

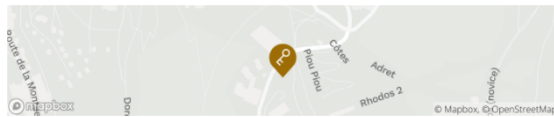


HOTEL

Hôtel Le Coucou

\$\$\$ | A HOT LIST 2020

A legitimately family-friendly, radically playful take on the traditional ski chalet in the posh French Alps.



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AMENITIES

- Spa
- Free WiFi
- Skiing
- Bar
- Movement Fitness
- Gym
- Pool

ROOMS

55

A dark-themed infographic titled "TL;DR: Breaking the mold". It features a central key icon. Four key points are listed around the key:

- FIRST IMPRESSION:** Doormen, in black jeans and cowboy hats
- FOOD & DRINKS:** Top-notch Italian cuisine and laid-back sharing plates
- STAFF:** Youthful but suited to service
- BED & BATH:** A touch of whimsy, courtesy of Paris-based interior designer Pierre Yovanovitch

By SOPHIE BUTLER
Contributing Writer

Set the scene.

Bird-spotting becomes a fun game here. Artist Matthieu Cossé's frescoed dome of owls in tree-tops on a sky-blue backdrop splashes color into the circular reception, in the public cloakrooms there's a background audio loop of cuckoo songs and the walls in the bar are graced with avian artwork. It's clear that designer Yovanovitch's hand is everywhere, from his exclusively manufactured furniture and carpets to the displays of vintage alpine jugs personally sourced by him from Parisian flea markets. There's work by an eclectic line-up of contemporary artists and sculptors including Ugo Rondinone and Alexander Calder, set off by strong, matte wall colors (rich greens, taupes, blues, and deep reds).

What's the backstory?

The hotel was opened in December 2019 by Maisons Pariente, a small family-run company headed up by French owner Patrick Pariente (the 1970s founder of prêt-à-porter brand Naf Naf) and his daughters Leslie Kouhana and Kimberley Cohen. Their portfolio of three properties includes **Hôtel Crillon le Brave** in Provence, reopened after refurbishment in May 2019, and Hotel Lou Pinet in Saint Tropez, newly opened in June 2019. Next year, 2021, sees a fourth property opening in **Paris's Le Marais** neighborhood. From planning to completion, the Pariente family has worked closely with Pierre Yovanovitch, who started his career with Pierre Cardin in men's couture before launching an interior design agency in 2001. Predominantly specializing in private commissions from his offices in Paris and **New York**, Le Coucou is Yovanovitch's first hotel project.

What can we expect in our room?

There's plenty of quirky humor: light shades resembling ice cubes, chair backs carved with cuckoo beaks, owl-shaped coat hooks, furniture legs shaped like ski poles, polka-dot carpets. Tactile velvet and wool fabrics combine with warm salmon-pink and mustard-yellow wall colors, and rooms are strong on practicality, too: plenty of space for ski gear in pale-wood cupboards and generously sized bathrooms with deep baths and Le Labo goodies.

How about the food and drink?

The Beef Bar is open for lunch and dinner, and focuses on, yes, beef, cooked in all sorts of exceptionally delicious ways: oven-grilled, teppanyaki, wok-fried, barbecued, tartare, and boeuf bourguignon served with the silkiest signature mash flavored with truffle, lemon, caviar or jalapeño pepper. The star dish in the Italian Bianca Neve restaurant is the risotto al tartufo, and this is where breakfasts are set up with squishy fresh breads, cakes, and pastries alongside fruit, cheeses, and yogurts. Plates of cooked eggs are only an ask away.

What's the crowd like?

Serious off-pisters and first-track fans who want a ski-in, ski-out location (few properties offer this here), millennial groups from Lyon, plus plenty of Brits who come to Meribel in droves (the resort was founded by a British skier in 1938). Families like the dedicated playrooms for children, and non-skiers like the spa treatments, poolside reading, and the sun terrace.

Anything to say about the service?

Some of the staff are still finding their feet, but there's a feeling of tight teamwork and attention to detail.

What's the neighborhood scene like?

Not good for late-night clubbers hoping to stagger back from Meribel center in minutes. The hotel is a 10- to 15-minute zig-zagging drive up the hill, through the chalet clusters that are spread over Meribel's steep slopes, but it's close to Le Rond Pont Bar (affectionately known as "The Ronnie" with its rocking après scene).

Anything else to add?

Groups of family or friends wanting more privacy and the option to self-cater can rent one of the hotel's two "chalets." These aren't standalone, but discretely integrated into the hotel building. Named Eleonore and Eglantine after characters from childhood stories invented by Patrick Pariente for his daughters, these sleep up to eight people and come with a kitchen, small pool, mini-spa, and ski room with direct access onto the slopes.

Anything you'd change?

Opening glitches which need ironing out include the lighting in the restaurants, which lack atmosphere, especially by night.

Is it worth it?

Yes it's worth it, if only for its exceptionally good ski-in ski-out location, bang in the center of one of the world's biggest and best ski areas.