

# Clients Cornered

More and more LetSites clients have been asking for advice about catering, so we have "Cornered" **Helen & Keith Archibald** ([www.chezarchi.com](http://www.chezarchi.com)) to find out how they feed and entertain their Bed & Breakfast guests every morning and most evenings throughout the summer.

My husband, Keith, and I moved to the Corrèze in 2001, where we bought a house large enough for our own accommodation, plus three B&B rooms and a guest lounge, and converted a barn into a self-catering gîte for two.

Because B&B guests share our house, we aim to attract couples and adult groups, rather than families with children. We also cater for our guests most evenings (including the gîte guests), which gives us a ready-made social life. We enjoy good food, good wine and good company all year round on our own doorstep - and make some money at the same time!

Mind you, if Keith gets over-enthusiastic with pouring the wine, the "making money" sums don't always necessarily add up at the end of the evening...

As a teenager, I spent a lot of time cooking for my large family. I had to be organised, efficient and fast - which has proved invaluable experience for catering for paying guests. We offer a four-course evening meal for 25€ per person, which includes an aperitif, wine and coffee. Meals are served in the farmhouse kitchen, so this is quite a major consideration when planning menus.

Preparation for the menus actually starts during the winter. A couple of nights a week are set aside for cooking and evaluating new recipes. It's usually just the two of us doing the tasting, but occasionally special friends get to be guinea pigs - not always with spectacular results, but then what are friends for? The best way to describe our cuisine is "Franglaise", since we get our ideas from both French and English recipes and cookery books. We use home-grown fruit and vegetables and also try to give guests something they don't normally eat at home, so we steer clear of the "Delia" recipes (with the exception of "sticky toffee pudding")!

Before we plan a menu, we ask each guest if they have any particular likes, dislikes or dietary requirements. If there's one vegetarian and there are others who don't like cheese or onions or tomatoes, choosing suitable recipes can be a bit of a nightmare. For this reason, we never bulk-freeze prepared meals and don't have a two-week rolling programme of menus. Each guest actually has a record card detailing every meal we've served them so that they never have the same meal twice - an important factor as more and more repeat clients come back each year.

Getting down to details, preparation for each evening's meal starts in the morning or early afternoon - we hate ending up in a panic later in the day. If the desserts are cold, they can be made and put in the fridge; salad dressings can be mixed, potatoes can be peeled and the all-important wine stocks checked. We try to avoid having to cook between courses and have to work very tidily during the meal, although the kitchen does have a small area which is tucked away behind the fireplace called "Helen's messy corner", which helps! Our roles have not been allocated on sexist grounds, it's just that my strength is the cooking and Keith is very good at peeling vegetables, setting tables and taking orders (from me)!

Aperitifs are served at 7.30pm. Keith is chief host and chat-merchant while I'm busy in the kitchen. In effect, each meal is like a glorified dinner party and we like the atmosphere to be as relaxed and convivial as possible. After each meal, we ask ourselves how the evening and the meal went - is there anything we should change or could do better? Could presentation be improved? Should we try different vegetable combinations? Did the timings go according to plan? Did the guests enjoy the meal? Everything is carefully noted alongside each recipe for next time.

Breakfast menus are considerably easier, simply because we serve "continental" breakfasts. Although a good fry-up is enticing to some people, the lingering cooking smells rule them out. Instead, we offer fresh fruit, fresh fruit salads, yoghurts, croissants, pains-au-chocolat, toast, homemade jams, honey, cereals, coffee, tea, orange juice... and stacks of all of it. Getting up for breakfast after a long meal the evening before is difficult for some people (Keith!), but I actually look forward to a lively chat with guests over breakfast. Keith tends to be monosyllabic at this time of day, so he is in charge of flower watering duties and the early-morning pool clean. So you see, we make quite a good team. *Que ça dure!*



Helen & Keith

# LetSites Newsletter

Issue N°8 June 2005



[www.letsites.com](http://www.letsites.com)

If you'd like to be "cornered" in a future issue, please contact [emma@letsites.com](mailto:emma@letsites.com)

## The LetSites Newsletter - June 2005

Welcome to the June 2005 LetSites Newsletter! Once again, it's time to start thinking about your 2006 brochure adverts, so below you'll find the very latest information about deadlines and discounts. Adware & Spyware bring our annoying Little Devil series to an end in this issue - but in the September Newsletter, we shall be starting a new series exploding all those myths about search engines. And our Cornered Clients this time are Keith & Helen Archibald from the Corrèze.

Finally, we'd like to say an enormous thank you to everyone who took part in the Marketing Poll during March. The results have been on line since early May and have already generated a great deal of positive feedback from you.

### The dates for your 2006 brochure advertising deadlines are...

**Chez Nous:** as of 30th May, no confirmed dates yet, but *probably* 31st July (for new advertisers) & 15th August (for existing advertisers). The people we spoke to at Chez Nous believe that there might be different charges this year for brochure-only advertising, website-only advertising & brochure+website advertising. Full details are due out in mid-June, along with news of other changes planned for 2006. The 2006 brochure is due out in early November.

