



East to Eden

Martha's Vineyard softly seduces and embraces, just like a woman

Well, shall we, like, get naked?" asks my tour guide, a zesty, short-haired girl named Lisa. Without waiting for an answer, she strips off her white top, drops her blue shorts and climbs naked up the side of the towering, multicolored Gay Head Cliffs, where about a dozen people of both sexes are lolling in the ooze of the clay baths. I timidly disrobe and clamber after her. Anything for a story.

"Room for two more?" Lisa shouts.

"Sure!" the gang replies in a giddy chorus, and several mud-splattered arms beckon us. Lisa sidles in beside a grinning college kid, and I flop next to her.

Here, on the west coast of Martha's Vineyard, the ancient land of the Wampanoag Indians, everyone has gone native. The man wallowing like a hippo beside us is a computer programmer from Boston; mud has splattered his dark glasses. He has been here for a couple of hours, he says, and has no plans to move. On the beach below, nude couples stroll about or lie sunning themselves, their skin a post-nuclear gray from the mud drying on their bodies. One bearded man dribbles clay onto his girlfriend's chest; a group of high-spirited women draw spirals of red clay on one another's backs.

Up in the baths, we frolic in the mud like children, running our hands through the goop, smearing it over our bodies, lying back in it to gaze up at the radiant sky. The watery clay is the consistency of a three-scoop milk shake, and it feels as a water bed ought to: soft and pillowy and enveloping.

"I'm not usually like this," Lisa says, spreading clay across her cheeks and down her nose. Twenty-six, she quit a job selling software in Manhattan and is taking a vacation from a live-in boyfriend, to be a waitress on Martha's Vineyard for the summer, or, possibly, for longer. Things are up in the air just now. "This island does something to you," she says. "It really does. It opens you up." Then, wearing only a smile, she leans back and immerses herself once more in the soothing embrace of the Vineyard.

By John Sedgwick

GOOD CLEAN FUN: AMONG
THE MANY NATURAL
ATTRACTIONS OF MARTHA'S
VINEYARD ARE THE CLAY
BATHS ATOP GAY HEAD
CLIFFS. THE BATHS ARE
SAID TO BE HEALTHFUL.
BUT THAT'S PROBABLY
BESIDE THE POINT.

Geographically, Martha's Vineyard is only five miles out to sea from Cape Cod, but spiritually it is considerably more distant. When you board the ferry at Woods Hole bound for Martha's Vineyard, islanders say, you leave America behind. They call the surrounding sea "the moat." It keeps out most modern ways and not a few modern inhibitions. Clothes are skimpy, and hitchhiking is safe. There are no stoplights on the island, no billboards, and, as far as anyone can remember, there have been no murders.

Islanders speak of the long winters, culminating in "Funny February" and "Mad March." And it is true that, in winter, alcoholism is so extreme and pervasive that one resident says you need a "ten handicap" to get into AA. But the island follows its own logic year-round. While one thinks of Martha's Vineyard as consisting of handsome sea captains' houses and weather-beaten cottages by the sea, a substantial number of its houses are tiny Munchkinland structures done in Carpenter Gothic and painted in pastel colors. The island has its own holidays—Illumination Night, when jack-o'-lanterns are set out in August, and Cranberry Day, to kick off the cranberry harvest in September. And for years, the island supported a substantial deaf population because of excessive inbreeding; many islanders learned to communicate by sign language, and though the deaf inhabitants have since died, some elders still find their fingers twitch when they think of a word.

Except for these stunning cliffs by Gay Head on the southwestern corner of the island and some nice beaches, the landscape itself is not all that striking, although it has been much painted by Thomas Hart Benton and other artists who have summered on the island. The wind whips so fiercely off the water in the winter that it



SEPARATED FROM THE MAINLAND BY FIVE MILES OF WATER AND CENTURIES OF HABIT, MARTHA'S VINEYARD RESISTS THE NEW. ABOVE, A NAUTICAL SCENE AT VINEYARD HAVEN. UNLIKE MANY OF THE DISCREET HOMES ON THE ISLAND, THE HOUSE AT LEFT STANDS PINK AND PROUD.



leaves the white pine and the scrub oak shrunken and bent over; trees never grow up here. Where it has not been cleared for farmland or development, the terrain is a thicket of high-bush blueberry, beach plum and poison ivy, as well as the grapevines that grow like kudzu and give the island its name. The vegetation is beautiful only to the celebrities who rely on it to discourage the unwelcome.

