



LFW

G r a p e v i n e

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2005: Living Off the Land in Southwest France! *By Bill Smith*

Since announcing our Taste of Southwest France last month we are almost full for our June 2006 trip. Only a few spaces remain, but I thought I would tempt you again.



One of the most intriguing stops on our three day tour will be a tasting at Clos d'Yvigne in Gageac et Rouillac just south of the Dordogne River and west of Montbazillac.

Clos d'Yvigne

is a fairy tale story of an English woman named Patricia Atkinson who came to France and started her own winery almost single-handedly. When Patricia and her then husband arrived in rural France in 1990 they bought a farmhouse that came with a few hectares of grapes and never intended to establish a winery. However, when her husband developed an illness and had to return to England and they started running out of money, Patricia was forced to rely on her grapes to make a living. She did not know how to speak French and knew nothing about growing grapes or making wine.

Patricia had to learn the wine business from the ground up. She wrote about her

adventure in a recent best selling book in England entitled *The Ripening Sun* (2003). The book has not



been released for publication in the US yet but will be this year. In the meantime you can buy it on Amazon by typing in her name. The London newspapers have dubbed her the next Peter Mayle. However, I think her story is more compelling than Peter's. The BBC did a special on her, and it put her on the map.

Patricia has followed up this book with a new one entitled *La Belle Saison* (2005) which goes into detail about the joys of countryside living in France. This includes sections on truffles, hunting, crabbing and, of course, the development of her vineyard and winery. There are also many references in her books to the stops on our trip.

I visited Gageac et Rouillac in June and it is



a charming quiet village just as it is described in her books. You will love it. I also spoke to her about LFW and she is very excited about meeting us and suggested that we have a tasting event at her house which is part of the winery.

Clas d'Yuigne



Her wine is AOC Bergerac approved, and she is on the AOC tasting committee there. She is very knowledgeable, but she is someone with whom we can

identify. Her wines vary from dry reds to sweet Montbazillac which is wildly popular with the Dutch.

Patricia has been to California and she hopes to make more trips and do some publicity for her books and her wine. We hope she will become a good friend, and there is nothing better than starting that relationship with a visit. Yes, Patricia is now fluent in French after 15 years living in the countryside, and she is delighted that we will be stopping by her stone house and vineyard. Reading her books will give you the insight you need to get the most out of our visit.

Again, we only have room for a few more people, so if you plan to join us in France next June, do not delay! Email me immediately at WBSAS@aol.com.

Wines of Southwest France

For those of you considering joining us in France in June 2006, it is time to get the best book on the subject entitled *Wines of Southwest France* by Paul Strang. It is available online, and I will be sending excerpts of it to those of you who are coming. This book will broaden your horizons if you think Bordeaux is the only wine producing area in southwest France. It also will provide you with a roadmap to all of the other grape growing regions and will guide you to wonderful winemakers you can visit including Chateau Tiregand which we will be visiting as a group.

In addition to this book I also invite you to consider two recent books written by American author, Michael Sanders, both of which are easily available at any big bookstore or online. The first is "*From Here You Can't See Paris: Seasons of a French Village and Its Restaurant*".

This is the story of a small village about 45 minutes to the north and east of Monflanquin called Les Arques (population 169) and its well regarded restaurant called La Recreation

(meaning recess). It's in an old schoolhouse and is owned & operated by a delightful couple named Jacques and Noelle Ratier. Sanders describes Les Arques perfectly in his book.

In aspect Les Arques seems the postcard-perfect embodiment of everything our imagination tells us a small village in the south of France should be. In short, it immediately and hopelessly seduces the eye. On an early morning stroll in summer, the impression is of order and quiet and old, old stones: the cooing of pigeons, a single barking dog, the murmur of old ladies in housekeeping dresses having coffee behind open windows of neatly kept houses that face the street, their shutters wide to let in the cool air before the heat of the day.

La Recreation is a restaurant of about a dozen outdoor tables in a privately fenced in front



yard. Noelle Ratier dutifully visits every table and often sits down to join the conversation. She

speaks perfect English.

What you can't see in this picture of my new wife, Laureen and Noelle at the front porch table of the restaurant is that it's under a huge trumpet vine laden with ladybugs. Yes, ladybugs; just like Under the Tuscan Sun. La Recreation is full nightly and it has a good local wine list with selections from Cahors, Bergerac and Bordeaux. It is well worth the visit and you must read the book first.

The second Sanders book just came out and it is a "must read" for our group and anyone interested in wine. It is entitled "Families of the Vine," and it is the story of three winemaking families in the lesser known Cahors winemaking region just to the south of Les Arques and to the east of Monflanquin one hour. Cahors is working hard to improve its reputation. Sanders' book is an excellent introduction to wines of the southwest and Cahors and you will enjoy it very much. You also can visit these real families when you are in France which will make your trip more enjoyable. The Cahors AOC starts a half hour from Monflanquin and extends eastward all the way to Cahors. / - *A bientot, Bill*