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UNtypically LOCAL

LONG A BASTION OF CULINARY TRADITION, THE FINE DINING SCENE ALONG THE CÔTE D'AZUR IS FINALLY MOVING WITH THE TIMES, THANKS TO A NEW WAVE OF YOUNG CHEFS



Below, the Tourteaux brothers, G el, on right, and Mick el of Flaveur and, opposite page, their dashi custard and Chioggia beetroot with wasabi sorbet, borage and tatsui greens, served with loin of veal and soy sauce





Left, chef Stéphanie Le Quellec of the Four Seasons at Terre Blanche and, below, her duck foie gras with fresh grey shrimp bouillon and raw and cooked porcini mushrooms

'I LIKE TO MIX COOKING PROCESSES IN ORDER TO CREATE TOTAL TASTE SENSATIONS'

SCOOPING UP A SPOONFUL OF COCONUT BROTH,

I slice off a chunk of the *tanudes* (grey sea bream), caught off the nearby Cap d'Antibes. My husband, meanwhile, has opted for buttery foie gras, topped with locally foraged nasturtium flowers. As I move on to a plate of candy-striped Chioggia beets, roasted and paired with wild chives, the Provençal flavours strike me as harmoniously odd. In six years of reviewing restaurants on the French Riviera, I have never tasted 'local' cuisine quite like it.

The scrubby hills of Provence offer poor grazing and many of the region's traditional, Italian-influenced dishes reflect the relative scarcity of meat. Daube beef stew is actually oxtail soup, slow cooked for flavour, while Niçois *petits farcis* are courgettes, onions and mushrooms, stuffed with cheaper cuts of veal. Simple, flash-fried Mediterranean fish such as red mullet are another standby, paired with a wealth

of vegetables. Delicious as it is, Côte d'Azur cuisine doesn't stray far from tomatoes, olive oil and liberal amounts of garlic, using fairly standard cooking techniques along the way.

In the last few years, though, a handful of young chefs have been challenging traditions along this sunny strip of coast. Among them are brothers G ael and Mick ael Tourteaux, 35 and 31 respectively. Having worked at some of the region's finest restaurants, including the Michelin-starred Le Chantecler and Le Moulin de Mougins, in 2009 the pair teamed up with 29-year-old maitre d' Xavier Richard to open a wildly experimental Provençal restaurant, Flaveur – where we ate our fish in coconut and foie gras with flowers. In 2011 they won a Michelin star of their own.

The brothers Tourteaux – which translates as 'cake' in French – spent much of their childhood on the islands of R union and Guadeloupe. It left a lasting impression: Flaveur's menu isn't fusion per se, but incorporates favourites from their youth, such as dragon fruit, *anone* (cherimoya, 'the most delicious fruit known to men,' according to Mark Twain), and citrusy Indonesian combawa, with local produce. 'Our choice of ingredients reflects the journey of two young chefs and our curiosity about the world,' explains G ael.

The restaurant's fish – often served up just hours after being caught by local fishermen – is sourced from Carras, one of Nice's last fishing ports. Aromatic tarragon and lemon thyme are grown on the plains north of Nice. Twice a week, the brothers forage through the city's surrounding forests. 'Recently, we've found wild asparagus, flowers such as oxalis (wood sorrel), borage and violets, along with wild garlic and onions,' says G ael. Their Niçois cuisine, although hardly typical, is far more authentic than many of the Riviera's so-called 'traditional' restaurants. ▶





A few minutes' walk from Flaveur is Saison, run by the fiercely talented 33-year-old Keisuke Matsushima (his original, more formal restaurant on Rue de France holds a Michelin star). At Saison, the Tokyo-born chef takes local cuisine to greater extremes, transforming time-honoured Riviera ingredients into almost unrecognisable Asian forms. His sea bream carpaccio, a Niçois classic, is seasoned with sesame oil, garlic and pickled onion, then served up with a soy-spiked aïoli. Donburi, a Japanese rice dish commonly topped with tempura or raw tuna, is crowned instead with pan-fried foie gras or duck. Yet rather than highlighting the differences between Japanese and Mediterranean cuisines, his dishes emphasise their similarities – the freshest local ingredients prepared with pared-down panache.

