



JANE BARNES GOES ON AN AUTUMN SHOPPING SPREE IN ONE OF LANGUEDOC'S LOVELIEST TOWNS

MUST HAVE DIED AND GONE TO HEAVEN. I am sitting outside Terroirs, one of many attractive restaurants on Place aux Herbes in Uzès, an ancient, charming town in the Gard département of Languedoc. In front of me is an assiette gourmande, an aptly named plate of taboulé, pureed aubergine, grilled red peppers, lollo rosso lettuce and juicy ripe tomatoes, with a sharp vinaigrette dressing. Beside it sits a basket of freshly baked bread, and a chilled glass of crisp Muscat Sec – one of my favourite white wines.

It is a sunny Wednesday in autumn, and after a shopping fest, I am watching the colourful spectacle of the weekly market. I know Uzès well, but the magic of market day never ceases to amaze me; foodies owe it to themselves to visit this medieval town and its circular, mainly car-free centre at least once.

The market (held on Wednesday and Saturday mornings) is a feast for the eyes and tastebuds. Seasonal, local produce is displayed in abundance; today, the stalls are heaving with girolles mushrooms, chestnuts (fresh, candied, pureed and roasted), and snails (be sure to sample escargotine, a spread made from butter, garlic, parsley and shallots). A little later in the year sees the arrival of the highly prized truffles. The annual truffle fair, held here in January, is well worth a visit as most restaurants serve a truffle-based menu and the Maison de la Truffe – a treasure trove for fungus fans – comes into its own.

I had arrived early and made my sweep through the edibles, filling my basket with spicy olives, soft purple figs, ripe goat cheese, a garlicky saucisson, and a pot of lavender honey. After that, it was time to hit the shopping trail; the backstreets of Uzès are home to some beautiful boutiques, selling everything from gourmet foods, luxury toiletries, chic homewares and funky fashions, and I wanted to make the most of my visit.

The morning had started with a café crème at Le Vieux Café, one of the town's oldest watering holes, opposite the tourist

office on boulevard Gambetta. Leaving the comfy red leather chair, I browsed the homewares next door at Atzana before heading down rue Jacques d'Uzès and into the enchanting alleys of little shops.

Le Petit Bain stocks exquisite, exclusive fragrances and beauty products (I fell in love with the latest creation by Romano Ricci, great-grandson of French perfumer Nina Ricci), while opposite at In Fine, customers can "create" their own fragrance from a myriad of mini-testers.

A little further down, at Place Dampmartin, Sidartha has stylish womenswear, while just around the corner on rue Pélisserie, Les Armoires Vides stocks more bohemian creations and unusual footwear.

I turned up the tiny Passage Georges Gourbeyre, and stepped out onto Place aux Herbes. On my right was a smart bookstore called Le Parefeuille and across the square is Metre et Carré – a store crammed with all manner of fancy French trimmings for the home. Next door, Question de Charme was selling tasteful mushroom-grey throws and cosy floral bedspreads, no doubt with winter's approach in mind.

The maze of attractive, well-kept streets and old stone buildings has a distinct chic aura. Doors, shutters, window frames, and rubbish bins – everything in Uzès is painted a subtle grey-green that contrasts well with the creamy-coloured stonework.

On rue du Docteur Blanchard, I found Design by C. A friend had tipped me off about this newly-opened boutique and its

contemporary interior design wares, and I was not disappointed: giant-size lavender sachets in gorgeous, modern fabrics; possum-fur cushions and a host of other cool items to add the finishing touch to your home. After a very therapeutic shopping morning, I hurried back to Terroirs: I had a reservation and didn't want to lose my table. After all, when you have emptied your purse you need to fill your stomach, and this gem of a restaurant and fine food emporium is just the place to do that... ■

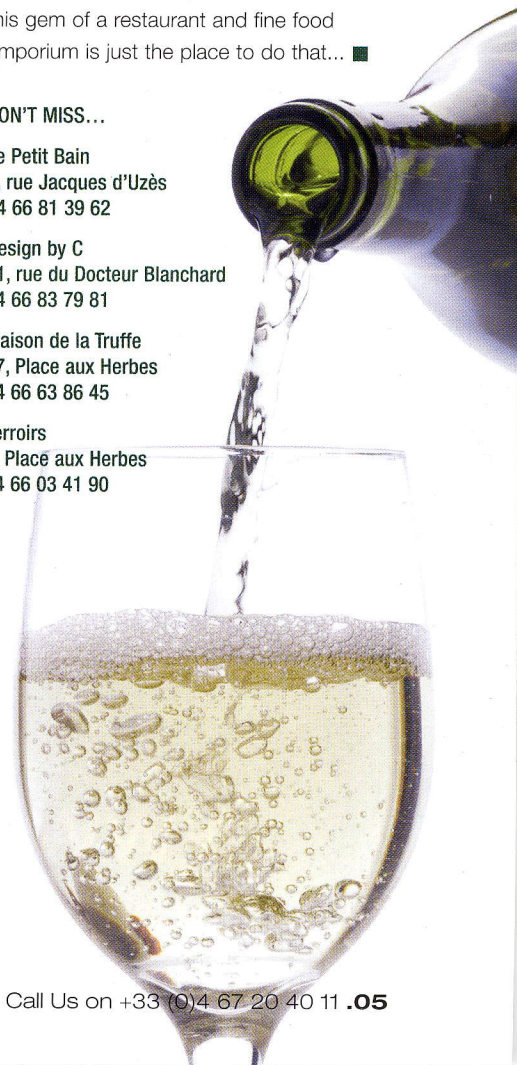
DON'T MISS...

Le Petit Bain
7, rue Jacques d'Uzès
04 66 81 39 62

Design by C
21, rue du Docteur Blanchard
04 66 83 79 81

Maison de la Truffe
27, Place aux Herbes
04 66 63 86 45

Terroirs
5, Place aux Herbes
04 66 03 41 90



Call Us on +33 (0)4 67 20 40 11 .05