

LA BELLE FRANCE

THE SOPHISTICATED



GUIDE TO FRANCE®

The Back Roads of Northern Burgundy Auxerre, Chablis, and Vézelay

Burgundy has the most confusing wine profile in France. Roughly one million micro-climates insure that growers can produce *three* million different wines. (We're exaggerating... but not by much.) The properties are small... and the bottles are baptised in the names of millions of Burgundian micro-villages. Appellations change. If the wine wasn't so fabulous, there would be no point in investing the time to decipher the labels.

By now, LBF readers have built up a familiarity - if not total comprehension - of the Côte d'Or's blockbuster vineyards around Beaune and Dijon. So let's head into confusion mode again. Northern Burgundy - only a delightful 90 minutes by car from Paris - has only *one* wine moniker known from Venezuela to Vladivostock and all points between: *Chablis*.

The rest of this area, loosely referred to as the Auxerrois and including Irancy, Saint-Bris, Epineuil and Vézelay wines, is less well-travelled by oenophiles. That's not to say that there's a shortage of fine dining and charming hotels on the northern fringe of Burgundy. Check our back issues for articles on Leslie Caron's guesthouse in Villeneuve-sur-Yonne; the remarkable Côte Saint Jacques in Joigny; and the Madeleine in Sens.

In order to get a good handle on this region, we suggest that you get in touch with a local, low-key band of tour specialists managed by Pascal Leclerc. He founded a group called

HEDS that allows patrons of his three value-conscious hotels to connect with the local zeitgeist which - in this neck of France - generally rhymes with *wine*.

Guided tours, vineyard visits, wine tastings, cooking classes, hot-air balloon rides, chauffeured cars, kayak rentals, riverboat cruises, golf, horseback riding, even spa treatments in an 18th century priory that can be privatized for 2 to 6 guests... these are some of the services that HEDS can provide for patrons of its three hotels in Auxerre and Vézelay on a "one-stop-shopping" basis. Since there are more back-roads than highways in this area, it helps to have a driver who knows the territory.



Vézelay street scene

Auxerrois hamlets have kept their small-town souls. Even comparatively cosmopolitan Vézelay, which was one of the four great departure points for pilgrims on the way to Santiago de Compostella, retains its sleepy village ambience. The area's monuments - like the "must-see" feudal Château Bazoches-du-Morvan that belonged to Louis XIV's military architect Vauban - are off the beaten track. (www.chateau-bazoches.com)

We'll also break the news about a glamorous bed-and-breakfast - not part of this group - that opened four months ago in the shadows of Vézelay's Marie Magdalene Basilica. But before we get there, we're heading for Auxerre and our first HEDS destination, in an air-conditioned *Bourgogne Avec Chauffeur*

In This Issue:

The Back Roads of Northern Burgundy	1-5
Auxerre: Le Parc des Maréchaux; Chablis: La Cuisine du Vin; Vézelay: Hôtel de la Poste & du Lion d'Or; Le Pontot	
Strasbourg: Buerehiesel	5-6
Paris Restaurants: Itinéraires, Les Fines Gueules, Les Grandes Bouches.	7-8
November Notes	8



Le Parc des Maréchaux

van. (www.bourgogne-avec-chauffeur.com) PS: HEDS can also arrange guides who drive mythical “2 CV” cars.

Auxerre

For centuries, Burgundy’s wines floated up to Paris on the Yonne River. Auxerre is a quiet port whose waterfront is dominated by a Gothic Cathedral and a Benedictine Abbey founded in the 6th century by Clovis’s wife. (HEDS found us a terrific tour guide named Isabelle, full of Auxerre lore, and we recommend her highly.) Trains from Paris to Auxerre take anywhere from 90 minutes to 3 hours. The town’s one-starred restaurant, Barnabet, is in the process of being sold so we’re following up with a good option in neighboring Chablis.

