



## PROMOTIONAL ESSAY FOR LA MAISON DU CHATEAU

Burgundy is probably better known by name than any other part of France. The name is associated with colour, the deep rich red that is unmistakably burgundy, and the colour of the wine from the vineyards that have been established in Burgundy since Roman times. In mediaeval times the Dukes of Burgundy were more powerful than the Kings of France and the name alone is evocative of the ancient glories of France. No other region of France is so steeped in the traditions of what is also regarded by many as the principal cultures of France: great art and good living.

It was against this background that following a series of happy accidents La Maison du Château and twenty-four acres of parkland were purchased by Sir Nicholas and Lady Lyell in 1989 from the family of the Comtes de Béru. They are recorded in *Dictionnaire de La Noblesse Française*, 1977, as having been ennobled in 1687 by Louis XIV and established in northern Burgundy since the seventeenth century. The house was originally a hunting lodge and adjoins the quiet village of Cry-sur-Armançon where a château built at the end of the nineteenth century was demolished ninety years later. The park borders the wooded banks of the river Armançon. The Lyells renamed the former hunting lodge, built around 1750, La Maison du Château. Sir Nicholas Lyell, later Lord Lyell of Markyate, was MP for Mid Bedfordshire and Solicitor General at the time, and later Attorney General. During the following thirty years the Lyells and their guests at La Maison du Château devoted their time to painting and to enjoying the unique heritage of the wines of Burgundy.

Early on in the ownership of La Maison du Château, Nicholas and Susanna Lyell started to hold paying painting holidays for small groups of about ten artists of varying degrees of skill with an artist in residence who was either Tim Scott Bolton, the noted authority on Capability Brown, or Susanna Lyell. The inspiration for this cultural innovation derived from the Lyell's artistic backgrounds. Nicholas Lyell was the grandson of Lowes Luard, a contemporary of Augustus John and Walter Sickert, and one of six artistic generations stretching back to a soldier in the Battle of Waterloo. Luard became a noted painter of horses and racing scenes at the turn of the last century. When not sketching in pen and ink, Nicholas Lyell devoted much of his non-political life to preserving his grandfather's legacy. Susanna Lyell, a talented artist in her own right, takes particular pride in being the granddaughter of General Jack Seely, later Lord Mottistone, whose famous portrait on his horse Warrior, painted in 1918 and now in the Canadian War Museum, is one of the most notable equestrian portraits of Sir Alfred Munnings.

After owning La Maison du Château for six years and having held numerous painting holidays, the Lyells decided to combine their artistic talents and the experiences they had gained from their painting holidays to exhibit more than two hundred paintings by seventy artists who had taken part in painting holidays at La Maison du Château in a special exhibition held in London. The exhibition was called *La Maison du Château Artists. An exhibition to help Fight for Sight* and was held for two days at the Mall Galleries in January 1996. A catalogue was produced by Felix Rosenstiel with a cover by Tim Scott Bolton and a foreword by Sir Hugh Casson, a former President of the Royal Academy, who wrote, 'All the artists exhibiting here are linked together by the painting inspiration of La Maison du Château and the common desire, whether amateur or professional, to try to create beautiful images for us all to enjoy.' Nicholas Lyell wrote in his introduction, 'The elegant nineteenth-century gateway, the light on the river, the pigeonier, the long low line of the house and barn, the cool of the chestnut avenue, the little street of the village with its ancient church and arched stone bridge all feature in these paintings.' The exhibition included several paintings by Susanna Lyell, notably a watercolour of *Château de Tanlay* and a pen and ink drawing by Nicholas Lyell *In the Cabinet Room* in which his friend John Major, Prime Minister at the time, is clearly discernible. Four hundred people attended the exhibition, including Prince Edward. A second exhibition was held at the Mall Galleries in 2001 attended by Prince Andrew. The two exhibitions were attended by almost a thousand people and were the most successful exhibitions ever held by the Mall Galleries. More than £100,000 was raised for the charity Fight for Sight which resulted in considerable publicity for La Maison du Château.



