

Wall Street International

A Sweet Escape Charming and personal

22 APR 2016 by MARCELLA MARTINELLI & TRAUSTI THOR SVERRISSON

There is no shortage of sumptuous holiday destinations in this day and age, the luxury travel industry thriving as never before. But for all their poshness and polish, many lack what may be difficult to put into words, character, integrity, effortless charm, a personal dimension. Now that may not be your cup of tea but it certainly is ours and It was therefore with great joy that we accepted an invitation to stay at, in our minds, one of the most iconic places of gastronomic and hospitality excellence on the French Riviera, The Belles Rives in Juan- les- Pins.

Sometimes one dreams of staying in a hotel that not only has beauty, comfort, elegance and luxury on the waterfront all combined in equal measures but also dares to expect to find a hotel with that added romantic touch. This is such a place, with a touch of old fashioned glamour that you feel immediately when you walk through the doors. But there is more than just a vague feeling of elegance and class, before long we notice a quotation engraved in marble: ‘Nobody was in Antibes that summer... except me, Zelda, the Valentinos, the Murphys, Mistinguett, Rex Ingram, Don Passos, Alice Terry, Etienne de Beaumont... Just the right place to rough it, an escape from the world.’

We most certainly were in the right place for our escape, where F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote his masterpiece, ‘Tender is The Night’, transforming Villa Saint Louis into a resort for wealthy Americans discovering the pleasures of wild partying and swimming in the sea, providing him later with inspiration for The Great Gatsby.

And his presence is still felt, as the owner, Marianne Estène-Chauvin, tells us as we spend the best part of our first morning in her gracious company. The Scott Fitzgerald Prize is awarded annually, she remarks, at the beginning of the summer, for a literary novel reflecting the elegance, spirit, style and taste of the art of living as portrayed in Fitzgerald’s novels and indeed his own lifestyle. She also reveals how her own family came here from Russia via Paris and after trials and tribulations through generations she can now focus on doing Belles Rives justice as the jewel of the Riviera with the newly restored sister hotel, Juana, close by.

Discovered and launched by Cole Porter and F. Scott Fitzgerald, the seaside resort of Juan les Pins was originally created in 1882 and subsequently developed in the thirties under the impetus of the American billionaire Frank Jay Gould, after whom the Pine tree gardens are named, a festive and in many ways a family-oriented resort Juan les Pins also plays host to one of the oldest Jazz festivals in Europe.

The Belles Rives is ideally located, at the centre of the Riviera, emblematic of the prestige and glamour of the Côte d’Azur. Famous not only for its unique panorama of both mountain and sea one might argue the Côte d’Azur is a unique region in the world, characterised by its cultural riches and dolce vita. Many artists have of course been inspired by the natural beauty of the scenery, from Renoir to Matisse, Pablo Picasso and Nicolas de Staël to name a few. And although you will not be found wanting here you may like to take advantage of the diversity of the Côte d’Azur extending from Saint -Tropez and its famous beaches to Monaco, princely and cosmopolitan, without forgetting Nice – a city of art and culture and Cannes, with its world-renown International Film Festival. Our favourite is however the food market every morning in Antibes where you can acquire a small feast to take and enjoy on the beach nearby.

If you want a more formal setting for your meal however, you can either have it in the hotel's own Michelin star restaurant La Passagere or right on the water, in La Plage, enjoying your lunch on the edge of the Mediterranean with a cuisine to suit the summer, light with Provençal flavours centred around grilled fish, the salad bar, langoustine skewers and, of course, a perfectly chilled glass of rosé. We can attest to the excellence of chef Yoric Tièche and may we also advise to succumb to the irresistible collection of pastries created by Steve Moracchini, the Pastry Chef of the Year 2016.

As we leave thanks are due to the most attentive concierge team for making our stay so pleasant. The French Riviera offers an unparalleled variety of cultural attractions, natural beauties, artistic treasures, vibrant nightlife and, last but not least, an excellent choice of restaurants which the team helped us navigate. As a memoir we are happy to take with us a piece of Mediterranean sun and colours in the form of beautifully crafted crockery made by our hostess and adorning the restaurant tables, somehow very fitting to the character and attentiveness you will find in this wonderful place.

