

FOOD & WINE printer friendly page

<http://www.foodandwine.com/invoke.cfm?objectid=B6C512F7-F7A8-42B2-A053962997A27ED8>

Travel

French Cooking School Vacations

The biggest names, the newest programs, the most luxurious idylls, the toughest internships: there are classes in France for every type of home cook. Here's all you need to know.

By Stephanie Curtis and Peggy Knickerbocker

LIFESTYLE ED

In exquisitely restored farmhouses and châteaux throughout France, cooking teachers give you an opportunity to live the life you've dreamed about—if only for the length of a vacation. In classes of eight or so students, the teachers, often American, offer lessons on how to cook like a French native, whether braising a guinea hen or roasting a leg of lamb in a wood-burning oven. The following courses all stress local specialties (shellfish in Bordeaux, duck in Gascony, olive oil in Provence) and, of course, regional wines. A typical day begins with a visit to a market; then there's class and a sumptuous meal—in the garden, weather permitting. Accommodations, when they're not at the school, are in charming inns or homes nearby.

BORDEAUX

Two Bordelais

Teachers Jean-Pierre Moullé, longtime co-chef at Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California, and his wife, Denise, who comes from an old Bordeaux family.

Setting Classes take place both at the Moullés' 300-year-old stone farmhouse (which has an outdoor wood-burning oven) and at one of Denise's family châteaux.

Emphasis Southwestern *cuisine du marché*—whatever looks good at the market that day.

Highlight Duck day—confit, duck ham, grilled duck breast, foie gras.

Accommodations Rooms in a nearby B&B.

Price \$2,400 for five days (including lodging).

Contact 510-848-8741 or twobordelais.com.

GASCONY

The French Kitchen

Teacher Kate Hill, barge captain and author of *A Culinary Journey in Gascony*.

Setting Hill's 18th-century dovecote, dominated by a stone fireplace for grilling and roasting.

Emphasis The Gascon classics—*confit de canard*, foie gras, game and (not least) Armagnac.

Highlights Visits to eau-de-vie cellars, walks along the Canal des Deux Mers. accommodations

Rooms in Hill's farmhouse and in a hotel nearby.

Price \$3,225 for five days (including lodging).

Contact 800-852-2625 or thefrenchkitchen.com.

NORMANDY

On Rue Tatin

Teacher Susan Herrmann Loomis, author of six books, including *French Farmhouse Cookbook*.

Setting A renovated 17th-century kitchen with an organic garden, only an hour from Paris.

Emphasis Both traditional French country recipes and restaurant-inspired dishes.

Highlights A *pain au levain* bread class (students get to take the starter home); mother-daughter sessions.

Price \$2,000 for six days (not including lodging).

Contact 415-673-4292 or onruetatin.com.

PROVENCE

At Home with Patricia Wells

Teacher Patricia Wells, F&W contributing editor and author of, most recently, *The Provence Cookbook*.

Setting Wells's 18th-century hilltop farmhouse in historic Vaison-la-Romaine.

Emphasis Provençal specialties; dishes baked in the wood-fired bread oven.

Highlights Courses on truffles and wine; a two-week fitness program, which includes healthy recipes and the participation of a personal trainer.

Accommodations In nearby hotels.

Price \$3,500 for five days (not including lodging).

Contact 919-845-9031 (fax) or patriciawells.com.

À La Bonne Cocotte

Teacher Lydie Marshall, French native and author of four cookbooks, including *A Passion for My Provence*.

Setting The indoor and outdoor kitchens of Marshall's 10th-century fortress in medieval Nyons.

Emphasis Personal versions of Provençal classics, such as ratatouille and bouillabaisse.

Highlights Excursions to local potters for colorful glazed plates and pots.

Accommodations In the fortress and garden house.

Price \$2,200 for five days (including lodging).

Contact 800-727-1606 or lydiemarshall.com.

Haute Provence

Teacher Georgeanne Brennan, author of 22 books on cooking and gardening, including *The Food and Flavors of Haute Provence*.

Setting A large farm-style kitchen in a restored 17th-century convent and walled garden, in medieval Aups.

Emphasis Provençal dishes.

Highlights Visits to cheese and honey makers.

Accommodations Large rooms at the convent.

Price \$2,750 for seven days (including lodging).

Contact 530-795-3043 or georgeannebrennan.com.