Le Parc des Maréchaux

On his return from Elba in 1815, Napoleon stopped in Auxerre where he encountered Maréchal Ney, who had been sent to Burgundy to battle Bonaparte but joined forces with him instead. In 1854, a Parisian family constructed a Napoleon III-style townhouse near the Napoleon/ Ney meeting place.

This will be a first choice for a summertime trip as the hotel possesses a large walled garden and an outdoor swimming pool. Pascal and Marie-Jeanne Leclerc have decorated the house in Empire style and provide air-conditioning, WiFi, and excellent mattresses. If there’s



anything amiss, it’s low wattage in the bedrooms (though not in the admirably modern, pristine baths). Pack your 19th century ormolu flashlight if you *really* want to find those socks you dropped on the floor.

The hotel’s manager, Rosemary Coulaud, hails from Essex so you can start your discussions of the HEDS tours that interest you most in English. As an added service, the hotel provides a limited room service menu so that guests can relax over a quiche or a platter of honey-glazed duck in the garden, by the pool, or in the bar.

Le Parc des Maréchaux. 6 avenue Foch, 89000 Auxerre. Tel: 03.86.51.43.77. Fax: 03.86.51 43 77. www.hotel-parcmarechaux.com Twenty-five rooms from 78€ to 130€. Breakfast: 12€. Elevator available. All major credit cards.

Chablis

Chablis wines may need no introduction, but that doesn’t mean that their vineyard situation escapes Burgundian complexity. Chablis, however, is one of the few places where you can actually see the appellations change. Franck Chrétien of Chablis Vititours will drive you past the vineyards and



The LA BELLE FRANCE Rating System

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| 20 - Perfect; As Fine As It Gets | 17 - Very Good |
| 19 - Extraordinary; Nearly Flawless | 16 - Above Average |
| 18 - Excellent; At Times Memorable | 15 - Average; Uninspired |
| 14 and below - Varying Degrees of Dissatisfaction | |



La Belle France: The Sophisticated Guide to France is published monthly by Travel Guide, Inc., 1180 Seminole Trail, suite 290, Charlottesville, VA 22901 USA. Second-Class Postage paid at Charlottesville, VA 22903. ISSN8750-9180. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to *La Belle France* at the above address.

Terence Y. Sieg: Founding Editor & Publisher	One-year subscription:	\$119
Ashley Williams: Publisher/Editor-in-Chief	Two-year subscription:	\$205
Corinne LaBalme: Editor	Overseas shipping:	\$38/yr
	Back issues:	\$15
	Executive binders:	\$40
	Paris Guide:	\$85
	Provence Guide	\$49
	French Countryside Guide	\$97

To place orders, call toll-free 800-225-7825 (or 434-295-1200), or visit us online: www.labellefrance.com.

Copyright © 2009 Travel Guide, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction of any kind, including photocopying, is strictly forbidden without written consent of the publisher. Illustrations, unless otherwise noted, courtesy of Samuel Chamberlain.

1-800-225-7825

lead you through a forest to a hillside vantage point with a birds' eye view of where *grand cru*, *premier cru* and "Petit Chablis" rub noses. Tel: 06.11.47.82.98. www.chablis-vititours.fr If you'll be in France on February 6th and 7th, the village of Milly-Chablis will be hosting Burgundy's annual "Saint-Vincent Tournante" wine festival with banquets, a dance night, wine-tastings and a parade. See www.saint-vincent-milly-chablis.com for details.

La Cuisine du Vin

Daniel-Etienne Defaix is the 12th generation of a family that has produced Chablis wine for over 400 years. In fact, he produces "celebrity" Chablis. Clients for his *premier cru* wines like "Les Lys" ("My most intellectual wine, perfect with turbot in hollandaise sauce") and "Vaillon" ("Spicy and round, wonderful with a lobster ragout or fine Indian food") have included Queen Elizabeth, John-Paul II, Lady Di, Vladimir Putin, Harrison Ford (who flaunted a bottle of Defaix Chablis in *The Fugitive*), Daniel Boulud, and a *bon vivant* French astronaut who carried a bottle into space.

