

SLEEPING BEAUTY STIRS

Once regarded as a sleepy setting, Bordeaux is now revealing a sensual identity. Michael Raffael raises a glass to a city revelling in change

PHOTOGRAPHY BY IAN WALLACE



This page: get up close and personal with the region's wines at Ecole du Vin.
Opposite page: tram lines run towards the city's grand cathedral



'At night, the gentrified squares and backstreets of Saint Pierre and Saint Michel fill up. The city has 2,000 restaurants – too many say the locals. The good ones, though, are full'



Above, from left: Le Point Rouge's dramatic space; braised lamb at Mama Shelter; there's no shortage of options at Le Point Rouge

La *Belle Endormie*, or The Sleeping Beauty, is what the French call Bordeaux. The city has yawned, stretched and woken up as bright and honeyed as a glass of Château d'Yquem, its sweetest daughter. Its 18th-century architecture now scraped clean of grime helps justify its Unesco World Heritage status but its cosmetic makeover is only a small part of the story.

Over the past decade the city has reinvented itself. Views of the River Garonne shut off by decaying warehouses are now a memory. Trams, wide pedestrian avenues and a new TGV line that brings it within two hours of Paris have made it a destination for the *bon chic, bon genre* – Paris's Sloane Rangers – as well as tourists.

By day, these visitors hang out in front of Le Grand Theatre or window-shop along Cours de l'Intendance. They reinvigorate their weary feet in the Miroir d'Eau, a sheet of water framed by the Place de la Bourse, where backpackers pass for steamy adventurers and

newlyweds pose. At night, the gentrified squares and backstreets of the Saint Pierre and Saint Michel quarters fill up. The city has 2,000 restaurants – too many say the locals. The good ones, though, are full. Revellers pack out La Brasserie Bordelaise, where sides of beef and ham hang from rafters, and jostle for space in wine bars such as Aux Quatre Coins du Vin.

Beyond the historic centre, the river curves seawards. At the end of the Quai de Bacalan is La Cité du Vin. Not so much a city, it's a sinuous structure that was designed to reflect wine swirling in the bottom of a glass. When it opened in May last year, the press instantly compared it with Bilbao's Guggenheim museum.

Sylvie Cazes, who has overseen the project since it began in 2007, tells me it was conceived as a symbol of France's love affair with wine but it soon outgrew its original concept. 'When it was a port, Bordeaux attracted people' ➤

Travel information

Bordeaux is in south-west France. Flights from the UK take around 1.5 hours and the time is one hour ahead of GMT. Currency is the euro. In July, the average high temperature is 27C and the average low is 16C.

GETTING THERE

easyJet flies several times daily from London Gatwick to Bordeaux-Mérignac Airport from £77 return. easyjet.com

Eurostar offers services from London St Pancras to Bordeaux Saint-Jean, transferring in Paris from Gare du Nord to Montparnasse, from £178 return. eurostar.com

RESOURCES

Atout France is the official website for tourism. france.fr

CARBON COUNTING

To offset your carbon emissions when travelling to Bordeaux, visit climatecare.org and make a donation. Return flights from London produce 0.25 tonnes CO₂, meaning a cost to offset of £1.84.

Where to drink

Aux Quatre Coins du Vin The grand dame of the city's wine bars. You load a credit card on entry and can drink your way around 40 or so wines by small, medium or large glass. There are also hundreds of other wines from around the globe available by the bottle.

8 Rue de la Devise, 00 33 5 5734 3729, aux4coinsduvin.com

Le Bar à Vin It's a part of Maison du Vin, headquarters of the body governing wine in the region, but it also has a standalone bar. The entire Bordeaux range – reds, dry and sweet whites, rosés, claires and sparkling wines – can be sampled. There is tasting information to go with whatever you drink and the staff are knowledgeable.

