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In this issue ...

The Insider

WE welcome a few guest writers this issue. Florian Brehin and Scott Bell come on board, a surfboard that is, explaining on page 32 how winter weather on the Med can bring in some dominant weather systems and world-class waves along with them. Part of those powerful storm fronts involve wind flow, and on page 30 you'll find everything you've ever wanted to know about the Mistral and all her sisters.

Ian Brodie of monacolife.net has been covering the collapse of JP Construction, a drama which broke before the holidays, with the scale of losses involved believed to be around the €5 million mark, most of it owing to clients with a significant proportion outstanding to suppliers and sub-contractors. See page 16. Another heart-wrenching and cautionary tale (page 14) is of a local woman who was scammed out of her life savings. Shades of Somerset Maugham.

Scape Design won a gold medal and an award for the best garden in the "Fresh Garden Category" at the Chelsea Flower Show 2013. With a low-maintenance philosophy, they shed some light on the world of garden design on page 34. Also in Monaco, an English-language bookshop has opened its doors near the new Starbucks while in Valbonne, Nicky Hooper of Cutting Shop fame launches Headhunters.

On page 22, Canadian author Patricia Sands shares some tips about home sharing, and we visit the stunning new villa in Cagnes-sur-Mer, home of the Swedish Club on page 24. In Nice, Jonathan Lippman is looking for like-minded neighbours to help keep the city's beaches clean (see page 31).

And on page 40, a real "taste-good" story on the tradition of the king cake – the *galette des rois* – a must read for those who want to impress family and friends, says she as she wipes the flaky crumbs from her chin. *Nancy Heslin, Editor*

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Cover: La Titote © Mitch Waite



HOME ON THE RANGE P25

riviera reportage

FROM FAUX PAS TO FASHIONABLE: THE ART OF *ReCARDING*

THESE days people don't even raise an eyebrow when it comes to the act of regifting. The US even has a specific holiday – National Regifting Day – on the Thursday before Christmas, embracing the ever growing practice.

One element that has changed though over the years is the introduction of the online gift card, which has replaced that unwanted singing tie or useless kitchen gadget.

In 2011, some €4 billion worth of gift cards were sold in France and yet, according to Issam Toufik and Younes Souilmi, two young engineers in Sophia Antipolis who co-founded the start-up *Esioox.com*, “Only about 10 to 30 per cent of gift cards are appreciated by the recipient. Either the brand isn't something the person would use or it's not available in his or her area.”



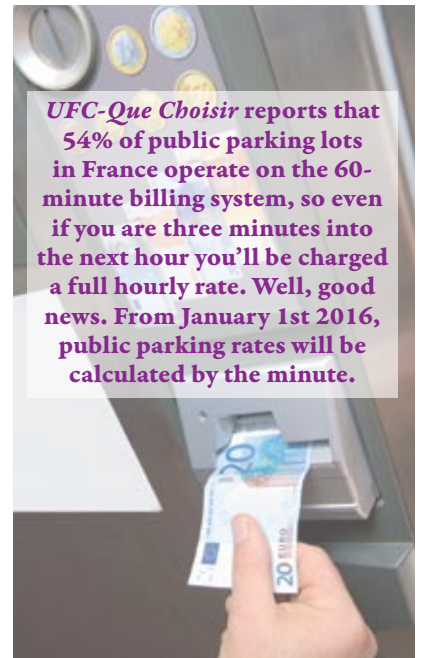
Esioox.com lets you sell your unused gift card for cash (payment is made via PayPal or cheque within 24 hours) at up to 90% of its value or you can exchange the card for another that would be more useful to you. Nothing to exchange or sell? You can always go online and buy heavily discounted gift cards.

Within three days of *Esioox.com*'s launch, before Christmas, the site had 40,000 users.

€2470

The amount a pack-a-day smoker in France will shell out this year for cigarettes as the Jan 13th tax hike means a pack of smokes now costs €7. This figure represents about 1.5 months' salary for the average household net-adjusted disposable income in France, according to the OECD.

UFC-Que Choisir reports that 54% of public parking lots in France operate on the 60-minute billing system, so even if you are three minutes into the next hour you'll be charged a full hourly rate. Well, good news. From January 1st 2016, public parking rates will be calculated by the minute.



le FLASH



A MOVEABLE FEAST

GLENN and Richard graduated from culinary schools and worked in 4-star

establishments before deciding to branch out on their own. In October 2013 they set up Le Vieux Taco Burger Truck in Antibes, *er...* sort of.

Le Vieux Taco is part of the Street Food Movement – mobile takeaway, which took off in the UK in 2011; they support local growers and actively recycle. Glenn and Richard also use neighbourhood businesses – accounting, banking, insurance – to contribute to the community.

But *les food-trucks* are not appreciated by local eateries, who say these moveable restaurants are unfair competition (*concurrence déloyale*), setting up anywhere while traditional restaurants are suffering.

