

the magazine for english speaking residents & visitors to southwest france

Make the most of summer in Languedoc-Roussillon with our 'places to get pampered', BBQ recipes, wine tasting suggestions and more!

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Au revoir...

I know that this might seem a strange greeting but its our way of letting you know that sadly, this is the last issue of accents for a while.

We are a small but perfectly formed team here and while this is undoubtedly one of the strengths of accents, over the last few months it has also been a challenge for us. Those of you that know us personally may be aware that Paul and I have been coping with various illnesses in the family and this has made it impossible to give accents the time and effort it needs and deserves in order to continue successfully. Our personal circumstances are unlikely to change in the short-term, so as a team we have decided that it is best to stop production for the time being with a view to starting again once things are more settled.

We have thoroughly enjoyed producing accents over the last year or so. It has been a great pleasure to get out and about in the Languedoc-Roussillon region and see so many places and meet so many people that we wouldn't otherwise have done. Our grateful thanks also go to our advertisers, contributors and readers for their support and without whom we wouldn't have had a magazine at all.

Despite this being our last issue for now, our ever-reliable team of contributors have come up with some great ideas for enjoying summer throughout Languedoc-Roussillon. You can read Louise Sayer's suggestions on 'places to get pampered' on pages 4 and 5 and another Louise - Louise Hurren writes about five fantastic vineyards to be found within a stones throw of each other in Jonquières in the Hérault. On a more practical note, Charles Purdy explains how to stop the banks cashing in on your overseas money transfers on page 12 and as ever, Jane Buckle - this time quite literally - has the last word on page 14.

On behalf of the team, I wish you a very happy summer and look forward to being back in print again in the not too distant future.

With best wishes

Alison
Editor



The Team: *Editor & Publisher:* Alison Tully
Design & Production: Kim Lower
Sales & Distribution: Paul Tully

Contributors: Louise Sayers, Louise Hurren, Deborah Alexander, Elizabeth Woolley, Charles Purdy, Gill Pound and Jane Buckle.

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Production: production@accents-southwest.com

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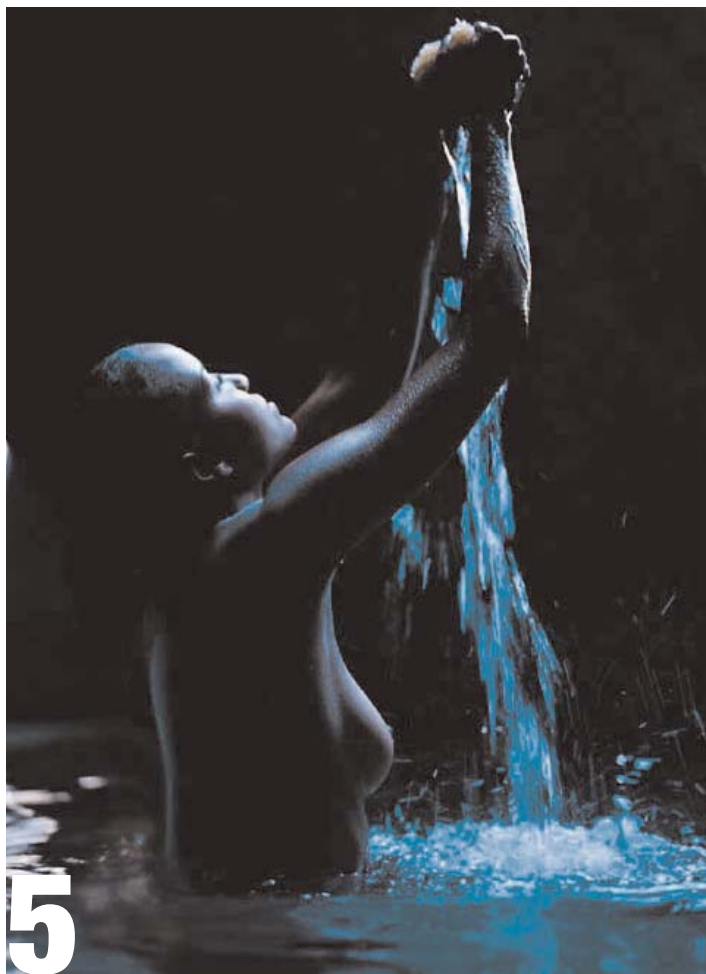
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Cover photograph courtesy of Louise Hurren

CHATEAU L'HOSPITALET COMPETITION WINNER

Congratulations to Jeanne Chantebel, the winner of the Chateau L'Hospitalet competition featured in the May/June 2010 issue of accents southwest. Her prize is a jazz dinner and overnight stay for two people at Chateau L'Hospitalet near Narbonne Plage.



