

B21 BORDEAUX - A LAND OF QUALITY VINES AND WINES

PROJECT: EUROPE 2011

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DATE: 26 JUNE 2011

We left the land of rolling hills and limestone caves and slowly descended to the land of quality vines and wines...the Bordeaux region.



Typical Chateau in the Bordeaux region

Before we share with you our wonderful time in this area we have a sad announcement. Somewhere between Blois and Limoges, our trusted guide, Mlle. Collette Recalulaire slipped off to GPS heaven. Up until then she had been chatty if not always accurate in her directions and suddenly she was there no more. It happened without fanfare and took quite a while for us to realize that we were blazing through a foreign land completely without guidance. We tried all things to revive her short of mouth to mouth, but to no avail. When we replaced the MG's front wheel we discovered a solder joint had come apart, cutting off all electrical life support and causing Mlle. Recalulaire to slowly starve to death right in front of us. "Great," Louise said. "Problem solved." If that was only so because the reconnected jolt of electricity did nothing to bring her back. We now carry her lifeless body around with us, hoping for some electronic miracle.



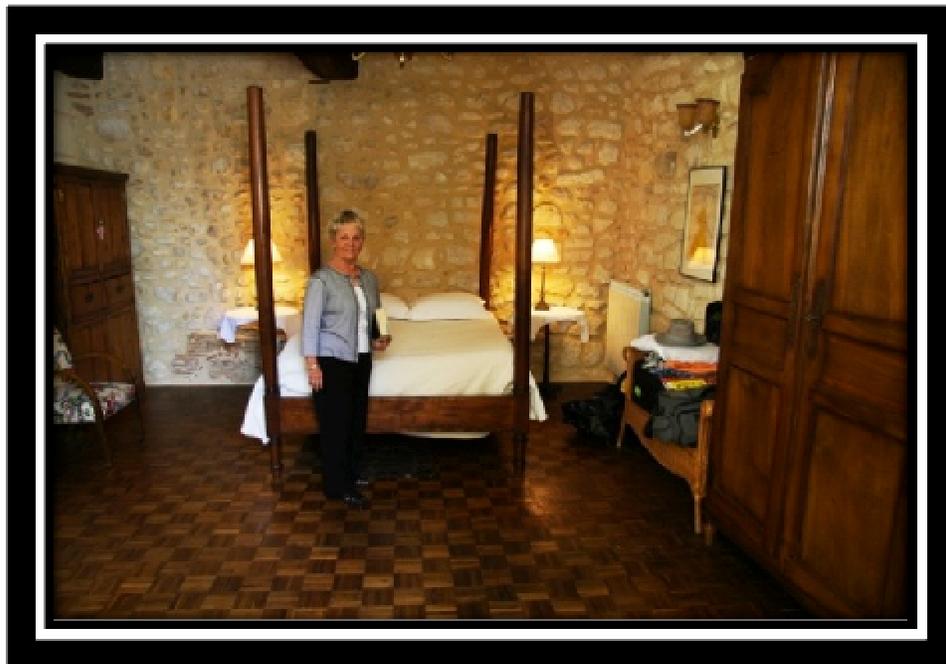
The above paragraph is to explain why we got so hopelessly lost in the vine covered fields of St. Emilion. Our previous hotel gladly printed off a highly detailed Google map that took us right down to the graveled entry of a chateau that not only was not expecting us but had never heard of us.



After a couple frantic calls to Maureen Stratford at Beau-Sejour, she sent her husband, Jon, to fetch us and lead us back to their wonderfully charming B&B in Naujan et Postiac, about 16 miles from Bordeaux. It turns out those previous highly detailed instructions were about five miles off. Something to do with no numbered addresses and only place names available as a locator. We were mildly scolded for not using the tested directions on their accueil@beau-sejour.net website.



