

ECONOMICS

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FASHION

Globe

A NEW EXPERIENCE BEYOND LUXURY
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Art Basel - Miami/ Hong Kong

PRINCESS CAMILLA

OF BOURBON TWO SICILIES
DUCHESS OF CASTRO

INSIDE SOUTH AFRICA

VILLA BELROSE HOTEL

– ST. TROPEZ –



When dealing with the reality of running a hotel in St Tropez, and when dealing with luxury in general, the character, the soul of space and a place is rooted in its history and the profound understanding of a vast variety of things.

The hills of Gassin, where the Villa Belrose, is a 5-star hotel, on the Côte d'Azur, five minutes away from the well-known small village of Saint Tropez. As you drive up the hill, the Florentine building is both dazzling and enticing.

You may be running a commercial venture but somehow it's necessary to make guests feel that the experience they are having is not a touristic affair. It needs at every stage to be a sensory experience so wonderful and life affirming that the business of paying seems painless, supplanted by the much more exciting memory of having experienced something that cannot be replicated elsewhere.

FINE ROOMS.

The design Studio Fine Rooms based in Berlin, headed up by Isabella Hamann and Markus Hilzinger, have a clear design philosophy. For them, the Villa and, indeed any hotel, is like an empty theatre building: a space that can be transformed into a place that is utterly unique.

Or to switch the metaphor, as Isabella said in one recent interview: "Good interior design is like good couture: when it is not seated correctly, then it pinches", says Markus. In other words, there is all the difference in the world between a five star hotel based on a soulless template (in which when you turn up in Russia, you might as well be in the USA and vice versa) and the individual vision that imbues luxury hotels with their character and aura.



As far as Markus and Isabella are concerned, the result of their involvement is that a luxury hotel becomes more like a grand home. They achieve this by devoting a huge amount of time to acquiring the right piece of art and the right sculpture. Sometimes they commission artists directly. Other times separately or together they scour famous flea and local art markets to help move a concept off the design board to something that feels original.

"We love Alberto Pinto and his porcelain products and furniture. A sofa from Promemoria or an armchair by Romero Sozzi are already design classics. A glass vase of Guax is today in each building a decorative object."

Their style is contemporary fusion. As you pass from room to room, one is immediately struck by the crisp, yet lavish décor – a perfect foil to the Florentine Villa's classic proportions. A trademark touch is filling the public rooms with contemporary art and black and white photography. With much love for detail the newly created upstairs rooms are decorated with graphical portraits, oil paintings, photographs and sculptures, providing each room with its own unique character. The textiles many of them from Hermes are also of an extremely high quality lending a sense of tranquillity to the 40 bedrooms and suites.





FINE DINING.

The restaurants of the Althoff Hotels combine the largest number of Michelin stars worldwide, making Althoff a truly global Fine Dining Destination.

The guests after all have the pick of sumptuous dining around the globe – for this is a hotel that greets and receives statesmen, governments and famous people every day of the week. And yet, judging from the comments around the web and more importantly stated privately, the kitchen is regarded as one of the best in the world.

Until recently, the chef in charge was Thierry Therein. He liked to say that he began his journey into the high realms of gastronomy because he was saving for a motorbike. He got his motorbike and the guests at Belrose flocked to experience his imaginative cuisine. He was at the Le Belrose for twenty four years.

But recently there's been a change of guard. Now the restaurant is being reshaped by the vision of a rising superstar: Pietro Volontè. Enormously young still – and all the more exciting for that – he cut his teeth and knives alongside Gordon Ramsay working at the Royal Hospital, a three-starred Michelin property in London.





Volonte has lost no time in establishing his own line up of signature dishes. Here's a behind the scenes look at what to expect. For the first course, you will find a wonderful pate of foie gras, veal rice and glazed almonds. Or, possibly, a risotto created out of artichokes, black truffles and lobster. Other favourites are raviole of langoustines or lobster steamed with Riesling. The white plates are suitably large – announcing in no uncertain terms the grandeur of your surroundings.

As for the wine, you'll be in the hands of, Sophie Ribra from Alsace. She has around 500 wines on her list. Prices start at 30 euros and go up to 2000 for 1996 La Tâche.

Meanwhile, waiters are never far away: ready to pick up the napkins of those diners who leave their places for a moment or wheeling along the trolley laden with greenery with consummate skill.

SHOWTIME.

From June through to September, Brigitte Bardot look-alikes rub shoulders with today's film stars and other celebrities from the world of politics, sports and business.

Not surprising then that luxurious companies are keen to attract their attention whenever and however they can. Especially when everybody is in partying time.

Chopard is just one of several luxury companies who has staged spectacular shows and galas at the hotel. Caroline Scheufele invited 180 guests to view a catwalk display organized by Ali Karoui. The collection in question was appropriately enough called: "The Red Carpet" collection.

The evening was also a way of introducing, Simone Zanoni et Pietro Volontè to St Tropez. They came up with a daring and beautifully executed menu.

GM: VAN STRAATEN

And then of course there is the irrepressible and very noticeable Van Straaten, the impresario of the hotel who has confessed to having a secret desire to either captain a ship or work at the Crazy Horse in Paris. It is he as much as anyone who ensures that everything is ship shape.

Rather charmingly he is a man who still has boundless energy and a very optimistic side to him. Apart from travelling the world, he has said that he hopes one day to have lunch with Friede Springer. Perhaps she'll act on the information, hop on a yacht and ask herself to lunch! ☺

