

backbeat

38

APRIL 2014

THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

SWIFTFITNESS IN ADVERSITY
BERNICE LIU

BY THE BOOKSHELF



FASHION & BEAUTY & LIFESTYLE

MAGICAL MARRAKECH TOUR

Whether you are a hippie at heart or want to follow in the footsteps of fashion icons, *Carol Wright* tells you how to souk up the Moroccan mecca's heady atmosphere in style.

Marrakech is the ultimate rose-red city. Twelve kilometres of russet clay walls in the 11th-century fortified city (medina) blush blood-red at sunset, the perfect time to take a caleche (horse-drawn carriage) ride when the air is heady with the scent of rose gardens. The most atmospheric of North African cities has kept its Arabian nights allure while offering superlative hotels. Old Moroccan riads (traditional mansions with interior courtyards) have become elegant boutique hotels, surrounded by narrow souk tunnels selling every known craft; fondouks (ancient inns for camel trains) are now workshops; hammams provide steamy body cleansing and the air is fragranced with bread baking in communal ovens.

Outside the medina walls, *Thousand and One Nights* exotica meets Parisian chic in the French-founded Gueliz neighbourhood, named after its church. Here, off the main avenue of Mohammed V, are top shops, cafes and vibrant nightlife.

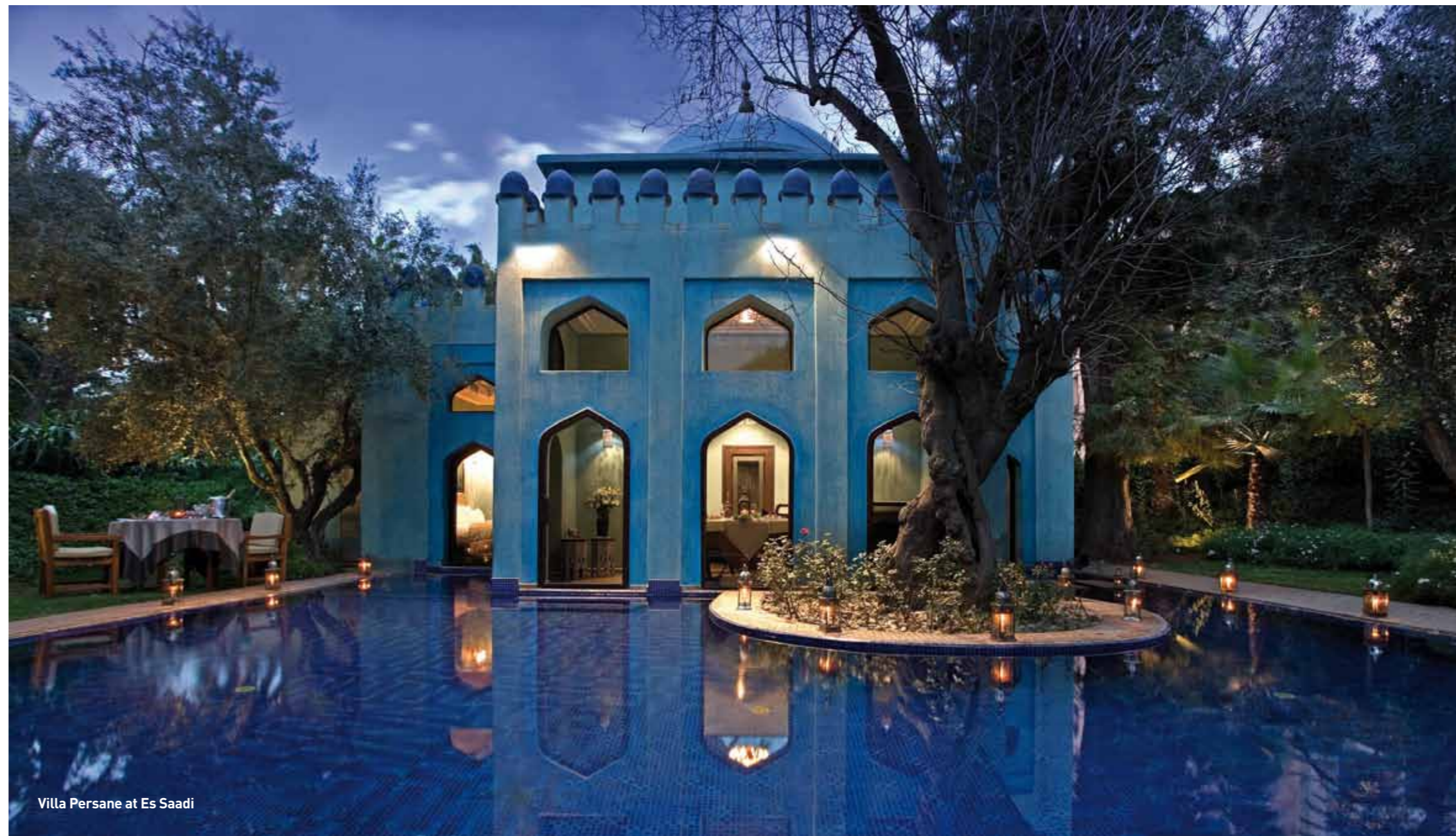
BEST BEDS

Es Saadi (www.essaadi.com), set among 20 acres of subtropical gardens, boasts the new all-suite **Palace** hotel with a stunning Assyrian-inspired lobby, spa and spacious rooms overlooking one of Marrakech's largest pools, with a central bar. Ten superlative villas are secluded in lush vegetation, allowing the likes of Catherine Deneuve, Leonardo DiCaprio and senior French politicians to drop quietly out of sight. All the villas have large garden pools with double-bed loungers, jacuzzi baths, fireplaces, wifi and butler service. Decor varies from Roman and Art Deco to Oriental silk and chandelier glamour.

La Mamounia (www.mamounia.com), the Art Deco doyenne of Marrakech hotels – Sir Winston Churchill stayed here – has now reopened after renovation by architect Jacques Garcia. The vast, immaculate gardens – an 18th-century sultan's wedding gift to his son – are perfect for pool-side lunching after forays in the souk.



Dar Les Cigognes



Villa Persane at Es Saadi

Royal Mansour (www.royalmansour.com), also situated within the old city, is a new high-priced hotel owned by the king of Morocco. It showcases local craftsmanship in public rooms dazzling with chandeliers, leather, silks and intricate lamps. Bedrooms are within a red-walled 'medina' of mini three-floor riads, each with a patio, roof terrace and plunge pool. A system of tunnels and discreet entrances shields guests from staff intrusion.

