



PICTURE PERFECT: The Antibes coastline and the Palais Grimaldi, right, once Picasso's studio, now a museum dedicated to his work

A new angle on the Cote de Cubism

GAZING out over the packed beaches of the Cote d'Azur, Picasso once admitted he had 'a lot to answer for'. It was true. Before the great artist first visited Saint Raphael in 1919, the Riviera was best known as a winter retreat for pale-skinned Britons, but by the mid-Twenties it had become a fashionable summer destination for the cultural elite. Exiled Russian royals, English aristocrats, European

Steve Turner tours the French Riviera in the footsteps of Pablo Picasso – the artistic legend who put it on the map

intellectuals and American bobemians streamed to Nice, Cannes, Monaco and Antibes in search of good times. The American socialites Gerald and Sara Murphy – whose motto was 'Living well is the best revenge' – were trendsetters of the era. F. Scott Fitzgerald was so mesmerised by their style that he fictionalised them as Dick and Nicole Diver in his novel *Tender Is The Night*. The Murphys went to Cap

d'Antibes in 1922 to visit Cole Porter, who had hired a villa next to Hotel du Cap. The hotel was then open only in winter, but they persuaded the owner to remain open for the following summer and invited Pablo and Olga Picasso to be their guests. This marked the real beginning of the Riviera boom. Walking into this calm but palatial hotel today and feeling the sea breeze waft through the Bellini Bar, it's hard to see why Riviera



HAUNTING: Picasso's Self Portrait Facing Death painted in 1972, a year before he died

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summers were ever considered a bad thing. What's not to like about luxurious lawns, a rose garden bordered by mimosa trees, an infinity pool blasted out of the rocks, a dining pavilion that gives you the feeling of being on the deck of a ship, and a regal avenue running down to the ocean's edge?

But you have to remember that before the Twenties, a sun tan was a stigma rather than a statement and beaches weren't places to play. Back then, La Plage de la Garoupe – the closest beach to Hotel du Cap – was so strewn with seaweed and stones that the Picassos and Murphys routinely took spades, rakes and a sieve with them to clear space. Tans came into vogue only when Coco Chanel returned to Paris in 1923 with her skin accidentally browned after visiting Cannes on board the Duke of Wellington's yacht.

Although Picasso would eventually rue many of the changes his holiday choices had brought about, he didn't stay away. Born in Malaga, he had a lifelong love of the Mediterranean's clear light and bold colours. He was inspired by the forms of bathers, the clarity of shapes lit by the sun and the primal nature of rocks, shells, ocean and sand.

In the Twenties he rented villas in Juan les Pins but in the Thirties, on the recommendation of the surrealist poet Paul Eluard, he moved inland to the small hilltop village of Mougins. Here, from his balcony at the Hotel Vaste Horizon, he could see not only the blue of the ocean but the green of cypress groves, the mustard colours of buildings and, in the far distance, the snow-white tops of the Prealpes.

The medieval village of Mougins is a welcome layby from the modern world. The narrow streets are lined with lovingly tended old buildings, many draped in green foliage or fronted by terracotta pots sprouting flowers and bushes. Cats stretch out in the sun knowing that they can remain undisturbed by traffic.

If Disney had to create a cute corner of southern France for one of its theme parks, it would probably base it on Mougins.

It may well be the Picasso connection that has allowed Mougins to focus on beauty and pleasure. The village has become renowned as a centre for food and art. Almost every commercial outlet is a gallery, a craft store, a restaurant or a grocer's. Each September, international chefs descend to battle it out at the Festival International de la Gastronomie.

Its galleries sell everything from ashtrays for tourists to large sculptures for collectors.

SOME artists, such as Patrick Duperron, who can be seen painting at his gallery on Rue des Lombards, are obviously influenced by Picasso, but many aren't. Mary Larsson, who shares space with two other female artists at The Mougins Art Studio, was encouraged to paint by the work of Van Gogh and is now inspired by Scandinavian myths and Indian religious philosophy.

Picasso remains a presence in Mougins but not an overpowering one. The local hero is Amedee-Francois Lamy, who was born in Mougins in 1858 and died in battle in 1900. He was a career soldier who served in Algeria, Tunisia and the Congo before helping France conquer Chad – and his

He loved the clear light, bold colours ... the primal nature of the rocks, the shells and the sea



STATE OF THE ART: Steve Turner with Picasso ceramics in Antibes' Musee Picasso

statue stands at the entrance to the village.

