

Square Meal

SUMMER 2009 £3.50

LIFESTYLE

SERENA WILLIAMS
QUEEN OF THE COURTS

CHRISTIAN BALE
ON THE DARK ART OF METHOD ACTING

dangerous
mind

CHAMPAGNE SPECIAL

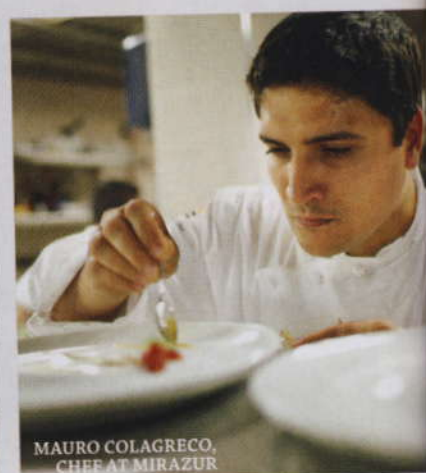
NATIONAL TREASURES
WE SELECT THE UK'S TOP 50 PLACES TO EAT

PLUS
★ fashion ★ gadgets
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★ new openings ★ travel



sunshine on a plate

Eating out on the glamorous Côte d'Azur has always been something of a curate's egg as Michelin stars jostle with menus touristiques, but the tide is turning. **Hilary Armstrong** discovers plenty to smile about in this summer playground



MAURO COLAGRECO,
CHEF AT MIRAZUR

CEP CARPACCIO
AT MIRAZUR



THE RIVIERA
AT MENTON

FROM TOP:
VIEWS OF THE
BELLES-RIVES,
JUAN-LES-PINS



From Cassis in the west all the way to the border with Liguria, the Côte d'Azur holds

an enduring appeal for travellers. It's hard not to be seduced by mile after mile of sun-kissed coastline, glossy resorts, pretty hillside villages and lively markets. Lovers of good food have certainly never been immune to its charms, with such legendary houses of haute cuisine as La Colombe d'Or at Saint-Paul de Vence and Le Moulin des Mougins near Cannes being unmissable stops on any gastronomic tour de France. In truth, the region also has its fair share of tourist traps overcharging for substandard salade niçoise. Happily, a new breed of young chefs and restaurateurs are putting an end to such bad practice, serving up the kind of exciting, modern Provençal food we actually want to eat. Here's our pick of the best...

DESTINATION DINING

MIRAZUR

30 Avenue Ariste Briand,
06500 Menton; +33 (0)4 92
41 86 86; www.mirazur.fr

In just three years, Argentinian chef Mauro Colagreco has achieved great things at Mirazur in Menton, including *Gault Millau's* Chef of the Year 2009 and a place on the current list of the World's 50 Best Restaurants. As destination dining on the Riviera goes, it's the address du jour – and a snip compared to Monte Carlo's big-name establishments. Perched above the blue-rinse town of Menton, this imposing venue enjoys panoramic views of the sea and gardens from which Colagreco draws his inspiration. Dazzling local ingredients come unadulterated, their flavours pure and uncomplicated. Don't miss the San Remo 'gamberoni', jumbo

prawns served whole, their juices spilling onto a jumble of flowers. Equally impressive is the region's ubiquitous red mullet, swimming in a milky foam of smoked butter and sorrel. Colagreco's recent travels in Japan have also inspired some audacious combinations such as celeriac noodles tangled up in dashi broth.

LA PASSAGERE

Hotel Belles Rives, 33 Boulevard Edouard Baudoin, 06160 Juan-Les-Pins; +33 (0)4 93 61 02 79; www.bellesrives.com

Alain Llorca swapped one prestigious Riviera address for another when he moved from Michelin-starred Le Moulin de Mougins to the exquisitely preserved art deco Hotel Belles Rives. His food is synonymous with jaw-dropping prices, but he has reined in any extravagant tendencies with menus that are a comparative steal at €90. Big hits include a 'bonbon' of seared foie gras, 'pizza cube' with black olives, artichokes and tomatoes, and a signature scallop risotto with peas and morels. The dining room with its art deco frescoes is gorgeous – although, on a balmy night, the terrace overlooking the sea is unbeatable. Otherwise, slum it at Les Cabines on the private beach. Champagne 'on the rocks' at €15 might bring a tear to the eye, but it's worth forking out for a bottle of chilled rosé and a sardine baguette if only to park one's derrière on one of the Riviera's most sought-after deckchairs.

LES BACCHANALES

247 Avenue de Provence, 06140 Vence;
+33 (0)4 93 24 19 19

Chef Christophe Dufau has thrown open the doors of his grand abode high in the hills of Provence, and created a chic, yet informal restaurant a short walk from the Matisse Chapel at Vence. His contemporary cuisine, strewn with locally foraged flowers, chimes perfectly with the bold canvases and sculptures that adorn the dining room and garden, and dishes have a commendably light touch. Lubéron asparagus with spicy 'pane con pomodoro' is offset by a cooling foil of thyme ice cream, while sesame- and goji-topped hake comes with a smooth almond purée. Dufau, a Niçois local, has imported a chilled approach to service from his sojourns in Denmark, and now takes every order himself. Menus from €34 to €70.



not the usual wimpy 'curry' à la française.
Formulas at €15 and €23 are worth a look
at lunch, evening menus are €30 or €50.

