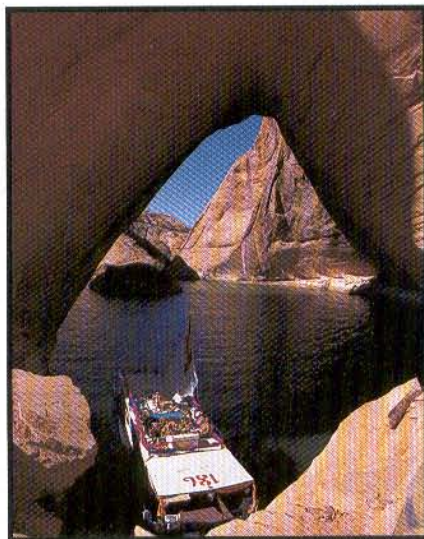


WATER FUN



KERRICK JAMES RIGHT: SEAN ARSABI

Big, but not titanic

Gather friends and family for a no-hassles holiday on a luxurious houseboat

BY LORA J. FINNEGAN

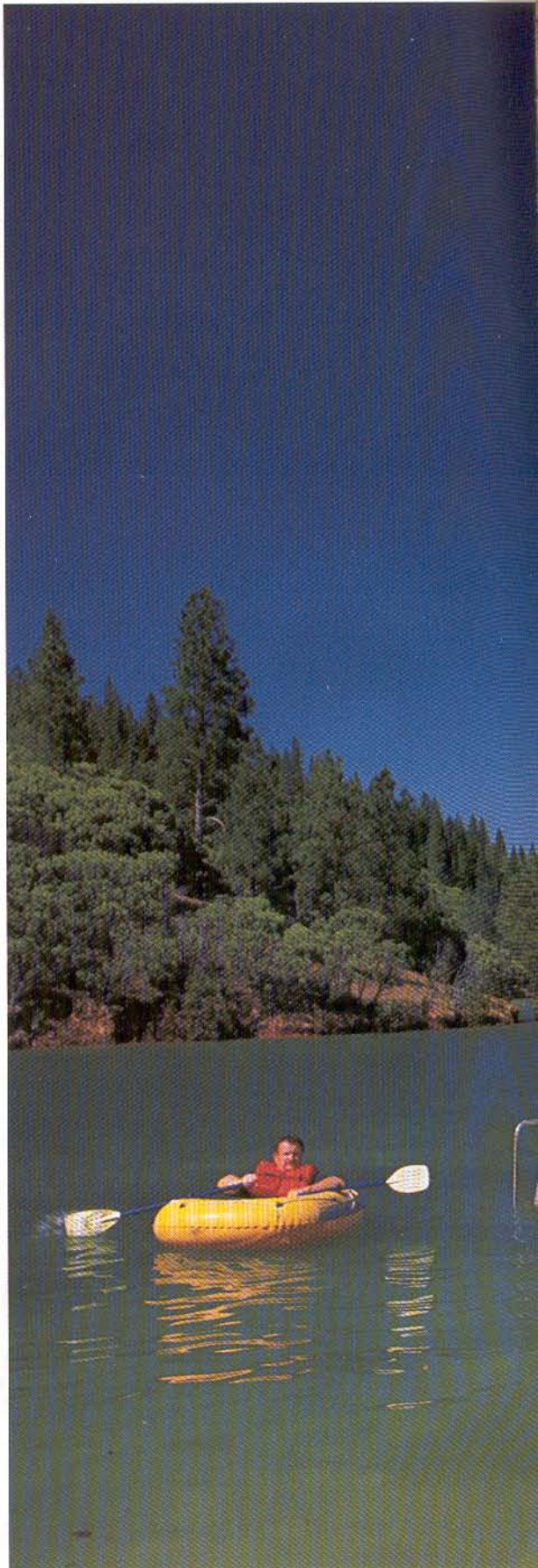
■ I'm standing on the dock at the Jones Valley Resort on Northern California's Shasta Lake, and gaping up at the gleaming white houseboat we've just rented. I can't believe how big it is—56 feet long, three stories high. I'm reminded of that shot in *Titanic* in which Kate Winslet cranes her neck to see the massive ship that will be her home for, well, about as long as we'll be on the *Voyager* (four days).

