

SUPPER

GLOBAL HOTEL F&B

ISSUE 12



Hotel Pacai

A trio of venues by Nordic Food Republic take centre stage at a Baroque palace in the Baltics

Experimental Group

The group's founders on building a versatile brand spanning cocktail bars, restaurants and hotels

Heinz Beck

The German-born chef discusses Italian cuisine and the future of his growing restaurant empire

Le Royal

Royal Champagne Hotel & Spa, Épernay

Words: Caroline Morrish • Photography: © Mr Tripper

Le Royal, at the recently refurbished Royal Champagne Hotel & Spa, takes the concept of the champagne dinner to the next level. Nestled amongst the historic vineyards of Épernay, the stunning destination is defined by the sparkling wine, which flows and fizzes through every aspect of the operation from design to food and drink.

Set between the villages of Champillon and Hautvillers (the birthplace of Dom Pérignon and champagne itself), and overlooking the vineyards of Moët & Chandon, the hotel's prestigious and picturesque setting was what first attracted Boston-based operator Champagne Hospitality Group to the project. With champagne house Leclerc Briant and luxury resort Le Barthelemy in St. Barts already in its portfolio, the group acquired the venue in 2014 and decided that a new, wholly contemporary approach was needed in order to make the most of the property's potential. Reims-based architect Giovanni Pace was brought on-board to undertake a total renovation of the site. The large-scale works have taken four years to complete, with a vast 100,000ft² extension added to the original 19th century post-house building that is home to a new Biologique Recherche spa, two restaurants, event spaces and 49 guestrooms.

The architect took the location as inspiration for the design,

saying: "We wanted to create a building that has a respect for local materials and which embraces nature." As such, locally quarried quartz stone has been used in construction of the modernist, amphitheatre-style structure, which has sweeping glazed façades, with the huge windows making the most of the beautiful panorama across the vineyards below. The grapevines themselves are also referenced in the design inside the hotel, with subtle plant motifs woven throughout the scheme and a colour palette that moves through various champagne tones from rosé to gold. Natural materials such as oak and stone have been used to add softness and warmth to what is otherwise a very sharp and minimalist look.

Le Royal is the hotel's signature restaurant, headed up by Michelin-starred chef Jean-Denis Rieubland. Set in the older wing of the building, the 50-cover dining room brings together the heritage of the site with luxurious, contemporary stylings. The lofty, gold-leaf ceiling is illuminated by 36 spherical blown amber glass lights, while the walls are illustrated with classic paintings of the women in Napoleon's life (as the French leader is said to have stopped off at the original coaching house in the late 1800s), all of which gives the space an art-gallery feel. Stepping into the pristine stainless steel kitchen, there is a chef's table, which has





a handful of seats available for reservation only. Here, guests can enjoy a specially curated menu that changes with each service, and watch the team working with military precision to prepare dishes.

When developing the food offering, understanding the produce of the region was the starting point for the menu. Rieubland first met with local wine producers, visiting their cellars to get a rounded understanding of the viticulture and heritage. “The menu is my personal interpretation of the champagne terroir,” he explains. “I have tried to highlight the products of the region, and honour the produce, whilst infusing it with a sunny freshness.” This has meant not only putting the best champagnes onto the drinks menu, but also working closely with regional producers to source the most interesting ingredients, such as goat’s cheese from the nearby Forest of Argonne, lamb from the Pyrenees and fresh fish from Brittany. The chef makes a point of establishing first-person relationships with all of his suppliers, so what you find on your plate is produced by someone who is a friend of the hotel. “We work with passionate people and have a strong dialogue with them, as well as a shared pride in what we create,” says the chef.

This commitment to using the freshest local ingredients has been taken even further, with the chef establishing his own kitchen garden. Ten minutes from the hotel in the tiny town of Avenay-Val-d’Or, the 20-acre patch is run by Arthur, the son of a local winegrower, who takes a biodynamic approach to his growing. He cultivates a variety of herbs,

berries, courgettes, tomatoes, root vegetables and seasonal greens, which all go to the hotel’s kitchen. A man of many talents, he also keeps bee hives that supply the hotel with its own fragrant signature honey, and chickens that provide eggs all year round. In the spirit of inclusion, guests are offered the chance to visit the allotment to chat to him and see first-hand where the restaurant’s food comes from.

