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DRINKING &amp; DINING TRAVEL

## La Grande Maison, Joël Robuchon's Bordeaux bolthole

*A high-end restaurant with rooms, Joël Robuchon's La Grande Maison is set to become one of Bordeaux's best dining destinations*

BY ANDREW PURVIS  
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"Je n'aime pas le noir," says [Joël Robuchon](#), the world's most decorated chef, demanding that the black tassels be removed from the Baccarat crystal chandelier dangling above his head. With 28 Michelin stars and the title *Meilleur Ouvrier de France* (the culinary equivalent of a Nobel prize) to his name, the 69-year-old is something of a perfectionist. "He wears a black chef's uniform most of the time," my interpreter explains, "so he doesn't want more black. Mr Robuchon likes to be involved in even the smallest detail."

It is Wednesday morning at La Grande Maison, an 18th-century mansion tucked away in a surprisingly scruffy backstreet in Bordeaux. This is the day when architects, contractors and the odd culinary legend gather to discuss the project – a "residence", or high-end restaurant with rooms, six to be precise, appointed in elegant Napoleon III style

La Grande Maison's dining room

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(from 1855, when the Bordeaux Grand Cru wines were first classified) but with modern touches. The black-and-white tiled entrance smells of fresh paint, the mattresses are still in polythene sleeves and a man in a suit is unhooking the black tassels.

For interior designer Frédérique Fournier, the controlling intelligence behind La Grande Maison's look, it must be a bit of a nightmare. The property, a collaboration between Robuchon and the Bordeaux wine magnate Bernard Magrez, is due to open on December 9 and most of her work is done. But things have just got a lot more complicated with the arrival of Robuchon, whose undisguised ambition is to win three Michelin stars here.

In the plush L'Olivier lounge bar, he is now debating the height of the chandelier (urging staff to walk beneath it, testing scalp clearance), the depth of the purple lacquered table tops (will they snag ladies' stockings?) and the contemporary art on the walls (easy to swap, since his friend Mr Magrez has a vast collection, some of it housed in the charming [Institut Culterel Bernard Magrez](#) across the street). "He's worried about the eyes," the interpreter tells me, as a huge painting of a Chinese woman's face is removed from the gastronomic restaurant. "Diners might find her stare disconcerting."

We escape the din of power tools and fire alarms being tested for a tour of the rooms, each named after one of Magrez's vineyards (he owns 40 wine estates worldwide, 22 in Bordeaux). "Espérance" has opulent silk wall coverings (nothing as vulgar as wallpaper) with delicate pink flowers climbing up them, plus the property's only four-poster bed ("I'm not sure about them," says Fournier); in "Lumière", the walls are ablaze with richer, warmer floral fabrics; "Harmonie" is all blue/grey stripes and "very British", says the designer; "Contemplation", has calmer, more restrained geometric patterns. On arrival, guests will find a bottle from the relevant vineyard waiting in their room.



La Grande Maison

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Bathrooms are minimalist and tiled in white, with free-standing baths and Hermès toiletries. "Everything is made in France," says Fournier. In the main restaurant, the cutlery is by Christofle, the glassware by Baccarat and the bold, modern ceramics are handmade by a local artist. No expense has been spared, yet there are humble touches. Brass door fittings from the original house, owned until recently by the president of the law school at Bordeaux University, have been retained, while all the books in one of the restaurant's salons (styled like a library) belonged to the family, including their photo albums.

"There is no spa, and no gymnasium," Bernard Magrez says. "La Grande Maison is all about art, the art of gastronomy, the art of wine" – including no fewer than 259 Grands Crus Classées de Bordeaux in the cellar beneath our feet.

Until now, luxury travel in [Bordeaux](#) has been all about the wine, from tours and tastings by Rolls-Royce or helicopter to stays at exquisite wine estates, not least the other jewel in Magrez's crown, [Château Pape Clément](#) in Pessac. La Grande Maison will offer a discreet urban base for activities to combine with



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that: exploring modern art (at the Institut), music (at the opera house, or performed by a violinist in the restaurant), haute cuisine and grand design – with or without black tassels.

Rooms at La Grande Maison cost from €295 (£234) per night from December 9-20, rising to €345 from December 21, including continental breakfast.

**LA GRANDE MAISON**

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[www.lagrandemaison-bordeaux.com](http://www.lagrandemaison-bordeaux.com)  
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