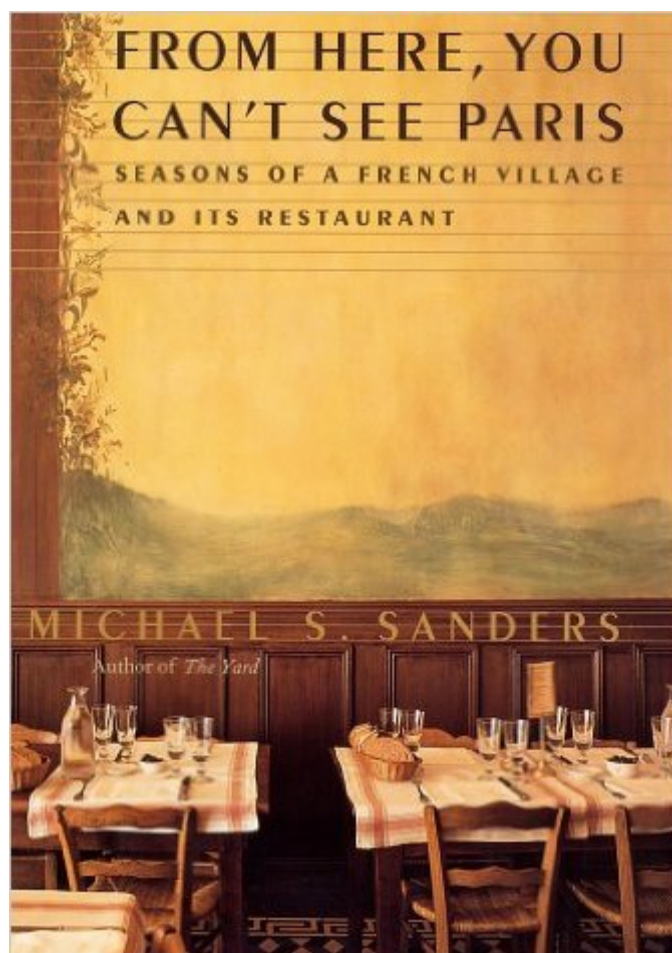


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From Here, You Can't See Paris: Seasons Of A French Village And Its Restaurant



Synopsis

From Here, You Can't See Paris is a sweet, leisurely exploration of the life of Les Arques (population 159), a hilltop village in a remote corner of France, untouched by the modern era. It is a story of a dying village's struggle to survive, of a dead artist whose legacy began its rebirth, and of chef Jacques Ratier and his wife, No lle, whose bustling restaurant -- the village's sole business -- has helped ensure its future. The author set out to explore the inner workings of a French restaurant kitchen but ended up stumbling onto a wider, much richer world. Whether uncovering the darker secrets of making foie gras, hearing a chef confess his doubts about the Michelin star system, or absorbing the lore of the land around a farmhouse kitchen table after a boar hunt, Michael Sanders learned that life in Les Arques was anything but sleepy. Through the eyes of the author and his family, the reader enters this world, discovers its still-vibrant traditions of food, cooking, and rural living, and comes to know the village's history, sharing along the way an American family's adventures as they find their way in a place that is sometimes lonely, often wondrous, and always fascinating.

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Customer Reviews

I loved this book. As an American who lives half time in France, a former restaurateur and ardent Francophile, it had all the things that most interest me here. A type of lifestyle very similar in many ways to the rural people who live all around me in Normandie, the story of a restaurant struggling to survive and prosper, as all small business owners do, and the experiences of an expatriate family

who tried their best to assimilate into the French culture, something which is very hard for unilingual Americans to do.

