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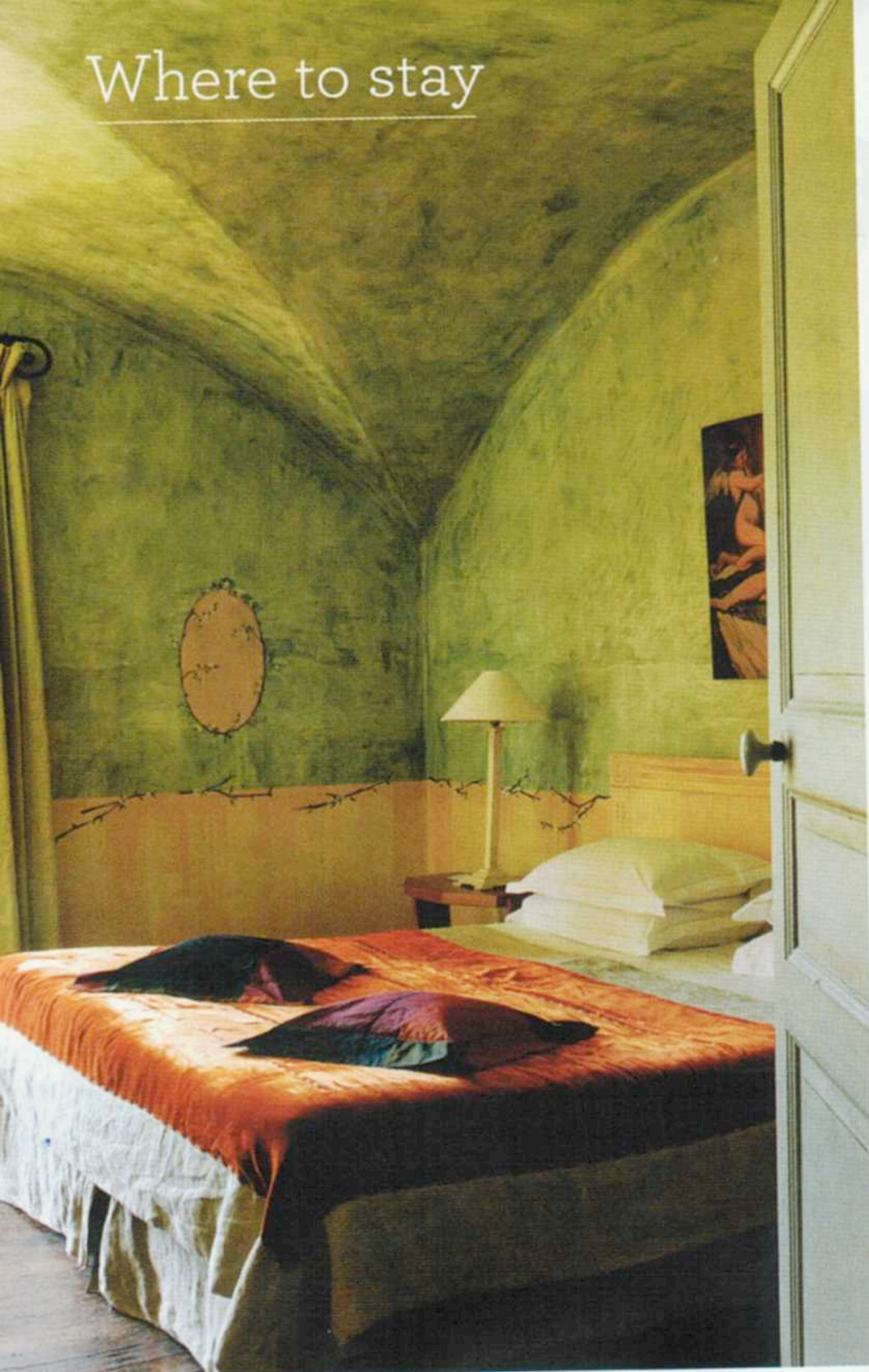
★ A classic drive from
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Left, one of the bedrooms and, below, the restaurant at La Signoria

villas with pools were added and plans are in place for a large state-of-the-art spa complex to open next year.

