

Chapter Five

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SHOPPING THE WINE REGIONS: CHAMPAGNE, BURGUNDY & BORDEAUX

CHAMPAGNE

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Champagne is a French *département* and the name of a very particular drink. By law, if the grapes for this sparkling wine aren't grown in this region of France, the bubbly ain't champagne. If it is champagne, then officially it's capitalized, (making it Champagne).

If you look closely at a map, you'll realize that the *département* of Champagne is shaped like the letter C; most of the famous bottlers are to the north, while some are more in the south. There are factory outlets in the south, in and around the town of Troyes (pronounced *trois*, like the number 3).

Locals take day trips from Paris to either northern or southern Champagne; there are also tourist overnights and fancy tours that go to Troyes for the shopping and then to Epernay for the tasting.

Charm Warning

Before you get all excited about Reims, the capital of the Champagne region, or start wondering how many bottles of bubbly are on the wall, let me warn you that if you are thinking romantic, if you are thinking beautiful, you might want to sit

down now and try to cope before you are off, running, and daydreaming.

Reims is not adorable. It was bombed in World War I (although the vineyards weren't), and although it has a very nice Gothic cathedral (bombed but not ruined), there is not a lot of quaint charm to win over your heart and head. That said, Reims is a terrific place to have some fun, tour a few caves, buy champagne, and eat gourmet meals. And if you want charm, you can go to Troyes. Epernay is more charming than Reims—and closer.

Reims & Surroundings

You might not be able to spell it (I thought there was an *h* in there somewhere) or pronounce it (say *Rance*), but you do know this town as the heart of the French Champagne district.

GETTING TO REIMS

Most of the big-brand champagne houses are within the city limits of either Reims or Epernay, but Reims is on the main train line, while Epernay, which is technically closer to Paris, is not. The smaller brands tend to be in smaller towns along the Route du Champagne.

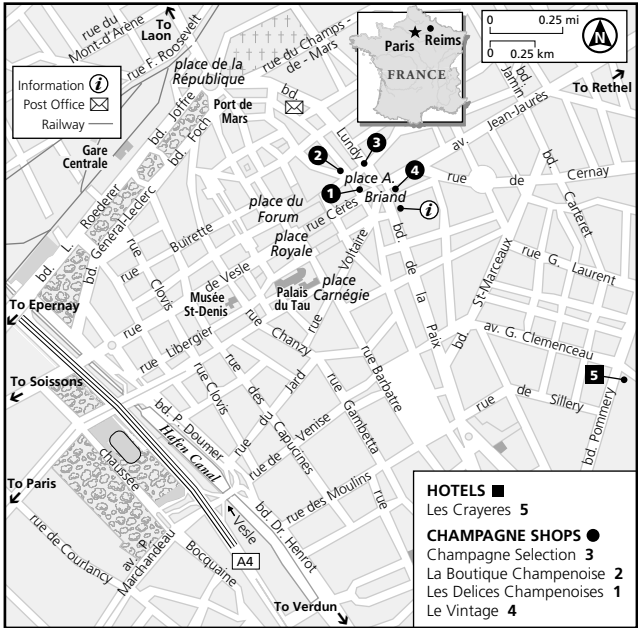
Catch the train at the Gare de l'Est in Paris; it's a 90-minute trip. You can buy tickets ahead of time through **Rail Europe** in the U.S. (© 877/456-RAIL; www.raileurope.com/us). When the TGV-East opens in 2007, Reims will be one of the stations, accessible via Lille or Marseille.

Driving from Paris to Champagne is very easy: Just head out past Disneyland Paris on the A4, pay a few tolls (by credit card, if you like), and pick your exit depending on the houses you wish to visit. As you drive, you can see the new TGV-East tracks and stations as they are being built.

GETTING AROUND REIMS

The train station is alongside downtown Reims; you can walk just about everywhere in the downtown area, but the cathedral

Reims



is across town. There are taxis waiting at the train station, and some drivers will make a deal for a day of sightseeing. To call a taxi 24 hours a day, dial ☎ 03-26-47-05-05.

If you're going for a simple overnight and a little sightseeing, eating, and sleeping, you do not need a car. If, however, you want to really see the area and the vines, you do need to drive.

SLEEPING IN REIMS

Most of the famous kitchens in Reims also have rooms, since people like to linger over a gourmet dinner or want to drink.

LES CRAYERES

64 *bd. Henry Vasnier, Reims.*

Not only is this the number-one choice for all discriminating visitors, but it is often named one of the top five hotels in the

world. Although the formal name of this restaurant and hotel is Les Crayeres, most people call it Boyer, in honor of the famous chef who is now retired from the kitchen.

Located across the street from the Pommery château and almost in the heart of town, this manor house is set in a small park and comes complete with so many luxuries, you'll have to pinch yourself to make sure it's all real.

Rates begin at 265€ (\$305) and go up to about 500€ (\$575). And that doesn't usually include breakfast. Book in the U.S. through **Relais & Châteaux** (☎ 800/735-2478). Local phone ☎ 03-26-82-80-80. Fax 03-26-82-65-52. www.relaischateaux.com.

ROYAL CHAMPAGNE

Champillon-Epernay.

