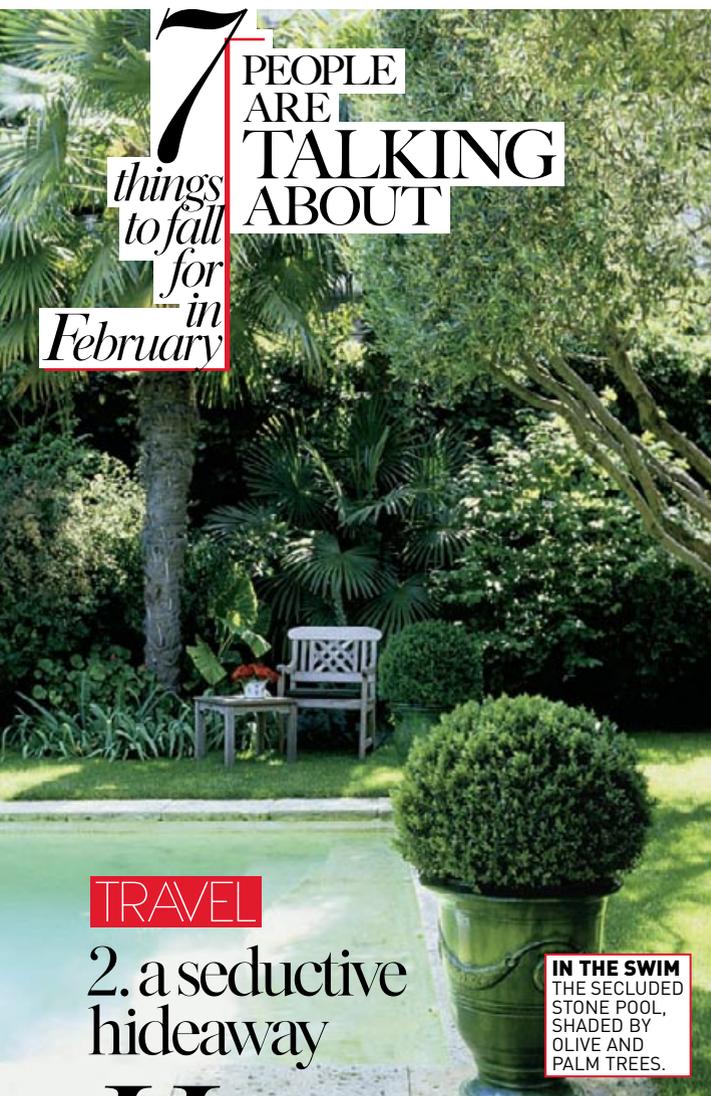


7
things
to fall
for
in
February

PEOPLE
ARE
TALKING
ABOUT



TRAVEL

2. a seductive
hideaway

Hidden behind a high wall on an unprepossessing street in Nîmes lies one of the most romantic small hotels in the South of France. **Jardins Secrets** is an eighteenth-century former inn and an adjacent cloister surrounded by gardens of bougainvillea, orange and olive trees, and a lovely swimming pool. The creation of stylist and interior decorator Annabelle Valentin and her photographer husband, Christophe, the four-year-old property has just unveiled ten new rooms and suites—outfitted with exquisite antiques and opulent silks by the likes of Pierre Frey, Nobilis, and Braquenié. Served in the garden, breakfast consists of mini-croissants and

homemade jasmine-flower and rose-petal jams. For other meals, Annabelle and Christophe will offer a salad-and-cheese tray or steer you to nearby restaurants like the hip Provençal hangout Le 9, a ten-minute walk from the hotel through Old Nîmes, which boasts some of the most impressive Roman ruins outside Italy. Back at the hotel, there's a smart new bar with sixteenth-century Indian wall hangings, but the pièce de résistance is Jardins Secrets' new marble-columned spa, which can be booked only one room at a time. What could be more romantic than a steam in the hammam, a soak in the heated pool, or a candlelit massage for two? (Doubles from \$252; chichretreats.com.)—RICHARD ALLEMAN

IN THE SWIM
THE SECLUDED
STONE POOL,
SHADED BY
OLIVE AND
PALM TREES.

MOVIES

3. a love
triangle

When Joaquin Phoenix announced that he was through with acting, people wondered whether he was serious or just indulging a mood. You might ask the same question of his wayward character in the offbeat romantic drama **Two Lovers**. He stars as Leonard Kraditor,

a depressive, charismatic Brooklynite who lives with his dry-cleaner parents. Eager to change his life, he starts wooing two radically different beauties: Sandra (Vinessa Shaw), the nice Jewish girl his folks want him to marry, and their mysterious neighbor Michelle (Gwyneth Paltrow), a tantalizing blonde who any sane man would know is Trouble.

The American-born filmmaker James Gray (*We Own the Night*) is hugely admired in France for his stories of passionate souls striving to escape an imprisoning fate. In *Two Lovers*, Leonard's desire for freedom leads to scenes charged with poetic yearning, such as his windblown rooftop encounter with Michelle, whose air of wounded allure showcases Paltrow's knack for edgy character parts. Yet like most men who expect love to save them, Leonard lacks inner resources: He's drawn to whichever woman happens to be right in front of him. A famously ambiguous actor, Phoenix turns Leonard into an amusing portrait of a selfish yet decent guy who means what he says—at least while he's saying it.

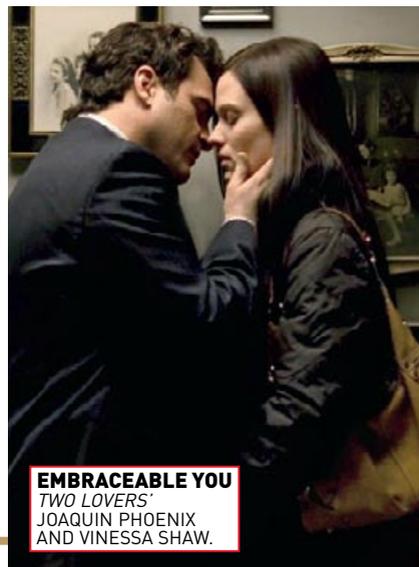
—JOHN POWERS *pata* >136

SCENE

4. a new
favorite

Known for creating intimate New York haunts like the Beatrice Inn—“Everything today is so big. I like doing small, warm spaces,” he says—Matthew Abramcyk partnered with his brother, Jack, and chef Sean Giordano for the upcoming **Sta Posta**. Housed in a Tribeca brownstone with a powder-pink tin wall, marble floor tiles, and a black-lacquer bar, the restaurant will feature a simple Italian menu and banquettes covered in blank artists' canvas on which guests can leave their mark. “It'll be like place cards for regulars,” Abramcyk says.—STEPHANIE LACAVA

THINK PINK
VINTAGE STYLINGS—
LIKE THIS STUDIO
PRINTWORKS
WALLPAPER—WERE
THE INSPIRATION.



EMBRACEABLE YOU
TWO LOVERS'
JOAQUIN PHOENIX
AND VINESSA SHAW.

From left: Courtesy of Jardins Secrets; Pauline wallpaper: Courtesy of Nancy Burges for Studio Printworks; Courtesy of Magnolia Pictures. Details, see in This issue.