La Maison Arabe (www.lamaisonarabe.com), a pioneer riad boutique hotel property, was once a restaurant where Churchill and Jackie Onassis dined (not together). It is now owned and has been charmingly decorated by Count Fabrizio Ruspoli. Family antiques mingle with elegant Moroccan art work and rooms ramble around flower-draped courtyards. There is a large terraced pool and solarium as well as a cookery school.

Dar Les Cigognes (www.lescigognes.com), a former spice merchant's house neighbouring the royal palace, is named for the storks' nests seen from the delightful floral roof terrace – a sybaritic place to sample traditional Moroccan dishes. The American owner has written a flavour- evocative cookbook and cookery classes are given in the riad kitchen. Themed rooms run the gamut from Sahara to Berber.

TABLES OF THE TOWN

Traditional Moroccan food is substantial but subtly spiced; think domed tagine dishes of simmering chicken or lamb stews served with cous cous and vegetables, and pastille, a feather-light pastry layering sweet and savoury ingredients. **Dar Yacout** (79 Derb Sidi Ahmed Soussi, Bab Doukkala, Medina, tel: +212 5 24 38 29 29) and **Le Tobsil** (22 Derb Moulay Abdallah Ben Hessaïen,

Medina, tel: +212 5 24 44 40 52) are long-established traditional restaurants set in huge medina palaces. Save your hunger to cope with the many courses and generous portions served around fountain-cooled courtyards.

La Grande Table at the Royal Mansour (tel: +212 5 29 80 80 80) has short menus masterminded by three-star Parisian chef Yannick Alleno. The service and cool white setting are ultra-elegant; the sommelier a perfectionist in marrying wines to dishes such as foie gras with cherries and pine nuts.

La Cour des Lions at Es Saadi Palace (tel: +212 5 24 33 74 00) boasts an amazing dining room with white sculpted plaster work modelled on Spain's Alhambra. It looks out toward the Atlas mountains and specialities include prawns with coriander pesto and raspberry mousse with rosewater. Set within the resort's gardens is the

WHERE TO SHOP

Expert guidance is recommended to untangle the souk maze, where haggling skills and the ability to consume endless glasses of mint tea are assets. **Boutique Souk** (www.boutiquesouk.com) run by Rosena Charmoy from Ireland will book riads and

steer you round the top shopping spots. **Travel Link** (www.travelink.ma), a sightseeing and chauffeuring service, has excellent guides enabling you to discover the medina lifestyle stress-free.

