

# Cognoscenti magazine

## The Route des Vignobles de Provence La Bastide de Tourtour Bruno de Lorgues

There are many vineyards in Provence, and even for the most ardent of wine enthusiasts, locating the best and arranging visits is likely to prove a difficult, time-consuming proposition. That's where **La Route des Vignobles de Provence** comes in: It offers aficionados an extraordinary 3-day circuit of fine wine, gourmet dining and luxury lodging.

Available through Chateaux et Hotels de France at a cost of 1,455.00 Euros for 2 people, the circuit includes 10 vineyard visits with gastronomic lunches and dinners—not to mention *de luxe* lodgings at renowned 4-star establishments such as “La Bastide de Tourtour” and Alain Ducasse’s “La Bastide de Moustiers” and his “L’Abbaye de la Celle.” For those interested in discovering the Var region’s cultural and historical sites, including its many fine abbeys and the awesome canyons in the Gorges du Verdon, the route can be further tailored to client specifications.

Vineyards participating in the program include *Chateau Beaulieu*, *Chateau Vignelaure*, *Domaine les Delfands*, *Chateau de la Curnière*, *Domaine les Sarrins*, *Chateau Roubine*, *Chateau Saint Julien d’Aille*, *Chateau Thuerry*, *Domaine Rabiega*, and *Chateau Maïme*. For those who like to keep their schedules flexible, there’s a separate program that enables visitors who purchase a 10 Euro “Passport” to visit any 3 of these vineyards on their own. Each stop is special, lasting 2 hours, including a

full facilities tour and a comprehensive wine tasting (naturally!). Detailed maps and multi-lingual driving directions are provided to make the navigating easy.

**Cognoscenti Magazine** editors first visited the exclusive hotel and restaurant **La Bastide de Tourtour**

in 2002; in 2003 they returned like a visit to an old friend. Splendidly situated in a 4-hectare park planted with pines and pink laurel trees, the beautiful grounds have been further enhanced since last year with olive trees and lavender encircling a fountain.



*La Bastide de Tourtour*

There’s a swimming pool and Jacuzzi, bowling, billiards, ping-pong, and bicycling to keep guests active, but we arrived with an *appetite*, and were anxious to sample the latest offerings of Chef Grégory Delbreuve’s cuisine. Settling into a warmly-lit dining room with mustard yellow walls, we began our repast with glasses of a brilliantly clean *Laurent Perrier* 1995 with nice fruit, low acidity, and roasted hazelnuts in the mouth. Fish textures were very well rendered in a light, fresh style, with the *dos de loup rôti* with mesclun salad and *tomates concassées*, dashed with virgin olive oil and dots of balsamic vinegar reduction. A very fine chocolate fondant, served with chocolate/banana ice cream, starfruit and strawberries, concluded the elegant repast.

Sommelier Joël Feuillerat proposed a series of local wines with dinner, including a fruity *Rabiega* Blanc 2000 “Vin de Pays” by Swedish winemaker Tortenson. The star of the evening was the red 1999 *Chateau St-Julien d’Aille* “Triumvir des Rimbauds” Aged 1 year in oak and 2 in bottle, it showed butter, fat, lovely chocolate-like Syrah aromas in the nose. A bit green on the attack, the wine had very good concentration—a well-balanced, prune-jammy offering that held coffee notes in the finish. The dessert wine was a *Maury* Mas Amiel, 15 years old, a rich, port-like production that worked nicely with an equally decadent chocolate-banana ice-cream.

First stop for visiting Cognoscenti Magazine editors on the day we traveled the winery route was **Chateau Roubine**. It was here that we begin to understand that this was no ordinary tour. The organizers (including Pascal Loddo, General Manager at La Bastide de Tourtour) have contributed their expertise and familiarity with the region to organizing an authentic Provencal touring experience.

At Chateau Roubine we were greeted by the delightful Valérie Riboud. Her sparkling green eyes, passion for wine and gracious manner put us at ease right away. Since acquiring the property in 1994, she and her husband Philippe (a 2-time Olympic gold medal winner in fencing) have devoted themselves fully to lifting this 70-hectare property into the first rank of Provence’s wineries. We tasted a range of Roubine wines, includ-

ing a 2001 white *Cuvée Philippe Riboud*. (The Cuvée Philippe Riboud represents what the Ribouds consider their finest of each vintage.) This lightly-oaked offering exhibited aromatic complexity, some light but interesting minerality, and fresh white peach fruit. The 2001 *Cuvée de Bargemon* white is a 100% Semillon offering. Its fruit was nicely concentrated, with subtle grilled almond notes on the palate. In the reds, we tried a 2000 *Cuvée de Bargemon*, a well-balanced 60% Cabernet blend with a pleasantly persistent finish, and a 2000 *Cuvée Philippe Riboud* whose mainly Syrah character revealed itself in concentrated tones of cocoa and cherry.

Then we were off to lunch at **Chez Bruno of Lorgues**, a pilgrimage for gourmets that is owned and operated by the flamboyant “King of Truffles” himself, Clément Bruno. (Through his various enterprises, the irrepressible Bruno sells an amazing 6000 kilos of truffles each year.) Before lunch, we joined the amply proportioned, highly charismatic owner for a chat on the terrace outside his restaurant (over flutes of “Bruno” champagne, of course!). There he held court in appropriately royal style, declaiming on matters ranging from Périgord truffles (Périgord accounts for only about 5% of French truffle production, but it has the “marketing clout”) to culinary guidebooks (many of them are unreliable). On the day we visited, a group of Swiss had flown in all the way from Geneva for a special birthday just to have truffle-filled lunch at Bruno’s. They were flying back to Geneva that very evening—compelling evidence of Bruno’s adoring following.

Passing into the charmingly rustic restaurant, we began a gourmet lunch experience that encompassed no fewer than 4 different kinds of truffles: *melanoporum*, *brunale*, *uncinatum* and *aestivum*. The cooking was rich—super rich—no doubt about that. But we have scarcely



Above, Bruno, the “King of Truffles.”  
Below, Chateau Roubine.



ever encountered a kitchen that knows how to showcase truffles better. We began with *asperges vertes, foie gras rôti*, served with a delicate caviar of truffles. Then, *la truffe tuber aestivum en feuilletée au foie gras et lard fume, sauce à la truffe noire*, an amazing dish consisting of a whole black truffle baked in pastry. The texture of the truffle was sublime, with hints of meatiness and mushrooms, and the port that was added to the sauce stood up very well against the powerful flavors of truffle. In the *selle et carré d'agneau rôtis, son jus, fricot de légumes de printemps aux truffes*, the tenderly cooked lamb coming from the Pyrénées was excellent.

After that morning's visit at the winery, it seemed only fitting that we have a red 2000 *Chateau Roubine* "Cuvée de Bargemon" to accompany our meal.

In the afternoon, we stopped by **Chateau Sainte Roseline**, which is well worth a stop, not only because this cru classé vineyard founded by Pope Jean XXII produces a slate of interesting wines produced by manual sorting and gravity-powered harvest, but because its 11<sup>th</sup> century chapel has a beautiful mosaic by Chagall as well as a fine Giacometti piece. Perhaps it was the wines (or the truffles?) going to our heads, but then it occurred to us just how valuable the sort of skilled tour operation offered by **La Route des Vignobles de Provence** can be.

This article was written by Nicole Medvecky-Riggs and Jeffrey Riggs, Contributing Editors to *Cognoscenti Magazine*.

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