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Give Me Five...places to get pampered

Words & pictures: Louise Sayers

Go on, treat yourself to a day of pampering – you deserve it!

Hamмам at Carine Casanova, Perpignan

If you've never tried a hammam, I strongly recommend that you give it a go. It's the perfect preparation for a summer beach body and Carine Casanova has created a fabulously relaxing space in the basement of her hairdressing salon (great haircuts here too, ladies and gents) where you will be pampered to within an inch of your life.

The deal is this: you get covered all over with a paste prepared from bay leaves and then are left to cook in the steam room for 20 minutes or so. Once the paste has done its work and drawn all the impurities out of your skin, you are showered down and then rubbed briskly all over to exfoliate. I think I shed about five layers of skin during this process! After a few minutes relaxation time with a cup of green tea and some chill out music, the treatment is finished off with a fabulous massage. I came out feeling like I was floating on air and with baby soft skin.

The salon is right in the middle of Perpignan in rue de la Fusterie, just off the place de la République. See www.carine-casanova.com for more information.

The thermal spa at Amélie-les-Bains

The spa at Amélie-les-Bains dates back to Roman times so maybe there really is something in the water. The French certainly think so, with many visitors to the spa in Amélie coming for 3 week cures thermales prescribed by doctors to treat respiratory disorders and paid for by the state. There are two parts to the Amélie spa: les Thermes Romains, a listed building on the same site as the original Roman baths, and les Thermes Mondony, a more contemporary building with equipment. The former is the more exclusive and expensive of the two, levying a supplementary charge, which is not covered by the state, clearly designed to keep the riff raff out!

Here's the (very basic) science: the water, which is delivered to the spa via eleven natural hot springs, is rich in sulphur, which has analgesic and anti-inflammatory properties, and silica, alleged to target the mucous membranes of the respiratory system.

Fortunately for us, the spa now opens its doors to those who want to benefit from these alleged medicinal properties without a doctor's prescription, and is working hard to promote this side of the business.

They offer a basic Aqua Relax package for just 20 euros, which includes a session in the pool with aqua jet massage, followed by a mud bath. There are other packages with different options to choose from including under shower massage, inhalation of steam from the spring water and other unusual water-based treatments!



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66110 Amélie les Bains

Thalassol Institute in Port Barcarès

Those pioneering Romans also came to Le Barcarès, although Thalassotherapy came along significantly later in the early 19th century and the Thalassol centre in Port Barcarès has been around a mere 25 years! It is located between the Salses saltwater lagoon and the Mediterranean Sea in Port Barcarès.

Thalassotherapy literally means 'treatment by the sea' and the term covers a variety of treatments based on seawater, seaweed and other stuff from the sea including algae, mud and sand. You'll be pleased to know that all these are cleaned and purified before use!

While the Thalassol centre originated as a rehabilitation centre it is now also targeting the spa crowd and the jury is out as to whether these treatments have any medical benefits. There is no proven scientific evidence that Thalassotherapy works, however, anecdotal evidence suggests that the benefits are wide ranging from alleviating circulatory and respiratory problems to boosting the immune system and, listen up ladies, reducing cellulite.

One thing is for sure, they make you feel good and relieve stress and I'm all for that! There are loads of treatments to choose from at Le Barcarès including aqua gym sessions where you work out gently in the water while water jets target different muscle groups and a walking pool where you are immersed in sea water which alternates between hot and cold as you wade through – good for circulation apparently! There are other less strenuous options too from mud wraps to detoxifying algae baths.

The thermal baths at Saint-Thomas-les-Bains

On a budget? You can still feel pampered with a visit to the thermal baths at Saint Thomas, which costs just 5 euros in high season or 4.50 euros in low season. The water is alleged to have healing and pain relieving qualities (it contains sulphur, fluoride and silica) and there can be few more scenic places to relax. A stone amphitheatre surrounds the two pools and the whole site is in an incredible setting with views of the mountain. It's a fabulous end to a day's skiing in nearby Les Angles and Font Romeu.

The obligatory range of beauty and massage therapies is also on offer at the attached beauty centre, as well as a hammam, sauna, solarium and jacuzzi.

The baths are closed during June (as I write this) for a bit of a refurb – let's hope they make a few improvements to the changing rooms, which are always a bit crowded and badly laid out. And a word of warning to you fellas – bring your Speedos as swimming shorts are strictly forbidden (as in all French public pools – for hygiene reasons, apparently!).