The restaurant continues to be the hotel's star attraction, with exquisite dishes based on Corsican fare (lamb, kid, rock lobster, squid) given a gourmet twist. Prices are steep, though: on the night of my visit, the least expensive main course was rack of lamb with asparagus at €29.

To my mind, the grounds are the hotel's greatest glory, a haven of tamed nature – roses, bamboos, climbing jasmine and more – set against the raw majesty of wild and rugged Corsica beyond. It all makes for a beautiful and seriously luxurious package, yet in some ways it seems too smooth and contrived, out of kilter with the craggy charm and character of its location.

There was information in my room about La Signoria's beach facilities yet no mention

Oil paintings, antique-style furnishings and distressed paint finishes are used to conjure an impression of age

► plays on this supposedly noble past. Oil paintings, antique-style furnishings and distressed paint finishes are employed to great effect (sometimes a little overblown) to conjure an impression of age. But then, in the dining room, a painting of a modest white farmhouse turned the hotel's impression of its own grand patrician past on its head. For the subject of the painting, it was pointed out by the ever-helpful staff, was in fact the original Genovese building upon which the hotel is based.

The former farmhouse was an established and well-respected restaurant-with-rooms when Calvi hotelier Jean-Baptiste Ceccaldi bought it in 1986. He gradually transformed it into a stylish outfit, providing further accommodation by building the hacienda-style villas. Then he added chic leisure facilities in the three-hectare grounds: an elegant swimming pool, indoor Jacuzzi, small spa, hammam and sauna. He also created a beach club with a lunchtime restaurant in Calvi, so that guests can get their fix of sun and sand, booking their deckchairs in advance.

La Signoria joined Relais & Châteaux last year (it is one of just three hotels on the island to be a member) and this year acquired its fifth star. The hotel remains a work in progress: last year five private

of any other attractions nearby. But in the mountains to the east there are lovely villages, among them Montemaggiore on its rocky pinnacle and Pigna, a picturesque tangle of cobbled lanes and now a centre for Corsican arts and music.

How curious, I thought, to celebrate the (somewhat imaginary) past while ignoring the real richness of the land and life around.



LA SIGNORIA, ROUTE DE LA FORET DE BONIFATO, CALVI, CORSICA (00 33 4 95 65 93 00; WWW.HOTEL-LA-SIGNORIA.COM). DOUBLES FROM €310

4 MORE CORSICAN BEAUTIES

LA VILLA, CALVI

There are views of Calvi's fortress from La Villa's fabulous infinity pool. This sleek and contemporary Relais & Châteaux hotel is beautifully positioned and provides easy access to beaches. There are 49 quietly stylish rooms, and facilities include five pools, a spa and one of Corsica's most highly rated restaurants. 00 33 4 95 65 10 10; www.hotel-la-villa.com. Doubles from €200

GRAND HOTEL DE CALA ROSSA, PORTO-VECCHIO

Off a white-sand beach opposite the increasingly cool resort town of Porto-Vecchio on Corsica's east coast, this Relais & Châteaux hotel – another one – is the island's most established luxury retreat. It is a dreamy world unto itself with a Michelin-starred restaurant, beachside bar, spa and swimming pool and just 48 rooms. 00 33 4 95 71 61 51; www.hotel-calarossa.com. Doubles from €370



U CAPU BIANCU, BONIFACIO

You're off the beaten track and right on the coast at this rustic-chic retreat near the town of Bonifacio, on the southern tip of Corsica. The hotel is set on limestone cliffs with access to an isolated beach below. Its 41 rooms all have spectacular sea views, and facilities include a swimming pool, two restaurants and a boat for day trips to outlying islands. 00 33 4 95 73 05 58; www.capu-biancu.com. Doubles from €248

U PALAZZU SERENU, OLETTA

Oletta is an ancient village of immense charm and great views. This striking art hotel opened in November in an extensively refurbished 17th-century mansion, now decorated with works by Anish Kapoor, Wendy Wischer, Paul de Pignol and others. It has nine bedrooms, a terrific terrace, heated swimming pool, small spa area and restaurant celebrating Mediterranean cuisine. 00 33 4 95 38 39 39; www.upalazzu-serenu.com. Doubles from €145