



<http://www.southoffrancehotel.com>

## ALASTAIR SAWDAY'S SPECIAL PLACES TO STAY

### Newsletter February 2010

It has been more than usually long since our last newsletter!

### Room Tariffs Remain at 2005 Levels

Our tariffs for 2010 remain unchanged from 2005, our first season; rates are from €90 per room per night including breakfast (May, June, Sept and October) and from €120 per night in July and August.

Tariffs for the apartment are from €675 per week (for up to 6 people).

### Breakfast Buffet and Lunch



Towards the end of last season we introduced a new breakfast format for all guests; our breakfast now includes a **buffet selection** of French cheeses, hams, salami, boiled eggs, a

### Cookery Writing and a Night of Lime Scented Passion

I've spent the last 2 winters writing and re-testing recipes for our eventual cookery book, including a recipe for an utterly irresistible baked lime cheesecake, which found me devouring every single crumb in one sitting. As it was for 10-12 it was a true feeding frenzy, but I'd do it again now! (I'm a bit of a sucker for a citrus desert and this scrummy recipe keeps a true lime fresh zing combined with a cool melt-in-the-mouth texture.)

You can experience these recipes yourself - although not yet the cheesecake - on our Cookery Blog, as well as countless 'tips for success'. All recipes describe why certain steps are taken and what the end result is meant to be like.

Follow this link to our blog : [Click here](#)

Regular updates will continue throughout 2010, and health permitting after my third year of re-testing, I shall be here in the summer to cook for you!

We hope you enjoy the recipes. We've already had 13,500 visitors since we re-launched the blog last April.

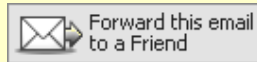
mix of *croissants*, *pains au chocolats*, home made and French bread, cornflakes, poached fruits, orange juice, yoghurt and home made muesli, as well as your choice of hot drink.

Lunch is available on a weekday at Le Domaine. Everything is cooked to order according to your choice, so please advise us the night before. **2 course lunch with wine and coffee €15 (served at 13:00) served on the breakfast terrace (weather permitting)**

### Sourcing Food Locally

Most of you will be aware that France has a strong tradition of supporting small farmers and in fact many people continue to live off the land, or at least generate some of their income from this, unlike in Anglo-Saxon countries where food production is dominated by agri-businesses and supermarkets.

We are therefore able to source all of our



### Website Integration Project



Now for something much more boring - but important. For several years we have had 2 websites, [www.auxquatsaisons.com](http://www.auxquatsaisons.com) and [www.southoffrancehotel.com](http://www.southoffrancehotel.com), both with a completely different look and feel, as you can see above.

Over the next couple of months we will be amalgamating the sites so that they look exactly the same whilst keeping the name 'Le Domaine aux Quat'Saisons' across both of them. The idea is to make it less confusing...but if you are used to one or the other of the sites, next time you log in you may see a completely new version.

### Lilly 2001 - 2010



On 27th January 2010, one of our four dachshunds, Lilly, passed away peacefully in the garden; it was a warm sunny afternoon and she had gone to sleep in her favourite sun bathing spot.

We are very sad and miss her so much. She followed us everywhere and used to sit with her head on my feet while I sat at my desk working.

fruit and vegetables, and in season, eggs (naturally raised hens do not in fact lay outside summer) from small producers directly in the village. If you take a walk down to the *Argent Double* river you will see where all this produce is grown. The soil is a soft sandy loam, deposited by the river, unlike the hard-to-work clay that is in our garden. In France everyone has the right to obtain free water from their own well, or from a river, and this is used for the irrigation, which would otherwise be uneconomic using tap water.

Basking in the sun and free from pesticides, this produce is delicious, as well as not being flown in from the other side of the world.

### The Garden and Vineyard

Although we have a 2.0 acre garden we are aware that many guests do not use it. Everyone is very welcome to stroll through it and in order to further this we have established several new graveled areas this year with walk ways through them.

### Featured Plant - Brazilian Pink Peppercorn Tree

The Minervois is a valley of alluvial clay soil containing a basin of Mediterranean air, ensuring a mild humid winter, hot dry summer and plenty of humming bird hawkmoths



(picture left feeding in our garden)

does not rain for months and temperatures are in the 30's.

For guests, this means that is unlikely to rain during your visit and you will be unlucky not to experience hot sunny days. For our garden, plants have to be able to withstand both very hot arid conditions as well as wet winter roots.



You will notice that many of our plants are planted on raised beds or with gravel and sand to protect their roots from the winter wet of the clay beneath - dry garden plants hate winter wet, especially if they are cold.

