



In the 14th century, two of the towers at Chateau St. Philippe were destroyed.

Courtesy of A.M. Realty



Palisadians Sukeshi and Chuck O'Neal, here with their children, Charlie, 9, and Isabella, 11, and bought Chateau St. Philippe at the base of the French Alps "on a whim." The family lives in the Huntington Palisades.

Photo: Ami Bhalani



The dining room at the chateau has been completely restored.

Courtesy of A. M. Realty

# Chateau St. Philippe: My "Tres Grand" Adventure

By ANTHONY MARGULEAS  
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What's the perfect holiday gift for someone you love? A week in one of Europe's oldest chateaus, of course!

When my old college friends, Chuck and Sukeshi O'Neal, who recently moved to the Palisades, showed me photos of their 1,000-year-old chateau which they had recently turned into a vacation home for family and friends, I thought: "Wow, would I love to go." The next thing I knew, I was on a plane to France.

Sitting on a rocky outcrop looking across a wide valley, with the Alps as a panoramic backdrop, I found the area breathtaking. As you approach the chateau from the river, you see an imposing façade with ancient stone towers. But when you drive through the gates, the chateau looks completely different. Three wings of the building surround a tree-lined courtyard, with the main entrance through the old

cloisters. This historic chateau started life as a monastery for Benedictine monks.

I was immediately enchanted seeing the evening sunlight filtered through the chestnut trees and conifers. A stream appeared from underneath an ancient stone building, what might have served as a washhouse at one time. Across the courtyard is an imposing, ancient stone barn, complete with beams, cobblestone floors and even its own resident owl.

The magic continued as I entered the 12,000 sq.ft. building. On the ground floor, the O'Neals have preserved the architectural integrity of the chateau. There are stone floors in the hallways, with vaulted ceilings in the vast gourmet kitchen, dining room and salon. There are hand-painted scenes on the walls of the living room, several hundred years old. Below the ground floor are a series of brick caves that can easily accommodate 200 people. In sharp contrast is a state-of-the-art screening room and a games room.

The bedrooms—all 10 of them—not only exude history but comfort as well. Many have fireplaces, wood floors and beamed ceilings. In my bathroom, the toilet was in the tower, with a view of the valley and mountains! While the door had "1676" engraved on it, the bathroom itself had all the conveniences of a deluxe hotel: an Italian marble floor, designer washstand, ceramic tiled shower, and hot water with loads of pressure—clearly a feat in a 1,000-year-old chateau.

I tried to envision what the chateau was like before the O'Neals started the rehabilitation, which included adding a bathroom to each of the bedrooms, thus turning them into suites. Maybe the spirit of the monks had a hand in it, plus, of course, the work of the French artisans. Also instrumental in the miraculous transformation was Chuck's father Chic, a hydraulics engineer, and project manager Hugh Green, an ex-New Yorker. Paintings by Chuck's mother, Patricia

Terrell O'Neal, an accomplished artist, grace many of the walls in Chateau St. Philippe. Some are landscapes. Some are personal portraits of family members. Some are images of French life.

The Savoie region, where the chateau is located, has its own micro-climate. Here, the summers are warm and dry, the winters relatively mild. This is the land of mountains and lakes and all they provide: skiing, hang-gliding, biking, hiking, fishing, and water sports. Lac Bourget, the largest lake in France, is 20 minutes away. For the less active, the local area is gourmet-central, especially for cheese, which you can see being made.

The nearest small town is St. Pierre d'Albigny, which has an outdoor food market, cafes, bars, as well as small family-run restaurants. Organized walking tours and tours of local vineyards and wineries are available. And if there isn't enough history on your doorstep at the chateau, you can visit plenty of other ancient cas-

ties and monuments in the area. In nearby Montmelian, the regional museum has displays on all the local wine-making traditions.

I won't soon forget my fairytale visit to Chateau St. Philippe, which is easy to reach—90 minutes from the international airports in Lyon (France) and Geneva (Switzerland). The chateau is available for rent, year-round, from \$12,000-\$14,000 a week depending on the season. Maximum occupancy: 20 people. A private chef can be arranged. It is an ideal venue for a romantic getaway, family get-togethers, reunions of old friends, special birthday or anniversary celebrations, even corporate retreats. For more information visit the website: [www.chateauphilip-petour.com](http://www.chateauphilip-petour.com).



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