

# La Chartreuse du Bignac

This country manor, built upon the ruins of a former fortified house — of which the vaulted lower rooms (cellars) still remain — is a fine example of 18th-century Périgord architecture and perfectly embodies the definition of a traditional *Périgourdine chartreuse*.

Dating its construction precisely is difficult; some sources suggest between 1690 and 1715.

Built at the summit of a hill, just a few hundred metres from the village of Saint-Nexans, La Chartreuse du Bignac enjoys a privileged position. It overlooks a valley and a small stream, surveying to the south-west the rolling hills and distant bell towers of Conne-de-Labarde, Colombier and Saint-Nexans; to the north-east, the plateau stretching towards Saint-Aubin-de-Lanquais, Issigeac and Montaut — a land of cereals and orchards.

Extended by two service wings, the residence has preserved all the charm of a refined country home. On the courtyard side, facing the vestiges of a chestnut-lined avenue, it opens onto lawns framed by boxwood hedges, the dovecote courtyard and, beyond, the vast orchard. On the garden side, it dominates the hillside. A double-flight staircase leads first to the south-facing terrace, then gradually down to a shaded ornamental pond where the main house is peacefully reflected in the water.

This pond is fed by natural springs running alongside the house before reaching an old washhouse bordered by stone walls. The water then flows into a large basin surrounded by iron railings and climbing roses. In earlier times, this basin supplied the mill located further down the hill.

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## Life in Former Times

To fully understand the estate within its rural past, a few details must be shared. The inhabitants of this manor — first called a château and later a chartreuse — lived in near self-sufficiency. The estate once comprised around fifty hectares of fields, meadows and woodland, some likely managed by a nearby tenant farm.

Like many noble properties of the time, it followed a clear hierarchy:

The outbuildings, arranged around a courtyard, housed the kitchen, servants' quarters, barn, stables, saddlery and henhouse. The kitchen opened onto the south terrace, once probably used as a kitchen garden. Water was drawn directly from the spring below using a pulley system, as there was no well.

A bread oven, still preserved today, stood in a small independent building now known as *La Maison du Boulanger*.

At the centre of the courtyard, a square dovecote — a privilege of noble houses — contained around 800 nesting boxes.

A large wine cellar stood on the opposite side of the main house, storing barrels, bottles and vineyard equipment. It opened east and south to allow carts to enter.

The estate's mill ground grain not only from the property but also from surrounding farms, contributing to the household's sustenance.

The Chartreuse originally had no upper floor. Over time, wooden dormers were added, and attic rooms served as servants' quarters.

The ground-floor rooms, arranged along a large central corridor, were modest in size but generous in ceiling height, each with fireplaces made from yellow Eyzies stone. During the 20th century, these were covered in faux marble or wood. During the 2001 restoration, they were replaced with local white stone fireplaces crafted by a stonemason.

Sunlight streams through tall windows, crossing the house from one side to the other — the ideal country home: simple, sunlit, surrounded by gardens and terraces, yet imposing and aristocratic.

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## From Origins to Restoration

1690–1720 (approx.)

The Chartreuse was built by the d'Aurout family. A member of this family is said to have been appointed alderman of Bergerac by Louis XIII.

Through successive inheritances, the property passed to the Nadal family, then the de Grezel family, with a few bourgeois interludes.

It was only in the 20th century that it became a farm and gradually lost some of its splendour. Farm animals invaded the park and dismantled the basin for use as a watering trough. The vineyard was replaced by an orchard of *prunes d'Ente* (used to make Agen prunes). Stone walls crumbled and the wrought-iron gate was sold.

Yet this beautiful aristocratic residence never lost its soul.

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## From 2001 to Today

In 2000, Brigitte and Jean-Louis Viargues purchased the property and chose to make it their home, transforming it into a four-star boutique hotel.

The main house regained its classical elegance after the removal of a 1960s extension. The original staircase was reinstated, and the interior layout preserved. The ground floor remains designed for entertaining, with rooms flowing gracefully into one another.

The former wine cellar was converted into guest rooms while retaining its original openings. The attic and servants' rooms disappeared, replaced by comfortable guest accommodations.

The country kitchen regained its terracotta tiles and grand fireplace, while preserving its stone sink. From its windows, one can watch either the dovecote courtyard or the terraced gardens.

The barn became the hotel restaurant in 2016, carefully restored with original timber beams, stonework and traditional craftsmanship.

The mill was rebuilt in 2008 using reclaimed materials to preserve its rural character.

The park was replanted with native species. Box hedges were restored, terrace walls rebuilt, and the pond once again became a defining landscape feature. Generous roses climb the pillars each spring.

The owners' ambition is clear: to preserve the estate's authentic structure and spirit, ensuring that this quintessential Périgord property continues to pass gracefully through the centuries.

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## What defines La Chartreuse du Bignac?

Harmony.  
Gentle living.  
Serenity.  
Charm.  
Countryside.  
Rest.  
Panoramic views.  
Hospitality.

Friends, come and see for yourselves.

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## Key Dates

2001 – Acquisition of the property  
2003 – Opening of the 4-star hotel  
February 2016 – Opening of the fine dining restaurant