

## French fancy: Le Mas Candille

The Provençal village of Mougins is celebrating a gastronomy festival and the anniversary of Picasso's death this month, but its hill-top luxury hotel is a constant reason for celebration, says Rosamund Urwin



High praise: in the hills above Cannes, former 18th century farm Le Mas Candille has a Michelin-starred restaurant serving exquisite cuisine; (inset) the spa hotel has three pools and rooms with views of the Alps

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He was being helicoptered to Monaco, naturally.

The "Candille" name comes from the cypress trees that line the path as you drive up to the entrance, interspersed with olive groves. You get to see the three swimming pools too; one is intended for the under-16s so that those wishing to sunbathe with a book won't have the pages of The Shining Girls punctuated by shrieking children.

On arrival, the view from the restaurant terrace immediately lifts the spirits: pines to the Alps, with Grasse, the French home of perfume, glistening in the Provençal sun.

My room faced the same way. To describe my suite as luxurious would be like calling the Sistine Chapel "prettily painted": it was white truffles and Krug luxury, without crossing the line into ostentation. It had a walk-in wardrobe, a dining table, a marble bathroom that was bigger than my current bedroom and a large balcony.

Attention is paid to every detail, from the petits fours sent as a welcome from the kitchen to the finest cotton sheets on the bed. I slept as well I have in years — aided by a massage in the Shiseido spa.

I suspect the food helped there too. You will need far more resolve than me not to return from Le Mas Candille a few pounds heavier — the cooking is simply too good.

Breakfast is a buffet, with bread straight out of the oven, pastries, exotic fruits, yoghurts, cured meats and eggs. It's easily enough to carry you to dinner where the feast really starts. On my second night, I sampled the eight-course gastronomic dinner that has earned its chef, Serge Gouloumes, a nod from the Michelin judges.

He cooks with whatever is in season and looks good in the market in Cannes that day.

That meant scallops to start, with a light lemon oil dressing, followed by a green asparagus stew and then pigeon supreme with glazed courgette blossom. Each course was better than the last — the pigeon deliciously tender — and the presentation worthy of an immediate upload to Instagram.

Pudding was the highlight, though: a lemon meringue with vanilla panna cotta and poached pineapple — the flavours complementing each other perfectly.

Gouloumes will be one of the stars of the village's annual Festival of Gastronomy, "Les Etoiles de Mougins", which runs from September 27 to 29. It's no surprise Mougins can support such a celebration of food — it is a gastronome's fantasy, with 48 restaurants and a heavy emphasis on fine dining.

Gouloumes will be holding demonstrations and hosting dinners during the festival. An acquaintance of Raymond Blanc's, he possesses a similar cheeky Gallic charm. And he's equally passionate about food: he showed a small group of guests around the market in Cannes, teaching us how to pick the freshest fish before cooking what he had found in the kitchen. If only culinary genius rubbed off.

Aside from its curving medieval streets and cuisine, Mougins has another great draw: art.

Picasso moved there in 1961, and remained until his death 12 years later. The village has been marking the 40 years since his passing with a series of exhibitions; until the end of the month, the Musée d'Art Classique de Mougins (MACM) is hosting "Picasso's classical heritage", featuring etchings and linocuts exploring his obsession with the classical.

The MACM, which has only been open two years, already holds a phenomenal collection, blending ancient and modern art. So it houses sarcophaguses but also a Marc Quinn sculpture.

It is the baby of Christian Levett, a London hedge fund boss and avid art collector. There is also a small photography gallery that warrants a swift visit — my favourite image showed Picasso scrubbing his back in the bath.

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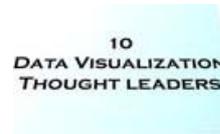
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beyond Mougins, a trip to Grasse is recommended. At its International Museum of Perfume, they teach how to mix scents to construct a perfume.

Nice, Cannes, home to the glitzy film festival but rather tawdry when it's not in town, and Monaco, with its casino and tax exiles, are also within easy reach. And for the ultimate contrast with that moneyed pair, you can take the boat to the nearby island of St-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, home to wine-making Cistercian monks.

On the journey home — with my happiness diminishing as Heathrow approached — I wondered what I could do to return to the Mas Candille (buying a flat in London means luxury breaks are off the agenda).

Maybe there's a body organ that I can sell on the black market? We have a spare kidney, after all. Or perhaps there's some relative I could auction off on eBay. Either way, I hope I'll find my way back there some day.

#### DETAILS: FRANCE

British Airways flies from Heathrow to Nice, returns from £152.70, [ba.com](#)

The Mas Candille has doubles from £305 room only, [emas candille.com](#)

[esetoiledemougins.com](#)

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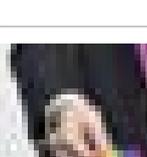
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