

Dis-moi!

The essential *French Magazine* round-up of places to go and people in the know

SAWDAY'S SPECIAL STAYS

Secret garden



The 18th-century *relais de poste* hides in a walled garden brimming with mimosa, bougainvillea and roses – yet nothing prepares you for the sensuous, flowing interiors. Annabelle's exquisite taste has weaved its magic from chic upholstered Louis XVI *fauteuil* to baldaquin bath lit with candle sconces: an atmosphere of relaxed indulgence reigns. She is the smiling, elegant hostess, he is the inspired cook. For breakfast you feast on homemade *pain aux raisins* outside, or at a big farmhouse table beneath a bejewelled chandelier.

Tranquillity prevails, yet this is in the town centre, so make the most of the bikes and discover the

Roman treasures of Nîmes. Later return to one of three salons, comfortable with travel books, whisky or brandy as Debussy wafts into that dreamy garden. Then up the fine stone stair with iron balustrade to extravagant bedrooms with huge beds and billowing pillows, hot-water bottles tucked between crisp sheets and your own winter fire.

- **Jardins Secrets: 3 rue Gaston Maruejols, 30000 Nîmes; 00 33 4 66 84 82 64; www.jardinssecrets.net.**
- **Doubles cost €190–€260 (£128–176).**
- **For Special Places to Stay guide details, visit www.specialplacestostay.com.**

LEADING QUESTIONS

Chloé Doutre-Roussel, chocolate expert



Chloé Doutre-Roussel is the chocolate buyer at Fortnum and Mason in London and has written a new book about chocolate

French Magazine: Why do we associate chocolate with romance?

Chloé Doutre-Roussel: Sweet products create well-being. We are biologically programmed to feel pleasure when we eat sugar, but chocolate in addition melts at body temperature, smells at room temperature, and flirts with our senses; coffee and tea are also often associated to seduction for similar reasons. They are all sensual products.

FM: Is it fair to sometimes consider that chocolate is better than sex?

CD-R: There are poor quality chocolates and there is poor quality sex; there are sublime chocolates and there are sublime moments in sex. It is a question of what you choose to give to your body... it is up to each person's values and choices in life, there is no set rule, but if you are epicurian, you won't go for mediocrity in either!

FM: What's your fondest memory of being in France?

CD-R: Six months training on a farm, milking 60 cows twice a day and sharing, at each break time, wonderful French food with the farmers, simple, true, hard working and full of love for life. It was 15 years ago... the real values in life and nature, trust, friendship; not a sign of consumer society and its sharky marketing.

FM: What box of chocolates would you like to be given on Valentine's day?

CD-R: Most of the people are scared to offer me chocolate as I am too fussy, but Valentine's is about sharing and love, so half of the box should be the partner's favourites, the other half my favourites... I think chocolate should be an every week present, small quantities, a gesture, *un clin d'oeil*.

● *The Chocolate Connoisseur* by Chloé Doutre-Roussel is available now from Piatkus books, priced £9.99 (www.piatkus.co.uk).



The Food Hound



If you are a wine producer and want to entertain clients, what do you do? Do you go to a restaurant and let them sell you your wine, at three times the price you sold it to them?

If you are lucky enough to be in the esteemed 'Grand Cru' of Gevrey Chambertin, the answer is Castel de Très Girard. Walk through the door and you are met by a huge wooden cabinet. Each locked, glass-fronted section displays a stack of bottles. A plaque proclaims the producer (these are private stocks – just in case).

To match such oenological masters, the cuisine must be superb. It was. The restaurant is on its way to a Michelin star and justly so. After an *amuse bouche*, I moved to langoustine, split and grilled to perfection. The veal, carved at table, was the best I have tasted for many years. A choice of cheeses from a groaning chariot sealed the savouries and a study in chocolate nirvana capped our €40 (£27) per person. The wine was a vin de pays produced from vines surrounding the restaurant. Gorgeous! As an aside, I hear the chef is off to the Holiday Inn Garden Court in Dijon shortly – I'd book now!

● **Castel de Très Girard: 7 rue de Très Girard, 21220 Morey St-Denis; 00 33 3 80 34 33 09; www.castel-tres-girard.com**

The Food Hound anonymously sniffs out French cuisine and always pays his way.



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