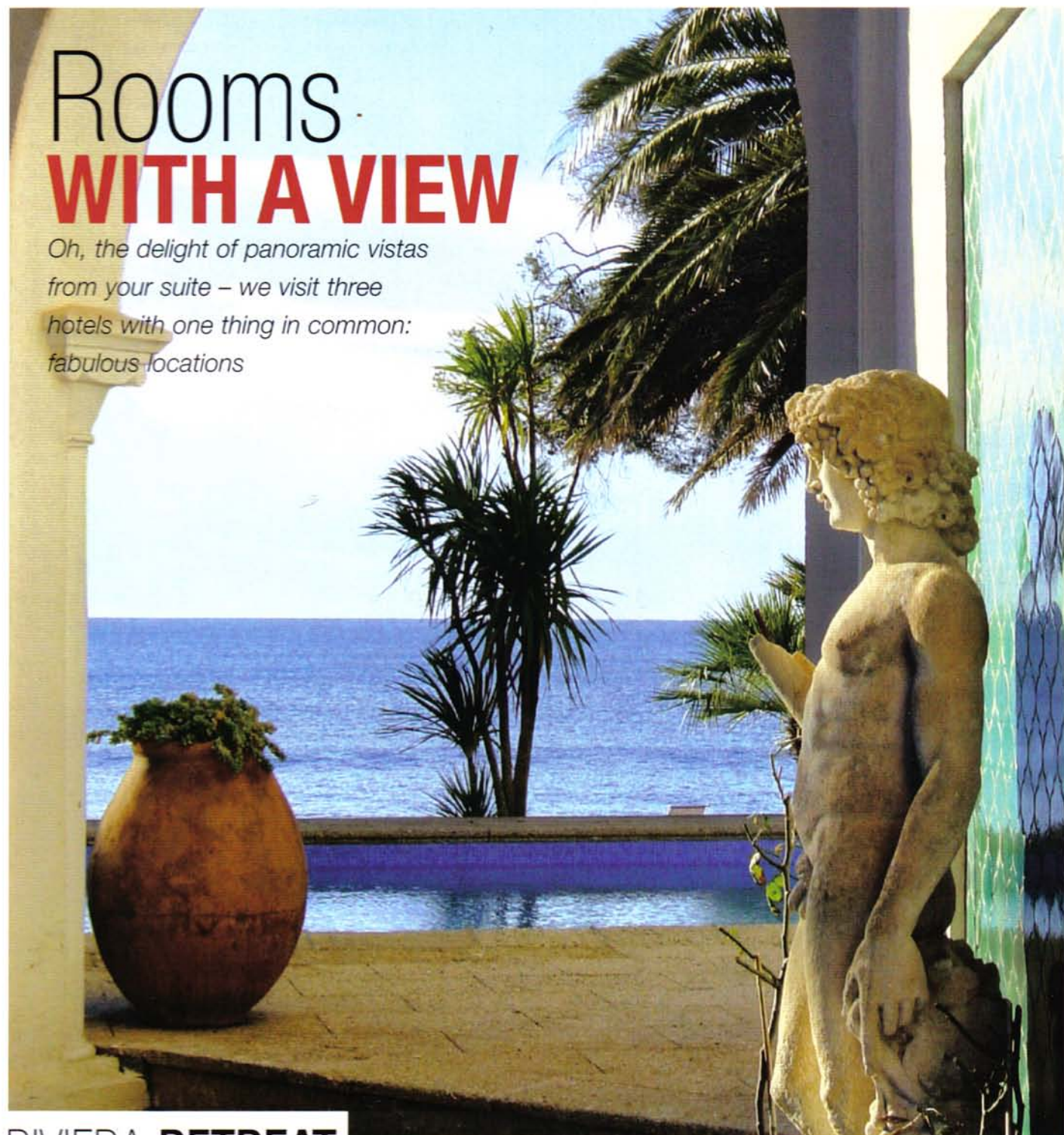


# Blaok

*A guide for the sophisticated traveller here and abroad*

## Rooms **WITH A VIEW**

*Oh, the delight of panoramic vistas from your suite – we visit three hotels with one thing in common: fabulous locations*



### **RIVIERA RETREAT**

Those who think that the Côte d'Azur's overdeveloped, traffic-snarled coastline may have no more uncharted secrets to discover, think again. Just west of St Raphael, hidden away on the Route de la Corniche behind pale rose crenellated walls, is the sumptuous recently opened Villa Mauresque, a 15-room B&B housed in two dazzling, white neo-Moorish castles. Designed in 1860 by Riviera architect Chapoulard, this seaside oasis, surrounded by lush gardens and century-old palms and umbrella pines, is so peaceful that you may never want to leave the grounds. The rooms and suites are all different, stylishly furnished with big brass four-

posters, hand-painted chests from Morocco, comfy square daybeds and gleaming ceramic tile and marble bathrooms. Each has been named after French artists and writers, but don't strain your imagination trying to find the decorative parallels, as there are very few!