Royal Champagne is for those who prefer to be closer to Epernay than to Reims, more out on the Route du Champagne; it's also a tad closer to Troyes. (Troyes is slightly more than an hour from Epernay.)

This lush property was created from a former post house. The rooms are huge and really nice—and each has a sweeping view of the vines. The feel is not as grand manor house as Boyer, but it is very, very nice and quite plush, with decorations in the local rustic style. Again, there's a famous chef and good eats to be had here.

There are 27 rooms; rates begin around 250€ (\$288), but there are promotional deals. From the U.S., call **Relais & Châteaux** (☎ 800/735-2478). Local phone ☎ 03-26-52-87-11. www.relaischateaux.com/royalchampagne.

SHOPPING IN REIMS

SHOPPING HOURS Most stores in Reims are open from 9am to noon and 2 to 7pm. The *hypermarchés* (modern dry-goods stores) are open nonstop until 9pm. (Frankly, though, they don't have that much good champagne, and their prices aren't much lower than anyone else's.) Some stores open at 10am

and remain open during the lunch hours. Monday mornings are slow.

REAL-PEOPLE SHOPPING In keeping with the feel of the town, the real people's "downtown" shopping district isn't very cute, either. The main drag is Victor Hugo, where there's a decent branch of **Galeries Lafayette** (with supermarket). You'll find more commercial shopping and mass-market brands (and **Monoprix**) at place d'Erlon.

MARKETS & FAIRS Markets are open in Reims from 6am to 1pm every day except Sunday. On the first Sunday of every month, except in August, there is a flea market from 8am to 7pm at the Parc des Expositions. **Galerie Jamin** (6 rue Jamin) is open Monday and Friday from 2 to 7pm, Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 7pm.

FINDS Because most people go to Reims partly to see the incredible cathedral, it's important to know that you can gawk, worship, and then go shopping all in the same space. There are a handful of excellent wine shops here that sell many, many brands and offer great gifts.

Almost all the shops sell chocolate champagne corks, which make a super gift. I'm also big on small bottles of champagne for the folks back home, so that they can taste a range of bubbles, and I love the fact that a few houses (Moët in particular) make six-packs of small bottles. Another novelty item comes from Pommery—it's a small (200ml) bottle of champagne called Pop. It was designed for teens and tweens, to be drunk with a straw and to teach them the taste of fine champagne.

CHAMPAGNE SELECTION

Face à la Cathédrale.

This store does not sell champagne. Rather, it makes custom champagne corks, so you can get ones that announce the baby or celebrate a big birthday. You can provide a photo of the celebrant to be imprinted on the metal top that goes over the cork. The minimum order is 250 pieces, which costs about 87€

(\$100). A bottle can be personalized in 2 minutes. Other novelties are available as well.

LA BOUTIQUE CHAMPENOISE

5 place du Cardinal Luçon.

This isn't as cute or elegant as other shops in the area, but it's jammed with merchandise and has probably the best prices.

LA VINOCAVE

45 place Drouet d'Erion.

This store is toward the end of the pedestrian shopping street that leads from the Reims train station toward downtown and the cathedral. You'll recognize it by the 3-foot-tall bottles of champagne standing outside. Inside, the large selection includes both big-name and little-known makers. The helpful staff speaks English.

LE PARVIS

Place du Cardinal Luçon.

This shop has a large selection of bottles and a helpful staff.

LES DELICES CHAMPENOISES

2 rue Rockefeller.

How can you not love a champagne store that's open daily? It sells all brands, big and small.

LE VINTAGE

1 cours Anatole France.

Located directly across from the rear of the cathedral, this store has a huge selection of champagne, including small-size bottles of the *grandes marques*, which make great gifts. I never knew there were so many choices. I paid about 14€ (\$16) for a half-bottle of Bolly to bring home. This is the best of the several boutiques around the cathedral.

About Those Cookies

You can buy biscuits de Reims in any grocery store in France, but if you want the real thing from the real source, check out **Fossier**, 25 cours Jean-Baptiste-Langlet, Reims, which opens Monday through Friday at noon. The point of the biscuit is that you don't get drunk and they get dunked. Fossier is the most famous brand, and the *rose* is preferred.

Touring the Champagne Houses

Many of the champagne houses have two (or more) addresses, since each has both a showroom and an actual château out in the fields, where the grapes are grown. Most often, the château is used for private functions or can be visited only by appointment.

A few of the big houses own several brands, so the addresses are the same. Don't worry.

Call before you drive any great distance, as there may be a closer address for what you want to see, taste, or buy.

SIPPING HOURS

Most champagne houses follow the same hours as local retail shops: They open at about 9:30am and close for lunch around noon. Many close at 11:30am so that the final groups are out by noon; one or two actually close at 11am. After lunch, they reopen, usually at 2pm. Champagne houses close for the day at various times—some at 3:30pm, some at 7pm. Anything in between is also possible. Hours may vary with the season.

Believe it or not, most champagne houses are open on Sunday! However, some of them are closed on Monday and Tuesday.

MONEY MATTERS

Many châteaux have elaborate visitor centers and tours (even train rides). Most of them charge a fee for the tour, usually from

5€ to 10€ (\$5.75–\$12) per head (it can be more—ask). The price of admission includes a glass of champagne at the end of the tour. If you just want to buy, you can usually be admitted directly to the shop without taking the tour.

