



IN PRAISE OF THE FRENCH WATERWAYS

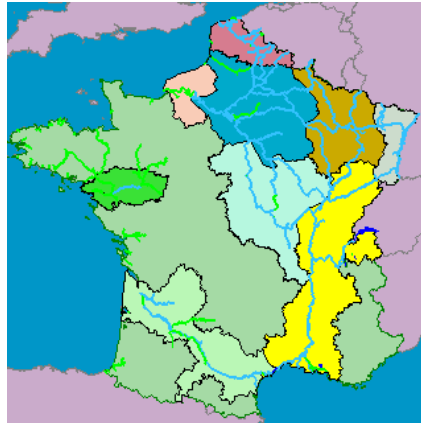
By Derek Banks

Boating and France go together like a crusty baguette and a bottle of wine. You can appreciate the one all the more because of the other! British tourists hiring a bed and breakfast barge for a week or two in Burgundy originally created this successful combination in around 1966 and since 1974 Go Barging has been one of the main players in this tiny industry, but concentrating on the upper end of hotel barging.

Barging is for families, and individuals, anyone can come along and the diversity of waterways means once you have barged, you will never look back!

France is definitely regarded as the most attractive barging destination in Western Europe. With its diverse geography and a network of more than 5,000 miles of rivers there is plenty of choice. Enthusiasts can tour many regions, from Normandy to Franche-Comte, from Picardy to Provence, from Burgundy to Brittany, from Bordeaux to the Ardennes and the network has been regularly modernized and extended.

The canal network started growing after the “Canal du Midi” opened in 1681 for commercial barges. And 300 years on, the BBC still found it fascinating enough to commission a 10 part series aboard our barge Anjodi with celebrity chef Rick Stein aboard. As many canals in France are hardly used for commerce at all nowadays, they are perfect for a relaxed floating holiday. France can still offer visitors a rare commodity – tiny hamlets and villages which have somehow escaped the modern world and kept in their own time-warp, where baskets of carrots and potatoes are sold at the locks with an honesty box for money, storks make their nests on the chimneys and oxen still pull the ploughs. Because the waterways often take you where no roads have ventured, you get a privileged insight into these sorts of places from your vessel.



The diversity of France’s 22 regions with their vastly differing regional accents, traditions and geography gives a real incentive to the curious traveller, who can compare the peaceful grazing Charolais cattle with the fiery black fighting bulls, or the motionless heron with the flamboyant pink flamingos, or lush orchards with the dry chalky vineyards.

Another positive feature of cruising is the pace. Averaging out at 8 miles per day, the value of your trip doubles when suddenly you find yourself enjoying the details of your surroundings, the sound of the water, the sight of birds swooping to snap fish from the river, the swishing of the willow branches against the barge as she sails underneath. This is inspirational – sketchbooks, which have lain dormant, for months are eagerly torn from the suitcase and cameras grabbed from the cabin to capture treasured moments.

Anyone who lives by the water appreciates the different pace of life which an evening stroll can offer, there's always something to see and France has the added attraction of being bathed in a special light which seems to bring out the full vibrancy of colour no matter what time of year. Discovering France from the water presents a myriad of possibilities, from a gastronomical viewpoint to one of climate, from a hotel barge or a self drive vessel, with friends, family or alone. Whatever you are looking for the French waterways have a solution. Just take the time.....

Life is uncomplicated on the water and you can soak up all there is to see instead of just snatching drops which is so often the case in today's frenzied times. If you feel like a bit of exercise you can jump off at a lock and walk or cycle alongside the barge on the towpath.

A historian's delight, the French waterways follow ancient trading routes started by the Phoenicians and Greeks along the protected lagoons and saltwater lakes of the South of France, carried on by the Romans up the major rivers such as the Rhone, Seine and Loire and along the medieval and industrial revolution canals mainly dug by captured armies. There always seems to be something of historical interest just a short walk away. The thousand or so stone locks themselves, which allow safe navigation along the rivers, and canals seem to have been individually designed with subtle differences to the historical engineer.



FIND FLOATING ROMANCE ON A EUROPEAN HONEYMOON CRUISE

European Waterways is launching a **honeymoon** barge charter programme with a choice of three romantic destinations, namely Venice, the Loire Valley and the Scottish Highlands.

Three of the more intimate vessels in the European Waterways fleet will be configured for an exclusive two-person charter. Couples have use of the best double suite and will enjoy fine onboard dining by candlelight after champagne cocktails, with one evening meal ashore at the best table in a Michelin-starred restaurant. Cruises include special features such as a serenaded gondola ride, balloon trip or luxury loch-side picnic with piper in discreet attendance. Daily excursions are tailored and can sometimes be made by bicycle or horse-drawn carriage. .