## LA MAISON DU CHATEAU

Next in importance to the painting holidays at La Maison du Château have always been the wine tasting holidays as wine is undoubtedly Burgundy's most famous worldwide ambassador. The noble grapes and the great wines of France are more applicable to Burgundy than to any other region of France. For two thousand years the village of Vosne-Romanée, which has no less than five *grand crus* vineyards, has produced the world's most celebrated wines, and in the firmament of wines Vosne-Romanée is its brightest star. The Côte-d'Or owes its name to the apparently inexhaustible gold mine of its vineyards. It is the backbone of Burgundy, the region which produces the most famous names in the wine-drinking world: Chambertin, Clos de Vougeot, Romanée, Nuits-St-Georges, Corton, Beaune, Pommard and Volnay for red wines; Montrachet, Meursault and Corton-Charlemagne for white wines. These have always been considered by wine connoisseurs to have such excellence as to be the finest wines on earth. La Maison du Château is not far from the very heart of this region where a vineyard was established at Cluny in the tenth century, and which Shakespeare refers to in several of his plays. Wine tasting holidays at La Maison du Château have included visits to wine growers, visits to great wine houses and wine tasting at historic cellars.

With the profits from the painting and the wine tasting holidays La Maison du Château was steadily and carefully restored, furnished with period furniture and equipped externally with all the assets normally associated with an important country house. Major improvements have been made in the last ten years. The same care was given to the special features of the garden and park. As a result it is currently in a remarkably good state of repair. The property is located twenty minutes' drive from the town of Montbard, made famous by the naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon. Montbard is about five miles from Fontenay Abbey and thirty miles from the great Romanesque Basilica at Vézelay both of which are UNESCO World Heritage sights. It is in a region of Burgundy richly populated with historic chateaux, Ancy-Le-Franc, Bazoches, Cormantin, Missery and Tanlay to name but a few. The house has been continually in use as a second home for thirty years and has also been run as a business for cultural holidays. Because of the space available in the grounds as well as the large number of people, as many as twenty-two, that can sleep in the house, La Maison du Château can be used for groups of people for holidays devoted to painting, wine tasting, French speaking, cycling, bridge and yoga. Golf, riding and hot-air ballooning are also available. There is an imposing galleried music room with a semi-concert grand piano, included with the property, where small concerts or recitals can be held. The property is offered for sale with all furniture, fixtures, fittings and the usual utilities, except for items which are of personal interest to the family.

La Maison du Château is in effect a miniature estate of twenty-four acres which besides the main house includes a Gate House and an island, which is included in the title-deeds, in the River Armançon which borders the property and in which there is a rowing boat and private fishing. The entrance to the property is through impressive nineteenth-century stone and wrought iron gates at the end of the village street of Cry-sur-Armançon. There is a modern heated swimming pool with a changing space and hot shower, a hard tennis court, a walled garden, a pigeonier, an old orchard and an avenue of tall chestnut trees which formed the approach to the former château. It has a well-maintained garden. The accommodation comprises a gracious entrance hall with a marble floor and a grand cantilevered staircase, three reception rooms, a galleried music room, nine double bedrooms and nine bathrooms. The Gate House has two double bedrooms and a bathroom, and a wood-burning stove.

La Maison du Château has a number of significant advantages not normally found in rural French properties. It has only had two owners in more than two hundred and fifty years. Its location near the town of Montbard, makes it accessible from London in around five hours by Eurostar and TGV. Unusually for a French country house La Maison du Château has full central heating and a modern boiler. The roof is in good condition and is insulated. It has separate self-contained accommodation suitable for grandparents or in-laws. The services of a legendary long-established cook, maids and a caretaker are available. The property has been carefully maintained by its discerning owners for thirty years.

Nicholas Lyell lastingly described the setting of La Maison du Chateau, 'This part of Burgundy situated between Chablis and Beaune is old France, the land of Charlemagne. Its châteaux, abbeys, fortified towns and hilltop villages, its vineyards, cellars and poplar-lined banks of the Canal de Bourgogne are inspiring, not only for the painters but for all who stay at La Maison du Château.' It is a beautiful manageable family home, with extensive and secluded grounds in an attractive setting. It is the sort of historic property, which has been the subject of decades of careful guardianship, that people dream about in France but can hardly ever find. Such properties very rarely become available.