

La Cité du Vin; Le  
pâté de Périgueux;  
Domaine du caviar  
Neuvic; Château  
Pape Clement

# Une Épicure en France...

From the Bordeaux wine  
route to the Dordogne  
route du foie gras  
**By Adam Waxman**

**T**HE WORLD OF WINE SWIRLS around Bordeaux. Bordeaux is a style, a quality, and a symbol of status. The soul of Bordeaux is vested in the newly minted **La Cité du Vin**. Is it shaped like a decanter? What is it? We ask. In fact, it's a "non-shape." It is an abstract representation of the flow of wine pouring into a glass. Sheer brilliance. A magnet for oenophiles and for those simply curious about the alluring and iridescent mica and glass structure, changing colours as it reflects the sun like a glimmering temple nestled on the riverbank.

Inside, we move like molecules in a glass of wine, circling multi-sensory exhibits that provide insight and stimulate curiosity at each stage of the winemaking process. Nineteen interactive modules demystify the components of colour, taste, mouth feel and aromatics and provide a history of wine. At the *Terroir Table* we push buttons to survey the geography of the major wine regions. We learn about old and new world wines from ancient vineyards in Georgia to emerging ones in Canada. In "salons" we learn how to trust ourselves in wine tastings; get introduced to the wines of Bordeaux as well as international regions; and sample wines while reading the classic literature, like Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*, to which they correspond. In a dark room we recline as sounds and images are projected along with aroma diffusers to help us identify wine notes. A comfortable library displays books on wine in a variety of languages and includes *manga*. There is even a workshop for children using colours and juice. On the top floor we taste and compare international wines while overlooking "la belle endormie" (the sleeping beauty), Bordeaux.

CP L. DRUET (FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE)



Strolling along the boardwalk by the Garonne River and through public parks is such a pleasure. There is calm civilized sophistication. This is a city known for its art and 18th-century limestone architecture. Some buildings even date back to Roman times. It was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its “*outstanding urban and architectural ensemble.*” Rue Sainte-Catherine, one of the longest pedestrian-only shopping streets in Europe purveys all the epicurean specialties I love. Wine bars, cafés, chocolatiers, *fromageries*, and quaint cobblestone public squares seduce me with the most refined products in the world. I enjoy espresso with *canelé*, a miniature caramelized cake with vanilla and rum that symbolizes the elegance of Bordeaux’s pastry making. At the **Maille** boutique I sample fresh mustard on tap. This is not the ballpark yellow condiment I grew up with. These mustards are wonderful rich flavours that immediately inspire food pairings. Dozens of mustard varieties tempt me like *Hazelnut, Black Chanterelles and White Wine; Mustard with Acacia Honey and Balsamic Vinegar*; and the limited edition *Chardonnay with White Alba truffles*. My gift bag is full.

**TIME TO COOK.** At the *Côté Cours* cooking school within the **Saint-James Hotel**, I don an apron, raise a glass of Medoc, and follow along as my teacher instructs, in French, how to prepare our Mexican feast, Bordelaise style. Classes here are in cuisines of the world, but the quality of ingredients and the

preparations are quintessentially French. With each sip of wine, I feel I can understand better. Who would believe what I just made? Crisped local shrimp atop a disk of salsa and roasted corn looks beautiful, but it’s the techniques that I will bring home. From his Michelin-starred restaurant within the hotel, Chef Nicolas Magie serves us a vibrant display of cléry strawberries elevated with basil sorbet, fennel and cookie crumble. *Magnifique.*

Bordeaux is the wine capital of the world with more than 7,000 wine producers in 65 appellations. My anticipation soars as I drive through the quiet countryside in an English taxi, **Wine Cab**, converted into a wine-tasting chamber. There’s **Château Margaux!** Can I take a peak through the iron gates? That’s as close as I’ll get. This is wine royalty, and the mystique is closely guarded. However, appreciating wine is as much a local pastime as it is the main industry here and, from the wine bars to the wineries, I find it all happily accessible. First stop: **Château Pape Clement** where, not only do I learn how *Grands Crus Classés* are made but, in the wine lab, I also create my own Cab/Merlot blend, and bottle it with my own label which I name after my son. This is the oldest planted vineyard in the region, dating back to 1300. The politics of wine and the papacy are evident here. Named after Clement V, the winery was maintained by successive archbishops. In the wine cave I feel the medieval ambience as church music echoes ►►

*“Another market is known for truffles, but I am lured into a bistro for the local specialty: Le pâté de Périgueux”*



through the cavernous tomb of the archbishop. Old meets new as Asian inspiration harmoniously blends with French classicism at **Chateau Marquis d'Alesme**. Surrounded by serene gardens, new production facilities combine Taoist principles with organic and biodynamic practices. Grapes are hand picked for the “caviar” of the estate. Through a long spacious hall lined with dragon scales, moon gates open to reveal them quietly resting in their barrels. In an adjacent villa I sniff aromatic oils to test my olfactory skills, and sample a bouquet of Cabernet-dominant wines. Floral, elegant black fruit, richly textured with a refined mouth feel seems patiently coaxed from the grapes with virtue and virtuosity. We select a few bottles to enjoy in the courtyard with a platter of fresh bread, charcuterie, cheese and olives all locally sourced. I could not be happier.