Louise Sayers runs Med and Mountain, who offer property for sale as well as translation and interpreting services, language assistance and ad hoc PA services for individuals and small businesses. See www.medandmountain.com email info@medandmountain.com or call 04 68 56 54 22

Calicéo in Saleilles

Located just off the main road from Perpignan to Argelès on the outskirts of the village of Saleilles, this is a veritable haven of relaxation to soothe your weary bones. An attractive circular building made from natural materials including glass, marble, wood and stone houses five pools heated to an average of 33°C with all manner of watery novelties including jacuzzis, massaging jets, fountains, geysers and cascades. There are also saunas and steam rooms to relax in – no chatting allowed here though, I was severely chastised! With pools both inside and out you can let the current drag you outside to bathe under a blue sky, which feels wonderfully decadent in winter.

There is also a spa attached offering a wide range of treatments and massages although I felt pampered enough after a couple of hours of being pummelled by water jets in the main pool (chatting permitted here). At 14 euros for two hours, I think this is great value. You can also buy a 35 euro forfait, which gives you 300 minutes of time, to be used as, and when you like, so you can nip in for a quick half hour soak whenever the mood takes you.



Mas de l'Écriture: Jewel of Jonquieres

Words and photos:
Louise Hurren

The little village of Jonquières is tucked away in the top corner of the Hérault département, a short drive north-west of Montpellier. A modest, perfectly pleasant sort of place, what sets Jonquières apart is its concentration of world-class, award-winning wineries. There are no less than five in and around the village itself, within walking distance of each other, and with others dotted around in the outlying areas, this is the perfect destination for a great day's wine tasting.

If La Pèira en Damaisela, Château de Jonquières, Cal Demoura and Mas Jullien are all worthy of a visit, it's their neighbour, Le Mas de l'Écriture, which you can't miss – quite literally, as the name of the domaine is painted in metre-high letters on the side of the winery. Drive into the village, turn right and you arrive at a tiny roundabout on the outskirts; take the third exit and there on the right, standing quietly amongst the vines, is a modern pink building that proudly proclaims its name.



Come up the vine-flanked drive, park outside the winery and there is more sign-writing: painted boldly on the walls of the winery entrance are quotations from French poet and Résistance activist René Char (owner-winemaker Pascal Fulla has a penchant for poetry and the philosophical side of life).

A decade ago, there was nothing here but an ancient stone-built shelter – known in French as a mazet – set amongst the vines, bearing witness to a time when labour was manual and horses were used for ploughing. The humble structure provided shelter from the searing sun and water from its own small well (Pascal will happily show the mazet to visitors keen to step back in time).

Pascal came to the wine business in 1999, ditching a background in law and a senior management position in a 'carpe diem' kind of phase. He decided to carve out a new career in Coteaux du Languedoc country, within the highly-prized Terrasses du Larzac appellation. The soil here is stony, sandy-clay beneath Jurassic limestone, and characterized by the exceptional quality of its drainage, which forces the vines to put down deep roots and provides the potential to make wines with a distinct sense of place.

The domaine sits at the foot of the Larzac plateau, and it is not unusual to find fossilized oysters and mussels amongst the vines –

witness to a time when the waters of the Mediterranean washed over this land.

Pascal built Le Mas de l'Écriture from scratch, swapping the boardroom for the barrel cellar and getting some dirt under his fingernails while fulfilling a long-held dream. Once the modern, pristine pink winery and barrel chai (complete with temperature and humidity controls) were ready, he set about making precisely-crafted wines of great elegance and balance.

His unique approach is all about drilling down to the detail. Each plot of vines is harvested, vinified and aged separately; it is only at the end of this process that Pascal blends his wines. The estate boasts its very own weather station, with the climatic data run through a software programme to decide how best to anticipate vine diseases, which means the use of treatment products is kept to the absolute minimum.

As visitors will notice, the Mistral and Tramontane blow regularly across the Jonquières area, but these winds are valuable allies, keeping the vines dry and disease-free (Pascal set out on the three-year path to Ecocert-status in March 2009, so 2011 will be his first officially organic vintage).



Pascal Fulla

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Le Mas de l'Écriture is a tightly-run ship. Having just 10, carefully-tended hectares under vine allows the team to apply their highly-focused approach. To achieve intense fruit flavours and Terrasses du Larzac typicity, vine yields are kept ultra-low (lower yields mean better quality; the vines at Le Mas de l'Écriture are farmed so they only produce 18-to-22 hectolitres per hectare, compared to the officially-allowed ratio within the Terrasses du Larzac appellation of 50 hl/ha).

As befits a boutique winery, the result is a small but perfectly-formed range. Le Mas de l'Écriture makes just three red wines – l'Émotion, Les Pensées and L'Écriture – which are joined in outstanding years by a fourth – the one-off, Syrah-dominant Message Personnel. A rosé occasionally complements the range, and all can be bought direct from the domaine (prices range from 10 to 31 euros).

With ten harvests under his belt, his wines gracing the lists of some of the world's very best restaurants and rave reviews from international wine writers including Robert Parker and Jancis Robinson, it would seem that Pascal has made his vision reality.