It's not just independent restaurateurs who are shaking things up. In the lavender-clad hills north of Cannes, Le Faventia at Four Seasons at Terre Blanche is headed up by 28-year-old Stéphanie Le Quellec. Beginning her career in the kitchens of the George V Hotel in Paris in 2001, she has spent the last five years at Terre Blanche, first as sous-chef, then head chef. Last year, she upped the ante by winning the popular French television cooking competition *Top Chef*.

Le Quellec doesn't simply recreate traditional local recipes. 'I like to mix cooking processes, particularly combining raw and cooked ingredients, and to make unusual dressings and colours in order to create total taste sensations,' she says. A good example is her simply named 'blue Mediterranean fish'. Underrated local seafood underpins three playful takes on Côte d'Azur classics, which are plated up as one: sardines are served with puréed aubergine; small mackerel, blended with basil, are diced into tartare; and finally *pan bagnat* – a hearty Provençal sandwich – is given a salty tang with a layer of fresh, lemon-marinated anchovies.

Back on the coast, Bordeaux-born Ludovic Ordas is chef and proprietor of Cannes' Mon Rêve de Gosse ('My Childhood Dream'). Ordas, now 31, began working in a professional kitchen at the age of 15, but



it was a stint at double Michelin-starred Restaurant Richard et Christopher Coutanceau in La Rochelle – where he fell in love with both the food and the relaxed, homely ambiance – that really channelled his ambition as a serious chef.

After a stint as Christian Sinicropi's second-in-command at La Palme d'Or in Cannes (another two Michelin-starred establishment), Ordas finally opened his own premises in 2010. Awarded its first Michelin star a year later, his compact backstreet bistro is as accomplished as it is informal, with a short seasonal menu comprising three starters, three mains and three desserts. At lunchtime, meanwhile, the plat du jour followed by coffee costs a knockout €15.

Often overlooked local ingredients form the foundation for his menu, including cheap, flavoursome cuts such as beef cheeks. 'I don't think local cuisine