3 Cours du 30 Juillet, 00 33 5 5600 4347, baravin.bordeaux.com

Le Point Rouge Luxury wine, cocktail bar and bistro that sets out to make a statement and delivers. It's more of a nightspot for fine drinking. Everything down to the wine glasses looks plush and glamorous. There's a surprising number of Japanese whiskies to choose from and they also do a mean range of delicious canapés to soak up all the alcohol. 1 Quai de Paludate, 00 33 5 5694 9440, pointrouge-bdx.com

From top: La Cité du
Vin's curvaceous
exterior; a ceiling
loaded with swim rings
at Mama Shelter
should keep your head
above water



GOURMET TRAVELLER BORDEAUX

Clockwise from top: the atmospheric Miroir d'Eau; Brasserie Bordelaise's timeless interior; dorade, onion and saffron purée at Le Chapon Fin; its chef Nicolas Nguyen; his Garigouette strawberry dessert



Where to eat

Prices are per person for three courses with wine, unless otherwise stated.

Belle Campagne Totally unpretentious, the dishes at this bistro in Saint Pierre are robust and well-flavoured, from pigeon or octopus down to an enormous bowl of delicious *frites* (chips) fried in duck fat. From £75.

Brasserie Bordelaise Charcuterie, steak and wine are the go-to choices here. For the more adventurous, there's lamprey stew. From £100.

50 Rue Saint-Rémi, 00 33 5 5787 1191, brasserie-bordelaise.fr

15 Rue des Bahutiers, 00 33 5 5681 1651, belle-campagne.fr

Le Chapon Fin Once one of the great provincial restaurants of France, this beautiful belle époque dining room is finding its feet again thanks to the

imaginative cooking of young chef Nicolas Nguyen. From £115.

5 Rue Montesquieu, 00 33 5 5679 1010, chapon-fin.com

Restaurant Le 7 On the top floor of La Cité du Vin, this bistro has great views of the River Garonne and cooking that's both clever and reliable – no mean feat given the numbers who want a table. From £75.

4 Esplanade de Pontac, 00 33 5 6431 0540, laciteduvin.com

La Tupina A Bordeaux institution, it serves up farmyard chickens and sausages spit-roasted over an open fire. The owner, Jean-Pierre Xiradakis, is a reputed local historian and author. His book *Le Pion de Bordeaux*, a series of walks through the old city, is a useful guide for Francophones.

From £120. 6 Rue Porte de la Monnaie, 00 33 5 5691 5637, latupina.com



from everywhere, especially the English and Dutch,' she says. 'It was an open city trading with the rest of the world through its wine. We realised that we had an opportunity to bring together and harmonise the universal heritage of wine.'

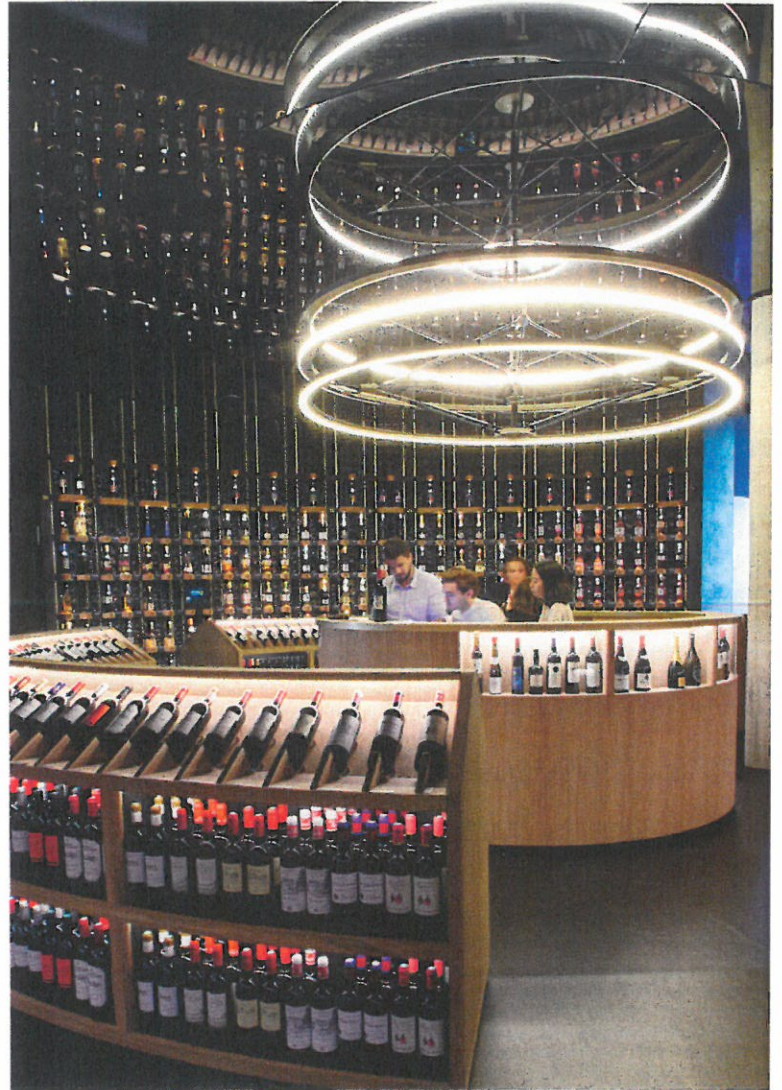
To think of it as a museum, she says, would be missing the point. 'It's a place where people see and experience what wine culture is. We want them to discover diverse forms of art and heritage related to wine with different themes that combine both art and science.'

