



LUXURY HOTELS AND RESORTS

Where Dreams Come True – Domaine Les Martins, Provence

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by



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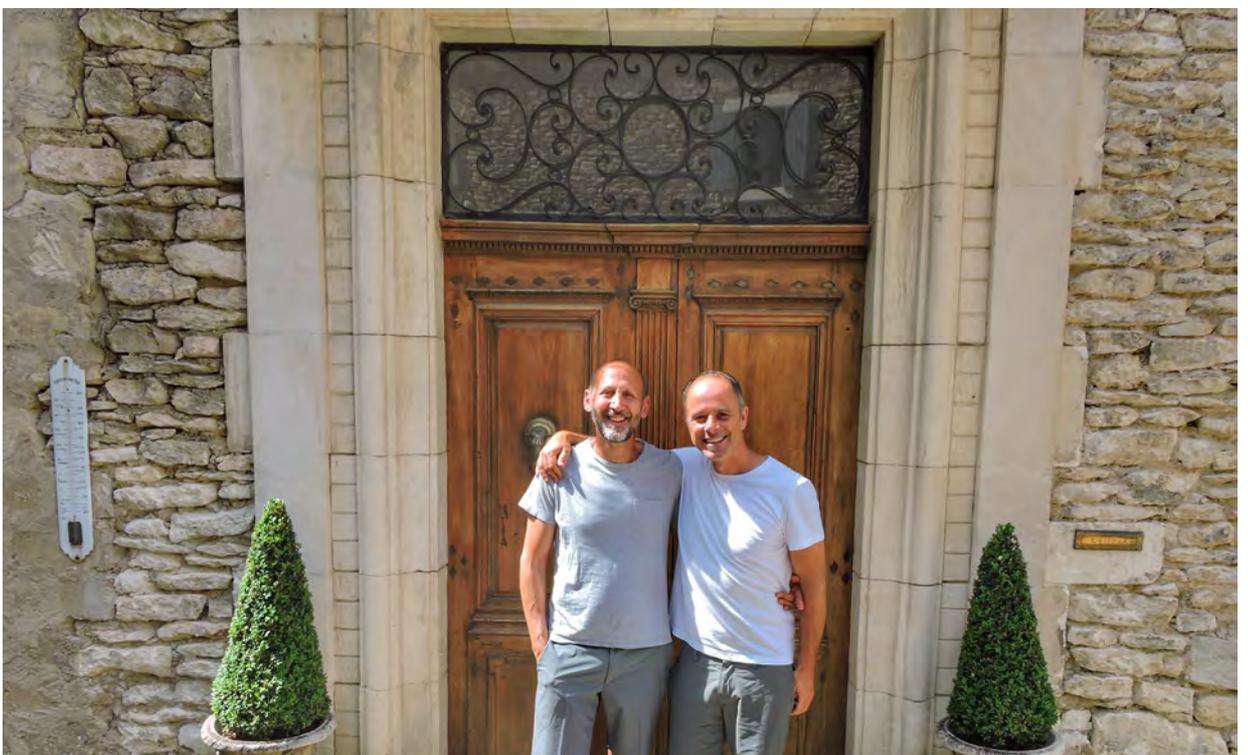


Admit it. You have a secret dream nestled deep in the folds of your brain, one that you reach for whenever you've had just one-too-many meetings, have read one-too-many emails, as you sit in your car in a long, long line of commuters stuck on the freeway. It's a dream of escape. It's the dream of freedom – from the politics of office jobs, the blaring of the alarm clock at 5:30 AM in the darkness of a winter morning, of scraping ice off a windshield.

In my dreams I am somewhere warm, dry and sunny. Spain? Italy? How about France – Home to inarguably the best food in the world. Those flaky croissants, fluffy quiches, those awe-inspiring soufflés! Wineries where you can swirl, sip and savor some of the finest wines in the world after spending a morning or afternoon exploring picturesque medieval villages and innumerable cultural sites!

Well, for two fine gentlemen who were living the high but incredibly stressful executive life in New York City, this was the case. When the daily grind of a busy work life began to consume them to the point that time off became simply time to withdraw, they realized it was time to act on their dreams.

First of all, let me tell you a little about the dream property that David and Regis have made their reality. Located in Gordes, in the Luberon Valley in Provence, Domaine Les Martins overlooks dreamy fields of lavender and poppies, is surrounded by ancient trees, and lends an air of elegance to the tiny Hamlet of “Les Martins” established in the 1600s.





