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Part Deux :: Food & Lodging in Auvergne, France

July 10, 2010 04:50 PM EDT

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[Food & Lodging in Auvergne, France](#) Part I

Day III cont . . .

I remarked that the lunch at the Museum restaurant was more remarkable for the “hint of meals to come”. What I meant was that the chicken was unusual in that it was a boneless piece of meat with skin, braised and crisped, served stuffed with ground carrots and pork on a bed of green beans. Had a later meal not raised that dish to dizzying heights, this one would be remembered better.



Centre national du costume de scène

Quartier Villars – Route de Montilly

03000 Moulins

Tel : +33 (0)4 70 20 76 20

www.cncs.fr



After the costume museum we stopped for pastry and coffee at **Frank Giza's Artisan Pastissier** shop in Varennes-sur-Allier. There I tasted *Le Valencon*, an orange flavored round cake, and *Piece Montee*, another regional confection, this one created for weddings and other special occasions. It was made of walnuts and caramel in a delicate pastry crust. Delicious! (sorry, the recipe was not forthcoming!)



Hôtel restaurant Le Clos de Bourgogne ****

83, rue de Bourgogne

03000 Moulins

Tel : +33 (0)4 70 44 03 00

www.closdebourgogne.fr

The Hôtel Le Clos de Bourgogne advertised that they had gourmet food, but I had been eating so well on this trip that I have to rate it as a good place to eat, not great. We were served a simple dinner of a salmon/whitefish terrine followed by duck confit with mashed cauliflower. (I can't believe I said "simple meal"! You see how jaded I became.) The fruit served for dessert was old, both looking and tasting, and left me with a bad taste in my mouth. Still, the rooms were lavish, the garden was peaceful, and the new café diningroom was stylishly decorated. I had a wonderful night's sleep in an elegant room. I'd definitely stay there again.

Day IV

Breakfast was a simple buffet in the same dining room, disgraced again by the "old" fruit of

the evening before. That really was unfortunate. The hotel also has a grand dining room of beautifully laid tables for occasions I wasn't able to experience.

Lunch at



Restaurant le 9/7

97 rue d'Allier 03 000 Moulins

Called 9/7 because it occupies building number 97 rue d'Allier (sometimes it is the simplest answer that is the right one!) This appeared to be an almost fast-food luncheonette with high-end design elements, when, in fact, the food lived up to the high design.

Everything was so creatively and tastily prepared that until my selection for each course was served, I coveted my neighbors' selections! After a few plates of little nothings: shrimp in foam on a spoon, stuffed puff pastry, buttered toasted herbed baguette slices, etc., the chef got down to business.



I ordered the chicken mold salad, which was the chicken from lunch at the museum, only refined and elevated, probably by the addition of sweetbreads and herbs ground into the mix. Served on a complex salad of crunchy baby vegetables and lettuce, it could have been a meal in itself (I especially liked the beet sprouts combined with match-stick beets) when paired with the excellent sourdough bread.



But no . . . I also ordered a braised pork chop on a bed of gnocchi married to the plate with stewed tomatoes. More beet sprouts punctuated the flavors as the rich gravy wove them together. It was delicious! When the scalloped turnips arrived in their own dish I tasted them and almost swooned. The chef really nailed the food combinations with that course.



For dessert, I learned the chef & I shared the same philosophy. Dessert should not be too sweet. The variety of flavor and texture made it an excellent crown to a fantastic meal. I had a shooter of creamy banana mousse, an “exotic cream” of lemon, pineapple, mango & vanilla on a hazelnut tart, and lemon ice on an almond-meringue lemon tart. These were truly over-the-top combinations that were almost a sin to eat. But, since they weren’t too sweet I struggled through.



I reluctantly set aside the two wines (I had white with the chicken and red with the pork, of course) to have espresso with dessert. That was more for the caffeine than the taste, since the afternoon wasn’t scheduled for a nap, but rather a grueling tour of a cathedral and some endless walking. I had to be energized!

After that lunch we all agreed (me, more or less reluctantly) that dinner should be lighter fare.

Dinner and Night at Central Hotel in Vichy

Central Hotel

6 Avenue du Président Doumer
03200 Vichy
Tel : +33 (0)4 70 31 45 00

www.centralh.fr

The hotel is centrally located and properly angular on a triangle-shaped block in the heart of Vichy. We sat in the glass-walled point of the restaurant, people-watching and eating a hearty

salad plate of cold cuts, greens, hardboiled eggs, pickles, olives, and every garnish imaginable. It was a not-light, light supper. The rooms were all odd lines and unusually shaped, sporting an edgy design. The place was funky & fun, not an elegant or pretentious thing about it. The word “Mod” comes to mind. I’d definitely stay there again.

