



Moulin Renaudiots

STYLE Danish-Dutch designer pad

SETTING Water-edged woodland

'Everything from the artworks to an immense and beautiful collection of glassware has been carefully chosen and perfectly arranged, striking a triumphant balance between old and new'



Moulin Renaudiots, Moulin Renaudiots... I speak French every day of my life but, even so, it's a bit of a mouthful. I can only sympathise with Anglo-Saxon visitors to this countryside chambre d'hôtes, while assuring them that any pronunciation-related jaw-ache will be more than compensated for by the romance of the magnifique Moulin. Elegant, low-key, luxurious: these are the words that enter my head when I try to describe this peaceful place. So who cares how you say its name?

At the bottom of a hill, surrounded by forest, the Moulin sits a few miles outside Autun, a town founded by the Romans back when Augustus wore the laurels. We walk up the tiered front garden, with its stone walls and parterres of herbs and flowers. We reach the few steps that lead to the main door, and the Moulin whispers to us: 'We are not yet another hotel in that tired, camped-up French-countryside style, oh no – we have something special up our stylish sleeve'. Unlike Burgundy's more formal retreats, which feel stuffy at best and, at worst, make you hanker for home and your cherished white walls, this historical hideaway is all about creating a sincere but contemporary experience of France's fine countryside.

It is then that Peter – Danish, tall, smiling – walks down the stairs and welcomes us. He warmly shows us to our room, a vast, high-ceilinged, studio-like boudoir, replete with 1950s furniture and an exceptional mid-century Kai Kristiansen desk. Brightly hued retro glassware provides graphic colour; the only nod towards the country context comes from a stately dark-wood antique wardrobe looming over the bed. We need to concoct a ruse to see all five rooms, so we say we're thinking about booking the whole place. And, once we've seen the oak-beamed ceilings, the limestone fireplaces and the fantastic ensuite sitting rooms, we're contemplating it for real.

In the main living and dining area of the renovated 17th-century water mill, deep greys, beiges and whites complement the natural stone walls, original timber-frame ceiling and polished concrete floor. Furnished with sleek Scandinavian and north-European pieces, the living space is arranged around a fireplace; the dining room aligns neatly, with six square tables and 12 smart chairs.

Everything – from the artworks, which include a series of miniature 'Hopes' (those instantly iconic graffiti odes to a booming Obama), to an immense and beautiful collection of glassware and china – has been carefully chosen and perfectly arranged, striking a triumphant balance between old and new.

Our next encounter is with Jan, who is Dutch, welcoming and soft-spoken. Peter has asked his partner to organise us a reservation at Châteaubriant, a brasserie in Autun, since the table d'hôte isn't on tonight. Peter cooks a few nights a week, generally not on Fridays. We're not sorry to have an excuse to explore, and Peter and Jan, who have lived in the region for years, are brimming with info on what to do (and, crucially, where to avoid).

Crisp-yet-fluffy baguette, croissants and cheese are our perfect Saturday morning breakfast, and we linger in the living room, thumbing our books and succumbing to complete relaxation. Jan joins us, and we ask how they came to acquire the Moulin, eight years ago. The answer summarises four fraught years of construction and refurbishment, a two-year spruce-up of the garden, then the addition of a pool and sprawling deck. As with all perfectionists, they have absolutely not finished, and relish the prospect of further beautification.



For the committed wine lover, few are the pages in the atlas that compete with Burgundy for heady map-reading. We set off on a world-class wine-tasting trek, homing in on Meursault and Pommard (among other legendary producers), and carting back crates of serious reds and whites. After a light lunch in Beaune, where the Hospices de Beaune is an essential architectural/cultural/historic stop, we take our time driving home along the Route des Grands Crus, in order to take in the vine-lined landscape.

When the clock strikes seven, *l'apéro* is served on the terrace (or fireside, when it's unkind outdoors). Here, as the crickets chirp, Mrs Smith sips a *crémant de Bourgogne rosé*, while I manfully sample the Moulin's signature *kir*, made with home-crushed *crème de cassis*. We chat to the other guests: two Belgian couples rejoicing, as we are, in a few precious days' escape. Peter is back on chef duty around eight. We dine on scallops, fennel and truffle vinaigrette, followed by veal filet mignon, then almond and nut tart with pecan caramel. All this is nothing short of divine, and the Côte de Beaune and Côte Chalonnaise aren't bad, either.

Peter and Jan have created a genuine original in the Moulin Renaudiots. Yes, it is beautifully designed and, true, it's beyond welcoming. But what we love most about this boutique guesthouse is its inventive take on the rural retreat. We find a brave new Burgundian world, where the beds are big and comfortable, furniture mid-century iconic, and the bathrooms stylish enough for an interiors shoot. There are strictly no decorative touches depicting scenic châteaux, and definitely no flower-choked curtains that grab you and scream 'Hey city boy! You're in the country now!' No, Moulin Renaudiots is much subtler than that. Everything it utters has substance, and it's all – including the name – conveyed in most seductive tones.

Reviewed by Réda Amalou