You can also buy champagne at many stores in town or even at Carrefour, the *hypermarché* right outside town at the junction of RN31 and BP7. Carrefour may be slightly cheaper, but only by about a buck a bottle. I went, hoping to find God, but was disappointed: The selection was not very good, and the savings weren't worth the trouble.

Do not expect factory-outlet prices at the factory. In fact, prices will be only slightly lower than in Paris—and may be similar to prices at home. In some cases, prices are even better at home. Forget about airport duty-free prices in the United States or France; you'll do better on the street.

For the luxury visitor, there are package tours and day trips from Paris that include a tour of a cave and lunch at Les Crayeres. The price can be 200€ (\$230) per head or more, but this is actually a bargain—and you don't have to drive, so you can drink.

RENDEZ-VOUS, SVP

It is best to have an appointment for a tour; at some houses, you will be seen only with a private appointment. Many of the houses advertise, especially in French food, wine, and cooking magazines; they also have roadside signs. Please note that just as in Bordeaux, there are a lot of mixed messages and conflicting sources of information out there.

If there is a house you'd like to visit, but someone tells you, "Oh, no, they are not open to the public," call or fax the house yourself. Also note that there is a difference between the showroom and the château, so there may be a difference in how happy one or the other is to see you.

Brace yourself for a wide discrepancy in style at the various houses. At Bolly, I found the selection terrible and the attitude

even worse. At Pommery, they were prepared for princes and kings and treated me as if I were both; the selection there is bountiful, well displayed, and easily accessed.

Also brace yourself for cultural differences and know your French manners. There's a huge difference between the big commercial houses and the tiny family houses. There are also many houses in between. I wanted to buy directly from one such house in Reims, and when I called for an appointment, it was easy and well done. When I called later to tell the house we were running late, which I thought was incredibly polite, they denied that I had an appointment and didn't know what I was talking about. Another house tried to trade me over to a sister firm, one that I had no interest in. In such situations, don't be so polite that you end up wasting your time.

MATTERS OF TASTE

It took only a few hours in Champagne for me to begin to suffer from Belgian Chocolate Syndrome, which I acquired doing research and which left me sick at the very sight of chocolate. (I have since recovered.)

BETTER BRANDS

Why does each house make several kinds of champagne, and are the more expensive cuvées worth it? You might not be able to afford it, but the difference in taste between nonvintage and vintage grande cuvée is enormous. You can pay 26€ (\$30) or 56€ (\$65) for a bottle of champagne, but you will be able to taste the difference. Nonvintage champagne is for those who aren't willing to spend the money to learn that there is a difference.

Note that prices of important vintages and brands can be lower in the United States than in France, especially if you luck into a year-end promotional event. Know your stuff before you commit to a big-ticket item in France. The shopping in Reims is really best for brands or vintages you can't get in America.

THE MAGIC FLUTES

The following are the big-name champagne houses in Reims and the surrounding region.

CHAMPAGNE BILLECART-SALMON

Château: 40 rue Carnot, Mareuil-sur-Ay.

© 03-26-52-60-22

CHAMPAGNE BOLLINGER

16 rue Jules Lobet, Ay.

© 03-26-53-33-88

CHAMPAGNE KRUG

5 rue Coquebert, Reims.

© 03-26-84-44-20

Château: Le Clos du Mesnil, Mesnil-sur-Oger.

© 03-26-57-51-77

CHAMPAGNE LAURENT-PERRIER

Tours-sur-Marne.

© 03-26-58-91-22

CHAMPAGNE LOUIS ROEDERER

21 bd. Lundy, Reims.

© 03-26-40-42-11

CHAMPAGNE MOET ET CHANDON

18-20 av. de Champagne, Reims.

© 03-26-54-71-11

Château: Abbaye d'Hautvillers, Rue Cumières, Hautvillers.

© 03-26-59-42-67

CHAMPAGNE MUMM

34 rue du Champs de Mars, Reims.

© 03-26-49-59-70

Château: Moulin de Verzenay, Verzenay.

© 03-26-49-59-69

CHAMPAGNE PIPER-HEIDSIECK

51 bd. Henry Vasnier, Reims.

© 03-26-84-43-44

CHAMPAGNE POMMERY

5 place du Général Gouraud, Reims.

© 03-26-61-62-55

CHAMPAGNE RUINART

4 rue des Crayères, Reims.

© 03-26-77-51-51

CHAMPAGNE TAITTINGER

9 place St-Niçaise, Reims.

© 03-26-85-45-35

Château: Château de la Marquetterie, Pierry.

© 03-29-54-04-53

CHAMPAGNE VEUVE CLICQUOT PONSARDIN

1 place des Droits de l'Homme, Reims.

© 03-26-89-53-90

MAISON PERRIER-JOUET

26 av. de Champagne, Epernay.

© 03-26-53-38-00

MAISON PHILIPPONNAT

Château: Le Clos de Goisses, 13 rue de Pont, Mareuil-sur-Ay.

© 03-26-52-60-43

POL ROGER

1 rue Henri Le Large, Epernay.

