On the Isle of Skye, a lush life tied to the land

By Anthony Flint GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

SLEAT, Isle of Skye, Scotland -Gazing out the window at Kinloch Lodge, one happily returns to the matter of dinner, savoring every bite of venison and every sip of Talisker single-malt whiskey, with something approaching gratitude. Because outside, a light rain falls in feathery curtains on a rugged landscape; clouds gather over the whitecaps of Loch Na Dal; and the temperature drops, right on time for mid-August in Scotland.

But the proprietor, Lady Claire Macdonald, author of 17 books on cooking and the country's version of Julia Child, would argue that it's not just the contrast with the growing chill outside that deepens our culinary appreciation. Tastes come alive because virtually everything consumed in this former shooting lodge is local and seasonal, from the lamb to the cod to the mushrooms in the soup. Staying here is a lesson in what's missed when food comes from far away.

"We must eat seasonally. Seasonal keeps the cook on anticipatory toes," she says in the prim and comfortable sitting room, the portraits of Macdonald ancestors adorning the walls. In the spring she works on a bright chicken salad; in the fall, it's braised game and stews.

"And we have a great loathing for food miles," she says, referring to the time- and energy-consuming distance that most grocerystore food travels — asparagus and apples from South America, for example, maddening to see on the shelves when local stuff is there for the taking. Starting long before concern about carbon footprints and the popularity of Whole Foods Market in this country, Macdonald has been harvesting everything that can be had from the island, the Highlands, the sea or the lochs and rivers, and often right from the garden in back.

The local and seasonal theme is carried on in her cooking demonstrations, which are offered as part of weekend packages at Kinloch

The inn, which Macdonald and her husband, Godfrey, the lord of Clan Macdonald, have been running for 34 years, is an oasis of comfort on the austere Isle of Skye. It is located about 12 miles



Spreading beyond the lawn of Kinloch Lodge, the ancestral home of Clan Macdonald on the Isle of Skye, is Loch Na Dal.

from the bridge that connects Skye to the mainland, and a short drive to Armadale for the ferry to Mallaig. The government has been steadily improving the roads in the region, which for decades have been single tracks with little spots to pull over to let oncoming traffic pass. Kinloch Lodge is a fine place to base explorations of the Isle of Skye; most of the sights are to the north and west. At \$500 a night for two people

(plus \$300 for dinner), Kinloch Lodge is a splurge. But given the expense for Americans traveling anywhere in Europe these days because of the weak dollar, the fine food and royal treatment represent a relatively good value. Marketing itself as a "sanctuary for the world-weary in Europe's last great wilderness," Kinloch Lodge is drawing an affluent clientele, and is fully booked in peak months August and September. Recently a family has rented the entire 14room compound for the Christ-

The Macdonald clan ancestors in their kilts in the portraits throughout the main building are, in a sense, the origins of the enterprise. Lord Godfrey inherited the clan's lands and holdings, and also crushing debt. Various assets were sold off, and Kinloch Lodge, the shooting lodge for Clan Macdonald's Armadale Castle on 60 acres of hillside and moors, was converted into luxury accommodations. There are two buildings and landscaped grounds, and renovations are forthcoming.

Walking and hiking around the lodge are popular activities because many calories need to be burned off. Our dinner included quail ravioli, seared Isle of Skye scallops, and a mushroom, white truffle cream, and sherry soup; fillet of Highland venison and panfried Highland lamb; triple ginger pudding for dessert; and a 2004 Blue Cutting Road cabernet and merlot blend from O'Leary Walker Winemakers in South Australia (generally speaking, grapes are

If you go ...

How to get there

The Isle of Skye is 180 miles north of Glasgow, and 80 miles southwest of Inverness, on the western coast of Scotland. From the mainland by car, take the new Skye Bridge at Kyle of Localsh, or by car or train, the ferry from Mallaig. Boston to Glasgow is served nonstop by discount airline

FlyGlobespan and with one stop by

What to do

Northwest and American.

Hiking, fly-fishing, deer stalking, exploring castles and fishing villages, photography. For general information, visit skye.co.uk.

Skye Walking Holidays Duntulm Castle Hotel, Duntulm 011-44-1470-552213 skyewalks.co.uk Guided talking tours of the area.

Cuillin Guides 011-44-1478-640289 cuillin-guides.co.uk Mountaineering tours.

Armadale Castle and the Museum of the Isles

Armadale 011-44-1471-844305 Portraits of clan chiefs, a wine glass said to be used by Bonnie Prince Charlie, gardens and castle ruins. Open April 2-Oct. 26, adults \$10.40, families (2 adults, 4 children) \$29.

Aros Experience Viewfield Road, Portree 011-44-1478-613649

aros.co.uk Live feeds from eagle and heron nests, wide-screen aerial video of the Cuillin Hills; play area for children. Open year-round.

