

Press Kit



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10, place du Général de Gaulle
83170 La Celle-en-Provence
Tel : +33 (0)4.98.05.14.14 – Fax : +33 (0)4. 98.05.14.15

<http://www.abbaye-celle.com/>
contact@abbaye-celle.com

« Inns are the hymns praising the art of the innkeeper, made from an encounter between a story and a mood. They translate a faith in Man's generosity, in his innate sense of hospitality. »

Alain Ducasse

Since he created the Bastide de Moustiers in 1995, the profession of contemporary innkeeper has impassioned Alain Ducasse. Presiding over Châteaux & Hôtels Collection since 1999, he opened the “Hostellerie de l'Abbaye de La Celle” the very same year, followed by Andana in Tuscany in 2004. He was able to restore these three houses to their original nobility, and they now carry his name, like a medal of honour.

When gazed upon with the reverence they warrant, they finally reveal their unique history, inhabited by particular accents and scents. While offering to the traveller all the expected modern comforts, these establishments display their vision of “art de vivre”, at the crossroads of an era, a regional culture and an omnipresent nature. Over anything else, Alain Ducasse wishes to value the jobs that demand rigorous and subtle know-how.



SOME HISTORY

The history of the Abbaye de la Celle is that of a beautiful combination of splendour and decline, and a way of life pursued in the lands of Provence.

This boutique hotel, member of « Châteaux & Hôtels Collection », is adjacent to a 12th century Benedictine roman abbey that in its heyday, defrayed all the chronicles. In a hidden valley at the foothills of the Loube, three kilometres from Brignoles, this historical hideaway gained notoriety when Garcende de Sabran, Queen of Provence, took to the veil. Leaving behind her court and troubadours who had celebrated her captivating beauty in Aix, she became the mother superior of the abbey. Donations abound. Soon, other girls from wealthy families follow her example. Some by their own volition, other pushed by their families if an advantageous marriage could not be arranged. The nuns gradually implement their retirement with pleasures brought in from outside their confinement that the money provided by their families can offer. They build elegant pavilions on the grounds of the abbey to receive their “tender friends” in their cells, transformed into bedchambers. News of their scandalous behaviour reached Versailles.

In 1660, Cardinal Mazarin personally decides to close down the abbey, where twenty-four “recluse” still remain. Defended by the villagers, the nuns refuse to leave the premises, which slowly decline due to lack of funding. The monastery slowly deteriorates. In 1886, the Benedictine convent is classed as a historic monument.

It is only in the 20th century that the site is given new life: Sylvia Fournier, then owner of the Porquerolles Islands, purchases it in 1938. Within a few months, the chapter house on the grounds of the abbey is restored. The new Hostellerie gains in rank as the first four stars in the Var, a location where the general de Gaulle sojourns three times, lauding its « appeasing serenity ». So proud of the 300 000 trees she planted throughout her life, Sylvia Fournier remains to this day the Great Lady of La Celle. She dies in 1971. The property falls back into slumber until it is purchased by the Conseil Général of the Var, in 1990. The medieval section is restored.

It is at that time that Alain Ducasse takes over the Hostellerie that soon becomes the primary meeting place for gourmets of the region, who gather around a sensitive culinary interpretation, a reflexion of the image that is unique to the Hostellerie. The chef calls upon the talent and expertise of the local craftsmen who, under the masterful eye of Robert Michel, a Brignoles architect restore the home to its 18th century Provençale panache. Francesco Flavigny, a landscape artist selected by the “monuments historiques” laboured to preserve the bicentenary flora of the three-hectare property when rejuvenating the grounds.

A PERFECT BALANCE OF LIFESTYLE, HERITAGE AND GASTRONOMY

In 1999, Alain Ducasse invests himself into the future of the Hostellerie de l'Abbaye de la Celle, renovating it with the utmost care, transforming it into a boutique hotel nestled in the heart of green Provence. In 2011, he draws back attention to the Romane abbey. He hands the project to the decorator Tonya Peyrot who works towards creating a feminine atmosphere, steeped in lightness, refinement, light-heartedness and renewed happiness, inspired by the nuns who once lived there. The aim was to restore the Hostellerie to its original personality and true identity, with that certain additional soulfulness that defines strong and distinct places.



A CONTEMPORARY LIFESTYLE RESPECTFUL OF THE PAST

While the names of the famous nuns are inscribed on copper plates, the interior is completely updated. Soft grey or sky blue, the natural lime paint deepens the intensity of the walls and the doorframes. Previously varnished wood furniture has been stripped bare. Now nourished with wax, they are once again of sober elegance. Living spaces are interspersed with decorative elements creating contrast between tradition and modernism. On the walls as in the lobby, lighting by Jean-Claude Novaro evokes a floral theme in a resolutely contemporary aesthetic vocabulary. The main building, a house built in the 18th century, opens on the ground floor to a series of welcoming living spaces and the staircase that leads to the rooms.