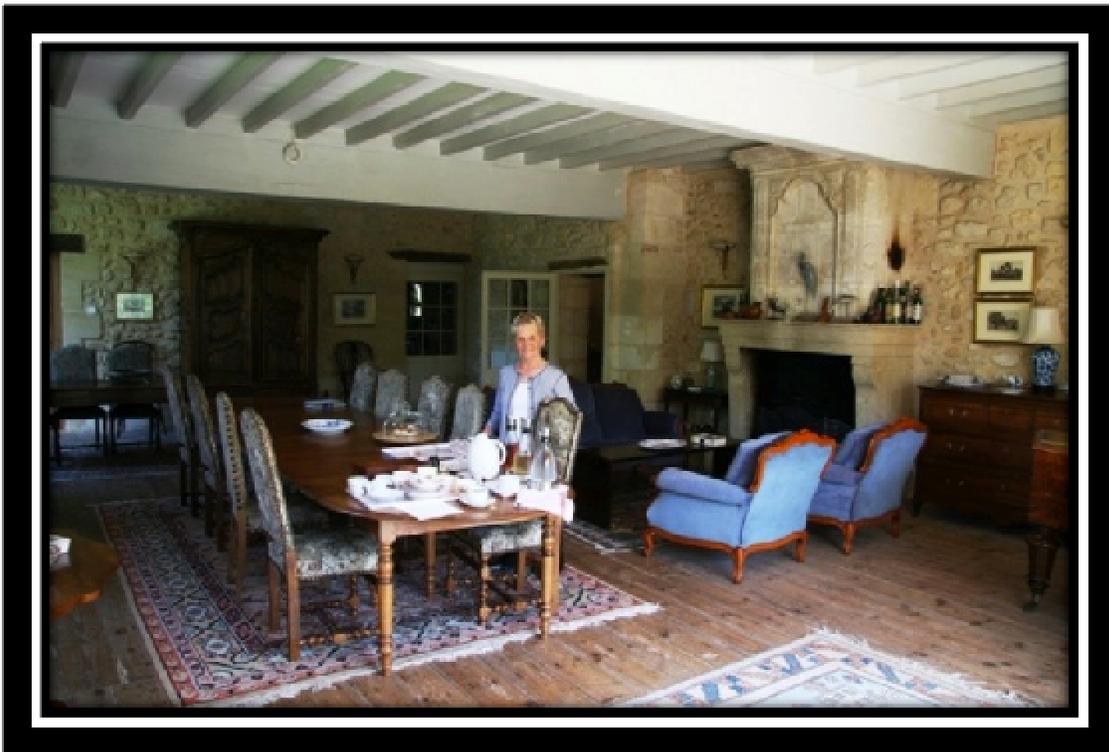
Like many B&B's, their accommodations started out as something else...usually barns or other outbuildings...and made their way slowly to housing humans instead of animals. In the process, walls were moved, doorways created and manure shoveled out.



Our spacious and beautifully decorated bedroom was once the local bakery. The other four large rooms have their own histories, probably related to storing hay and the like.



Expatriates from Great Britain, Maureen and Jon have poured their savings into turning this place, at the edge of famous vineyards, into a refuge. They've retained the English custom of afternoon tea that includes cookies, coffee, tea or two local wines. Our choices were vin blanc or rosé.



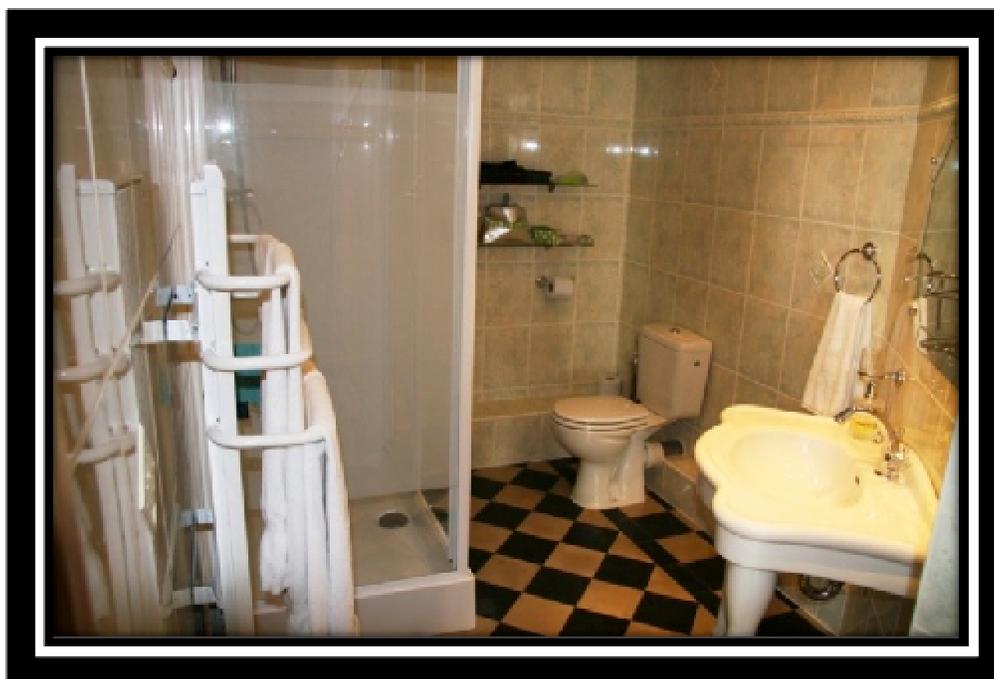
Tea brings together their guests from varied countries. That was the case today because a Wine Expo was taking place in central Bordeaux. We had the pleasure of sitting at Le Sejour's large table and learning about wine tastes from all over the world. Sylvia, of Italy, is a sommelier and says her country produces top quality wines and a lot of lower class ones. Christina, from Lithuania, says she wants to help wean her country from vodka to wine and has a long way to go.



