

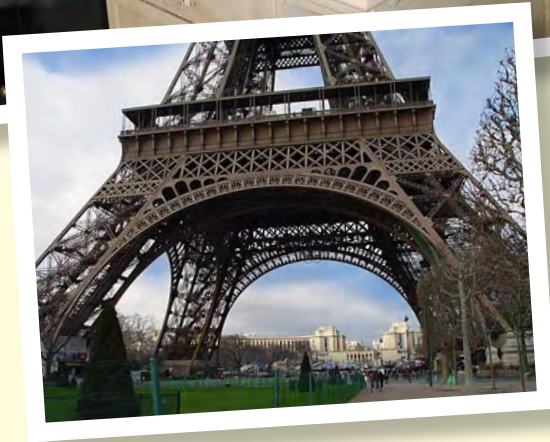


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Annie's Story

"I love to eat," Annie Jacquet-Bentley declares. Growing up in Paris, meals were always important occasions, whether she was dining out "*avec Grand Père*" or eating more simply *en famille*. Cheese *soufflé* was her father's favorite dish, and Annie guesses that she made her first one for him at the age of 10. When she married and moved to the countryside outside of Philadelphia, she cooked for her new family every night—"a two-course meal *au minimum*."

"I'm not looking for a stove just to look pretty, I want a work horse!"



PRINTABLE STORY





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All Work and No Play . . .

But time in her own kitchen became harder and harder to find as Annie became more and more involved in the food business. She imported and sold wine. She managed one and then two French restaurants in the Philadelphia area. When that became too much, she moved into consulting, helping with the conception, design, and planning of new restaurants.

In 1996, she developed a program called *L'École des Chefs*, which placed interns with many of the finest chefs in France and the US: Guy Savoy, Thomas Keller, Michel Troisgros, and Eric Ripert, to name a few. When this program grew beyond her ability to manage on her own, she sold it to the prestigious Relais et Châteaux Group in 2001.





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Back to Serious Cooking

At this point in her life, Annie says, "I wanted to get back into serious cooking" and to spend more time in her own kitchen. After all her experiences, the stove of choice for her working kitchen was a Lacanche Sully range. In an earlier kitchen, she had a commercial range, but she found it "very clunky" and industrial looking *et même* "un peu dangereux" when a roll-out of flame from the salamander sent her to the emergency room.



She had also looked at other French ranges, but, for all they cost, she did not find them terribly practical. "The ovens are so tiny," she explains. "I'm not looking for a stove just to look pretty; I wanted a workhorse." In Lacanche, she found the power, control, and reliability she was looking for, all in "a stove that looked like something your grandmother cooked on."





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*"...I have fallen in love with
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countryside, the ever-present sun..."*

Provence

At the same time Annie was making more time to cook for her own pleasure, she was getting back to her roots in France and discovering the region of Provence. "Over the past decade, I have fallen in love with Provence, the raw beauty of its countryside, the ever-present sun and the character of its people . . . Above all, being a passionate cook, I fell in love with the colorful and bountiful markets of Provence, where I can find freshly picked lettuce, fuzzy fragrant peaches, handmade goat cheese in burnished chestnut leaves, and big red heirloom tomatoes. In the fall, wild game and mushrooms, followed by black truffles in the winter, all combine to make Provence truly a feast for the senses!"





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An Old Stone House

So in love with Provence, she and her husband bought a house in the hills above the village of Gordes: an old stone house that began life as a sheepfold built in the seventeenth- or eighteenth-century, where shepherds sheltered their flocks from the mistral (the wicked wind from the North) a few months a year. Gradually it evolved into a farmhouse lived in year round, although it had neither electricity nor running water as recently as 10 years ago.

Now, Annie says, "One of the guest rooms is in the *poulailler* (chicken house), the other one used to be the *fenière* (hayloft). The kitchen stands where the donkey and goats lived, the wine cellar is carved out of the stone, the old walls are plastered and, like my mason says, 'have beautiful movement.'" Asked why they have gone to so much trouble to restore and preserve the old structure while making it comfortable with all the modern amenities, Annie says, "An old house has soul, tells stories." And at the center of this house that combines the best of tradition with the best of modern conveniences is another Lacanche range.





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Le Programme Pour La Truffe

In addition to daily meals cooked and shared in the farmhouse kitchen, each session will feature trips to local markets and vineyards. The two January sessions are scheduled to coincide with the *cavage* or truffle hunting season. Describing this special and crazy time of year, Annie laughs at some of the things she has seen—old men dressing up as women who are seemingly taking their dog for a stroll in order to raid someone else's truffle ground.

After the truffles are collected, Annie describes what comes next: "back to the kitchen, with its big fireplace—oh, a truffle cooked *sous la cendre, c'est un petit peu de paradis, ça!*—or a more sophisticated preparation, such as *la poularde en demi deuil* [or "half mourning" as the black truffles show through the white skin], or plump sea scallops, or the luscious *foie gras* . . ."

[TRUHF-uhl] It's hard to believe that one of the rarest and most expensive foods in the world is located by pigs and dogs. This exceptional fungus grows 3 to 12 inches underground near the roots of trees (usually oak but also chestnut, hazel and beech).





Cooking Classes with Annie

Thinking about where to go next with her career and that she did not want another activity that would take her out of the kitchen or away from France, Annie decided instead to bring people home, to invite them into her *provençal* kitchen for a week of cooking classes.

Drawing on all her previous experience in the restaurant business and teaching cooking classes at home, Annie designed her new kitchen to accommodate multiple cooks and to give everyone a clear view of what's going on at the stove. Now, this winter and again this summer, Annie is offering four one-week sessions, each limited to four to six participants. Of the classes, Annie says they "are meant to be instructive of course, but most of all fun—a celebration of life and cooking, an experience that will be relaxed and joyful."

All in all, it does sound like a little slice of heaven.