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RETURN to FRANCE

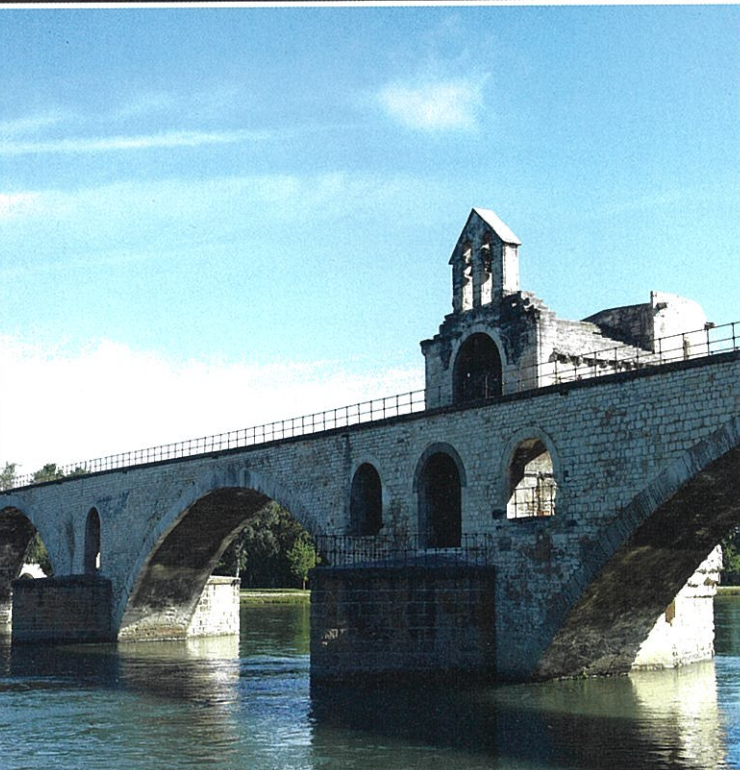
Our favorite
destinations, cuisine,
and décor

MAY/JUNE 2015



DISPLAY UNTIL 6/15/15

Treasures in Classic
BLUE & WHITE



The four remaining arches of the venerable Saint-Bénézet Bridge reach out to the Rhone River as it flows past Avignon, France. The partial span has survived centuries of floods to become an iconic symbol of this enduring city, which served as the seat of the Roman Catholic Church for much of the fourteenth century. The majestic Palais des Papes (Papal Palace) and the Romanesque-style cathedral are shining reminders of this chapter in the town's storied past.

But Avignon holds much more than history within its ancient walls. Along the streets radiating from Place de l'Horloge (the central square), countless stores and restaurants brim with undeniable charm. Perhaps the most elegant shops are found along rue Joseph Vernet, where one might browse timeworn antiques and old leather-bound books alongside the latest in home décor and couture fashions. Those seeking sustenance can sample traditional cuisine at one of the many local cafés that serve signature dishes such as ratatouille and bouillabaisse.

Visitors drawn to the area for cultural pursuits will discover opportunities around every corner. Rue des Teinturiers—Street of the Dyers—is the center of Avignon's famed textile industry, while the Musée du Petit Palais is filled with rare Italian paintings and sculptures. Each July, the community hosts the



Opposite top: Named for an Avignon-born seascape painter, rue Joseph Vernet winds through the town's premier shopping district. Opposite bottom: The Saint-Bénézet Bridge inspired the traditional French children's song "Sur le Pont d'Avignon." Top and center left and above right: Window-shopping here is a delight for the senses, whether one is searching for feminine chapeaus, couture apparel, or home décor. Below left: The charming Hotel Cloître Saint-Louis features a tree-shaded courtyard. Below right: Quaint cafés dot the neighborhood circling Place des Corps-Saints.



This page: Each afternoon, guests at historic hotel La Mirande are treated to refreshments presented in the casually elegant atmosphere of the terrace. A selection of French pastries, such as poppy-seed cakes, madeleines, and almond croquants, accompany traditionally prepared hot chocolate and teas.





acclaimed Festival d'Avignon, which showcases the performing arts in various venues.

La Mirande, sheltered in the shadow of the Palais des Papes, is a quaint boutique hotel almost as old as the city itself. The building stands on the site of the former Cardinal's Palace; in fact, the basement is part of the original fourteenth-century structure. The hotel was purchased by the Stein family nearly three decades ago and renamed La Mirande after the grand room where visiting dignitaries were once received. A meticulous renovation followed, replicating the aura of an eighteenth-century aristocratic residence.

"The owners are collectors who are passionate about everything in antiquities and art," explains hotel spokesperson Rozenn Le Goff. "All fabrics and wallpapers are based on drawings of art in the eighteenth century." A perfect example is the Chinese Cabinet Room—a chamber filled with antique curiosities, such

Above, left and right: Aubusson tapestries line the staircase leading to the guest quarters, while eighteenth-century antiquities fill the Chinese Cabinet Room. Inset photo: La Mirande's logo references the hotel's Asian and Italian influences. Right: Waitstaff set the table in the small dining room.





as those Europeans amassed on their travels throughout Asia during that period.

The Steins' attention to detail is evident throughout the premises, where prized Aubusson tapestries grace the walls and baths boast vintage faucets that Mr. Stein painstakingly procured. One bedroom features fabric reminiscent of ancient frescoes, and the gardenlike courtyard contains chairs once displayed in a Parisian museum.

Cuisine is also central to the La Mirande experience. Guests may dine at the gourmet restaurant, enjoy demonstrations at the chef's table, or hone their culinary skills at the popular on-site cooking school (see "Lessons in Local Cuisine," on page 43). With its myriad amenities, La Mirande is the *pièce de résistance* of any visit to Avignon, where the past and present intertwine for an unforgettable sojourn in the heart of Provence. *V*

Above: Among the sweets and savories served at this buffet breakfast is homemade jam, prepared from citrus fruits grown at the Côte d'Azur residence of one of the hotel's owners. Left: Maids dress in old-fashioned attire, in keeping with the property's eighteenth-century ambience. Opposite: Drawings influenced by Pompeian artwork are reproduced on the fabric covering the walls of this guest room.



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Lessons in LOCAL CUISINE

One of the favorite activities for guests at La Mirande is Le Marmiton, the monthly, weeklong cooking school taught by the hotel's own chef, as well as a rotating roster of guest chefs from the Avignon area. Participants meet with the instructor each morning and then go as a group to the town's covered market to purchase ingredients for that day's dinner. They return to La Mirande's downstairs kitchen, located in the medieval section of the structure, to prepare the meal. With students gathered around the kitchen's enormous sycamore table, the chef mixes lessons with storytelling—and oftentimes a song or two—for a thoroughly entertaining educational experience.





Above, lower right: Under the keen guidance of Le Marmiton cooking-school chefs, students learn the finer points of choosing fresh ingredients at the local market. Below: Participants gather in La Mirande's circa-fifteenth-century wine cellar to choose an apéritif for the evening meal.