

1 Mirazur

Mirazur is tucked into the most south-easterly corner of France. Gaze westwards from the restaurant's 1950s Modernist edifice and you'll take in the pastel-painted skyline of Menton's *vieille ville*. A dozen steps eastwards and you're in Italy.

It's somehow appropriate that Mirazur toes the frontier between cultures, for this esteemed establishment is no ordinary restaurant. Chef Mauro Colagreco sharpened his culinary skills working for legendary French figures such as Alain Passard and Alain Ducasse. However, the two-Michelin-starred chef is neither French nor Italian – but Argentinian, and he has a food-loving Brazilian wife.

Since Mirazur opened in 2006, the accolades have come thick and fast. In 2009, Colagreco was the first foreigner to be named Chef of the Year by the influential Gault et Millau restaurant guide. By 2014, Mirazur had reached 11th place on San Pellegrino's list of the world's 50 best restaurants.

Chef Colagreco's innovative cuisine is decidedly modern French. Fish are sourced from the Mediterranean waters that shimmer below. Seasonal fruits and vegetables (including 24 types of tomatoes), plus herbs and edible flowers, are plucked directly from the restaurant's organic kitchen garden. "This sunny spot, spoiled by the Mediterranean breezes, is a perfect place to express myself and to create," Colagreco confides. Settle into one of the flower-splashed tables on the panoramic top floor and you'll soon concur.

Menus are strictly seasonal, often changing daily. A salad may be composed of a medley of beans, trumpet courgettes and cherries, drizzled in pistachio vinaigrette. Scallops are dressed with purple cauliflower and local citrus. Taleggio-topped Cévennes onions are laced with hearty black truffles, while *foie gras poêlé* might be paired with beetroot and confit Menton lemon.

Mirazur is closed from the start of November to mid-February, allowing Colagreco to travel the world in search of new inspiration. Visitors can expect his spring menus to reflect his latest revelations. Set menus from €70.

Mirazur, 30 Avenue Aristide Briand, 06500 Menton

Tel: (Fr) 4 92 41 86 86

www.mirazur.fr



On the Côte d'Azur, local resident **Kathryn Tomasetti** explores the restaurant scene in a resort that blends French and Italian flavours

2 Le Cirke

Le Cirke is a place of serious seafood pilgrimage. Midday and evening, diners are a cacophonous mix of hungry locals and Italians. (Menton was part of Italy until 1860, and many of the visitors who flock here from over the border still consider it so.) Little wonder: the restaurant, perfectly positioned on the eastern edge of Menton's colourful *vieille ville*, and facing its Italianate port, is a magical mixture of French and Italian cuisine.

The restaurant is family-owned, with talented Agostino as head chef and charming Eva front of house. This Italian father-and-daughter team pride themselves on sourcing the Mediterranean's freshest bounty, from sea bass and bream to sole and sweet langoustines. Seasonal Riviera vegetables are thrown into the mix – artichokes and tomatoes, asparagus and flowering courgettes – and are all transformed into top-notch specialities including octopus salad, cumin-laced *soupe de poissons* and fisherman-sized portions of casserole.

Reserve a table in one of Le Cirke's two small dining rooms, decorated with circus-inspired prints, or outdoors, where the snug terrace is trimmed by palm trees and overlooks Menton's deep public beach. Then order up one of the restaurant's seafood specials, which cover a sweep of the classic Mediterranean flavours with aplomb.



PHOTOGRAPHS: STEPHANE DANNA/REALIS; PER-ANDERS JORGENSEN

3 Saveurs d'Éléonore

If you don't know your *pichade* from your *pissaladière*, or are flummoxed by the mention of *petits farcis* and *socca*, there's no need to fret. Saveurs d'Éléonore is the tastiest place in town to get to grips with *mentonnais* specialities.

Chef and owner Véronique Hedouin, who runs the tiny restaurant single-handedly, married into a *mentonnais* family 14 years ago. Her in-laws taught her the region's most authentic recipes, "most of which", she says, "rely almost exclusively on the Riviera's seasonal vegetables."

Handy then, that the tiny terrace faces Les Halles, the town's daily fruit and vegetable market. From delicate courgette flowers to baby mesclun leaves, much of the menu's farm-fresh ingredients are sourced here. Diners who arrive just before lunchtime are afforded front-row seats on the action while locals bargain hard as the market winds down for the day; producers throw in a handful of parsley or a couple of extra chanterelles.

First-time visitors to Menton are best opting for Saveurs d'Éléonore's *Assiette Mentonnaise* (€13). This generous platter offers a taste of all the regional flavours, which includes the aforementioned *pissaladière* (*niçois* onion-topped pizza) and *pichade* (a similar tomato and anchovy tart, particular to Menton). The menu also includes South of France speciality *petits farcis* (tiny vegetables stuffed with veal), artisanal mountain cheeses, *tourte aux légumes* (a pie filled with rice and seasonal vegetables) and *ratatouille*. Alternatively, the plate of *socca* (crispy chickpea pancake that's a popular local street food, served with your choice of drink (traditional lemony *citronnade de Menton* is a favourite), is a steal at €6.50.

