

Destination MALLORCA



SPLENDID SURROUNDINGS

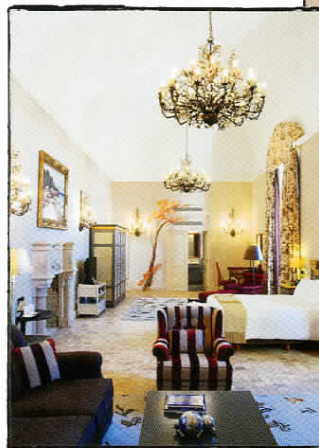
The pool at Es Ratxó;
a table at La Residencia;
a Hilton Sa Torre suite



Love it or hate it, you can't deny the place is a touchstone, a pioneer and a phenomenon. Tourism as we know it was practically invented on Mallorca: this is where the Northern Europeans pitched up *en masse* in the early 1960s and continue to pitch up today, cramming the beaches of S'Arenal and Magalluf, swigging back that sangria and filling up a total of more than a quarter of a million hotel beds. Nine million tourists visited Mallorca last year; there are days in high summer when the island's airport is the busiest in Europe.

But something has changed: the Mallorca of 2010 is not quite the island of sea, sand and sunburn that it used to be. For many years the Spanish royal family's summer residence, Mallorca gradually ousted Marbella as the St Tropez of Spain during the 1990s. And the euro-boho crowd quickly followed suit: in high season, so one well-placed source informs me, there are so many private jets backed up on the tarmac that some are rerouted to Barcelona.

In the minds of its inhabitants, the island quaintly divides up into two distinct elements: Palma, the city and capital, and *Part Forana* – the "outside bit". The quality of life in once-sleepy Palma has been compromised by the pressures of modern life. Prices are high; traffic is omnipresent. Some things about this charming city never change, however – like its compact size and superb situation on the wide arc of a calm Mediterranean bay, and the Gothic cathedral of Santa Maria, one of the most magnificent in Spain. For years the historic old town of



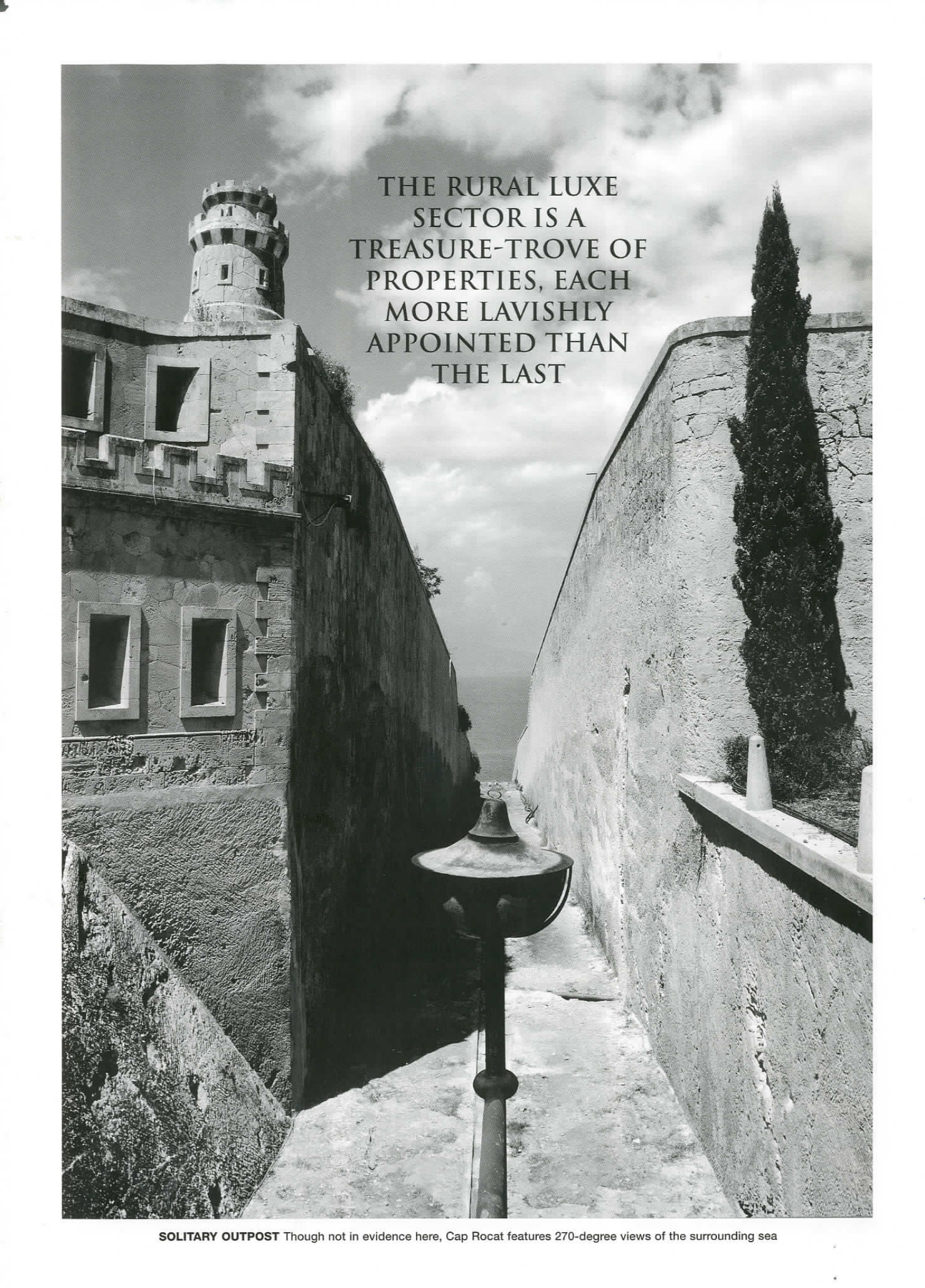
Palma lay unexploited. Then came a wave of boutique hotels: first *Ca Na Galesa*, a sumptuous refit of a grand mansion hard by the Cathedral, opened in 1995 and now something of a classic, a status also earned by the more modest Hotel San Lorenzo and Dalt Murada. The second wave – Hotel Tres, Puro and the Convent de la Missió – fell into line with the omnipresent hotel minimalism of the mid-2000s. Nowadays, old-town Palma is busier – and noisier and more touristy – than ever.