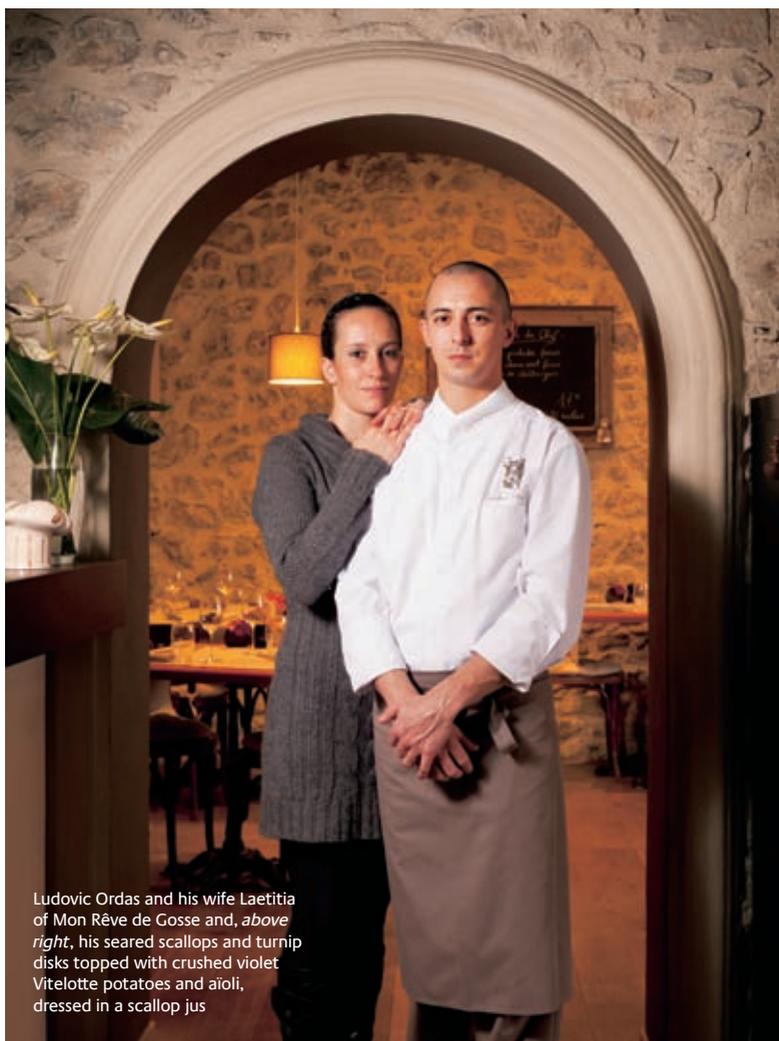
MATSUSHIMA TRANSFORMS TIME-HONOURED RIVIERA INGREDIENTS INTO ASIAN FORMS

Left, a chef at work in the kitchen at Saison. *Above*, chestnut and pumpkin soup. *Opposite page*, his sashimi of sea bass, sea bream, scallops, bonito, squid and chinchard (similar to mackerel)

has changed in recent years, but it has taken a different path,' he says. 'We're still using classic recipes, but giving them a freshness and a lightness, without devaluing them.'

Ordas buys 90% of his fresh produce at Forville Market, just round the corner from the restaurant. Seafood is only on the menu when prices permit. Seasonal produce is put to inventive use here, in dishes such as late summer coco beans, seasoned with rockfish jus. Come the autumn, spinach and ricotta ravioli might be accompanied by beetroot mousse, while toasted chestnut bread is served with rabbit and dried fruit pâté in the winter.

Impeccably prepared as it is, this kind of food is a world away from the fussy haute cuisine of old – the sign, says Ordas, of a new taste for simplicity along the Côte d'Azur. 'Customers want to get back to basics,' he says. 'Good food, fresh ingredients, simply prepared.' ♡



Ludovic Ordas and his wife Laetitia of Mon Rêve de Gosse and, *above right*, his seared scallops and turnip disks topped with crushed violet Vitelotte potatoes and aioli, dressed in a scallop jus

WHERE TO GO

Flaveur

Brothers G el and Mick el Tourteaux mix flavourful influences from their childhood homes of R union and Guadeloupe with classic Riviera cuisine. Open lunch and dinner Tue-Fri, dinner only Sat.

25 Rue Gubernatis, Nice; +33 4 93 62 53 95; flaveur.net

Saison-Nice

Keisuke Matsushima is referred to along the Riviera as *le plus Ni ois des Japonais*, or 'the most Ni ois of the Japanese'. He fuses southern French cuisine with dishes from his native Tokyo. Open noon-2pm, 7-10pm Tue-Sat.

17 Rue Gubernatis, Nice; +33 4 93 85 69 04; saison-nice.com

Four Seasons Resort Provence at Terre Blanche

Chef St phanie Le Quellec's innovative creations put a spotlight on local fish, seafood and seasonal vegetables. Open 7.30-10.30pm Tue-Sat.

3 100 Route de Bagnols-en-For t, Domaine de Terre Blanche, Tourrettes; +33 4 94 39 90 00; fourseasons.com/provence

Mon R ve de Gosse

This tiny restaurant is chef Ludovic Ordas' 'Childhood Dream'. Virtually all of his ingredients are sourced from local Forville Market, and his canny use of cheaper cuts of meat keeps the prices low. Open lunch and dinner Wed-Sun.

11 Rue Louis Blanc, Cannes; +33 4 93 39 68 08; monrevedegosse.com



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