IN THE MEDINA

- **Ministero del Gusto** owned by former Italian *Vogue* fashion editor Alessandra Lippini for retro furniture or vintage Chanel
- **La Porte d'Or**, where Paul McCartney, Hillary Clinton and David Bowie have shopped for antiques and carpets
- **Le Perle Fassi** for babouches (backless slippers) in all shades and fabrics
- **Moustafa Blaoui** for lanterns and interior decor
- **Aya** for embroidered silk and linen kaftans
- **Moro** for unusual leather items, bikinis and kaftans

IN GUELIZ

- **Atika** for buttersoft leather slip-ons and winter boots
- **La Place Vendome**, where Naomi Campbell and top models source handbags and kaftans
- **L'Orientaliste** for interior decor items, from furniture to silver-rimmed dishes and tasselled key rings
- **Les Parfums du Soleil** for locally created perfumes
- **Quartier Industriel de Sidi Ghanem** - Yahya workshop for exquisite pierced lamps as seen at Royal Mansour and Maison Arabe

A DAY AWAY

ESSAOUIRA, a two-and-a-half-hour drive west of Marrakech to the coast, is a white-walled, blue-windowed town snug within sturdy ramparts. Now a surfer's mecca, in the 1960s it was hippy heaven, attracting the Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix and Cat Stevens. Lunch at **Heure Bleue Palais** (www.heure-bleue.com), a pasha's mansion house, or sample local fish and white wine around the rooftop pool.



Jardin Majorelle

Casino of Marrakech – Maurice Chevalier and Edith Piaf sang at the theatre here. Modern abstract art hangs over the gaming tables; **L'Escalade Gourmande** serves light meals and **L'Epicurean** offers bistro-style food under period crystal chandeliers inside or illuminated palm trees on the summer terrace.

La Maison Arabe's fine dining restaurant **Les Trois Saveurs** (tel: +212 5 24 38 70 10) blends French, Moroccan and Asian flavours; the fish, soufflé and mille feuille here are noteworthy. A classical lute player strums while you feast. Lunch or dine around a turquoise-tiled pool or in two intimate salons at **Dar Moha** (81, rue Dar el Bacha, Medina, tel: +212 5 24 38 64 00, www.darmoha.ma), the medina house formerly owned by Pierre Balmain. The menu is stylised Moroccan – pigeon pastry with cinnamon, sea bass tagine, and cous cous dessert with melon and thyme honey.

Al Fassia (tel: +212 524 43 40 60, www.alfassia.com), run by women from Fez, is a good spot to enjoy a lunch of lamb and almond tagine or the Moroccan tea ceremony performed by waitresses in silvery silk robes. **Bo-zin** (tel: +212 5 24 38 80 12, <http://bo-zin.com>), a candle-lit garden located just outside town, is perfect for romantic sundowners. Sit at low tables to indulge in Beluga caviar and camel tagine with truffles.

HAMMAM HAVENS

After shopping and sightseeing, be pampered at top spas. **Royal Mansour's** spa entrance resembles a huge white bird cage recessed with relaxing sofas. Check in for the Chanel salon and facials, and get clean in private hammam suites.

At **Es Saadi Palace** spa, an exercise pool circling a massive eucalyptus tree leads to a sensuous Oriental thermae area of ornate

chambers. Steam, breathe in mist scented with orange blossom or myrrh, sample music therapy, or sit by the fire in the spa suite with a private hammam, twin baths, a library and herbal tea room. Dior Institute treatments are offered.

La Maison Arabe, though, offers the best hammam experience; lying on a marble slab you are steamed and scrubbed with black soap and a rough glove called a 'kiss' until your skin is baby soft. **17**

GETTING THERE

The most comfortable route is via London on British Airways (www.ba.com), which operates a new direct service taking about three hours. Business class provides extra space, champagne, a cooked meal and the latest magazines to read.

Tea room at La Mamounia



Museum of Marrakech



3 MUSEUMS TO FOCUS THE SHOPPING EYE

- Yves Saint Laurent's North African art collection at **Jardin Majorelle** is a must-see. The legendary designer and his partner Pierre Berge lived here and YSL's ashes are enshrined within bamboo and cactus gardens (named for the 1930s French painter Jacques Majorelle). The collection embraces everything from high carved doors to Berber wedding belts. Good cafe and shop. Tel: +212 5 24 33 21 02. www.jardinmajorelle.com
- Maison Tiskiwin**, a museum in a glorious 19th-century pasha's mansion, features Dutchman Bert Flint's collection of Berber and Tuareg crafts and carvings. 8 Rue de la Bahia tel: +212 5 24 38 11 91
- Museum of Marrakech**, where palatial architecture vies with collections of jewellery, ceramics, daggers and modern art. Place Ben Youssef tel: +212 5 24 44 18 93 www.museedemarrakech.ma