No, it is not the landscape but the spirit of the island that is its true attraction—a soft seductiveness that entices and enfolds and lulls, much as the clay baths do. It's not her body but the way she moves.

Yes, she. It is *Martha's* Vineyard, not Tom's or Dick's or Harry's, and as if to underscore the point, the twenty-mile-wide island is shaped like an inverted reproductive tract. Others have sensed the Vineyard's female nature. "The island is voluptuous and warm and nurturing," says Robert Brustein, the artistic director of Harvard's American Repertory Theater and a longtime summer resident. Psychologist Carol Gilligan, who summers at Gay Head, feels there is something feminine in the "nonhierarchical" nature of the relationships between the diverse communities on the island. "There's a sensual quality to the atmosphere," says Peter Feibleman, a novelist who first came to the island to visit Lillian Hellman in 1963 and now makes the Vineyard his permanent home. "It has sexy air."

3 PERFECT VACATIONS

And too many have been seduced. The year-round population, hovering at about 5,000 until 1970, has climbed to 12,000. During the same period, the summer population has shot up from 42,000 to 90,000, jamming ferries, crowding roads, straining services and getting mauled on mopeds at an appalling clip. (One recent summer, 119 moped drivers landed in the hospital.) And this doesn't include day-trippers and hotel guests. Property values have soared in recent years. With higher prices have come fancier designs, bringing a vague and, to some, frightening Hamptons look to certain corners of the island. Multimillionaire Edward Redstone's \$3.9-million house at Makonikey Head, for instance, consists of three hexagons, all glass on the seaside, with curtains to pull as the sun shifts. His late wife's bathroom has a sunken marble tub and such nice views that she had moved in her desk to make the john her office.

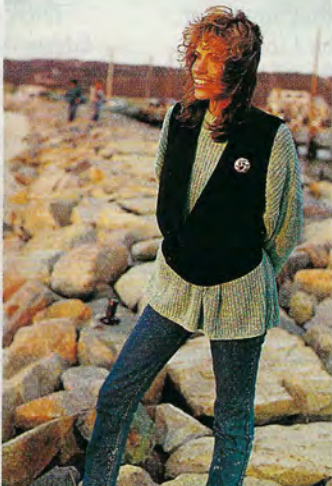
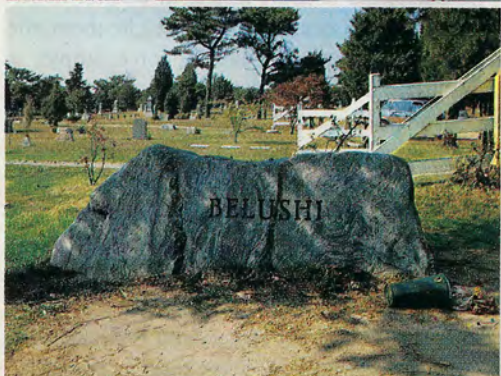
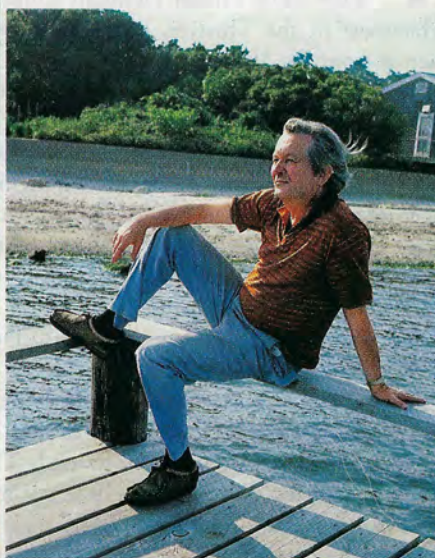
WHILE THE ISOLATION OF
MARTHA'S VINEYARD IS
DEEP ENOUGH TO HAVE
PRODUCED A COLONY OF
DEAF PEOPLE—THE
CASUALTIES OF
INBREEDING—IT ALSO
ATTRACTS A BEVY OF
PRIVACY-SEEKING

NOTABLES. AMONG THEM,
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
WALTER CRONKITE, MIKE
WALLACE, WILLIAM STYRON,
JAMES TAYLOR AND CARLY
SIMON. A SIMPLE STONE
MEMORIAL MARKS THE
GRAVE OF JOHN BELUSHI
ON ABEL'S HILL.