Inside, the interactive exhibits encourage visitors to use all five senses in an environment that at times feels like the inside of a psychedelic whale. Sylvie tells me about her favourite part: 'I like the audiovisual production *The Banquet of Legends*. They have conversations about wine, so there's a funny dialogue between Napoleon and Churchill, for instance. Maria Callas, Mozart and Alfred Hitchcock are also there too.'

With wine so high on the city's agenda, food has often appeared to play second fiddle. In 2014, Joël Robuchon put his name over the door at La Grande Maison and it quickly earned two Michelin stars. But early last year the chef, who has more accolades to his name than any other, announced he was moving out. His partner issued a statement saying Bordeaux didn't have the economic potential for a stellar haute cuisine restaurant. Gordon Ramsay, with his Le Pressoir d'Argent outpost at the InterContinental, might challenge this. So too might chef Nicolas Magie of Le Saint James, a country house hotel in Bouliac, a village on the fringe of town.

Le Chapon Fin was one of the first 33 establishments to be awarded three stars by Michelin in 1933. Painter Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec dined here. As did Sarah Bernhardt and Curmouky (pseudonym of Edmond Maurice Sailland, who first identified and promoted regional cuisine). It has an extensive and envied wine cellar which you can take a tour of. These days at lunch one may expect to share the beautiful and elegant *fin-de-siècle* (turn-of-the-century) dining room with executives entertaining their secretaries and a couple with a French bulldog.

Its £29 menu may include a starter of cucumber, cockles, wild sorrel and black lemon followed by a pavé of turbot, saffron purée, pak choi and an onion crisp. It's the kind ———>



Clockwise from top: take your pick at La Cité du Vin; its Le 7 restaurant; tender rib of beef at Brasserie Bordelaise; its inviting exterior; wine as far as the eye can see; canelés are a Bordeaux speciality



