



WORDS ELISABETH KING

## BORDEAUX' STAR ON THE RISE

FEW nations rival the French when it comes to nurturing a grand vision. As the new Cite du Vin in Bordeaux looms into view, the ringing tribute of Francois Hollande during the opening ceremony in June springs to life. Dubbed the "Guggenheim of Wine", the gleaming spiral of a building inspired by the swirl of wine in a glass really is, as the French President truthfully exclaimed - "An emblem of excellence, a symbol of coming together... a success for France".

Bordeaux has undergone major urban renewal over the past few years. A renaissance best viewed from the Belvedere on the eighth floor of the Cite du Vin, which offers a 360-degree panorama of the iconic wine city. Built at the cost of \$124 million, the project was designed by star architects Anouk Legendre and Nicolas Desmazieres as a museum-cum-theme park. As fascinating for neophytes as it is for wine connoisseurs, especially when both parties are sipping the free glass of wine at the end of a tour.

The man behind the rebirth is Mayor Alain Juppe, who is planning a run for president. To boost his political ambitions, he has overseen the pedestrianisation of the old city centre, introduced a tram network and reinvigorated the historic custom houses on the Garonne River. Owners of the city's majestic 18th century buildings were told to scrub up the facades and cruise ships can now disgorge their passengers close to the heart of town. A whirlwind of activity that has led to a UNESCO World Heritage listing.

As Johnny-come-lately countries have challenged French wine supremacy, the Cite du Vin is not only intended to attract more tourists but also to rubber-stamp Bordeaux's standing as the world capital

of wine. That doesn't mean a hard sell of local vintages. The meet and greet space on the ground floor is the Latitude20 wine bar, lined with 14,000 bottles of wine from 80 countries. The usual suspects are well-represented, of course, but visitors can also discover hard-to-get bottlings such as Ethiopian chardonnay.

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The international nature of wine cultivation continues on the cavernous second floor. Giant screens show chopper rides through vineyards from South Africa and Chile. There's a chillax zone where you can listen to wine-inspired poetry. Queues are routine at the "chair of despair", where you can listen to celebrities describing their worst hangovers. A programme of wine workshops caters to all levels of knowledge from children to wine writers to bypass the spectre of one-upmanship.

The permanent World's Fair atmosphere sprawls over 20 themed areas. A highlight even for the jaded is the Disney-style boat ride that retraces the journey of a wine

merchant's galley. Where there's wine, there's food and the Cite du Vin boasts several restaurants and cafes. One offers 50 wines by the glass and it might take a while to order at the top end eatery with its wine list of 500 wines.

Bordeaux' star is so much on the rise that a new branch of France's high-speed TGV train will make its first run in early 2017, cutting the journey time from Paris by 90 minutes. Eurostar already links London with Bordeaux with a change at Lille or Paris for a sub-seven hour train ride. The preferred mode of transport for many of the British surfers who catch the waves on the Atlantic surf coast.

There's plenty to see in France's fifth largest city, poetically known as the Port de la Lune (port of the moon). Victor Hugo loved the city and gave it a tourist tagline that has never been superseded: "Take Versailles, add Antwerp, and you have Bordeaux". Evocative venues to plan how to spend your time are both located amid the clutch of wine bars in the old city. Aux Quatre Coins de Vin is a quirky bar where patrons are given magnetic cards to self-select Bordeaux wines by the glass. You pay when you leave. The Ecole du Vin de Bordeaux is a wine school in monicker only and is a top choice for a quiet drink.

The biggest culinary excitement of the past two years was the opening of La Grande Maison de Bernard Magrez. A two star Michelin restaurant and five-star hotel, grand is too mean a description. Magrez, the owner of four Grands Crus Classes including La Tour Carnet, has teamed with super-chef Pierre Gagnaire to offer the ultimate in haute Bordelaise cuisine and a dream cellar of 168 grand crus.

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Another hot eating ticket is Garopapilles, which translates as "get ready tastebuds", where chef Tanguy Laviale serves up inventive dishes such as squid ink gnocchi and pan-roasted scallops with shiitake mushrooms and parsley. For half the price, Restaurant Miles showcases the talents of four young chefs from Israel, Japan, New Caledonia and Vietnam. Consider: veal tartare with sesame seed oil-marinated egg yolk and swordfish with Madras curry jelly and coconut and coriander gremolata.

Using local produce has always been a drawcard of French regional restaurants, but the historic tendency has reached new heights. The Saint Pierre area buzzes with restaurants, but there's often a queue at Belle Campagne, where it's hard to fault mains such as free range guinea fowl with foie gras. Chef Rudy Ballin has also upped the locavore cred at Cote Rue, where the relaxed atmosphere contrasts with the artistry of dishes such as quail fillet with fresh turmeric. French chefs are tracking the affordability trend as strongly as their Australian counterparts, and value is the lure at Bourchon Bordelais, where the market-driven menu contains gems like scorpion fish with fennel, black olives and parsley jus.

For the wine pilgrim, a wide variety of half-day excursions fulfills your fantasies of tours to St Emilion and Margaux. Or, why not make things easy on yourself by heading to the Cours de l'Intendance, Bordeaux's ritziest shopping street, and settling in for the afternoon at L'Intendant des Grands Vins de Bordeaux, one of the most storied places to buy the finest offerings from Bordeaux's biggest names. 

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