But, aside from the style, the sheer quantity of the new construction distresses most islanders. "It used to be you'd look out your window and see a house here and a house there," says one resident. "Now you look out and see house, house, house, house, house, house."

The island was discovered in 1602 by Bartholomew Gosnold, an English explorer who'd come in search of sassafras—which was then thought to be a cure for syphilis—and named by him after his daughter, wife or, possibly, mother-in-law (accounts vary). It was 250 years before the island experienced its first building boom. God was responsible for that one, drawing thousands of Methodist penitents to the town of Oak Bluffs for vast camp meetings in the mid-1800s. Martha's Vineyard being Martha's Vineyard, the revivalism gradually evolved into social get-togethers and finally into summer vacationing pure and simple in thousands of those tiny Carpenter Gothic cottages on minuscule lots.

The current boom is the island's second. It started around 1970, and this time sexual rumors caused it, rumors compounded by publicity. Islanders trace the population explosion directly to Teddy Kennedy's ill-fated midnight drive with Mary Jo Kopechne across the Chappaquiddick bridge on the balmy, moonlit



PERSONALITIES: PETER SIMON; OTHERS: GEORGE LANGE

night of July 18, 1969. The tragedy put Martha's Vineyard on the map, and, in reporting the story, few writers failed to mention the gorgeous local color—the Vineyard's peaceful nature, its many resident celebrities and its out-of-the-way location. In the end, the scandal did more to popularize the Vineyard than its chamber of commerce ever could.

What Kennedy began, the island's own James Taylor continued, putting out his platinum record *Sweet Baby James* a year later. And then, in 1975, appeared the blockbuster movie *Jaws*, filmed on location in the island's charming fishing villages of Menemsha, Edgartown and Oak Bluffs, and Martha's Vineyard was changed forever.

In one of the more piquant ironies of Vineyard life, the celebrities are involved in the fight against development—raising money and consciousness through various benefit appearances. But, of course, if they really wanted to slow development, they would take the next boat out. The celebs will never go, though. They have become as much a part of the island as the beetlebung trees.

Ever since Lillian Hellman came with Dashiell Hammett in the Thirties, settling, as was their wont, across from the Vineyard Haven library, the island has drawn, in fairness, the better sort of celebrities, not low-rent TV "personalities" but individuals of some genuine accomplishment—Beverly Sills, three Yale presidents, Yo Yo Ma. And the island favors them in return by ignoring them. For instance, Franco Modigliani, who lives in Chilmark, won the Nobel prize for economics in 1985, as his neighbor Robert Solow did two years later. No one paid any attention. "We think of Franco the same as we did before," says local historian Art Railton. "He's still a lousy sailor."

The island is perfectly suited for lying low, with its labyrinth of unmarked sandy lanes and that tangle of vegetation to keep out the uninvited. The Lindberghs came to Martha's Vineyard to hide out after their baby was kidnapped and murdered. More recently, Kitty Dukakis came here to recover quietly from spinal-cord surgery during the presidential campaign last summer.

The unwritten peace treaty between the people and the People has been violated in recent memory only twice. King Hussein and Queen Noor had the gall to arrive one afternoon in a fleet of Sikorsky helicopters, surrounded by CIA, Secret Service and their own bodyguards, all armed with sawed-off shotguns and Uzi semi-automatics. And Richard Dreyfuss, who had already set off the locals by appearing in an all-black celebrity outfit at the local high-profile watering hole the Oyster Bar, once walked into an Oak Bluffs clothing store called

Take It Easy Baby, stripped off his sunglasses so that he would be sure to be recognized and then, when the patrons started to gawk, loudly insisted that the room be cleared so that he could shop in peace.