The Brazilian Pink Peppercorn Tree (*Schinus molle*) or *faux poivrier* is remarkably well adapted to our climate. It's native to Peru's Andean desserts and it withstands heavy drought, frost, high temperatures and a wet clay soil in winter. What more could you ask from a fast growing attractive tree with a weeping habit that has a lovely aroma of pink peppercorns? The pink peppercorns are edible and indeed they are the pink peppercorns of cooking. They contain more than 50 different plant oils. Part of the role of these oils is to suppress all plant growth under the canopy; so it's weed free too!

### Limoux - the World's very first Bubbly

In 1531, Benedictine monks at the *Abbaye de Saint Hilaire* discovered the world's first bubbly, but unlike in

Many plants that are highly adapted to xeric conditions have been



introduced and we have been experimenting with plants from, literally, all over the world, some of which are very rare and unusual. It is quite an exciting time in the garden and space does not permit us to go into much detail. Please ask us for more information if you are interested.

#### **A Reminder about Other Activities Nearby:**

**river swimming**  
**caving**  
**guided sea fishing**  
**and wild trout fly fishing**  
**wind surfing**  
**golf**  
**tennis**  
**canal boating**  
**walking and hiking**  
**wine tasting and vineyard tours**  
**cycling**

**May 2009 Garden Open Day for Charity**

Champagne, they did not go ahead to promote it. - instead they kept it to themselves and it only acquired recognition by the French winemaking authorities in 1938. The best of Limoux bubbly is nonetheless extremely good, and a steal compared to *champagne*.

Another of Limoux's vinous secrets are the *Toques et Clochers* (Chefs Hats and Church Towers) range of white chardonnay wines. The best casks from this co-operative of growers are sold at an auction sponsored by France's finest Guide Michelin 3-star chefs on Palm Sunday each year. The wines are fabulous and comparable in quality to white Burgundy. Indeed the 'everyday' blends of *Toques et Clochers* wines can be tasted in Limoux and purchased at an extremely affordable price. Our favourite is *Terroir Haut-Vallee*. Lovely.

Limoux is an attractive town for a pleasant afternoon stroll after a tasting and is near to other tourist attractions such as *Rennes-les-Chateaux*.

#### **Tailor Made Tours**



For those of you who do not wish to drive or who wish to experience an insider's guide to the region, we are delighted to be able to offer the services of a local experienced guide.

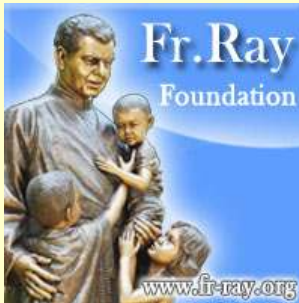
**Wildflowers of the Languedoc, Cathar Castles, the Secrets of Rennes-les-Chateaux, Lagrasse and the Corbieres, Minerve and the Montagne Noire.** Catriona has spent several years working on organic vineyards,



travelling the world in search of plants for TV programmes as well as studying Fine Art and History.

For our guests with an interest in plants, **Wildflowers of the Languedoc** is a ravishing tour, as the region is home to

We were pleased to host an English afternoon tea with a tour of our garden. All proceeds went to charity and all costs were met by us. **€675 was raised with 50% to the Father Ray Foundation for Orphans in Pattaya, Thailand and 50% to ITA, a charity working with Oxfam for the education of girls in Pakistan.**



many species of wild orchid, wild irises, daffodils as well as a myriad of other spring flowers. (Picture left of wild jonquils and irises near Minerve)

### **Kate Mosse and the Languedoc Trilogy**

The authoress has become a veritable *française* following the phenomenal success of *Labyrinth* and its sister book *Sepulchre*. A third book, *Citadel*, hence the trilogy, is set to be published in Autumn 2010 and is set in WW II in the frontier between the *Aude* and *Pyrenees-Orientale*. As far as we know it is based on true stories of the Resistance in this area.

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### **2010 Opening Dates**

Hotel Le Domaine aux Quat'Saisons will be open from 9th May to 17th October; please contact us as normal for reservations.

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### **Contact us**

**Telephone:** +33 (0) 4 68 24 49 73

**Email us:** [info@southoffrancehotel.com](mailto:info@southoffrancehotel.com)

**Getting here:** if you have not visited us for a while, it may be worth checking the Ryanair website as a number of new routes have opened in the last 2 years.

### **And Finally...**

Thank you for reading our latest newsletter and to all the many clients who have so kindly written such favourable comments about us. It makes it all worth while, for hospitality is all about constant attention to detail and hard work.

Should you require any further information about Le Domaine aux Quat'Saisons, please do not hesitate to contact us.