© 03-26-55-41-95

THE LITTLE-KNOWN HOUSES

Of course, a champagne need not be world famous to be good. Without a big advertising budget, a house may remain little known. Part of the glory of champagne shopping in Reims is that you can uncover your own finds and fall in love.

There are thousands of little champagne houses; you can drive around and taste for years. I bought just a few specialty bottles that were suggested by the wine stores in Reims or by experts. Most of these brands are carried in the stores in downtown Reims; few bottles are exported to the United States.

Please note that most of the wines I tested were vintage, top-of-the-line cuvées. It does make a difference. A nonvintage wine from the same house will not be the same. The following list mentions by name each bottle that I found so special, just to steer you toward the right taste, although you might find other vintages more appropriate when you shop:

- Clos des Goisses 1986, **Champagne Philliponnat** (13 rue de Pont, Mareuil-sur-Ay; © 03-26-52-60-43)
- n.v., **Champagne Ployez-Jacquemart** (Ludes, Rilly-la-Montagne; © 03-26-61-11-87)
- Les Mesnil 1983, **Champagne Salon** (Mesnil-sure-Oger; © 03-26-57-51-65)
- Grande Cuvée 1985, **Champagne Alain Theinot** (4 rue des Moissons, Reims; © 03-26-47-41-25)
- n.v., **Champagne Vilmart** (4 rue de la République, Rilly-la-Montagne; © 03-26-03-40-01)

Troyes

If you want a totally different area of the *département* Champagne, where you can sip the bubbles, see an adorable town, and get to factory-outlet stores, then perhaps Troyes should be your destination. (*Note:* This is a lot to do in a day.)

Troyes has a fine Museum of Modern Art, marvelous architecture, and, of course, plenty of cute places to stay and eat. There are not as many American tourists here as in Reims, so you'll feel more of a sense of discovery. The problem is that you pretty much have to decide if you've come for the outlet shopping or for the other tastes of France.

I've been to every outlet in Troyes, and seeing them all is really a 2-day proposition (as long as you have the strength and the financial backing). Otherwise, you can visit for a day and pick and choose. Because the outlets are owned by different companies, they are in different parts of the city, often in towns or suburbs that are not technically called Troyes. The city center is filled with posters, signs, and billboards to guide you. Note that none of these outlet villages are cute.

Boyer's Babies

I asked three-star chef Gérard Boyer, still the biggest star in Reims despite retirement from the stove, for his list of favorite small houses. Here are his choices (Boyer says you can use his name as a reference):

- Christian Busin, Verzenay
- Diebolt-Vallois, Cramant
- Pierre Gimonnet, Cuis
- Lasalle, Chigny-les-Roses
- Lilbert, Cramant
- Monmarthé, Ludes

GETTING TO TROYES

The outlets are about 1½ hours from Paris, south toward Dijon. If you do not go on an organized tour, you'll need a car. To get there, head south on the A5 and get off at exit 21 (Epernay). For directions or specifics, call the outlet center (☎ 03-25-82-00-72) or the Troyes tourist office (☎ 03-25-73-00-36).

SLEEPING IN TROYES

HOTEL DE LA POSTE
35 rue Emile-Zola, Troyes.

This four-star hotel is a member of Best Western France; it has 32 rooms. It is also right in the center of Troyes and 2 blocks from the cathedral. Rooms cost about 87€ (\$100) per night. ☎ 03-25-73-05-05.

EATING IN TROYES

LE CLOS JUILLET
22 bd. du 14 Juillet, Troyes.

Most foodies agree that not only is this the best table in town, but it's also reason enough to visit Troyes. For reservations,

call ☎ 03-25-73-31-32. It's closed for dinner Sunday and all day Monday.

SHOPPING THE OUTLETS

BELGRAND

5 rue Belgrand et 55 bd. du 14 Juillet, Troyes.

This small center bills itself as the “downtown” factory-outlet mall; I can't get too excited about it except that it has Rodier.

MACARTHUR GLEN

Zone Nord, voie du Bois, Pont-Ste-Marie.

This is a lot less cute than it used to be, but then maybe you don't care about cute. MacArthur Glen has an international array of outlets, including Armani, Calvin Klein, Versace, Nike, Mephisto, and, of course, McDo (which is what locals call McDonald's). It's open Monday from 2 to 7pm, Tuesday through Friday from 10am to 7pm, and Saturday from 9:30am to 7pm.

These guys have a *navette* (shuttle-bus) service that runs between Paris and the mall. For information, call (toll-free in France) ☎ 08-00-80-92-43; the pickup point in Paris was once place Concorde, and then it moved to Bastille, so be sure to check. Also note that the bus goes to only this mall; the other outlets are too far away to make walking between them possible.

MARQUES AVENUE

114 bd. de Dijon, St-Julien.

Marques Avenue (www.marquesavenue.com) was one of the first outlet malls in France and remains very French in style. This is the largest and most famous outlet mall; the brands are the most well known in France, short of being Lacroix, Balmain, or St-Laurent.

Some 800m (2,624 ft.) from the five-building Marques Avenue complex is a separate part of the mall, called Marques Avenue Maison & Decoration, with 30 shops devoted to home style.

MARQUES CITY

Rue Danton, Pont-Ste-Marie.