The Venice cruise onboard **La Dolce Vita** includes arrival by high-speed water taxi, secluded anchorages by remote lagoon islands and a trip up the River Brenta to Padua, the setting of two of Shakespeare's plays. There is also time for cappuccinos in St Mark's Square and 10 Bellini cocktails at the famous Harry's Bar.

The **Scottish Highlands** trip offers spectacular inland waterway scenery with the Scottish Highlander finding dramatic anchorages such as Urquhart Castle on mysterious Loch Ness. Guests can wander the heather-clad shores with only sheep for company or relax onboard with a "wee dram" of single malt whisky.

The Loire Valley cruise with its fairytale chateaux and tranquil vineyards sees the **Nymphaea** moor in picturesque settings by centuries-old watermills or under weeping willows.

Call **OUTDOOR TRAVEL Pty Ltd** for details of these 'honeymoon' options and the regular sailing schedules.



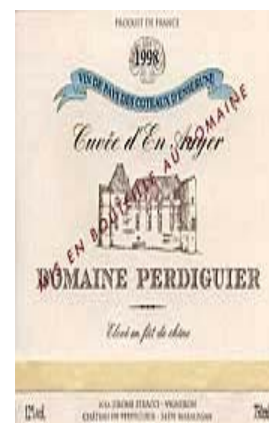
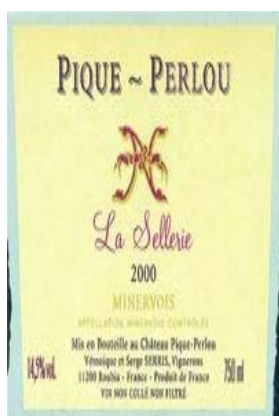
FRENCH WINES OF THE MIDI, LANGUEDOC ROUSSILLON

By Julian Allsop

Having briefly described the history of the wines of the Midi in an article about a year ago, I thought it was about time to mention some of the wines, which the region is now producing, and becoming more available worldwide.

Although many of the wines come from the region in which the Anjodi cruises, between Carcassonne and the etang de Thon, there are some from all over the Languedoc Roussillon region right down to the Spanish border, and all are regularly served to guests on the Anjodi. The generic appellation of Coteaux du Languedoc covers the whole area between Montpellier and Narbonne, and the wines can use all of the major regional grape varieties, which are for red and rose wines: Syrah, Grenache, Carignan, Mourvedre, and Cinsault. For white wines it is, Grenache Blanc, Clairette, Bourboulenc, Marsanne, Rousanne, Rolle and Picpoul.

On the whole the reds are full and fruity, while the whites are dry and aromatic, as a generic appellation there is much variety, but there are some up and coming village appellations which are allowed to add their name to the label. In particular: From around Montpellier, Pic St. Loup, quite soft and relatively light reds with a pronounced spiciness, goes well with duck breast. From the shores of the Etang de Thou near Marseillan there is Picpoul de Pinet, this is a crisp dry white made especially to go with the oysters that come from the Etang (salt water lagoon). We always serve this wine from a producer called Gaujal along with the local oysters, and it is the most consumed wine on the barge.



Then there is the charmingly named La Clape from the Mediterranean coast near Narbonne, we serve white and rose from a Domaine called Mire L'Etang, they are full yet crisp with good aromas and go very well with all kinds of lunchtime dishes and salads. North of Narbonne in the foothills of the Black Mountains are three regional appellations, from east to west they are Faugeres, St. Chinian, and Minervois. Faugeres has excellent rose, and some good white wines made from the Rousanne and Marsanne grapes of the Rhone which make full wines that are less dry than most Midi whites. St Chinian is a rugged area of narrow limestone gorges, and blends Grenache with Mourvedre and Syrah to make fruity wines with a herb flavour; a particularly well-balanced example we serve is from the Domaine du Servilliere.

The Minervois has become a true classic of the Midi wines; here the slopes have fewer ravines, and a good aspect, which has allowed the enthusiastic entrepreneurs of the new wave of midi winemakers to prosper. The heat and soil favours the use of the Syrah grape, and with a great many committed winemakers Minervois wines can boast a depth and complexity, which is harder to find among other appellations of the Languedoc.

