

SUPPER

HOTEL FOOD & DRINK



La Nauve Hôtel & Jardin

COGNAC

The Almae Collection unveils a gastronomic riverside retreat in a region celebrated for its distilling traditions.

Words: Lauren Jade Hill • Photography: © Lenaka

Cognac, a wine-growing region best-known for its namesake spirit, spans an expanse of the Charente department, home to a medieval old town and over 250 different cognac houses amid swathes of undulating vineyards. The river Charente flows through this bucolic landscape with the historic town rising from a stretch of its left bank. La Nauve Hôtel & Jardin is set on the riverbank, downstream from Cognac old town, in a peaceful area where its sprawling gardens – complete with original canal, 150-year-old sequoia tree and new swimming pool – run right down to the waterside and a private dock. The latest property in the growing Almae Collection, which also includes Armancette in Saint-Nicolas de Véroce, this new arrival takes over a Belle Époque residence and former distillery dating back to the 19th century.

Led by architect Éric Daigre, the restoration of the Relais & Châteaux property pays homage to the gastronomic identity of Cognac in a space set apart by its level of craftsmanship – white stone from Avy meets the redwood marquetry of Christian Thierry Drevelle and Murano glass features alongside wrought-iron artistry.

Taking responsibility for the hotel's culinary offering is Anthony Carballo, who previously worked at the likes of Le Meurice in Paris and Four Seasons Hotel Megève. Simon Souchaud joins him as the hotel's pastry chef and Florentin Clément brings guests' attention to the property's







A sense of place permeates Carballo's culinary creations with Cognac used in both sweet and savoury dishes

impressive Cognac and almost-800-reference wine collection as Head Sommelier. Cognac also serves as the protagonist of creative cocktails by Bar Manager Antoine Schilling.

For Carballo, the focus here needs to be on locality. "I wanted the whole culinary experience, from the breakfast to each restaurant, to have the same DNA, which is about sourcing locally and keeping products authentic to their original taste," he explains. "We met with cognac houses as we began to create dishes, but cognac doesn't stop at the spirit, and that's the real work of sourcing, drawing on everything that is the *savoir faire*, or know-how, of this area."

In the main manor house, a grand lobby centred around a showstopping staircase, lit by a Murano chandelier, leads to the library and breakfast area, spilling out to a terrace on one side and to the bar and fine dining restaurant, Notes, on the other. The more casual dining spot, Brasserie des Flâneurs, takes over the beamed distillery building, where original features like pulleys are integrated into the design.

In both venues, a sense of place permeates the dining experience. Cognac is used in desserts and chocolates as well as savoury dishes like poultry with Pineau, which uses the region's Pineau des Charantes aperitif. "This connection to Cognac also draws on local craftsmanship, such as the creation of our knives whose wood comes from old staves found at Maison Lheraud, or the use of barrel shavings to make sauces with tannic notes," says Carballo. "We use the spirit and everything around it."

Alongside the ingredients sourced from producers in the surrounding area, homegrown products are a key part of the chef's menus. On first arriving at the property, Carballo took full advantage of the house's expansive gardens by planting fruit trees, vines, vegetables and herbs, as well as installing beehives for honey, building a chicken coop for fresh eggs and restoring the estate's fishery.

At the 20-cover restaurant Notes, a Napoleon III-inspired salon is the setting for a four- or seven-course *carte blanche* tasting experience,





during which artfully presented plates representative of the season's ingredients are offered with wine pairings.

At the 50-cover brasserie, where the dining space includes a 16-seat communal table and outdoor terrace, more casual meals – including sharing options – also highlight local produce, with plates ranging from royal sea bream ceviche with citrus fruit from the greenhouse to roasted monkfish with piperade sauce and a peach and thyme tart.

“In winter, we will create comforting dishes showcasing seasonal ingredients like truffle, as well as game such as venison,” reveals Carballo, offering a preview of what's to come later in the year. “These are classic dishes with a French typicity and culinary technique. For one dish we will age eggs with the season's truffles.”

Adding to the locavore mentality, this culinary approach is defined by the inspiration Carballo takes from his childhood memories. “Sunday morning was always a Cordon Bleu workshop for my family, and my brother, who was a baker,

would bring pastries like a Saint-Honoré back from his work to share as dessert,” he reflects. “Both the Cordon Bleu and Saint-Honoré gâteau are dishes on the menu.”

During a stay at La Nauve, the kitchen's culinary creations are also on display during indulgent breakfasts, enjoyed out on the terrace when the weather suits, incorporating homemade breads and pastries, the property's honey, local jam, butter and fresh fruits – all brought to the table – as well as à la carte options like crêpes. Picnics of shareable lunch plates are also provided for riverboat trips.

Some might say a visit to this area is only complete once you have stepped inside one of the local cognac houses, which include the big names like Hennessy, Rémy Martin and Martell along with smaller distilleries known for their long history, like Bache Gabrielsen. More guest experiences, such as trails through the vineyards, further add to the immersion La Nauve provides into this small pocket of southwestern France.



IN A BITE

Operator: Almae Collection

Affiliation: Relais & Chateau

Architecture: Éric Daigre

Chef: Anthony Carballo

Pastry Chef: Simon Souchaud

Bar Manager: Antoine Schilling

Head Sommelier: Florentin Clément

www.almae-collection.com