

TRAVEL SECRETS

# 50 THINGS TO DO IN France

*From browsing brocantes in Normandy to cycling in Cap Ferret, marcelling at modern art in Provence to taking tea in Le Marais...*

*We asked ten top interiors specialists, designer-makers and gourmands to reveal their favourite places and pursuits in this wonderfully varied country*

FEATURE EMMA J PAGE  
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**GILLES BONAN,**  
CEO, ROCHE BOBOIS  
[roche-bobois.com](http://roche-bobois.com).

**EXPERIENCE** Meander around the Saturday morning market in Honfleur, Normandy. My family likes to stock up on cheeses and la teurgoule, a rice pudding made with local cream and caramel.

**GASTRONOMY** Arriving at La Chassagnette, [chassagnette.fr](http://chassagnette.fr), a beautifully converted farm building in the salt marshes of the Camargue, is a pleasure in itself. But it's the freshness and flavours of the menu, using organic produce from the kitchen garden, that keeps us going back.

**PLACE TO STAY** Before my family and I bought a weekend home in the area, we used to stay at La Maison de Lucie, [lamaisondelucie.com](http://lamaisondelucie.com), a charming hotel in the old town of Honfleur. It's the perfect place to unwind, particularly sitting in the peaceful courtyard for a long, late breakfast. We loved it so much, we bought the house next door.

**CULTURE** Look out for Les Rencontres d'Arles, [rencontres-arles.com](http://rencontres-arles.com), a world-famous photography festival that takes place every summer with exhibitions shown in sites all over Arles, including ancient churches, derelict warehouses and the old SNCF train depot.

**SHOP** Not far from my office in Paris, La Maison Plisson, [lamaisonplisson.com](http://lamaisonplisson.com), is a new grande épicerie and café-restaurant selling fresh dairy products, meat, vegetables and breads sourced from small producers across France. All your foodie needs are met here.



**OLIVIER ROSET,** GENERAL  
MANAGER, LIGNE ROSET  
[ligne-roset.com](http://ligne-roset.com).

**EXPERIENCE** Île-aux-Moines (island of the monks) lies in the Gulf of Morbihan off the southern coast of Brittany. It's distinguished by its unusual cross shape and has a really unique atmosphere; nowhere on the island lies further than 450 metres from the water.

**GASTRONOMY** Le Nausicaa, 0033 2975 37611, is a relaxed bar in the small harbour of Arzon with views out to sea. I like to read the newspapers over a coffee and watch the bustle of the port in the morning.

**PLACE TO STAY** Nestled in the sand dunes, the aptly named Le Château de Sable, [lechateaudesablehotel.fr](http://lechateaudesablehotel.fr), meaning sandcastle, is a luxury eco hotel located on the west coast of Brittany, not far from Brest. It offers the most amazing coastal views with miles of sandy beach.

**CULTURE** Designed by the Catalan company RCR Architectes, and named after artist Pierre Soulages, Musée Soulages, [musee-soulages.rodezagglo.fr](http://musee-soulages.rodezagglo.fr), hosts contemporary art exhibitions sited in cube structures covered with glass and weathered steel. The building also offers seductive views of the surrounding gardens, the town of Rodez and the Aveyron mountains.

**SHOP** It's more of a window-shopping experience, but I love visiting the GT Spirit showroom, [gt-spirit.fr](http://gt-spirit.fr), which is home to more than 150 vintage collectors' cars in one location at La Boisse, near Lyon.



**RUSSELL PINCH & OONA BANNON,**  
DESIGNERS, PINCH  
[pinchdesign.com](http://pinchdesign.com).

**EXPERIENCE** The food market at La Rochelle, on France's south-west coast, is one of the best. It's abundant with fresh produce in the warmer months, but our favourite time to go is on New Year's Eve, when wild boar hangs from the ceiling, the Vacherin Mont d'Or cheese is ripe, and the queues are festive as we wait for the hand-shucked scallops and langoustines.

