

## Insider's Guide to French Wine Country

Famed wine regions like the Loire are becoming more accessible—and friendly new restaurants are a big part of the attitude adjustment.

*By Megan Krigbaum, Alessandra Bulow, Kate Krader*

### French Wine Regions

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The Loire's grand Manoir de Restigné. Photo courtesy of Le Chai.

Some legendary French wine regions, like the Loire and the Rhône, are notoriously unwelcoming to tourists. Most of the famous wine producers have little interest in opening tasting rooms. And, until recently, there just weren't many good places for a traveler to eat, beyond a few straightforward country-inn dining rooms and a handful of extravagant Michelin-multistarred restaurants. But now, haute chefs like Michel Troisgros in Roanne and Jean-Luc Rabanel in Arles have opened casual places with terrific food and accessible wine lists. And some wine-country insiders, like chef Jean-Marc Bourgeois and winemaker Olivier Leflaive (renowned for his Burgundies) have taken things even further: They've opened amazing inns to make guests feel especially at home in French wine country.

### The Loire Valley



*Duck with Parmesan cream at Le Chai. Photo courtesy of Le Chai.*

#### [Le Chai at Manoir de Restigné](#)

There are hundreds of gorgeous châteaux in the Loire valley; what makes Manoir de Restigné especially alluring is its restaurant, [Le Chai](#), featuring **Damien Cousseau's** pristine, inventive cooking. Like Loire winemakers known for their [biodynamic methods](#), Cousseau sources local organic ingredients, which he uses to create fantastical combinations like fried foie gras with beet ravioli and beet ice cream, or roasted prawns with celery custard and chestnuts. Wines, like Domaine Breton's mellow, cassis-flavored 2006 Trinch! Bourgueil, reflect Le Chai's location in the middle of the Cabernet Franc-centric Loire.