

Cognoscenti magazine

Because life is short

Le Metropole Beaulieu-sur-Mer

Le Metropole, a Relais & Chateaux establishment, is a very fine traditional seafront hotel in the small Côte d'Azur village of Beaulieu-sur-Mer, located halfway between Nice and Monaco. Its loyal clients know what they want—and to its considerable credit, Le Metropole's experienced service team knows precisely how to give it to them.

Our room, one of 40 (all have been refurbished and soundproofed in the last two years), featured painted furniture with exotic themes throughout—period sketches of the Yangtze River in China and the Taj Mahal. Its private balcony offered stunningly direct views of the Mediterranean sea, with Cap Ferrat on the right, and Monaco on the left. Every amenity, from air-conditioning and mini-safe to mini-bar, was provided, and everything was in perfect functioning order. Electric retractable shutters made it possible to take a refreshing nap in a dark room on a hot afternoon, while at night, after a storm blew in, we listened to the crashing of the waves on the dock below.

The entrance drive is lined with luxuriant strands of bamboo, providing a dense and exotic buffer from the outside world. "You're in a park at this hotel, you're away from the traffic, yet you aren't isolated—you're in the middle of the town," notes General Manager Jean Rauline.

There's a swimming pool and private jetty for sea outings, water-skiing, and other aquatic activities. The salt-water infinity-edge swimming pool is heated to 30 (!) degrees centigrade, with a heated "tunnel" that permits bathers to pass from hotel to pool during

cool months without becoming chilled by the outside air—just one of the thoughtful touches that abound at this hotel.

Thanks to its fine location, going out for a day on the town is as pleasant as staying in. It's only a few minutes' walk to Villa Kérylos, built on the seafront be-



Rooms directly over the Mediterranean

tween 1902 and 1908 in the Hellenist tradition, and now open to the public. It has some extraordinary mosaics and a superb location on a point over the water—some rooms have sea-views on three sides. Just a little further on, there's a vehicle-free path that winds along the water beneath elegant villas all the way to Cap Ferrat.

The hotel's ground-floor restaurant also looks out onto the sea. In summer, meals are served on the outside terrace, with a lavish open-air lunch buffet on offer. Although there is some room for improvement

in his flavor harmonies, Chef François Blanchet, who was previously sous-chef, shows the right instincts in his cooking. His touch with seafood, as in one fragrant plate we tried of langostino ravioli with artichokes and fennel, is particularly sure.

Saint Jacques poelées en salade de celery et truffes, or pan-sauteed scallops with celery and truffle salad, was accompanied with a delicious balsamic vinaigrette. Lobster meat was succulent in the *demi-homard bleu aux poivrons, flambé au cognac*—even if sweet peppers weren't the right match here. There was a lovely bouillabaisse of red gurnard and saffron potatoes, with croutons and *rouille* attentively served at table. In *tronçon de loup rôti au fenouil sauvage*, a thick cut of wild fennel-roasted sea bass fillet was matched with sweet baby Italian zucchinis.

In the *cote de veau cuite doucement au plat accompagnée de jambon de Serrano*, veal chop was simmered over low heat and served with fresh rosemary, Serrano ham and olive-cake piperade. The veal was sliced at table, but it should have been sliced thinner.

A 1999 *Louis Latour* Meursault showed funk and fat—a nicely structured and nicely metallic offering that was all of a piece. A 1996 *Louis Latour* Nuits-St. Georges was light-bodied, showing fine Asian spice, and fully mature—beginning to fade in color, its fruit dropping before its tannin.

When we asked Mr. Rauline about the delightful sense of pace and comfort we were feeling, he answered, “People come here to live.” The Metropole really *does* feel like a residential hotel—a place where one could as easily stay a month as a night. The closets are huge

in the rooms, the menu is changed daily for both lunch and dinner, and the staff is cordial and professional. Le Metropole's commitment to service excellence is epitomized by Mr. Rauline himself. While General Managers of lesser hotels sometimes make themselves scarce, this one was frequently present in the lobby, greeting his guests personally and by name. When it came time to depart, there was Mr. Rauline, bidding us farewell—and leaving us with a warm, friendly feeling that lingers to this day.



A sure touch with seafood at the Metropole's restaurant

This article was written by Jeffrey Riggs and Nicole Medvecky, Contributing Editors to *Cognoscenti Magazine*.

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Le Métropole

15, bd du Maréchal Leclerc
06310 Beaulieu-sur-mer
France

Ph: 33 (0)4-93-01-00-08

Email: metropole@relaischateaux.com

Web: www.le-metropole.com