

Dormez BIEN

Where to stay in style

This issue: Château hotels for wine-lovers

Tasting – and bringing home – the local wines is one of the joys of taking a holiday in France, so what could be better than staying in historic hotels in the heart of the country's wine-growing regions? All three of these château hotels are in imposing buildings that have been carefully restored to provide every modern comfort. Two actually make their own wine, but all three provide a tranquil and enticing getaway for anyone who loves the noble grape.



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Vintage selection

Languedoc: Take the chance to chill out on the terrace

There's a warm welcome when you arrive at Château Les Carrasses; the laid-back atmosphere of this luxurious destination can't fail to put guests at their ease. Whether your stay in Languedoc-Roussillon is a weekend getaway or a longer road trip, there is a holiday feeling as soon as you pass through the elegant gates.

Surrounded by vineyards, the 19th-century turreted château has been converted from a crumbling pile into 28 luxury suites, villas and apartments, all with self-catering facilities. It opened to the public last July and is already proving popular with British and American visitors. Each interior has been individually designed and the results are a stylish blend of antique and modern, whether you're staying in a stylish

rooftop apartment in the château itself or one of the stunning three-bedroom *maisons de la cave* in the former winery, complete with its own terrace and pool.

For our two-night stay, we took up residence in one of the two-bedroom *maisons des vendangeurs* apartments, with its open-plan kitchen and living area. The decor of pale grey and terracotta was simple yet stylish and all mod-cons were available: a huge flat-screen TV, iPod dock, microwave and dishwasher. Despite having such conveniences at our disposal, we couldn't turn down the chance to be waited upon and so headed over to the chateau's brasserie. Up on its huge terrace, overlooking the vineyards and out towards the sea and Pyrénées, we sipped a chilled bottle of local rosé and tucked into tapas-style dishes

brought to us by the young and friendly waiting staff.

The new winery has resurrected the property's vinous past and, under the guidance of winemaker David Alcaraz, the château will release its own vintage this year. For those whose interest goes deeper than simply quaffing the local produce, tasting masterclasses and winemaking courses run throughout the year. Also on site are an infinity pool, bikes to borrow and plenty of cosy corners in which to relax, providing every reason to stay and enjoy the surroundings before exploring Beziers, Montpellier and the coast; all within an hour's drive.

Carolyn Boyd

€ From €114 per night for a chateau suite



Aquitaine: Where going Dutch is a real treat

When staying in France, you might expect to have to choose between a cosy, good-value *chambre d'hôte* and a more expensive château hotel with a gastronomic restaurant. On my last visit to Gascony, however, I found a little gem of a hotel that incorporates the best of both.

As you approach Château de Buros at the end of a long driveway, the building has a genuine wow factor. I was greeted by owners Angélique and Marijn de Wit – a Dutch couple who fell in love with and bought the château 15 years ago – and handed a glass of Côtes de Gascogne Blanc on the terrace, where I learned that Marijn shares my passion for Gascon wines and the local spirit, Armagnac.

Located in wild, unspoilt countryside between Mont-de-Marsan and Agen, the château was built in 1889 as a private residence. The rooms are simple, clean and cosy, and

everything is wonderfully old-fashioned: restored fireplaces, period windows and doors that open with real keys!

Angélique is *chef de cuisine*, while Marijn manages the restaurant. A delicious daily set meal is served for just €29 and Marijn is in his element as sommelier, recommending a wide range of local wines and Armagnacs.

The hotel's rural location attracts those looking for a bit of peace rather than weekend revellers, although I was tempted to stay on the restaurant terrace long after my meal was finished, to listen to the chatter of guests and the birds' dusk chorus.

The de Wits have combined luxury and familiarity at a price that reflects the latter rather than the former. The hotel re-opens at Easter.

Dominic Rippon

€ Rooms from €51, including breakfast



Burgundy: Marvel at the Mâconnais wines

The village of Clessé lies in the heart of the Mâconnais wine-growing area of Burgundy and it is here you will find the Château de Besseuil hotel.

The area has traditionally been a source of good-value white Burgundy, although many of its winemakers now make more serious, age-worthy blends. The purpose of my visit was to root out some of the best Mâconnais wines, so booking into a luxury château hotel was an unusual treat.

As you enter the gated courtyard, the hotel makes an immediate impression; venture to the back and a beautiful walled garden provides views of the vineyards that stretch out in every direction. I stayed in one of the hotel's enormous apartments, which marry painstakingly restored original features with the reassuring modernity of walk-in showers and well-equipped kitchens. For those not interested in self-catering, there are smaller,

slightly cheaper options, all spacious and elegantly finished.

Château de Besseuil is also a working wine estate, surrounded by its own vineyards. The white wines are made in the local Viré-Clessé *appellation* by vigneron Jean Thévenet, who has played a key role in the resurgence of the Mâconnais as a wine region. He applies his organic approach to the chardonnay vines, which he harvests only when the grapes reach a high level of ripeness. Sommelier Laurent Simonnet runs the estate's cellar and tasting room, where its excellent wines are for sale.

The restaurant serves traditional Burgundian dishes in a stylish setting which, like the hotel, effortlessly blends the antique with the contemporary. Set menus start at €27 for the lunchtime *menu du marché*.

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€ Rooms from €139