

# Bright spark

**ALAIN DESPERT**'s painting commissioned by the Cordina family to mark Caffé Cordina's 175 years was recently inaugurated by the President of Malta at the café. The French artist is now holding a retrospective exhibition **From Bora Bora to Malta**, paintings from 1990-2012, at the **Auberge d'Italie** in Merchants Street, Valletta. He gives **Marie Benoît** a glimpse into his world of vivid hues

**T**he French artist Alain Despert moved to Bora Bora in French Polynesia in 1986. Convinced to move to New York City by the editor of *Town & Country* magazine to pursue his artist's dream in 1990, shortly after his arrival there Despert was discovered by the legendary marketing genius from Absolut Vodka and included in the famous worldwide advertising campaign. He achieved international fame for his painting of a bottle of Absolut vodka floating in the Bora Bora lagoon which appeared in international magazines.

His paintings have exhibited coast-to-coast in the United States. His work is collected throughout the entire world and his paintings have been selected for prestigious collections along with renowned contemporary artists such as Keith Haring, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Rauschenberg and Jim Dine. In 2001, after over a decade of painting and exhibiting in the United States and Paris, Alain returned to settle in Bora Bora and once again paint in the tranquility and splendour of the island he so loved. After ten years in Bora Bora he decided to return to Europe in 2011.

Alain Despert is a prolific artist and has covered a wide range of subject matter from *Cars of the Fifties* to *Dante's Divine Comedy*.

**You were discovered in Bora Bora. What brought you there?**

I was in the hotel business for several years before I started painting professionally. My last position was Manager of the Hotel Bora Bora.

**What is your background?**

I went to Hotel School in Strasbourg, and later moved to the U.S. before ending up in Bora Bora.

**What brought you to Malta?**

Now that I am in my senior years, I felt like it was time to return to Europe to be closer to my family. My wife and I met a very nice Maltese couple, Linda and John Cordina, while in Bora Bora. They suggested we take a look at Malta. We visited and fell in love with the island and the people, so here we are.

**Have you always painted or did you come across your talent later on in life?**

My main hobby was photography, later on I started painting. I was almost 50 years old when my artistic career began to flourish.

**What role does the artist have in society, in your view.**

I like to make paintings that people enjoy and want to have around them. I like to inspire others to explore and express their own creativity.

**Which artists do you most identify with?**

I love art generally speaking and I like a lot of artists from many different periods. I don't identify with any artist in particular, for instance, I like Picasso, but I don't necessarily like everything he created, the same would be true for Matisse and Basquiat. There are certain elements from many artists that I can identify with.

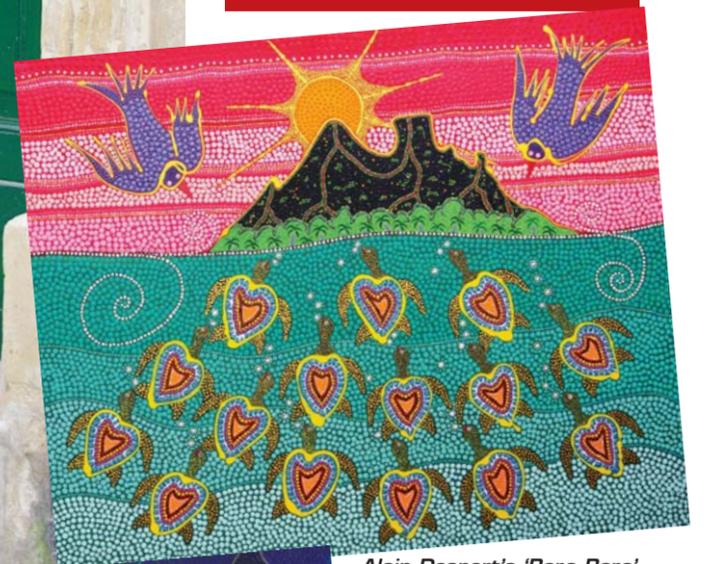
**Do you come from an artistic family? Is art in your DNA?**

I suppose it is in my DNA. My father was

*The artist on the threshold of his studio in Strait street, Valletta*



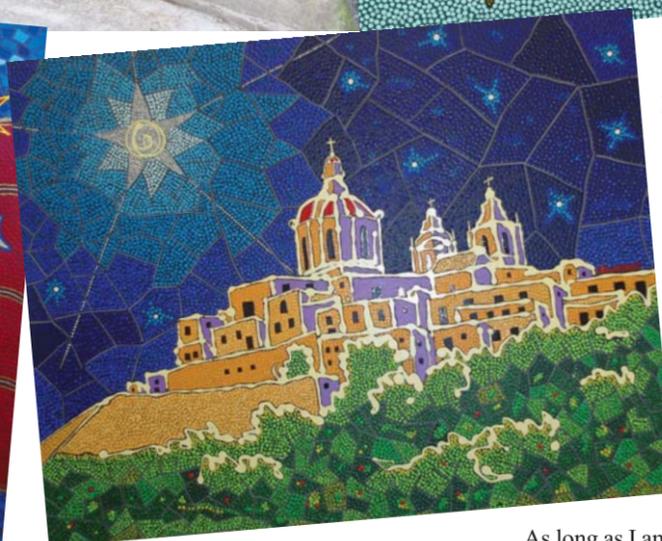
*Alain Despert: From Bora Bora to Malta*, will be on view at Auberge d'Italie from January 14 through February 8, 2013. Featuring approximately 45 paintings, the exhibition charts the artist's journey from 1990 when he was selected for the world renowned ad campaign "Absolut Artists of the '90s" to the present and includes works from many previous series; such as *Cars of the 50s*, *Paris*, *Carnaval de Venise*, *Dante's Divine Comedy* and *Bora Bora*. The retrospective culminates with his most recent Malta series which will be on display for the first time. The exhibition is being held under the auspices of the Parliamentary Secretariat for Tourism, the Environment and Culture, the Malta Tourism Authority and Heritage Malta. The event is sponsored by Caffé Cordina and Jacob's Creek.



*Alain Despert's 'Bora Bora'*



*The commissioned painting to celebrate the 175th anniversary of Caffé Cordina. It is now hanging in the café*



*The artist's vision of Mdina*

**Do you have a dream project?**

I get excited working on projects: series of paintings, commissions, charity – almost anything. That allows me to do my own research on the subject and translate my version onto canvas. I suppose my dream would be to establish the right partnership with an important gallery or museum.

**Do you have a favourite and inspirational place?**

As long as I am happy where I am I can find inspiration. My inspiration comes from inside.

**What is the best piece of advice you have been given?**

When I was painting as a hobby in Bora Bora, the editor of *Town and Country* magazine from the U.S. advised me to move to New York and pursue my artist's dream, which I did. I think that was the best advice I have ever been given, to follow my dream.

**What advice would you give a budding artist?**

Perseverance.

and I like it, I can find the right angle to approach the subject and reproduce my version on canvas in my own way.

**Name something you love and why.**

I love travelling and walking around and exploring new sites. I find it creatively stimulating.

**Name something you don't love and why.**

I don't like being cold, that's one of the reasons we chose Malta, to return to Europe in a mild climate.

an interior designer. Several of my extended family members have artistic talents. They are not all professional, but some are painters, sculptors and photographers – there is even a camera man in the family.

**Does anything inspire you in particular?**

Everything inspires and I have no limits in my subject matter – I can paint a portrait of the Queen of England or the cockpit of a 747. As long as I can see it or visualize it