



Photo © Rr Rudy Ricciotti



Opposite page: Set to open in 2013, Le MuCEM – Musée des civilisations de l'Europe – boasts a sleek, semi-transparent façade along its sea-facing wall.

Above: Marseille's old town is crammed with historic charm.

NEW FACE

The feisty, sun-drenched Mediterranean city of Marseille has designed itself a stunning new makeover.

France's oldest city, Marseille is in the midst of transformation. Three hours from Paris on the TGV, a popular destination by air and a pleasant train ride from Spain and Switzerland, Marseille has an exciting urban renewal project in full swing, readying it for the title of 2013 European City of Culture.

'Euromediterranee' is considered to be the largest urban renovation project in Europe and aims to place Marseille on the map as a major urban hub by building a new 'city on the city'.

The architects, who include Rudy Ricciotti, Zaha Hadid and Massimiliano Fuksas, have aimed to respect the principles of sustainable development. They have constructed and renovated housing and hotels, as well as cultural and leisure facilities.

The dock clean-up and city revitalisations make sense when you consider the natural amphitheatre-like design of the city, with its protective mountains and spectacular views overlooking the glistening Mediterranean sea.

The old town

Indeed the first thing you should really do on arriving in Marseille is visit some of the sites along this historic arc, to appreciate its natural beauty. Inhale the sweet, salty air (a mix of baguettes, butter croissants and sea air) and stretch your travel-stiff legs by climbing uphill to visit the Notre-Dame de la Garde – Marseille's most famous landmark. Gaze to the top of the church at and beyond the golden Virgin Mary and enjoy the spiritual moment, whether you are religious or not. Regain your breath while taking in the incredible view of the town, sea and islands (immortalised by Alexander Dumas in *The Count of Monte Cristo*). Sip a Perrier at the church café and, if it's up your stream, you can purchase a model ship as a souvenir.

Staying on the religious theme, Basilique St-Victor is well worth a visit for its historical assets. It originally belonged to a large abbey founded in the 5th century, and features castle-like 11th and 14th century towers, a display of Greek artefacts, and 3rd century sarcophagi in its crypt.

Now that you've built up a healthy appetite, what better than a seafood lunch with a crisp white wine at the revamped docks? Then board the free ferry from Place aux Huiles to the Panier quarter across the Vieux Port (the Old Port), or explore the city by tram or vélo (bike). The vélo scheme operates from Place aux Huiles, and is easy to use.

Marseille by design

Given all the hammering and reshaping now underway on Marseille's cityscape, it's not surprising the city has some compelling attractions for design connoisseurs.

Cycle past the town hall to check out the surrounding post-war reconstructions by Pouillon and Castel, and continue to the MuCEM (the Museum of Civilisations from Europe and the Mediterranean), designed by Rudy Ricciotti. While this museum won't open its doors until 2013, there are exhibitions in the old building, Le Fort St-Jean, which will connect to the new museum via a walkway.

Pedal down the stunning ocean road, La Corniche, towards the beach and hop off at the magnificent MAC. The Musée d'Art Contemporain opened in 1994 and is today an internationally recognised cultural institution. The 1970s villa-style museum houses works from the likes of William S Burroughs, Nan Goldin and César. Also represented are artists of nouveau réalisme, such as Yves Klein, along with key pop art and conceptual pieces and a fantastic collection of installations and multi-media projects employing advanced technology.



Bar at La Résidence du Vieux Port (left); Retro façade of Hotel Corbusier (centre); Lounge area at La Résidence du Vieux Port (right).

DESIGNER SLEEPS

'The arty hotel is avant-garde, affordable and a must visit for architecture enthusiasts.'

The Centre Design Marseille, established in 2003, is managed by a collective of local design professionals. The association supports young artist-designers, and hosts exhibitions to help boost their profile. It is also something of a design and materials database – a great resource for design enthusiasts and professionals.

After a strong Marseille coffee or apéro (try pastis, the local aniseed liqueur), it's time to explore the design stores for insights, souvenirs and inspiration to take back home.

Le Cabanon Design, in the heart of the Antiquaires quarter, specialises in 1950s through 80s furniture sourced from around Europe by Christophe Chevallier. Holmegarde vases sit alongside Kaiser lamps and, since 2009, the store's mezzanine houses the Cabanon Design Gallery, a part of the Design Expos Network of contemporary art spaces in Marseille (www.marseilleexpos.com).

Over at design store Miss Julia, admire cardboard furniture that combines art and functionality. Originally from Paris, the eponymous Miss Julia takes her cues from pop art and much workshop experimentation, achieving a finesse and genius in her pieces that are also solid and functional.

Drawers, cupboards and shelves have a fresh, innocent aesthetic – and a certain sophistication.

One of the designer's personal favourite shops is Room Bazar. 'It's a little boutique design store full of interesting and unique objects,' Miss Julia enthuses.

Stop by the Flowerbox Gallery, located in the 6th arrondissement. The concept of the creators, Thibaut de Breyne and Philippe Tisserand, the gallery's work is seen in other art spaces around France and beyond – hundreds of flowers, plants and bulbs set in creatively designed boxes that transform the plants into wall hangings. These colourful, creative and refreshing pieces are the perfect present for new local friends, or could serve as inspiration for your own redecoration upon your return home.

With dozens more intriguing design finds and museums in town, visit the tourism office on your arrival or check their website in advance.



La Résidence du Vieux Port
www.hotel-residence-marseille.com

This design hotel is featured regularly in the press for its colourful and bold 1950s aesthetic. In the lobby is an impressive wall tapestry designed by Jean Lurçat, furniture inspired by Charlotte Perriand (a Corbusier collaborator) and bold yellow and black couches by Pierre Paulin. Best of all is the stunning view of the Port and the Notre-Dame de la Garde cathedral (for those happy to skip that uphill climb).

Hotel Corbusier
www.hotellecorbusier.com

An architectural masterpiece, with incredible detail as a mid-century modern building and a tourist attraction in itself. The arty hotel is avant-garde, affordable and a must-visit for architecture enthusiasts. It was originally part of La Cité Radieuse, a 165-metre long and 56-metre high structure made of coloured concrete, designed by the famous architect Le Corbusier in 1952. There's also a vibrant and reputable restaurant that can be enjoyed for a tasty French meal, or a classic drink or two.

Le Loft du Vieux Port
www.apartmentmarseille.com

For a more homely place to stay, try this sunny, spacious private rental studio near Marseille's Vieux Port. The apartment sits on the top floor of a venerable stone building overlooking the historic Place aux Huiles, above a tree-lined square brimming with restaurants. Of its minimalist design, wooden beams and arched windows with a view of the port, its co-owner Ian Lavis says, 'We wanted to contrast the ancient, atmospheric building with a modern interior to create the impression of space and light.'

More design-savvy apartments can be found on websites such as www.holidaylettings.co.uk, www.homelidays.com and www.abritel.fr

Address Book
Musée d'Art Contemporain
69 avenue d'Haïfa 13008
+33 4 91 25 01 07
www.arts-programme.com/musee

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76 avenue de la Corse 13007
+33 4 88 90 03 12
www.designmarseille.org/

Cabanon Design
32 rue St-Jacques 13006
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www.lecabanondesign.com

Miss Julia
20 rue Bussy L'Indien 13006
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www.miss-julia.com

Room Bazar
17 rue du Docteur Fiolle 13006

Flowerbox Gallery
7 rue des Trois Frères Barthélémy 13006
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www.flowerbox-gallery.com

Further information
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