



Monica Pasquariello, Les Amoureux

★ Rising Stars

-Tristan Rutherford

The French Riviera excels at fine dining.

Despite the heat, starched white tablecloths are unfurled year-round. Michelin stars may be sprinkled liberally over Europe's capitals and countryside, but along this gastro-fantastic coast they form a solid culinary ribbon, snaking from the Italian border to St-Tropez.

Fawning luxury is still in evidence at **Le Chantecler** at the Hôtel Negresco, Nice's doyen of fine dining. Silver salvers are opened simultaneously à table. Prices remain unmarked on ladies' menus, unfeminine as it is to pick up the tab. The atmosphere is redolent of an era when British Airways held a monopoly on routes between the London and South of France, and American debutantes arrived in droves, hoping to 'do a Grace Kelly'. At €55, Le Chantecler's lunchtime Menu Plaisir is heartily recommended. It also makes for a relatively inexpensive way to indulge in a decadent (and unapologetically hypoglycaemic) overload in one of the coast's renowned culinary establishments. But dinner weighs in at triple the price and the atmosphere could hardly be described as buzzing.

That's right, in the land of the three-hour lunch trouble bubbles just under the surface. Place settings at several of the Cote d'Azur's premier restaurants lie eerily empty. It's not that French food has lost its appeal – far from it. France is in the grip of a Jamie-style foodie renaissance and the country's great chefs – Alain Ducasse and Joël Robuchon among them – are placed on pedestals. The problem is that the mythical long lunch has been reduced to 90 minutes, and the financial crisis has left a groaning gap in the market for quality cuisine.

Over the last 18 months, a new breed of chefs has stepped in to satiate this unrequited appetite. All are young, and many have turned their backs on the Riviera's top tables in order to go it alone. Even better, all serve up serious gastronomy at blissfully low prices.

Around the corner from Cannes' Forville Market, proprietor-chef Ludovic Ordas of **Mon Rêve De Gosse** offers a €15 prix fixe lunch. Set lunches at his former employer, the double-Michelin starred La Palme d'Or at the Hotel Martinez, are ten times that figure. The ultra-rich paid for Ludovic's unique training, which involved making an Alice in Wonderland fantasy dinner under head chef Christian Sinicropi for Cannes Film Festival jury chairman Tim Burton in 2010. Ludovic then distilled his culinary knowledge into his own cosy eatery, which he opened last June at the tender age of 29.

Ludovic appeals to the cost-conscious foodie. The nouveau Provençal cuisine that he espouses may sound ritzy (lunchtime dishes include seared scallops over beetroot tartare with a coriander



Laetitia Legeaud and Ludovic Ordas, Mon Rêve de Gosse



perfume) but his cuts of meat include beef skirt and pig cheek. Fish are sourced locally and seasonality keeps prices keen. Ludovic's long-term girlfriend and business-partner, Laetitia, ably mans Mon Reve's dozen tables. Less enfant terrible than enfant sensible.

Gender roles are reversed at pizzeria **Les Amoureux** in Nice's lively port area. Naples-born Ivan regales guests with stories of his beloved Napoli football club in front of house, while his wife Monica manages the pizza oven. The couple, both in their early 30s, have served to nightly full houses since opening in May 2010. Tellingly, this faithful reproduction of a Neapolitan pizzeria – it's high on strip lighting, low on pretention – is now the restaurant of choice for eminently choosy local Italians.

Les Amoureux's key to pulling in crowds is quality and price. After a jug of wine and a couple of pizzas garnished with *salsiccia* (Italian sausage) or pumpkin purée, couples can waddle out near midnight with change from €30. Ingredients are shipped in weekly from Naples: buffalo mozzarella, Vesuvio tomatoes and *friarielli*, an herby green from the couple's native Campania province.

While the ring of restaurants around the port receive a steady stream of walk-ins for *moules-frites*, bookings for Les Amoureux's 7.30pm and 9.30pm sittings are scribbled on Ivan's notepad days in advance.

Filling tables each lunchtime with a €16 lunch menu – including wine – is **Flaveur**, a ten-minute walk away. Head chef brothers Gaël and Mickael Tourteaux are a baby-faced 33 and 29 respectively, but their calibre is distinguished. Not only

Young chef addresses on the French Riviera
In all cases an advance reservation is a must. Tables can be booked in English.

