

Chateau opens up to mark place in heritage of France



CHALLENGE: Joris van Grinswen opens up Chateau de Clérans as part of the national event celebrating French heritage

NEARLY 1,000 years of history goes on display when the Château de Clérans in Cause de Clérans, between Bergerac and Lalinde, opens its doors for the Journées du Patrimoine on September 18-19.

Boasting an impressive 30m-high keep, a substantial part of the original walls and a Roman chapel, the chateau is a remarkable vestige of the past and owner Joris van Grinswen, a Dutch interior designer and sculptor, has used contemporary style and artistic concepts to make the castle a place of interesting contrasts today.

During the 100 Years War, it witnessed many a bloody battle as ownership of the castle went backwards and forwards between the English and French. Now Mr van Grinswen has restored the chapel and made it into part of his home; he says his work preserving the walls and gardens has created a "sanctuary after all the killing and fear that has gone on before".

"It was very important for me that the chapel became a chapel again, but

at the same time I needed a kitchen. It was a big challenge."

Outside, within the castle walls, the garden has been planted with traditional European shrubs that mingle with surprise pieces of garden decoration. A bulldog sits on a black urn propping up a large, blue ball, and two, life-size deer hold silver balls between their antlers.

"Art should be allowed to have fun," says Joris. "It's nice to be able to smile a bit. That's my style. I bought the urn and the deer here so it is a kind of wink to France."

Although the castle dates to the 11th century, it was not until the 12th century that it became important, standing at the crossroads of medieval routes. The troubadour, Bertrand de Born, Lord of Hauteafort, cited Clérans among the estates that joined against Richard the Lionheart in 1180.

In the 13th century, the tower was badly damaged by new war methods and locals used the stones for building work.

The château will be open from 10.00 to 17.00. Entry is free and Mr van Grinswen will be exhibiting sculptures and designs along with of paintings by UK artist Gillian Myers.



From prehistoric times to Descartes

THE Journées du Patrimoine is a nationwide Open Doors event with thousands of sites open across the country. It gives people the chance to visit historic buildings, monuments and sites that are not normally accessible.

In the Dordogne, one of the most spectacular is the Abri du Poisson at Les Eyziès-de-Tayac, which contains a sculpture of a salmon that dates back 25,000 years.

It is one of only about 10 representations of fish in prehistoric artwork, and was nearly chopped out in 1912 to be displayed in the Berlin Museum.

One of France's leading restoration companies will also be showing its work at the Château de Monbazillac, where Socra from Marsac sur l'Isle will be displaying works including mosaics and sculptures which it has restored.

There will also be guided and go-as-you-please visits to the Gallo-Roman museum at Vesunna in Périgueux.

Elsewhere, the old Cité de Clairvivre sanatorium at Salagnac will open for guided visits to see the Art Deco exteriors and discover more about the medical work that went on inside the leading lung rehabilitation centre.

Les Jardins de l'Imaginaire will have special displays at Terrasson-Lavilledieu showing how the remarkable displays were created. Entry cost €5.50, €4 for 10-16 years.

The tower of Montaigne at St-Michel-de-Montaigne was the home of Michel Eyquem and is where he wrote the essays that inspired Descartes and Rousseau. See what gave him inspiration. Entry €4.50.

Further afield, visitors can see Henri IV's chateau at Nerac in Lot-et-Garonne.

Point of View

Learn Occitan if you wish, but Spanish would make much more sense

This month sees thousands of children across the Dordogne return to school. It is a time of change for all, as children adjust to new classes, new classmates and even new schools. But for some, the changes will also include adjusting to a new language. In Sarlat, children starting in the bilingual class in the Ecole Maternelle Pignol will be taught in French and Occitan, something that is already on offer in Sarlat primary schools.

For British children in Sarlat, these Occitan/French schools could prove to be a major coup; providing the children are keeping up with their English language skills at home, these schools will provide a chance for British pupils to become trilingual and to become fully immersed in the roots of Périgourdine culture.

I have to admit, though, I do have some concerns for French pupils. It is undoubtedly valuable to be fluent in more than one language and great for pupils to get to grips with their regional language. Sarlat pupils will benefit in comparison with their peers who are being taught exclusively in French. However, I can't help thinking that, when these children grow up, they may well reflect on the fact that it would have even more advantageous if they had become properly bilingual in a more mainstream language, such as Spanish or English.

I'm not criticising the rise in interest in Occitan in the Dordogne, or parent's wishes for their children to learn it. I'm just being realistic. Speaking another major global language opens the world up to you; if you're going to pick a second language to teach a child, then one spoken by a large percentage of the world's population would obviously be more useful to them. But, of course, there is no reason why Sarlat schools can't become trilingual. L.S.

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