This is the most low-end of the outlet malls; it's also the smallest. (It's not really a mall, but more a grouping of stores and freestanding buildings.) But it does have Etam stock (inexpensive high-fashion clothes for teens and tweens)—so if you're an Etam fan, you may have fun.

BURGUNDY

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Perhaps most Americans knew about wines from Burgundy before they learned their Bordeaux, but face it—the Bordeaux has quite a run as the snob's choice. These days, of course, international wines are the rage and French wines are being re-think, especially by Americans. Suddenly the Burgundy region has become more and more interesting, not only for the wines and the vines but also because it's not considered as touristy or overwrought as Provence.

The Burgundy region is closer to Paris, and though the weather may not be as good as in the south or in Provence, there's a whole lot of wine going on. The small area between Dijon and Lyon is now ripe for discovery.

Dijon

I recently read that *Dijon Vu* is the fear of mustard you have already seen. Dump those fears, as this is not going to be the problem when you get to Dijon—there are so many unusual mustards that you will consider buying a hot-dog stand. But wait, the subject was roses . . . and the vineyards that go with the roses. (When you start touring the vineyards, you will note that each row of vines has its own rose bush, an early warning sign for the detection of pestilence.) Dijon is the start of a visit to Burgundy and the capital of the region.

So welcome to Dijon, where the shopping is easy, the food is fun, and the architecture will fill your soul with the wonders

of wandering France. This is one of the most user-friendly cities in the country; you will love to shop and stroll . . . and snack.

And yes, you can do Dijon as a day trip from Paris, and without a car—you won't get much feel for the grape, but you can have a nice day out and see a few brands of mustard you might not otherwise find in Paris.

GETTING TO DIJON

Take a TGV train from Paris—the ride's a little more than 2 hours—or drive (about 3 hr.). The Dijon station is technically within walking distance of town, but not really—especially if you have luggage.

If you want to really see the countryside, you will need a car, but then, if you really want to drink, you will need a designated driver.

THE LAY OF THE LAND

Dijon is the Queen of Burgundy, so a visit here incorporates not only an adorable medieval town, and all that mustard, but also the regional foodstuffs and wines of the entire area.

Like most medieval French cities, the downtown area is restored and charming; malls and big-box stores are located outside of town.

Various cutie-pie towns are located downriver from Dijon, as is the Burgundy wine district. If you have a rental car, head south on the N74, the road right through the Côte d'Or and more vineyards (called *domaines*) than you can imagine. For specifics on Beaune, see later in this chapter.

If you are on a barge tour, you will probably use Dijon as your turn-around city and then get to many of the small villages via river.

GETTING AROUND DIJON

Although Dijon has more to it than a fancy high street, everything in city center is pretty much within walking distance and is well organized.

SLEEPING IN DIJON

HOTEL SOFITEL LA CLOCHE

14 place Darcy, Dijon.

This is *the* hotel in town—it's a four-star and it's a Sofitel. Furthermore, it's within walking distance of everything. The hotel is not a grand palace, but it is classified as a national monument. Interiors have some charm: Some of the rooms have the original beams; there are apartments as well. Rates are about 150€ (\$173) per night. © 03-80-30-12-32. www.hotel-lacloche.com.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DUKES

Since this part isn't often taught in American grade schools, it's easy to get confused about the part wherein Burgundy was a separate country and then part of Italy before it ended up in France. This enormously rich real estate brought much power to the dukes of Bourgogne, who were major players in medieval times. There were four dukes, ruling from 1342 to 1477 but setting the seat of power for centuries to come. Today, many historical references and parts of Dijon date back to the 14th century.

Along with this wealth and history came a very specific type of architecture, *faience* (painted, glazed, monochromatic earthenware), furniture (big, heavy, carved), and food—after all, where do you think *boeuf bourguignon* came from? And who invented the drink called a Kir? (M. Kir was once mayor of Dijon, folks.) Cassis is another regional foodstuff, a fruit very similar to the grape but with its own uses in wine or baking.

And because this is a short history of the Middle Ages, I am not even going to mention Alesia, which shoppers know as the name of a street in Paris with many stock shops. Historians know it as a battlefield in the Burgundy region where the Romans defeated the local thugs (played by Gérard Depardieu in the movie version) and took France. Hail Caesar.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MUSTARD

This has nothing to do with Colonel Mustard, and much to do with shopping in this part of France, so pay attention. You can thank not only Marco Polo for bringing mustard to Europe, but also the medieval pharmacists' guild for making this seed the germ of big enterprise. By the 13th century, Dijon had developed a reputation and even supplied the king's court with its mustards. Thereafter, all aristocratic banquets served mustard from Dijon. But Grey Poupon did not rest—by 1740 there was a mustard war between Paris and Dijon, and flavored or aromatic mustards were invented. In 1742, the house of Maille was founded—and the rest is, well, history.

BEST BUYS

Okay, so you think I'm an idiot—you have fancy mustard available in the U.S. and you know you'll visit other French cities that undoubtedly have mustard. Hell, you even see it at French train stations and airports. But wait—Dijon has a downright shocking number of flavored mustards that you simply cannot find anywhere else. Some are outright strange (*violette?*), which makes them the perfect gift. The price is right, too: A small jar of mustard usually costs less than 2.60€ (\$3), and designer mustard rarely costs much more. Note that a selection of mustards in a cute package is usually more expensive than individual jars.