**GASTRONOMY** On Île de Ré, La Cabane du Feneau, [lacabanedufeneau.fr](http://lacabanedufeneau.fr), best cycled to from Ars, is a gem. This simple cabin serves fresh fruits de mer, homemade mayonnaise and chilled Muscadet.

**PLACE TO STAY** La Maison du Bassin, [lamaisondubassin.com](http://lamaisondubassin.com), is a small and charming hotel with great dining, good cocktails and a very relaxed vibe. From here you can explore Cap Ferret, a headland in Aquitaine that separates the Atlantic from the Arcachon Bay – the area is all about oysters and cycling barefoot, with plenty of invigorating swims.

**CULTURE** The city of Rennes is one of our favourites and this year it hosts a series of exhibitions celebrating the work of the Bouroullec brothers, [bouroullec.com/rennes](http://bouroullec.com/rennes). It's a great excuse to wander the old town, marvelling at the cobbled streets and crooked timber-fronted houses.

**SHOP** We like to browse brocantes – many of our best paintings and a great collection of Fifties earthenware serving plates have been picked up at markets. They run across the country from May to September, usually all day on Sundays. Find a list at [brocantesfrance.com](http://brocantesfrance.com).



**PATRICK FREY,**  
**PIERRE FREY**  
[pierrefrey.com](http://pierrefrey.com).

**EXPERIENCE** Visit the antiques district in l'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, east of Avignon, where you'll find up to 500 dealers showcasing their wares from Saturday to Monday. I've unearthed beautiful 18th- and 19th-century fabrics there.

**GASTRONOMY** I love Monsieur Bleu, [monsieurbleu.com](http://monsieurbleu.com), a classic Parisian restaurant with great views of the Eiffel Tower and Sainte-Trinité, the new Orthodox cathedral by architect Jean-Michel Wilmotte.

**PLACE TO STAY** A great base for exploring the ancient walled city of Avignon is La Mirande, [la-mirande.fr](http://la-mirande.fr). It's a favourite of mine: grand, elegant and still reminiscent of the private house that it once was.

**CULTURE** When in Paris, I'd recommend a visit to the Louis Vuitton Foundation, [fondationlouisvuitton.fr](http://fondationlouisvuitton.fr). It's architecturally intriguing and an amazing space for art exhibitions, one-off cultural events, music and dance.

**SHOP** Le Bon Marché, [lebonmarche.com](http://lebonmarche.com), sells everything from wonderful culinary products to homeware and fashion. It's quintessentially Parisian.



**PRUNE ALLAIN DES BEAUVAIS,**  
MARKETING MANAGER, YVES DELORME  
[yvesdelormeparis.com](http://yvesdelormeparis.com)

**EXPERIENCE** Have a swim at the Molitor, [mltr.fr](http://mltr.fr), one of Paris's most famous pools, opened in the late Twenties. My French grandmother used to visit it when she was a little girl and she remembers seeing Le Corbusier there. Now I go swimming at the Art Deco complex with my son.

**GASTRONOMY** Eat a self-service lunch on the roof terrace at Le Déli-Cieux in Le Printemps department store, [printemps.com](http://printemps.com), in Paris. I started my career in there and the restaurant has breathtaking 360-degree views of the capital.

**PLACE TO STAY** Every summer, we visit Domaine de La Bretesche, [bretesche.com](http://bretesche.com), in Brittany, not far from Nantes. It is a castle with a fantastic golf course and a cosy spa devoted to well-being – I recommend its detox massage.

**CULTURE** Explore the Loire Valley, [loirevalley.com](http://loirevalley.com). Its Renaissance châteaux, medieval fortresses, cathedrals and abbeys are an ideal way to learn about the history of France and it's also a Unesco World Heritage Site.

**SHOP** For designer furniture, the best French maker is SOCA, [soca.fr](http://soca.fr), which offers sofas, chairs, stools and ottomans, all architecturally designed.