Picasso is more quietly celebrated at the Musee de la Photographie, where the top floor is dedicated to a collection of black-and-white prints of him (mostly by Andre Villiers) taken during the early Fifties.

On the outside wall of the building there is a framed poster of him characteristically stripped to the waist, his arms folded over his barrel chest.

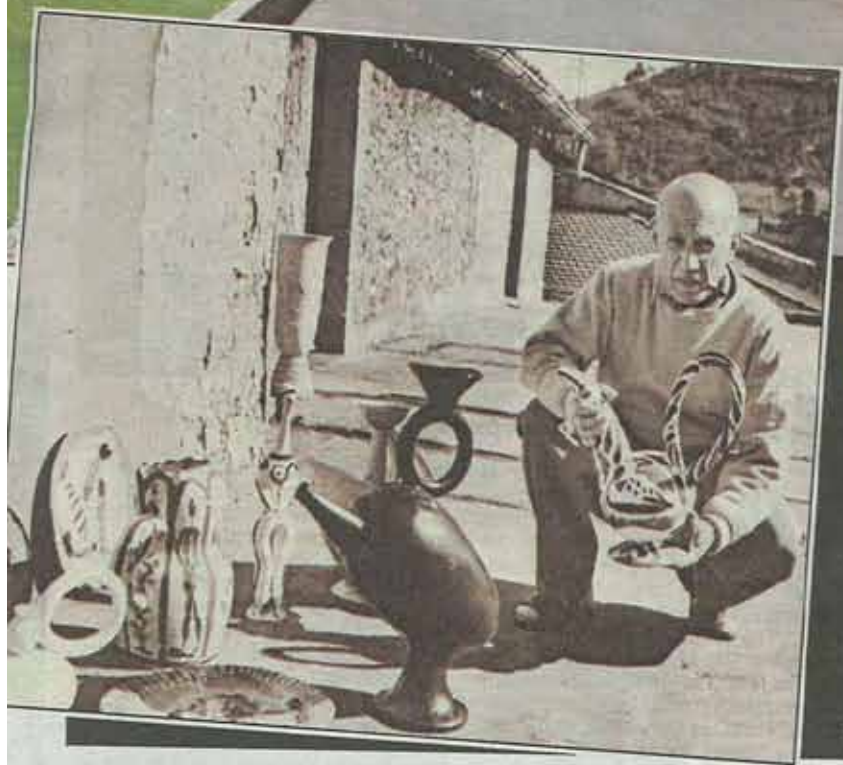
The Hotel Vaste Horizon, where the artist lived with his lover Dora Maar, Eluard, photographer Man Ray and other kindred spirits in the Thirties, had different names before closing last year. Picasso once decorated the walls of his room here in colourful paints, only to be told by the owner to return it to its original condition. It is now destined to become the town's tourist office and there is nothing to indicate that this was where one of the 20th Century's creative geniuses plotted his future.

The Second World War kept Picasso away from the Riviera, but the summer visits restarted after Paris was liberated. In 1946, he came to the annual pottery exhibition at Vallauris, a town just a few miles inland from Golfe

Juan. He was particularly intrigued by the work of local ceramists Suzanne and Georges Ramie and began collaborating with them, supplying designs for their plates, dishes, pitchers, vases, cups and plaques. Two years later, he moved there with his new lover, Francoise Gilot.

Vallauris has none of the charm of Mougins. For a Picasso tour of the town, you hardly have to veer from the Avenue Georges Clemenceau that climbs steadily towards a public square. Every other shop you pass sells ceramics. Halfway up, on Rue Ramie, is the now derelict Madoura pottery where Picasso produced 4,000 ceramic works with Suzanne and Georges. The gates are now locked and weeds sprout through the gravel pathway to the front door.