Day V

Buffet breakfast at the hotel was standard. I experimented by preparing my own soft-boiled eggs, with some success. They were still softish, anyway, and held me over to lunch.



Table de Saint Bonnet

2-4, route de Gannat

03800 Saint Bonnet de Rochefort

Tel : 04 70 90 52 32

Contact : M. Jean-Jacques Prugne

Just off a roundabout in the countryside is this delightful little gem of an eatery. Across the street the entire village was having a fleamarket, with food vendors, music and more junk than I’ve seen since I was back in the US. We had a first course of shopping (gawking really) before we were seated for lunch.



The specialty of the house was terrine of rabbit with curry chutney and a salad. It was my first taste of rabbit this trip – fantastic! The other appetizer was goat cheese & sausage served in a pastry bag on a bed of greens. It looked great, but the rabbit was a colossal treat not to be missed. A white wine, **La Fleur de Mondesir 2009** was light and pleasant, meant more to compliment the goat cheese appetizer than my rabbit.

The best dish of lentils I've ever eaten was served next. To duplicate it, I'm sure you need the local lentils, which are a specialty of the region.

LENTILS (recipe as given to me by the chef who presumed I knew how to cook)

Put lentils in cold water, bring to a boil and boil for 20 minutes. Turn down and simmer for 20 minutes more, adding salt 2/3 of the way through. Chop carrots, leeks and celery fine and sauté in butter until soft. Stir in drained lentils, still al dente, simmer a short while and serve in a bowl to pass.

The lentils were tucked under a luscious serving of roast lamb. I was happy to eat my way though the meat to get to them. Then I asked for more lentils!



Right about then the street musicians from the fleamarket marched in, charming the ladies and children, making a rousing good time of the meal. It was the unexpected; the rabbit and the music, (and those lentils!) that won me over. This was a most memorable lunch!



Instead of dessert, I had the cheese tray. It was my choice of any of the fabulous selection

you see in the photograph. Is it any wonder that when I'm in cheese country I eat so much cheese? To ignore it would be like saying no to the croissants for breakfast – what an insulting crime that would be! I should add that is also why I drink so much wine while I'm there. (That's my story and I'm sticking to it!)

We stopped for an aperitif and to tour a stunning castle turned historic grand hotel.



Château de Maulmont

63310 St. Priest Bramefant, Randan.

Tel: +33 (0)4 70 59 14 95

Fax: +33 (0)4 70 59 11 88

E-Mail: info@chateau-maulmont.com



With tennis courts, riding trails, outdoor and indoor pools, a nearby airport and family owners dedicated to providing guests with an elegant experience while they preserve the very historic nature of the hotel, I was sorry we weren't staying there for the night. The last King of France (Louis) called it home after the Revolution, and in the 13th century the last of the Knights Templar lived there. The Château de Maulmont is truly an historic place, besides being magnificent architecturally. Sadly, there was no room for us, and barely time for a quick libation and tour, then we were off again into the gathering dusk.



Dinner and overnight at the

Château de la Canière

Rue de la Croix Blanche 63260 Thuret

(www.caniere.com)



Lost to history, missing and abandoned for decades after WW II, Château de la Canière lay hidden in its own forest, undisturbed. A long drive lined with stately trees led us through corn fields and woodland to a castle in a clearing. The chateau was amazingly huge and beautiful in the evening light. After being discovered in the 1960s, an attempt to renovate it failed and it sat idle again, only to reopen to house recovering drug addicts. Part of their rehabilitation was to repaint it, including the mural on the domed ceiling which still remains.



A new group formed to convert it into a 5 star hotel. After a boom comes a bust, leaving their project stalled for lack of funds. Then, a new owner stepped in to finance and oversee the millions of dollars in final renovations. We walked in the door as they were nearly completed. Everything glistened and sparkled and smelled new. Our task was to christen the rooms and detail the final touches needed to reach perfection. Oh and we also had to have dinner in their 4 star restaurant. But that is a story for another day . . .



Day VI

I left the Auvergne region of France at 6 AM the next morning. Two Air France flights later, again luxuriating in Superior Class seats, and I was home in time for dinner and a good night's sleep in my own bed for a change. Still, I can't wait to return.