In the contemporary white-on-white Palais villa, set back from the water's edge, the poolside rooms on the ground floor are simple but comfortable, and give onto the sunny patio. There's also the palatial Renoir suite, a medley of restful beige and contemporary lines. The most sought-after room is the Picasso on the upper floor, a cosy mini-suite with sweeping views and a private terrace big enough for a major cocktail party.

Closer to the sea is the more exotic Les Jardins, laid out like a private mansion, from the parquet wood floors, squishy sofas and fireplace in the salon to the elegant bay-window dining room, where breakfast is served if it's too cold to dine outdoors on the pool terrace. The most spectacular room, perhaps, is the sprawling Rimbaud suite, where you can soak in a

tub and watch the sailboats glide by. Equally high on the wish list is the airy Baudelaire room, which has a four-poster bed so high that you practically need a ladder to climb in.



The Villa Mauresque adds up to more than just an eye-catching B&B. It also offers guests a full kitchen in each villa to prepare meals or stock their favourite local vintages. A gastronomic room service menu is available in high season, plus there are a number of good restaurants within walking distance. Should you decide to rent one or both villas for a special occasion, they are both equipped with private professional kitchens where a chef can be brought in to whip up your heart's desire.

When you tire of lazing by the pool, you can always wander off into a corner of the shady garden, or sunbathe on the deck near the red rocks of the shore (swimming is best just down the road, where there are two more accessible beaches). Other highlights: a jacuzzi-with-a-view and hammam in the rooftop tower, and a private port and boathouse stocked with canoes, windsurf equipment, scuba-diving gear and other nautical toys.

Less than an hour's drive from Nice airport, this low-key mini-paradise is the flip side of the huge, glitzy Riviera palaces, yet just as luxurious. And who needs a concierge with nostalgic timeless vistas like these? *Rates, from €195-€780. La Villa Mauresque, 1792 Route de la Corniche, 83700 Saint Raphael; www.villa-mauresque.com.*

LANIE GOODMAN

## STYLE IN THE COUNTRY

# Devon delight



The 6th Duke of Bedford picked what he considered to be the 'prettiest place in the county' to build the Georgian property that now houses the Hotel Endsleigh near Milton Abbot, Devon. Built in 1812, the house – Grade-1 listed, as is the Sir Humphrey Repton-designed garden – was positioned to make the most of spectacular views across the Tamar valley, and the effect is magical.

The transformation of Endsleigh into a delightful 15-room hotel is the work of Olga Polizzi, whose enduringly popular Hotel Tresanton is just a short drive away in neighbouring Cornwall. The decor is faithful to the house's Regency roots, and many original features remain in the shape of leaded windows, wooden shutters and panelling – even, in some areas, exquisite, hand-painted wallpaper. Teamed with these are carefully selected antiques, soft linens and bathrooms in traditional form, but with showerheads the size of dinner plates, Frette robes and gorgeous Essentiel Elements bath goodies.

The whole effect is to make you feel as though you are staying in someone's charming, well-loved country house – someone who also happens to have a really good chef. Nick Shopland presides over the kitchen, producing beautifully cooked local produce such as Devon Red Ruby beef with poached leeks and wild mushroom ravioli. The pudding menu promised such treasures as warm treacle tart with clotted cream and golden syrup sauce; my choice, set honeycomb cream with pineapple crisps, turned out to be melt-in-the-mouth sublime.

There are plans for a pool and beauty treatment rooms, but there's no spa, so if you can't live without Ayurvedic massage, Endsleigh probably isn't for you. But you can walk in the 44 hectares of gardens and parkland around the house, try your hand at fishing the Tamar for salmon and sea trout – the hotel owns seven rods – and use it as a base for visits to Dartmoor, the nearby market town of Tavistock and other local attractions. Or you can simply enjoy the peace and tranquillity, good food, stunning surroundings and, if you couldn't care less that your mobile phone may struggle to raise a signal, choose it as the perfect place to recharge your city-drained batteries.

*Rates, from £210-£350. At Milton Abbot, Tavistock, Devon; www.hotelendsleigh.com.*

JANE PARBURY

