

VIEW FROM HERE

LET THEM ALL TALK
Foxtel streaming

Take a trio of women of a certain age, college friends whose lives have taken very different directions, and dispatch them on a trans-Atlantic crossing from New York to Southampton aboard Queen Mary 2. No ports, plenty of time to connect and reflect, to blame and accuse each other for past betrayals, to stir the sediments of resentment. What could go wrong for the one-time “gang of three”?

Meryl Streep, Candice Bergen and Dianne Wiest, all brilliant actors with a clear talent for comedy, are brilliantly cast as Alice from New York (Streep), Roberta from Dallas (Bergen) and Susan from Seattle (Wiest). Alice, a famous writer of highbrow fiction, has been invited to give a lecture on board, demanded extra cruise tickets for her companions and is clearly in charge. She’s working on a long-overdue manuscript in her suite and a favourite nephew, 20-something Tyler from Cleveland (Lucas Hedges) is on board as her gofer. “I’m not going to be always available,” Alice declares to Roberta and Susan, “but we’ll have supper together.” It’s obvious she won’t be turning up for the masquerade ball or the Scrabble play-offs.



Meryl Streep and Lucas Hedges in Let Them All Talk

Director Steven Soderbergh did double duty as cinematographer and shot the film on board QM2. Cunard fans will spot familiar venues such as the gleaming two-storey 9000-book library, Royal Court Theatre, plush restaurants and the spa, where money-strapped Roberta, a department store lingerie saleswoman, tries to cash in her free treatment coupon. Alice’s rookie agent Karen (Jessica Chan), whose presence must be kept secret from Alice, is stalking her difficult author in a mildly flirtatious collaboration with Tyler. Will that next novel ever be delivered?

Soderbergh allows insights into the confessional nature of cruising, those fleeting social associations, flirtations and fib telling and, in the case of ballsy Roberta, hunting of the next (rich) husband. As the HBO movie’s title heralds, there’s whip-smart talk and wisecracking (mostly improvised, apparently, within scriptwriter Deborah Eisenberg’s outline), fabulous outfits, but deep sadness and nostalgia too. It’s a bit Woody Allen (Diane Keaton, where were you?) and enjoyable, even if the rushed ending and unsatisfying sense of closure may leave viewers lost at sea.

SUSAN KUROSAWA

SPEND IT

The word “flamboyant” barely begins to describe Bill Bensley, the US-born, Thailand-based landscape and interior designer whose hotel projects in Asia are renowned for their architectural



merit and environmental credentials. Now he’s turned his talents to art in a colour-drenched Fauvist style imbued with whimsy and storytelling. During 2020, Bensley holed up at his Bangkok glasshouse studio and worked on about 100 paintings, mixing mediums such as watercolours, acrylics, oils and pastels. He’s just set up an online store to sell originals and prints and raise funds for his passion projects in Cambodia, the Shinta Mani Foundation for community empowerment and Wildlife Alliance. The latter NGO funds armed rangers to protect the endemic animals and forests surrounding Bensley Collection: Shinta Mani Wild (T+I, November 19-20, 2019), a 15-tent safari camp in the southwest where threats from loggers and poachers have increased during the pandemic. Prints are made with long-lasting archival ink on 310gsm cotton textured paper; four sizes available, from \$US100 (\$130) for A3 format.

■ bensley.com

SUSAN KUROSAWA

FORWARD PLANNER



Much-loved northern NSW hideaway Halcyon House has added a one-bedroom suite to its line-up of accommodation options. The new digs, which enhance the existing 20 boutique guestrooms and luxurious two-bedroom Halycon Suite, are spacious and airy, featuring a king bedroom with walk-in robe plus separate living and dining areas.

The suite was created from the hotel’s former functions space and has a real holiday-home vibe. Timber floors lead to a furnished patio that offers direct access to the resort pool and Cabarita beach over springy green lawn. Kick off your shoes and leave them by the door.

There are two bathrooms, and the full-size ensuite has plenty of room for two, with a double shower, dual marble vanity and free-standing tub.



Interior designer Anna Spiro’s signature style is evident in the brightly patterned wallpaper and mix-and-match textiles and furnishings.

From \$1740 a night, twin-share, including breakfast and four-course dinner at acclaimed inhouse restaurant Paper Daisy, which is renowned for its wine list.