A particular favourite on the Anjodi is a 50/50 Syrah/Carignan blend from Domaine Pique Perlou, often served with beef filet at Captains Dinner. This wine also goes very well with Cassoulet, the traditional dish from nearby Carcassonne. Moving back down, between the Minervois and Narbonne is the largest regional appellation of Corbieres, this is another area of distinct variety, while there are the flatter lower planes leading right down to the sea the area also has its own range of hills running through the middle. The wines from the planes tend to emphasise the full bodied and fruity Grenache flavours, while those from the hills tend to be lighter and more complex with the rustic flavours of the native Carignan variety more present. We serve the wonderfully herby Domaine Serres Mazard with lamb, and the classic hilltop Corbieres from Chateau La Voulte Gasparets is elegant enough to accompany the chef's most delicate dishes. Moving further west to the other side of Carcassonne is the Limoux region; this white wine appellation is the coolest of the region, and the only one to include the Chardonnay grape.

A well-known favourite is made by Sieur d'Arques, and is called Toques et Clochers, it is a chardonnay in the oaked burgundy style and can compete on a premier cru level with Bourgogne Blanc! We often serve this with scallops and the chefs best fish with sauce dishes. Sieur d'Arques also make the regions best Champagne style wine, Cremen de Limoux, and have been making it since 1544, before Dom Pérignon! We like to serve this wine to accompany deserts and celebrations.

The Midi also has an excellent selection of sweet wines to drink as aperitifs, with deserts, or even cheese. The Languedoc in the east is specialist of sweet white wines, mostly made from the Muscat grape. Lying to the east of Picpoul along the north shore of the etang is the famous Muscat de Frontignan. This fortified wine has a rich raisin flavour; it is sweet and succulent with a honeyed aftertaste. It must be served well chilled as an aperitif, or with a sweet or fruit based desert. Our favourite sweet white on the barge is a St. Jean de Minervois, from the steep rocky slopes in the northern Minervois; although still sweet the Minervois Muscat is crisper and zestier than the rich sweet Frontignan. The Domaine de Barroubio is honeyed with a fresh citrus finish; it goes wonderfully with lemon tart, chocolate, Roquefort cheese, and foie gras, (although not all at the same time)



Further to the west is the Roussillon, where the Grenache grapes are used to make sweet red wines. The simple Vin doux naturel Grenache is made through out the Roussillon. This basic and inexpensive wine is light, sweet and fruity it is very pleasant to drink chilled on its own as little "pick me up", or mixed into a fruit salad. Best of all though is the appellation of Banyuls, the most southerly of all French wines, found where the Pyrenees meet the sea on the Franco Spanish border. This is the only Midi wine to be granted a Grand Cru status; it is not dissimilar to port with deep rich flavours of dried fruit, caramel, chocolate, and even coffee. Served with biscuit or chocolate-based deserts it can be truly magical.

So what about the Vin de Pays for which the Midi is so well renowned; well they are all around but hard to describe, as there are no geographical or varietal limitations, and yes they can be as good and better than the appellation wines. Sometimes they can be found within the boundaries of an appellation, because the winemaker prefers the freedom to choose his own style or grape varieties to the prestige of an AOC. A good example of this is the Domaine de Gourgazaud situated at La Liviniere, the most highly regarded village in the Minervois appellation. They have forfeited their appellation status to satisfy the demand for single varietal wines. We regularly serve from their excellent range of Chardonnay, Sauvignon, and Viogner white wines. Then there are those who make wines outside of the appellation boundaries, the area around the town of Beziers has always made wines of such differing styles that allocating an AOC has been impossible.

The Chateau de Perdiguier, just north of Beziers enjoys the freedom of their Vin de Pays status to make truly original wines. They make a medium dry Chardonnay, which goes well with white meats, and is an excellent alternative to sweet wine for foie gras. They also make an oaked rose wine, which is an unbeatable

accompaniment to spicy foods. Their premium red wine uses the traditionally Bordeaux grapes of Cabernet Sauvignon, and Merlot to make an elegant wine we serve with game bird such as quail at Captain's Dinner. The last thing to mention is not to overlook the rose wines from the midi, I am not alone in preferring the rose of the Midi to the better known Provencal rose. They have enough structure and flavour to accompany lunchtime meals, and they go down particularly well under the local sun. As with all potentially excellent wine try it and see.

NEW RENAISSANCE LAUNCHED

European Waterways has a new all suite luxury hotel barge called Renaissance formerly Bonne Humeur.

About Renaissance ... For the 2008 season, Renaissance will sport her new European Waterways exterior livery, and feature a new refitted interior, which will delight the most discerning passenger. Improvements include a new galley, a re-floored forward deck with roof extension for dining al fresco, an expanded, "guest-friendly" wheelhouse, upgraded suites and an additional silent generator.

