Three additions to the Languedoc

6 Oct 2012 by Richard Neville

For those wishing to stay in the very centre of the Languedoc-Roussillon vineyard areas and take advantage of the autumn sunshine in the south of France, there is some good news. Three places to stay and eat have opened recently close to Beziers.

Au Lavoir is a restaurant and maison d'hôtes in Columbiers, on the Canal du Midi west of Béziers. Owners Delphine and Louis have tastefully converted an old stone property with style and quality.

Suites are spacious and cost from €130 per night. The cuisine is modern classic perfectly cooked. It should be as Louis has worked at with Troisgros and Michel Guérard during his career. The menus are reasonably priced, starting from €14 for their 'plat du moment' including a glass of wine served midday weekdays. I have returned three times to profit from this bargain.

Cuisine and style is their expertise but wine, with no professional sommelier, lags a little behind, even if the list has some decent wines. The different wines served with each course of their tasting menu were not the best marriage and were served by a member of staff who left his fingerprints on the bowls.

Vinauberge in Poilhes the next village west up the Canal du Midi and equally on the canal, opened a few months ago. Harald, an enterprising German who lives in Poilhes bought the closed cave-cooperative and developed an interesting use for it: wine! It is in business to act as a link between the Languedoc-Roussillon vignerons and the international wine trade and public, stocking hundreds of different wines on behalf of the producers. His business model is interesting, as was the conversion work, but that is not the subject of this article.

In addition he built a hotel in the grounds with priority booking given to wine trade professionals. The hotel has gîtes rather than suites, with large rooms, kitchens and washing machines. Lydia is responsible for the gîtes. It is less stylish and less expensive than Au Lavoir; the gîtes are plainer and the restaurant serves tapas and simple dishes. Eating in the garden is pleasant and a plate of oven baked mussels, for example, costs jut €7, duck breast with honey and figs €12. Gîtes start from €96 in the low season. Vinauberge accommodates the disabled well and offers meeting facilities.

There are always 12 wines available by the glass, chosen blind, and Vinauberge will open any of the hundreds of others on request. A limited number of bottles will be opened free for professionals, importers and négociants to taste.

Ch Les Carrasses (pictured above left) can be found near the next village up the Canal du Midi, Capestang. The Château has been converted into suites, flats and houses up to 100sq m with de luxe kitchens. Some of them have private pools. Individually 'owned' by investors, they are let as serviced residences and managed by Özgür. Communal facilities include a bar, restaurant and swimming pool. In style it's somewhere between the two hotels listed above, and the well sized suites start from €139 in the low season.

The Brasserie serves food with a regional accent, but will also supply pizzas and picnic baskets. A three course lunch menu is €24, or €19 for two courses. The wine list, thankfully, has improved greatly from its early days and they now have a qualified sommelier, Maxime. The list is almost entirely of well-chosen wines from the Languedoc-Roussillon. They hold a free wine tasting by a Languedoc-Roussillon producer every Thursday evening.