On the first floor, the two suites overlooking the park display magnificent proportions, vast dressing rooms and communicating doors. The Lucrece de Barras suite is warm and very spacious. The tones– red, cream, white- and the materials – velvet, wood, and ceramic – harmoniously combine, giving the suite an air of rustic elegance.

The Garcende de Sabran suite has retained the imposing fireplace. The decoration plays with a soft pallet of parma and the brown tones of the walnut furniture. This suite is both chic and authentic.

On the second floor, the attic rooms have multiple volumes. Decorated with a panelling headboard, the Sancier de Signes room overlooks the market square and its venerable plane trees. Respectively declined in cream and almond green, the Cécile d'Avenos and Béatrice de Villeneuve rooms enjoy a view of the tree-lined terrace.

The Beguinage - annex of the main house - is not left out: the junior suites each enjoy private gardens. They proudly bear their new name: Etienne de Sault, Apolline de Waguelonne, Eliette Bourasu or Angélique de Champigny, which contains the bed that the General de Gaulle's slept on... Each room overlooks the Coteaux Varois vineyards. Three of them have particularly cosy ambiance, each with a mezzanine and sitting room. The Perpétue de la Celle room enjoys a bamboo-adorned conservatory.

In pursuit of the upmost comfort, the bathrooms have also been renovated: bathtubs are voluptuously sheltered within the alcoves, while Salernes ceramic tiles decorate the walls rendering very Provençal touch. Even the shower curtains are lined on the outside with a fabric designed by Nia Nordisca. Pierre Frey, Elitis and

Dédar provide most of the canvases in the Hostellerie. As a four star hotel, the inn offers air conditioning, internet access, telephone, hair dryer, safe deposit box and minibar. For the maximum comfort, beds, televisions and HI FI equipment have recently been upgraded.

Meals are served either in the Alsacie de Montpellier room or the wood panelled Diane de Calluire room. Moustiers pottery or in Palissy style ceramics hung on the walls establish an original dialogue between the glass light fixtures by Jean-Claude Novaro and the photos of vegetables by Jacqueline Salmon. Apples, pears or giant pumpkins...some marble powder ceramics are set here and there, an offbeat nod to the more traditional pottery activity entertained previously by the nun. On the tables, hand blown glass luminaries evoke Biot, continued through to the Salon des Amoureux Louise de Castellane, for a more intimate meal.

Contiguous, the conservatory overlooking the garden holds a bar and comfortable leather armchairs. Finally, within the heart of the inn: the kitchen is open to the guests, to the great delight of the chef Benoit Witz and his team.

At the Hostellerie de l'Abbaye de La Celle, receiving our visitors is a pleasure equal to being welcomed!



THE HOSTELLERIE FROM THE KITCHEN

Benoît Witz was one of the first members of the Alain Ducasse team. Alumni of the Louis XV restaurant in Monaco, he faithfully transcribes the great chef culinary philosophy. It is no accident that the inn has become a privileged landmark for the gourmets of the region. His motto: the product in the purest form, the chef's acquired knowledge and a certain feeling of mankind.

A variety of tomatoes, beef heart, green zebra, «noire de Crimée », «rose de Berne», and white, pink, and purple aubergines, orange chard... Benoît Witz is passionate about his vegetables, supplied from a garden watered with spring water and weeded by hand. Feel free to join him in his vegetable plot for a wonderful lesson in culinary botany! The author of the celebrated books « leçons de cuisine » occasionally completes his produce basket at the stalls of the greengrocers Duclos or Nicolaï. Far removed from static list of options, you will discover the evolution of menus at the rhythm of the seasons and of the markets. The chef works alongside local craftsmen: oils from the Moulin de St Cassien, brousse from Rove made with care by a local cheese maker, saffron made the old fashioned way at Sillans la Cascade or young wild fish, mostly caught in the Mediterranean, selected on the Marseilles markets. Regular guests at Benoît Witz' table follow his menus themes attentively, following the seasons best produce: Asparagus in the spring, lobster in the summer, truffles and cep in autumn, foie gras in the winter....

At the helm, sweet side, pastry chef Laurent Trocmé has worked along side Nicolas Berger (executive pastry chef at Alain Ducasse Entreprise) and Christophe Michalak (world champion pastry chef in 2005) in Paris. He fine-tunes his creations with Benoît Witz. Citrus tarts, grapefruit sorbet; Hautes-Alpes apples with shortbread pastry, vanilla ice cream. He delights guests with treats in their bedroom every evening and breakfast: mixed nut tarts, nougats, marshmallows, caramels and other delicacies.

For wedding banquets or any other celebration, the magnificent Salle Capitulaire can be privatized. Set in between the Hostellerie and the Abbey, this 77m2 room was the initially the nuns reading room. The original stones and vaulted ceiling are a prime example of Romanesque architecture. They open onto the beautiful cloister flanked with columns, owned by the Regional Council. Medieval history aficionados will appreciate the still existing secret passages and hallways leading from one room to the next. This room serves also as an exposition room.

