



The Butler and the Chef owner Georges Blum next to an 18th century Sicilian wine barrel cask, a French wine pump sits in the foreground.

Francophile for a Day

Do you dream in French but have no time to travel? Don't let that get you down. Now you can take a day trip, or two, to find French treasures without leaving Northern California.

Begin the trip at the **Butler and the Chef**, 290 Utah St., San Francisco; (415) 626-9600, www.butlerandthef.com. After getting a tour of the unique pieces that Georges Blum imports, (and remember, he used to be a pastry chef, so in the morning there may be croissants), head to Polk Street. Park as close to Green Street as you can. Grab a pastry and coffee at **Boulangerie de Polk** and walk down to **La Place du Soleil**, 2356 Polk St.; (415) 771-4252, www.laplacedusoleil.com. One of the unique features of this quaint shop is the ever-changing accessories that Amy Dean continues to find. Dean is constantly working and reworking her shop. **La Tulipe Noire**, 2418 Polk St., San Francisco; (415) 922-2000, a free-for-all antique store that is always in a state of disarray, offers great deals on treasures that owner Olivier Kleiser wants to part with.

Next, head to Mill Valley and prepare to meet Yasmine McGrane at **Maison Reve**. Her passion is apparent throughout the store and after speaking with her you will want to sign up for a cooking and antique tour of France. **Maison Reve**, 11 Throckmorton Ave., Mill Valley; (415) 383-9700, www.maisonreve.com.

Head north toward Yountville. You're in the thick of it now. Yountville, with **Bouchon**, **Reeds**, the **French Laundry**, **JP Steak and Bistro Joanny**, is France. And of course, the **Bouchon Bakery** is a great place to overload on pastry. But remember, there have to be some frames left for furniture and other accessories. Stop in and chat with Eli Qvist at **Antique Fair**, 6512 Washington St., Yountville; (707) 944-8440, www.antiqfair.com. Qvist has been at **Antique Fair** for 22 years and knows everything there is to know about the current trend.

Once you have enjoyed the artwork at **Antique Fair**, continue on to St. Helena, where you will find Jan de Luz' third store on Main Street. This store now offers his well-known French linens, slippers, bath products and his chateau-style architectural pieces. **Jan de Luz**, 1219 Main St., St. Helena; (707) 963-1550, www.jandeluz.com. **Vintage Home**, 1201 Main St., St. Helena; (707) 963-7423, has a vibrant selection of French linens.

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designer. When she came to the States, she knew that she wanted to do something different from her corporate job in France. She enrolled at UC Berkeley and studied interior design and architecture. After graduating, she worked for a year as an assistant designer and then opened **A Beautiful Place** in Berkeley. But Perrin does not look to her roots as a style for design.

"My grandfather was a chair manufacturer and my father built furniture, so I guess the craftsmanship thing is in my blood. But I don't look to follow trends. The French like to be unique and that is what I enjoy. That's how I approach my designs. In that way I am very French. I enjoy the French influence but I am not totally committed to it," Perrin said. The designer likes to use one great French piece and build around it.

As a child, when Claudia Schwartz was designing boxes with her father for fun, she had no idea her avocation would become her vocation. Now, 17 years after opening **Bell'occhio** in San Francisco, Schwartz realizes how the French trend has caught up with what she began.

Although the small, charming store is not completely French, the quality and style resemble the craftsmanship of European designs and many of the imported items are handmade in France. With one of the most intriguing handmade box selections around, Schwartz has captured the creativity of the craftsman.

"I try to find things that are especially made for the store," Schwartz boasted. "It is part of the experience. The music, the smell, the presentation all make people feel as though they are in another place. Possibly even France."

One of the areas that has experienced the most French influence in its transition is Upper Polk Street. The blocks between Green and Chestnut have taken on a French life over the past three years. Prize, a small emporium just off Polk Street on Green, offers ribbons, knickknacks, accessories and table-top antiques. The tiny space has an air only the French could create. Just past Green Street, Amy and Christopher Dean opened **La Place du Soleil**, and as you stroll past a handful of French bistros and cafes, **La Tulipe Noire** offers an occasional find. Even a real estate broker, **Maison Nouveau**, has adopted the French style to capture clients and stimulate the senses.

As the trend grows and spreads from Carmel to San Francisco to St. Helena, one fact stands out: The French know style, quality and craftsmanship, and as long as the containers keep coming, we'll be able to share the pleasures of the tables, and chairs, for a long time to come. ♦

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Virginia Barber, 2, tracks rose petals in Pêche Mignon's window, while her mother, Chappell Barber, looks on.