■ halcyonhouse.com.au

PENNY HUNTER

BOOK CLUB

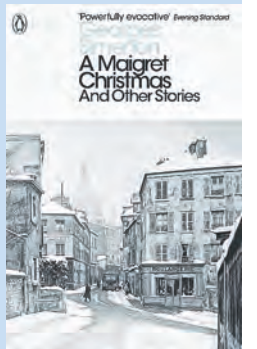
A MAIGRET CHRISTMAS
Georges Simenon

Who cares about “season-specific” reading when it comes to Georges Simenon. It’s Christmas, it’s Paris, it’s Chief Inspector Maigret. What could be more delightful. This trilogy was published in 1951 and most recently reproduced in a Penguin Classics hardcover (pictured) in 2017. In the title tale, there are mysterious goings-on along Boulevard Richard-Lenoir, where the Parisian detective lives with the devoted Madame Maigret. It’s Christmas morning, and a “fine, white powder” is falling but it’s not festive and magical. A gloomy Maigret is soon involved in a touch of neighbourhood intrigue, even if Madame Maigret would rather he stay in bed and be served his breakfast tray. If, like me, you’ve enjoyed the recent Maigret TV series with Rowan Atkinson in the title role, you may find it impossible not to imagine the erstwhile

Mr Bean surveying the sky “heavy and low and dirty white, [which] seemed to weigh down on the roofs”.

Similarly, when summoning an image of the wifely Madame Maigret, actor Lucy Cohu, Atkinson’s screen wife, pops to mind. The second tale is set at a Parisian police control centre where “three owls of the night shift” are sat before a city street map on a wall, with bulbs representing precincts. Lights flash when an alert is received. It’s a busy evening on the switchboard; someone is smashing the glass of emergency phone boxes, there’s a boy missing and a murderer at large. In the third inclusion, a lone drinker shoots himself in the head at a restaurant on Christmas Eve, when all of Paris is lit up – cinemas, theatres and bistros full of warmth and noisy with cheer. The plot develops beyond the suicide to the introduction of two women, Martine and Long Tall Jeanne, the only witnesses and unknown to each other, but whose stories begin to intersect. The story takes on a fable-like quality around Place des Ternes “where the broad, brilliantly illuminated swathe that runs down from the Arc de Triomphe comes to an end”. Simenon’s writing is full of tiny details of domestic life and broader society. Pipe-smoking, intuitive Maigret, in bowler hat and thick overcoat, was the first detective I loved, long before I was diverted by the likes of Poirot and Morse.

SUSAN KUROSAWA



SNAP DECISIONS

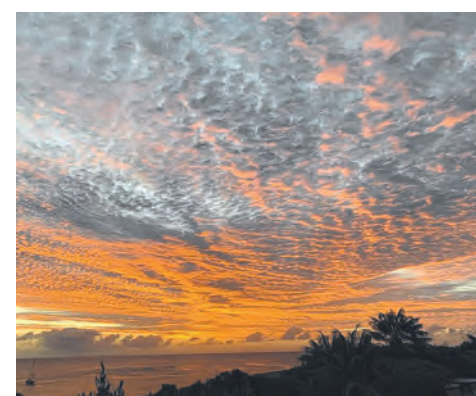
Sky high at happy hour

SUSAN KUROSAWA

As the old adage goes, when you’re young and fond of parties, you stay up for sunrises but as you grow older, you set the alarm and get up. Sunsets are another matter, beautifully timed for all ages. In our age of effortless happy-snapping with devices that yield instant results, most of us chase a sunset on holiday. Cocktails are often named in their honour and boldly hued spirits such as Aperol and

Campari provide an extra jolt of colour when held high to reflect an orange-red sky in a glass. Or the lowering sun might be mirrored in sunglasses or obliterated by a social media influencer posing and pouting and blocking the best view. But let’s not go there.

On the southern end of Lord Howe Island recently, the sunset I saw over the peaks of Lidbird and Gower was a cracker. From the pool terrace of Capella Lodge, superbly angled for panoramas of mountains, sea and sky, I joined a posse of fellow snappers and we



clicked away in unison. We sighed and shrieked and debated the shape of clouds. I burst forth with my knowledge of a mackerel sky, rippled with cirrocumulus clouds to form

fish-like scales. I know this only because I once researched nephology (“cloud contemplation”, to be more poetic) for a novel but was glad no one angled for more information. The soft and bulbous mackerel sky looked like a pink-patterned bedspread, too, although I kept that theory to myself.

The whole sunset “event” couldn’t have taken more than 40 minutes but the colours seemed to hang like a painted scrim as darkness took hold. The sun didn’t so much set as just sigh and relinquish its place in the sky, fading away with dignity and grace. The well-named happy hour was over. We all clapped and clinked glasses. We had witnessed the denouement of another day amid fun and fellowship. In a world of chaos and uncertainty, it shone as a small miracle worth celebrating.

Follow on Instagram: @susankurosawa