

ART DE VIVRE



BYBLOS STORY

NEXT YEAR, THE LEGENDARY LUXURY SAINT-TROPEZ HOTEL WILL BE CELEBRATING ITS FIRST FIFTY YEARS. A LOOK BACK AT THE HISTORY OF THE ICONIC BYBLOS – AN OASIS FOR INTERNATIONAL STARS – WITH A GUIDED TOUR OF THE PLACE AND ITS GOURMET RECIPES.

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PHOTOGRAPHS **VALÉRIE LHOMME** STYLING **LAURENCE DU TILLY**



Treat yourself to a generous slice of the chef's "Tropézienne cake", a revisited version of the famous cream-filled brioche dessert, the town's signature pastry, served at the Byblos's Rivea restaurant.

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Even legends have a birthdate. The DOB of Hotel Byblos, in May 1967, suggests a certain tone, a hint of a particular period, and a propitious bending of the palm fronds. Until a few decades previously, Saint-Tropez's reputation was rehearsed on canvas and Bible paper. The pages of the town's guest book were filled by the likes of artists Paul Signac and Bernard Buffet, and by writers from Maupassant, to Colette, Cocteau and Sagan. Around 1955, however, there was a commotion of celluloid. Brigitte Bardot emerged, like some latter-day Venus, from the waves lapping around the former lordship of the Suffren dynasty. The French Riviera was first the

haunt of Russian émigrés around 1900. In the mid-1920s, F. Scott Fitzgerald left his mark. Later, the coast was a target for libertarian Sun City-style housing projects. Marbella, Positano and Mykonos were yet to see their hour of glory.

With summér came a Mexican wave, a sudden urge to do up Provençal houses as haciendas for characters straight out of a Claude Sautet social satire. As a Mediterranean variant, some dreamt of a Moroccan riad, a stone's throw from the beach at La Ponche – a Mozarabic style tailored to those new-fangled music centres that would soon be playing Shocking Blue's "Venus" and Mungo Jerry's "In the Summertime". The dream was realised in Saint-Tropez by Lebanese entrepreneur Prosper Gay-Para, the owner of Beirut's Excelsior, who lifted the name of the

ancient city of Byblos to create an oasis of Roman tiles and whitewashed walls, a village within a village, with abutting houses, each with its wrought-iron balcony, a swimming pool, tiling courtesy of the Vallauris ceramicists and the eye of the decorator, André Denis. Actress Mireille Darc, who crossed Gay-Para's path on the set of *La Grande Sauterelle* in Lebanon, officially inaugurated the Byblos on 28 May 1967.

The genius loci remained intact when, shortly afterwards, the hotel was purchased by Sylvain Floirat, the magnate behind Matra and radio station Europe 1. The nightclub appended to the hotel, Les Caves du Roy, saw the eruption of Brigitte Bardot and her retinue, complete with sangria and sarongs. The enclave of Byblos became the sanctuary of a nymph pursued



The luxury Saint-Tropez hotel evokes a Provençal hamlet, with ochre and sienna façades, away from prying eyes and the hustle and bustle of the town, against a backdrop of Mediterranean vegetation. The floor of the spa's relaxation area is tiled with Vallauris ceramics.

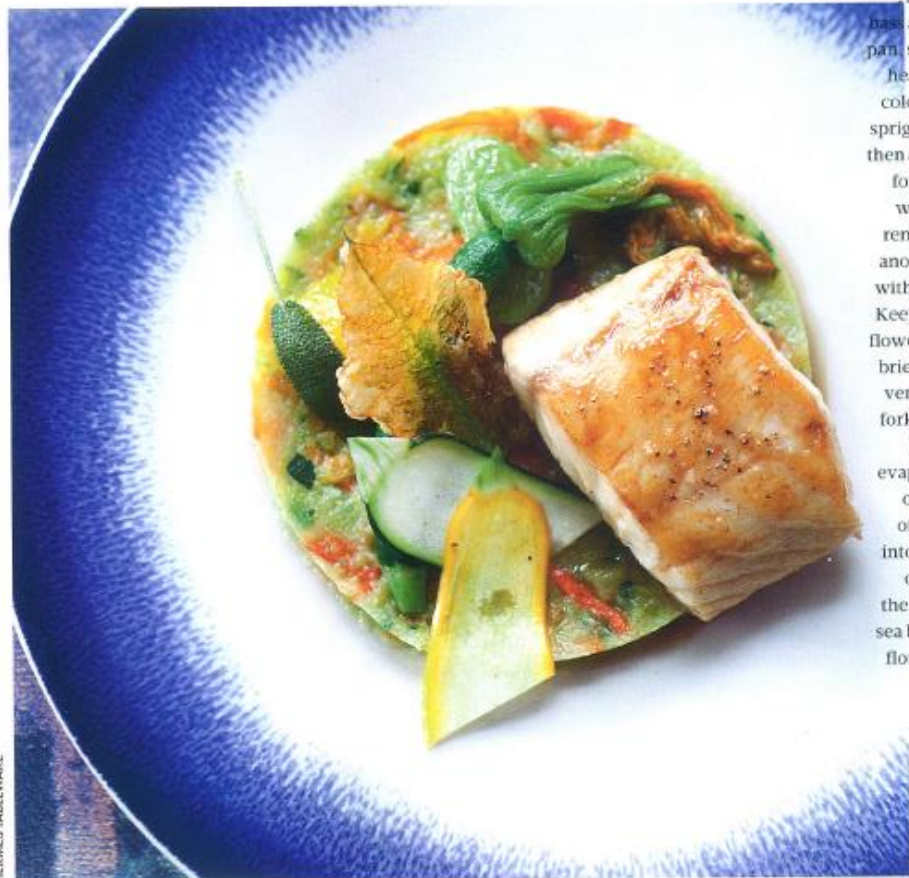
by a throng of Riva-piloting Ulysses types. It was the era of Jean Bouquin dresses, the Mini Moke, and doomed passion (of a sort). Lovers of champagne and raspberry cocktails, backgammon and VIP areas beat a path to the door. For record producer Eddie Barclay there was a Barclay's Club for old farts and their fat cigars. It had round beds, lacy four-posters, and fur throws, and the fur-coat-and-no-knickers set evolved from *Belle de Jour* fantasies à la Joseph Kessel towards the no less erotic fantasy à la Serge