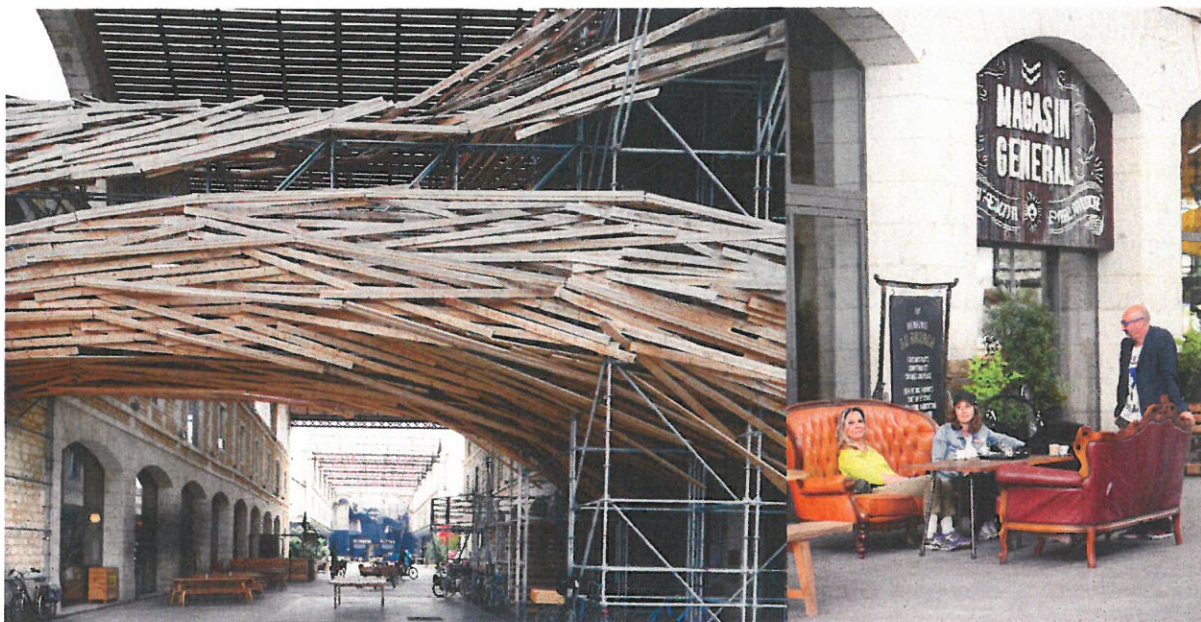
of smart bistronomique cooking that is flourishing. Stripped of frills passed off as gastronomy and meals puffed up into special events, dishes match wines instead of competing with them. It's a trick that Bordelais understand. Dine at Restaurant Le 7 on the top floor of La Cité du Vin, with an arcing view of the river, and you'll see *plats du jour* race out to the packed tables while customers queue for seats.

Fine dining doesn't hit the spot here. Drop by Jean-Pierre Xiradakis's La Tupina and the golden-skinned chickens revolving over the embers are more à la farmyard than *poulet de Bresse*. Chez Boulan twins oysters from the owner's Cap Ferret beds on the edge of the Médoc with ceviches of bass with moreish hazelnut butter or dorade and yuzu. At Brasserie Bordelaise, vegetables to go with the steaks arrive in beat-up aluminium pots.

Nor have all the chefs worked their way up through the ranks of

the brigade system. Clement Duport of Belle Campagne is a qualified psychologist. His bistro off Place Saint Pierre sources all its ingredients from within 250km of the front door. This includes duck fat from a Landes farmer, Salies-de-Béarn salt from the Pyrénées and other surprises such as tofu and soy sauce. It doesn't limit his inventiveness. Lentils and a carrot reduction pair with sturgeon (caviar is a booming local industry). Sea bream carpaccio is brushed with plum oil and spiced with smoked *piment d'Espelette* (Espelette pepper). Fried pigs' ears are tossed in garlic and parsley butter. He describes himself as cooking for *locavores*, a neologism equating roughly to people who want to eat natural food (organic is *passé*) with a minimal carbon footprint.

Six years ago there were no wine bars in Bordeaux, now there are dozens. They open – and close – in various —————>>



From left: an eclectic art installation at Darwin's public space; put your feet up and relax with a coffee outside its general store; with lentils, carrot and a honey reduction at Belle Campagne; treat yourself and stop off at Fromagerie Deruelle; some of its wide selection of French cheeses; owner and manager Elodie Deruelle

Places to visit

La Cité du Vin The most imaginative, entertaining and informative wine museum/happening/experience anywhere in the world. The Cave aux Vins, alone, deserves a visit. It will change any notions you may have about the wine world being fuddy-duddy and elitist. Covering more than 3,000sq m and with 20 immersive exhibitions, it's a great place to spend a day. 134-150 Quai de Bacalan, 00 33 5 5616 2020, lacityduvin.com

