



Under The Radar French Travel, Food and Wine
info from:

****Christopher Strong - The Bicycle Gourmet.***



******Chef Andre le Grand.***



*****Sommelier Jean Luc Laurent***



LET'S GO TO PRESS...



In my zillion and a half years cycling the French Country Backroads, I've found more than a few places well worth visiting. Without the usual avalanche of camera-toting, loud-mouthed, ice cream inhaling tourists.

Oppede the view is one of them. Way,Way off the beaten track.



And for reasons that will become clear as you read on, it's likely to stay that way. That, among other qualities is what makes "Oppède le Vieux" one of my personal Treasures of France.

For me, this is the classic hilltop village. Clinging to a side of the Luberon mountain range, in Provence's Luberon National Park. Not as celebrated as its hilltop neighbours, Gordes, LaCoste and to a lesser extent ,Bonnieux, Oppède le Vieux is the "real deal." Simultaneously in ruins, and in re-construction. Mostly by rich Parisians. Other European "deep pockets" are also represented.



As you might imagine, life in Oppede Le Vieux (before mod cons) was neither a bowl of cherries, a bed of roses, or a walk in the park. It was a llllong walk down, and an even LLLonger walk back. (No midnight pizza!)

By the turn of the century (before the “war to end all wars” that didn't) there were less than a thousand (we hope) happy campers in O.L.V.

Today Oppede le Vieux is home to the usual small group of artisans who inhabit such locales the world over. Such as the fair Celine. Ownè of the local boutique.



It was she who tipped me to the incredible frescos in the village's tiny (even further up the hill) church. Well worth the walk!



There is no restaurant in Oppède le Vieux. Only "Le Petite Cafe."



Which seems to have new owners every time I pass.
Never ate there. So – “Bonne Chance!

Happily, access to the centre of Oppede le Vieux is limited to foot traffic. There’s a parking lot a few hundred metres below.

Getting There:

The turn-off for Oppede Le Vieux, is a roundabout, three minutes or so by car after the village of MAUBEC, headed toward the village of MENERBES.

It’s a right turn. If you turn left ,you’ll quickly find yourself in “Oppede” – the village – one short street of not very much. And not where you want to be!



Pain de Genes, AKA Genoa bread (though it isn't at all bread like), or French almond cake, is a delicious classic. No one knows exactly when the cake was invented but legend has it that the recipe for the cake dates back to 1805, when Napoleon annexed the city of Genoa. After years of siege, there were only 50 tons of almonds left to eat, and a local pastry chef invented this cake and named it "Pain de Gênes". Made with marzipan, it has a dense texture and makes a good base cake and is also scrumptious served with a sauce or fresh fruit (see chef's notes below).

Recipe makes 2 cakes, each serving 6

Active time: 30 minutes Cooking time: 30 minutes

Storage: Up to 4 days in the refrigerator or 3 months in the freezer, wrapped airtight

EQUIPMENT 2 × 7-in. (18-cm) round cake pans 2 × 7-in. (18-cm) rounds of parchment paper Stand mixer fitted with the paddle beater

INGREDIENTS

7 tbsp (3½ oz./100 g) butter + more for the pans ⅔ cup (1¾ oz./50 g) sliced almonds 13¼ oz. (375 g) marzipan, roughly chopped 6 eggs (1¼ cups/280 g) 1½ tbsp (15 g) All purpose flour (plain flour) 1½ tbsp (15 g) potato starch 1 tsp (5 ml) Grand Marnier 1 tsp (5 ml) aged rum

METHOD

Preheat the oven to 400°F (200°C/Gas Mark 6). Grease the pans with butter and line the bases with the rounds of parchment paper to prevent the cakes, which are fragile, from sticking. Press the sliced almonds around the sides of the pans, removing any that do not stick.

Beat the marzipan on slow speed in the bowl of the stand mixer until malleable and smooth.

Add the eggs, one by one, and beat for 5 minutes on medium speed after each addition. Scrape down the sides of the bowl as needed. The mixture should be light and airy.

Sift the flour and potato starch into a bowl.

Melt the butter in a saucepan until foaming. Remove from the heat. Whisk in about one-quarter of the marzipan mixture, then the Grand Marnier and rum.

