

Cognoscenti magazine

Because life is short

Mas des Herbes Blanches Gordes

Approaching **Le Mas des Herbes Blanches** along a country road a little ways past Joucas, you see the building first, with its remarkable yellow-brown walls made in the traditional way, mortar-free, using small rocks typical of the area. Turning into the driveway, you notice the perfectly trimmed—and highly fragrant—hedges. Already you are getting the feeling: you are going to *like* this place.

“Le Lubéron,” the superbly-equipped suite occupied by **Cognoscenti Magazine** editors during a recent visit, actually has windows on *four* sides; it’s difficult to say which view is the most charming: The tiled roofs with chimney? The entrance archway with stones and fountains? The park of green fragrant pines? Or the terrace, with its expansive vistas far out over the Lubéron?

The striking and traditional wall-building techniques are utilized inside the suite as well as outside, with lovely red and yellow decorative touches effectively contrasting the stone’s monochromic presence. From the minibar, well-stocked with exotic liquors and treats, to the large, spotless sliding door that open onto the beautiful private patio garden, true touches of quality abound throughout. All those windows and

all that Provencal sunshine leave the guest rooms at Le Mas des Herbes Blanches bathed in a luminous glow. “We have a big focus on apertures,” notes owner Evelyne Juillard, “and we like to play with light.” All

rooms have outdoor spaces as well—either terraces, private gardens, or balconies.

As the sun set over Luberon’s pastoral hillsides, we passed into the L-shaped bar/salon and ordered flutes of 1995 Nicolas Feuillant *Cuvée Prestige*. Its lemon nose gracefully opened into notes of buttered

toast and truffle on the palate, leading into a long and nutty finish. As we were escorted to our table in the restaurant, we noticed that the walls of the beautiful dining room are daubed in a vivid natural orange ochre, drawn from the quarries of nearby Roussillon. Potted ficus trees and a trickling fountain in the center of the room lend the suggestion of being in a winter garden or on a veranda.

Chef Eric Sapet likes to develop culinary variations around a single food product, thus creatively highlighting a particular ingredient in several different forms. In one *amuse-bouche*, carrots were shown three ways; in another, three variations on mussels was of-



A stunning property with the highest level of hospitality.

ferred. In one starter (in honor of Easter), boiled eggs were utilized no fewer than 6 ways, and provocatively presented in a cardboard egg crate! And to end a meal, the chef presented three variations on strawberries: *gelée agrumes, avec orange*, and *avec fromage blanc*.

In *grosse Saint-Jacques roulées dans une fine barde de lard paysan, puis juste saisies, petits choux nouveaux farcis d'huitres, sauce ciabla*, scallops were wrapped in bacon with a sauce that is more often used to accompany roasted chicken. Said the chef of his daring notion, "It's the sensation of sweetness and violence, the calm and the tempest." Another fine play on scallops appeared in the irresistible *Saint-Jacques en coquille lutée, pulpe de citrons, fondue de fenouil et beurre de verveine* which was finished at table, the waiter unsealing the pastry and placing the coquille on the plate to yield a delicate combination of fennel with *verveine*.



Fine cuisine at the Michelin-star restaurant: Here, Tube noir de cacao.

Chef Sapet's culinary intrepitude extends beyond France's borders, bringing influences from places as diverse as Thailand and Morocco into dishes like a *soupe de moules au curcuma avec crème fouettée à la noix de coco*. And *grosse gambas piquées de vanille bourbon, poire sautée au gingembre et cardamon*, a prawn house signature dish both graceful and exotic, proposed creative flavor pairings venturing on flavors more often found in desserts: pear, vanilla bourbon and lemon. From the dryish bread served at dinner and the cake-like croissants served at an otherwise fine breakfast, baked goods were a weak point; as was a tendency to oversalt that was noted in several dishes.

Among Sommelier Jérôme Faure's wine selections were a *Hautes Roches Côtes du Ventoux 2001 "Cuvée des Combes,"* a mainly Grenache offering that had a fresh young nose and nice dark fruit; a light-to-me-



dium bodied 2001 *Foncrose* that showed notes of *garrigue*, mint, black currant, along with flint and a metallic aftertaste, and was too young to drink; and a *Chateau Mort Redon 1999 Chateauneuf-du-Pape* with cinnamon, tobacco and berry tones along with sweetish tannins and a playful finish.

This article was written by Nicole Medvecky and other contributing editors to *Cognoscenti Magazine*.

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