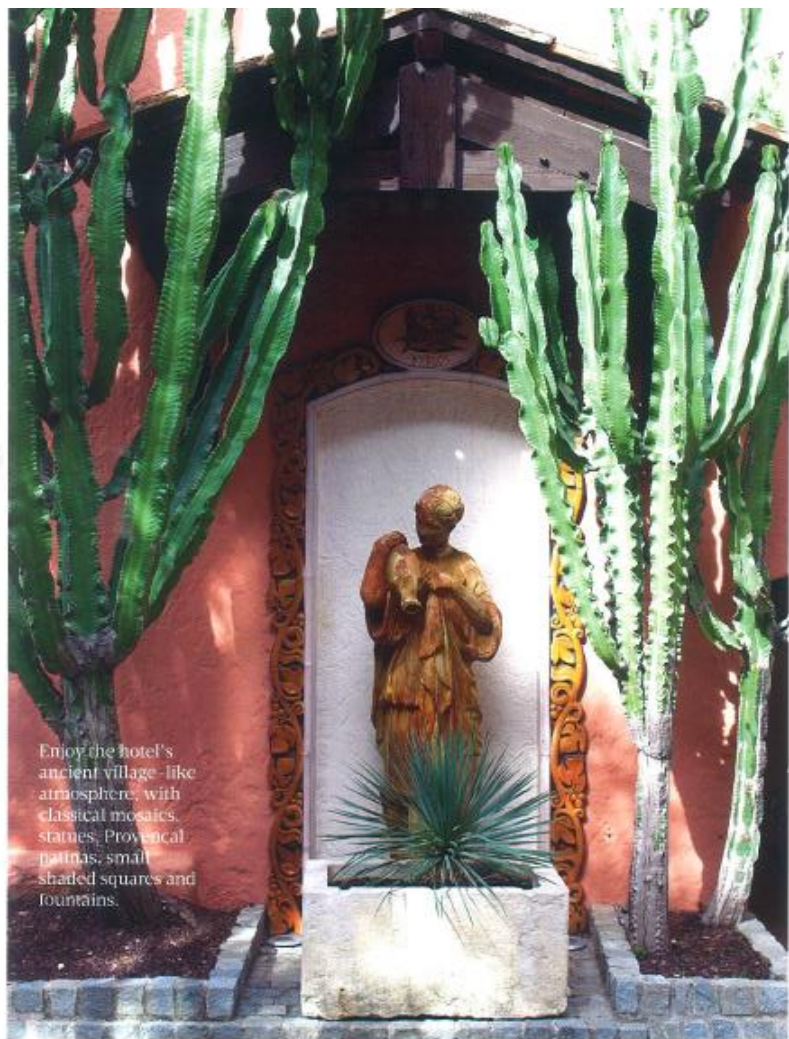
LINE-CAUGHT SEA BASS WITH COURGETTES

SERVES 4. EASY. PREPARATION: 20 MINUTES. COOKING TIME: 40 MINUTES.

1 whole line-caught sea bass - 2 shallots - 1 clove of garlic - 1 star anise - 1 sprig of thyme - ½ lemon - 5cl white wine - 20g butter - 15cl olive oil - 4 courgettes - 4 sage leaves - 6 courgette flowers - salt, freshly ground black pepper.