Out in the *Part Forana* the hotel fare is considerably more appetising. The rural luxe sector is a treasure-trove of properties, each more lavishly appointed than the last. Over the last two decades many of the island's grand *possessions* (country estates) have been converted into everything from five-star palazzi to simple rural hideaways and working farms with rooms.

The last two years, however, have been less about development and more about

consolidation, adding value to existing properties. A number of the older high-end hotels have been busy sprucing up their offer: *Castillo Son Vida*, the classic among classics, has a spring in its step after a recent renovation, with its peculiar brand of plush luxury, all pelmets and chintz, false turrets and pseudo-medieval decor. If full-on old-style luxe is your thing, you might prefer the *St Regis Mardavall* down on the south coast, a vintage beachside hotel now a little hemmed in by extraneous developments, but recently given a design overhaul. *Gran Hotel Son Net*, the superbly restored *possessió* in the foothills of the Tramuntana mountains at Puigpunyent, is also making a brave effort to stay ahead of the game, with four new rooms in a former stables and a designer refit of its spectacular dining room (a converted oil press).

It's always good to see a pioneering hotel that has managed to grow old gracefully, and boho destination *La Residencia* in Deià has now been open for an amazing 16 years. Meanwhile, just around the coast at Banyalbuàr, the legendary *Son Bunyola* holds its pole position as just possibly the island's most privileged place to stay. The estate, like *La Residencia* a former Richard Branson property, is gloriously sited in a fold between mountains and sea with no less than five kilometres of untouched coastline. It has two stone houses for rent, each with its own private staff and chef, and a third, *Son Balagruet*, will shortly be ►



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SOLITARY OUTPOST Though not in evidence here, Cap Rocat features 270-degree views of the surrounding sea



