

NUMBER THREE
L'OLIVIER

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When Julien Le Goff joined the kitchen of top chef Joël Guillet's restaurant L'Olivier in 2008 as second-in-command, he had no idea he'd soon be in charge of the world's most relaxed Michelin-starred restaurant.

But then perhaps he knew, just like his clientele, that once you've tasted the glitz of St Tropez, Cannes and Antibes and want to get back to Riviera basics – assuming those basics include impeccable service and gourmet cooking – L'Olivier is where you come. Four years later, it was Le Goff's job to keep that precious Michelin star, and he knew just how to do it.

Housed in the isolated Le Mas du Langoustier, a luxury Provençal chateau hotel perched on the westernmost edge of the Île de Porquerolles, lost between forest, rocks and a blue, blue bay, L'Olivier is an honest expression of its environment. "My mission is for the cuisine to reflect the spirit of the island itself, authentic and generous," Le Goff says. And, like the best remote restaurants, success depends on what comes from the surrounding land and sea, all eaten in spectacular surroundings.

Arriving at Le Mas by sea gives a taste of those surroundings, walking via a beach of black sand up the path to the entrance, flanked by aromatic eucalyptus and pines.

Inside, sit at one of the simple tables by the wide glass windows with a view of the wooded headland, ruined fortress and Mediterranean beyond. Notice the gnarled olive tree like a totem in the middle of the

room and the tuxedoed staff expertly weaving around it – they may be in black tie, but there's no dress code here. Diners come for the food, and shirt-sleeves and summer dresses are de rigueur. When head sommelier Damien Beghuin arrives with L'Olivier's signature Champagne aperitifs, sample the crisp, stand-out Pol Roger 2006 before letting Le Goff's cuisine take over.

Choose from the Côté Terre or Côté Mer, or opt for a sequence of tasting dishes. Naturally, seafood is the speciality, Le Goff's seasonal recipes garnished with delicious organic cèpes, morels and asparagus plucked wild from the island as well as more obscure delicacies such as sea nettles scoured from the ocean bed. Regulars come for the familial atmosphere and classic old-world charm exemplified by the waiters' flourished announcements of each dish: "*Langoustines rôties et Chapon marine*" – perfectly roasted lobster and marinated chapons with a subtle touch of bouillabaisse about it. Or "*Bœuf de l'Aubrac*" – served simply but elegantly with parsley, apple soufflé and a truffle juice ravioli that works beautifully with the 2004 bioorganic red from the island's very own *Domaine de la Courtade*.

One tradition remains constant. Post-meal stroll out onto the terrace, cognac in hand and gaze at the magnetic emerald sea dotted with boats lit up like tiny constellations, where you'll usually find a relaxed Le Goff himself enjoying the view

