

Cognoscenti

magazine

Because life is short

Riboto de Taven Les Baux de Provence

In its splash of colors—from the abundant greenery and the lavender trees to the brilliant white limestone cliffs and the bright blue sky overhead—the **Riboto de Taven** hotel is pure Provence. Set at the foot of the famous medieval fortified village of Les-Baux-de-Provence, it offers the perfect setting to watch the antics of soaring birds. Whether you're sitting in the lovely pool area, the well-kept garden with its trimmed hedges and wooden benches, or the quiet stone terrace that's carved out in the shadow of the cliffs themselves, views are fine in every direction.

Christine and Philippe Theme closed this charming *auberge* for 9 months in 2000 before reopening it with four new rooms to complement 2 junior suites that are carved out, troglodyte-style, in the limestone. The rooms are spacious, bright, and filled with appealing modern amenities like a practical lighting layout, a well-ventilated bathroom, and a true queen bed—not just two twin beds pushed together, as is the case at *too* many other French hotels! (We missed not having a valuables-safe in the room, however.)

The orientation of the new rooms towards the pretty swimming pool gives them a resort-like feeling. Guests reach the pool via pebbled walks, where they are free to relax beneath plane trees on stylish outdoor furniture. Les Baux de Provence itself is only a steep 5-minute walk away via an ancient stone staircase.

Dinners are served in the charming restaurant, where exposed beams in dark wood, checkerboard tile floors, and lovely candelabras conjure a cozy feel. Here Chef Jean-Pierre Novi changes the 3-course menu daily, serving straightforward but well-executed dishes with clear, recognizable flavors: chicken raviolis in broth, veal with porto sauce and langostinos. The modest wines on offer are exclusively Côteaux des



Riboto de Taven: Pure provencal charm

Baux de Provence. We tried a 2001 *Chateau d'Estoublon* (Fontvieille) that, although over-oaked, was well-matched by M. Theme for our entire meal.

The cheese tray, most competently presented by Mme. Theme, carried a fine selection of goat cheeses; the *mascaré de Banon* was a special delight. Wrapped in chestnut leaves, this half-goat, half-*brebis* Haute-Provence cheese delivered a pungent and creamy taste. ("Mascaré" means *blackened* in the local dialect, a term used to describe the cheese's darkened skin.) Soufflé took a long time coming to table, but made with "farigoule" alcohol and *herbes de provence*, it was well worth the wait.

This article was written by Contributing Editors to *Cognoscenti Magazine*.

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