Dijon is also famous for its *pain d'épice*, which translates as “spiced bread” and is somewhat like gingerbread. But this product also comes in assorted flavors, many of which may be totally new taste sensations. Don't have the preconceived taste of American gingerbread in mind before you nibble. The most famous maker is **Mulot et Petitjean**, with three shops in Dijon and one in Beaune.

Also try the local candy that's called a *Jacqueline*, sold at **A. Michelin**, 18 rue Lusette. It was first created in 1926 and represents the tears of a woman named Jacqueline.

SHOPPING NEIGHBORHOODS

MAIN STREET The high street with most French brands and multiples, and even McDonald's, is called rue de la Liberté. There's a famous mustard shop here (**Maille**, no. 32), near a bakery famous for *pain d'épice* (**Mulot et Petitjean**, no. 16).

BEHIND LIBERTE If you're walking on rue de la Liberté with the Sofitel La Cloche to your back, then at midpoint on the right side is a small mall and an entirely hidden shopping area, anchored by **Monoprix**. Go out the other side of Monoprix and you'll be on rue Piron, a secondary high street with brands such as **Marina Rinaldi** and **L'Occitane**, as well as stores you may have never seen (try **Fruits & Passion**, no. 25, for bath products) and many local mom-and-pop shops.

HIDDEN LUXE Nestled between these two streets, in a far corner, is a tiny alley—no through traffic—called the rue Amiral Roussin, only a block long and filled with big-name stores. Perhaps the best store in Dijon is here: **Les Appartements de JuJu** (no. 39), which sells women's fashion brands such as Yohji and Dries.

DOWNTOWN CROSS STREETS Running on a grid system between rue de la Liberté and the market hall are a series of small pedestrian streets devoted to shopping ops, cafes, and the like. They have names like rue François-Rude, rue de Godrans, and rue du Bourg. There are some brands in here, but also local heroes—plus most of the city's best food suppliers (see below). Closer to the main Poste, at place Grangier, you'll find a small, freestanding branch of **Hermès** (no. 12). Not far away is home-style guru **Geneviève Lethu** (15 place Grangier).

MARKET **Les Halles Centrales** is the covered market building made of wrought iron in a style you thought was lost when Britain's Brighton Pier sank last year. This building is the center of an entire market district that goes on for blocks and weaves its way all over the heart of town.

TO MARKET, TO MARKET

Market days are Monday, Thursday, and Friday mornings and all day Saturday. The market in Dijon is so wonderful that it deserves a special trip—plan your visit to include one market day, even in winter. Inside the market building, you'll find the usual suspects along with plenty of surprises, including a dealer who specializes in food supplies from Vietnam. Yet the Market Hall is just a small part of the show. Out on the streets, you can buy everything from fashion to copies of medieval tapestries. There's also a small flea market at place Grangier. Yawn.

DEPARTMENT STORES

GALERIES LAFAYETTE

41 rue de la Liberté.

Not only is this a larger than average branch of the famed department store, but it also has a fabulous gourmet grocery store in the basement. (*Note:* Much of the gourmet merchandise is also sold at Monoprix for a few cents less.) The store itself carries many fashion brands and offers tax refunds for those who spend 175€ (\$201).

MONOPRIX

11 rue Piron.

One of the best Monoprix in any city center, this one has a good-size supermarket upstairs (with an excellent selection of mustards and *pain d'épice*) and the best prices in town. You can also buy clothes for the family, home style, makeup, books, maps, and more.

FOODIE FINDS

AU PARRIAN GENEREUX

21 rue du Bourg.

The local master chocolatier.

BOURGOGNE SAVEURS

14 rue Musette.

Local foodstuffs in a fancy setting—pick from wines, jams, mustards, and more.

CASSIS VEDRENNE

1 rue Brossuet.

This firm also has a shop in Beaune. It's devoted to showcasing the local fruit champions in liqueurs and confitures.

LE CHALET COMTOIS

28 rue Musette.

Cheese heaven. Enough said.

MAILLE

32 rue de la République.

Located in the old Grey Poupon shop, this store sells its mustards as well as other foodstuffs and ceramic mustard jars. It doesn't have nearly the range of flavors you would imagine, but does have some worth snapping up, including Provençal (coral-colored and spicy), cassis, and honey. The shop in Paris (place de la Madeleine) is actually cuter and better stocked with non-mustard merchandise.

MAISON AUGER

61 rue de la Liberté; 21 place Darcy.

Along with Mulot et Petitjean, the other king of *pain d'épice*.

SPÉCIALITÉS YAZQUEZ

Rue Musette and rue Quentin.

This is the most exotic of the small food markets and the most Mediterranean in terms of product range and choice. Much is sold from outside, including a very wide selection of mustards

in unusual (some very unusual) flavors. I paid 1.30€ (\$1.50) and 1.40€ (\$1.60) for various jars, only to find the same brand for less at Monoprix. Still, this place is charming and adorable and everything you dream of in a market-souk movie set.

YVES NICOT

48 rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

This is one of the most famous *caves* (wine cellars) in the area and a great place to start for those interested in local wines, partly because of the knowledge of M. Nicot himself.

