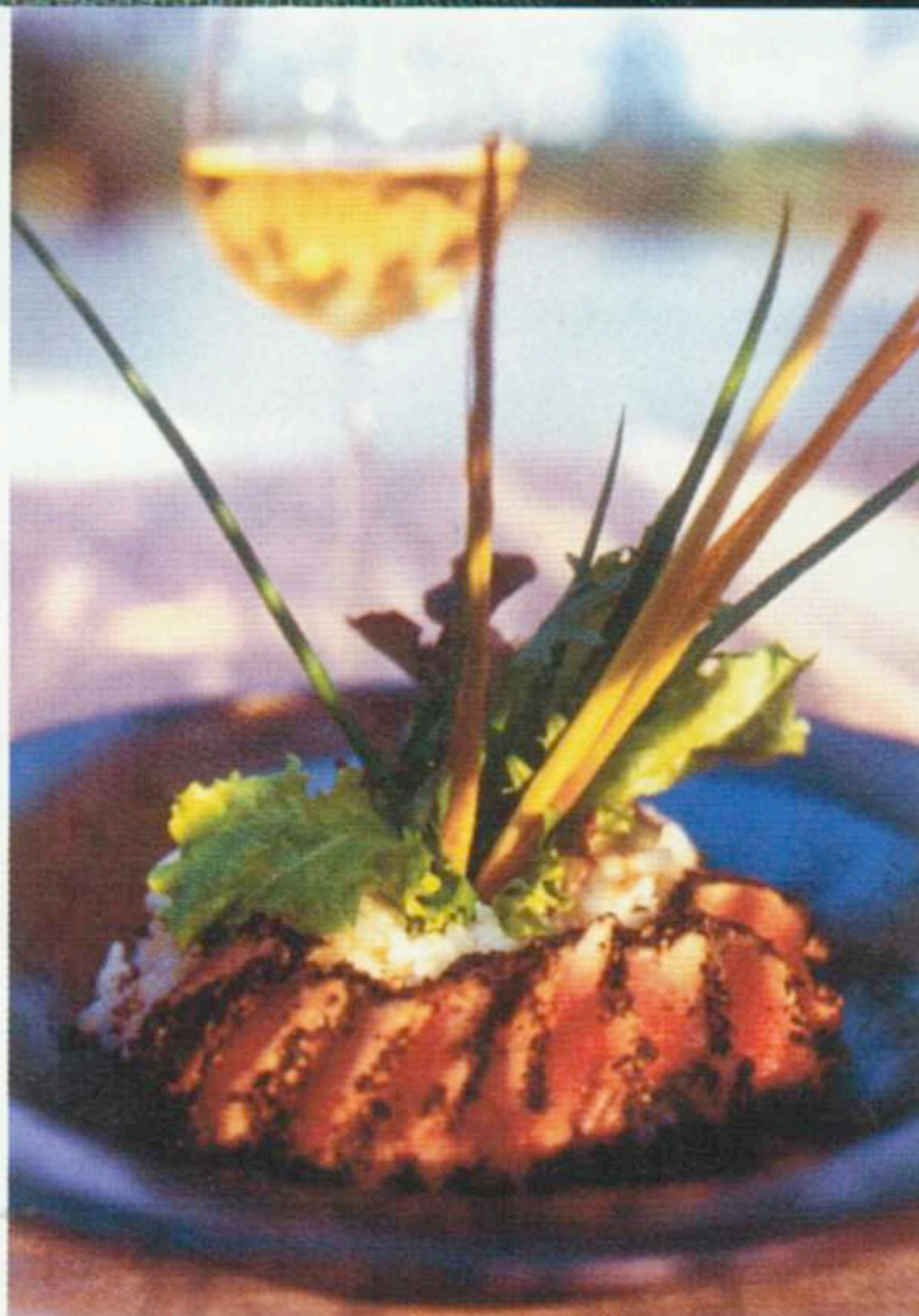




Clockwise from above ESPA spa at the Hotel Metropole, Monte-Carlo. The restaurant at The Metropole. 'Balanced cuisine' at the Evasion Hideaway & Six Senses Spa at Hua Hin, Thailand. **Opposite page (top and bottom)** The Soneva Gili & Six Senses Spa, Maldives



on a fact-finding cook's tour of Europe's top restaurants, an investment that has paid off with a delicious yet healthy gourmet approach called 'balanced cuisine'. It has just been launched at the Evasion Hideaway at Hua Hin in Thailand. The idea is to give spa guests 'feel-good' food that complements their treatment programmes.

The concept that the right foods can kickstart good health is part of spa life in India. According to Victoria McClelland of spa travel company Wellbeing Escapes, 'India's ancient health system, Ayurveda, uses food to heal and balance the body and is practised at holistic spas like Ananda in the Himalayas, Shreyas in Bangalore or Kalari Kovilakom in Kerala.'

Spa cuisine one-upmanship is the new buzz among luxury resorts across the world. One&Only Maldives at Reethi Rah has launched its own 'well-being cuisine'. A resident nutritionist tailors low-fat, low-sugar, additive-free meal plans for each guest, served in any of the resort's restaurants.

Not to be outdone, the glamorous Hilton Maldives Resort & Spa features the world's only all-glass undersea restaurant. The Six Senses Spa at Soneva Gili has retaliated in true spa wars-

style by opening its Organic Garden restaurant in a stunning tropical tree house.

Rising star gourmet spas include Auberge du Soleil in the heart of California's Napa Valley. This much-loved inn and spa has just received its first Michelin star. Choupana Hills Resort & Spa in Madeira now has two Michelin stars for head chef Stéphane Raimbault, along with a new fusion spa menu. SÁMAS at Park Hotel Kenmare, Ireland, recently had its cuisine featured in *The World's Best Spas*, so this is also one to watch.

But you don't have to leave the country to get fabulous food and serious spoiling. Whatley Manor in Wiltshire combines Martin Burge's Michelin-starred cuisine with the multi-award winning spa, Aquarias. Voted among the top 10 for Best UK Leisure Hotel and best UK Hotel Spa in the *Condé Nast Traveller Reader Awards* 2006, Whatley Manor is on a winning streak. The younger generation of British hotel spas such as Cowley Manor, The Grove and Babington House have radically changed the country house hotel scene from stuffy to sleek. All this is a great comfort for foodies in search of the perfect spa. At last we can have our (gluten-free, organic) cake, and eat it too. ■ *Hallie Campbell*



Above Hand-dived Shetland scallops at Whatley Manor