Darwin More than just an eco statement or amusement park for the alternative society, it's a central part of the modern-day Bordeaux experience. Bustling and egalitarian, especially at weekends, it's relaxed and classless. The home brew and coffee on sale at its general store pass muster too. 87 Quai des Queyries, 00 33 5 5677 5206, darwin.camp

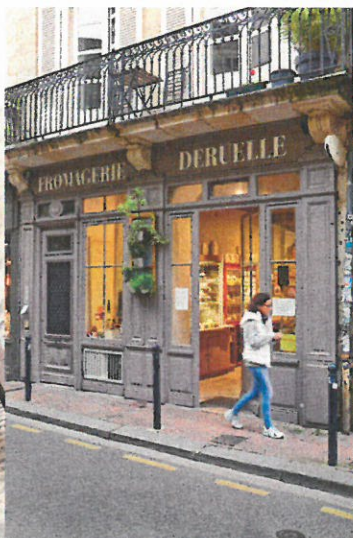
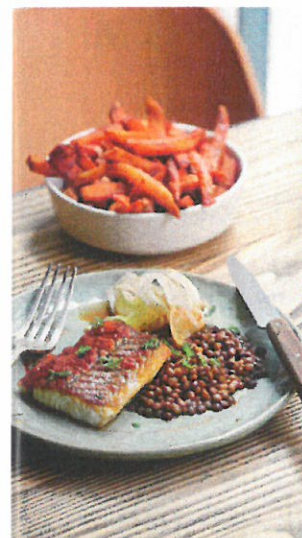
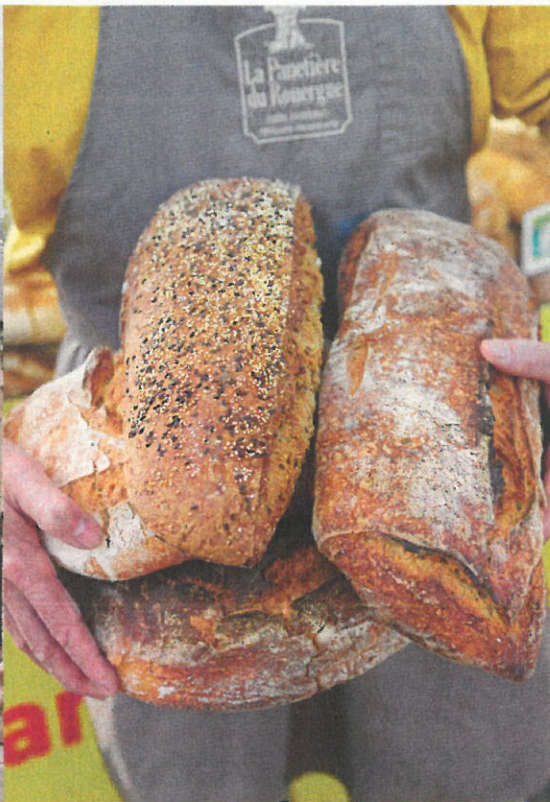
L'école de Cuisine Célia Girard, who tutors the cookery school attached to Le Saint James Hotel in Bouliac, is both an excellent cook and fine judge of character. She measures her courses against the ability of her charges to perfection. Children's classes are also available. 3 Place Camille Hostein, Bouliac, 00 33 5 5797 0600, saintjames-bouliac.com

Fromagerie Deruelle The Bordeaux region may not have any cheeses of its own but it can claim to have a superb cheese shop, elegantly painted in an oh-so-chic French grey. If you're thinking of a picnic, this is where you should stop off to stock up. 66 Rue du Pas-Saint-Georges, 00 33 5 5783 0415, quartiers.com/site/fromagerie-deruelle