The celebrities are so much a part of the island, and yet so much above it all, too, that it is helpful to think of them in the aggregate as a kind of royal family. In this regard, Jackie Onassis reigns supreme. She is the Queen Mum, a benign, reclusive eminence, glimpsed only occasionally as she ventures out by

While the mass media elsewhere are hurtling their audiences into the future, the island's radio station and newspaper are holding theirs back.

bicycle or examines the produce at the annual agricultural fair. Outsiders can view her 400-acre estate by Squibnocket pond only by airplane. (Designed to her specifications in the style of a modest farmhouse, it has guest quarters built into a silo that she had to petition the zoning board to allow, since it exceeded the height limit on the island. The place itself is so mousy and unassuming that, in their curiosity, the islanders have had only the bathrooms' heated towel racks to seize upon as subjects of gossip.)

Carly Simon, in Chilmark, is queen. Indeed, she views herself in that role and doesn't so much show up at Cronig's grocery store as, in the words of one observer, "make an appearance" there. She felt so personally affronted that

McDonald's was considering installing a franchise on the island a few years back that she emerged from seclusion to lead the fight against it.

Ex-hubby James Taylor is still king, even after their divorce. He plowed so much of his record profits back into island property that the Vineyard is practically his kingdom, anyway. He has also made such kingly gestures as buying a garage in Tisbury for his grease-monkey pals to work in.

Then there is the court. Old salt Walter Cronkite of Edgartown is the admiral of the royal navy. Tennis buff Mike Wallace is prince of racquets. Rose Styron is poet laureate. Art Buchwald is court jester, of course, available with a quip for any occasion. His article about the frustrations of owning a private beach, for example, is often cited as the final word on the subject.

John Belushi was, like randy Prince Andy, a knight-errant, a lovable rascalion. Curiously, the island had a calming effect on him. For all the time Belushi spent here, Bob Woodward, while researching *Wired*, was able to discover only one example of scandalous behavior, when John tried to jack up Carly Simon's dress at a party at William and Rose Styron's. Mostly, Belushi would just buy "Conan" comic books, eat oysters and bodysurf with Dan Aykroyd at his private

(continued on page 382)

MARTHA'S VINEYARD

jacket and tie, something regarded with incredulity elsewhere on the island. Indeed, loyalty to a certain accessory is so much a deciding factor that the two sides of the island might better be called "Socks" and "No Socks."

Islanders aren't sure how this confusing business of up and down came to be. Anne Simon, in her otherwise authoritative book about the Vineyard, *No Island Is an Island*, argues that "up" refers to the height of the Gay Head Cliffs, the island's highest point, and "down" to the flat plains of the northeast. More likely, though, "up" refers to the higher longitude of the western part of the island. Whatever the reason, up and down do mark the essential compass points for Vineyard society.

The first thing that one has to understand about Martha's Vineyard is that, socially, economically and politically, it is not an island at all but something more like a continent, a continent with lots of squabbling nations in residence. Not long ago, when each town still had its own high school, it was unthinkable for a girl in one school to go out with a boy in another. If it ever happened, it was the duty of the girl's brother to punch the boy out. There is a regional high school now, but in other respects the towns continue to refuse to have anything to do with one another. They

maintain separate police departments, fire departments, sewer systems and identities.

Edgartown came first, with its shipping captains and their proud Federal-style houses. Nowadays, with its flower boxes full of geraniums and its oodles of white paint, the town looks as though it was zoned for prim. Emily Post lived here for years. The fortunes of Edgartownians, once tied to whales, are now linked to the Yacht Club, a large breezy place on the water that is so hoity-toity that it maintains an exchange of privileges only with such eminence as the New York Yacht Club. The Edgartown Yacht Club regularly fires off a cannon at dusk, and one might think that the club is not so much marking the passing of another glorious day as it is dismissing the sun from further duty.