Michael S. Sanders has beat both Peter Maysles & Frances Mayes at their own game. Too bad his book sales don't seem to reflect it!"From Here You Can't See Paris" is written with a clear-eyed understanding of the hardships of picturesque rural life. Instead of being slightly patronizing towards the backwards locals & their quaintly amusing ways, Michael Sanders earns himself a place in the life of Les Arques by participating on an equal footing rather than as the newest deep-pocketed employer in the area. This is the France that I want to live in, an area trying desperately to retain it's ancient character while refusing to be an anachronism. The locals show great ingenuity in conceiving ways to achieve this. Michael Sanders documents their efforts, as well as informing the reader of the mechanics of such famed French food products as foie gras. The section on how foie gras is produced is fascinating, as is his description of daily life in a French restaurant. The only reason this book rates 4 stars instead of 5 (really, it should be 4.5, but again, doesn't allow partial points) is Sanders occasional Americanism. I was taken aback when Sanders described his dismay at his 5 year old daughters increasing "Frenchness". His wishing for "playdates" & typical American media diversions such as a local multiplex were annoying to me. The descriptions of Les Arques & the local school seemed all a parent could want for a healthy, intelligent & well-adjusted child; why yearn for a sullen, over-stimulated American brat? Those carps aside (& they are purely my own reactions to French culture) "From Here You Can't See Paris" has helped me to determine my future lies in France.

My part time home is located just down the road in Lapeze. Though fearful of the crowds swarming this lovely Lot if this book is popular, Michael Sanders writes with knowledge and heart. His stories ring true and treat our wonderful locals with the respect they deserve without the sentimentality or pompousness of other books about the region. His words remind me of how lucky I am to be in this area and it has been very educational for me and will make my next visit even more wonderful. Le recreation is a superb restaurant and its owners charming. Cest bon!!

After I read chapter 3, "Monsieur le mairie," I knew that I not only liked this book, but loved it. This is a book of very warm, real portraits of French people in a small community and of vivid and pleasant images of a village and the countryside around it. The book centers on the village of Les Arques in the valley of the Lot River, which lies below the better known valley of the Dordogne, and it is

loosely center around a restaurant, La Recreation, and the dedicated proprietors, Jacques and Noelle. Although I am not interested in restaurants and cooking, I found myself fascinated. Not only did I learn about the life of a small, yet dedicated restaurant, but about the farmer who lovingly came to grow produce for it. And about the many other relationships of Les Arques that spell the familial essence of being French. I learned about the trials of producing truffles, of raising ducks for foie gras, and of eking out a living in rural France. Yet it is a happy book, a joyous book, a real book, and a loving book. When the author returned to America, it was almost as difficult for me to say good-bye to Les Arques.

This is a delicately written account of a small village, its local restaurant, and its agricultural life, the village residing in the valley of the Lot river in central France. The book is also the record of encounters with a number of memorable, wise, and (mostly) kind village people and is, moreover, redolent with the aroma of truffles, foie gras, and the dark wine of Cahors. Reading it, one learns a great deal about farming in that part of the world, and about what is required to create a really first rate restaurant. I consider this admirable book to be in the splendid tradition exemplified by M.F.K. Fisher, Freda White, and Adam Gopnik.

Michael Sanders spent a wonderful year in Les Arques, a small town in the Lot, a rural area in southwest France. We're lucky that his absorbing memoir takes us along. Meet Jacques and Noelle, who have rescued the restaurant housed in the empty schoolhouse; the local farmers who grow the restaurant's produce and supply its meats; the town fathers who shepherded the restaurant renovation to help rejuvenate the town; and the villagers who give Les Arques its special warmth. This book will transport you to the Lot and you will enjoy the journey immensely. This book adroitly combines fascinating pictures of daily life in Les Arques with discussion of larger themes. Sanders offers keen insights into French rural culture and the economic and social forces that shape the fortunes of farming communities. The difficulties of running a small farming enterprise are formidable in this age of mass agriculture; Sanders' depictions of the farmers' patience, dedication and creativity in maintaining their land and bringing their wares to market are vivid and moving. Sanders's book is also an absorbing travelogue-- you'll learn the ins and outs of touring the Lot region and benefit from the lodging, dining and travel advice contained in an appendix. And armchair gourmands will find a mouthwatering read in the meals prepared by Jacques and Noelle for their fortunate patrons. Buy, read and enjoy-- you'll be transported to a wonderful corner of the world.

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