

# Cognoscenti magazine

**Because life is short**

## La Chassagnette Arles

“You’re my first outdoor customers of the year!” exclaimed Jean-Luc Rabanel, **La Chassagnette’s** chef, as we were seated in the restaurant’s delightful outdoor garden area. **Cognoscenti Magazine** editors had arrived early for lunch on a lovely early spring day after a prolonged cool snap—but with the garden already beginning to yield up its bounty of fresh, biodynamic produce, it was suddenly clear that spring had in fact arrived. And in the Camargue, windy land of flamingoes and wild horses by the sea, spring is most beautiful.



*Chef Jean-Luc Rabanel*

To the tune of a gurgling fountain, we began a series of courses of impeccably fresh food brought to table on rustic wooden platters. Full branches—not springs—of fresh rosemary adorned the table. First came a quartet of amuses-bouches that showcased the chef’s considerable talents through a series of delicious vegetable crèmes, veloutés, and caviars, including avocado cream, egg-plant caviar, tapenade, and *beignets* of *morue*. Thick, fiber-rich bread was served piping hot, right from the oven. We scooped the tips of fresh radishes (the greens still attached) into the dips to sample them. That morning, the chef had gone to his garden at 5 AM (as he does every morning!) and found that the radishes were ready to eat. “I see what’s in the garden and I plan my menu,” he told us. Fresh mussels with squid, chorizo thyme, and *tomates confites* were beautifully fresh, but we felt the chorizo added an unnecessary heaviness to this dish. The main course was *Cabillaud* fish with potatoes and roquette salad, the fish cooked in bamboo, with fresh cilantro adding a refreshing

bite. For dessert, we surrendered to a crisp pear tart with passion fruit syrup, baked to perfection at the edge of a wood fire.

Chef Rabanel’s boundless energy has him busy with a number of new projects. He’s planning on setting up big tents and lounge chairs in the grass behind the organic garden, so guests wishing to take a nap can tune out for a few hours to the sound of birds (and the wafting smells of his delicious dishes!) He’s also planting cherry, apricot and pear trees, and he’s creating what he calls “La table des copains,” a casual dining area at the front of the restaurant to serve simple dishes like sandwiches and sautéed mussels for those who are looking for just a snack. This apostle of biodynamic cuisine has recently created a cooking school to teach its particular appeal: “Here, the door opens, and we just showcase our passion,” says the chef. “It must not only taste good but also be good for you.”

There we sat in the warm spring sunshine, sipping at flutes of iced *Veuve Cliquot* and listening to frogs plopping into the canal next to the garden. We smiled: this was more than lunch; this was a full-blown—and completely delightful—ecological experience.

This article was written by Nicole Medvecky-Riggs, Contributing Editor to *Cognoscenti Magazine*.

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