The restaurant is backed by its own *épicerie* selling regional products. Many are created exclusively for Saveurs d'Éléonore, such as *reine-claude* (greengage) jam and orange chocolate marmalade (€5.80 each), peach verbena or fresh ginger cordial (€6.50), olive oil infused with Menton lemons (€8.90) and lemon *navette* biscuits (€4.90).

Saveurs d'Éléonore, 4 Place Docteur Théophile Fornari, 06500 Menton

Tel: (Fr) 4 93 57 60 00

www.saveurs-eleonore.fr ➤➤



FOOD TIP

Menton is the epicentre for all things citrus and it's almost obligatory to try the famous *tarte au citron*. The finest recipes create a perfect balance of sweet and sour, and most are served without meringue. (See page 18 for details on the Fête du Citron).

Menu highlights include French bouillabaisse (€68 for two), Spanish paella (€52 for two) and Italian *spaghetti aux fruits de mer* (€18). The house *grande friture* (€40 for two) is a wow-factor mix of ultra-crispy squid, prawns, whitebait and scallops, all served with a simple squeeze of Menton lemon. Le Cirke's wine list is almost as varied. There's a range of Italian vintages from Piedmont just over the border, including Dolcetto and Barbaresco, as well as a good selection of local tipples, from Côtes de Provence to Bandol. Three-course dinner menus from €30, lunch menus from €25.

Le Cirke, 1 Square Victoria, 06500 Menton

Tel: (Fr) 4 89 74 20 54

www.restaurantlecirke.com



COFFEE BREAK

Café de la Mairie

Place de la Mairie, 06500 Menton
Tel: (Fr) 4 92 10 11 22

www.restaurant-mairie-menton.com
This popular café/restaurant peeks out over the *mairie* (famed for its *salle des mariages*, decorated by Jean Cocteau in 1957). Ideal for a shot of espresso and a couple of regional *Barbajuan* fritters.



Eating in

Self-catering visitors to Menton are in for a treat, as traders sell a wide range of both Provençal and Italian treats



Tel: (Fr) 4 93 57 67 82
www.aubaiserdu mitron.com
Boulangier Kévin Le Meur was a finalist in 2013's competition *La Meilleure Boulangerie de France* (French TV's answer to the BBC's *Great British Bake Off*). Breads veer from the traditional, such as the rustic *baniche*, to gluten-free offerings. Sporty types are advised to pick up a couple of *barres muesli* - a blend of oats, almonds, apricots, figs, sesame seeds, honey and other energy-giving ingredients. Le Meur also has a stall in the covered market.

OLIVE OIL

L'Huilerie Saint-Michel

5 Rue de Bréa
06500 Menton
Tel: (Fr) 4 93 35 71 04
www.huilerie-saint-michel.com
Menton's favourite *huilerie* since 1896. Pick up a selection box of regional olive oils, or opt for one of their infused oils, such as lemon and ginger, created in collaboration with Mirazur's chef Mauro Colagreco (€24).

LEMONS

Au Pays du Citron

22 Rue Saint-Michel
06500 Menton
Tel: (Fr) 4 92 09 22 85
www.aupaysducitron.fr
For uniquely crafted drinks and nibbles infused with Menton's famed citrus flavours, head to this boutique in the *vieille ville*. Of particular note are *Limoncello de Menton* liqueur and lemon tapenade, as well as mini rum babas packed in limoncello cream. The shop also has a beauty section stocked with citrus body scrubs and organic perfumes. 🍋

FRUIT & VEGETABLES

Les Halles (covered market)

Quai de Monléon and Place Docteur Théophile Fornari
06500 Menton
Tel: (Fr) 4 93 35 75 93
Seasonal fruits and vegetables pack the stalls in and around the *Marché Couvert* (most vendors Tuesday-Sunday, 8am-1pm). More unusual offerings crowd the producers' kiosks in Place Docteur Théophile Fornari: look for yellow-striped aubergines, heirloom tomatoes, lavender honey and farm eggs.

CHEESE & CHARCUTERIE

La Ferme

Les Halles
06500 Menton
Tel: (Fr) 4 93 57 76 66
Planning a picnic? Pop into this deli-style market trader and your hamper will soon be overflowing. Cheeses range from Italian favourites, such as smoky Scamorza, to Provençal Banon and *brebis* sheep's cheese laced with black truffles. Cured prosciutto sits snugly alongside pâtés and country-style terrines. Vegetables preserved in oil abound too, from herby artichokes to porcini mushrooms.



APÉRO

Le Papparazzi

1360 Promenade du Soleil,
06500 Menton
Tel: (Fr) 4 92 41 02 71

Set on the seafront promenade, Le Papparazzi bar is perfect for a sundowner: sink into one of the deep turquoise couches with a glass of rosé, then watch the sun drop over the Mediterranean.

FROM TOP: *Limoncello de Menton* from Au Pays du Citron; The Café de la Mairie; A selection of olive oils sold by L'Huilerie Saint-Michel

**NEXT MONTH
EATING
OUT IN
NANTES**

PHOTOGRAPHS: ANTHONY LANNETONNE/AU PAYS DU CITRON