Ask your fishmonger to fillet the sea bass and keep the head and bones. In a deep pan, sweat the thinly-sliced shallot with the head and bones of the fish, and allow to colour slightly. Add the garlic, star anise, sprig of thyme, the half-lemon cut in slices, then add the white wine and allow to bubble for a few seconds, then just cover with water. **Simmer** gently for 30 minutes, removing any scum, and then strain into another pan. **Reduce** the sauce and whisk with a mixture of butter and 5cl of olive oil. Keep the sauce warm. **Steam** the courgette flowers. Slice the courgettes thinly and cook briefly at a rolling boil in a large pan. Once very well cooked, drain and mash with a fork. Season with salt and freshly-ground black pepper. Return to the heat to evaporate any excess juices and stir in 10cl of the remaining olive oil. **Chop** four of the courgette flowers and stir them into the courgette mash. Sear the sea bass on both sides in a frying pan. **Divide** the courgette mash on four plates, add the sea bass, and decorate with half a courgette flower, and pour over the cooking juices.





Enjoy the hotel's ancient village-like atmosphere, with classical mosaics, stables, Provencal patios, small shaded squares and fountains.

Gainsbourg of the discreet house of assignations. 1969: year of the erotic. In those bygone days, dark hair meant mystery and blonde was always bottled. Hairdresser Alexandre de Paris married his daughter off at the Byblos one day in 1970 at a ceremony attended by Princess Grace of Monaco. The following year, Mick and Bianca Jagger tied the knot: here, with Nathalie Delon and Paul McCartney looking on. This was the time when the world was about to shift from café-society to the cult of celebrity. The Byblos's Book of Hours began to fill up with icons pictured at daiquiri time: from their show-off Rolls Royces and noisy Yamahas tumbled Grace Jones, Elton John, Johnny Hallyday, and Jack Nicholson. Henceforth the painters no longer had a

hand in burnishing the legend of Saint Tropez. The baton passed to the film-makers. In 1968, we saw comic Louis de Funès as the Gendarme trying to get married in the discothèque. In 1980, Gérard Oury cast Pierre Richard as a poolside Buster Keaton in *The Umbrella Coup*. Valérie Kaprisky, she of the topless *Year of the Jellyfish* (it sounds better in French as *L'Année de la Méduse*) also went dancing at the Caves du Roy. Today, the now venerable Byblos is freighted with all the (hotel) stars it can carry and is steeped in the memories of those stirring decades, seeming to have lived several lives already in addition to its present one. The ghosts are friendly, carrying Tropézienne sandals rather than clanking chains, and their only stigmata: gorgeously insolent tan lines.



Vincent Maillard is executive chef at the Byblos. It's some twenty years since this Burgundian, who trained with Guy Savoy and Alain Ducasse, headed for the Mediterranean. His speech and dishes are perfumed with local flavours. Provence is his cottage garden, the Riviera his fishpond, Italian flavours his main theme.

YANNICK DOLMETTA'S SAFFRON
SILLANS LA CASCADE

"Yannick also supplies me with a range of wild herbs, from savoury to thyme, rosemary, marjoram, wild fennel, and serpolet, which he forages in the garrigue."
www.safran-dolmetta.odavia.com

LOÏC DE SALENEUVE'S CHEESES
COLLOBRIÈRES

"He makes 'Venus's Navel' goat's cheese, which he ages in a former hemp drying room to obtain a rich, smooth texture. To die for."
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www.revelette.fr

ART DE VIVRE

SQUID, VIOLET ARTICHOKE
AND BASIL TEMPURA

SERVES 4. VERY EASY. PREPARATION: 15 MINUTES. COOKING TIME: 5 MINUTES.

400g squid - cleaned - 4 violet artichokes - 100g flour - 3g fast-action yeast - ½ clove garlic - chopped - 1 egg white - whisked to soft peaks - 15cl iced sparkling water - 1 bunch basil - oil for deep frying - salt, freshly-ground black pepper.

Slice the squid into rings and place on a clean dry cloth. Remove the outer leaves and chokes from the artichokes and slice the hearts very thinly. Whisk the egg whites to stiff peaks. Prepare the tempura batter by mixing the flour, yeast, chopped garlic and a little chopped basil. Add the iced sparkling water and beat to the consistency of a thick pancake mix, then gently fold in the egg white. Dip the squid rings, artichokes, and whole basil leaves into the tempura batter and deep fry at 180°C. Drain on kitchen paper, season with salt and freshly ground pepper, and serve immediately.

CEUF'S MIMOSA
MAKI STYLE

**SERVES 4. FAIRLY EASY.
PREPARATION: 20 MINUTES.
COOKING TIME: 5 MINUTES.**

10 eggs, 100g mayonnaise, chopped mixed fresh herbs (parsley, chives, basil, dill), vegetable oil, salt, freshly ground black pepper.

Break the eggs, separating the whites from the yolks. Put the yolks into a freezer bag, tie the bag with string and place in a pan of boiling water. When cooked, allow to cool. Whisk the whites till they form soft peaks and cook like a pancake in a non-stick frying pan lightly greased with the vegetable oil. Allow to cool. Mash the cooked yolks with the mayonnaise. Season with salt and pepper and add two tablespoons' worth of chopped fresh herbs. Spread the mayonnaise mixture on the cooked egg whites, roll in cling film, and refrigerate. When about to serve, remove the cling film, slice, and serve sprinkled with the remaining fresh herbs.