

"Le plus escroc des deux", voilà le sud de la France que je cherchais. Si vous avez vu le film alors vous savez de quoi je parle. Des maisons de rêves, des yachts en bois, des blazers bleus, des écharpes Hermes et la voitures classique de sport anglaise. Mais où se trouve t-elle, me demandais-je, en passant devant encore un autre Mac Donalds... Où sont les villas, les pelouses taillées à la perfection, les piscines étincelantes, les Jet-Setters portant des Bulgari, les Benze et les Bentley (décapotables bien sur) ?

La réponse, c'est que de nos jours tout est caché derrière de grands portails, gardés par des chiens grognant et des vigiles baraqués. Tout ce qu'il y a d'intéressant sur la Côte d'Azur aujourd'hui se passe à huis clos. Ne serait-il pas formidable, me disais-je, si pour une fois une de ces villas pouvait refaire surface en tant que petit hôtel exclusif et exquis. Et voilà que la Villa Mauresque est apparu. Même en arrivant l'approche est prometteuse. L'étendu du mur de sécurité a été habillé en façade tout droit sortie du film Casablanca. Si le mur limitrophe à une telle allure qu'est ce que ça doit être à l'intérieur ?

La réponse ne déçoit pas. Derrière le portail se trouve deux bâtisses, construites dans un style architectural mieux décrit comme « folie mauresque orientale ». Seulement celle-ci relève de la folie sérieuse, avec des jardins impeccablement manucurés qui s'avance jusqu'au bout des vagues de la méditerranée. C'est le genre d'endroit qui laisse les gênes sans voix. Les chambres sont immenses, les vues sont parfaites, il y a un escalier idéalement situé pour des descentes remarquées en robes de soirées scintillantes. Il y a une piscine juste au dehors de la salle à manger, un port privé, un assortiment de jouets pour les grands (bateaux, ski nautique, kayaks) et une autre piscine (juste pour changer) le tout présenté sous le thème mauresque pur Hollywood. Cette Villa Mauresque est typique de la Côte d'Azur sous tous les angles : sauf que c'est un hôtel !

Composé de deux magnifiques maisons, une avec 9 chambres, l'autre avec 5, sur le plan architectural cette villa a tout conservé depuis sa construction dans les années 1860. Et idem, semblerait-il, pour le style de vie ; chaque chambre est luxueuse - facilement de la taille d'un appartement à Londres ou Milan, avec des plafonds impossiblement hauts, de grandes baies vitrées tout droit sorties d'un film Fellini. Il y a même un petit port (privé bien sur) mais les meilleures baignades s'effectuent entre les rochers rouges géants adjacent à la balustrade frontalier de la propriété. C'est glamour, c'est beau.

Vous êtes suffisamment près de Cannes pour garer votre voiture classique sur la corniche et réserver une table au Carlton. Mais la meilleure idée est encore de quitter les lieux le moins possible. A l'intérieur des murs de la Villa Mauresque vous êtes loin de la foule et des fast-food, des shorts et des T-shirts. Il n'y a que vous, la parcelle privée de la méditerranée, rien ni personnes pour interrompre l'illusion que la Cote d'Azur des films et des fantaisies existe belle et bien encore.

Hip Hotel, Guide 2005
Herbert Ypma.

HERBERT YPMA



HIP HOTELS



BEACH

Thames & Hudson

2004





villa mauresque

Dirty Rotten Scoundrels: that's the South of France I had been looking for. If you've seen the film, you will know what I am talking about. Stunning houses, wooden yachts, blue blazers, Hermès scarves and classic English sports cars – bling bling the old-fashioned way. But where is it, I asked myself, as I passed yet another McDonalds, another Carrefour, a Toys'R'Us, a Midas Muffler, a Casino supermarket, and countless service stations. Where are the villas, the immaculate lawns, the glistening swimming pools, the Bulgari-clad socialites, the Benzes and the Bentleys (convertible, of course)?

The answer is that these days it's all hidden behind big gates, guarded by noisy dogs and big, bored security guards. All the interesting stuff on today's Riviera goes on behind closed doors. Wouldn't it be nice, I used to think to myself, if once in a while one of these villas, preferably one with absolute water frontage, could re-emerge as a small, exclusive, exquisite hotel. Then along came the Villa Mauresque. Even from the approach it's promising. The run-of-the-mill security wall has been replaced with a facade straight out of the film *Casablanca*. If the boundary wall looks like this, what must it be like inside?

