

*Dear all,*

"Bonne Annee et Bonne Sante" (Happy New Year and Good Health, as you say in France) from AuvergneCottage, where we are grateful for the French etiquette which gives until the end of January to send New Year's greetings...

As we sit and write this, we think back on a pleasant year but especially we look forward to a year which we hope will be more clement for all those who have suffered from the economic recession.

2009 was our 8th season, renting out 5 cottages. In 2010, our offer will be changed considerably. Two cottages have been removed from Short Lets: Dame Lapin and La Tante, as they are now being rented out on a yearly basis. In 2010, we shall only be offering Bailli and Benedictines (henceforth renamed to La Maison de Constance) for short-term lets. Many of the high season weeks have already been booked, mostly by returning guests, which we reckon to be a very positive trend.

Our low-season long-term lettings have suddenly taken off in 2009. The guests seem to be mostly looking for a house to buy in France and find our region a good starting point, as our location is so central. Heating has been installed in all the cottages, to make them comfortable in all seasons – and the fireplaces can finally come into their own, instead of just getting wishful glances in the summer heat. These longer-term stays are a very nice way for us to make some new acquaintances and even friendships.

More and more of our guests ask us for help in finding and restauring houses for them, as there is still an interesting market for old houses and often at good value. So far, we are taking care of 2 renovations but it seems interest is increasing.

In 2008, as part of our continuous investment plan, we sold one of the Charroux cottages. And in 2009, we also sold La Maison du Chameau. This in turn allowed us to buy a beautiful old property in Bellenaves which we had had our eye on for a while, just next to Le Bailli. We have named it Le Ris Bertin, after the stream ("Ris" in local dialect) which runs at the end of the garden, next to the fortress wall of the chateau. Renovation work on it has already started, so we hope to have it ready for you by the summer of 2011.



Before the ink on the contract was dry, someone had already shown surprising interest in the house: for an ad about milk! However it turned out that it wasn't exactly what was needed, but they did shoot some of the scenes just by the stream and we helped them find the right location.



You can see the finished result here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UTnngJ3juL8> And those of you who know Bellenaves will recognise a few things, especially the church!

The village of Charroux had a fantastic season in 2009, as many French tourists opted to stay at home instead of going abroad, which was a boon for the local businesses.

In Chantelle, the council has decided to undertake major works in the village and along the river Boule. The latter means opening more paths by clearing the trees which have gradually taken over what was originally a large orchard. The felled trees were removed by helicopter which was an extremely impressive sight, and apparently both cheaper and more sustainable than trying to get them out by road. The road to the abbey is also being refurbished with paving stones and electricity masts are being taken down in many places, most importantly for us for in front of La Maison de Constance.

Our daughter Anne-Sophie, her husband Jacob and their little Constance (self-renamed Coco) are still thriving in London. They often manage to spend long holidays with us, and we were thus lucky enough to have our grand-daughter for 6 weeks this summer! And we have just been told that she will be joined by a little companion next August...

We also went on a few trips ourselves in 2009, mostly to London (of course), but also a 4 day road trip through Poitou-Charente, then to La Rochelle and the Atlantic coast. It was a pleasure to see old houses of a different kind, and especially old towns on the pilgrimage road to St Jacques de Compostelle.

As usual, we participated in the brocantes in Charroux and Chantelle. Charroux was a bit special this time, as we had sold the place we always used as a base, La Maison d'Ulysse. Fortunately, Silva's brother owns a house just opposite where we could host the traditional lunch for all the friends who were attending. The rain poured down all day long, but for once our wares were inside in the barn, and it was therefore easy for us to attract lots of customers and sell more than the poor souls who had to cover up everything with tarpaulin. It was a delightful lunch as always, although Constance did not try to hide that it was very cold, wet and weird. Luckily, Anne-Sophie found a bargain: a trike, a shopping trolley and lots of plastic produce... and Constance enjoyed bringing it all into a big puddle!

Finally, we would like to thank you for another good year, with new and old friendships, and we hope to see you around here soon again.

*Bonne Annee et (surtout) Bonne Sante a tous,  
Silva & Henrik*