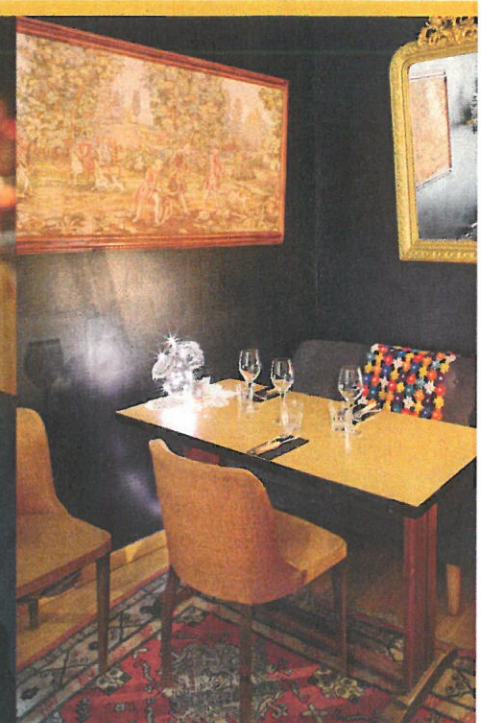
La Maison du Glacier The artisan ice cream maker is in stark contrast to rivals selling garish and artificially flavoured options. A great place to rest your feet. 1 Place Saint-Pierre, 00 33 6 3545 5007

Marché de Chartrons Along the quays, the open-air Sunday market is a riot of colours and smells. Expect food, furniture, flowers, handicrafts and, of course, plenty of tastings. 2 Rue Sicard, 7am-3pm, bordeaux.fr

Vieux Lormont Buy a tram pass at infotbm.com (the easiest way to see the city) and you can use it on the ferry that goes from the Bourse to Vieux Lormont, a 30-minute boat ride away. It's a pretty village with streets winding between alleys, neo-gothic chapels, a nature park and 15th-century whitewashed houses. The real attraction, though, is the trip itself.



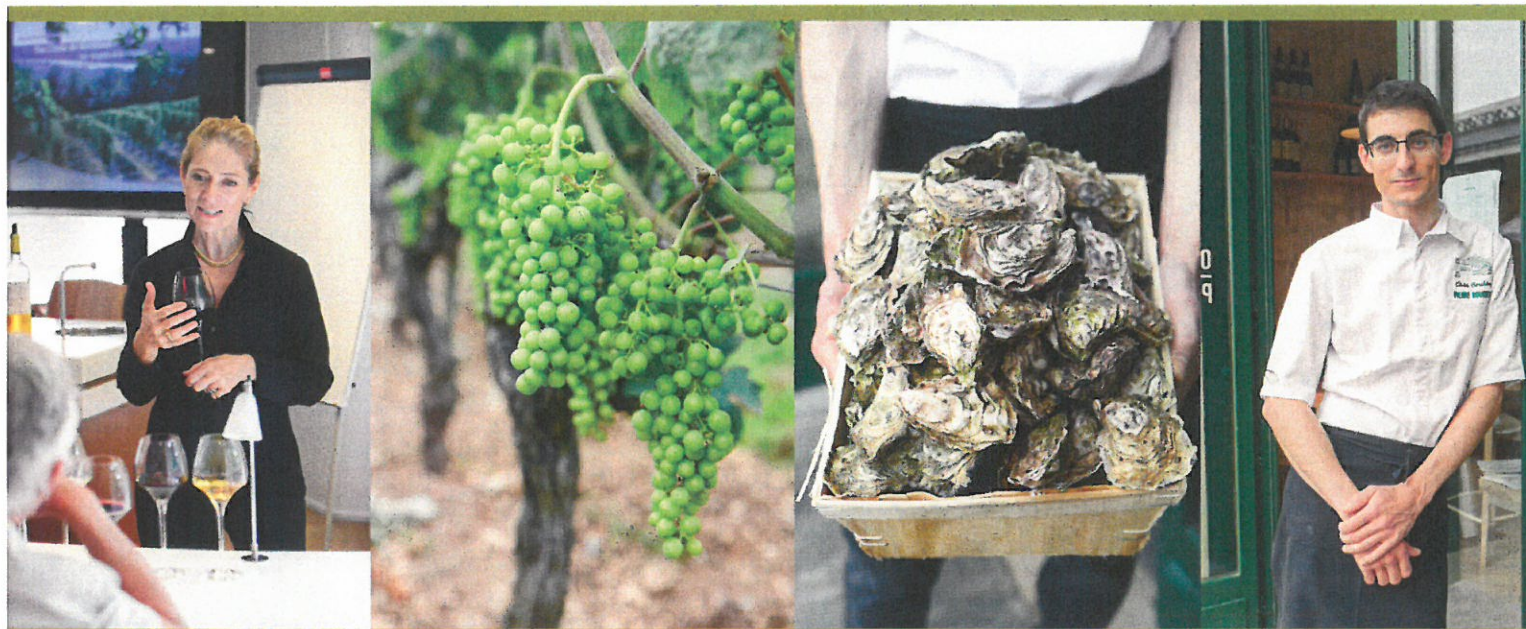
Above, from left: Place de la Bourse fountain; there's plenty of fresh bread to sink your teeth into; Pont de Pierre connects the city's left and right banks. Below, from left: industrial interiors at Darwin; Le Point Rouge's sommelier Alexander Morin; a quiet corner at Belle Campagne