**Owners in France:** 1st August, BUT if you book before 1st July, you get a free advert on the website. There are discounts for existing advertisers and a possibility of a 2-year advertising package. The 2006 brochure is due out in late October.

**Bonnes Vacances:** end of July to qualify for a 10% discount - the latest possible deadline is end of September. The 2006 brochure is due out in mid-November.

**Update your website for 2006:** If you haven't yet sent us your 2006 tariff, you simply need to email us the prices and the tariff band dates.

**School holiday changes:** Over 30 LEAs in England have changed to a "six-term" school year and more LEAs are planning to follow suit. Children at "six-term" schools have longer holidays in May and October and shorter holidays in the summer - so now might be a good time to research this and see how these planned changes might possibly affect your prices in the future...

### Questions, Questions, Questions...

The Marketing Poll in March was a great success. There were many interesting and helpful hints from you about where (and where not) to advertise for the 2006 season! Thank you again for all your excellent input - and we intend to run a similar Marketing Poll at the same time next year to record your views about *this* season.

Meanwhile, we plan to run a poll in October quizzing you about "optional extras". Do you offer free internet access? Do you cook meals for your clients? Do you have a children's play area? If you don't live on site, how do you offer clients that "little bit extra"? Or perhaps you've stopped providing "optional extras" because they're just not worth the hassle?

Incidentally, in this poll we'll also be asking you for some anecdotes. Did you have any disasters (or disastrous clients) during the summer? Perhaps you had some nice surprises? However, this won't be until well after the season when you've all got a sense of humour again...



The Singing Host  
[www.figarolgites.com](http://www.figarolgites.com)

## Searching for Satisfaction

If you've been in the holiday business for longer than five years, you'll be very well aware of how much the internet has transformed tourism and travel. Today, it's difficult to remember what life was like before websites and online booking - and according to European Travel Monitor, the British book more holidays via the internet than any other Europeans.



The flexibility of the internet has also fuelled an ever-increasing desire for "independent" holidays (that is, holidays not booked through a high street travel agency). Independently-booked breaks have risen by 60% since 1998 and the demand for package holidays has fallen in consequence. In 2002, package holidays formed 53% of the total holiday market - in 2003, the figure had fallen to 49%.

Yahoo and AOL have been developing specialised travel search engines in response to these trends. At present, these search engines are primarily for price comparisons, but may well evolve into more general holiday listings as time goes on. One thing's for sure, both companies are very well aware of how difficult it is to use search engines to look for holidays - a bit like looking for a particular prawn in a paella, perhaps!

So in the next issue of the LetSites Newsletter, we start a series of features about search engines and explode all those myths perpetuated by the local pub/café bore...



### Little Devils : Freeware, Adware, Spyware... Better Beware!

Any software which shows an advertising banner while it's running is called **adware**. Most such software is **freeware**. Software which transmits information to a third party *without your knowledge* is called **spyware**. Not all adware is spyware, and not all spyware displays ads. Hope that's clear!

Adware and spyware only get onto your computer because you install them.

In most cases you will have downloaded them from a website in order to get a free piece of software: maybe a graphics package, an email checker, a calculator - *or even an anti-spyware program!* [www.spywarewarrior.com/rogue\\_anti-spyware.htm](http://www.spywarewarrior.com/rogue_anti-spyware.htm) lists **199** dubious or downright malicious programs masquerading as anti-spyware.

Some just transmit information about your surfing habits in order to target you for particular sorts of spam. Others open a "back door" which renders your computer open to attack. Others secretly install programs which can use your machine to send spam... Whatever they do, they take up disk-space and processing power. If your machine grinds to a halt, or your hard disk goes down, it is nowadays statistically more likely to be a spyware program that has done the damage than a virus.

**How to avoid it:** Never install **any** free/cheap software unless you know it's kosher.

**How to detect/remove it:** Two free (but kosher!) anti-spyware solutions are Lavasoft ([www.lavasoft.de](http://www.lavasoft.de)) and SpybotS&D ([www.safer-networking.org](http://www.safer-networking.org)). Microsoft also have a free (*beta*) version of their forthcoming AntiSpyware at [www.microsoft.com/athome/security/spyware/](http://www.microsoft.com/athome/security/spyware/)

### STOP PRESS! STOP PRESS! STOP PRESS!

Back in November, Kirk & Sally Ritchie ([www.verevalley.com](http://www.verevalley.com)) and Gordon & Diane Thom ([www.la-villamhor.com](http://www.la-villamhor.com)) were featured in online articles on [www.FrenchEntree.com](http://www.FrenchEntree.com)

New websites dedicated to all things French are appearing all the time - and many of these websites need new France-related articles each month. So if you have an interesting story to tell or some useful tips to share, please do contact us!