The dramatic clifftop town of Gordes is an easy drive from Domaine Les Martins, as are other charming villages such as Menerbes, Rouissillon, Bonnieux. Jump in the car in the morning, afternoon or night and easily find fantastic places to eat, drink, shop and enjoy the sights. An intimate collection of accommodations are offered, from gites to large suites and apartments. Some offer full kitchens. Our apartment had the most divine rooftop terrace overlooking rolling hills and distant villages. If travelling with a large family, one gite, a suite and a standard room can be combined to form your own private house with a separate entrance.



We are so happy David and Regis chose to live their dream so that we can visit and enjoy the wonders of their paradise. I could tell you their very interesting story myself, but I want you to hear it in their own words. Perhaps it will encourage you to consider making your dreams a reality too!

NJS: Regis, it sounds like you both had very successful careers in NYC. What motivated you and David to make such a radical lifestyle change? I can't think of two environments and cultures that are more different from each other.

DLM: David was an executive in the fashion business and I had my own retail branding agency. We both had very busy schedules in the city and were traveling a lot without time to recuperate from our exhausting agendas. So we slowly withdrew from everything New York City offered that was not business related. We retreated to our beach house on Fire Island to refuel. It was then we realized that we could live anywhere in the world, as we were no longer taking part in NYC life. Then, in 2014 David had a health scare, thankfully that turned out well, but it made us stop and think about where we were and where we wanted to go in life. We decided to follow our guts and aim at Europe. This way we could be closer to our parents who were getting older. We did not want have regrets because we did not make enough time for them.



NJS: Was it always a shared dream to own and manage a property in Provence, or was it a gradual evolution in thinking over time?

DLM: The idea for a B&B stems from a long-standing joke amongst us and our friends after we saw an ad for a Watermill in France. We joked "one day we will own such a romantic place and turn it into a small guesthouse". The mill stayed



our budget, so we realized we could pursue our idea of a guesthouse.

somewhere in the back of our consciousness and came back once we started looking in Europe. France was the only place we could go that had an appealing Mediterranean climate and a common language for both of us. It was simply a romantic idea at first, then we saw properties bigger than we expected to find with

NJS: Hotels, like restaurants, have always been a big challenge to get off the ground, and then even more of a challenge to stay successful in the long term. Did any friends or family try to talk you out of it?

DLM: Most of our friends thought we were crazy going to a foreign country to do something we had no experience in! But they also thought we were brave and courageous to follow our dream to open yet another new chapter in our lives.

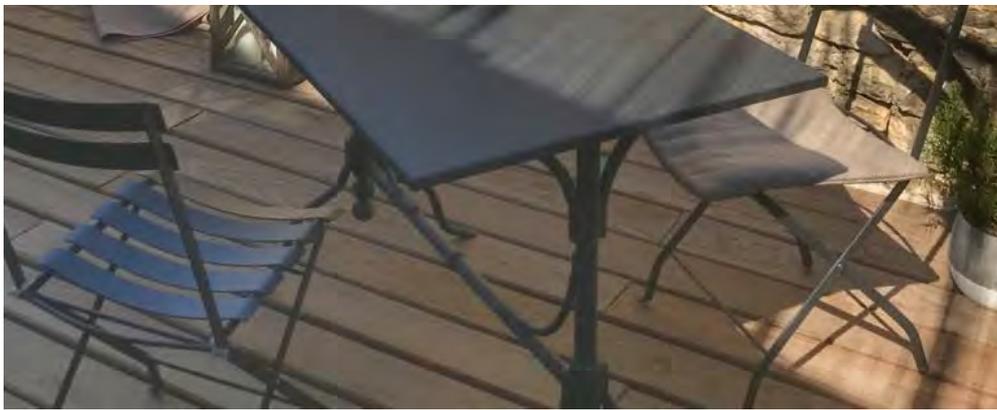
NJS: What were some of the challenges in finding the perfect property? Did you have your hearts set on Provence, or did you look at other regions of France as well?

DLM: We looked everywhere in the South of France, from Biarritz to Monaco, but found magic in the Luberon Valley in Provence every time we crossed it. Provence has that quality of light, the hilltop medieval villages, the beautiful vegetation and the ideal position, nestled between the sea and mountains. It is also right on the north-south axis that connects Paris to Marseille. The third time we arrived in Avignon we got that feeling of “homecoming” and knew in our hearts that this was the place.



NJS: We know that you were able to restore Domaine Les Martins and open your doors in a very short time (and with spectacular success!). How did you manage this – and how difficult (or easy?) was it to accomplish?

