

# COUNTRY & TOWN HOUSE

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

MARCH 2020 £3.90

## DESERT STORM

*Style up for summer*

## GREEN & WILD

*Is Bill Bensley the  
hotel industry's  
eco saviour?*

HOT  
TRAVEL  
TRENDS  
2020

## THE HAPPINESS INDEX

*Why Bhutan  
works for its  
residents*

*Travel issue*

TREAD SOFTLY BECAUSE YOU TREAD ON MY DREAMS



Sip wine on the slopes  
of Mount Etna with  
Tasca d'Almerita



# THE GRAPE ESCAPE

Take wine tasting to the next level with these all-new estate hotels and tasting experiences, advises **Alice Lascelles**





1 Cloudy Bay's tasting shed 2 Four Seasons Resort, Napa Valley  
3 Ripe French vines 4 Devon's Lymptstone Manor 5 Château Lafaurie-Peyraguey in Sauternes 6 Sicily's Tasca d'Almerita



**W**ine and wanderlust have long gone hand in hand. Now a fresh crop of hotels, retreats and tasting rooms offer oenophiles the chance to get straight to the heart of the action.

New for New Zealand is the Cloudy Bay Shed ([cloudybay.co.nz](http://cloudybay.co.nz)), a beautifully appointed cellar door in Central Otago, the South Island region that famously served as the spectacular backdrop for the *Lord of the Rings* movies. Set in a lush garden among acres of vines, this state-of-the-art, glass-walled tasting room is the place to sample the Cloudy Bay vineyard's celebrated pinot noir, before enjoying a barefoot barbecue under the stars. If that whets your appetite, Cloudy Bay also offers From Forage to Table, a six-day gourmet extravaganza of spearfishing, oyster shucking, foraging, wilderness picnics, vineyard tours, helicopter flights over fjords and glaciers, and private dinners at its HQs in Central Otago and Marlborough, accompanied by lashings of its top wines. I had a little taster of this, and all I can say is: prepare to be amazed.

The curator of this – and many other – exclusive wine trips is Clos 19 ([clos19.com](http://clos19.com)), an arm of luxury drinks company Moët Hennessy. With access to a whole portfolio of illustrious wine estates and distilleries around the world, including Krug, Ruinart, Hennessy and Glenmorangie, as well as New World wineries

including Cloudy Bay, Newton Vineyard in Napa and Argentina's Cheval des Andes, it's a one-stop shop for epicurean adventure. Choose from a range of prêt-à-porter packages, or talk to them about arranging something tailor-made.

Bespoke travel specialists Black Tomato ([blacktomato.com](http://blacktomato.com)) has teamed up with online restaurant magazine *Eater* to create Eater Journeys, an exciting new series of itineraries taking in some of the world's top eating and drinking destinations. The Paris & Burgundy trip begins with an urban safari through some of the capital's most famous restaurants, bars and food shops, adding in a guided market tour, a cookery class and a cheese and wine tasting, before culminating in truffle hunting and more wine tasting in the heart of Burgundy.

Despite its glamorous reputation, Champagne used to be curiously short on good hotels, but that's all changed since the arrival of the Royal Champagne Hotel & Spa ([royalchampagne.com](http://royalchampagne.com)), a sumptuous, creamy-coloured retreat among the vines, just outside Épernay. The panoramic views from the roof terrace are glorious, the spa is delightful and the champagne list to die for, but what this five-star hotel offers above all is the contacts to create a wine trip that's really unique: a one-to-one champagne tutorial for instance, or a private visit to Hautvilliers, the spiritual home of Dom Pérignon, as well as access to the kind of cult, independent champagne houses that are not normally open to the public.

One of my favourite jaunts of last year was a visit to the sleepy but utterly enchanting appellation of Sauternes, in south Bordeaux. Oft overlooked in favour of its more high-octane





neighbours in the north of the region, Sauternes is now seeing major investment. Laliqé CEO and wine magnate Silvio Denz has poured huge amounts of time, love and money into the 13th-century Château Lafaurie-Peyraguey ([chateau-lafaurie-peyraguey.com](http://chateau-lafaurie-peyraguey.com)), restoring its famous winery and adding a Michelin-starred restaurant and a crystal-encrusted hotel. Situated just a short bike ride from several other eminent châteaux – including the ravishing Château d'Yquem – this dramatic property is a wonderful base from which to explore this lovely region.

Just down the road from Lafaurie-Peyraguey, the luxury hotel group Six Senses ([sixsenses.com](http://sixsenses.com)) is also in the process of revamping accommodation at the Grand Cru Classé Château d'Arche winery. An opening date has not been set, but having stayed at Six Senses, Douro – a hotel with a very cool, pared-back aesthetic, wonderful wine list and glass-walled room looking out on the valley's vertiginous vineyards – I have high hopes for this one.

Sometimes simply looking at the vines is not enough. At the five-star Castelfalfi ([castelfalfi.com](http://castelfalfi.com)) resort in Tuscany, wannabe vigneron can now adopt their own vineyard (or olive grove) on the 1,100-hectare estate. 'Be a Farmer' prices start at €260 (around £221) for a row of organically-farmed sangiovese vines and there's a tailored package of extras that can include an invitation to join the harvest as well as personalised bottles of Tenuta Castelfalfi. Even if you're not in it for the wine, this cluster of farmhouses, cottages and apartments in an 800-year-old medieval hamlet is well worth a visit.

If you're heading down south to Sicily, be sure to arrange a visit to Tasca d'Almerita's stylish new tasting room on the north face of

Mount Etna ([tascaalmerita.it](http://tascaalmerita.it)). This sparingly renovated 'palmento' (a traditional Etnean wine cellar) lies just yards from the winery's spectacular 99-terrace vineyards and is fully equipped for hosting private dinners and tastings, either in the lofty stone dining room or in the more cosy drawing room by the fire.

One of the most hotly anticipated openings in the US this year will be the Four Seasons Resort in California's glitzy Napa Valley ([fourseasons.com/napa/valley](http://fourseasons.com/napa/valley)). Blessed with its own vineyard, spa, garden-to-table restaurant, farmhouse-style lodgings (without the mud, of course) and views of the Palisades Mountains, it promises winemaking tutorials with the hotel's winemaker, Thomas Rivers Brown, as well as tastings and vineyard tours by bike.

Closer to home, Lympstone Manor ([lympstonemanor.co.uk](http://lympstonemanor.co.uk)) – chef Michael Caines' romantic vineyard hotel on the Exe Estuary in Devon – will celebrate its first harvest this autumn. If you want to be sure of a front row seat (and you can literally see the vines from your bedroom window) book sooner rather than later. And leave room for a Michelin-starred dinner of truly epic proportions.

But why wait until you get to your destination to pop the cork? Private jet company VistaJet ([vistajet.com](http://vistajet.com)) now offers in-flight tastings as well as expert advice on buying and investing in fine wine. The company's well-connected concierges can also arrange a spin around your favourite wine region: how about a three-day tour of Tuscany and Umbria including dinner with the Antinori family, helicopter vineyard tours and accommodation on the family estates? Oenotourism has well and truly had an upgrade. [@aliceascelles](https://twitter.com/aliceascelles). ■