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News From The Road

How do the people of Old York feel about New York? Are they jealous? Are the respective mayors in daily contact? Do New Yorkers get 30% discount at the National Railway Museum and the Jorvik Viking Experience? How would the builders of the old Ark feel about Newark? Still in the transport business, though...I have forgotten the names of most hotels I've stayed in since 1967 – I think most of them were called the Excelsior – Ah the dubious comforts of the “Lie-By” Guest House in Brum, sweaty brushed-nylon sheets and institutional waxed toilet paper, and the roll of the dice that was the “mixed grill”.

News From Home

Returning home to the Trellises after 10 days on the road, I am distressed to find that I cannot direct the cab driver to the right house. We overshoot by a block before I can recover, and we painstakingly backtrack to where I thought my house was...I suddenly realize that it has been rendered neutral by the application of paint – the subtle colour I so carefully chose to replace the hideous pink turns out to have a camouflaging effect –indeed, it is so earthy, so utterly one with nature, that it blends in with absolutely everything, and makes the entire house invisible to the naked eye. The real word for this colour, which I hesitate to allow past the lips at all, is – brown. Brown! I've fought hard to

eradicate brown from the face of the Earth these last 30 years, obeying the paradigm palettes of Conran and Quant and Trisha Guild and Vivian Westwood, toiling like a good crusader to quash the final remnants of Victorian England; with its brown rooms, and brown furniture, and brown people, and anything not already brown painted brown to blend in, obeying some twisted neo-Tudor aesthetic of Morris or Ruskin, as dark and stifling as a Sunday afternoon at your Gran's. And now, my own house, unmistakably painted from head to toe in the stale old, boring old hues of pre-Goon Show, pre-Monty Python, pre-Sex Pistols Britain, and I am again bamboozled by the ever misleading paint sample. Those innocent little squares, promising so much with their seductive names, yet delivering such perfidy, such mayhem!

With some trepidation, I approach Akbar, who is putting the finishing touches to the garage, and express my confusion and disappointment at the colour. He gives me a rather complicated look – I think I detect disbelief, suppressed rage and amusement at another's misfortune in amongst the multitude – and he asks what I propose to do next. It is then, gentle reader, that I have one of my rare flashes of true inspiration. I ask him what would happen if we mixed the rejected hideous pink paint ("Dream Of Tuscany") with the equally unacceptable camouflage brown paint ("Burnt Scone"). He shrugs, as he does, and says, I'm the boss, and tells a couple of his boys to get to it. Of course, we had copious amounts of pink left over – no conceivable second-hand market for it – and still a good deal of brown intended for a second coat. As the mixture blends and homogenizes, I must say that a small thrill of electricity runs through me, as I gaze, like Cortez from a peak in Darien, at this brave new colour, never before seen by human eye. It seems perfect this time – not too loud, not too quiet – and for a change I insist that we test about 12 square feet on the wall, round the back by the compost heap, and it still looks good. Even Akbar seems slightly impressed, and said he'd never seen anything quite like it, and I should think up a name for it. I quickly settle on "Scone Of Tuscany" as the closest to the spirit of the colour, which meets with the hearty approval of Mrs. RT and Honourable Sons Nos. One and Three, and has gone some way towards restoring my shaky credibility. We are now 10 days into overtime on the project,

and needless to say the bills are climbing, but I feel justified now that visual harmony has been achieved.

Took my neighbour, Mr. Alphonso, down to the beach to watch the 4th of July fireworks. It was his housekeeper, Anita's, day off to visit her family, so the atmosphere was a little more tranquil than usual. The display was terrific, and set Mr. A to reminiscing on Hollywood galas and premieres of old. We repaired back to his place for a nightcap and a hand of Canasta, and I asked him if he had ever worked with Jimmy Stewart's famous horse, which had the reputation of being able to understand verbal instructions. He said he had only worked with Stewart on one picture, "Winchester 73", one of Mr. A's first on arriving in the U.S., and he had been a junior wrangler, assigned to other livestock. He said the smartest horse he had ever seen was in Chile, and belonged to a government minister – it could count to ten using its hoof, and drink beer out of the bottle (how smart is that?). Hard to believe all of Mr. A's stories – he claims to have known just about everybody, including the daughter of Butch Cassidy (carnal relations implied), the Tango King Carlos Gardel, and the entire population of Tinseltown, mostly circa 1950-70. I did ask him about the war (WW2, not the Falklands – we avoid that one), and he said he remembered seeing the scuttled remains of the German pocket battleship "Graf Spee" lying like a beached whale in the estuary of the River Plate. In response to your kind enquiries, let me give you a better visual description of Mr. Alphonso:- Yellowish-white hair still very full, with matching pencil-thin moustache, slight wave in the hair (think Cesar Romero) – a touch bulbous and broken-veined about the nose, from an earlier bout with alcoholism (now TT), eyes remarkably clear and sharp in the middle distance, and a fine line in dentures. Complexion leathery, tanned and weather-beaten. Wheelchair-bound, but ramrod straight from the waist up, always nattily dressed, favouring slacks, blazers and cravats mostly, or casually a wide choice of dressing-gowns with bogus crests and coats-of-arms on the pocket. Fingers still nicotine-stained although he supposedly quit smoking for health reasons 5 years ago.

Mr. A later complimented me on the house colour, said it reminded him of the Pampas after a rainstorm. I felt a brief glow, until I realized that his current view was of the hideous brown rejected hues of "Burnt Scone". I'll break the news to him tomorrow.