Five years ago, he decided to open his own restaurant in central Chablis, a place that would serve the fresh Burgundian cuisine that he loves (including his grandmother's recipe for snails) and vegetables from his own gardens. He imported Chef Patrick Bouloton from Castel-Novel and Pralong-Courcheval 1850 to do the cooking. While Michelin still snubs the restaurant, Gault-Millau (which is generally faster off the starting block) lists it as a "table en vue."

The food is simple and very good: parslid ham, house-made terrines, a finely spiced pumpkin soup, a succulent pintade fermière au Chablis, a monkfish *pot-au-feu*, local cheeses and desserts like pears (poached in Chablis.) There are fixed price menus for 24 € and 39 €. An *à la carte* dinner for two will run roughly 85 € before wine.

The wine - of course - comes from Defaix's own vineyards: A bottle of his luscious 2000 *premier cru* Vaillon is 36€; half-bottle 18€; and 6€/glass. The top-of-the-line 2002 *grand cru* Blanchot is 53€. And - as long as you have a driver - try one of the adventurous house liqueurs in



Chef Patrick Bouloton & Daniel-Etienne Defaix
poppy, violet, ginger, chestnut or rose flavors.

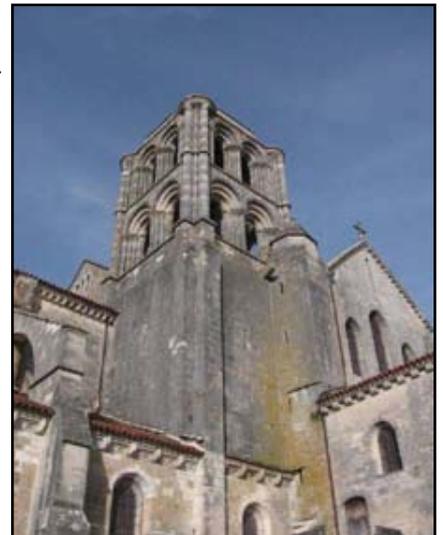
Architecture fans will enjoy the setting. Defaix believes that the original, 10th century building belonged to a member of Chablis's then-thriving Jewish community. (The staff can point out some carvings over a doorway.) The rest of the building was added in the 12th century but Defaix decided to go against the historical grain when decorating the restaurant with fluorescent plastic tables and chairs, a bold design decision that, surprisingly, works quite well.

La Cuisine du Vin. 16 rue Auxerroise, 89800 Chablis. Tel: 03.86.18.98.52. Closed Monday, Tuesday and Sunday night. All major credit cards.

Restaurant	Cuisine	Decor	Service	Wine List	Value	Total
La Cuisine au Vin	17	18	17	17	17	86

Vézelay

Vézelay was popular with foreign tourists long before Saint Bernard launched the 2nd Crusade here in 1146. Richard the Lionhearted passed through, and Saint Francis of Assisi chose it for a monastery site. The Basilica was rebuilt by Viollet-le-Duc in pure Romanesque style in the mid-19th century. The town's tourist vocation means that there's a multitude of cafés and shops plus a fine modern art museum based on





Poste/Lion d'Or

the collection of Christian Zervos who founded *Cahiers d'Art* in 1926. www.musee-zervos.fr With Vézelay as a base, visit Bazoches castle and bio vineyards (like the daring young Domaine La Cadette) that are carving out a larger and larger place in Burgundy's crowded wine community. Note that Marc Meneau's two-starred restaurant is only three kilometers outside town.

