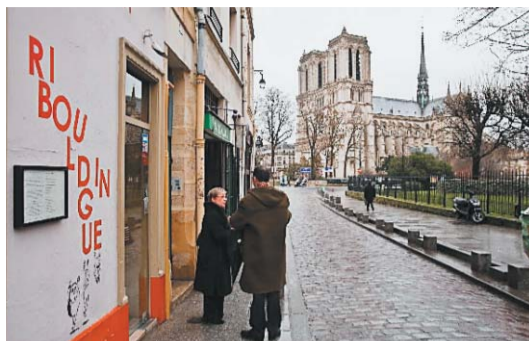


FRANCE



Diners inside Ribouldingue . . .



. . . whose neighbor is Notre Dame.



Valerie DeLahaye owns La Mère Agitée.

In Paris, like eating at grand-mère's

These restaurants offer what's cooking that day and something off the menu that can be just as nourishing: a familiar comfort



At Chez Mamy in the 11th arrondissement, a customer chats with Pauline Clavel, who owns the restaurant with her daughter.

BY JOE RAY | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

La Mère Agitée looked promising before I got there: The tiny restaurant's website features a photo of the contents of a saucepan being submerged in a stream of heavy cream. Next to the photo is the claim: "best pig's head in the world since 1995."

Likewise, an artist's palette in a display window outside Chez Lucette reads "traditional cuisine made without microwave ovens," "little dishes, simmered with care," and, even better, "pontiffs and grumps stay away."

Ask most Parisians — even those in the know — if la cuisine traditionnelle made and often delivered to your table by what the French would call a dame d'un certain age still exists in the City of Light, and they will probably give a nostalgic sigh.

Luckily, a handful of these places, perfect in their ability to make you feel as if you're eating at Grandma's, are still here. Combine fantastic comfort food with a gentle price tag — and the feeling that you are both being cared for and part of something greater — and you have got something incredibly well-timed for a sagging economy.

"Right now, people want a sure thing — they want the recipes of their grandmothers," says Valerie DeLahaye at La Mère Agitée.

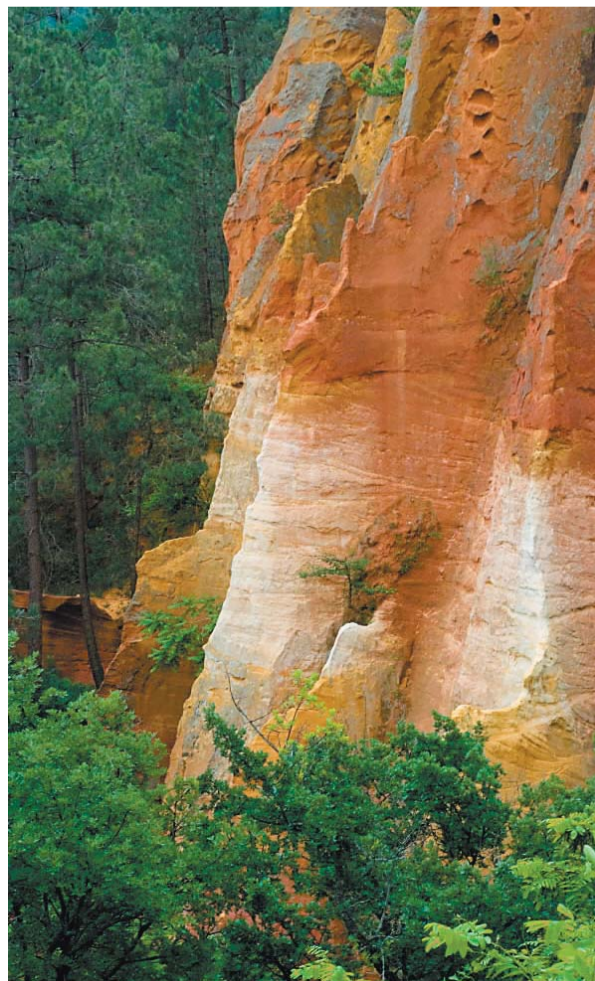
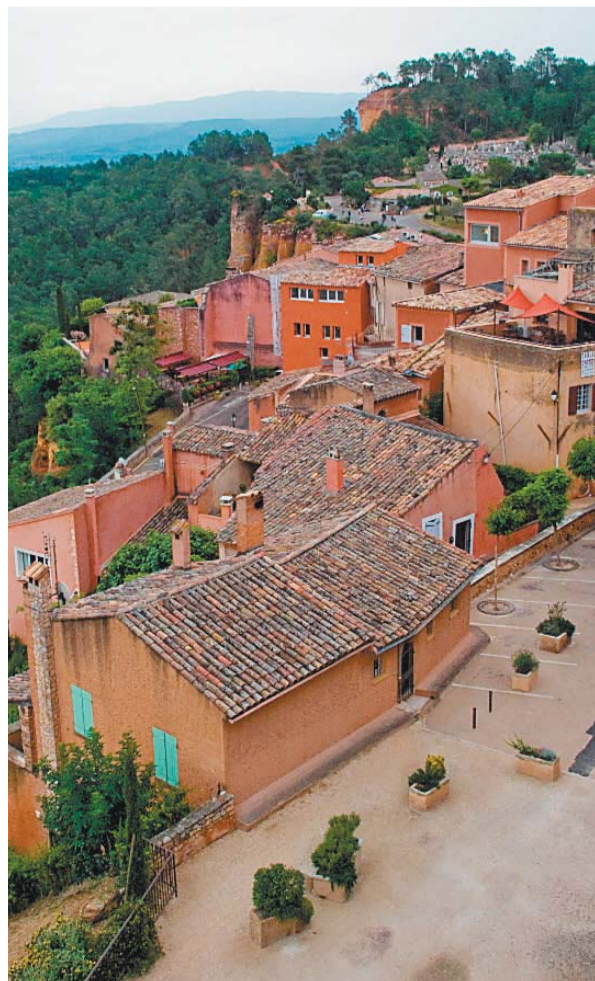
Part of DeLahaye's philosophy became clear the first time I ate at her 14th arrondissement bistro. Arriving very late for a group dinner, I asked whether I could have a pitcher of wine, and she pointed at a half-full bottle of red on a nearby table and said, "Take that one."