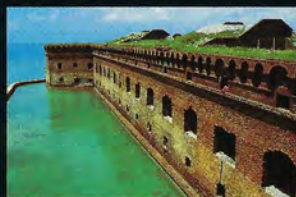
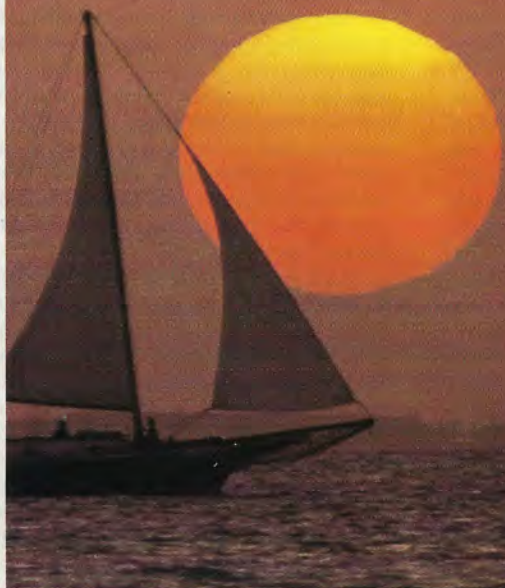
The only sensible thing for free-thinking people to do was to leave town, and they did. So, much of the exploration of the island is due less to an urge for discovery than to a need for flight. Suffragette Lucy Stone, in the 1890s, was among the first of these pioneers, but Socialist Eugene Debs, in the 1920s, was the most significant, since he and his set, which included the ACLU's Roger Baldwin, Walter Lippmann and Thomas Hart Benton, determined the correct up-island life-style for decades to come. Debs and some of his

friends set themselves up in an old farm they called the Barn House or, when they were in their cups, the Bar Nouse. They slept in renovated chicken coops, ate and drank together in the barn and—this was the scandalous part—bathed naked together at the beach.

The Barn House still stands, just up the road from Chilmark's private beach, Lucy Vincent, its membership made up of descendants of the original Barn House crowd. They eat supper communally and sing rounds as they do the dishes. They have curtailed the nude swimming, however, for the sake of the children.

Nowadays, few political dissidents can afford property in Chilmark, where prices start at a half million. During the summer, the town is populated largely by psychiatrists. But the bohemian tradition remains, chiefly via the all-important outdoor showers and the continued nude bathing at Lucy Vincent, a parking sticker for which (it is open only to Chilmarkians) is the closest thing to a vanity plate on the island. Few Chilmark celebs strip, though, as they're not eager to find their picture in a skin mag. Still, Peter Simon, Carly's brother, remembers the nude beach as a great place to find a date in his youth. "You got to see the whole woman," he says. "That started a lot of romances."

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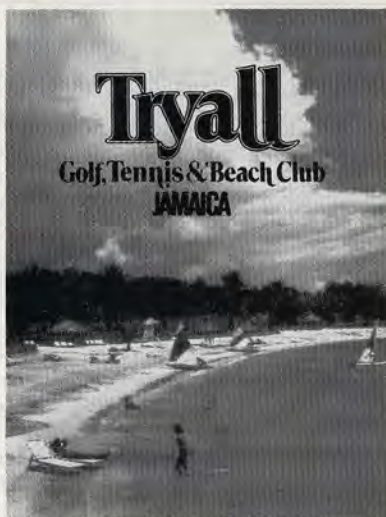


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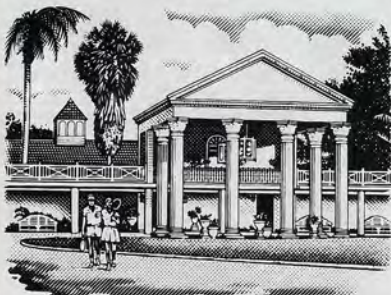


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MARTHA'S VINEYARD

Chilmark and Edgartown form the two poles of island life, the up and the down, the raw and the cooked, the bare-ankled and the socked. Yet clustered around them are important variations on each theme. Gay Head, to Chilmark's west, is a wilder and more remote version of Chilmark. The Wampanoag Indians still live out there, and because their land claims were held in question for several years, it took a more adventurous sort to plunk down large sums for property, considering the possibility that the title might never clear. West Tisbury, more accessible, is more conventional; it has a general store.