The answer does not disappoint. Behind the gates, there are two compounds, built in an architectural style best described as 'Moorish oriental folly'. But this is a serious folly, with immaculately sculpted gardens that run right up to the very edge of the Mediterranean.

It's the kind of place that leaves most people, particularly Americans, speechless. The rooms are enormous, the view is perfect, and there's a staircase perfectly suited to gliding down in glittering evening dress. There's a swimming pool just outside the dining room, a private dock, a bunch of adult toys (boats, jetskis, kayaks) and another swimming pool (just for a change), all executed in a Moroccan style that is pure Hollywood. Villa Mauresque is a proper Côte d'Azur villa in every respect... except for the fact that it's a hotel.

Not that the proprietors of Villa Mauresque were the first to think of turning an elegant villa in the South of France into a hotel. But most villas that are converted inevitably lose the very quality that was so attractive in the first place. In the quest to expand and invest in additional building, they lose any sense of ever having being a house. That's certainly not the case with this villa. No structural changes were made in order to turn it into a hotel.



Villa Mauresque's suites are all individual; this one is bright, white and distinctly Oriental



Maximum impact, minimum expense – the interiors have been curated with great flair



Right down to the doors, the decorative detailing is completely in step with the villa's Moorish inspiration

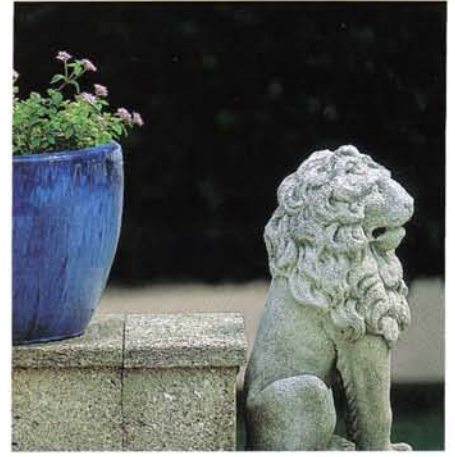




Generous windows with panoramic views of the Mediterranean: this is the South of France the way it used to be



Rather than convert all available space into guest rooms, the proprietors preserved the open atmosphere of a villa



Borrow a Bentley and book a few rooms – you and your friends can live your own version of *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels!*



villa mauresque

Comprising two splendid houses, one with eight bedrooms, the other five, architecturally this villa is no different today from when it was designed in the 1860s. Neither, it seems, is the lifestyle. Each room is palatial – easily the size of an apartment in London or Milan – with impossibly high ceilings and grand windows straight out of a Fellini film.

My room was a dark green fantasy with an enormous wrought-iron canopy bed. The sun glistening off the calm blue waters of the Med woke me just in time for an early swim before breakfast. I crossed the manicured green lawn and walked to the end of the private jetty via the boat house. There's even a tiny beach (private, of course), but the best swimming is between a cluster of giant rocks just off the property's sea wall. My only regret was that I didn't have my diving goggles. Breakfast that morning was served in the shade, on a deck adjacent to the *belle époque* kitchen and its en suite orangerie, beside swimming pool number one.

It's glamorous, it's beautiful, but in true aristocratic fashion, don't expect everything to be done for you. Like many individual hotels around the world, this is a place that expects you to entertain yourself. Villa Mauresque provides breakfast, but the rest is up to you. You can cook for yourself in the well-equipped kitchen, or go out – maybe take one of the boats and go for a tour of St Raphael, a safe distance from the hoi polloi. Or jump into your Jag and make your way to any number of restaurants (the concierge can help out with an appropriate list). You are close enough to Cannes to park your classic on the Corniche and book for dinner at the Carlton. But the best idea is to leave the grounds as little as possible. Inside the walls of Villa Mauresque you're away from the crowds and the fast food, the shorts and the t-shirts. There's just you, the perfect villa, the immaculate garden and a private slice of the Mediterranean – nothing and no-one to disturb the illusion that the Riviera of film and fantasy does still exist.

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room rates from €131

