

The big six

Chic Provençal retreats

BY AOIFE O'RIORDAIN

Le Couvent des Minimes Mane en Provence

Founded in the 17th century, the Couvent des Minimes is surrounded by terraced gardens that were once tended by Louis XIV's botanist. Transformed into a contemporary-styled hotel three years ago, these days one of the convent's biggest draws is more sybaritic than spiritual – it is home to the first L'Occitane spa in France, where you can indulge in true Provençal pampering. Le Couvent des Minimes Hôtel et Spa, Chemin des Jeu de Mai, Mane en Provence (00 33 4 92 74 77 77; couventdesminimes-hotelspa.com). Doubles start at €180, room only.



Crillon le Brave Vaucluse

Part village, part hotel, Crillon le Brave takes its name from its setting – a picturesque, honey-coloured village high on a hilltop in the Vaucluse. The hotel's 23 rooms and seven suites are scattered throughout houses that populate the tiny winding streets. The décor is a marriage of old and new – with billowing linen curtains and painted furniture in a subdued palette. Both the pool and the restaurant terrace afford breathtaking views of the surrounding countryside and nearby Mont Ventoux. Crillon le Brave, Place de l'Eglise, Crillon-le-Brave (00 33 4 90 65 61 61; crillonlebrave.com). Doubles start at €250, room only.



La Bastide de Marie Ménerbes

Set just outside the village made famous by Peter Mayle's *A Year in Provence*. As well as the 14-bedroom hotel, there is Villa Grenache – a converted agricultural building set in a vineyard, sleeping 10. La Bastide de Marie, Route de Bonnieux, Quartier de Verrerie, Ménerbes (00 33 4 90 72 30 20; labastidedemarie.com). Doubles start at €450, half board. Villa Grenache starts at €7,300 per week.

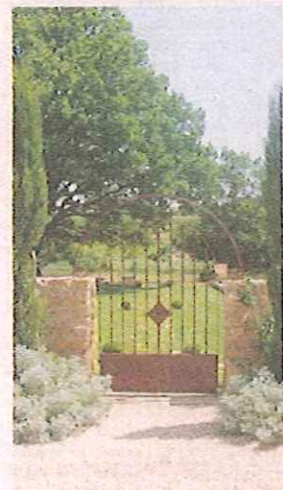
La Pauline Aix-en-Provence

Built for Napoleon's sister, La Pauline is an elegant 18th-century mansion set behind an avenue of trees. There's a pool with lovely views and guests have the chance to enjoy breakfast on a terrace outside their room. La Pauline, Les Pinchinats, 280 Chemin de La Fontaine Des Tuiles, Aix-en-Provence (00 33 4 42 17 02 60; www.la-pauline.fr). Doubles start at €150, including breakfast.



Ferme de la Platane Ansois

There are just four apartments hewn from the outbuildings of this historic, rambling farmhouse. Each sleeps two people and has been tastefully decorated by the British owners in traditional Provençal style with locally made textiles, beamed ceilings, a smattering of antiques and terracotta floors. There are small well-equipped kitchens, a swimming pool and lots of thoughtful touches such as fresh flowers and a bottle of rosé in the fridge on arrival. Ferme de la Platane, Route de Lourmarin, Ansois (00 33 4 90 09 80 89 33; fermedelaplatane.com). Apartments start at €650 per week, self-catering.



Hostellerie Abbaye de la Celle La Celle

One of Alain Ducasse's more low-key operations is this 10-room country inn in the Var region. As the name suggests, it is set on the site of a Royal Benedictine abbey, whose remains can still be seen in the grounds. There's also a one-star Michelin restaurant and a pool. Hostellerie Abbaye de la Celle, La Celle (00 33 4 98 05 14 14; abbeycelle.com). Doubles start at €250, including breakfast.