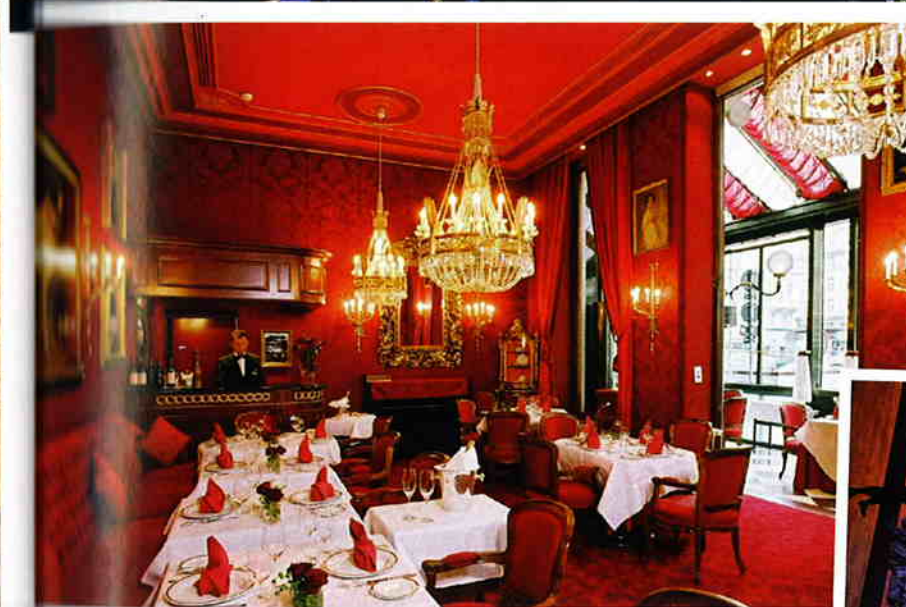
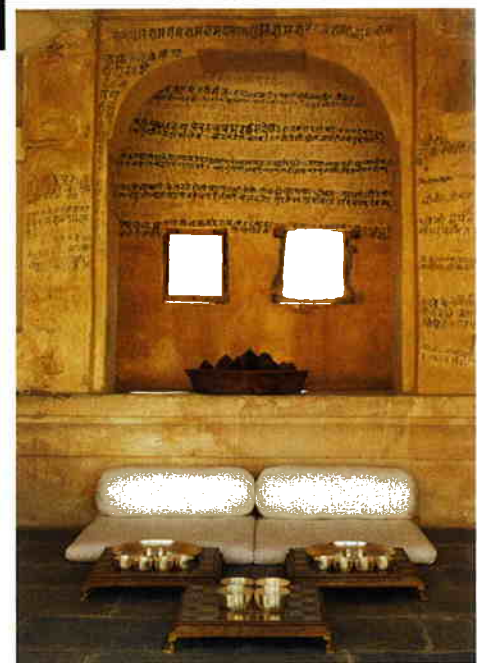




Travel Treasure

# Leo Schofield, AM

*The original culture vulture, Leo Schofield has forgotten more about his travels than most of us will ever experience. The arts patron, festival director, infamous reviewer of lobster and restaurants, Leo reveals his favourite travels, festivals, restaurants and hotels to IT.*



Clockwise from far left The roof top bar at The Peninsula New York. The view of St Marks from Hotel Cipriani Venice. The restaurant at Villa D'Este Lake Como. Spanish women in dress for the Feira Sevilla. View of the Louvre from the Royal Suite at the Meurice Paris. Andreas Scholl as Julius Caesar at the Salzburg Festival. The restaurant at Hotel Sacher Vienna. A bedroom at Taj Hotel's Devi Garh.

**Q What is your memory of your first holiday?**  
**A** We used to come down in summer [Leo was born in Brewarrina where his dad owned a pub] and holiday at Bondi. My parents would rent a flat in Kalua Street, or another one of those walk-to-the-beach places.  
 A distinctive memory I have was the smell of pork sausages, because we never got much pork in the country. It was all beef or lamb, or dad would go out and shoot a few ducks and that'd be on the menu that night.  
 I can remember the sizzle of the pork sausages and bursting out of the end. My brother and I used to battle for that little knob of crispy meat at the end. I mean boarding school food was unspeakable, of course, unspeakable.  
**Q What are some of your earlier memories of your international trips?**  
**A** I used to travel overseas quite a lot, and write about food, and for a few years I took groups on food tours. A travel agent, Mary Rossi, offered me a great opportunity to host a trip to Italy. We threw in a couple of cooking school experiences and we took everybody to Villa d'Este and to the Hassler Hotel. Mary had very good connections in Italy; Carmen Worth, the Swiss family that owned the Hassler Hotel.  
 So we'd go to the Hassler Hotel and have cooking lessons there, we'd take buses into

