

## LA COLOMBE D'OR – SAINT-PAUL

**L**a Colombe d'Or is not a place of mediocre accomplishments. Perched on its terrace in the hills of St-Paul-de-Vence, a middle-aged British woman says to a waiter, "We're celebrating tonight!" clasping her husband's hand, "would you like to know what?" With seasoned necessity the waiter replies, "Of course." Pointing to her husband the woman exclaims, "He swam the English Channel!"

The hotel is of course known for its history of artist-guests, who traded their work for rooms: a line drawing of a coy-looking woman by Matisse casts a skeptical eye over the dining tables, while a huge Calder mobile dangles with a magnificent silliness over a green pool, which seems more suited to French-style lounging than swimming. The beauty of much of the hotel's collection is that it is displayed not in a rarified or precious way, but rather as work that is meant to be lived with, dined with, and loved in a daily manner. On this summer day though, the guests choose to eat with the swimmer of the English Channel, shaded by interwoven fig trees on the patio, where a Leger tiled wall and some impressively Picasoesque plastic surgery certainly suffice.

This terrace is the heart of La Colombe d'Or. Here waiters debone fish on silver platters with detached bravado, appreciated for years by clients such as a deeply tanned French woman who theatrically shushes a group of three boisterous Swedish children and asks if they could please, "Go play some-

where else," a move silently applauded by those in earshot. One night at dinner a highly augmented Russian woman, who looks like a balloon held down by her clothing, curtly requests a chair for her Berkin bag as if her waiter has forgotten a seat for her child. But she is the exception; the majority of diners seem more seasoned in the art of relaxing amidst the balmy ease of the Côte d'Azur.

Above the terrace, the hotel's rooms have the mysterious charm of at first seeming unimpressive, then becoming irresistible. A long Visseaux radio, seemingly in place since the hotel's inception, and a balcony that overlooks green hills dotted with villas and palms, put one in the mood to recover from an existential crisis, to write a novel, or both. Although there is no formal room service menu, one can always dial the front desk and ask for breakfast, a snack of prosciutto and melon, or whatever else might be dreamt up. Possibly La Colombe d'Or's greatest accomplishment is that it makes no attempt to suppress eccentricities in itself, or its guests. <sup>BC</sup>

LA COLOMBE D'OR - PLACE DU GENERAL DE GAULLE, 06570 ST-PAUL-DE-VENCE, WWW.LA-COLOMBE-DOR.COM  
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