The variety is greater at the other pole, as each of the down-island towns has its own social subdivisions and sub-subdivisions. Tisbury's West Chop, for instance, is less a neighbor of Vineyard Haven next door than it is of Hobe Sound, Florida. Ask someone in Chilmark about West Chop and he'll roll his eyes and say, "Oh, *them*." West Chop has its own tennis club, its own real-estate agent and its own zip code, since it maintains its own post office, right by the courts, for its few hundred residents. Some people confuse the West Choppers with the Edgartown crowd, but that's a mistake. "West Chop is what Edgartown aspires to but covers over with too much white paint," *Martha's Vineyard Times* reporter-at-large Jib Ellis explains. "Muffy and Buffy are in Edgartown. This is Stephanie and Deirdre." The families in West Chop aren't from the *Fortune* 500, they're from the *Fortune* 50: the Douglasses of IBM, the Plunketts of Procter & Gamble. Wasp purity is maintained by channeling all candidates for real estate through the private tennis club, which serves the same role as a governing board does in a Manhattan cop, screening out the undesirable. Here, fame is no asset. "Joe Cocker would never make it," one resident says. "Never."

East Chop, across the harbor in Oak Bluffs, is the mirror image of West Chop only to the uninitiated. "The East Choppers have fun and smile while doing it," explains Ellis. "That's unheard of in West Chop." Says another islander, "The West Chop crowd doesn't talk to anybody, but the East Choppers talk to a few people." East Chop maintains a tennis club, a beach club and a yacht club, and the effect is to dilute the ethnic purity to an extent that would raise the eyebrows of their brethren across the harbor. Marty Nadler, a writer for *Happy Days* and *Laverne and Shirley*, lives in East Chop. To a West Chopper, that's scary.

Oak Bluffs was once one of the largest black resorts in the country, and it is still conspicuously colored on an island that is otherwise as white as coconut butter, although nonwhites do not form a majority. "Blacks are more noticeable, know what I

mean?" says Dorothy West, a writer of the Harlem Renaissance movement, who started coming to Oak Bluffs in the Twenties. Paul Robeson and former U.S. Senator Edward Brooke used to have houses here.

And, finally, Vineyard Haven is the island's literary sanctum. William and Rose Styron, Art Buchwald and John Hersey all live in a little cluster about Lillian Hellman's old house, now the home of novelist Peter Feibleman. The presence of these writers most likely accounts for the location of the island's best bookstore, Bunch of Grapes, in their town. The bookstore regularly hosts autograph parties and at least once has gone quite a bit further to launch a new book. That was for Hersey's *Blues*, his account of the island's bluefishermen. When Bunch of Grapes found itself short of the title, which it was sure would be a big hit on the island, it called bookstores throughout the Northeast and bought their stock in such quantities it accidentally put the book on the *New York Times* best-seller list.

All the islanders, however, have a common enemy to unite them, and that is time. Martha's Vineyard does not exist in the present. That is one of its joys. The ferryboat introduces a lag of time far greater than the forty-five minutes it takes to make the passage. Fashions come late to the island, if they ever come at all. Each segment of island society is lost in its own time warp—the Chilmark hippies obviously in the Sixties, the West Choppers in the Thirties, the Edgartownians around 1800 and the Gay Head crowd somewhere before time began. While the mass media elsewhere are hurling their audiences into the future, the island's one radio station and its leading newspaper are holding theirs back. WMVY plays the Beatles, Dylan, the Stones and, of course, Carly Simon and James Taylor, as if the songs were still Top 40. And the *Vineyard Gazette* is deliberately a throwback. About three inches wider than any other newspaper in America, with rules between the columns, an elaborate cluster-of-grapes logo, heavy use of woodcuts and no color photography, the paper looks as though it could have been published by Sam Adams. "If slam-dancing came to the island," says editor Richard Reston, "we wouldn't cover it."

And that is the way the islanders want it. Development, I suspect, isn't alarming simply because it means more crowds and congestion, nuisances as those things are. Tucked in their hideaways, few residents would notice. Development is alarming because it hauls Martha's Vineyard into the present, and that is wholly unacceptable. A recent controversy involves the construction of a small shopping center in Tisbury. Studies showed that most residents

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TURKISH DELIGHTS

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For all of Istanbul's historical and retail wonders, nothing compares with the visceral satisfactions of Turkish baths and Turkish food. I spent more than one afternoon wallowing in the hot mists of the ancient *Çagalöglü* (pronounced *jowl-o-loo*) Baths, where I was pressed, cracked, scraped, soaped, rinsed and reassembled to a squeaky fare-thee-well by one of the Conan-like attendants. Lurching out the door like a shiny Mercedes off the conveyor belt of an L.A. car wash, I would reckon with my newly invigorated appetite. If dinner was far off, I would duck into one of the typical meat houses in the Blue Mosque area for a cheap plate of *köfte*, lamb grilled to greasy perfection with onions, salt and pepper. There are many sleek fish restaurants with big picture windows overlooking the Bosphorus, of which I found Palet 2, Abdullah's, Facyo and the restaurant at the deluxe *Büyük Tarabya* Hotel to be of comparable elegance and quality. Since the days were so full, I was relieved that Istanbul's nightlife proved to be less than compelling, although the elaborate nightclub shows at the *Keravansaray* and the panoramic *Galata Tower*, with their buoyant belly and folk dancers, get your tourist juices flowing.