Dunvegan Castle

Dunvegan 011-44-1470-521206 Swords, silver, a dungeon and Rory Mor's Drinking Horn, a Celtic vessel that holds a half-gallon of claret traditionally downed by clan chiefs. Mid-March through October 10 a.m.-5 p.m., November-mid-March 11-4.

Talisker Distillery

Carbost 011-44-1478-614308 Guided tour of Skye's only distillery, free dram included. Easter-October 9:30-5, November-Easter by appointment, adults \$10.40.

Uig and the Fairy Glen Uig, Trotternish Peninsula (turn off A855 at the sign for

Sheader and Balnaknock) Otherworldly landscape of conical hills and velvet ridges and hillsides. Keep an eye out for the paranor-

Where to stay **Kinloch Lodge**

011-44-1471-833333 kinloch-lodge.co.uk Fine food, cooking demonstrations by Lady Claire Macdonald at former shooting lodge on 60 acres on inlet. Doubles May 1-Sept. 30 \$312-\$572, Oct. 1-April 30 \$270-\$468.

Where to eat **Three Chimneys**

Colbost, Dunvegan 011-44-470 511258 threechimneys.co.uk Seafood in a candlelit crofter's cottage; three-course dinner \$104.

not successfully grown in the Hebrides). Manager Tom Eveling has developed an extensive wine list, and takes suggestions from guests

for additions. In the evening, it is irresistible to repair to the living room to taste a dram or two of single-malt whiskey, arranged with explanations on a menu on a writing table near the fireplace. Afterward, guests sleep in Egyptian cotton sheets with the sounds of sheep bleating outside. The only challenge is mustering an appetite for the delicious breakfast in the morning: blood pudding, kippers, bacon,

boiled eggs with buttered soldiers (strips of toast), porridge, and smoked salmon.

"Food should never be serious. It must be fun," Lady Macdonald says, explaining that she is happy to make mistakes in her demonstrations so that others don't have to. There is also is a well-stocked store of jellies and chutneys, as well as tools of the trade like a razor-sharp onion mincer. "It's got to be good to earn a space in the drawer," she says.

Food is not the only focus here. There is seal-spotting, fly-fishing, walking around Dunvegan Castle,

the theatrical Cuillin mountains, the fishing village of Portree, the dramatic land sculpture of the Old Man of Storr, and the Faery Glen, a magical area of vibrant green conical hills and purple thistle not far from the village of Uig.

Then again, a picnic lunch is entirely appropriate for all such excursions. Kinloch Lodge will provide one, and it's a safe bet it will be the finest meal ever to come in a box.

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In today's bistro fare, tension mixes tradition with evolution

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this the best-smelling bakery in France.

Dos Santos walks across the floor, grabs a baguette à maïs something like a multigrain baguette made with fresh corn kernels — breaks it open and stuffs his face inside.

"Ahh - smell this!" he exclaims, emerging from the torn loaf with a huge smile on his face and flour on the end of his nose. If you could get drunk on the smell of bread, it would happen with this baguette.



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We scoot around the corner to the Halle de la Martinière market, and my guide makes a beeline for his favorite cheese shop, Le Jardin de la Martinière. Owner Virginie Messad gives us a taste of some seriously good Morbier, with a perfect creamy texture and raw-milk flavor, as she and Dos Santos discuss the market's stature in the neighborhood, far from the hubbub of the city's ritzy and touristy Les Halles de Lyon market.

The tour has already brought us past a beautiful butcher shop, Dos Santos's favorite place for ice cream, a furniture restoration workshop that looks like it belongs in the early 1900s, and a pristine bakery, but when Messad asks me what I think of the city and its people, I realize we have been moving so fast, nothing has sunk in.

We hit the brakes when Dos Santos introduces his photographer friend Frédéric Sonier, who goes by the nom de plume Frédéric Jean.

"We're bad at making people feel welcome, and we're closed," says Sonier, describing the typical Lyonnais. "But that mentality is changing. People are becoming more open and sympathetic.

"It takes a while to discover their richness — they're like the 'traboules,'" he says, referring to Lyon's easy-to-miss pedestrian passageways that link one street to







another, often hiding a beautiful courtyard.

"I can't speak for everybody," Sonier says, "but I share what I

The soul-baring — and a state of the union for Lyon's cuisine comes from a pair of unlikely sources. Jojo stops for lunch at Les Adrets, a few doors up from Antic Wine on the Rue de Boeuf, and introduces chef Jean-Luc Wesolowski, 57, and cheesemaker François Maire, 42. Los Santos gets a "Cheers"-esque welcome as he makes the rounds of the restaurant, with warm hellos to everyone in the kitchen and half the

Wesolowski sits down after the busy lunch service to describe the slow change that's happening to Lyon's revered cuisine.

