

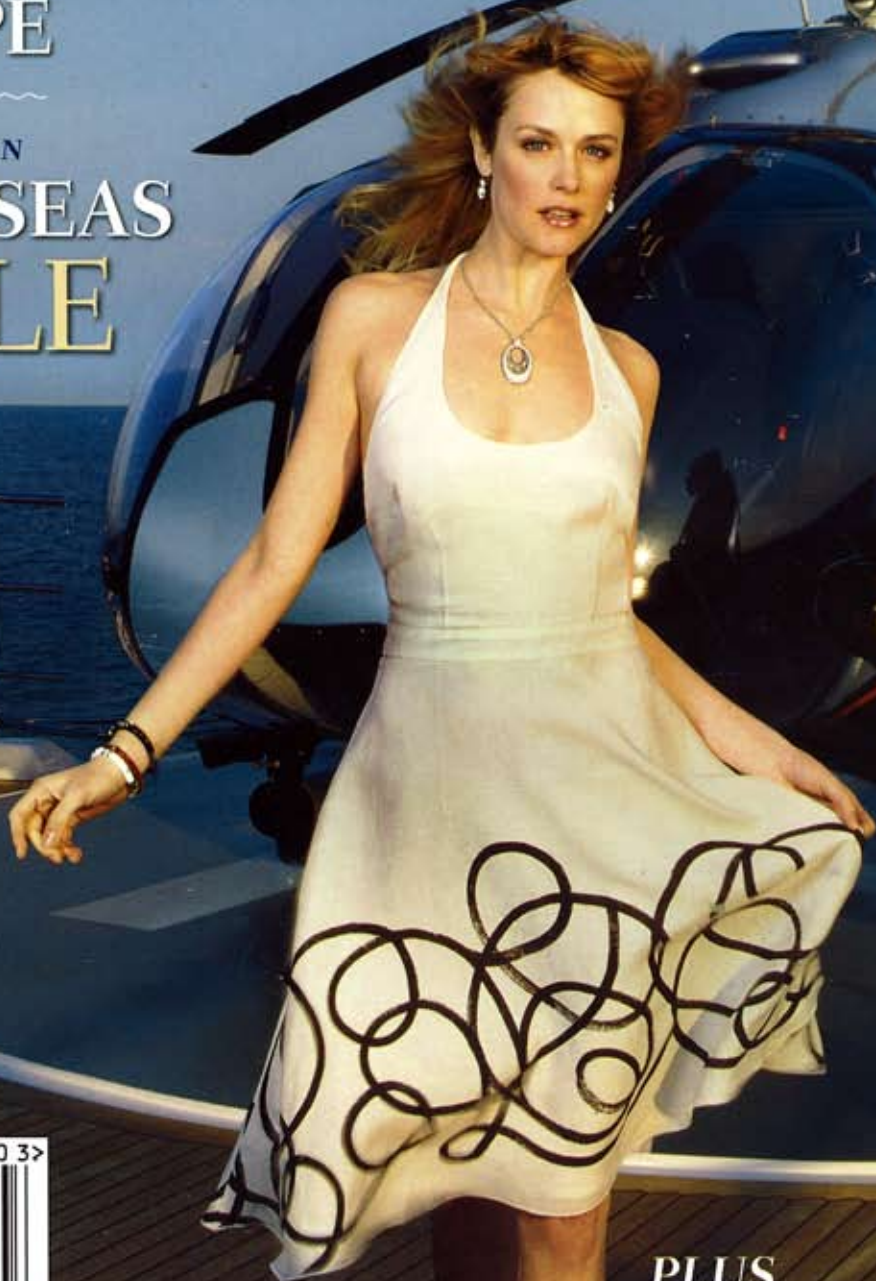
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SIMPLY BEAUTIFUL

BARBUDA IS NOT overtly glamorous, which is exactly why some people favor this mostly barren, 64-square-mile island north of Antigua in the Caribbean. Opened last year on a 90-acre parcel of pristine Barbuda coastline, the Beach House hotel (888.776.0333, www.thebeachhousebarbuda.com) reflects the island's unassuming spirit, welcoming those who

want to disconnect from their always-wired lives in a simple, intimate environment free of marble bathrooms and other five-star amenities. The property's wooden-shuttered Club House serves as a restaurant, bar, gathering spot, pool house, and library, where guests play backgammon, chess, and cards while trading stories about their day's explorations of local reefs and caves.

The laid-back atmosphere at the Beach House does not preclude attentive service. A concierge will do everything from taking your room service order to organizing a tour or a fishing or snorkeling excursion. This year, the resort is adding a fractional-ownership vacation club and a limited number of cottages that will be available for purchase or rent. —LAURIE KAHLE

DRIVING FAST AND LONG

A PORSCHE CAYENNE picks you up at the Birmingham, Ala., airport and whisks you to the new Renaissance Ross Bridge Golf Resort & Spa (800.593.6419, www.rossbridgeresort.com) for two kinds of driving. The resort, which opened

last August, offers classroom training and track time in a 911 through its partnership with the nearby Porsche Driving Experience, and its golf course—said to be the world's third longest—challenges even the most powerful hitters from the tee.

The Ross Bridge course, the newest on Alabama's Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail, measures 8,191 yards from the back tees. Designed by Bobby Vaughan and Roger Rulewich (who built several of the trail's existing courses while serving as Trent Jones' senior design associate), the layout circles back and forth around the forested property, returning to the hotel every three or four holes. The hotel itself, the first high-end resort in the Birmingham area, also includes a 12,000-square-foot spa and offers its fleet of Cayennes as courtesy vehicles. —JUDITH FEIN



SHORE THING

VIEWS OF SANTA MONICA Bay and the Southern California coastline from Shutters on the Beach (310.458.0030, www.shuttersonthebeach.com) are much, if not exactly, as they were two years ago, but the interior of the beach house-style hotel has seen considerable change. Renovations to the Santa Monica, Calif., property, which Los Angeles interior designer Michael Smith began in 2004 and finished last fall, have accentuated its casual, by-the-shore ambience and added new technologies to the 186 guest rooms and 12 suites. The accommodations now feature mahogany-stained hardwood floors and Tibetan wool rugs, floor-to-ceiling shelves of literature and art books, 32-inch LCD TVs, and high-speed wireless Internet service. The new Shutters One spa, completed early in the refurbishment, further emphasizes the property's maritime theme: The interiors and porthole-style windows of its six treatment rooms resemble those of a yacht.

—JENNIFER HALL



BOTTOM LEFT: PAUL ROSS