Tuscany, the Villa d'Este outside Milan and cook there, and Venice, cooking classes at Gritti Palace in Venice.  
**Q And what are your favourite hotels?**  
**A** I love India and India does luxury very well. The most beautiful hotel I've ever stayed at is just outside Udaipur, it's called Devi Garh. It's absolutely wonderful. It's in an 18th century fort, and has been marvellously done over, but not in a regal style, really post-modern. I had a great time there, I've been there three times and love it.  
*I think to see the Grand Défilé at the Paris Opera is the most amazing experience, it's terrific.*  
 I love all the Taj Hotels in India.  
 I really love Claridges and have stayed there over the years a lot.  
 Paris does luxury hotels brilliantly too. I mean I love the Meurice, and I did like the Crillon until it was taken over and Americanised.  
 I loved the old Carlisle when James Sherwood was running it, it was so great. I love that hotel but most of the American hotels I think are very impersonal and the chains are really horrific.  
 That's another great hotel, the Cipriani. That is the ultimate bit of luxury, because if you love Venice,

you get on that little shuttle boat and you're removed from the mayhem of San Marco with all those blow-in buses, and you escape into another world of total quiet and beauty. It's wonderful.  
**Q What's the favourite thing you've ever bought from travel overseas?**  
**A** A shoe cleaning kit from Fratelli Rosetti in Venice.  
**Q And what's your favourite bar?**  
**A** New York has great bars. The bar in The Peninsula is great, but I tend also not to go to upscale places if I'm staying in an upscale hotel.  
**Q What are some of your favourite restaurants that you really love?**  
**A** I had a couple of wonderful meals at The Vinegar Hill House in Brooklyn, which I'd recommend unreservedly to anybody. The pork chops are the best I've ever had in my life, and I also like Peter Luger Steakhouse in Brooklyn.  
 I like all the steakhouses in New York too. I think that's a great tradition and it's a unique kind of food in a way.  
 I love the restaurant, only for afternoon tea, at the Sacher Hotel in Vienna, I love staying there. It's right across the road from the Opera House and within walking distance of the galleries – and they are two of the primary reasons for visiting Vienna.  
 Last year in May I just jumped on a plane and

went to Salzburg specifically to see a performance of Handel's Opera Julius Caesar at the May Festival. It was a roll call of the best singers in the world and it was an amazing production.  
 We had the most terrific food at a place, the Blaue Gans, [Blue Goose] and it's right next door to a very traditional hotel there called the Golden Stag, but the Blaue Gans is also in a historic building and it's got a very modern twist to it, with a beautiful restaurant right outside on the walkway to the festival.  
**Q What are some of your favourite festivals of the world?**  
**A** The greatest one is the Salzburg Festival; millions and millions of dollars are generated by that festival, you can't believe what it's like. It started out as something very short and now it virtually runs the whole year round. In Salzburg they have an Easter festival, and Whitsun festival, and then the big festival of the whole month in July and August.  
 I also love the Bayreuth festival, which is solely Wagner. I like the Glimmerglass festival in upstate New York near Cooperstown, and I like, of course, the Glyndebourne Festival in Sussex.  
**Q Is there anywhere on the bucket list that you still have got to tick off?**  
**A** Los Angeles is on my bucket list. Oh you mean good stuff? I thought you meant my shit list. I hate

*The Vinegar Hill House in Brooklyn, I'd recommend unreservedly to anybody. The pork chops are the best I've ever had in my life.*  
 LA, it's impossible to get around. I like the expression 'city like mass' because it's not a city.  
 I haven't been to Japan. To be frank, apart from India, Asia has very little appeal for me.  
 I've been to South Africa but briefly. I suppose I should do one of those A&K [Abercrombie & Kent] tours, I mean I love cruising strangely enough and I don't do a lot of it.  
**Q I'm surprised that you like cruising to be honest.**  
**A** Look, I've met some interesting people on cruises, it's really great. And how often do you get the opportunity to read?  
 You can just sit out on a balcony and the world goes by, and you can read a substantial part of a book. I'm a big reader, if I don't have a book I get shaky.  
 One of the best I cruises I've done was the Minerva cruise – they're very British and the Brits abroad are pretty intolerable, but it was a two-week cruise out of Dover, of the Baltic and it was absolutely sensational.

They had the most interesting lecturers on board; they had experts on music, the Baltic states, they had a phenomenal historian, Sir John Keegan, who wrote four or five great books on warfare and the tactics of war – and we sailed over the spot of the battle of Copenhagen on the way to Copenhagen and he talked about Nelson's victory. It was really fascinating.  
**Q And final question. If you had to pick one experience for Australians to see, what would that be?**  
**A** I think to see the Grand Défilé at the Paris Opera. That is a most amazing experience, it's terrific.  
 At the opening of the ballet season they have the entire complement of the ballet, all of the stars, the soloist, the premiere dancers, the choruses, and then they go right through to these eight-year-old kids who are in the school and they march in to the Grand March from the Trojans. They come in waves at you and they all form into this astonishing formation on the stage.  
 The other great experience is to go to the Feria in Seville, the Easter Fair because they have Holy week, then a week off, and then in a big field outside of Seville where they used to burn people during The Inquisition, they have an extraordinary fair where all sorts of tents are set up – but in a very orderly way. It's like a miniature city springs up with crossroads and wonderful lights. Seville is a beautiful city of course. ●