[Centre National du Costume de Scene](#)

[Moulins, France](#)

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Richard Frisbie, FOOD Correspondent:

RICHARD FRISBIE is published twice a month to Gather Essentials: Food. It is a food junkie's take on growing, raising, preparing and - above all else - eating food. Together we'll explore the trends, addictions, equipment and regional specialties that make up the sometimes mundane and sometimes sublime cooking and dining experience. You can keep up with my other postings and Gather activity by joining my Gather network -- I look



forward to hearing from you.



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DISCLAIMER - Richard Frisbie accepts free copies of books for review, restaurant meals to critique, bottles of wine and liquor for tastings, and all-expense-paid trips in exchange for articles about the destinations. He is paid for these articles.



BIO - Richard Frisbie writes culinary travel articles, is a columnist for his local newspapers, and is a regular contributor to the many Hudson Valley, Catskill Mountain and other regional New York publications. Online, he writes frequent articles for EDGE Publications, GoNomad and Travel Lady, as well as Gather.

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Comments: 28

[Nora D.](#) Jul 10, 2010, 4:54pm EDT

Fantastic post, and such beautiful photos! My family is hoping to travel to Europe next year.....on a cruise!
Thanks so much for sharing!

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jul 10, 2010, 5:03pm EDT

Thank you Nora. Glad you liked it. Now you know where to stay and what to order where. Bon appetit!

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jul 10, 2010, 5:00pm EDT

I know some will think of this as a photo-essay, but at 1700+ words it is a full-fledged article illustrated with my photographs. I hope you enjoyed it.

[Sonia M.](#) Jul 10, 2010, 5:02pm EDT

What do you think?!!

[Sonia M.](#) Jul 10, 2010, 5:01pm EDT

Everything glistened and sparkled and smelled new. Our task was to christen the rooms and detail the final touches needed to reach perfection. Oh and we also had to have dinner in their 4 star restaurant. But that is a story for another day . . .

Oh, Richard....you poor thing.....you're so brave to slog through all these terrible sounding meals and places..... I feel for you.....NOT! (except I'm pea green...)

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jul 10, 2010, 5:05pm EDT

As it was explained to me: "This is a trip to explore the early years of the life of Coco Chanel, but we have to eat . . ."

I always have a good time in France (who wouldn't?) and miss it when I return. Glad you got to enjoy it vicariously.

[Sonia M.](#) Jul 10, 2010, 5:13pm EDT

;-) I love reading about your trips - the photos are always great and the topics and interesting!

[Rose Hill](#) Jul 10, 2010, 5:09pm EDT

What an absolutely magnificent culinary journey.

The last chateau sounded the most intriguing of all and I know I'd love the turnips you described, the cheese trays and of course the not too sweet sinfully delicious desserts.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jul 10, 2010, 5:35pm EDT

Thanks Rose. Both the last two were amazing; one for what it has become, and the other for what it is becoming! You have good taste in food too! Glad you enjoyed the tour.

[Mariana T.](#) Jul 10, 2010, 9:18pm EDT

My first read - fascinating post overall and beautifully illustrated with your photos - all show so much for the palate and the spirit. It's too bad about the bad fruit as this time of the year, you'd think there would be oodles of fresh everything. I love the way they made that complex salad - of course, I always learn so much from all of your posts - will come back to this - thanks Richard! Salud

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jul 10, 2010, 10:31pm EDT

Thank you Mariana. I had the choice between a fresh fruit or fruit salad. I chose the salad - it was a misunderstanding of some kind. The fruit was all uniformly chopped and kept in a big jar, as if they were brandying it, or something. BUT - no booze taste, and not described that way - just as salad - it was an unfortunate occurrence in a place with gastronomie in their name - I'm just sayin'!

[Madame Donna C.](#) Jul 10, 2010, 11:50pm EDT

France is one of my favorite spots on earth, Richard. I often talk about moving there when I'm older. Of all the foods you described, which were enticing, I've been really taken with those beet sprouts since I first tasted them about two years ago at a unique little, private, wine tasting/dinner and art show at a restaurant in Arizona. The foods above were elegant and I would have enjoyed every one of them though.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jul 11, 2010, 12:59pm EDT

They were my first beet sprouts, and they were brilliantly paired with the real beets. I don't see beet seeds in my sprout list or I'd grow them at home. FYI - that chicken mold was really over the top. The chef put everything in it but the kitchen sink. He was so proud, saying "Bet you never tasted anything like that." He was so disappointed when I told him about the Museum chicken.

