



Castles are the stuff of dreams.

They have spurred the imagination of writers from Bram Stoker to Dan Brown and cinéastes from Walt Disney to Ron Howard. This month, the three-century old diva, the Château de Villette, appears as a

major player in the film set to open the Cannes Festival, *The Da Vinci Code*. No stranger to stardom, this same, mute protagonist has already loomed large in a handful of feature films, including *Casanova* and *Le Comte de Monte Cristo*. Even the public can indulge in time-travel with all the modern amenities during a Chateau de Villette sojourn. Another castle familiar to filmgoers and visitors alike is Alnick Castle, the historic home of the 12th Duke of Northumberland, which has provided the suggestive setting for that phenomenal boy wizard, Harry Potter. In Devon, it was Bovey Castle, that inspired Arthur Conan Doyle's unforgettable *Hound of the Baskervilles*.

The influence of castles is much more than oneiric. As the Comte Bertrand de Rougé of Baronville observes, "When the past is no longer a guiding light for the present, we lose direction." Within the time-honed stone walls of ancient castles is the collective memory of centuries of history, architecture and culture. The original Baronville castle, in Ile-de-France, was freed by Joan of Arc during the 100 Years War with the English. In 1066, the Lord of Canisy, who created the nucleus of the present-day Château de Canisy, in Normandy, participated in the conquest of England alongside William the Conqueror. The castle home of the 8th Earl of Carnarvon, the subject of innumerable books and films following his ancestor's archaeological "scoop" of the early 20th century, the discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb, houses a permanent exhibition of Egyptology within its cellars. Château Beijing Laffite, faithfully reproduces, in the orient, the brilliant architecture of François Mansart's Maison-Laffite masterpieces. Few eccentric castle owners can rival the talented Marquess of Bath who is not only painting the murals for his Longleat home, but has created Britain's longest labyrinth and a zoo on his property.

We in Monaco have a castle within walking distance: the Palais on the *Rocher* has been the home of the ruling Grimaldi family since the 15th century. And less than a two-hour drive away is the intriguing Château de Grimaldi, in Aix, (now owned by the proprietress of Château de Villette) which is the starting point of a Mary Magdalene tour that traces her supposed 30-year residency in Provence to the Basilica where she was buried.

A common thread binds all these culturally, historically and geographically disparate edifices: they are all accessible to the public. They offer visits and sojourns, locations for film and media companies, private events, weddings and corporate events. Their ease of selection is the brainchild of BAM member Freda Katritzky. Not only has Freda published a very readable, colorfully illustrated, well documented book, *Châteaux Privés*, featuring 20 castles in Europe and abroad, she offers a personalized location service for those compelled by the idea of escape from the humdrum to an historic castle experience. Freda became seriously enchanted by castles during a childhood visit to Schloss Neuschwanstein in Bavaria, and has personally spent time in each of the private palaces, castles and estates she represents. The driving force behind Freda's interest in castles is both passionate and practical. "Even one person can help in the preservation of our common heritage." For an *ante-prima* of the venues and locations, click on www.chateauxprives.com or telephone Freda direct, in Monaco, at + (377) 93 50 28 90 or fax + (377) 93 50 28 92.