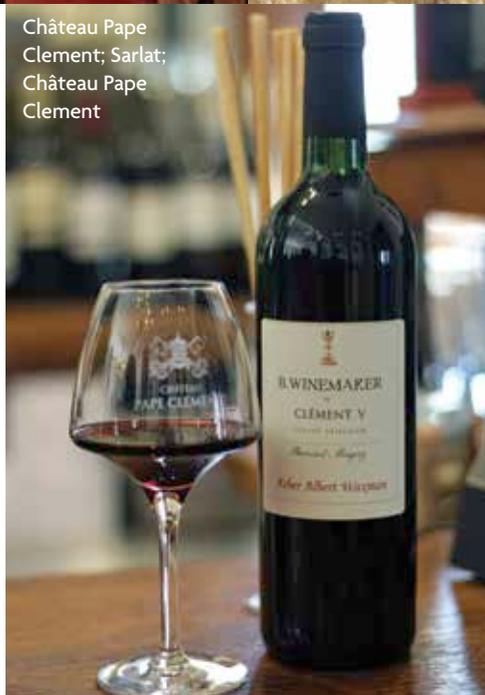
Lunch at the 2-Michelin star **La Grande Maison** by esteemed Chef Pierre Gagnaire is a privilege for the senses. The culinary architecture of each dish is astonishing. Each ingredient, plucked from source, is neatly set in colourful assemblage. Sea bass with oysters and pearls of cider is a confluence of voluptuous textures with subtle sweetness. Red mullet is layered with foie gras mousse, crisp fennel, black olive jelly, a thin sheet of daikon and a potpourri of tiny flowers and micro greens. This is exquisite cuisine and, needless to say, the Bordeaux wine pairings are luxurious.

DRIVING THROUGH NOUVELLE AQUITAINE to Dordogne is, itself, a romantic experience. So many boutique neighbouring wineries dot the countryside as the winding road meanders past medieval towns that beckon my curiosity. I have to pull over. Steep cobblestone lanes lead me to the summit of Saint-Émilion. En route, brasseries unveil inviting aromas of river fish cooked in red wine. Beneath the Monolithic Church and its Bell Tower lies a 200km tunnel system. Exploring just a portion of these dark catacombs carved from rock more than 1,000 years ago is a spooky, but fascinating glimpse into the past.

From the wine route to the foie gras route artisans flourish. France is the main producer of Siberian sturgeon. At **Domaine du caviar Neuvic** I feed goats and am then taught how to eat sturgeon caviar. Metal spoons affect the flavour so we use mother of pearl, and sample a variety of delicate caviar, signature and reserve, on toast, with vodka and sparkling wine. Over lunch at **Relais de la Ganache** we enjoy a dollop of caviar on a *sous vide* egg in a cauliflower velouté with a drizzle of hazelnut oil. Sturgeon is lavished in a yuzu crème and asparagus puree. We finish with a glass of matcha and white chocolate mousse, local strawberries and caviar.

Locals bring walnuts and hazelnuts to a 12th century watermill that has been maintained by the same family since the 1500s. At the **Moulin de la Veysière** I observe the same process of milling nuts into oil that has endured for seven generations. There is a milky texture to the walnut oil, and the flavour of the hazelnut oil is very pronounced. I also sample a nut wine made from macerated green walnuts. There is a humble country charm here and I feel like I've travelled back in time.

Château Pape Clement; Sarlat; Château Pape Clement



For **La truffière de Péchalifour**, Edouard Aynaud Humblet employs his dogs to sniff out the revered *Black Truffles of Périgord*. Humblet clarifies for me that often we are misinformed about these highly sought after tubers. They are native to the Périgord region, seasonal and black on the inside. We chase his dogs through the woods, until Humblet rewards their find with kisses. Dinner at **Hôtel Les Glycines** showcases the black truffle on an organic egg and brioche; in a beautiful risotto with Colonnate bacon and hazelnuts; and with roasted veal and smoked potatoes with juniper. The cocoa-y peppery profile of these truffles is a rare privilege.

NESTLED IN THE WOODS, the enchanting 16th century **Château de Lalande**, with ancient vines shrouding its calcaire stone walls, is straight out of a fairy tale. Moss-covered 300-year-old wisteria branches form a pergola on the terrace through which I begin exploring

the forest. In the dining room I indulge in duck, the specialty of Chef Yves Staebell. A dish of cured duck, *Magret de canard farci* (duck with foie gras inside), and foie gras sprinkled with sea salt pair mellifluously with a local Rosette wine. Dining in this castle is the height of decadence. Chef Staebell's adroitness is reconfirmed with a fall-off-the-bone crisp duck leg. It doesn't get better than the care and hospitality here.

All roads lead to Périgueux. The artwork and the architecture of this Medieval and Renaissance town, and the views from within it are awe-inspiring. In every public square markets are filled with farmers and artisans selling gourmet items that one would normally find at a specialty food shop. In the square of Place Saint-Louis we find duck confit, caviar, croissants, and velvety goat cheese made by monks in Rocamadour. This is heaven. I purchase foie gras and a baguette...for breakfast. Another market is known for truffles, but I am lured into a bistro for the local specialty: *Le pâté de Périgueux*. Foie gras, wrapped in black truffle, is encased in local pork and a thin pastry. Locals make this in their homes for guests. Never have I wanted to make friends more than now. This is the height of gastronomic indulgence.

No tour of the Foie Gras Route through Dordogne would be complete without visiting **Restaurant Le Nicolas L**. Here, Chef Nicolas Lams-taes teaches me how to de-vein and prepare foie gras. It's harder than I thought. My reward? I get to eat it! Through the breathtaking countryside and the country hospitality of passionate artisans, it's easy to feel the many reasons why we love France. My heart and my palate have just tasted the best of them. ♦ [www.tourisme-aquitaine.fr](http://www.tourisme-aquitaine.fr)

#### DON'T MISS

- Visit the **Lascaux Caves** complex of prehistoric paintings drawn 17,000 years ago
- Leisurely stroll the tranquil grass paths of **Eyrynac Jardins**, the most beautiful private gardens in France.

The same family has maintained each generation's signature topiary garden for 500 years.

- Ride the glass elevator up the bell tower of **Sarlat** for panoramic views of this historical jewel of the Black Périgord.