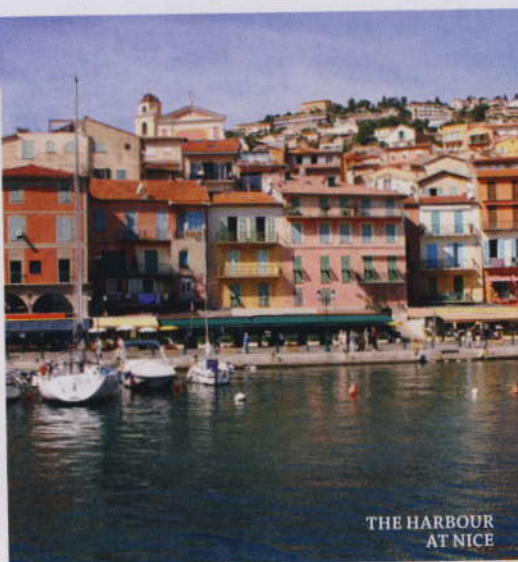
In a quiet street behind
Picasso, Laurent Paris
year-old kitchen is a place
to the town's most
weekly changing



22 Rue
02 26 06, www.
his Michèle
ese chef Keisuke
to a more
What

Young
challenged
new organ

SIMONE
SERENA WILLIAMS



La Merenda is a cramped, masochistic trial of hard chairs and parties of five clashing elbows around tables for two. Of course, it's also quite wonderful

is relaxed, beach-friendly stuff including crudités with tapenade, salade de Nice with a nip of lemony olive oil, paella with jumbo prawns and delicately flavoured ice creams. Prices aren't low, but portions are large.

LA CAVE DE L'ORIGINE

3 Rue Dalpozzo, 06000 Nice;
+33 (0)4 83 50 09 60

An épicerie-cum-'bistrot à vins' with space for diners at shabby-chic bench seating towards the back. Around a dozen, mainly local wines are offered by the glass, with €5 corkage on bottles picked from the shelves. The food is traditional and thoughtfully produced – plates of charcuterie, foie gras terrine, vegetable gratins or cheese from favoured Riviera affineur Robert Bedot.

TRADITIONAL PROVENÇAL

LA MERENDA

4 Rue Raoul Bosio, 06300 Nice
Internet food forums buzz each summer with the latest word on getting a reservation at the famous no-cards, telephone-free Merenda near Nice's Cours Saleya. Being on

bisous terms with the ex-Michelin starred chef-patron, Dominique Le Stanc, helps – although swinging by pre-service with a polite request sometimes works. Once you're in, it's a cramped and masochistic trial of hard stools and parties of five clashing elbows around tables for two. Of course, it's also quite wonderful. Pasta with garlicky pistou, tripes à la niçoise, stuffed sardines and courgette flower beignets are modest but flawless Provençal dishes, from €9 to €13 a throw.

LE CAFÉ DE LA FONTAINE

4 Avenue du Général de Gaulle, 06320 La Turbie; +33 (0)4 93 28 52 79;
www.hostelleriejerome.com

Bruno Cirino is a regular at Nice's food market, and his Hostellerie Jérôme – set in a magnificently frescoed, medieval presbytery – serves refined 'cuisine de terroir' in the fine-dining idiom. Budget day-trippers, however, might prefer to dine at his wood-panelled, all-day bistro, Le Café de la Fontaine. Here, a lively mix of locals and visitors can tuck into rather more homely Provençal dishes and pichets of wine at a third of the price. Expect to pay around €25 for three courses, which might include pistou of market vegetables, gigot d'agneau and strawberry tart.

WHERE TO STAY

TOILE BLANCHE, SAINT-PAUL DE VENCE

826 Chemin de la Pouchounière,
06750 Saint-Paul de Vence; +33 (0)4 93
32 74 21; www.toileblanche.com
Run by artists in the hills by Saint-Paul, the Toile Blanche is the very definition of boutique, with just six rooms on offer. Also at guests' disposal are a 16m pool, wellness suite and quality restaurant. Up to €255 a room.

HI HOTEL, NICE

3 Avenue des Fleurs, 06000 Nice;
+33 (0)4 97 07 26 26

A youthfully zany 38-room hotel with Green Globe eco-certification. Designed by Philippe Starck protégé Matali Crasset, with waterbeds on the roof terrace and modesty-be-damned bathrooms, it's a cool city getaway 200m from the beach. Doubles from €239.

HOTEL BELLES RIVES, JUAN-LES-PINS

33 Boulevard Edouard Baudoin, 06160
Juan-Les-Pins; +33 (0)4 93 61 02 79;
www.bellesrives.com

Once a home-from-home to F Scott Fitzgerald and his wife Zelda, the Belles



Rives was turned into a luxury hotel in 1929 and remains the most elegant address in the Cap d'Antibes area thanks to its spacious terraces and listed art deco styling. Illustrious guests have included Ella Fitzgerald and Cab Calloway. Rates start at €535 for a sea-facing room in high season.

HOTEL NAPOLEON, MENTON

29 Porte de France, 06500 Menton;
+33 (0)4 93 35 89 50;
www.napoleon-menton.com

Located on the seafront at Menton, with views out over the Med and the old town. Rooms are modern, spacious and reasonably priced, peaking at €249.