Wine enthusiasts keen to taste the fruit of his labours should call ahead to arrange an appointment at this must-see estate. After a visit and tasting, the highly-acclaimed La Terrasse du Mimosa (<http://laterrassedumimosa.blogspot.com/>) wine bar-bistrot in neighbouring Montpeyroux is an excellent spot for lunch or supper (their list of local wines is second-to-none). Want to linger a little longer? The Château de Jonquières offers bed and breakfast from 85 euros per night.

Le Mas de l'Écriture wines can be enjoyed at many fine dining destinations in south-west France, including:

- La Terrasse du Mimosa (Montpeyroux)
- Le Jardin des Sens (Montpellier)
- L'Auberge du Vieux Puits (Fontjoncouse)
- Alexandre (Nîmes-Garons)
- Les Demeures du Ranquet (Tornac)
- La Chassagnette (Arles)
- Chez Boris (Montpellier)
- Le Prana (Balaruc Les Bains)
- Le Paris Méditerranée (Sète)
- Quai 17 (Sète)
- Le Bistrot du Port (Sète)
- L'AmériK Club (Sète)
- La Ola (Sète)
- Le Kinoa (Montpellier)
- Alexandre (La Grande Motte)
- La Compagnie des Comptoirs (Montpellier)
- Cellier Morel-Maison de la Lozère (Montpellier)
- La Réserve Rimbaud (Montpellier)
- Le Vieux Four (Montpellier)



Visit the Famous Five

Always phone ahead before visiting

Le Mas de l'Écriture

06 80 15 57 72

www.masdelecriture.fr

La Peira

04 67 44 79 48

www.lapeira.wordpress.com

Cal Demoura

04 67 44 70 82

www.caldemoura.com

Mas Jullien

04 67 96 04

masjullien@free.fr

Château de Jonquières

04 67 96 62 58

www.chateau-jonquieres.com



Getting here

From Montpellier to Jonquières is a 42-kilometre drive. Head out of town on the N109/E11 towards Millau, then take the A750/E11, coming off at exit 57 (Montpeyroux).

At the roundabout take the D619 to St Félix de Lodez, then follow signs to Jonquières (journey time approx. 40 minutes)

Louise Hurren provides PR and copywriting services to French companies, mainly in the wine sector, who are looking to raise their profile in the UK.

You can contact her on 06 17 66 92 53 or email her at louisehurren@wanadoo.fr

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a true Catalan Aperitif

Words and photos:
Elizabeth Woolley

On a rainy afternoon a visit well worth making is to the town of Thuir near Perpignan, to discover the secrets behind Byrrh, a French aperitif created by Simon Violet in 1886.

Byrrh is a blend of red wine and quinine and was a popular French aperitif in the early twentieth century through its marketing and reputation as a 'hygienic drink'.

The doors to the caves in Thuir have been open since in 1892 and are still open today welcoming 60,000 visitors a year. The Byrrh family business was acquired in 1977 by Pernod-Ricard, who still use the Thuir caves today.

The tour itself allows you to discover the process of Byrrh from the spices to the aging process to the spectacular ateliers designed by Gustave Eiffel. One remarkable aspect of the tour is the visit to the world's largest oak vat – a truly impressive sight! The tour is followed by a tasting of the different aperitifs.

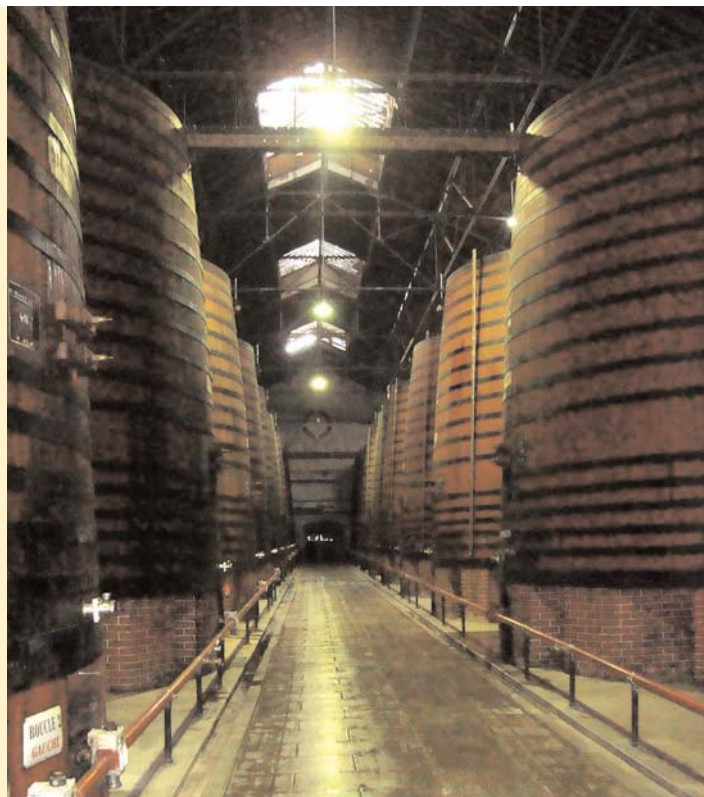
An afternoon well spent surrounded by the secrets of the region's traditional aperitif.