[Madame Donna C.](#) Jul 11, 2010, 2:33pm EDT

Richard, beet sprouts are as easy as alfalfa! Here: [beet sprouts](#).

That chicken mold salad looked absolutely as rich as butter! Was it sort of like a terrine or pate? I can't tell by the photo if the texture was grainy or more like a puree.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jul 12, 2010, 1:14pm EDT

Answered in the wrong spot - sorry - see below

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jul 11, 2010, 2:51pm EDT

My organic supplier doesn't have them - thanks - I should have looked elsewhere.

The chicken was rich, and it had a texture, almost as if the chef pureed most of it and then mixed a bit of finely chopped chicken in at the last minute. Devine!

[Madame Donna C.](#) Jul 12, 2010, 11:42pm EDT

Me too, see below.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jul 13, 2010, 1:33pm EDT

Funny! FYI - thanks for the beet sprouts link. Hirt's just confirmed my order.

[Madame Donna C.](#) Jul 11, 2010, 9:04pm EDT

Oh, that does sound luscious.

[Tina C.](#) Jul 23, 2010, 4:49pm EDT

Another great article, Richard! Château de la Canière is beyond beautiful! What a treasure. I'm glad the renovations have finally been done. Thank you for the lentil recipe. Simple, yet it sounds delicious.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jul 23, 2010, 5:03pm EDT

Thanks for your kind words, Tina. I already wrote (and posted here to Gather) The Best Lentil recipe, but after tasting these I have to admit . . . well . . . that the lentils make all the difference. These were better.

Funny, Château de la Canière was stunning, but there were many little things wrong - details omitted between the different reconstructions - that made me think tough times are ahead. AS an example. My room was gorgeous and huge, but there was no plug near my desk for my laptop. When I turned off the water in the sink the whole pipe turned, and water gurgled in the neighboring tub. When I sat on the john my feet didn't reach the floor. Anyone over 6 ft would hit their head on the (painted) ductwork in front of the door.

That being said - their kitchen and their chef were (ARE) fantastic!

[Dorine H.](#) Jul 30, 2010, 3:17pm EDT

Oooh! The photos of scenery and food a feast for the eyes, the writing a feast for the imagination! The food had me drooling, then I got to the terrine of rabbit and *swooned*! And then those cheeses! Sigh...

Wish you'd gotten the terrine recipe.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jul 30, 2010, 3:36pm EDT

Thank you, Dorine - I was lucky to get the lentil recipe, but don't think the rabbit terrine was unusually prepared. It WAS a treat though.

FYI - I had Greek rabbit last night, an unprinted "special" on their special Thursday Greek Night special dinner menu. It was served with pearl onions in a cinnamon sauce (began with an S, but I never saw it written down.) The waitress said I was the first to order it! It was delicious!

[Dorine H.](#) Jul 30, 2010, 11:45pm EDT

I can imagine! Dishes I've enjoyed in Spain include rabbit al chilindron and rabbit al ajillo. It's a pity it isn't eaten more in the US. Our meat and fowl eating tends to be so very sadly limited. Think about it; our ancestors in England enjoyed swan, peacock, wild boar...

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jul 31, 2010, 12:39pm EDT

And rabbit is so good for you - less fat than chicken. My rabbit dinner had the cinnamon and pearl onions, but not the traditional fruit as sweetener. It was a surprise to find it offered in a restaurant.

[Dorine H.](#) Jul 31, 2010, 3:00pm EDT

A lovely surprise, too! Rabbit manages to be very tasty while being low in fat, something rare in meats. You know, I've never had rabbit prepared with fruit or sweetened in any way. My grandmother used to barbeque it in a hot and tangy sauce similar to that used in Eastern Carolina pulled pork barbeque. The Spanish recipes tend to be garlicky, and the chilindron has all those vegetables. The rabbit with cinnamon and pearl onions sounds tasty, and I think of the cinnamon with meat as a Middle Eastern touch.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jul 31, 2010, 3:22pm EDT

Yes, definitely Greek (there is a recipe in the current Savour Magazine) but it calls for prunes or dates which weren't in this dish. There are regionalisms (this was Crete) and family preferences that factor in though.

[Dorine H.](#) Jul 31, 2010, 5:33pm EDT

You find cinnamon in North Africa, too, such as in a lamb tagine or couscous, and in Saudi lamb dishes. I'm not sure if rabbit is a halal meat or not.

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