Mon Rêve De Gosse

11 rue Louis Blanc, Cannes
+33 (0)4.93.39.68.08
Closed Monday and Tuesday.

Les Amoureux

7 rue Fodéré, Nice
+33 (0)4.93.07.59.73
Dinner only. Closed Sunday.

Restaurant Flaveur

25 rue Gubernatis, Nice
+33 (0)4.93.62.53.95
Closed Sunday and Monday.

Keisuké Matsushima

22 rue de France, Nice
+33 (0)4.93.82.26.06
Closed Sunday and Monday.

L'Aromate

20 avenue Marechal Foch, Nice
+33 (0)4.93.62.98.24
Closed Sunday and Monday.

does their surname translate charmingly as ‘cake’, they have cooked in the Riviera’s finest kitchens, including Le Chantecler and the Moulin de Mougins, a food-lover’s site of pilgrimage north of Cannes. Their previous experiences gifted them the chance to experiment with offbeat ingredients, including raw Indonesian turmeric and Australian finger lime, before dazzling diners with their own finely balanced creations.

Flaveur’s maitre d’ and co-owner Xavier Richard, 28, describes the former void in the Riviera’s budget-gastro market as “a situation where our friends had nowhere to eat”. But his desire to “democratise” cuisine not entirely altruistic: the decision to open a Flaveur during the height of a recession was studied, and dedicated to filling a market niche.

To taste the whims of two highly experienced young chefs is also sheer delight. Their imaginations run riot on the two pricier evening menus. French-reared caviar is paired with kiwano spiky melon. Mains include roast venison with figs and smoked aubergine. And the cheeseboard arrives with carrot and lovage jelly.

What happens when this collection of young chefs matures? Judging by two other pioneers in the Riviera restaurant arena, they receive hearty commendation, and push up their prices a little too.

Chef Mickael Gracieux flung open the doors of his experimental eatery **L’Aromate** in central Nice in 2008. Now basking in Michelin starlight, the restaurant’s evening set menu of squid and chorizo stuffed aubergine, and jellied crab with ginger and fennel emulsion, weighs in at €55. Expensive, yes, but prices aren’t on a par with most Côte d’Azur’s traditional top tables.

Nearby, Tokyo-born, French-trained **Keisuké Matsushima** was awarded the prestigious Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres for the cuisine at this eponymous restaurant. A €28 lunch menu still tempts in economical epicureans, but prices swell come evening, when sea urchin with apple mousse followed by tiers of scallop and sea bass come to the fore.

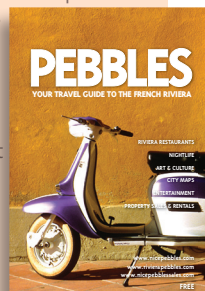
Catching the Riviera’s young masters in their prime has never been better value.

The VIP Treatment

Flaveur is one of our recommended restaurants found at page 73; however, our readers will notice that the others are not. Why not you might ask?

There are hundreds of great restaurants in Nice. Sadly, we don’t have the time to try them all. When we do get the chance, we like to go at least a few more times before we can safely recommend them to our guests and collect guest feedback on them. So, our recommended restaurants are by no means a definitive list, but they are the ones we can very personally recommend to you and know that guests have enjoyed them too. Things sometimes change in restaurants; all it takes is a new waiter or chef, and so if we see a restaurant starting to slide in the rave reviews, by our guests or us, we stop recommending it. None of the recommended restaurants pay to be in this Guide. Our team so often frequents most of our recommended restaurants that the staff and owners know our guests and us. They love our guests and they are always telling us how charming they are. This is why you really should mention Pebbles when you go dining. The owners and staff of the restaurants tell us often that they only learn their diners are Pebbles guests when they are on their way out or when they are getting the bill and chatting. They tell us this is a shame because they wanted to make you feel extra special.

So please let the restaurants do what they want to do: treat you as a VIP (that’s a Very Important Pebble) and tell them you are from Pebbles, or if you are shy, just casually leave your key ring or Guide on the table. It’s a great icebreaker to start chatting as most speak a decent level of English.



We originally titled this piece with the cheeky title “Young Buns”, but before going to print we received the fabulous news that the Flaveur brothers Gaël and Mickaël Tourteaux were awarded a Michelin Star for 2011. So to celebrate their well-deserved achievement, we thought a change to the title was in order. Congratulations to all at Flaveur.