**PIERRE YOVANOVITCH,**  
INTERIOR DESIGNER  
[pierreyovanovitch.com](http://pierreyovanovitch.com)

**EXPERIENCE** Walking in the Hautes-Alpes, [hautes-alpes.net](http://hautes-alpes.net), is a wonderful experience and a reminder that the mountains are more than a ski destination. I love nature and this part of France is wild and beautiful. I go as often as possible and in any season.

**GASTRONOMY** Julia Sedefdjian is a young Michelin-starred chef who heads up Les Fables de la Fontaine, [lesfablesdelafontaine.net](http://lesfablesdelafontaine.net), in Paris. Like me, she is from Nice, and I feel at home every time I eat there. Try the aioli décomposé, an inventive, gourmet version of a classic family dish from Nice.

**PLACE TO STAY** À la Fontaine de Grégoire, [aubrac-chezremise.com](http://aubrac-chezremise.com), is a guesthouse in a former convent in the Aubrac. It's great to unwind here in the summer and explore the hilltop village with its slate and shale houses, fountains and Romanesque church.

**CULTURE** Château La Coste, [chateau-la-coste.com](http://chateau-la-coste.com), belongs to an Irish collector who has turned his Provençal vineyard into a contemporary art centre. I love the architecture and landscape here. The main building is designed by Tadao Ando, the wine storehouse by Jean Nouvel and the open-air theatre by Frank Gehry. It's utterly unique.

**SHOP** Occupying an old wallpaper factory in Paris, Merci, [merci-merci.com](http://merci-merci.com), is an eclectic design store featuring unusual homeware and on-the-pulse fashion. Best of all, some of its profits are donated to development and educational projects in Madagascar.



**SEBASTIAN COX,**  
DESIGNER-MAKER  
[sebastiancox.co.uk](http://sebastiancox.co.uk)

**EXPERIENCE** I love driving through the Loire Valley in pursuit of delicious wines. Last summer we enjoyed a very relaxed and intimate wine tasting at Lebreton vineyard, [domaine-des-rochelles.com](http://domaine-des-rochelles.com). It's family owned, and parents, siblings, customers and locals all enjoy its easy atmosphere. Its Crémant de Loire wine is now a firm favourite.

**GASTRONOMY** One of the things I love about France is the excellent quality of its seafood, served simply and deliciously. You can arrive on the ferry, tumble into the nearest seaside spot and find a delicious fish supper. I've enjoyed some of the tastiest oysters at La Criée du Tomahawk, 0033 2335 40908, at Saint-Vaast-la-Hougue in Normandy.

**PLACE TO STAY** Hôtel du Temps, [hotel-du-temps.fr](http://hotel-du-temps.fr), is a really charming little hotel in Paris. It has beautiful interiors and the rooms, halls and stairs are decorated with lovely linocut prints. It's centrally located, too – just a ten-minute walk from Gare du Nord.

**CULTURE** Musée d'Orsay, [musee-orsay.fr](http://musee-orsay.fr), is one of my favourite galleries in Paris. It's less crowded than the Louvre but just as good.

**SHOP** Maison Gosselin, [maison-gosselin.fr](http://maison-gosselin.fr), in Saint-Vaast-la-Hougue is a trove of culinary delights. The shop's numerous nooks and crannies are filled with authentic French produce from cheese, meat and wine to jam, bread, biscuits and fruits. On my last visit I chose a selection of coffee beans and had them ground into my own personal blend.



**ALEXANDRA CHAMPALIMAUD,**  
FOUNDER, DESIGN STUDIO  
[champalimauddesign.com](http://champalimauddesign.com)

**EXPERIENCE** Carpenters Workshop Gallery, [carpentersworkshopgallery.com](http://carpentersworkshopgallery.com), in Paris is a collective creating limited-edition furniture, sculpture and collectable pieces. It's a dream to visit its expansive studio and view the handiwork.

