



WIND, SAND AND STARS

OUR NEW COLUMN REVEALS TRAVEL SECRETS. THIS MONTH:
THE FRENCH ATLANTIC COAST

by Anthony Lassman

La Huchet is a unique secret beach house compound on the French Atlantic coast, between Bordeaux and Biarritz. It is elevated above Europe's longest stretch of sand—120 miles of wild, untouched beaches backed by extensive pine forests.

It is the concept of restaurateurs-cum-hoteliers, Michel and Christine Guérard, best known for their hotel and spa, Les Prés d'Eugénie at Eugénie-les-Bains, 55 miles away, just an hour and forty minutes by car. The journey is shorter (around one hour) if you arrive directly from Biarritz.

La Huchet is a place perfect for those who seek solitude and comfort but value their independence. Two simple, very well-appointed beach houses constructed in wood in the style of *Maisons Marines*, are set back above the dunes behind Huchet's main house, the Pavillon An-

glais, which is for the exclusive use of the Guérards. Aside from the outside dining deck and the lower level dining room, it is off-limits to guests.

The immediate impression is of space and solitude. An expanse of wild grasses, sand and sky, a world apart, deep in the countryside of the Landes, approached by a dirt track road that ends right here—tailor-made for those who seek peace, privacy and comfort, but value their independence and do not require the trappings of a hotel-style set up.

At La Huchet a house manager and chef will take care of everything you need, as if you were staying as privileged house guests. The house manager looks after your lodgings and serves at the table, while the chef will prepare your beautifully executed brunch and dinner with everything just as you like it. Attention to the finer points,

and the quality of food and wines, is world-class. Everything has to conform to the exacting specification and instructions of the Guérards whose control is evident. For example, it is brunch and not lunch!

The houses for paying guests each comprise a canopied porch that leads into a large sitting room with a king-bedded room beyond and a spacious, well-appointed bathroom.

The detailing is apparent everywhere, from Shaker-paneled walls to the lace-trimmed half curtains, the choice of fabrics and paintings, a log-burning fire, vases of flowers, the candles that are lit at night and the unguents in the bathroom.

This attention to detail is repeated at mealtimes. It's seen in the way the house manager sets a morning table with flowers, home-made confitures and yogurt, perfectly grouped bowls of summer fruits, jugs of freshly

squeezed orange juice and eggs perfectly cooked to order. Equal care is evident at night, when the table is set for dinner and the candlelit scene changes the ambience. Dining on the freshest, healthiest of ingredients is joyful, the flavors delicious, the regional wines perfect. On our visit we followed dinner with a brief stroll to take in the pure night air before retiring early so we could take full advantage of the following day, doing very little other than reading, walking the beaches, appreciating the elements and thinking about who else would love it here.

La Huchet will not be for everyone but for the right people: it has a magic that makes it unique.