Another young woman from China started a wine import business with her husband and intends to lead The Chinese away from the junk they drink now into something of better quality. They are all aiming at importing middle quality wines, a market not now being well served in their countries. For us, the amazing part is that we were speaking to people from all over the world about wine and using one language ...English.



*In the best B&B tradition, Maureen and Jon serve a hearty breakfast (included in the price) that includes breakfast meats, local cheeses, breads, biscuits, jams, jellies, coffee, teas and French bread toast ...mountains of toast prepared by Jon with a dedication I've rarely seen.



Here is the obligatory bathroom shot for those of you demanding news of en suite conditions. Our bath was completely modern, comfortably large and spotless. Every amenity was available including a small pack of Kleenex, something we had yet to see in France. Really helpful for those with a post-nasal drip.



If given enough notice, they'll prepare an evening meal that includes hors d'oeuvres, salad, main course, dessert and appropriate wines. Maureen is extremely gifted in the kitchen and prepared a frozen, blended tomato appetizer, salmon, rice pilaf, a little cheese soufflé with a red

pepper sauce and a chocolate/expresso ice cream dessert. I can't recall if Jon prepared toast but it is his specialty and difficult to stop him. We shared the evening with an American couple from South Carolina. They were good dinner companions and between the six of us there was never a lag in the conversation.



The desire to make their guests feel at home even extended to our MG. Jon has maintained ties to his native land by keeping a 60's era Jaguar XKE coupe in the garage. Without asking, he booted his Renault station wagon and insisted the MG spend the night in the company of another English car despite the class difference. We both wondered what they talked about when left alone.

It was Maureen who asked the question "What is the name of your MG?" We couldn't answer because it had never before been asked. "We just call it the MG," I answered lamely. "Well, it needs a proper name," she said. "In England all soft top cars are female and hard tops are male, so it's a girl" she announced. After some discussion we agreed on the name "Mighty Girl." Get it? MG = Mighty Girl...and so it will be from now on thanks to Maureen.



The morning we had to leave came too soon. Jon helped load Mighty Girl (really appreciated) while Maureen just stood by and wrung her hands in despair. We felt a bonding with them in such a short time and tried to memorialize the event with the usual photos. Jon refused to join us claiming an aversion to graven images. He would take the picture but not be in it. I accused him of being wanted in his homeland for a nefarious crime and not wanted to be recognized on someone's blog. He looked me in the eye, and with a sly smile, said, "Prove it."

If you want a crack at proving it you'll have to travel to Beau-Sejour and meet Maureen and Jon for yourselves. It's a journey well worth making.

Before we move on to our next destination it's time for an MG Update.

The clacking and thumping from the right front wheel was annoying and getting worse. Our hosts recommended a nearby garage that specialized in fixing old cars and, after confirming it in our MG Club de France magazine, we headed for Les Garage des Anciennes ...literally, the garage for old cars. It was like an auto museum for cars that weren't running. We felt very comfortable.



Patrick Champanard, the owner, was waiting for us and jumped right to the task. He shook the right front wheel and his head at the same time. "Par bon," he said. I guess "Not good" sounds the same in any language. We pulled the wheel and inspected the spline. It was worn which would cause it to shake back and forth on the spline and creating the noise we would occasionally hear.

Only then did I remember instructing the wire wheel repair shop in LA to put the spare on the ground to wear off the new tire paint. I'd forgotten to swap it back and now it was clearly evident why it was the spare. Voila, problem solved. Since we were on a roll Patrick attacked luggage rack problem with a drill and two screws. We will try the result today as we head for Cognac.

Louise and Ray