Beaune

Say the name of this town the way you feel about it (in French, of course): *Bon*. After you've mastered that, get your hotel reservation: This is a major tourist destination and is mobbed the minute the weather gets good—as well as during special events and wine auctions. And no, the famous *Hospices* is not a hospital.

Beaune is simply one of those adorable, cutie-pie towns that is perfect in every detail except its popularity—it can be mobbed. If you drive here, park or leave the car at your hotel; if you come by boat—lucky you. The town is medieval in its layout, which means it's somewhat circular and snail shaped, so you can just wander until lost and found.

This is not really shopping paradise—there are a few French multiples and many, many wine shops selling souvenirs, carafes, decanters, and postcards. You will have no trouble finding wine by the bottle or the case, and will be swamped with wine-inspired gift items. *Caves* for tastings are in and outside of town.

The town is located only a half-hour south of Dijon. To get here by train from Paris, you must change to a regional train in Dijon. If you're driving, you'll pass through many of the most famous names in wine. There are taxis and shuttles from Dijon into the nearby villages.

If you're spending the night, you want to stay within walking distance of the action. My first choice is **Hôtel de la Poste**,

5 bd. Clémenceau (☎ 03-80-22-08-11), where rooms begin at 100€ (\$115) for a single. Right down the street is **Le Cep**, 27 rue Maufoux (☎ 03-80-22-08-11), which is also nice and charges similar rates. Both of these are four-star hotels. Hôtel de la Poste has its own parking area.

Note: For my first overnight in Beaune, I chose a place to stay from a guide of cute hotels. I verified the information by phone when I booked. When I got there, I was shocked by what the owner defined as “in town” and canceled my reservation. I was lucky to find something much better for my needs. Be warned that this is high tourist territory; anything goes.

If you have a car and prefer to be tucked away in your own château at night, there are several deluxe ones in the area that take guests. **Hostellerie de Levernois** is a member of Relais & Châteaux; go to www.levernois.com for details.

For guides to the nearby châteaux, winery visits, or cooking classes with local chefs, get a list at the tourist office. You can even arrange a visit to **La Moutarderie Fallot** (www.fallot.com), a mustard-making factory with museum and shop. The mustard tour costs 10€ (\$12) per person.

MARKET DAYS

All markets are held in the mornings only. The Beaune gourmet market is on Wednesday; the main market and *brocante* are on Saturday. Meursault is on Friday. Nolay is on Monday. And Savigny les Beaune is on Sunday.

BORDEAUX

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Ah Bordeaux, I blush, I laugh, I giggle, I seethe when I realize it's time to fess up. I hate Bordeaux because every time I've been here, I've been lost. That's not a very good excuse, I know, I know. I wholeheartedly welcome you to the Bordeaux area . . . and the rest, well, welcome and we'll figure it all out together.

I love the areas around Bordeaux and recommend them—from various domains to the wine spa in Martillac (Les Source

de Caudalie), even Arachon, a beach area that has a nearby wealthy community that has everything to do with money and not much to do with wine. I've recently become interested in the wines of the Blaye district, which is nearby—so yes, I'd go there, too.

But metro Bordeaux? Forget it! I was once so lost that I had to hire a taxi so I could follow it to my hotel. I'll admit that it's easier if you arrive by cruise ship and don't have to deal with the sprawl of this town.

The Lay of the Land

Where there's wine, there's rivers, so this area feeds off the Gironde and the Garonne rivers and nestles into a bicoastal niche formed off a peninsula jutting into the ocean.

Many of the nearby domains and/or châteaux are so famous, they're brand names. The various areas do take on their own personalities, but you'll have visitors who like certain mini-regions because of their preference for the wine of those areas.

My late husband and I did one of those driving trips where we thought we'd just poke along the roads, take in the villages, and stop at various châteaux. For the most part it was a bust—few of the châteaux take walk-ins, and things didn't always go smoothly even when we had appointments. Out of a handful of visits, only one was a truly wonderful experience.

On the other hand, I went on a bus tour of the St-Emilion area and found it delightful—often the vineyards are geared toward tour groups, and they sure get more friendly when there are 30 people hanging around.

Surely, my best visit to the area involved arrival at the Bordeaux train station with pickup from the wine spa, a drive through the vines that I didn't have to navigate, and a luxurious few days—tour of château included—at Les Sources de Caudalie on the property of Château Smith Haut-Lafitte.

Obviously this area offers many, many choices—having the wine experience does not necessarily mean a trip into

downtown Bordeaux. You may want to work with either your favorite wine-tasting towns or a well-known hotel chain (such as Relais & Châteaux) to find choices that are outside of downtown Bordeaux.

The *grands crus*, and therefore the basic wine-growing areas, are:

- Médoc
- St-Emilion
- Pessac-Leognan
- Graves
- Sauternes
- Barsac
- Pomerol

DOWNTOWN BORDEAUX

Alas, I let my obsessions about getting lost get in the way. Bordeaux is a large town set within a huge ring road. In fact, there are actually two ring roads. What you really want is Old Bordeaux.

In reality, Bordeaux is not only a great town but also one that keeps getting more interesting, partly because of M. Alain Juppe, the controversial mayor and president *manqué* of France. As France's provinces have stopped being provincial, Bordeaux has taken a lead among the most interesting of the cities headed into new futures.

