A rustic interior scene, likely a dining room or kitchen, featuring a round wooden table in the foreground. On the table are three green wine bottles, a white cloth, and a wicker basket. In the background, there are wicker chairs with floral cushions and a large bouquet of flowers on a white surface. The walls are textured and aged.

SOLVI DOS SANTOS

GREAT FAMILY WINE ESTATES OF FRANCE

STYLE • TRADITION • HOME

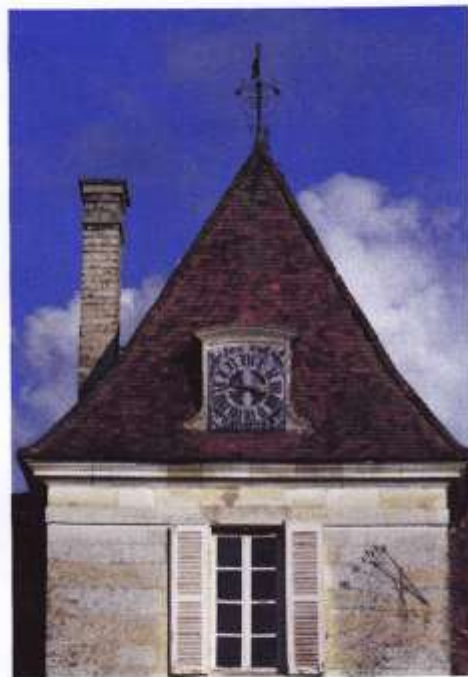
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CHÂTEAU DE BÉRU

The Chablis wine area lies at the northernmost tip of Burgundy, a full hundred miles closer to Paris than the Côte d'Or. Just 37 miles to the south of Champagne, the region is notorious for its cold winters and damp weather conditions. 'In 2007 hail stones the size of golf balls wiped out 80 per cent of our grape crop in a single storm,' recalls Athénaïs de Béru. Weather conditions apart, she is blessed with an enviable birthright. Château de Béru, family seat of the Counts of Béru since 1620, is the most impressive address in the village: a classified monument, medieval in origin, surrounded by the only walled vineyard in the whole of Chablis. The property was founded in the 13th century, then enlarged and rebuilt during the Renaissance and again in the 18th century. The eastern gateway, facing the village, features a 15th-century moondial – one of only two in Europe and the only one still in use. Scientists come to take readings every year, checking for the least sign of disruption in the lunar cycle. 'Proving', says Athénaïs, 'that the lunar influence is real. A winemaker knows that working in harmony with the phases of the moon does bring results.'

It says something about the success of her methods that all of Château de Béru's wines are now organically produced from organically grown fruit. Particularly when you consider that there was nothing left of these vineyards just 25 years ago. Ravaged by *Phylloxera Vastatrix* in the late 19th century like every other vineyard in France and in Europe, they were replanted nearly a century later by Count Eric de Béru. 'My father's background was in import-export,' explains Athénaïs. 'But his real passion lay here – in these vineyards that he replanted in 1987. The château then was my grandparents' home – the place where my father grew up and later spent most weekends and holidays, wife and children in tow.' She remembers, in particular, how surprised and delighted he was at her own venture into winemaking. 'By 2002 I realized I had missed my true vocation, so I dropped my City career and signed up for an oenology diploma in Beaune.' Her first vintage was the Clos Béru 2005, released shortly before her father's tragic demise in 2006. 'He always left us free to choose our own careers – but from the moment I came on board, he taught me everything he knew.'

The estate – vineyards, reception facilities and *chambres d'hôte* – is now entirely managed by Athénaïs and her mother Laurence, the Count's widow. 'You have to be a one-man band in this business,' says Athénaïs. 'Burgundy winegrowers make and market their own wines, knowing that every vintage is only as expressive as the *terroir* that produced it in that particular year. The Clos Béru 2009 is the wine from the Clos Béru in 2009 – no more, no less. Pure Chardonnay, from a single named vineyard.' Unlike Bordeaux, Burgundy wines are never blended: the reds are made with Pinot Noir and the whites with Chardonnay. You could say that this château expresses that same uncompromising identity: unspoilt, unadulterated and admirably true to its roots.



Above: The façade of the house on the courtyard entrance side, with the sundial in view. On the other side facing onto the village is a 15th-century moondial – one of only two in Europe. The other one, no longer in use, is at Queens' College, Cambridge.



Above: Back view of the house, looking out over five hectares of Chardonnay plantings on the southern slope of the Bérus valley. Known as the Clos Bérus, the vineyard is enclosed by a 19th-century wall. Total holdings amount to some 15 hectares – all Chardonnay – located around the village itself.

Right: Renaissance archway under the south wing, leading to a lawned garden with pool. Beyond is a square gateway that looks out onto the Clos Bérus. The house and grounds are open to the public, but remain the private home of Laurence de Bérus, Athénais' mother.





Opposite: The main entrance hall runs the length of the ground floor and gives onto the main reception rooms. It is unusually light for a hallway, thanks to windows at the front and back of the house. The square Art Deco chandelier is the work of French master glazier Louis Barillet, designer of the stained glass windows in Chartres Cathedral, working with the French architect Robert Mallet-Stevens. Against the wall is a Gothic wedding chest, overlooked by various hunting trophies (some of them bagged by present chatelaine Laurence de Béru). The black-and-white tiled floor dates from the 18th century.

Right: An eclectic but tasteful collection of paintings and furnishings gives the hallway a very warm and welcoming feel. A gilt-framed portrait of a sober young lady sits well with the muted tones of the floral wallpaper.

Below, left: Assorted walking sticks and handmade canes used by various ancestors.

Below, right: Eighteenth-century fabric-covered screen displaying perspective paintings.





Above: Drawing room off the hallway, furnished in the Louis XVI style, with antiques and bibelots from all over Europe. The Renaissance table in the middle of the room is Florentine.

Left: A small triptych of Madonna and Child, possibly Italian. The crystal *dragée* dishes in the foreground are of Irish origin.

Opposite: Wood-panelled 'blue' reception room across the hallway from the drawing room featured above. The young man in the painting on the left was named Edmé – a tradition in the de Béru family. Athénais' 25-year-old brother is the latest in a long line of Béru males to bear the name.



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Left: Reception and tasting room for group functions and paying guests, in the converted stables (east wing). The building dates from the Renaissance and retains many original features such as the stone walls with built-in horse troughs.

Opposite: The oak-panelled dining room in the main house (alongside the 'blue' room), hung with portraits of King Louis XIV and Athénaïs de Montespan, namesake of the present Athénaïs, and Louis' favourite mistress.

