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THE TIMES SPA GUIDE

Domaine de Verchant, Montpellier, France

This sprawling château is an A-list favourite, thanks to top-class spa treatments, chic bedrooms and gourmet dining

Harriet Addison

December 10 2016, 12:01am, The Times



The château has charming courtyards and beautiful gardens

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of a vineyard, 10km (just over six miles) from the Mediterranean coast, and only ten minutes' drive from the airport. The sprawling, traditional 16th-century limestone château has charming courtyards with an orangery, and beautiful, manicured gardens. Slightly less classical is the quirky modern decor, with the odd splash of orange or geometric rugs. Last year the château opened a luxury spa, and you can practically reach out and touch the vines from the infinity pool . . . before getting stuck into a post-spa wine-tasting at the on-site winery. For the complete vineyard experience, you can have a full-body exfoliation in the spa which uses the pulp and pips leftover from the wine-making (known as vinotherapy). It's worth visiting Montpellier's old town, with its pretty narrow winding streets and leafy boulevards, ten minutes away by car.



The restaurant overlooks the infinity pool and has a St Tropez feel

What's it like?

The main restaurant and bar, which overlooks the infinity pool and vineyard, is a noisy, buzzy affair with a St Tropez feel: French men in crisp white shirts, women in gold jewellery and

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outside is a pretty safe bet.) The pool isn't enormous but the waterfall massagers are aggressive enough to pummel the stress out of your shoulders, and the mosaic tiling on the pool walls is stunning. There's also a hot tub, sauna, steam room, and spacious gym with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the vineyard.

The treatments

The treatment "cabins" in the glass, marble and tiled spa range from pretty big to absolutely enormous. I had a full-body treatment in a VIP twin-bedded room with sliding doors opening on to a tiny walled garden. The signature treatment started with a full body exfoliation using salts and oils made at Domaine de Verchant (using grapeseed and residue from grapes used in on-site wine-making, called oenotherapy), followed by a full body massage that left me knotless and fast asleep. The facial, which used Anne Semonin products, was a phyto-aromatic treatment tailored to my skin using various oils, and it included a wonderfully vigorous neck and shoulder massage while the mask was doing its job. There are male-specific treatments on the spa menu too, including a firming cryotherapy facial; there's also a wide range of massages (from the "manual drainage" to the Hawaiian "Lomilomi" in the World Massage Collection) and a selection of slimming and firming treatments.

Who goes?

The proximity to the airport means that there's a mix of rich Europeans and Russians popping in, as well as Parisians on a weekend jaunt. Johnny Depp and Vanessa Paradis (when still married) stayed here, as have the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Bruce Springsteen. The château is also popular for weddings.

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All the rooms have enormous walk-in rain showers

What are the rooms like?

A modernist interior designer has had a field day. Flourishes include oversize pink polka-dot curtains, a neon coral basket chair, a wall of bamboo encased in glass, geometric rugs and a vast circular bed in one bedroom (I could have done without the luminous purple “bed lighting” in my room) — while retaining the original wooden shutters. My third-floor bedroom had a roof terrace with hot tub and Bali day bed; ground-floor accommodation has private front gardens and several rooms. The Deluxe rooms at the lower end of the scale don’t have balconies, but at 27-40 sq m they are not small, and all have enormous walk-in rain showers, computers, and remote-control curtains. There is also a separate house on the estate for whole families (or rock stars; Bruce Springsteen took it over when he stayed). The Hermès products, including cologne, are a welcome high-end touch, as are the panama hats and beach bags in every room.

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What about the food?

Breakfast is top notch — great coffee and a full buffet of fresh scrambled eggs, breads, cake, cheese, ham, smoked salmon and even tabbouleh — in the Verchant restaurant overlooking the orangery and turquoise pool surrounded by urns, lush gardens and sunloungers. The food at the “casual” restaurant and bar La Plage (truffle and parmesan risotto €36, or £30; caesar salad €26) was relaxed and delicious. The more chichi and experimental Verchant restaurant, on the other hand, has a set menu that costs €98 and includes dishes such as scallops in an iodised shell with salsify, hazelnut and liquorice stock.



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minute Balinese massage costs €120. Double rooms start at €360 for the Deluxe; the Premium Junior Suites start at €700 a night, domaineverchant.com. Fly from London Gatwick to Montpellier-Méditerranée airport with easyJet from £32.49, easyjet.com



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