The Caves Byrrh can be found at 6 Boulevard Violet, 66301 THUIR.

Tel: 04 68 53 05 42

Web: www.byrrh.com

Tours and visits run between 10.00 and 11.45 hours and 14.00 and 18.45 hours during the months of July and August.



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this radiant nectar...

By Deborah Alexander

For me, the 'radiant nectar', described by the poet Jean Camp, has to be a chilled Muscat, its honeyed reflections illuminated by the Languedoc sun. For others, it might be a glowing, red Fitou, or a sparkling Blanquette de Limoux that lights their fire. But, I think we can all agree that, if you're looking for the home of wine, you've come to the right place. The Languedoc-Roussillon is essentially a south-facing suntrap adorned with vines from its mountains to its coastline, or, according to Larousse, 'a vast, crescent-shaped amphitheatre facing the sea'. Sounds perfect, doesn't it? But many a drama has been played out in this arena in order to bring the wine to your table.

Overproduction, leading almost inevitably to loss of quality. This has to stop! Dig up the inferior vines and focus on the few that do make the grade. Recent news? No, this is AD 92. The Languedoc area is governed by the Roman emperor Domitian, who issues a decree to focus on quality rather than quantity. So, old news, new news.

Yet one can see how the situation develops. A sunny region, which vines have made their natural home since before Greek and Roman times. Who wouldn't see the opportunity for a revenue from winemaking? It would be like asking a prospector in the Gold Rush to throw away their sieve and shovel and leave the golden nuggets for someone else to find. This problem continues through to today, with the EU offering grants for those willing to grub up their lower-quality vines. When you consider that, as recently as 2001, this area was producing more wine than the whole of the United States, you can see that there is a long way to go.

Overproduction has not been the only stumbling block. Back in the 1800s the arrival of a small, yellow aphid (phylloxera) caused utter devastation in this area. Replanting with more resistant varieties proved the solution, but not until untold damage and loss of revenue had occurred. By the 1900s, the wine-production business was once again booming, and before long, the age-old problem had returned. Mass production, with little or no regulation of winemaking practices. Anything goes... diluting wine to make it go further, adding sugar to make the taste acceptable. More conscientious winegrowers attempted to bring this to the notice of the powers-that-be in Paris and, before you know it, you have a full-scale revolt in the South. Did it work? Change certainly came about but sadly it took numerous violent demonstrations, including several deaths, to achieve this aim.

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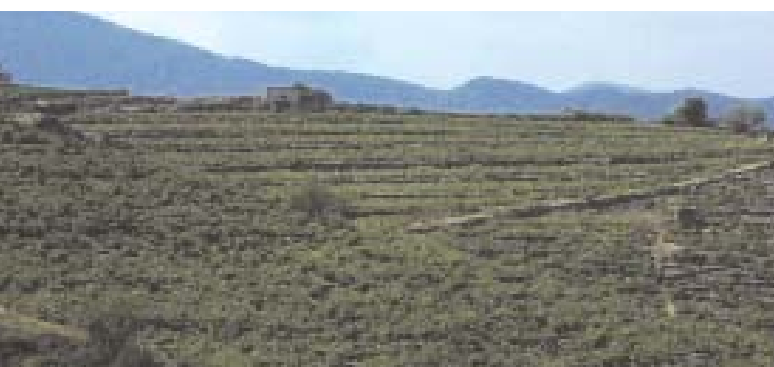
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Change came in the form of the AOC (appellation origine contrôlée) labelling we know today. Not only labelling the wine according to its grape type but also identifying its origins. But change, by its very definition, has no end. Wines from the New World, South Africa, Argentina and New Zealand, for example, continue to challenge the previous prominence of French wines. Lower prices, simpler labelling and a sharpened sense of business that can be lacking in this area. This, combined with the recent financial crisis, ensures that the struggle is far from over.

So, as you sit back in the autumn sunshine and sip your chosen vintage, just remember... a great deal of blood, sweat and tears went into filling your glass.

Cheers!



brilliant barbeques

Some different meaty and spicy recipes to give your barbeque some bite!



