

Travels with Anzie - Bits and Pieces May 2022

Medieval Urban Designs

As we travel around South Central France we note that some villages are designed in concentric circles. Whereas others are designed as series of rectangles, much like our modern cities. The first design is called a **circulade**. The ancient Romans called it an **oppidum**. The purpose of the design was to defend against invaders. Each circle is composed of houses that served as walls of a fortress. If the invading force breached the exterior circle, the population would move to the next inner circle and re-commence their defense. In the center of the town was a fortress, the lord's chateau, or an open market area.



The second design is called a **bastide**. Much like most cities, it consists of a grid, a series of rectangular blocks, which are surrounded by streets, alleys or lanes. Much easier to navigate than the circulade. The design includes a central square, which is used as a market or for social occasions.



Castles in the Dordogne

Legend has it that there are 1001 castles/chateaux in the Dordogne. Castles tend to be defensive fortresses and chateaux were palaces or the homes of the wealthy. Many of the castles range along either side of the river. During the Hundred Years War, the British occupied castles on one side of the river, while the French occupied those on the opposite side. An example exists about five miles from our digs.

The **Beynac** Castle sits on a high hill on the north side of the river. This was the French bastion. King Richard the Lionhearted spent the last years of his life here after the crusades.



The **Castlenaud** Castle sits on the opposite side of the Dordogne. The design really shouts “military fortress”. History tells us that the lady of the castle complained to Lord Caumont that she didn’t like living in a “fort”. So, in the late 1400’s, he built her another castle, **Chateau des Milandes**, just a short distance up the river. Interestingly enough, the famous singer **Josephine Baker** rented Milandes in the early 1940’s. She ultimately bought it to house her “Rainbow Tribe” of 12 adopted children. Hers is an interesting life, well worth reading about.



Castlenaud

Chateaux

There are literally 100s of chateaux in the Dordogne. Some are ancient like **Milandes**. Some were built by wealthy wine merchants in the late 18th century. Some are being built as I write.



Milandes



A chateau we passed by chance driving among the nearby hills.

Most beautiful towns of France - Les Plus Beaux Villages

This is a 40 year-old program of the French government. There were two agendas. The first was to highlight and promote beautiful towns in France. The second was to support small towns through tourism, as many had few other forms of income and were falling into disrepair. There are now 160 such towns. Most villages don't make the list and it's understandable when you consider the criteria:

- there must be some rural character with no more than 2,000 inhabitants
- they must have two national heritage sites
- there must be an on-site evaluation and
- the application must have mass support of the town council.

We have visited 10 of the villages within 25 miles of us, an incredible density for the program. And yes, they are beautiful!



This town has also the “best quality of life town” – another national program. See the attached link for all the villages. www.les-plus-beaux-villages-de-france.org

How the rich mow their lawns – robo lawnmowers



This one is charging!

Springtime in the Dordogne – Asparagus, Strawberries and Roses



At Bergerac market



Our back terrace



White asparagus growing covered so won't turn green

And finally fois gras!



Fois gras before.....



and after! (note prices!)



Now ready-to-eat fois gras



The town of Sarlat is so into fois gras. This statue is in the center of town

And finally, for you Catholics – a holy water dispenser – another Covid innovation!



Home soon – Chuck and Anzie