know it; there is so much space and few queues.

On my way to the gym early one morning I stumble across a Pilates class and before long I am stretching with the best of them. I then pound the treadmill and head back to my suite exhausted, passing the ever-smiling Maria to find a bubble bath at the ready.

How did she know that's just what I needed - Seabourn intuition I'm guessing - ahh yes no wonder caviar cruising is so addictive.

As for that ruby and diamond necklace - I spot the same one in the opulent jewellery salon, take a peek at the price and decide that lanky Texan must also own an oil well or two. •

Photography by Seabourn

FINESSE AFLOAT

Clockwise from left: Dazzling jewellery displays tempt passengers; The intimate Restaurant2 is perfect for a romantic dinner; Cool off in the pool or relax in the jacuzzi; Fillet mignon is cooked to perfection

Opposite page: Caviar cruising is addictive aboard *Seabourn Sojourn*.

Opening spread: It doesn't take long to settle into life aboard *Seabourn Sojourn* known for its outstanding facilities and intuitive service.



travel facts

SEABOURN

Seabourn's five ships carry between 208 and 458 guests exclusively in ocean-view suites many with verandahs. Complimentary open bars and open seated dining are features as well as award winning cuisine served in a variety of venues.

Seaborn Sojourn carries 450 guests offering the highest space per guest ratio in the cruise industry and the largest spa on any ultra-luxury ship. Features include a library, boutiques, outdoor water sports marina, two outdoor pools and four dining venues, all at no extra charge.

CRUISES

Seabourn is offering a wide range of cruises across the globe this year including its new Extended Explorations program. The program, features cruises throughout Africa, Asia, the South Pacific and South America and Antarctica and will see *Seabourn Sojourn's* sister ship, *Seabourn Odyssey*, return to Australian waters in December.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Seabourn: 132-402; seabourn.com