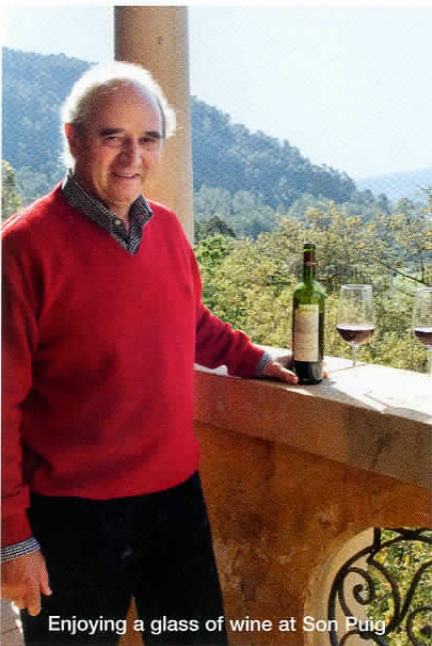
Earth hues at Can Bonico



The sister owners of Ca Na Toneta



An old windmill near the Hilton Sa Torre



Enjoying a glass of wine at Son Puig



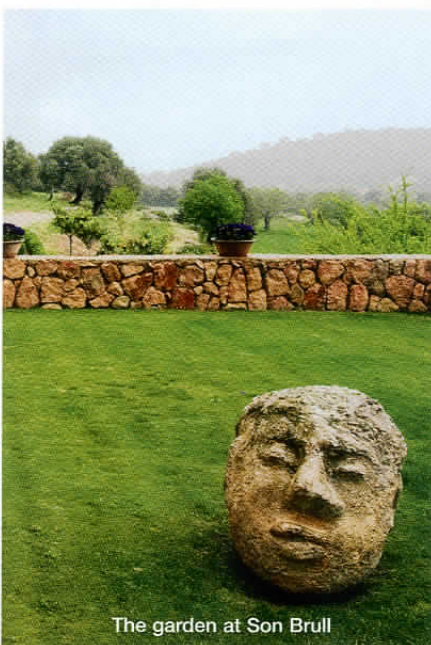
On the beach at Es Trenc



Comely cuisine at Santi Taura



The checkerboard terrace at St Regis



The garden at Son Brull



A courtyard well at Finca Flacumis

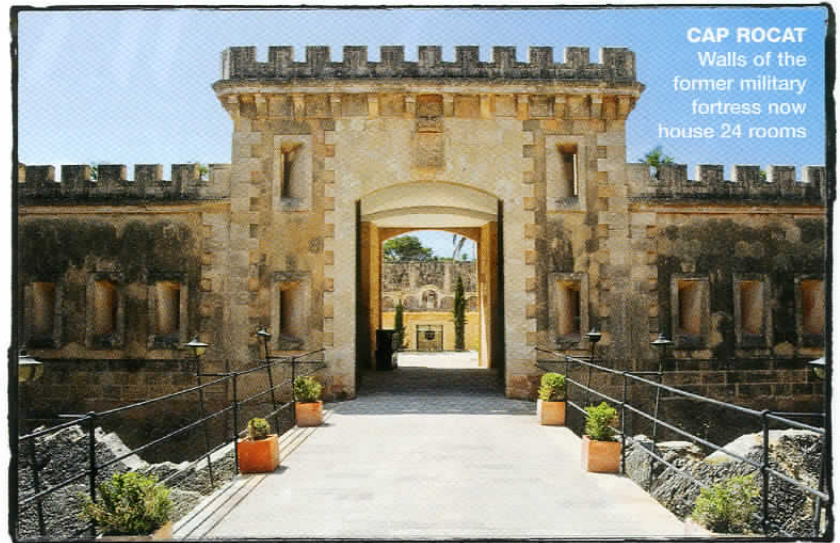
coming on stream. Further north, outside Pollença, **Son Brull** remains, six years after its opening, perhaps the most exquisitely achieved of all the island's panoply of top-shelf properties. The manicured grounds of this former Jesuit convent blend into a rustic landscape of orange trees and vegetable gardens, while the interior is cutting-edge, cool and calming and faintly austere in the modernist manner.

But a further crop of stunning new properties is now coming into view. As hotel gems go, the new **Cap Rocat** is set to become the jewel in Mallorca's crown. This 24-room hideaway, housed in an 1898 military fortress in an inexpugnable position on the southern side of the bay of Palma, with 270-degree views of the bay that redefine the meaning of the word "panoramic", seems certain to become the island's hippest hotel. The setting, in a marine reserve on its own private peninsula, is unbeatable. Antonio Obrador, Mallorca-based designer to the stars, has staked his career on a project that transforms the imposing inner spaces of the fortress into awe-inspiring oases of calm and luxury. Cap Rocat is nothing if not original, striking and absolutely of the moment. And it has no real competition at this exalted level – at least until the Jumeirah Group unveils the Port Sóller resort on a dramatic hilltop adjacent to the sea. When it opens next summer, it will offer 120 guest rooms, four restaurants, a Talise spa and a pair of swimming pools, all above the harbour in Sóller.