Cajun chicken kebabs

3 teaspoons of garlic salt
2 teaspoons of ground black pepper
1 teaspoon of good quality chilli powder or cayenne pepper (to taste)
1½ teaspoons of ground cumin
1½ teaspoons of paprika
3 tablespoons melted butter
4 chicken breasts

1. Take chicken breasts out of the fridge and leave them to come up to room temperature; then cut them up into reasonable sized pieces and place in a bowl.
2. Meanwhile put all of the spices in a small bowl or cup and mix well.
3. Melt the butter and stir into the chicken to cover all the pieces.
4. Add the spice mix to taste while stirring the chicken to give it an even coating.
5. Put the chicken onto skewers and barbeque for approximately 15 to 20 minutes, turning occasionally so that it cooks but is not blackened.
6. Serve on the skewers.



8. Put the pork into a flat dish then pour the marinade over.
9. Using a fork, make holes in the meat so the mixture can sink in, turning it over several times as you do so.
10. Cover and leave to marinate for 24 hours at room temperature occasionally turning the meat.
11. On the day of the barbeque, remove from the marinade leaving the excess marinade on the meat and barbeque on a medium heat for approximately 20 minutes. You can use the remaining marinade in the dish as a baste.

Traditional homemade burgers

500 gms of minced beef
250 gms of minced pork
2 onions, very finely diced
1 teaspoon of thyme
1 teaspoon of dry rubbed sage
½ teaspoon of freshly ground black pepper
½ teaspoon of salt

Note: Mixing the minced beef and minced pork together gives a fuller taste and eliminates the need to add breadcrumbs or egg to make the burgers stick together. It also helps to reduce shrinkage of the burger when it is cooking.

1. Put both minced meats into a large bowl.
2. Mix together, adding all other ingredients as you do so.
3. Finish the mixing with your hands until thoroughly and evenly mixed.
4. Separate into balls that you can just hold your closed hands over, then flatten into a pattie.
5. Cook on a medium to hot barbeque until the juices run clear when you pierce the burgers through the centre with a sharp knife and the burger is cooked to the required degree.

This amount of meat should make about 10 good-sized burgers. Unused burgers can be frozen providing the meat has not been previously frozen. Wrap or bag each individual burger for use as and when required.



Marinated Chinese pork

2 tablespoons of olive oil or butter
3 large cloves of garlic
1 teaspoon of hot chilli powder
4 teaspoons of Cinq Parfums spice mix or Barts Chinese 5 Spice Stir Fry Paste
4 tablespoons of dark soya sauce
2 tablespoons of honey or 4 tablespoons of dark brown sugar (the sugar will make the marinade darker than the honey)
4 pork shoulder chops

1. Put the olive oil/butter and crushed garlic in a small saucepan and add the chilli before heating the saucepan. Turn on the heat, mix and simmer for 2 or 3 minutes.
2. Add the Cinq Parfums or Barts Chinese 5 Spice paste.
3. Cook gently on a low heat, mixing all into a paste and simmer for a couple of minutes, taking care not to burn.
4. Add the soya sauce.
5. Mix and bring back to a low simmer.
6. Add the sugar or honey and melt into the mixture on a low heat, again making sure not to burn.
7. Remove from the heat.

stop banks from cashing in on your overseas transfers

By Charles Purdy

Many British ex-pats in France send or receive money to or from the UK and in the process they unintentionally lose money. In some cases, losses can be up to tens of thousands! This special 4-part series has been written to outline how the bank-to-bank international payment process works, the specific areas where ex-pats are losing money and definite actions that can be taken to mitigate losses. Initially, most ex-pats are introduced to the international payment process when they make a payment or payments from the UK to France for a property purchase. The general series of events consists of the property buyer putting down a deposit and then sending one lump sum or a series of staged payments from their UK bank to a bank account in France.

Once a buyer becomes a fortunate French homeowner, their international payments tend to become smaller and sent on a regular basis. Many Brits receive their UK pensions, investment payouts or funds from savings through UK bank to French bank transfers. And in some cases, many Brits send funds to the UK for mortgage payments or to top up their UK funds for visits. Whether transferring large or small funds, either internationally or on a regular basis, it's the same procedure. The person making the transfer instructs their bank to send the amount due to the beneficiary's bank overseas. When calculating the amount due in the overseas local currency, the bank will instruct the buyer of the cost and they will be debited accordingly. Within 5 days of instructing the bank, the funds in the designated currency will arrive and clear at the overseas destination.

The actual process of moving money isn't rocket science – however, the commission, currency exchange rate and fee structure imposed on clients by the banks can be extremely confusing. And through this confusion, the banks are able to relieve clients of substantial sums of money without them even realising it. The Sunday Times (5 Feb 2007) reported that: "Britons buying property abroad could have lost out on up to £1.8 billion because of high-street banks offering such a poor deal on foreign exchange, according to new research."

