

The Aquitaine Region

in 101 Buildings

A Region in Motion

Editorial

by Xavier Rosan



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How can we define the Aquitaine Region? It is France's third largest region, and offers an astonishing variety of landscapes, each reflecting the strong cultural currents in which its identity is rooted. The Atlantic Ocean forms its long seaboard, interrupted only by two major estuaries, the Gironde and Adour, into which pour the winding rivers of its interior – the Dordogne, Gironde, Lot, Garonne, Adour and Gaves du Béarn. To the northeast, lie the foothills of the Massif Central and to the south the Pyrenean mountain chain, marking the border with Spain. From the Périgord to the Basque Country, the region's character is determined by its proximity with the ocean, while the Garonne valley is more clearly coloured by the neighbouring influence of southern France. The Atlantic is a rich source of overseas exchange. Nothing, then, could be more seemingly heterogeneous, nothing more divergent than the multitude of components forming the patchwork of its administrative composition. And yet, from this unlikely mismatch of areas sometimes artificially split in two to serve the purposes of bureaucracy, the key elements of the region's character emerge. Aquitaine is a land of exchange, diversity and amalgamation. It is a land with a generous, welcoming heart, a land

of discovering and sharing, values reflected in its culture, history and endeavours. This sense of movement constitutes the keystone of its common identity, safeguarding its singularity and uniting the fragments of its rich mosaic, despite the far-reaching structural changes of the last decades. From the valley of the Vézère to the Médoc and on to the Bassin d'Arcachon, from Chalosse to the Basque coast, from the countryside of Soule to the Béarn, and the confluence of the Lot-et-Garonne to Nérac... each distinct area has its own personality, be it subtle or powerfully voiced, together part of a finely balanced whole, at once unwavering and ceaselessly renewed. The region's architecture naturally reflects this cultural interaction, with examples both of eloquent individuality and astonishing territorial unity. The present guide offers the reader a selection of 101 buildings and historic sites. It does not pretend to be exhaustive and is, at times, subjective. Our aim is to reflect the inspiring diversity of the region's cultural heritage, inviting the reader on an informed voyage of discovery, borne on the tide of insatiable curiosity the region's myriad faces never fail to inspire.

Above: the Atlantic coast
from Cordouan lighthouse.
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Front cover: The Château
de Monbazillac in the
Dordogne.
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