—Peggy Knickerbocker

Cooking-Class Packages

Hamilton Fitzjames

This Burgundy-based company doesn't slot you into an existing program; every culinary vacation

it designs is tailor-made to match the client's particular interests and can be set up almost anywhere in Europe. Active itineraries in Burgundy are the company's specialty; says company cofounder Tom Hamilton, "Biking and hiking work off the meals." Hamilton Fitzjames recently organized a five-day tour for a group of 16 (at a cost of \$3,450 per person) that featured cooking classes, two with chef Matthieu Fontaine at the restored 13th-century Château de Bagnols in Beaujolais; included were lodging at the château, bike rides, hikes in hilltop vineyards and a trip to the market in Lyon, plus a class and dinner at Paul Bocuse nearby.

Contact 800-801-6147 or hamiltonfitzjames.com.

Gourmet on Tour

This London-based tour organizer offers a large choice of European packages—more than 20 in France—with cooking classes and accommodations with fabulous chef-teachers. One of the properties, the Manoir de Carabillon, is a stone manor house in Normandy; another, the Hostellerie Bérard, is a cluster of restored buildings in a Provençal village. Vacations can include visits to markets, vineyards, *fromageries*, or fishing ports if you're near the coast. They are available for as few as two travelers and last from half a day to a week. Prices vary with the package; five days at the Hostellerie Bérard, for instance, costs \$1,480, including lodging, excursions and some meals.

Contact 800-504-9842 or gourmetontour.com.

—Stephanie Curtis

Learning from French Chefs

LANGUEDOC-ROUSSILLON

L'Atelier de Cuisine

Teachers Twin chefs Laurent and Jacques Pourcel, of the Michelin three-star Jardin des Sens.

Setting A modern annex with home-kitchen equipment across from the Jardin des Sens in Montpellier.

Emphasis Simplified versions of the Pourcels' Mediterranean-accented cuisine; in French.

Price \$65 per class, \$310 for five classes (not including lodging).

Contact 011-33-4-67-79-07-68 or jardin-des-sens.com.

PROVENCE

Le Passage

Teacher Reine Sammut, of Auberge La Fenière, one of France's best woman chefs.

Setting An old candy factory in the heart of Aix-en-Provence that will reopen this month as a restaurant, pastry shop, tearoom, fancy-food store and cooking school.

Emphasis Haute Provençal cooking; in French, but English translation is available.

Price \$68 per class, \$260 for four classes (not including lodging).

Contact 011-33-4-42-37-09-00 or reinesammut.com.

—S.C.

For the Overachieving Cook

L'École des Chefs

The French Relais & Châteaux hotel group offers "boot camps for chefs," cooking internships at dozens of their member properties around the world, including some of the most prestigious restaurants in France: Au Crocodile (with two Michelin stars, in Strasbourg, Alsace), La Maison

Troisgros (three stars, in Roanne, near Lyon), Les Maisons de Bricourt (two stars, in Cancale, Brittany), and L'Espérance (newly back in the three-star club, in St-Père-sous-Vézelay, Burgundy). The experience is designed for one person, though occasionally two can partner. Students wear kitchen whites and have their choice of just observing what goes on in a famous kitchen or working up to 10-hour days. They can prepare food at each of the kitchen's stations, from peeling vegetables and boning chickens to scaling fish. And they sit down to staff meals, the lunches and dinners the cooks make for themselves. Non-French speakers are placed in kitchens where English is spoken.

Price From \$1,100 for two days, from \$1,900 for five days (not including lodging).

Accommodations Rooms at special rates are often available in the hotels where students are housed.

Contact 877-334-6464 or relaischateaux.com.

L'École du Grand Chocolat

In an annex next to the Valrhona factory, France's famous chocolate maker has set up two state-of-the-art teaching *laboratoires*, as French chefs call their commercial kitchens. Frédéric Bau, Valrhona's head pastry chef, teaches intensive three- and four-day hands-on courses for eight participants: Entire sessions are spent learning just about ganache making or about chocolate pastries. Most classes are in French, but many of the instructors speak English.

Setting The Valrhona factory is in the Rhône Valley town of Tain l'Hermitage overlooking the vine-covered slopes of the region's most famous winemakers, Jaboulet and Chapoutier.

Highlight Learning to temper couverture, a candymaker's chocolate especially high in cocoa butter; this technique makes sweets particularly glossy.

Price \$780 for three days, \$1,015 for four days (not including lodging).

Accommodations Pavillon de l'Hermitage, a comfortable hotel with a pool, a restaurant and a wine cellar stocked with Rhône greats, offers special rates to Valrhona students. It's a five-minute walk from the school.

Contact 011-33-4-75-07-90-37 or valrhona.com.

—S.C.

This article originally appeared in May 2004.

Copyright © 2004, American Express Publishing. All rights reserved.