



SATURDAY

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My royal secrets

Charles, Camilla and me

By Lady Glenconner

MAGAZINE



Open marriage

What it's really like

WEEKEND

Plus
Giles Coren reveals all

COMMENT

Care homes told to stop shutting out loved ones

Residents could get legal right to have visitors

Chris Smyth Whitehall Editor
Kat Lay Health Editor

Care homes and hospitals will be forced to allow visitors under plans being drawn up by the government.

Helen Whately, the care minister, said shutting out relatives showed a lack of humanity. Covid-19 rules mean some of the country's most vulnerable people still cannot have loved ones at their bedside.

Whately, who has told of her personal grief and frustration at being barred from visiting her critically ill mother, is now developing laws to give residents and patients a right to receive visitors.

Although official visiting restrictions were dropped in the spring in England, there are still widespread reports of care homes and hospitals refusing to let in relatives or imposing stringent conditions that ministers do not believe are justified by public health guidance.

Hundreds of care homes still refuse to accept visitors entirely, according to government figures, while others restrict residents to one relative at a time. A recent survey of people with loved ones in care homes found at least one where phone calls had been stopped for fear that handsets would get infected.

Campaigners report residents losing weight because their relatives cannot go in to help them at mealtimes amid staff shortages. They also fear residents are being left in bed for long periods because staff know there will be no

visitors to check on them. Whately said that she was "determined to fix" the issue, adding: "No one can be in any doubt now how much visits matter". She told The Times: "The darkest days of the pandemic are thankfully behind us but I'm still hearing from families [who are] being stopped from visiting loved ones."

"I know how it feels. I didn't know if I would see my mum alive again when she was very ill in hospital in the summer. I remember well the feelings I had at the time — grief mixed with frustration and even anger at a system that seemed to lack humanity."

She acknowledged the need for caution but said: "The vast majority of places are now allowing visits. Those who aren't can follow their example on how it can and should be done."


Covid-19 cases fell across the UK last week for the first time in over two months, data showed yesterday, with declines among every age group in England. Hospital admissions are also falling, with about 5,600 inpatients known to have the virus in England.

In June NHS leaders told hospitals they should return to pre-pandemic policies on visiting and patients being accompanied in A&E or to appointments. The guidance said "no patient should be alone during their care unless this is their choice". Masks should not be "routinely required" of visitors, but there is local discretion. In care homes, Continued on page 4



Flying the flag for freedom

Ukrainians celebrated in Freedom Square, Kherson, as their troops entered the city having forced out the Russian invaders. War's biggest win, pages 44-45



My week by Matt Hancock

*As imagined by Hugo Rifkind

NEWS



How to exercise and stay injury-free

WEEKEND

Are you on the Ick list?

The biggest turn-offs

MAGAZINE



Luxury Bordeaux

Santé! The most relaxing vineyard break in France

Unlike other wine estates, this château has cool interiors and no baffling winespeak. It's a fun place to stock up for the season ahead, says **Susan d'Arcy**



Troplong Mondot vineyards



One of the hotel bedrooms



A picnic at the estate

ROMAN ESCOBAR

friend and regular at Troplong Mondot.

De Gironde has spent the past five years modernising this 19th-century estate to reflect his inclusive attitude. A cornerstone of that strategy is being more welcoming to guests, including opening a trio of boutique bolt holes for those who'd quite like to sleep off their tasting session. The Keys, in a whitewashed outbuilding, has three quirky rooms. My favourite is the Art Studio (from £230 B&B), for its cosy sitting room, while the Vineyard House has two rustically romantic rooms tucked among the vines (from £245 B&B).

The latest addition, which opened this summer, is the five-bedroom 18th-century château where I am staying (exclusive-use only, from £6,500 B&B, sleeps ten). It's Catherine De-neuve in bricks and mortar, effortlessly cool and awesomely understated with a series of public salons, including a sitting room, library and dining room, and a flank of French windows that open onto a terrace. As the estate is at the highest

point of the area, this is the place to watch the sun sink behind the silhouette of Saint-Émilion's monolithic church a couple of miles away.

That night, I have a casual château supper including piquant ceviche, a salad with just-picked green beans and a moreish walnut tart, whetting my appetite for dinner the following evening across the garden at the estate's Les Belles Perdrix restaurant. It has a Michelin star as well as a green star for sustainable gastronomy. Sustainability is central to de Gironde's ethos and the winery recently became the first in France to reach Silver Membership status of the International Wineries for Climate Action organisation.

I drop a clanger as I accept a third glass of the Mondot 2018, remarking that I won't get a hangover because it's organic. Tumbweed moment. Despite its environmental accolade, the estate is not officially organic. Granted, it banned the use of herbicides and pesticides more than 20 years ago, upholds time-honoured traditions such as using horses to plough 80 per cent of the vineyard and embraces green innovations (vine prunings are transformed into pellets to fire its heating system, reducing emissions by 75 per cent), but de Gironde reserves the right to have nasty old chemicals in his top pocket for dire emergencies.

His caution is understandable. French winemakers face epic challenges because

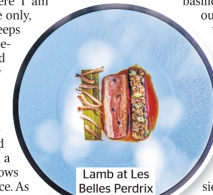
of the planet's increasingly unpredictable weather patterns. This year, they battled not only record-breaking heatwaves but batterings by giant hailstones that smashed car windcreens and flattened vines. One of the eco options de Gironde is considering to counter the latter is to burst huge balloons filled with salt in front of approaching hailstorms to disperse them.

