

LUX

Responsible Culture

LOGO BY IDRIS KHAN

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**Jeff Koons:
My next move**

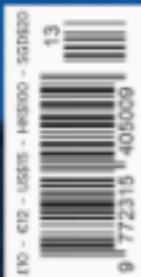
**Christian
Louboutin
unwrapped**

**How to be rich
and sustainable**



IDRIS KHAN

Photographed by Maryam Eisler



DARIUS SANAI

LUXURY TRAVEL VIEWS



LUX's Editor-in-Chief analyses four hotels of very different styles, at the top of their respective games

Four Seasons Grand-Hôtel du Cap-Ferrat, Côte d'Azur

Cicadas trilling down a long avenue lined with high walls, behind which some of the world's most expensive real estate lurks. Glimpses of the Mediterranean through the hedges. A security-guarded gateway, a short driveway and doormen opening doors on either side at the entrance to a Belle Époque mansion.

Arrival at the Four Seasons Grand-Hôtel du Cap-Ferrat could barely be more grand. You are in an unchanged south of France of 1920s flapper legend. Not here the camper vans, beach-going day-trippers and crowds of normal people that besmirch even the swankiest Monaco boulevard. Cap Ferrat is a place where the rich can be rich, and the Grand is the sea-facing jewel at its tip. High ceilings, light marble, big windows: first impressions

are of a Parisian palace hotel transplanted and reworked to suit the setting, rather than anything like a resort. But wait, that comes later.

Our room was light, a bedroom connecting through sliding doors to a living area with a taupe sofa, white and light grey colourways everywhere. Open the window (there was no balcony) and lavender and thyme and the sound of the cicadas pour in in one sensual flow.

Down through the palatial lobby, out of the door at the top of the staircase at the back of the building (or is at the front?), and down towards the gardens, it's as if you are descending through layers of formality into total chillout.

The terrace of Le Cap restaurant is on the first layer of terrace, shaded by mature trees. Next layer down is a casual dining terrace and the bar where a rather good jazz band played under the canopy of the trees every evening. Carry on walking across the big lawn of the hotel and you can take various paths into a labyrinth of flower beds and trees – quite an indulgence in the place with the highest residential real estate price in the world. The gardens are on a gentle slope down towards the sea, and at night the combination of starlight, the bouquet from the plants and the sound of the jazz is intoxicating, even without a champagne cocktail.

Directly across a little road from outside the back gate at the bottom of the garden is the entrance to Club Dauphin, the hotel's beach club



From top: the Club Dauphin pool at the Grand-Hôtel; the gardens and Le Cap; the entrance hall

The Royal Champagne is built into south-facing vineyards on the Montagne de Reims



Royal Champagne Hotel & Spa, Épernay

If the devil is in the detail, the Royal Champagne is a devil of a place. In the best possible way. What detail to pick on? The barista-style Italian espresso machine in the room? The pale-leather welcome box containing a bottle of boutique Leclerc Briant champagne in an ice bucket, two champagne glasses and some fruit slices? The delicate mesh on the light wood occasional table? So many.

In truth, Champagne has been in need of this hotel forever. I have been visiting the region on business and pleasure for years, and the choice has been between a couple of old-school country luxe hotels with little in the

way of contemporary pleasures, and an array of functional places wholly out of keeping with champagne (the drink) and its image of indulgence.

From the very start, it's plain that the Royal Champagne is something else: an indulgent hotel created with extreme love and style (and budget) by deep-pocketed owners wanting the best and hang the cost. (That is my impression, and I challenge them to prove me wrong.)

You approach from Reims by driving up the Montagne de Reims, the forest-topped big hill with vineyards on both sides that demarcates the territory between Reims and Épernay, the two capitals of Champagne. Through the forest at the top of the hill, onto a lane through the vineyards, and the hotel entrance appears out of nowhere.

The Royal is built into the hillside, a contemporary building and a feat of engineering beside the historic building that gives it its name.

Inside, everything is light, open. The welcome is professional and swift, and our room, like all of them, faced out over the vineyards, with a big balcony and vista down to Épernay and to the hills of the Côte des Blancs beyond. The balcony table shaped as a hollow-sided mini-barrel was particularly cute. Inside, everything was generous, light grey, cream, gold: the big bathroom has a sliding wooden screen to the bedroom so you can bathe with a view.

The temptation to hang out in the beautiful

bedrooms is extreme but should be resisted. A couple of levels below, an indoor pool stretches the length of the main building of the hotel, all with picture windows out to the vista; there are beds on pedestals at either end to relax on, as well as more conventional loungers all around, and on an expansive terrace outside there are more chillout spaces and an outdoor pool, warmed to cope with the north European weather, on the edge of the vines.

Then there's the aptly named Le Bellevue restaurant, with a vast terrace with a view, where you can choose from an array of specialist champagnes and – amazing for the region – choose from a light, modern, organic-based menu. Bulgur and coriander tabbouleh, baked monkfish with chard risotto, that sort of thing. And do yourself a favour and allow the sommelier to choose for you from one of the small-grower champagnes: you may never have heard of them, because they only sell locally and make in tiny amounts.

The Royal Champagne is so good that it could be a destination hotel and resort for someone not interested in drinking champagne. It manages the trick of being desirable for couples, friends or families without overwhelming the solo traveller. The service is brilliant without being corporate (it's not part of a group) and like another LUX favourite, the Alpina Gstaad, it redefines contemporary *hôtellerie*. It really is that good. ♦

royalchampagne.com



The pool overlooks the champagne vineyards of Épernay