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## PARADISE REGAINED

With a bumper start to the year and sales solid into 2021, the feelgood factor has returned to the Caribbean, where new properties and reopenings are invigorating the market

Plus: Japan, Mauritius, Cuba, Israel, the Canary Islands, weddings and honeymoons, family holidays and expedition cruising, plus a round-up of all the winners from the TTG Luxury Travel Awards

## Hotel Le Coucou, Meribel, France

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It's a blizzard outside – I can see it closing around the balcony attached to the deluxe junior suite I'm cosied up in at Le Coucou. Combined with the night drawing in, it makes for a forbidding scene, and a very different one to the sunny morning I'd experienced earlier, setting off for the slopes with my snowboard instructor directly from the hotel's very own ski shop and boot room.

That area – filled with designer ski clothing and with a comprehensive boot and equipment hire service – is one of many brilliant creations in this 55-room hotel, designed from top-to-toe by Pierre Yovanovitch. Known more for top-end private homes and high-profile retail and commercial projects for the likes of Christian Louboutin, the hotel is one of his most ambitious projects to date. It's also the latest addition to the Maisons Pariente portfolio, and boasts a fantastic ski-in/ski-out location on the heights of Belvedere, at 1,650 metres. All you need to do once kitted up is head onto the green runs of Les Rhodas to start the day.

Yovanovitch drew on memories of his family's mountain chalet,

### GOOD TO KNOW

■ Le Coucou has a kids' club, created with the help of child entertainment specialist Sophie Jacquemin. There's also a separate Teens Lab with table tennis, table football and karaoke.

■ The hotel is one of three under Maisons Pariente, a new family-run collection including Hotel Lou Pinet, Saint Tropez and Hotel Crillon le Brave in Provence; a fourth in Paris is scheduled for 2021.

■ Le Coucou has two, four-bedroom ski-in/ski-out chalets built into the hotel, with spacious living area, private ski room, pool and spa.

■ A ski pass for 3 Valleees costs around €63pp (Meribel alone is €53); half-day private lessons cost from €190 depending on the time of year (up to six per group).



with plenty of emblematic wooden carvings and Alpine-esque furniture dotted around. But his personal style obsession is vintage Scandinavian and American design, and he is an expert in 20th-century furniture, with plenty of references across the hotel. Two other obsessions are clear: a love of ceramics and a joy of shopping for antiques. "It's a big sickness," he tells me.

This might not be the place for clients with ornithophobia either, in particular owls, which Yovanovitch is very fond of and there are pictures and statues of them everywhere. One of the most dramatic examples of this is the rotunda in reception, which is home to a handpainted fresco of owls. And while to say "cou cou" may sound like a bird noise, it's also a cute friendly way of saying hello in French, hence the name of the hotel.

My generous suite had a dining area with an almond-shaped table piled with treats when I arrived; a huge bed, against a pine-panelled wall; and a deep dusky pink carpet with white spots designed to represent snow. There was also a cosy nook with lemon-coloured walls and sofa – where you could just sit and chill with a shelf of books – and tons of wardrobe space.

The service in the boot room was

second to none, with the friendly team always on hand to help get you in and out of boots; after a painful morning's snowboarding, trust me, when someone offers to help get those boots off your feet quickly, it's a Godsend. As is the hotel's six-room spa, which has a tie-up with the exclusive American, all-natural brand, Tata Harper. A deep tissue massage did exactly what it said on the tin and I also explored deeper into the spa, including the steam room with aromatic, soothing mist pumping through it, a hot tub with a view of the mountains and the indoor/outdoor pool.

Le Coucou is also home to two restaurants, including Beefbar, a rapidly expanding dining concept by Riccardo Giraudi. As the name suggests, the focus is on the rarest meats with the most prestigious origins, from Black Angus Beef from Argentina to Australian Wagyu and Japanese Kobe. But there are wonderful fish and vegetarian options too; among my highlights were crispy calamari with curry powder, truffle and rocket pizza, seabass ceviche with raspberry, voluminous kale salad and little copper pots of mash so creamy they should be illegal. There's also a huge outside dining terrace with epic views of the slopes.

Meanwhile in Italian restaurant

Bianca Neve, you're greeted by an open kitchen and three enormous loaves of focaccia. The design wasn't as impressive as the rest of Le Coucou, but the food was – from the salmon tartare with pomegranate and Campari to the sole meuniere.

The hotel closes on 6 April – so be sure to keep it on clients' radar for next winter, as this place will be in high demand going into its second season, providing all the quality and style of Courchevel with none of the crazy pricetags. Tel: 00 33 4 57 58 37 37, lecoucoumeribel.com

**How to book it**  
Ski Solutions offers seven nights at Le Coucou in Meribel from £2,050pp, including flights (Geneva is the most obvious airport choice), transfers and breakfast (based on two sharing). Tel: 020 7471 7761, skisolutions.com