**GASTRONOMY** There's something quite exquisite about La Colombe d'Or, [la-colombe-dor.com](http://la-colombe-dor.com), in St-Paul-de-Vence. The restaurant is part of a beautiful historic property and its walls are covered in art by Matisse, Picasso, Calder, César and Arman. It also has a delightful terrace with stunning views of the Côte d'Azur. I pop by from time to time on my way to Cannes or Nice.

**PLACE TO STAY** Le Royal Monceau, [leroyalmonceau.com](http://leroyalmonceau.com), always delivers a quintessentially Parisian experience, from its Philippe Starck interiors and impressive private art collection to its Michelin-starred restaurant.

**CULTURE** The Musée Matisse, [musee-matisse-nice.org](http://musee-matisse-nice.org), in Nice is a charming building filled with some of the artist's most colourful pieces.

**SHOP** I love Karawan Authentic, [karawan.fr](http://karawan.fr), in Lyon. It sells hammam bowls, beautifully crafted trays, oils and soaps. No two items are exactly the same.



**VERONIQUE PIEDELEU,**  
CO-OWNER, CARAVANE  
[caravane.fr](http://caravane.fr)

**EXPERIENCE** Le Tigre Yoga Club, [tigre-yoga.com](http://tigre-yoga.com), offers the best yoga experiences in Paris. It holds 200 sessions each week in a relaxing atmosphere and I do my best to make sure I visit at least twice a week. The massages are sublime and there is a great organic juice bar.

**GASTRONOMY** My favourite place to eat is the family-run L'Oenosteria, 0033 1771 59413, on Rue Grégoire de Tours, Paris. The menu, which changes daily, offers a true taste of the Mediterranean.

**PLACE TO STAY** I love the vineyard setting of Château Angueiroun, [angueiroun.fr](http://angueiroun.fr). Nestled on Cap Benat on the Côte d'Azur, the building is designed in country style, featuring natural materials such as marble and limestone. It's very chic and a wonderful place to recharge.

**CULTURE** Bibliothèque Forney, 0033 1427 81460, founded in 1886, has an extraordinary collection of original patterns and designs across a range of fabrics, lace and furniture. It's a continual source of inspiration and the building in Paris is as impressive as the treasures it contains.

**SHOP** Flower.fr has been providing arrangements for our shop in Rue Jacob, Paris, ever since it opened. I never cease to be amazed by its beautiful floral bouquets, whatever the season.



**SYLVIA KONTEK AND VITTORIO MONGE,**  
RESTAURATEURS  
[barmargaux.co.uk](http://barmargaux.co.uk); [barbandol.co.uk](http://barbandol.co.uk)

**EXPERIENCE** The Arcachon Bay happens to be the oyster capital of the Atlantic coast. It's the ideal place to unwind. Rent a bike and visit the tiny fishermen's villages and, across the lagoon from Cap Ferret, climb up Dune du Pilat, [dunedupilat.com](http://dunedupilat.com), the highest sand dune in Europe.

**GASTRONOMY** With its origins as a modest open-air café, Le Bacon, [restaurantdebacon.com](http://restaurantdebacon.com), has been a fixture in Cap d'Antibes since the Forties when it was opened by the Sordello family. We head there for the best grilled langoustines and views over Antibes.

**PLACE TO STAY** Les Avisés, [selosse-lesavises.com](http://selosse-lesavises.com), in Champagne is a beautiful boutique hotel and restaurant owned by winemaker Jacques Selosse, with rooms overlooking the vineyards.

**CULTURE** Fondation Maeght, [fondation-maeght.com](http://fondation-maeght.com), is a modern art museum featuring incredible works by Giacometti, Chagall, Braque, Miró and Matisse – all in the midst of the classic Provençal landscape of St-Paul-de-Vence.

**SHOP** Head to Le Marais in Paris for the most noteworthy art, fashion and perfume boutiques. We love Mariage Frères, [mariagefreres.com](http://mariagefreres.com), for the best teas in town.

