



Second helpings

Dominic Bliss lived in the Var during his student years, subsisting on shamefully cheap food and wine. Decades later, he returns to redeem himself with the finest culinary and oenological delights this bountiful Provençal department has to offer

My relationship with the Var goes all the way back to my teenage years. In the late 1980s my parents – inspired, like many Brits, by the *Mad Max* movies – took me to Provence – born in this region. I grew up in this world, very much a part of it. In an attempt to spend a year in the middle of Provence, I spent three months in the region, stumbling through the vast landscape and the local cuisine. Those blissfully hot summer days allowed my

brother and me to sample the local food and drink. We were hardly what you'd call epicureans. We were just two young boys on a baguette and a glass of wine. In a region where the wine is so good, it's a shame that the food is so bad. In a region where the food is so good, it's a shame that the wine is so bad. In a region where the food and wine are both so good, it's a shame that the people are so bad. In a region where the food, wine, and people are all so good, it's a shame that the region is so bad. In a region where the food, wine, and people are all so good, it's a shame that the region is so bad.



IMAGES © VARTOURISME, MICHEL CARAISCO

CLOCKWISE FROM THIS IMAGE:
 FOLLOW THE COASTAL PATH
 FOR STRIKING VIEWS; DRINKS
 AND OLIVES AT THE CAFÉ DU
 MIDI IN BAUDUEN; WINES
 GALORE CAN BE FOUND AT THE
 MAISON DES VINS COTEAUX
 VAROIS IN LA CELLE



“The Var is renowned for figs, truffles, saffron, chestnuts, honey and seafood”

has to offer. So, 35 years later, when I was given the chance to spend a week in the Var sump...

The... in... d'Azur... olives, olive... and... plenty... ing... ants, the Va... tarred

restaurants, two of them holding the maximum three stars.

Star-studded viticulture

Then, of course, there is the wine; rosé, to be precise. The Var is the world's leading producer of AOP rosé, with hundreds of winemakers dotted around the region. So renowned is viticulture here that multiple foreign celebrities, including Brad Pitt, George Clooney, George Lucas and Kylie Minogue,

have invested in the industry, lending their world-famous names to various ranges of the pink stuff in particular.

And it was with wine that my return to the Var commenced. A few kilometers inland on the... o a... audio... (ww... orga... Gui... H... e... vari... Cins... tast... itier, rou... Tibo... slight... an e... dire... win... don... It was all very different from the cheap rose my father had purchased in his jerry can decades before. For lunch I was invited to one of the Var's most famous beach restaurants, Le

But I found myself craving something more typically Provençal. The following day I had lunch at *Le Jardinier* (www.lejardinier.fr). With its terraces and sea views, it's a more relaxed kind of focus on the Var. All the dishes are in a bouillabaisse, so, my table is a mayonnaise and pepper sauce. There are two courses, from the Var and Alsace.

By alternating shifts, they ensure there's always a maestro present in the kitchen.

The theatre of dining

My most memorable culinary experience of all, however, was dining at *Le Jardinier* in the bay of Saint-Tropez. The chef, André Del Monte, keeps every dish famous bouillabaisse of course, weevils, more garlic, de Provence his vast platter. Immediately, like two surgeons at



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: THREE DISHES TYPICAL OF THE FINE DINING YOU CAN EXPECT IN THE VAR'S MANY EXCELLENT RESTAURANTS; DINE BENEATH THE TREES AT LA PLAGE DE L'ÎLE D'OR IN SAINT-RAPHAËL AND ENJOY THE VIEW ACROSS THE SEA TO THE ÎLE D'OR; ANDRÉ DEL MONTE PROVIDES THE THEATRE AT MAURIN DES MAURES



THE FAMOUS BOUILLABAISSE AT MAURIN DES MAURES

THE FINEST MICHELIN DINING

To experience Var cuisine at its finest, you could do worse than visit one of its two restaurants which have both Michelin stars. *Le Jardinier* is run by Fabien Ferré, located between Marignane and Saint-Tropez. On the menu, there are 50 different courses. Unmissable is the bouillabaisse, a virtuoso cuisine of full-bodied seafood. The other restaurant is *Le Jardinier* (www.chevaleret.com) where your bank manager would be proud. "The chef's dishes are both high flying and underscore pigeon, lamb or sweetbread. An exceptional experience every time."



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: MARKET DAY IN LORGUES IS A TREAT FOR THE SENSES; CHEESES FROM THE FERME DE LA PASTOURELLE; COLOURFUL FRUIT AND VEGETABLES ARE A STAPLE IN THESE PARTS; A TARTE TROPÉZIENNE

the operating table, they attacked their creation, sewing it up with greens and doing it out. It could be cool, but it must be ordered, but then, it's a fish and... "When making bouillabaisse, it tells me through its not complex or not, it's useful for the client. He has welcomed French president Nicolas Sarkozy, Geldor and Roger Taylor, actors Omar Sharif, Olivia Newton-John and Charlotte Rampling, and model Jerry Hall.

Room for dessert

My final culinary treat was a true Var classic: tarte tropézienne. It's a world-famous, made by the owner of the famous Ant-Tropez. During his grand opening, it was a mingling of Brigitte Bardot and Mickaël Mouton cementing its glo-

Seventy years on, Micka's Creation is as successful as ever, doing a roaring trade at multiple cafés and shops across the Riviera



and beyond. There are even plans to expand abroad. The current owner of the business is Albert Dufréne.

"For a firm and simple, it's a general rule: melt and describe its so-called result. As a pastry chef, I'm using the best few days. I'm enjoying its trip.

discovered, redemption comes in many forms – eating and drinking perhaps the most enjoyable of all. **ToF**
www.visitvar.com

WINES OF THE VAR

You won't want for roof in this part of France. It's the work of the Var. Four different types of grapes are used: appellation d'origine contrôlée.

BAN
Don't be surprised by the varieties of wine in the Var. The number of vineyards is increasing. Their production is around 100,000 hectolitres at the moment. www.maison-des-vins.fr

CÔTE
On the Côte d'Azur, the wine is produced in the north of the Var.

CÔTE
Focus on the Côte d'Azur. It is well known for its wine. The number of vineyards is increasing. Their production is around 100,000 hectolitres at the moment. www.maison-des-vins.fr

CÔTE
This is the Côte d'Azur. The wine is produced in the Var. The number of vineyards is increasing. Their production is around 100,000 hectolitres at the moment. www.maison-des-vins.fr

[maison-des-vins.fr](http://www.maison-des-vins.fr)