DML: We visited DLM three times during winter 2015/16. We took lots of pictures and started sketching out ideas of how we would renovate it. During the closing



period we developed our ideas and made all the necessary drawings so that we could look for craftsmen the moment we arrived to take possession.

Luckily we found a

great contractor quickly and broke ground at the end of September 2015. Ten months later, after intensive work on all the buildings and gardens, we opened the doors to our first guests.

NJS: What part of the restoration was the most challenging?

DLM: There was no specific challenge during the renovation. In general it was more of a race against time, so we needed the teams to always do their best. As well as supervising the contractors on a daily basis, we did all the interiors ourselves, which was a huge project.

NJS: Do you plan to expand the number of guest rooms in the future, or are you happy with the intimacy and charm of the property as it is?

DLM: When we first decided to do this, our goal was to create a property clearly distinct from a hotel, while still offering services desirable in a guesthouse. We wanted the guest experience to be like visiting friends, a personal, homey and intimate experience, attributes that luxury hotels struggle to offer. We also wanted to offer privacy to our guests. This was a difficult balance to achieve: that's why our search for a property took two and one half years. As we would have multiple buildings we knew we could separate our house and our garden from the guest areas so that guests would not have to share any common space with the owners, even though staying in a guesthouse. Yet, when guests would want to interact with us, they would have the option. We are afraid that if we expand the room numbers we might end up losing the feeling guests experience of being at a friend's house.

We are also very hands-on with everything; we prepare and serve breakfast, the table d'hote, the picnic baskets, the food for movie nights. We also help our guests plan their days, we suggest and make restaurant reservations. We can manage to do this with our seven units, but if we add more rooms it will be difficult to keep the same level of service and personal involvement. After all we came to France for the "lifestyle". We do not want to get carried away with the business side and forget why we decided to do this.

NJS: You both clearly have the warm





personalities necessary to connect with guests and make them feel very welcome, and importantly, you seem to really enjoy it. What do you and David consider the most rewarding part of running a boutique property in France?

DLM: We both really enjoy meeting new people from all over the world, from all backgrounds and professions. We like chatting with them and sharing stories. Everybody we meet is on vacation, so they're always in a relaxed mode, which makes it very easy to connect. Vacations are precious, so we feel privileged that people choose to spend their time with us, therefore we do everything possible to help them leave with good memories.

The biggest reward is when guests come back, as this is the biggest validation of our accomplishments and what we do. We have lots of returning guests, and with each visit the connection with them becomes stronger. It's like receiving friends to our house. And of course, we also get to live ourselves in this beautiful place in Provence!

NJS: When you have some time for yourselves, where do you and David love to go to relax? Is there a particular village or region that you consider a favourite? If so, what is it that makes it so special to you?

DLM: We are in the middle of so many of the charming villages of Luberon. Within a fifteen minute drive we have seven famous villages you can easily visit: Gordes, Roussillon, Lacoste, Menerbes, Goult, Oppede-le-vieux and Bonnieux. If we have only an hour or so, we tend to go to one of these villages for a walk or for coffee to enjoy the amazing views.

If we have a full afternoon free, we sometimes go to the beach in Cassis or to the Toulourenc River for a dip and a walk. There are also many flea markets in the region; you can find one almost every day of the week to go for "treasure hunts".

NJS: If you want to go out for a fabulous dinner with friends, or even just the two of you, where do you love to go?

DLM: For an amazing fine dining experience we go to "Bistro Lagarde" in Lagarde d'Apt. It is a Michelin Starred restaurant with amazingly creative, beautifully presented and delicious food. For delicious local cuisine in a simple environment, we go to La Terrasse in Goult. For a lively bistro with a killer view, Bistro Le 5 in Menerbes is our favorite.

NJS: Do you have any advice you would like to share with anyone wanting to take the leap into running a hotel in France?

DML: Sure, I'd say do it right away! Do not waste time. It is really a fantastic lifestyle. Even though we really enjoyed our previous lives, we do not miss them at all. And the best advice we received while we were in the early stages of our project was: "The most important thing in the hospitality business is Location, Location and Location!"

New Jetsetters can enthusiastically endorse this property for many reasons, but we encourage you to head over to their website and take a look at the many other reasons you might want to head to [Domaine Les Martins](#) for your next vacation. "New Jetsetters" were not sponsored or remunerated in any way by this property.

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About Author

Deborah Thompson is Co-Founder of New Jetsetters, Editor in Chief of New Jetsetters GLOSS Magazine and a well known Luxury Travel writer and Influencer.