Cruise Route... In 2008, the well established cruise route will include cruising on the River Seine, the Canal de Loing and the ancient Canal du Briare with stops in the beautiful towns of Samois-sur-Seine, St Mammes, Nemours, Nargis and Rogny les Sept Ecluses.

In keeping with its tradition over the years, European Waterways has engaged an outstanding, experienced crew that will continue to keep Renaissance's guests cheering about the care and enthusiasm the crew bestow on their guests during a fabulous cruise week in the Upper Loire and Western Burgundy regions.

Renaissance accommodates up to eight passengers in ultimate luxury. The beautifully appointed lounge has comfortable seating. A cosy bar is stocked with your favourites, and bookshelves contain a Bose CD system, current books, up-to-date periodicals and magazines.

THE LOIRE FESTIVAL IN FRANCE



The launch of the all-suite luxury hotel barge Renaissance (ex Bonne Humeur) reminded me to look up what the status was of the beautiful embranchment canal, which leads down to Orleans and the Loire River. Shut for over 50 years the first lock nearest the river Loire has been restored at considerable expense by the French government and navigation is now possible up past Orleans. It's a big project though and with over 50 miles still to refurbish and numerous locks, the 2009 predicted opening is a bit optimistic probably.

At present every year there is a festival on the river Loire and the link www.festivaldeloivre.com: leads to it.

My first memories of the Loire were when I discovered some prints. Now long mislaid unfortunately, of three laden barges under full sail making slow passage up against the summer current between the sandbanks and rapids and under the 17th century bridge at Orleans. As the first barge went through the bridge it dropped its mast (which for the techie ones of you reading this, was in tabernacles, to allow a controlled descent of the 70-foot wooden spar. The following two vessels still under sail with a prevailing wind coming up astern, then pushed the front barge with mast lowered, through the bridge. In quick sequence the middle and third vessel followed, with then the first vessel raising its mast and sail, thus powering the trio though.

*Just two persons per vessel made this amazing feat of navigation between the years of about 1750 and 1940. I wish I had the picture and if any reader can find it on the Internet or on their wall, I would be happy to swap it for a bottle of single malt! When we moved Nymphaea to the real Loire Valley down near Tours, which sports more chateaux than you would care to shake a stick at further down stream. We considered running down river at half flood, we had more sense and in the end loaded her on a truck and covered the 200 kilometres by road, which merits another page in Lockkeeper sometime. **Derek Banks***



RICK STEIN'S FRENCH ODYSSEY

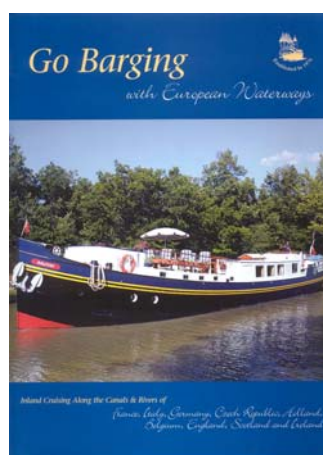
The DVD of the complete BBC series of [Rick Stein's French Odyssey](#) is now available. The series featured the famous British chef on board our barge Anjodi. Rick Stein's French Odyssey first aired in late summer, 2005 on BBC2 and then on Australia's 'Lifestyle Channel'. The series has been a great success and has received lots of positive reviews:

"... an example of a first-class BBC commission. Amiable, if a little wobbly, chef Stein sets off on a sumptuously filmed gourmet tour of France... everywhere he goes he demonstrates or explains the recipes he encounters and does with undisguised joy." **UK Observer**

"Stein pauses to stuff his face at every opportunity. Who wouldn't? So what if, in reality, few of us will attempt to cook this fantastic food ourselves? You can almost smell it wafting off the screen." **Daily Express**

"After stuffing his face in Vendee, Rick hops on a luxury barge to appreciate France's cuisine – not to mention gorgeous scenery and blue skies – at a pace more suited to leisurely digestion. And I'm not sure whether we're supposed to rush out and start cooking our chips in duck fat – as they do at Rick's favourite restaurant in Bordeaux – or just be sick with jealousy... You'll be glued." **Daily Mirror**

If you have any suggestions, feedback or bargaining stories to tell us, then call 1800 331 582. We'll be glad to hear from you and share your inputs in the lock-keeper.



Contact Outdoor Travel directly for more details, travel brochures and reservations:

- Travel Agent Reservations - Toll free: 1800 331 582 or (03) 57551743
- Fax (03) 57501020
- Email: info@outdoortravel.com.au
- Web: www.outdoortravel.com.au
- Mail: Outdoor Travel Pty Ltd, PO Box 286, Bright VIC 3741