



"I have taken a somewhat Proustian approach," says de Marseille, an art historian and specialist in historical film sets, of his strong, timeless aesthetic. "I wanted to recapture the spirit of Saran in the lounges, dining rooms and living rooms of the château by evoking the everyday lives of the great families of Champagne in the 19th and 20th centuries."

Eleven large suites are themed to reflect periods of – and characters from – history, and the rise of Moët & Chandon across the globe. So we have the Louis XIV suite, with its red, green and gold Versailles-style opulence and original portrait of the Sun King. The Imperial suite has parquet flooring in distressed oak, a fireplace with columns and a painting of Napoléon with his Empresses, Josephine and Marie Louise.

The Japanese suite – bamboo armchairs, traditional Japanese screen, wallpaper embossed with green hills, golden rocks and languid cranes – is decorated from the perspective of an 18th-century European. The Roaring Twenties suite is an art deco dream: panther statues, black-and-gold

ironwork, prints inspired by Paris's Folies Bérgères. The Hollywood suite – 1940s style, with touches of gold and lattice wallpaper in vanilla – pays tribute to Marilyn Monroe.

Bathrooms are bright, in keeping with the spirit of the rooms. Baths are marble; fittings are brass, gilded and patinated bronze. Deft use of light is obvious throughout, from the suites and lounges to the landings, vestibules and grand staircase. Choosing objet d'art, many of them Moët family heirlooms, and placing them just so, is another of de Marseille's fortes.

Château perused and sighed over, we descend into the vineyards, where a mirrored marquee with a transparent ceiling and wall glints in the last rays of the sun. Inside, past a trio of pyramids fashioned from hundreds of coupe glasses, are long tables set with name cards and lovely wildflower centrepieces. A four-course menu featuring langoustine tartare and scamorza-stuffed morels showcases the considerable talents of Yannick Alléno, a three-Michelin-starred chef and brand ambassador for Moët & Chandon since

Above left and above: family heirlooms and the château's Japanese suit. Above right: Prince Jean-Christophe Napoléon Bonaparte and his fiancée, Countess Olympia von Arco-Zinneberg.



2014, and Dominique Crenn, the first female chef to receive three stars in America.

There are different wine pairings, of course, including a Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage 2009 chosen to commemorate the year in which Roger Federer married his wife, Mirka (earlier spotted swiftly brushing her husband's lapels). Seated at a central table with Portman, Thurman and other extra-important VIPs, Federer was praised in an after-dinner speech by Bernard Arnault, who waxed lyrical about the long friendship between the tennis champ and the champagne house.

"For many years you have been an inspiration for our teams. You are a symbol of elegance and perfection," says Arnault, France's richest man, who pledged €200 million (\$322 million) towards rebuilding Paris' fire-ravaged Notre Dame Cathedral, as the good-natured Federer laughs modestly. "So tonight we have the king of wines meeting the king of courts."

Live entertainment comes in the form of burgeoning superstar Freya Ridings, a 25-year-old English singer with a

powerful voice and ethereal sound, who, accompanied by guitar and cello (played by Laura Mvula's brother, James Douglas), takes to a grand piano to deliver a mesmerizing set of originals including her 2017 hit, *Lost Without You*.

The champagne flows, and flows some more, not least after a trio of sommeliers climb ladders positioned next to the coupe pyramids, and send Moët Imperial cascading in tiered torrents.

Then the house lights are lowered and guests are instructed to look towards the transparent wall, to where Chateau de Saran glows, white and alone, on its hilltop, and a spectacular fireworks display suddenly erupts from the vineyards beneath it.

To an epic classical music score, fireworks light up the night sky, exploding in candles, spinning in spirals, bursting into stars. Changing from pale gold to blush pink, the colours of Moët Imperial and Rosé Imperial. Oh, and also the colour of the earlier sunset.

Here in Champagne, even nature knows how to raise a toast. **L&L**

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