On the evenings when I sought sanctuary from the city's hurly-burly, the lofty, high-ceilinged dining hall of the *Pera Palas* was a comforting alternative, and I could usually count on finding my Margaret Rutherford look-alike and Mildred. The house *kabob* (thin strips of beef, peppers

and tomatoes in a pool of warm yogurt), stuffed green peppers and a bottle of Turkey's good *Doluca* red wine were my favorite combination, marred only by the *Muzak*-like strains of "Spanish Eyes," courtesy of the house organist. As dessert was being served, a belly dancer would make her appearance, undulating sweetly around the tables and looking alarmingly as if she were one of my Long Island cousins stepping out of a Bob Hope-Bing Crosby movie.

After dinner, I would retire to the bar to commune with those fish from outer space or to chat with a German diplomat in black tie about Turkey's overtures to the European Economic Community. On a rare night when the bar was empty, I wandered over to the big shopping avenue, *Istiklal Street*, a block from the hotel, and found myself sitting in a *Woody Allen* movie. The film was *Radio Days*, shown in English with very creative Turkish subtitles, and I was intrigued to find out how a Turkish audience would relate to this very ethnic New York film. As expected, I found myself laughing alone a lot, until a sequence that concerned, oddly enough, *Yom Kippur*. When one of the characters complained that fasting was a conspiracy against the proletariat, a wave of appreciative laughter swept over the Muslim audience, who were in the midst of Ramadan, their monthlong high holy days of fasting and abstinence. It was this moment, more than any other during my stay in Istanbul, that made me want to return to Turkey. I do not subscribe to the song that insists it's a small world after all, but at such times I feel that, at the very least, it's a negotiable one. ■

Jan Stuart is chief drama critic at 7 Days.

MARTHA'S VINEYARD

(continued from page 374) strand, which he dubbed *Skull Beach*. Unlike *Dreyfuss*, he used to sit for hours in *Take It Easy Baby*, which was owned by a friend, to watch the customers make their selections. He is buried on the island, in a grave marked by an Indian cairn and a stone slab inscribed "BELUSHI," in an ancient cemetery on *Abel's Hill*. The grave had to be moved closer to the entrance because so many of his fans came by for a visit, and they still regularly leave cocaine, roach clips, even money for him. His publicist once explained that the island was selected because it was "the only place where John ever slept well."

As on that other congested, celebrity-filled island to the south, there are two essential directions on *Martha's Vineyard*: up and down. But it is typical of the Vineyard that, to outsiders at least, these bearings make absolutely no sense at all. On a map, "up-island" lies vaguely to the southwest

and involves the rural, sparsely settled towns of *Chilmark*, *Gay Head* and *West Tisbury*; "down-island" heads northeast and includes the more densely populated towns of *Edgartown*, *Tisbury* and *Oak Bluffs*. In the all-important social sense, each portion of the island considers itself "up," although the up-islanders are probably the shrillest voices in the chorus. And each side of the question treats the other as the butt of its jokes. *Chilmarkers* deride "those *Edgartown* people in their red pants"; *Edgartownians* refer only to "those *Chilmark* people," finding the rest unspeakable. Sartorially, "up" is actually down, and "down" up. *Bohemians* by nature, the up-islanders dress down, way down, quite frequently *all* the way down, as at the clay baths in *Gay Head* and at the island's only official nude beach, in *Chilmark*. Proper villagers, the down-islanders, by contrast, instinctively dress up, occasionally to the point of actually donning a

would regard one-stop shopping as a convenience on the island. As it is, many islanders have to go to the mainland for their purchases. They don't, however, want a *shopping center*. That smacks too much of modern times.

