

DOLCE VITA

By Marie Mitchell and Debra Moffitt



FOR THE LOVE OF ART AND WINE

The Amour Vinum wine-bar is a modern, cheerful and popular rendez-vous for wine-buffs who find themselves spoilt for choice with over 1,020 labels, as well as honey, jams and other regional products. In the evening, the chef proposes a selection of 10 main dishes accompanied by 10 different wines, now to be savoured while admiring a dozen paintings by Mattéo Bosoni (photo). With a doctorate in the psychology of art, this Italian artist masters the figurative style, assemblage and abstract Impressionism with equal success and sensitivity. 27 rue Châteauneuf, Nice (04 93 44 06 44).

The Abbaye de Lérins' 19 acres of vineyards hide behind fences in the center of the island with signs marked "Reserved for Monks Only." Dressed in white robes and black cowls, the monks diligently prune the vines in a sil-



Divine wines from Saint-Honorat

ence broken solely by the sound of sea surf and the screech of pheasants. This haven of peace just a 30-minute boat ride from Cannes has given birth to what the Bottin Gourmand calls "a new *grand cru*". In a phenomenally short ten years, the Abbaye's Cuvée Saint-Sauveur and Chardonnay wines have won national and international acclaim, and now grace the tables of the Carlton and Palme d'Or in Cannes, and L'Arpege in Paris. The success of its herbal liqueur Lérina encouraged the Abbey to produce fine wines. The Cisterian monks use Syrah, Mourvèdre and Carignan for their fruity, aromatic reds, Clairette and Chardonnay for the whites. The combination of the monks' dedication and excellent

advice from experts like Jean "Le Nez" Lenoir and chef Jacques Chibois assured their success. The head *sommelier* at L'Arpege described the Saint-Sauveur 2003 as a complex yet delicate wine, offering wine-lovers a "*voyage d'épices*". The Chardonnay Grande Cuvée 2003 was ranked fourth by *Culture et Goût*, just behind the Montrachet Grand Cru. The Abbey produces approximately 35,000 bottles of wine per year, from 21 to 49 € per bottle, all free of chemical fertilizers or pesticides. The island owes its name to the saint who arrived there in 400 A.D. It offers an exceptional climate and paths lined with pines and eucalyptus trees centuries old. In addition to the extraordinary neo-Roman

church built in 1875, seven chapels dating from the 11th century are dotted around the island, a site for pilgrimages in the Middle Ages. The fortified 10th-century monastery at the water's edge remains one of the main attractions. At the time of Napoleon, it was sold to a famous French actress who occupied the tower and chapel before it reverted to the hands of the monks. Connoisseurs are invited to join the *Club des Amis du Vignoble de St. Honorat*, which proposes wine tastings and preferential prices. And those who need to get away from it all can also ask to stay at the monastery for a spiritual retreat. Contact Frère Marie Pâques, Abbaye de Lérins, Ile Saint-Honorat, BP 157, 06406 Cannes (04 92 99 54 10).



Cave Pierre Bianchi

Rue Raoul Bosio has been home to the Cave Pierre Bianchi since 1860. Inside this enchanting old-world wine cellar, you'll discover the finest wines, champagnes and an exclusive range of spirits. The store specializes in wine from Provence (the family owns a vineyard in Bandol), as well as major wine producing regions elsewhere in France and even abroad. A cosy "salon de dégustation" welcomes visitors to taste their fine range and venture down the wooden steps to a dusty cellar where the oldest vintages will tempt you to pull out your wallet. This is a delightful place to learn from the experts and shipments can be arranged all over the world. During the winter, cultural evenings are combined with tastings the first Friday of each month. 7 rue Raoul Bosio, Old Town of Nice (04 93 85 65 79) and 5 rue Maréchal Joffre in Cannes.

Photos: Marie Mitchell - Press