Gently fold the flour and potato starch into the marzipan mixture in the bowl. Slowly pour in the butter mixture and fold it in using a spatula.

Divide the batter between the pans, filling them three-quarters full.

Bake for 10 minutes, then reduce the oven temperature to 350°F (180°C/Gas Mark 4) and bake for an additional 20 minutes, until the cakes are golden and the tip of a knife inserted into the center comes out clean.

Let the cakes cool completely in the pans before carefully inverting them onto flat serving plates, with the parchment paper uppermost. Carefully peel off the

parchment paper.

Chef's Notes

These cakes can be served with chocolate sauce or vanilla custard sauce, or with a fresh fruit coulis. They are also delicious on their own, with a cup of tea.



While vineyards have long been around in France, there is one wine region that has a special harvest. A harvest that continues into late autumn, almost to the edge of winter. In Jurancon, in the Pyrenees-Atlantique region of southwest France, the harvest starts early weeks in November and goes through to mid-December.

Jurancon – an extraordinary wine-growing area

The segmented vineyard of Jurancon sits southwest of

Pau, the capital of Béarn. As you enter the region you start to notice the vineyards perched on the hillsides sloping southwards towards the Pyrénées. The vineyards cover around 1000 hectares. The appellation (the name given to a product made in a specific place) of Jurancon consists of dry and sweet white wines. The main grape variety used are the Gros Manseng and Le Petit Manseng grapes, both native to this region. The Manseng vines thrive in this environment where the winds from Spain sweep across the vineyards. It literally contributes to the passerillage or natural dehydration of Le Petit Manseng, creating a raisin- like sweetness.

Le Cave de Gan Jurancon



The Cave de Gan (in the village of Gan), was established in 1949 by a cooperative of 15 members. The present membership consists of 250 wine growers under the AOC Jurancon and 50 under the AOC Bearn who deliver their harvests to the Cave de Gan. The decision when to harvest is collective between the winemakers, the manager of the winery and winegrowers

The first grape generally harvested is the Gros Manseng which produces a dry white wine. Le Petit Manseng is harvested later and is more resistant to moisture and rain fall. It is left to continue the process of passerillage. Once the harvests are delivered the fermentation begins in huge vats which you can visit on a tour of the Cave de Gan. The wine is sent through underground piping to aroma vats in the aging room.

Preceding the aging room is the entrance lobby. Upon entering, the nose senses fruity aromas from the wines! There is a large display of Jurancon wine bottles, the oldest dating from 1926.

Two Gallo Roman mosaics spread across the wall illustrate the arrival of the Romans in this area in the first century A.D. And they prove that wine was cultivated here as there is a clear pattern of green vine leaves around the border. The Cave de Gan inherited the mosaics which were discovered close to the village of Jurancon.

Large vats hold the wine from the cooperative but also from individual chateaux domains who produce their wine here. The wine matures from 6 months to 3 years. Wine is also aged in oak barrels. The ageing cellar contains up to 500,000 bottles. The annual harvest produces up to

5,000,000 bottles. The wine bottles are stacked vertically and the guideline is: the deeper the colour the older the bottle.

The wines of Jurancon

The Jurancon dry white wine is fresh and elegant, the appearance is very clear and pale yellow and it's good with fish and cheeses! The sweet white wine is golden coloured and the taste is intense, full of exotic fruits, citrus and honey. It pairs well with blue cheeses, foie gras, spicy dishes and dark chocolate.

What makes it so unique

First, the climate is ideal for the Manseng grapes. The sun fills the vineyards and the winds attend to the passerillage, increasing the sugar concentration and aromas. Second, this region has the climate that produces a Late Harvest and this is exceptional and rare. The area is certainly worth a detour to taste and buy these uniquely delicious wines.

THAT'S ALL WE HAVE FOR YOU -
THIS TIME

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with "*send it*" in the subject line. And you're good to go for the next /future issues.

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Franchophile pals.

Until next time, for all of us, this is the Bicycle Gourmet
wishing you Great Adventures.

"Life is either a great adventure, or nothing."

- Helen Keller-