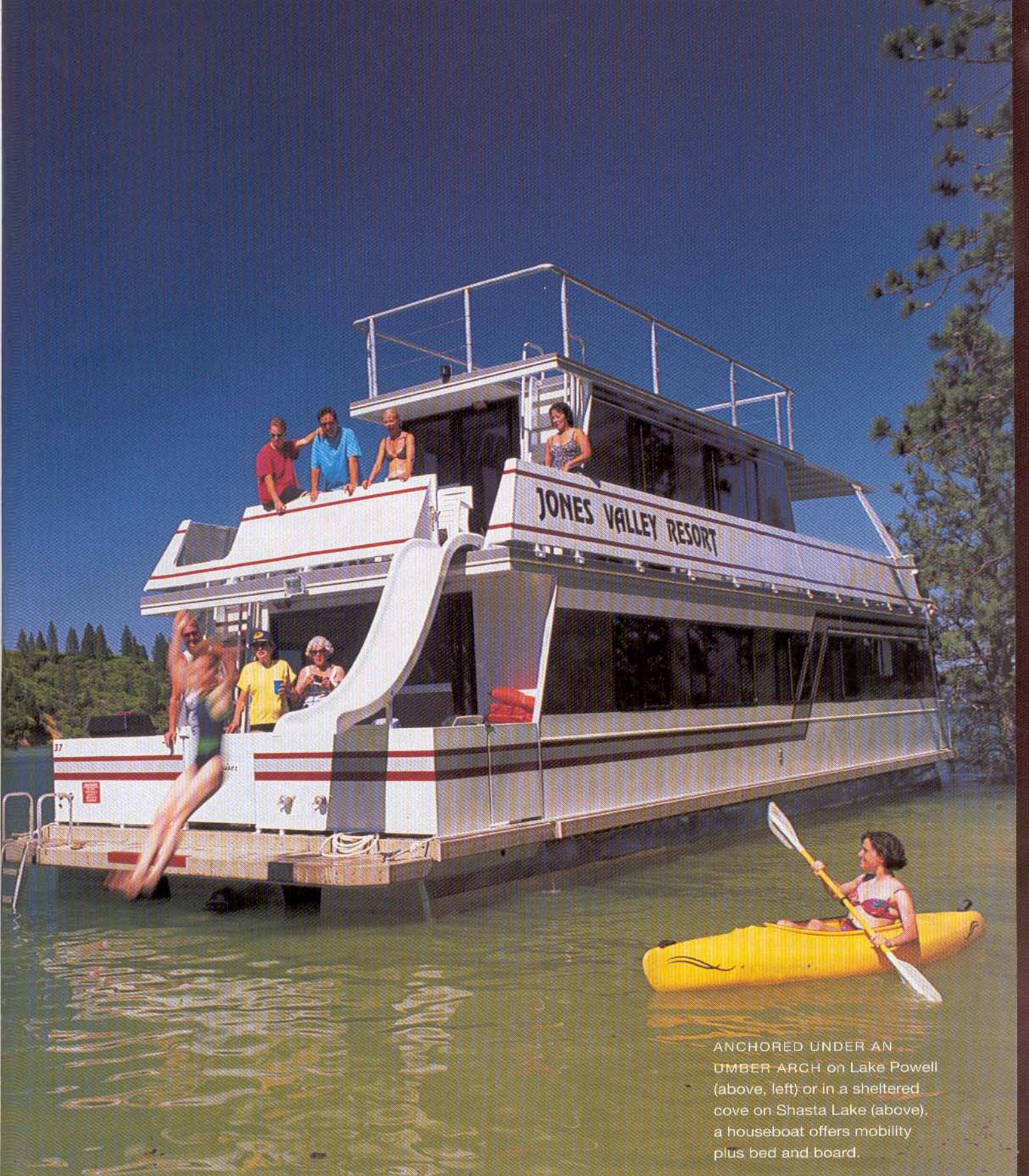
Like the famous ocean liner, the *Voyager* has sleek lines, designer touches, and plenty of conveniences—in our case, everything from a home entertainment center to a trash compactor. Okay, the craft doesn't have chandeliers, but it still shows how upscale houseboating has become. And how popular—in the past five years, houseboat rentals have increased about 4 to 6 percent annually at Lake Powell, one of the West's busiest houseboating sites.

These huge luxury models are the latest wrinkle offered by the industry, and they're beginning to take up berths—large berths—around the West. And they're just the beginning. "Our next boats will come with a big-screen television and a hot tub," says Jones Valley Resort general manager Michael Han.

travel

RECREATION





ANCHORED UNDER AN UMBER ARCH on Lake Powell (above, left) or in a sheltered cove on Shasta Lake (above), a houseboat offers mobility plus bed and board.

The appeal of these boats is readily apparent if you've ever attempted to share a vacation with a large group of people. A boat this big, with all its toys, comforts, and space, offers something for everyone in my extended family, from rowdy cousin Mike, who likes opera and beer, to quiet sister-in-law Pam, who enjoys books and gourmet meals.

As we cruise toward Shasta Dam, the first truism of houseboating becomes clear: A houseboat never goes as fast as you wish it would. When we finally arrive to take in the dam, Mt. Shasta commands the northwestern sky like a snow giant, and bald eagles call from the treetops. Everything is wonderful, idyllic. Enter the iceberg.

We attempt to dock at a marina to pick up some supplies, trying to moor

between two smaller houseboats. Picture Mark McGwire squeezing between two preschoolers on a small bench. At the helm, veteran powerboater Mike is having trouble maneuvering. As my brother Bill succinctly puts it, "The steering response stinks."

The situation seems promising on our second attempt, but then, at the last minute, a puff of wind starts to blow us sideways toward the sharp metal bow of another houseboat. Suddenly, scattered phrases from all that legal paperwork we signed before boarding come rushing back, and we realize 1) we're responsible for any damage and 2) our new houseboat costs more than most houses.

We jump to action stations, and with mops, brooms, and paddles, push off the other houseboat and back away, an-



THIS GALLEY REALLY COOKS, with loads of room—even an entertainment center.

choring well offshore. It is then, in a moment of profound clarity, that we send our fishing skiff ashore for the supplies.

Houseboating truism number two: A boat this big never stops as fast as you hope it will. And number three: Delicate maneuvering is pretty much impossible, so don't get yourself in a spot where you'll need it.

At dusk, we fire up the barbecue to grill our salmon, and fix dinner in a galley that's better appointed than my home kitchen. By nightfall, our party of 11 retreats into various suites, nooks, and crannies. Each of the four bedrooms has its own large window ("Kind of like a cruise ship," says Mom); the pullout beds are comfortable, and curtained for privacy. On the CD player, Andrea Bocelli sings "Con Te Partiro" ("Time to Say Goodbye").

As I drift off, some last, familiar truisms lap against my consciousness. To enjoy the journey, strike a pace that lets you unwind; never forget to take in the view; and when you work together, sometimes you can avoid disasters of *Titanic* proportions.

Western houseboating questions and answers

Q: *Is a three-story houseboat a little big for a first-timer?*

A: Yes. Start small. Even if your nautical experience consists of watching reruns of *McHale's Navy*, you'll find that a basic 36-foot houseboat (sleeps six) is easy

LAKE SHASTA'S DREAMBOAT