In the square stands Picasso's bronze sculpture L'Homme Au Mouton, which he donated to the municipal council. It's a dark, craggy piece that suggests a mood at odds with the children scrambling in front of the library, the old men swallowing their beers and the women exchanging gossip. He never commented on its meaning. It could be the Good Shepherd of the Gospels returning with the lost sheep or



GRAND DESIGNS: Pablo Picasso, left, with some of his painted ceramic works at his studio in Vallauris. Above: The celebrities' favourite, Hotel du Cap in Antibes

WHERE TO SEE PICASSO'S WORK THIS SUMMER...

Picasso: Peace and Freedom at Tate Liverpool until August 30, 2010. A major exhibition bringing together more than 150 works by Picasso from across the world. Admission £10. Pre-book tickets at www.tate.org.uk/liverpool or call 0845 604 7083.

Picasso: The Mediterranean Years (1945-1962) at Gagosian Gallery, Britannia Street, London. Until August 28, 2010. Entrance free. For more information, see www.gagosian.com.

Vauvenargues Castle will be open until October 2 for guided visits. Visit www.chateau-vauvenargues.com or call 00 33 4 42 38 11 91.

For information on Picasso events on the French Riviera this year, visit www.picassoenprovencecotedazur.com.

merely a peasant with some fresh meat.

A few yards away, housed in an old priory, is the Musée National Picasso. It's a grand name for a small and limited collection focused mainly on posters and ceramics created during his five-year stay in the town. There's plenty of space, but not a lot of guidance. There wasn't even a catalogue for sale.

In the priory's small chapel, the walls and ceiling of its barrel-vaulted chancel are covered with the wooden panels of a grand fresco, *La Guerre Et La Paix*, painted by Picasso in 1952. Although large and ambitious, the work seems cursory and the thinly applied paint gives the impression of a job done in a hurry. When Picasso

started working with ceramics, he was offered work space at the Palais Grimaldi - Antibes' museum. In gratitude for the city's generosity, Picasso donated many paintings, drawings and ceramic works and in 1947 they went on display.

ALMOST 20 years later, the collection having been expanded by further donations and acquisitions, the Palais Grimaldi was renamed Musée Picasso. It's a wonderful place to view Picasso's work, not just because of the spaciousness of the rooms and the building's superb position overlooking the sea, but because almost everything

on display was created locally. What you experience is his wide-eyed and joyous embrace of his new Riviera life.

Opposite Musée Picasso, at Ceramiques du Chateau, it is still possible to buy from some of the 633 designs Picasso allowed to be produced in limited editions. They are predominantly dishes from the Fifties and start at around £1,600. The most expensive plate in the gallery - *Scissors And Grapes*, produced in 1948 - is unique and signed. It has a price tag of £50,000.

From Vallauris, Picasso

moved to Cannes. He had a new woman in his life, Jacqueline Roque, and wanted more space for his work, and more privacy. He bought a huge white villa overlooking the town, which became known as La Californie.

Although no longer in the Picasso family, the house remains secluded. It is now called Pavillon de Flore.

For the final stage of his life, Picasso went back to Mougins. Tiring of the tourism of Cannes, he bought a house on the side of a hill outside the old village and named it *L'Antre du Minotaure*. He died here in 1973, aged 91.

In accordance with his wishes, his body was taken to Vauvenargues, a 14th Century chateau he had bought for Jacqueline in 1958 on the hills outside Aix-en-Provence. He was buried in the grounds, his resting place marked by one of his sculptures. After Jacqueline committed suicide in 1986, she was buried next to him.

Last year, for the first time, the public were allowed to view the house which had remained virtually untouched since his death. It is open again this summer until October 2 for visitors who pre-book.

Ninety years after his first visit, Picasso is still drawing people to the South of France.

GETTING THERE

Return train fares from London to Cannes start at £109 per person. For bookings, see www.raileurope.co.uk, call 0844 848 4070 or visit the Rail Europe Travel Centre, 1 Regent Street, London SW1. Rooms at Hotel Martinez, 73 La Croisette, Cannes, start at around £470 per night during the high season. To book, visit www.hotel-martinez.com, email resa-martinez@concorde-hotels.com or phone 00 33 4 92 98 74 10. The hotel has a number of lithographs by Picasso on display in public areas and in its suites. Hotel du Cap (00 33 4 93 61 39 01, www.hotel-du-cap-eden-roc.com) offers rooms from €480 per night.

INSPIRATION: A 1957 Picasso painting of the Cote d'Azur

