



THE LIGHT FANTASTIC

Since Matisse, artists have flocked to the French Riviera, magnetised by its pure light. Go beyond beaches and bagnats to behold Nice's array of avant-garde art

Words Cheryl Markosky



Clockwise from left: Musée Matisse interior and exterior



In 1917, upon arriving in the Cote d'Azur capital, Nice, the artist Henri Matisse gladly pronounced: "When I realised I would see this light every morning, I couldn't believe my good fortune".

Known for his vivid paintings and paper cutouts, Matisse accepted his lucky fate, remaining in Nice for the remaining 37 years of his life. This summer sees a re-hang of his collection – linking the post-Impressionist more firmly to the Mediterranean city – at the Matisse Museum (musee-matisse-nice.org), dedicated solely to his oeuvre.

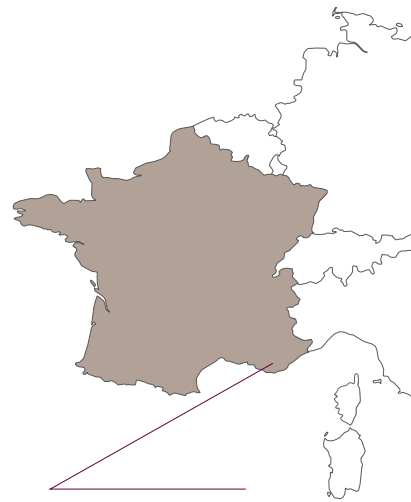
Other well-known talents attracted to the purest possible light in this lively Riviera town – now a city of 344,000 inhabitants – included Marc Chagall, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Pablo Picasso, Jean Cocteau and Amadeo Modigliani.

With a persuasive legacy of celebrated artists creating work in this part of the world, it's the ideal locale to peruse





Clockwise from left: Villa Camline exterior and Lanterns by Stéphane Blanchard



**QATAR AIRWAYS
STARTS FLYING
TO NICE IN JULY
2017**

STÉPHANE BLANCHARD



Painter Stéphane Blanchard, Nice resident for the past 12 years, says he wanted to return to his roots after a decade living and working in the USA.

His style has shifted from trompe l'oeil realism – “there wasn't enough emotion” – to a less rigid form between abstract and figurative. “Most of my paintings have a red mark representing the heart and a curve for the circle of life.”

He seeks inspiration from mountains, oceans and Italy, which he visits each year with his Italian wife and daughter. s-blanchard.com



galleries honouring 20th century art alongside today's experimentalists.

Visitors should head to the Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain, as it celebrates 40 years of L'École de Nice in a show running from 23 June to 22 October, in cooperation with Villa Massena, Galerie des Ponchettes and Chantier 109.

The project references an earlier exhibition about Niçois artists at Paris's Centre Georges Pompidou in 1977. MAMAC's Olivier Bergesi explains: “We're presenting artists that were important at that time through pieces from our museums and works not known by the public in private collections.”

While at MAMAC, it's also worth checking out the permanent collection. There's a room dedicated to Yves Klein, born in Nice and famed for his monochromatic blue sponge paintings. Niki de Saint Phalle, one of few French

women feted for monumental sculptures, has her own zone within the building.

In addition, pop art grandees Robert Rauschenberg, Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol and Claes Oldenburg, and Frank Stella, Barnett Newman and Richard Serra from the conceptual movement all have pieces of their work on show.

This month, Bureau Botox(s) – a network of 30 plus art centres, galleries, private spaces, artist collectives, publishers and museums committed to contemporary art from the Riviera to the Alps – celebrates its 10th anniversary.

“We organise year-round events, with our main exhibition, Visiteurs du Soir (Evening Visitors), at the beginning of this month. Nice used to have Chagall and Matisse, but now the city has new contemporary artists as well,” says Elsa Comlot, general coordinator at Botox(s).

The art association's strength is not only

Artwork at
Nice's Musée
Marc Chagall



“Nice used to have Chagall and Matisse but now it has contemporary artists as well”

representing artists, but architects, writers and performers in large edifices such as MAMAC, and small artists' spaces – including a converted abattoir in the east of the city, adds Comlot.

Though the inventive Chagall was a jack-of-all-trades (producing drawings, paintings, engravings, ceramics, mosaics, stained glass and tapestries) not many fans know that upon moving to the Riviera in 1950, he discovered sculpture in a big way.

Luckily, the Musée National Marc Chagall is making up for the fact that hardly any exhibitions have been devoted to the Russian-French artist's sculptures. An exhibition open until 28 August,

reveals this hitherto largely unrecognised aspect of his labours.

And keep an eye out for the OVNi Festival created by Odile Redolfi-Payen, proprietor of Hôtel Windsor on Rue Dalpozzo. Bridging the gap between contemporary art and modern technology, art videos from international and young, domestic artists, are displayed on floors, walls, ceilings and even within bedroom wardrobes.

With such fortune – and light – in a city dominated by the legacy of its illustrious artists, it's hardly surprising that visual culture continues to draw visitors to the southern French city.

STATE-OF-THE-ART CUISINE

Eateries with views that inspired Nice artists



LES PÊCHEURS

Berthe Morisot painted *Nice Harbour* in the winter months of 1881-2. Sample grilled lobster and fish stew with coconut milk in this restaurant with vistas of the harbour and rocky coastline. lespecheurs.com



RESTAURANT LE CHANTECLER

The city's beachfront promenade adorns many canvases. Pair gastronomy with artistic surroundings at this two Michelin-star restaurant at the Le Negresco Hotel. lenegresco.com



BISTROT D'ANTOINE

Dine al fresco in Vieux Nice (Old Town) in this local, Michelin guide establishment, awarded Bib Gourmand status for high quality, good value food under €40. facebook.com/pages/Le-Bistro-D-Antoine