

In pictures (left to right): Boats on the old harbour front at St Tropez; Renee Niklan at her easel.



Who wants to be a **millionaire?**

JOHN BRUNTON SPENDS A DAY IN ST TROPEZ WITH ARTIST **RENEE NIKLAN**. PICTURES BY THE AUTHOR

BORN IN TURKEY IN 1936, AND NOW based in Geneva, Renee Niklan has been coming to the Cote d'Azur for over 30 years. She and her businessman husband have made their home in what is known as the Beverley Hills of St Tropez. She comes here several times a year, and always spends the summer. Having studied as a painter in the Fine Arts Schools of Paris and Istanbul, Niklan had a lengthy break from the art world at the end of the 1960s, when she was primarily involved in the fashion industry, with five boutiques in London. But since 1983, she has concentrated full time on her artistic career. Although a great grandmother, Renee works on her art every day. She is represented by the Alexia Goethe gallery in London, and has been exhibited all over the world. She is currently one of the invited artists of the prestigious annual exhibition, Dialogues Méditerranéens, held in St Tropez itself.

8.30 AM St Tropez in summer is a bedlam of movie stars and celebrities, royalty and paparazzi, the streets a catwalk of haute-couture brands, the tiny old harbour filled with huge yachts, some with their own helicopter. But the Niklans live far from these maddening crowds, ensconced in their villa in the hills overlooking the sea. "I get up and always start the day by having breakfast with my husband, but he is a workaholic, and the moment we've finished, he disappears to his office upstairs in the villa."

9.30 AM Renee works outdoors under a shady terrace, with just an easel and table filled with paints and brushes. "I can't draw a single line in silence," she says. "When I am creating – working at the start of a new piece – then what I love to do is put on an audio tape of a book or a play. Once, I was inspired for a whole series of paintings by the writings of Oscar Wilde. Another time, I prepared a series of painting on CD covers, 144 of them: it became so repetitive I said 'I'll shoot myself', but then I found the right books to listen to and everything worked out perfectly. But when I move on to complete a piece, I need to concentrate more, so I listen to classical music which calms me down, as this is the moment in a work's creation when I get very nervous."

1.00 PM Renee only carries on working in the afternoon if the weather is bad – a Mistral wind for example – when the skipper of their boat advises against going out to sea. "If the sun is shining, I take a shower as soon as I've finished, as painting is dirty work, and then my husband and I drive straight down to the port at St Tropez and take our boat out. There is always a group of friends who turn up, we'll have a cold lunch prepared by our chef, then spend the afternoon sailing and swimming."

7.00 PM "Back home again, it is time for another shower, and then dressing up for the evening. Those of us who actually live

in St Tropez rarely go out to the town's glitzy restaurants, and the real social life here takes place privately in people's homes. In fact, I'd say that St Tropez is actually like one big country club."

9.00 PM The social scene on the Riviera is legendary, and parties take place every night throughout the summer. "Everyone loves entertaining here, and the evening always starts off with drinks – usually champagne – whether we have guests at home or have been invited to a friend's house."

10.30 PM "I hate it, but dinners always start late in St Tropez. We have our own Italian chef – no one eats French food anymore – and my husband has built a pizza oven for him. The chef makes better pizza than any restaurant in St Tropez, so often friends will call us up to host an impromptu pizza party around the swimming pool."

MIDNIGHT It is after midnight when St Tropez really begins to hot up, at decadent clubs like Byblos and Papagayo, or hip bars like the Maison Blanche – where a cocktail costs 20 euros and the preferred snack is caviar. Renee likes simpler pleasures: "After dinner I love to go down to the port for a delicious ice cream at Barbaroc. Even at two in the morning you'll see crowds queuing up here – and I can tell you, the owner has become as rich as all the millionaires who can't resist his *gelati*!" **i**