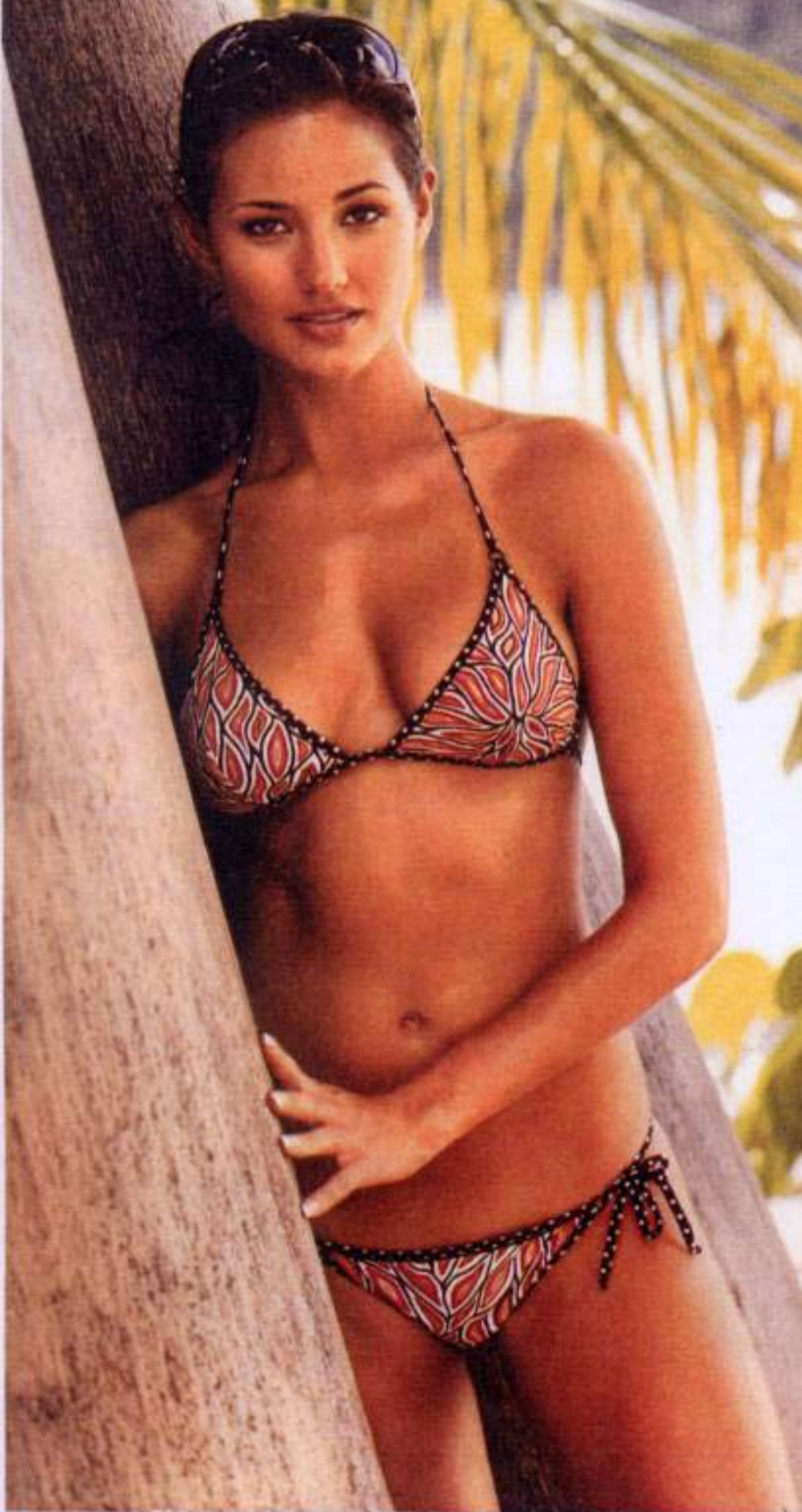


Town & Country TRAVEL

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Mr. Know-How

Wedding and party planner par excellence Colin Cowie opens his little black book and shares some of his top addresses from around the world.