Hôtel de la Poste & du Lion d'Or

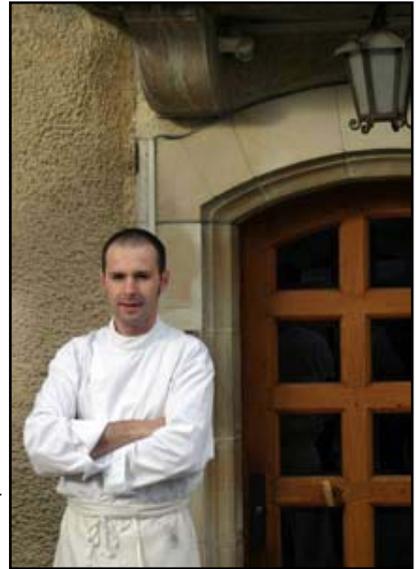
A location on the edge of this tiny town means that the Poste & Lion d'Or offers sweeping views of the Morvan countryside from the dining room and many of the guestrooms. The best views are from the top stories but as there's no elevator in this scenic former postal relay at present, many guests may prefer to opt for lower-floor rooms like N° 38, 102€, a sunny twin room with an attractive antique armoire and an extra-large bathroom.

Pascal Leclerc of HEDS lured the talented young chef Grégory Vallet away from Ducasse's *Spoon* in Saint-Tropez so, at present, this is The Place to dine in Vézelay. Monsieur Vallet is equally at home with classic Burgundian fare like *oeufs en meurette* for the restaurant's 22€ lunch menu and more complex creations like meltingly tender langoustine ravioli, beef tenderloins topped with *girolles*, asparagus and roasted figs or pork *filet mignon* with a mussel garnish.



The Poste & Lion d'Or lobby

Fixed price menus are available at 26€, 40€, and 58€. The wine list showcases the new neighborhood finds like the 2008 Domaine de la Cadette "La Chateleine", 22€ and Olivier Wartel's 2006 Epineuil, 24€, but doesn't shy away from 2001 Vosne Romanée for 120€. (Magali Vallet brings Saint-Tropez panache to the house cocktails that change daily.) The



© Françoise Kuijper

Chef Grégory Vallet

restaurant's pretty, provincial dining room probably looks much as it did in 1966 when Bourvil and Louis de Funès stayed here while filming "La Grande Vadrouille".

Hôtel de la Poste & du Lion d'Or. Place du Champ de Foire, 89450 Vézelay. Tel: 03.86.33.21.23. Fax: 03.86.32.30.92. www.laposte-liondor.com Thirty-eight rooms from 71€ to 103€. Breakfast: 12€. No elevator. Closed January and February; restaurant closed Monday and Tuesday from November to March. All major credit cards.

Restaurant	Cuisine	Decor	Service	Wine List	Value	Total
Hôtel de la Poste & du Lion d'Or	17	16	18	17	18	86

Briefly Noted...

Le Pontot

The dazzlingly chic **Le Pontot** opened late last summer in an 17th century presbytery. There are only five rooms, each furnished with whimsical, one-of-a-kind antiques and hand-embroidered linens. The most romantic may be Suite N° 1 with a graceful *Polanaise* canopy over the bed and contrasting country textiles (rose-flowered chintz and pea-green checks). The immense suite N° 3, 280 €, dubbed the Dior Room, is nestled under the eaves with dove grey walls, stone floors, and a white-beamed Cathedral ceiling. (It's a room that sits



The terrace at Le Pontot



The lobby of Le Pontot

atop the *pontot*, the little street arcade-bridge that gives the house its name.) The only problem for some visitors

will be access to the guestrooms. It helps to be very nimble in order to negotiate the skinny, 12th century stone staircase.

Le Pontot. 1 rue du Marché, 89450 Vézelay. Tel: 03.86.32.42.01 or 06.07.15.11.78. www.le-pontot-vezelay.com

Five rooms and suites from 150€ to 280

€. Breakfast: 15€. No elevator. Closed November to April. Credit card availability still undefined.

Getting There: Auxerre, 170 kilometers from Paris, is a straight drive down the A-6 highway. Auxerre and Laroche-Migennes are the train stations that serve this area. Check the timetables carefully because travel times vary widely.