"Bouchons are like museums," he says, referring to the bouchon Lyonnais, the city's version of the bistro that focuses on hearty food like coq au vin, straying often into offal dishes like tripe, and serving it all up with plenty of wine. Today, the authentic bouchon Lyonnais is wildly outnumbered by knockoffs

and finding a real one isn't easy. Wesolowski describes his own cuisine with a nonchalance that makes it sound like the simple dinner he prepares in the restaurant's kitchen almost every night for his wife, but others might say his cooking is the perfect evolution of a bouchon.

"Bouchon is exploited," says Maire, who is slowly orbiting toward our table after citing a mistrust of journalists. "People want to sell authenticity where there is none. It's a great idea, but it's too clean. Food is made to make you

Wesolowski would probably be a bit more upset by the slow death of one of Lyon's icons if he didn't understand why it was fading

"Before, people here were manual laborers who worked very hard — they needed heavy food," he says. "Now, road workers have machines to dig their holes. It's

"Here, the menu changes every day," he explains. "I go to the market in the morning and if the fish is beautiful and the fishmonger gives me a good price, I'll buy it." He passes these prices on to his customers, particularly at lunch when a prix-fixe menu is all he offers and the three-course meal with wine and coffee is a bargain

"Now, with [today's] lunch ov-

courtyards in Lyon, which are often only accessible by a series of passageways. In the basement of Antic Wine, foosball players hang over a stack of bottles. er, there's nothing left," says Wesolowski. "This is the principal characteristic of a neighborhood

restaurant." That said, it's not over for the bouchon. Wesolowski occasionally makes bouchon standards such as pork with lentils, fish dumplings known as quenelles, and a salad made with pigs' feet.

"He's unique," says Maire. "He still works with his heart."

After lunch, at the Café de la Cathedral, I get Dos Santos talking about wine while he sips on a San Pellegrino mineral water served in a Perrier glass. Even that becomes something of an indirect ode to the character of the Lyonnais. He begins by talking about the semiregular tastings he runs at Antic Wine, where anything from reasonably-priced wine to an expensive magnum might be served with some wonderful charcuterie, all for a ridiculously cheap \$15.

"The tastings are a lot of fun, but we certainly don't do it for the money," he says.

Case in point are two empty bottles left from previous tastings on a shelf at the shop, one from Château Haut-Brion and the other from Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, and each of them worth a couple of C-notes.

If you go ...

Where to buy wine **Antic Wine**

18 rue du Boeuf 011-33-4-78-37-08-96 anticwine.com The wine shop of Georges dos Santos is a veritable Lyon landmark. Closed Monday.

Where to stay **ARTELIT**

16 rue du Boeuf 011-33-4-78-42-84-83, 011-33-6-81-08-33-30 dormiralyon.com Frédéric Jean's beautiful, central, cozy B&B. Reasonably priced at \$132-\$176. The bed's in a loft, however, leaving you with little

headroom. **Cour des Loges**

2-4-6-8 rue du Boeuf 011-33-4-72-77-44-44 courdesloges.com Go high-class, Lyon style: beautiful decor, lush rooms, stunning atrium courtyard. \$351-\$878

a night. Where to shop **Boulangerie St. Vincent**

49 quai St. Vincent 011-33-4-78-29-34-23 The pain de maïs (bread made with corn, but not corn bread) is to die for.

Jardin de la Martinière

Halle de la Martinière Rue de la Martinière 011-33-4-78-29-56-24 Killer Morbier and goat cheeses, but ask owner Virginie Messad

what's best. Where to eat

Les Adrets 30 rue du Boeuf 011-33-4-78-38-24-30 Dos Santos's favorite place to dine in Lyon and a prix-fixe lunch at an unbeatable \$20. Closed in

August. Le P'Tit Bouffon

73 rue de Sèze 011-33-4-78-24-00-16 Stop feeling like a tourist and go to this friendly, no-frills restaurant with a Basque influence. Dinner with wine around \$40 a person.

Glacier Nardone

26 quai de Bondy 011-33-4-78-28-29-09 alaciernardone.com Closed Jan. 1-March 10 Get in your licks . . . at Dos Santos's favorite place for ice cream.

Information lyon.fr/vdl/sections/en/

"I'm generous — I don't do this for free, but I love working with food and with people," Dos Santos says. "Wine has got to be accessible to everybody. There's always money, but you've got to have

magic, too.' Later in the evening, Dos Santos plays waiter at Les Adrets for a private wine-tasting dinner he has organized with Wesolowski. The consummate host, here Dos Santos is clearly in his element. He skates around the floor, making jokes in the kitchen and with the clients, who try several wines over the course of the evening. He's all smiles, simultaneously running the show, charming everyone in his path, and, at the end of the

night, sharing a drink with them. At one point, he stops at a wait-

er's station to test a Burgundy he has just opened, pokes his nose in a glass, inhales deeply, then takes a sip. Then, like an aside to the camera, he turns to me, tingling with enthusiasm, and finally talks about the wine.

"Ça," he says, flicking the glass with his finger and making it sound a sharp, satisfying "ding!" "C'est magnifique!"

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