by Malachy Duffy

Given the infinite number of details Colin Cowie copes with in planning the myriad weddings, fêtes and corporate events he's known for, his office is surprisingly clutter-free. Housed in a loft looking out on downtown Manhattan, this party central seems more like the contemporary sanctum of a corporate magnate. But Cowie is definitely not dressed for that part. Gym slim, he is arrayed in a light suede coat, merino sweater, flared trousers and wickedly pointed shoes—all in shades of brown. The phone rings constantly, keeping the famously imperturbable Cowie in touch with his roster of clients, which has included Plácido Domingo, Jerry Seinfeld and Oprah Winfrey. Whether he's helping to plan a surprise birthday celebration at a safari camp or a house party on a small Greek island for eighty-one near and dear friends, the South African-born Cowie clearly loves the jetting about. He recently took a break to divulge some of his preferred places and things all over the world, from venerable standards to brand-new discoveries.

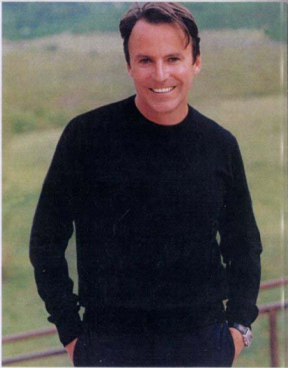
Favorite Parisian hotel: "The Park Hyatt Paris-Vendôme is a great contemporary hotel, with the best bathrooms in Paris; like those you find in Japan, each is divided into a dry area and a wet area with a shower. The hotel also has delicious food and a marvelously convenient location, right on Place Vendôme."

Favorite Parisian restaurant: "L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon. In true French style, the door has no handle outside. When the staff are ready to seat you, they let you in. But once you cross the threshold, they treat you like royalty. My suggestion is to go for brunch on Sunday; then you won't wait more than twenty minutes."

Great new discovery: "I just returned from an extraordinary trip to St. Petersburg. It was a complete cultural journey."

Favorite hotel in St. Petersburg: "The best place to stay is the Grand Hotel Europe. It has a superb breakfast buffet, which you need to fortify yourself with before seeing all the fabulous sights."

How to visit the Hermitage: "You have to give it three days. The first day you study just the floors, the second day just the ceilings. On the third day you need Xanax or you will have a heart



When traveling in Mexico, Colin Cowie, above, likes to stay at one of the Costa Careyes's villas, right.

attack from the remarkable quality of the art. The quantity of major works in such an amazing setting came as a total surprise to me. I have never seen so many Rembrandts."

Best St. Petersburg restaurant: "The Noble Nest, in the Yusupov Palace's tea garden, is small but charming. It serves Russian-Continental cuisine and has the city's top caviar and vodka service and a superb wine list."

Favorite palace in St. Petersburg: "Oranienbaum, on the southern shore of the Gulf of Finland, the summer residence of the future tsar Peter III. It has a room whose walls are paneled in bugle beads. During midsummer, when the sun doesn't set, the interior is luminescent."

Great undiscovered place: "I love the simplicity of Mexico's Costa Careyes community. On the Playa Rosa beach, there's a little restaurant of the same name that gets fresh fish every day, and that's what they serve. There are just fifty houses, and the owners and renters represent about twenty nationalities. People rent a casita and bring their staff so they can entertain between Christmas and New Year's; it's just a series of parties."

Next big destination: "Definitely Croatia, which fills in the gap between Italy and the Greek islands [see "Croatia," page 120]. It's

wonderful because you can get on a boat in Venice, go down the Dalmatian coast and end up in Greece, another of my favorites."

Favorite Greek isle: "Mykonos, one of the world's best places."

Favorite hotel on Mykonos: "I love the Belvedere Hotel, which is run by the handsome brothers Tasos and Nikolas Ioannidis. Its restaurant, Matsuhisa Mykonos, is a branch of Nobu."

