



The Darling Buds of Bormes

At first glance, Bormes-les-Mimosas looks much like any one of the hill villages scattered along the Côte d'Azur and its hinterland. Overlooking Le Lavandou, between Hyères and St. Tropez it has, predictably, a partially-restored château, beneath which you find winding, medieval streets and pink-tiled, old houses. In most respects this is a fairly typical *village perché*, except that it has been blessed with a very pleasant setting on the south-facing slopes of the Massif de Maurès, which creates a very mild microclimate, even in the depths of winter. Villagers enjoy wonderful views of the Mediterranean Islands of Port Cros and Le Levant and can even boast the summer residence of no less a person than the President of the Republic.

In February, however, Bormes-les-Mimosas distinguishes itself, thanks to the flowering of the ubiquitous mimosa tree and a marketing strategy of some genius. Until 1968 the village was simply 'Bormes', but the locals pulled off something of a coup when they secured an official decree renaming the village with its floral appendage.

The mimosa tree is actually quite common all along the Côte d'Azur, but it is not indigenous to the region it has colonised so profusely. A member of the acacia family, it originated in Australia and found its way to the Côte, some say

by way of Mexico, during the nineteenth century. It is clearly at home there now.

The inhabitants of Bormes were looking for a way to celebrate the arrival of Spring—rather like their fellow Provençals, the Niçois—and seized upon the idea of using this first wildflower of the year, which is so abundant on local hillsides, along with some white heather and assorted foliage. For the first time, in 1920, they decorated carts with this simple, but effective floral display and used donkeys to pull them up the boulevard de la République to the place Gambetta. The route has doubled over the years and now extends from the Table Ronde, at the foot of the village, to the Chapel St. François, overlooking place Gambetta. Not surprisingly, motorised vehicles are now used to pull the heavy floats, and cultivated

flowers such as marigolds, carnations and anemones have been added to the creations.

These days, the *Corso Fleuri de Bormes*, as the festival is known, is an enormous undertaking for a small community and is co-ordinated from the Hôtel de Ville. Madame Grando has been the committee president for more than ten years and is responsible for the smooth-running of an event which attracts thousands of visitors each year and several dignitaries, including Madame Chirac, who opens proceedings.

Opposite page: Mimosa trees add a splash of early springtime colour to the perched village of Bormes-les-Mimosas. Above: The bright yet delicate yellow flowers smother the trees, which take on a candyfloss appearance.

All photographs by Paul Shawcross