




## NEWS FROM LA VIEILLE DISTILLERIE



With Christmas and the New Year almost here it is interesting to us to observe how the French celebrate these festivals. As in England Christmas is a time for generosity, gifts, family reunions, sweets for the children and gifts for the poor.

Although these days fewer French attend Midnight Mass it is still an important part of Christmas for many families. This is followed by a huge feast called the Réveillon which means to wake up or revive. It is a symbolic awaking to the meaning of Christ's birth and is a culinary highlight of the season.

French children put their shoes in front of the fireplace so that Pere Noel can fill them with small gifts. Sweets, fruit and nuts, and small toys will also be hung on the Christmas tree overnight.



This year we have decided to make a Christmas and New Year Special Offer - three stress free days - we cook while our guests relax in front of our log fires and eat, drink and be merry!

On New Year's Eve, the feast of St Sylvestre, we will be celebrating the start of the New Year with dinner and dancing with the local community.

Details of menus and activities are on the website:

<http://www.lavieilledistillerie.com/christmas.htm>



You can't live or visit the Poitou Charentes without someone pouring a glass of the marvelous smooth liqueur known as Pineau des Charentes, a fortified sweet aperitif made in the Cognac region. It can be found in white, rose and red versions. Because it is made with Cognac, which halts the fermentation, it is a liqueur wine. Here's how this remarkable drink came about by accident.

In the 16th century, during a busy harvest, a Cognac producer accidentally poured some freshly pressed grape juice into an oak barrel already containing a small quantity of Cognac eau-de-vie. The barrel was put aside and forgotten about for several years until during a highly productive harvest all casks were required.



The barrel containing the grape juice and eau de vie mixture was found. The owner, on tasting the brew, was amazed by the subtle smoothness - hence Pineau was born.

The process of making this drink demands craftsmanship and experience and for five centuries producers have continued to follow the same tradition passed down from generation to generation.

Pineau is an excellent aperitif, or cocktail with tonic and also compliments the finest of foods throughout a meal. Some meats, such as pork cooked in Pineau, are delicious.

Living in the heart of the Pineau production region we are lucky enough to have private distilleries all around us and it is fascinating at this time of the year, when the distillers begin making Pineau and Cognac, to visit a distillery and watch the process which has been ongoing for the past 400 years.



Angoulême is famous for its International Comic Festival known as Le Festival International de la Bande Dessinée. Every year the town is taken over by the festival with shop decorating their windows with comic art and huge marquees erected for creators and publishers.

The event attracts several hundred thousands from all over the world who come to join in 4 days of exhibitions, meet with artists and see the presentations of some of the most prestigious awards in comics.



Driving through the hilltop city of Angoulême one of the most striking features are the wall paintings of comic murals. They are everywhere. Known as the Comic city, Angoulême has hosted the Comic Strip Festival since 1974. The event Angoulême is famous for its International Comic Festival known as Le Festival International de la Bande Dessinée.



This fascinating four day event takes place in January every year. For January 2010 the date is 28th to 31st.

Angoulême's busiest street was renamed Herge after the famous Belgian comic artist creator Tintin. A bust stands there in his honour.



Just over an hour's drive North West of us is the little village of Dampierre-sur-Boutonne which is home to a rare breed of donkey known as the "Baudet de Poitou". It is an interesting drive to the Stud and makes a fascinating day out for visitors who are given a guided tour of the grounds and see the dedicated team at work.

The "Baudet" donkey is a rare breed of the Charente. Noted for their dreadlock long hair. He is the tallest and the oldest breed of donkey. He is also one of the most endangered species in the world today. Some historians believe that the Baudet existed in France during the Roman occupation. He was certainly here during the Middle Ages.



In 1977 there were only 44 Baudet left in the world, a breeding programme, supervised by the French National Stud and funded by the Poitou-Charente region, has saved them. There are now more than 400 and the pure bred line has been restored. They are very large standing at 135cm to 150 cm (13.2 to 15 hands) with a very strong bone structure.

They can be seen at La Maison du Baudet du Poitou, Tillauderie, where the breeding programme is being carried on. They sire extremely strong mules and at the height of their use and popularity 30,000 mules a year were being produced for agriculture and army use. The breed was originally developed by the Romans during their occupation of Gaul.



*Last but not least,*  
*We wish you all*  
*A*  
*Very Merry Christmas*  
*and*  
*Happy New Year.*