Opposite page, clockwise from top left: immerse yourself in the history and science of wine at La Cité du Vin; quirky styling at Belle Campagne; the city's sleek trams; simple yet elegant interiors at Le Saint James; its striking exterior

Above, from left: the city has turned to cycling; Le Saint James chef Nicolas Magie; his airy restaurant; artful egg and prawns



Above, from left: Ecole du Vin lecturer Wendy Narby; young grapes; fresh oysters are a signature dish at Chez Boulan; its chef Pierre Rousseau

'Darwin, a complex of reclaimed warehouses, has evolved into a sprawling green space that's the antithesis of the polished limestone architecture on the other riverbank.'

shapes, colours and sizes. At a grassroots level, there's Ecole du Vin. Run by the CIVB, the body promoting the region's wines, it supplies information and tasting notes alongside glasses from a regularly changing list. It's a reminder that there are more than 7,000 producers to contrast with the crus classés that act as flagships.

Aux Quatre Coins du Vin sets the benchmark by which others rate themselves. It sells all the famous names but its USP is its 'credit card' system. At the bar, customers set the amount they want to spend. Armed with plastic, they can then help themselves to upwards of 40 wines in 30ml, 60ml and 120ml measures. A 30ml taster can cost little more than 85p. Aside from self-service, the list of bottles runs to hundreds from around the world.

Le Point Rouge has the trappings of an oligarch's speakeasy, including a good copy of Velasquez's raucous 1628 painting *Los Borrachos* that was bought in Cuba by the bar's owner, Claude Martignoles. It's a wine bar, cocktail bar and bistro merged into one. Everything here is geared to showmanship: carved ice blocks in glasses so slender that the stems wobble, rare spirits and cocktails ranging from 18th-century punches to porn star martinis. Even the sommelier/manager looks as though he's fresh off a Hollywood set.

In total contrast, over the river you'll find Darwin, a complex of reclaimed, disintegrating warehouses that were built to supply the army in the 1850s. It has evolved into a sprawling green space that's the antithesis of the polished limestone architecture on the other riverbank. Here you can have an artisan beer (£3) that matches the mood of youthful Bordeaux. Its name even carries an eco-warrior's message: Adapt to Survive. Its Magasin Général (general store) is part canteen, supermarket, bakery and coffee roaster. The Clubhouse, a sprawling hangar of bric-à-brac, isn't a bar in the Point Rouge sense. It's packed with Bordelais just hanging out.

Before its current incarnation, the site supplied free wall space for urban graffiti artists. Their works cover the brickwork. One recovered shed has morphed into a vast skate park and another into a roller-hockey pitch. Live bands draw crowds. A bike repair shop reflects the mood of a city that's turning its back on cars – you won't find a traffic jam inside Bordeaux; they're confined to its outskirts.

