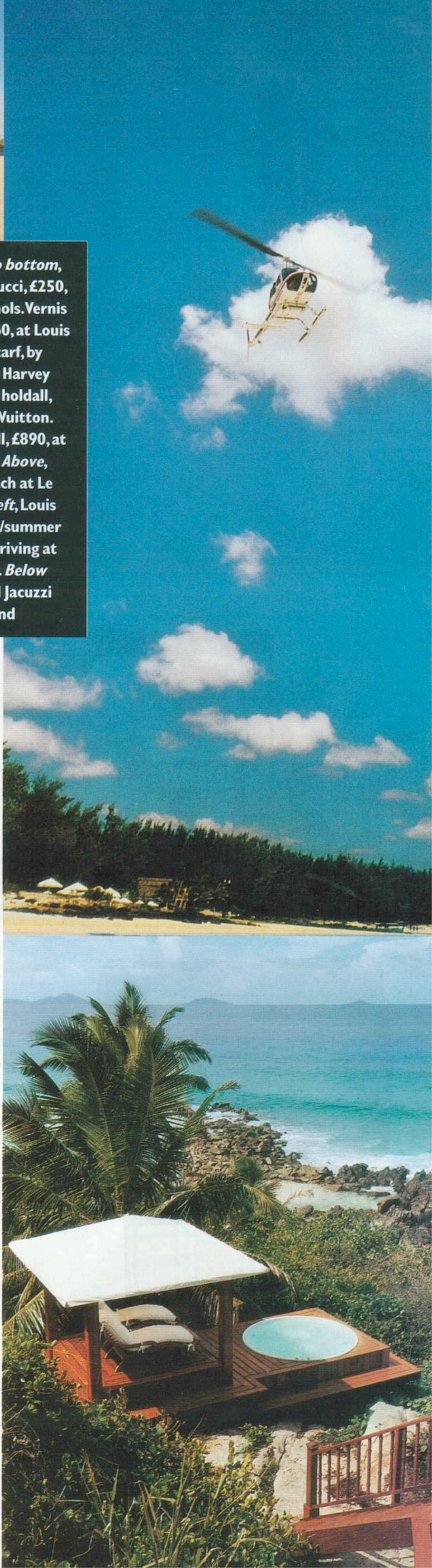




Far left, top to bottom, handbag, by Pucci, £250, at Harvey Nichols. Vernis duffel bag, £860, at Louis Vuitton. Silk scarf, by Pucci, £165, at Harvey Nichols. Vernis holdall, £975, at Louis Vuitton. Leather holdall, £890, at Alfred Dunhill. Above, raking the beach at Le Saint Géran. Left, Louis Vuitton spring/summer 2000. Right, arriving at The Residence. Below right, personal Jacuzzi at Frégate Island



The first hints were there last season and by the spring/summer shows the message was clear: the jet-set wardrobe, with its connotations of money, luxury and first-class travel, is back in fashion. It's hard to believe that last year we were drifting around in folkloric frocks, discussing the experiences we had backpacking in Kazakhstan. This summer, we're doing the opposite. Instead of wearing designer rags and getting in touch with our inner peasant, we're guzzling Krug, draping ourselves in rhinestones and walking around in gear that's so plastered with designer logos we're in danger of looking like advertising billboards. We're getting in touch with our inner credit cards and really enjoying it – without a trace of Nineties-style irony, cynicism or restraint.

What's great (or terrible, depending which side of the financial divide you're on) about this ostentatious new mood is that it isn't a mass-market thing. You've got to have money to look the part. But, as designers have realised, there's plenty of it out there. Fuelled by booming Western economies and the rise of e-millionaires, there's no shortage of people with the cash, time and inclination to indulge their most extravagant fantasies. How people travel these days is as significant as what they're wearing: this time round, guided tours of Nepal's lesser-known trails aren't featured on many itineraries – much too

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much like hard work. Instead, they are dropping \$175,000 to take over Soneva Fushi – a beautiful drop in the Indian Ocean – or booking Mustique's lavish new six-bedroom luxury villa, Sleeping Dragon, which costs \$22,000 a week. And nothing is smarter or more exclusive than tiny private islands reachable only by speedboat or helicopter. That's why stars such as Kate Winslet and Julia Roberts love Parrot Cay in the Caribbean: no chance of bumping into the masses here.

Travel hasn't been so luxurious since the Seventies, when a Caribbean holiday was the last word in chic. These days, if we have to hike anywhere, we are not going without our monogrammed Louis Vuitton Vernis rucksack. Roughing it doesn't have to mean roughing it any more, if you get what I mean. We watched *The Beach* with idle curiosity, but what we really want is Cate Blanchett's heiress lifestyle in *The Talented Mr Ripley*. Need proof that first-class travel is where it's at? Both Prada and Ralph Lauren have recently installed window displays resembling the interiors of private jets.

It used to be that spending a couple of million pounds on a hotel facelift was a big deal; now, hotels and resorts compete with multimillion-pound makeovers. The Benettons, Agnellis and every rich Italian you can think of stay at the extravagantly refurbished Villa Del Parco in Sardinia where it's wall-to-wall Armani bikinis >