I suspect that it will take some time before Martha's Vineyard joins the modern world. It is too determinedly backward to change all that much. As they have been for decades, most houses are marked only by a name painted on a mailbox at the nearest main road, which can be as much as a half mile distant. Up-island, especially, few houses have street numbers and few roads have signs. Everyone, in effect, is hidden—from others, even from themselves. One of the island police's biggest problems is that most people making emergency calls can't say where they are. As far as the police are concerned, they might as well be nowhere at all.

I got to know Lisa, my tour guide, better over the week of my visit as we traveled together about the island during the day and shared an occasional drink at night. I met her secret island lover, Danny. He was a rich kid from Virginia who, like Lisa, had come to the island to find himself. He was a year-rounder, working winters as a carpenter and summers as a waiter. He and Lisa lived at opposite ends of the island, but they spent as much time together as they could, sunning themselves on the nude beach at Lucy Vincent and having what Lisa called "great sex."

Lisa loved the island freedom. The problem was that her Manhattan boyfriend, a Venezuelan named Eduardo, was beginning to get suspicious. He told her she sounded "distant" on the phone. He'd called Lisa's sister to discuss the situation, and now the sister was calling Lisa to ask what was going on. More complicated still, Lisa's landlady at her boardinghouse in Oak Bluffs had grown frustrated with her, too. In exchange for a discount on rent, Lisa was supposed to help out around the place, but she hadn't been doing her part. Lisa thought the landlady, whose husband visited from the mainland on weekends, was simply jealous that Lisa was obviously having a good time all week long. She hadn't bothered to hide the fact that her bed was almost never slept in.

When I came by to see Lisa one morning toward the end of my stay, I found her looking ashen-faced. "I'm leaving the island," she told me. Eduardo had arrived the night before and burst in on her at work in the middle of her shift. She'd left the restaurant early, and the two of them had stayed up all night discussing "everything"—Danny included. Eduardo was out now, she told me, but he wanted to meet me when he got back. "Me?" I said,

amazed. "Yeah," she said, "I told him all about you." I looked at her suspiciously. "Oh, don't worry," she said. "Eduardo won't hurt you."

In a few minutes, I heard the sound of footsteps on the stairs, and Eduardo appeared. He was taller than I had expected and unshaven. When Lisa introduced us, he smiled grimly at me, and he asked me to go for a walk with him. I couldn't say no.

Out on the street in the warm air, he asked me about Lisa. What had happened to her? Should he marry her? Would she ever straighten out? It was like a scene out of a French movie. He'd known her for years, I for days. How the hell should I know? I guess he wanted an island perspective on her, as though that was different from his view from the mainland. I did my best to reassure him. "It's the Vineyard," I said, parroting what Lisa had told me days before in the mud baths. "It makes everyone a little loose. Give her time, and she'll be back to normal." But I was just being kind. In my heart, I was not so sure.

"I was afraid of this," he said gloomily. "I never should have let her come."

We returned to her room, and Lisa gave me a hug good-bye. She took a ferry off the island that afternoon. She returned home to her father in Pennsylvania to think her life over, while Eduardo went back to New York to await her decision about their future together.

I received a letter from Lisa a few days after I got home. The first part was written on the plane from the Vineyard: "A chapter in my life was completed today," she began. "It had a beginning, middle and end." She detailed the stages: first, the abrupt shift from "city life" to "island life," then "experimenting with anything and everything that was fun and free: clay baths, nude beaches, free sex and lots of wine," and, finally, the expulsion from Eden—getting "sent home" by her boyfriend to "get my shit together or get lost."

The second part was written from her father's house a few days later, after she'd had a chance to reflect. To my surprise, she'd decided she loved Eduardo after all. "I will enjoy his company back in N.Y.C. in the fall," she declared. "If I do any more venturing, I'll do it with him."

At first I was surprised that she was so quickly picking up where she had left off. But then I realized that it was probably inevitable. I figured she'd go back to that job selling software, too. Her life was falling right back into place. She'd left the Vineyard and come back to America. ■

John Sedgwick wrote about Harvard's Porcellian Club in the November 1988 GQ. He is the author of The Peaceable Kingdom: A Year in the Life of America's Oldest Zoo (Morrow).

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