Spend a night at Le Saint James in Bouliac and there may be a Harley-Davidson next to the bed. It's a curious design choice that's unlike the usual Napoleon III fittings most Relais & Chateaux hotels sport. Eccentric, perhaps, but it —————>>



Where to stay

La Cour Carrée It's a cosy but smart little boutique hotel in a quiet side street. The building is a restored 18th-century townhouse and the owners, gifted amateur hoteliers, are welcoming. Doubles from £91, excluding breakfast. *5 Rue de Lurbe, 00 33 5 5735 0000, lacourcarree.com*

Maison Fredon An offshoot of restaurant La Tupina, it's a lovingly decorated, imaginatively quirky guest house with five rooms that have enough fittings, artwork and decoration to give kitsch a good name. *5 Rue Porte de La Monnaie, 00 33 5 5691 5637, latupina.com*

Mama Shelter The rooms by designer Philippe Starck are functional city centre fare but his take on the downstairs bar and restaurant is delightfully kooky. Expect inflatable plastic swim rings hanging from the ceiling complemented by cocktails and a menu designed by culinary maestro Guy Savoy. Doubles from £69, excluding breakfast. *19 Rue Poquelin Moliere, 00 33 5 5730 4545, mamashelter.com/bordeaux*

Le Saint James Situated on a hill above the city, its modern rooms have been designed to show off the magnificent view. This includes a small vineyard of merlot in lieu of a front garden. The glass-fronted dining room plays the same card. At night, for a touch of theatre, the maitre d' dims the lights for one minute. Sommelier Richard Bernard puts together immaculate wine pairings with the Michelin-starred cuisine. Doubles from £165, excluding breakfast. *3 Place Camille Hostein, Bouliac 33270, 00 33 5 5797 0600, saintjames-bouliac.com*

Seeko'o Design Hotel Comfortable modern designer hotel on the waterfront. It's only a short walk from La Cité du Vin. Parking in Bordeaux is at a premium and the hotel's garage could be a solution if you're mobile. There are 45 loft-style open-plan rooms, one of which boasts a round bed. Doubles from £126, excluding breakfast. *54 Quai de Bacalan, 00 33 5 5639 0707, seekoo-hotel.com*





'An island surrounded by the Médoc, Saint-Emilion, Graves, Pomerol and Pessac-Leognan, the city hasn't let the famous vineyards go to its head.'

makes a point. The current French buzzword *ludique* (playful) sums it up. Grandeur and formality don't cut it anymore.

It may be that the great names – Mouton Rothschild, Margaux, Pétrus, Palmer – fetch phenomenal prices around the globe but here on the ground, within a few miles of their domains, they might be from another planet to all but a handful of the very rich.

The hotel's sommelier, Richard Bernard, an ex-world champion, knows them well, of course. Though when I ask him what bottle of wine he would take to a desert island, it isn't one of these.

'If I had one bottle to take with me, I wouldn't go for a château with a mythical reputation,' he says. 'It would be more about pleasure, hopes and dreams. It would be one that touches my memories of happy times, my emotions. I'd go to the Right Bank to an appellation that's not well-known, Côtes de Castillon Domaine de l'A. It's owned by Stéphane and Christine Derenoncourt. They travel the world as consultants and act for people such as Francis Ford Coppola. It's their own property and the wine reflects merlot beautifully: balanced, just like themselves.'

An island surrounded by the Médoc, Saint-Emilion, Graves, Pomerol and Pessac-Leognan, the city hasn't let the famous vineyards go to its head. Elodie Deruelle's cheese shop in the Rue des Mousquetaires typifies the spirit that's taken over. 'Many of my customers are under 20,' she says. 'They buy little but they want quality and not the *cochonneries* (muck) sold by the supermarkets.'

Bordeaux is careful, provincial and endowed with good taste. It hasn't succumbed to the hype associated with the select few vineyards that once made its reputation and is all the better for it. □

Michael Raffael and Ian Wallace travelled to Bordeaux courtesy of Atout France, the official website for travelling in France. france.fr

Clockwise from top left: La Tupina's rustic open kitchen; Le Saint James is lined with art; Bordeaux's glorious buildings; the modern bar at Le Saint James; a room at La Cour Carrée; funky Mama Shelter; cooking lunch at Le 7 Restaurant; its chefs at work