The cooking at Le Royal is light and refined and the menu concise, offering a handful of options from ‘ocean side’ and ‘terroir’. Rieubland describes his dishes as “preserving French know-how whilst infusing the food with a contemporary touch”, and guests can expect classic French cuisine that is unflinchingly seasonal but infused with interesting world flavours and creative twists. Standout choices include the turbot with seaweed butter, artichokes, carrots and chervil and veal sweetbread with chorizo, fricassée of girolles, caramelised pearl onions and sherry. These delicious creations are served on dinnerware by Maison Fragile, accompanied by cutlery from Christofle, glassware from Zalto and stylish table decorations by LSA.

Le Bellevue is the more relaxed sister restaurant to Le Royal. Looking down over the Marne Valley, light floods in through expansive windows and reflects off more than a thousand crystal pendants that decorate the ceiling. On a sunny day, this gives the room an effervescent quality, which is amplified by the warm wine-colour scheme on the walls. The restaurant opens out onto a large, impressive terrace, which is the



perfect spot to sit and enjoy the view with an afternoon apéritif served from Le Bellevue Bar. The drinks menu is the work of mixologist Aude Clément, who has created a cocktail list that brings together French classics and drinks with a more global influence, such as the Creole Punch with pineapple and guava and the Italian-influenced Blow Coffee with gin, ristretto coffee and vanilla liqueur. But it is, of course, champagne that has top billing, with the signature French 75 bringing together a delicious mix of gin, St. Germain liqueur, lemon, Cointreau and champagne. Meanwhile, the food seeks to showcase the “richness of the soil” and is a little more (down to) earthy than at Le Royal. The simple menu of pasta, meat and vegetables includes the likes of Reims ham with vinegar-soaked chantarelles and lamb’s lettuce, featuring vegetables from Arthur’s garden, naturally. Everything is still executed in an elegant fashion, but there is a touch of light-heartedness here and there, especially in ‘ice cream corner’ where the signature Le Royal ice with champagne sorbet, raspberries, hibiscus and rose biscuit is something of a showstopper.

More than 200 types of champagne are available at the hotel, from large well-known brands such as Gosset (the region’s oldest champagne

house) to smaller names. Tutored tastings are offered in the Salon Fines Bulles, which is fitted out with elevated tables and affords views straight down into the champagne cellar bellow. Guests are invited to spend an hour or two exploring the hotel’s best bottles with sommelier Daniel Pires, as well as touring the cellars. The property also prides itself on its links with the surrounding vineyards and arranges bespoke tours at a range of champagne houses in the region. “We always try and include both one larger house, and a smaller producer that guests may not know in our visit,” explains Pires. There is even the option to take part in harvesting the grapes at the group’s Leclerc Briant vineyard, enjoy lunch with the winemakers, and taste the pure pressed juice as well as the finished champagne.

It is clear that the Royal Champagne Hotel & Spa not only celebrates sparkling wine, but goes to great lengths to share its enthusiasm and passion for the subject. The end result is that however guests choose to spend their stay, they are sure to leave feeling as enamoured with the bubbly stuff as their hosts.

www.royalchampagne.com

IN A BITE Covers: 50 (Le Royal), 60 (Le Bellevue) • Owner: Champagne Hospitality Group • Architecture: Giovanni Pace • Interior Design: Sybille de Margerie
Head Chef: Jean-Denis Rieubland • F&B Manager: Grégory Charlier (Le Royal), Florent Chauveau (Le Bellevue) • Head Sommelier: Daniel Pires • Dinnerware: Maison Fragile x Nicolas Ouchenir • Cutlery: Christofle • Glassware: Zalto • Table Decoration: LSA • Table Linen: Quagliotti • Menu Design: Carré Basset