INSIDE OR OUTDOORS, ART FIND ITS PLACE

Plant sculptures by Isabelle Barriole, canvases by Isabelle Merlet or Yves Nioret, floral paintings by Jean Verrechia... Until purchased, these works are visible to the enjoyment of all, in the living spaces and the bedrooms. In the oversized garden, graphic and primitive steel sculptures and wood totems by Nathalie Decoster express a unique presence vacillating between time and poetry. The ancient chapel, a charming building whose portico is flanked by caryatides, now houses the boutique. Inside, guests can find aromatised honey, risotto rice, home made pasta, Terre Bormane olive oil, adorable cotton nighties or some of the essences that delicately scent the rooms of the Hostellerie.

UN ECRIN VEGETAL OU IL FAIT BON FLANER ET REVER

A string of gardens and vineyards surround the house. As the months roll by, birds, then frogs and finally, cicadas deploy their sunny song. As the days get warmer, lunch on the terrace is very in demand, as the park is protected from eastern wind by a row of centenary Cyprus trees, from the west by the nuns dormitory and from the south the Candélon mountains. Two natural springs feed the five fountains, some of which directly irrigate the vegetable garden. In the spring, the rose garden flowers on the bowers, sheltering the outside tables prized by lovers seeking out privacy to the sound of delicately trickling of the water. To get to the Béguinage, the walk through the « medicinal plant » garden offers a perfumed stroll amongst cherry trees, blackcurrant and gooseberry bushes. Inside boxwood planters, garden herbs are designated by names on slate. Chocolate mint, lemon verbena, tarragon and basil of all kinds...brushing up on your basics becomes a game! Wine lovers need only to cross through the Cyprus trees to arrive in an extraordinary conservatory containing 88 varieties of grape.

Could this be Paradise on earth?



AROUND THE ABBAYE DE LA CELLE

The third Alain Ducasse inn is the perfect starting point to discover another side to Provence: the Var, between nature and history.

Here, you will also find lavender, rosemary bushes and the same scents that colour the Mediterranean coast. But in this valley tucked between the Roc de Candélon and the Loube mountains, another Provence unveils itself, green and intense. At the heart of the Var, this mysterious region lauded in novels and legends, the charming village of Celle particularly shines due to its Romanesque 12th century abbey. Still in the process of restoration, it will open its newest renovated wing in 2012, after a long drawn project by the Regional Council.

Another local gem: the house of “Coteaux Varois de Provence” wines, neighbouring the Hostellerie. This mandatory player in the wine-growing world is located in a picturesque building of impressive volumes and minimalist décor. Wines from the “Coteaux de Provence” are centre stage. Wine tasting, sale, shipping... There is no better place to be introduced to a general guide to oenology, particularly to the local wines: the 80 cellars and domains of the region are represented here. Do not miss the Abbey vintage! For the pleasure of all senses, a selection of product dedicated to the “aperitif”, sacred here, are offered, such as the olive oil line PPP (First Press Provence) by Olivier Baussan, amongst other preparations including olives, anchovies and other flavours.

Lifestyle in Green Provence can also be sensed throughout the narrow streets of the village of Celle, on the banks of the river Caramy that runs through it, or even the fountains spotted around the village squares. In summer, a classical music festival or themed nights attract crowds of amateurs inside the majestic Romanesque abbey. From the market squares dotted with plane trees to the Mairie, from the Café du Midi to the police station, from the Boules court to the ancient laundry fountains and to the church, La Celle personifies quintessential Provence. And it is by traveling from one village to the next that one discovers the true Var. Christening of vintage Coteaux Varois, Olive Fest, local wine and produce fair...The region celebrates its culinary heritage throughout the year. A delicious way to revisit your history lessons!

In Brignoles, 3 kilometres away, the old medieval village is discovered from an elegant doorway to a ducal palace, revisiting the riche hours of the Dukes of Provence: epicures will organise a visit on a Saturday morning to enjoy the colourful market and its scents. Purists will not be disappointed: Saint Sauveur church, built in the 11th century, or Templars Gate are testimonials to a glorious past, as are the Roman ruins in Fréjus, only a few miles away. Aqueducts, amphitheatre, Roman theatres or arenas transport the traveller back to the cradle of occidental history. Entrecasteaux castle, built in the 16th century in the valley of the Bresque and on a river of the same name, or the famous Thoronet abbey, both offer an inspired voyage throughout a medieval universe. Finally in Mazaugues, man's ingeniousness has evaded nature's tricks: natural glaciers in Fronfrège allowed winter ice to be kept in stone cylinders for use in Marseille and Toulon, until the 19th century.

For a healthy spirit in a healthy body, the Var is also a treasure trove of sports activities: rock climbing by the Carcès Lake, canoeing down the Argens starting at Correns or Montfort, fantastic hikes or horse riding throughout Provence, and last by not least, the fabulous golf course at Barbaroux or Nans-les-Pins. The Hostellerie, however, offers the possibility to associate relaxation and health: in the shade of the chestnut trees, the swimming pool of exceptional beauty will next year include a pool house and a massage area.



Press Contact :

Manon Fays
Tel : +377 98 06 88 57
manon.fays@alain-ducasse.com