This is a city famous not as a medieval shrine (although there are parts that date back into the 1500s), but more as an artistic and business center from the 17th century on. This is a city that has considered itself sophisticated for many centuries.

As for the joys of Old Bordeaux, there's a nice bunch of historic buildings, a lot of good museums, and the thriving wine business, as well as much interest in contemporary art and home design. Shopping is secondary to pure visual delight in the historic parts of town. If you stick to the main shopping

districts listed below, you can walk everywhere and you won't get lost.

Getting Around Bordeaux

If you stick to the main areas and the *quais*, you can walk to most places of historic and shopping interest. Bordeaux also has a rather unique tram system that is part of the new technology and will have some 84 stations by 2007. (It now has 50-odd.)

Sleeping in Bordeaux

RADISSON SAS GRAND HOTEL BORDEAUX

2-5 place de la Comédie.

This was originally built as *the* grand hotel of Bordeaux, but over the course of time fell into a state of disrepair and had to be shut down. New ownership has now decided to extend and convert the existing structure into an international first-class property, to be reopened in early 2006. It will have 150 rooms, two restaurants, a lobby bar, a wine-tasting bar, meeting facilities, and a health club. The hotel has a superb location, right in the heart of the city center. From the U.S., call © 888/201-1718. www.radisson.com.

Eating in Bordeaux

BRASSERIE LE NOAILLES

12 allées de Tourny.

The *in* place, with a great location and local heroes to stare at. For reservations, call © 05-56-81-94-45.

CAFE DU MUSEE

CAPC Museum, 7 rue Ferrère.

The cafe in this contemporary art museum was created by Andrée Putman. The food is by Gregory de Lepinay, who also has his own bistro called Chez Greg.

Shopping in Bordeaux

SHOPPING NEIGHBORHOODS

QUAIS DES CHARTRONS The harbor, along with the old warehouses for merchants and wines. Follow your nose away from the *quais* along rue du Faubourg des Arts and you'll pass the home-style and -decor district. There are also some antiques stores right on the *quai*; try **Espace Antiquites** (no. 56).

COURS CLEMENCEAU Main street for luxury shopping, with all the big names you expect to find in any world-class shopping city. Don't miss **Jean Vier** (no. 40), a shop selling its own brand of Basque textiles. The area between here and the Opéra is called the *Triangle d'Or* (Golden Triangle) because all the big brands and luxury labels have their stores here.

OPERA Don't miss the Opéra itself while you're looking for the stores; it inspired the Opéra Garnier in Paris (so they say). There are many luxe stores dotted into the allées de Tourny, including **Cadiot-Badie**, a fancy, old-fashioned chocolate shop known for its truffles. There's also the **Parfumerie de l'Opéra**, which carries many hard-to-find fragrances (stop here if you're not going to be shopping in Paris). Among my favorites in this allée is **Compagnie Française de l'Orient et de la Chine**, which sells clothes and home style from China.

COURS DE L'INTENDANCE The third stroke of the triangle, with more big names and big brands. This runs east-west.

PLACE GAMBETTA Transitional landmark for shoppers moving between the Golden Triangle and the antiques district. There are several big-name stores here as well, including **Hermès**.

GALERIE DES GRANDS HOMMES It's a minimall with many brand names, right at the place des Grands Hommes in the center of the Golden Triangle.

RUE STE-CATHERINE This pedestrian street is more commercial, with the department store **Nouvelles Galeries** (no. 50–60), a division of Galeries Lafayette. Rue Ste-Catherine runs

north-south, heading into the Golden Triangle at a perpendicular angle. It's the heart of a pedestrian shopping district between the Bourse and place Gambetta.

BOUFFARD A district of antiques stores, with the rue des Remparts running alongside. Note that shops may open late in the day (say, 11am or noon); most are closed entirely on Mondays. Don't miss **Passage Saint-Michel**, 14 & 17 place Canteloup (☎ 05-56-92-14-76), with some 50 *brocante* dealers of all styles and prices. There's also rue Nôtre Dame and Le Village Notre Dame.

REAL-PEOPLE SHOPPING

You won't have trouble meeting personal needs in any *pharmacie*, Galeries Lafayette, or shopping mall. To find the pharmacist on duty on Sundays, call ☎ 05-56-01-02-03. If you need a hairdresser, there's a branch of **Jacques Dessange** right at 20 cours Clémenceau (☎ 05-56-44-74-91 for appointments).

THEME SHOPPING

Obviously you expect to find wine stores here, and the usual big names and chains, but there's also an interesting connection with British brands due to the centuries-old trade across the sea, directly between Bordeaux and the U.K. Brands such as **Penhaligon's**, 14 cours Clémenceau, have outposts here, and a store called **Covent Garden**, 52 cours Clémenceau, specializes in Brit brands.

With the proximity to the sea, there are also many products with nautical themes.

WINE STORES

AMOUR DU VIN

10 cours de Verdun.

The Sam's of Bordeaux vineyards.

LA VINO THEQUE DE BORDEAUX

8 cours du XXX Juillet.

This one is my favorite—it reps several hundred local vineyards.

L'INTENDANT

2 allées de Tourny.

This store is amazing to look at from all aspects, with over 15,000 bottles.