Before I explain how the banks make their billions on international currency transfers, let me explain what the 'interbank' rate is. The interbank rate is the price banks trade between each other when they're moving millions. When rates are announced on the News, on Internet ticker tapes or in the newspapers, they are not the rates that you or I can actually buy at, but they are the rates the banks use between themselves. Even though you can never buy currency at the rate quoted on the news, the interbank rate gives you an indication of where the rate is and what direction it's moving in. It also gives you a rough idea as to how much currency will cost you.

When you do decide to buy currency or make an international payment the institution that you do it through will put a 'mark-up' over and above the interbank rate. So – if the interbank rate for a pound is equal to 1.15 Euros, you should expect to buy Euros at a discounted price of 1.12, the difference representing the mark-up.

Below is the amount added on top of the interbank rate when purchasing from the following institutions:

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Banks: | they'll charge you up to 5% more for popular currencies such as the Euro and US\$, and up to 9% for less common currencies |
| Credit Cards | up to 7% more |
| Airport Currency Shops | could be as much as 10%-15% more |

The one institution that I didn't mention above is that of an International Payment or Currency Exchange Specialist. For bank-to-bank transfers (which means electronic transfer of funds and not physical cash), they add a mark-up of 1% (on average) over and above the interbank exchange rate. Compared with the mark-up supplied by the banks, that's an instant 4% saving. On a £100,000 transfer that's a reduction of £4,000 by using a currency specialist rather than a bank! And on a regular payment of £1,000 a month that's a saving of £40 a month or £480 a year!

Poor exchange rates are only one of the ways that the banks make extreme profits from their clients. In the next instalment I'll explain how they also charge their clients for the privilege but if you can't wait until then, you can read the full 4-part series immediately by going to www.SmartCurrencyFrance.com/smartseries.htm



Charles Purdy is a Director at Smart Currency Exchange Limited – the only international payment specialists in the UK that work specifically to help people moving money for property purchases or for regular payments such as mortgage or pension payments. Go to www.SmartCurrencyFrance.com/accents.htm for further information or call locally on +33 975 181 384



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in the garden...july and august

July and August are usually the driest months of the year and ones in which the garden is often resting and can look a bit jaded. Thus the summer months can also be a time when there is not a lot of colour in the garden. Plants which do flower in the summer and which are drought tolerant are all the more important. One excellent group of sub-shrubs are the 'Mexican' sages; salvias which come from Mexico, New Mexico and other nearby dry regions of the United States. There are four or five species and many colour selections and hybrids so that these sages are now available in a huge range of colours including white, cream, yellow, peach, pink, blue and red. Gaillardias are another perennial that give good colour throughout the summer.

The season for autumn planting will start once the weather cools at the end of the summer and we have had some rain, usually sometime during late September, so August will be an ideal time to sit in the shade and plan for the coming months. It is also a good time to order spring flowering bulbs for autumn planting, I find that botanical tulips and anemones seem to do particularly well.

Watering and weeding where and when necessary are ongoing tasks, remember that watering a flower bed the evening before weeding will usually make the job easier. Containers and hanging baskets may need watering daily during the very hot period but if you are watering your garden remember that a deep soaking once a week or fortnight is much more effective than frequent sprinkling. It is particularly important to keep an eye on the watering requirements of recently planted items, if you are choosing drought tolerant plants their watering requirements should be considerably reduced after the first couple of years

At **La Petite Pépinière** we shall be offering gardening courses again during the autumn months, the exact programme will be decided soon and details will be on the website.

At **Hidden Gardens, Hidden France** our spring 2011 programme of garden tours is now on the website - www.hiddengardens-france.com



During the summer think about the following:

- Continue to keep an eye out for damage by slugs, snails, insects etc and take appropriate action
- Vigorous climbers such as wisteria and trumpet vines may need some pruning from time to time over the summer
- Clip back aromatics such as santolina and lavender after flowering
- Continue deadheading perennials which will repeat flower such as Coreopsis and Rudbeckia to encourage a second flowering. Cut back hardy geraniums to encourage new growth
- Collect seeds from annuals such as Cosmos and Californian poppies, you can sow these next spring
- Prune early summer flowering shrubs such as Philadelphus
- Clear fallen leaves affected by blackspot from around roses



For further information about any of the above, or to discuss garden related issues, contact Gill Pound at La Petite Pépinière de Caunes (shrubs and perennials, ornamental grasses, unusual plants and plants for dry climates, garden advice and consultation), 21, Avenue de la Montagne Noire (route de Citou), 11160, Caunes-Minervois.

Tel: 04 68 78 43 81, email Gill@lapetitepepiniere.com
www.lapetitepepiniere.com

Open March to November 10h – 18h Fridays and Saturdays, 10h – 12h Sundays, or by appointment – just phone or email to fix another time.

The last word...