"I'm in a niche," she explains. "It's not expensive here. At 35 euros with wine, you

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PHOTOS BY JOE RAY/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE



PHOTOS BY DAVE MENDELSON/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Ancient colors of Provence mined from the land itself

By Janet Mendelsohn
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

ROUSSILLON — Selectively answering our questions, which we carefully constructed in beginner's French, the plump woman, on the plus side of 50, chatted amiably while directing our car to a dirt lot. "Oui, oui, le parking est ici!"

We had met her when, confused by the vague road signs in Provence, we stopped for directions to hiking trails in the jagged ridge of red and yellow cliffs that were within sight but seemed unattainable by car. The woman seemed to grasp our goal but nothing here indicated the trails, "les sentiers des ocres" were nearby.

A day earlier, we had visited Aix-en-Provence, where we toured the studio of painter Paul Cézanne (1839-1906) whose Impressionist master-

pieces owe much to the intense colors made possible by ochre from these hills. Later we would visit the village of Roussillon en Provence and a nearby ochre museum. But now, we needed a change of pace.

The hilltop village of Roussillon seems ochre colored.

Nearby cliffs show huge veins of the mineral pigment.

After the morning's croissants and coffee at our rented apartment in Vénasque, we drove a twisting mountain road to this valley quilted with farms and sprinkled with grazing sheep, dry-stone huts, and red poppies. Across

the greenscape, we could see orange cliffs known as le Colorado de Rustrel, a view that recalls the US Southwest.

The luminous colors of Cézanne's paintings had inspired us to seek out the source of ochre, the impure mineral used as a pigment for millennia. Four hundred miles northwest of Rustrel, in Lascaux, prehistoric cave paintings dating to 15,000 BC portray bison and horses in motion drawn with red and yellow ochre. In ancient churches and monasteries throughout Europe, ochre was used in frescoes painted by artists hired to bring lessons of the Bible to priests and peasants alike. Today, ochre is used to color tiles, ceramics, pottery, concrete, plaster, and fertilizers.

The world's biggest vein of ochre runs here in the Luberon.

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