

Cognoscenti magazine

Jules Cesar Hotel Arles

Because life is short

Set in a 17th century Carmelite convent only a few steps from the center of historic Arles, **Hotel Jules Cesar** offers an international clientele comfortable lodging along with fine food and wine at its gastronomic restaurant, **Lou Marques**.

Our room, one of 49 at the hotel, featured antique furnishings and exposed stone walls that hinted at the property's storied past, while the mini-bar, electronic safe, and TV addressed more modern needs. Air conditioning throughout the hotel means a welcome respite from Arles' torrid summer weather—as does the on-site swimming pool. Ill-fitting doors and a somewhat dated look suggest the need for renovation of the guest rooms, however.

A chapel attached to the hotel features an impressive baroque-style panel on its altar, with a central painting of St Teresa of Avila. These days it's used for seminars and banquets, hosting as many as 120 people, and thanks to its wonderful acoustics, concerts are also sometimes staged here.

"What's special here are our gardens *within* the city,"

notes proprietor Michel Albagnac. These include a hedged garden by the terrace of the restaurant (where breakfast is served in the summer), a lovely inner courtyard, and a provençal garden out by the swimming pool.



The Jules Cesar, a stately "Relais & Chateaux" in Arles.

In the restaurant, dark wood paneling, tall windows and curtains, and copper pots on the walls establish an appealing tone. Large wrought-iron lamps illuminate generously spaced tables; false flowers are a gauche touch. A skilled service team, including Maître d'Hôtel Sebastian Bapt and

Sommelier Ludovic Barat, make sure diners' needs are well looked after.

Chefs de Cuisine Pascal Renaud and Joseph Kriz serve an appealing and often delicious menu of classic provençal dishes. Fresh vegetables are matched to every dish—no dullish "croquettes" here!

To start, *filet de rouget au coques sur un pomme de terre safranée et jus de bouillabaisse*, or red mullet with saffron and baby "coques" (a kind of clam) was excellent as was the scallop risotto featuring the fine local red rice.

In *daurade royale d'élevage grillée, jus de poissons de roche au curcuma et mousseline de pois cases*, grilled dorado worked successfully with curcuma and peas. The chefs also show a deft hand with meats. Duckling was exceptionally tender, while pigeon was cooked just pink. One of the best dishes was the *grenadins de veau français aux asperges de Provence, jus léger à la graine de moutarde et marjolaine*, the filet of veal working beautifully with mustard and marjoram: a lovely cut of meat and exciting flavors to complement it.

A *soufflé chaud au Grand Marnier; sorbet de chocolat amer* was light and rich, although somewhat overly creamy inside.

Sommelier Barat, who oversees a wine list of 450 references, wished to show us that “we don’t just do rosé in Provence!”

And to illustrate his point, he poured a series of impressive wines, beginning with a white 2001 *Domaine D’Estoublon* Vin de Pays Vieilles Vignes that showed rich mineral complexity. A biodynamic 1999 *Chateau Romanin* Les Baux-de-Provence held loads of black fruit and cola nut, cherry, and a touch of herbaceousness along with black earth. A 100% Mourvèdre 1998 *Domaine Tempier* “Cuvée La Tourtine” (Bandol) revealed high glycerin levels and fig and red currant flavors—nicely darkish in mood and with good aging potential. A *Château Simone* 1999 Grand Cru de Provence held raspberry and cassis notes with cranberry and cherry flavors in a balanced structure filling the mouth.



Royal dorado at the “Lou Marques” restaurant at the Jules Cesar Hotel.

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