Jane Buckle takes a lighthearted look at life in France

Having decided to quit London in an effort to find a better life in France I thought I had waved goodbye to the dreadful habit of the British moaning on about the weather. How wrong I was!

I quote Oscar Wilde who famously said " England has four Seasons but do we have to have them all in one day?" We do where I live!

This coming September will mark six years of living in the South West of France, where I had expected to find endless blue skies and warm winters. Oh dear.....nothing could be further from the truth.

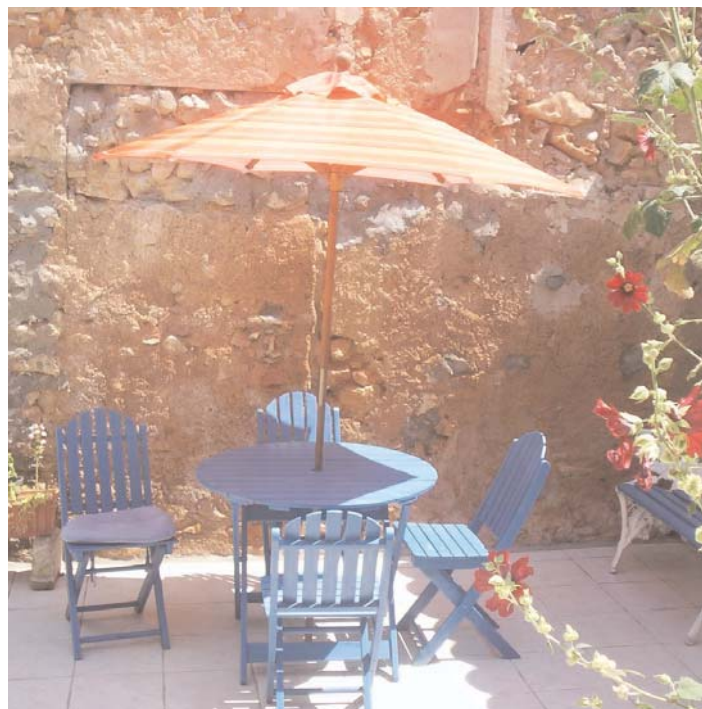
Alright I am talking about the specific spot I chose in France and there are those who swear that other spots are much warmer/colder/windier and suffer from more snow. That is right SNOW, which I and my gardens have now experienced three times.

The first time was quite funny. It might not have been had anyone been hurt but the old people in the village were wandering off to get their bread clad in their slippers and falling over left, right and centre. My Brother and I donned our Wellies and spent most of the morning lifting the old dears up and escorting them safely home. I also lost a fair amount of plants, which had just adjusted to the heat in France, only to be hit by bitter winds, sleet and snow. Not to mention the pouring rain!

The French drivers seem oblivious to the fact that that snow can easily turn into black ice and the sounds of crashing cars was rather alarming, except I knew mine was safely tucked away in the Courtyard.

In the second village, I took to the French habit, which I had spotted in various gardens, of wrapping their shrubs in a breathable sort of plastic. Either I did it wrongly (highly possible as I am sure many readers will point out!) or my British plants preferred to be a bit more macho, so several of them went to the great garden in the sky.

Here in Puisserguier the last winter was just dreadful. It was



bitterly cold and we had snow again plus a wind that could cut through you like a knife; so on piled the thermals, out came the gloves and hats and once again the garden suffered. I had hoped as it is completely walled that most of my plants in great big pots would be alright and those of a more delicate nature I moved into the outhouse for the duration.

But then come March, just when you might have thought it was safe to bring them all out again it was truly bizarre, one day was like Winter, then next Spring. I have lost count of the hours I have spent shivering in the street discussing with various neighbours how terrible the weather is, how impossible it is to do the washing and hang it out without it starting to rain etc, etc.

And all of them say exactly the same thing " It is just like the English weather" – well it isn't. I have never witnessed rain that pours down non-stop night and day for six days solidly causing small rivers to flow down streets. Nor have I had a Tornado warning (alright we will forget about Michael Fish and his famous dismissal of the tragedy of the Hurricane) which told everyone to stay indoors, fasten their shutters and NOT to drive unless in an emergency.

I have never spent a night like it. I thought the roof was coming off by the sounds of crashing tiles, but buried my head under the duvet and hoped for the best. I got off lightly with no damage to the roof, and still with electricity which most of the road did not have. EDF had a dreadful day trying to re-connect everyone, and there were cars in many streets smashed in with fallen trees.

Right now we are having a sunny/cloudy spell with rain in the evenings, but at least it is warm and I have been busy re-planting so the garden is beginning to bloom, it does cheer you up. Next thing will be the flood of complaints about how hot it is, but I am used to that!

But if you see me in the street PLEASE chat to me about anything but the weather, thanks!!

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