Favorite restaurants on Mykonos: "Katrin's, the island's finest restaurant, is famous for its Chateaubriand. And at Kiki's, just above Agios Sostis beach, you eat fantastic barbecued chicken and pork chops on the patio of what was once a private residence."

Best shopping on Mykonos: "Constantinos Skarmoutsos is a legendary figure on the island; he wears and sells the most extravagant jewelry. He does not have a store but sells by appointment. Gofas also has terrific jewelry, and it's the place to go for watches. I've bought wonderful carpets at South Coast Kilims and Carpets."

Favorite beach on Mykonos: "Panamos Beach. A restaurant there serves the most delicious grilled lobster you will ever eat."

Favorite resort in the world: "Las Ventanas, near Cabo San Lucas, which has the most exceptional service in Mexico. I once lost a button on my shirt, went back to my room and found a customized sewing kit with a note saying 'Dear Mr. Cowie: We've created a sewing kit according to the contents of your wardrobe. Please let us know should you require anything else.'"

Favorite African resort: "Singita, in South Africa, is by far my favorite game lodge. I never miss a game ride there, ever! I highly recommend all the lodges—Ebony, Boulders and Lebombo. And a fourth, Sweni, has just opened. This past Christmas I rented Castleton, once the owner's camp, and thoroughly enjoyed it."

Favorite Cape Town hotels: "The Cape Grace, which is located right on the water, has a two-bedroom suite that I love. It's on the third floor, with an adjoining patio, and is very well appointed. My other favorite is the Mount Nelson, a grand colonial hotel."

Favorite Cape Town restaurant: "Pigalle is the place to go for grilled *peri-peri* prawns and crayfish. I think of it as the best seafood in Cape Town."

Best side trips from Cape Town: "The drive on Chapman's Peak is stunning, as is a ride up Cable Mountain. Robben Island, the prison where Nelson Mandela was held, is incredibly moving. And in the warm weather, you have to see all the gorgeous people at Clifton's First, Second and Third beaches."

Jet-lag tip: "Here is my magic formula. Once on the plane, I eat as soon as I can; then I take ten milligrams of Ambien—you cannot drink alcohol with Ambien, but I never drink alcohol while flying anyway. When I get to my destination, I go to bed for two or three hours, then go to the gym and do a full workout. That night I stay up as late as possible and take ten milligrams of Ambien. On each of the following two nights, I take five milligrams. Also, get Airborne, an effervescent drink with vitamins that boosts your immune system. I have two before I get on the plane, two on the plane and two when I get off."

WHAT TO WEAR WHEN TRAVELING?

ONE WORD:
'CASHMERE.'
I ALSO BRING A BIG PASHMINA."

How to deal with airline food: "I refuse to eat the food on local flights. Instead, I have my housekeeper or the hotel I'm staying at pack up something for me. The Peninsula Beverly Hills has special boxes and an airplane menu for private and commercial planes."

How to make a hotel room home: "I always bring a scented candle, as well as my laptop—which has two speakers, so I have my music—and a digital camera. I download pictures to keep my family and friends updated. And I like having a big bowl of fresh fruit in my room."

Packing tips: "I pack everything in zippered bags. Shirts together, slacks together, larger bags for suits. When I get to my destination, I just put the bags in the drawers or the closet. You can get the bags at Hold Everything, Gracious Home or Bed Bath & Beyond. If I'm going to several destinations, I overnight a lot of what I wear and rely on carry-on bags."

Favorite way to travel: "Whatever is the quickest and most comfortable. I think British Airways' first class has brought glamour back to travel. They serve the meal on a silver charger, with cobalt blue china and a choice of two peppers and two salts."

What to wear when traveling: "One word: 'cashmere.' I wear cashmere socks, I bring a cashmere sweater, and I also bring a big pashmina, which I can use as a blanket or as a neck roll."

Fashion tip: "I always travel with four or five pairs of dark glasses. You can use them to reinvent an outfit in minutes. If I'm traveling for a couple of days, I'll bring mostly black or brown. On longer trips I bring black and brown." ❧