It's difficult to imagine danger on the delightful stroll through Troplong's vines to the ridiculously cute and cobbled Saint-Émilion, one of the first villages to be listed a Unesco world heritage site for its "cultural landscape". I sign up for a memorable tour of the underground basilica and catacombs, carved out of the soft limestone in the 11th century (£10pp, saint-emilion-tourisme.com) and enjoy shocking myself with the prices in its many wine stores: £8,500 for a Petrus 1945.

For my final dinner, de Gironde joins me at Les Belles Perdrix with a companion in tow, Rosie, his rascally English setter. It's warm enough to sit outside and take in a soft-focus panorama of the Dordogne Valley with our glasses of champagne. I'm surprised when Rosie trots merrily through into the dining room with us. With the blind love of a parent who refuses to believe that their little Johnnie pulled that girl's pigtails, de Gironde assures me that Rosie won't move from her spot under our table.

And she doesn't. At least not while we rave about the squid stuffed with spinach and sorrel from the garden. As my mouthful disappears, I envy the staff — they get weekly baskets of its fresh produce. Rosie also stays put as we tuck into the delicate red mullet with marjoram perfume and glazed sweet potatoes. Again, I don't leave a morsel, so no scraps from my plates for the pigs and chickens, aka the in-house waste disposal unit.

As de Gironde recalls how his wine education began when he and a buddy used to sneak bottles from his friend's father's cellar (probably helped that Dad owned a top vineyard), we don't notice a fellow diner tempt Rosie with some bread. Our hound sneaks out with the stealth of an SAS sniper and almost makes it to the woman before the maître d' intercepts her and drags her back, tail between her legs. It is the first — and I imagine the only — time I'll dine with a dog at a Michelin-starred restaurant. Fine wines and friendliness. Who wouldn't drink to Troplong Mondot?



Lamb at Les Belles Perdrix

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Wine tastings are intimate enough at the best of times. But a tasting at Troplong Mondot in Bordeaux, a Premier Grand Cru Classé estate in one of the world's most prestigious wine regions, could be the sort of nerve-racking event that leaves an amateur enthusiast like me in need of a stiff drink.

To add to my anxiety, my tasting group is led by Aymeric de Gironde, who is Troplong Mondot's CEO and one of France's most respected winemakers. We are in his state-of-the-art winery, which looks like a Bond villain's lair with its wow-factor architecture. We enter via a glass walkway which is embedded with gemstone lights and suspended vertiginously 11m above the cellar's oak barrel and includes a shop where I will later stock up for Christmas.

Its design may be thoroughly modern, but outside vines unfurl down hazy hillsides much as they have for centuries.

On this day you are flirting with the last rays of Saint-Émilion autumn sunshine. De Gironde pours some of the Château Troplong Mondot 2015 for my group (it's probably vulgar to mention...but it's £90 a bottle) and begins: "I remember the critic Robert Parker describing a wine as having the aromas of red cedar trees in the north of Lebanon." I shift nervously on my stool. Everyone else is nodding reverentially. Righto, just me feeling like an impostor then. "And I thought," de Gironde pauses, regards the inky darkness of his drink and deadpans, "Who knows what that smells like?"

He laughs, I relax. Welcome to French wine tourism, part two, except this time it's not so serious. "I'm not going to tell you what our wines taste like, that's up to you," he shrugs. "You don't have to spit either." There is a refreshing lack of pretension about the charismatic de Gironde. He even compares the creative process of wine-making to the rotation of players in a rugby squad. It later transpires that the former rugby union coach Clive Woodward is a

Need to know

Susan d'Arcy was a guest of Château Troplong Mondot, which has B&B doubles from £220 (troplong-mondot.com). Fly to Bordeaux or take the train to Libourne

Three more great wine hotels in Europe

Six Senses Douro Valley, Portugal
Near the historic town of Lamego and 90 minutes' drive from the captivating city of Porto, this 19th-century manor house overlooks terraced vineyards and the Douro River. The design pairs traditional craftwork with contemporary art, while days pair wine tours and spa treatments. Evenings are reserved for long dinners where the organic ingredients from the hotel's kitchen gardens are, of course, paired with local organic and biodynamic wines. You can also book trips to famous local quintas. Details B&B doubles from £387 (sixsenses.com)

Royal Champagne Hotel, France
This sophisticated hotel is perched on a vine-clad hilltop in Epernay, the capital of Champagne, and has interiors as creamy and sparkling as a glass of the bubbly stuff. Bedrooms have wallpapers inspired by the noble grape, and dinner in the Michelin-starred Le Royal takes its gastronomic cues from the terrace too. For a more informal supper, the Bellevue's terrace serves up a side order of misty views across to Hautvillers, where the great champagne maker Dom Pérignon is buried. Details B&B doubles from £555 (royalchampagne.com)

La Pensione Vignamaggio, Italy
With a working farm and vineyards covering almost 1,000 acres of Chianti-shire to call home, Florence and Siena on its doorstep and a state-of-the-art cellar for its quality organic wines, this little guesthouse has all the essentials for some dolce vita. For additional oomph, its 19 rooms are inspired by the love stories of the Renaissance writer Giovanni Boccaccio and come in soothing pastels, while the garden pool is scented with jasmine. It reopens in April after a winter break. Details B&B doubles from £145 (vignamaggio.com)



Six Senses Douro Valley