The winds of change in Mallorcan tourism have swept the rural hotel scene irresistibly upmarket. If you're looking to stay in a historic *possessió* in rolling countryside, recently converted into something comfortable and chic, you are, frankly, spoiled for choice. One of the grandest of the new crop of rural hotels is the **Hilton Sa Torre**, arranged around a stupendous medieval mansion down in the island's southern flatlands, among dry-stone walls and almond orchards grazed by hardy sheep. The original fabric of this 2008 restoration, its neo-Gothic chapel and 14th-century fortress, is impressive, and the *mise en scène* is undeniably splendid. A shame, then, that much of the overlain newness is either dull and formulaic, or wilfully and unsuitably *moderne*. The rural context is better assimilated at **Es Ratxó**, outside Puigpunyent, a *possessió* dating back to the 11th century which has

now acquired all the appurtenances of a 21st-century luxury retreat, including an excellent spa. The 60ha *finca* sprawls over a lush valley hemmed in by mountains, protected by the Galatxó natural reserve, with its own freshwater spring and endless opportunities for hiking and bird-watching. Few hotels in Mallorca can boast such a pristine natural setting – unless it's **Finca Filicumis** in Lloseta, where architect Joan Riera has transformed the family *possessió* into a farmhouse stay that beats all comers for sheer style, good taste, and sensitivity to its marvellous natural surroundings.

One of last year's absolute novelties on the island is **Can Bonico**, in Ses Salines, a brilliant conversion of a 13th-century mansion whose young owner/manager, Gori Bonet, is the latest in a family lineage stretching back to the Catalan conquest. Can Bonico bears the unmistakable imprint of Antoni Esteve, the architect and designer whose delicious brand of rustic minimalism worked so well at **Finca Son Gener**, the gorgeous rural hotel outside Artà, and Palma's Convent de la Missió. As in all of Mallorca's most successful top-end establishments, old and new combine in seamless, or at least mutually rewarding fashion. The rooms around the huge central garden, in the shadow of the village church, were once cowsheds; the library was once a private jail. Can Bonico has been a hit with visitors curious to explore the lesser-known landscapes of the island's southeast, the bustling market towns, the neolithic monuments, and the glorious unspoiled beaches of Es Trenc. Places like this offer further proof, if any were needed, that the revolution in Mallorca's hotel scene has plenty of life left in it. ●



CAP ROCAT
Walls of the former military fortress now house 24 rooms

Address book

HOTELS

CAN BONICO, hotelcanbonico.com; CAP ROCAT, caprocat.com; CASTILLO SON VIDA, luxurycollection.com/castillo; ES RATXÓ, esratxohotel.com; FINCA FILICUMIS, filicumis.com; FINCA SON GENER, songener.com; GRAN HOTEL SON NET, sonnet.es; HILTON SA TORRE MALLORCA, hilton.co.uk/mallorca; LA RESIDENCIA, hotellaresidencia.es; PALACIO CA SA GALESA, palaciocasagalesa.com; SON BRULL, sonbrull.com; SON BUNYOLA, +34 971 148521; ST REGIS MARDAVALL, stregis.com/mardavall

DINING ON THE ISLAND

Mallorca has a hugely variegated food scene, as befits an island with such a wide social range. Chef auteurs dominate the big-name restaurants, prime examples being Englishman Marc Fosh at SIMPLY FOSH in Palma's Convent de la Missió hotel (conventdelamissio.com) and SANTI TAURA at his eponymous restaurant in the village of Lloseta (restaurantsantitaura.com). The latter specialises in a modernised *mallorquin* cuisine which is wowing local foodies in no uncertain terms: bookings are set months in advance. Up in Caimari, sisters Maria and Teresa Solivellas at CA NA TONETA (canatoneta.com) have taken the *mallorquin* theme right back to its rural roots, with an insistence on all-local ingredients. Such exquisiteness is hard to find in the city of Palma, but there is at least one exception, tucked away in the old town. LAS OLAS (lasolasbistro.com) is a great little bistro where an Irish/Cambodian couple offers a fresh and invigorating fusion of classic French and homestyle Cambodian cuisines. The wine boom on Mallorca merits its own chapter, but there is one winery that shouldn't be missed. SON PUIG (sonpuig.com), a grand family-owned *possessió* outside Puigpunyent, offers on-site tastings of its exceptional wines, which are made with traditional island grape varieties.