Unfortunately local *mairies* are

feeling pressure from the restaurant unions and so these rolling businesses – such as Le Vieux Taco, Coup de food in Cannes, Riviera Food Truck in Valbonne or Le Camion de Sophie in Nice – are not given permits to be in city centres.

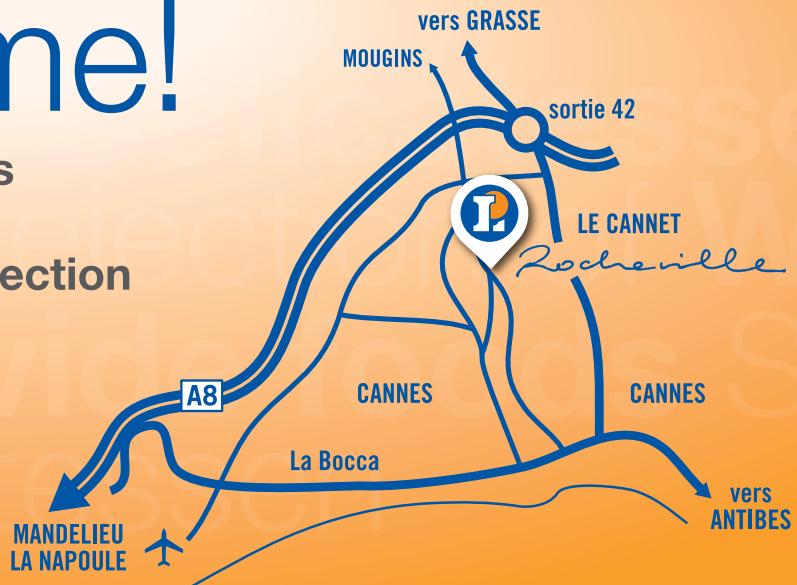
“I like to stay positive and hope that one day, with the help of customers and by offering healthy and good street food, we'll be allotted spots in city centres,” Glenn tells the *Reporter*. “We don't think it's unfair competition and maybe restaurants are complaining about the trucks because they're afraid of what they don't know. We have no problems with restaurants nor do we have time for this kind of war.”

Homemade burgers from €7.50 with English farmhouse cheddar and brioche buns. See levieuxtaco.fr

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FRANCE IN THE NEWS

On your right, you can see Nice

FOR more than 65 years, Nice has voted to the right of centre. The last time a Socialist was elected mayor was in 1945 when Jacques Cotta took office. He was ousted two years later by right-winger Jean Médecin, who remained in the position until his death in 1965. Every mayor following Cotta has been to the right of French politics, including Christian Estrosi, the current occupant of the rue de la Préfecture. Even the financial shenanigans and subsequent exile of Jacques Médecin, Jean Médecin's son and mayoral successor, haven't changed voters' conservative inclinations.

Few bettors would take a punt on this changing with the upcoming March municipal elections. Heavily criticised on the Left, Estrosi's hard-line on crime and contested but shrewd management of the city's finances have made him a popular figure with his fellow *niçois*. He will turn 59 in July, still cuts a young physique and participates actively in local sporting events like the Nice-Cannes Marathon.

Most polls give him an easy victory with about 54% of intentions in the second round, well ahead of socialist rival Patrick Allemand and FN candidate Marie-Christine Arnautu, who is expected to come third.

Disappearing act

THE French Socialist party was left (again) with egg on its face when it tagged a photo announcement that first secretary Harlem Désir would be travelling to Jarnac to attend a commemorative ceremony on the 18th anniversary of "the disappearance of François Hollande". The internet version of the text was corrected to read "François Mitterrand" but not before the Twittersphere repeated the gaffe.

The polls are in

A CEVIPOF/CNRS poll in January showed that nine out of ten French people claim they don't have confidence that politicians can deal with their real concerns but 36% say they trust Nicolas Sarkozy, 34% Marine Le Pen and only 20% François

Hollande. 69% say that French democracy is dysfunctional, 72% mistrust the unions, while a mere 23% trust the media. 63% think that voting is the best way to influence political thinking, 32% believe in the influence of demonstrations, and 23% feel that strikes can make a difference. Seven out of ten said there is too much immigration and half would like to see the death penalty reinstated.

Time to trim the turkey

EVEN the ruling party is beginning to admit that France is over-administered. Socialist MP Thierry Mandon recommends that the 22 French regions be reduced to 15 by blending some metropolitan areas with their surrounding regions. The French National Assembly has 577 *députés* (compared to 650 MPs in the British House of Commons and 630 seats in the German Bundestag) and the French *Sénat* has 348 Senators. The latest Hollande government has a whopping 38 ministers including the Prime Minister (compared to 22 Cabinet Ministers in the UK and 16 in Germany). **CONT PG 7 ►**

ALL THE PRESIDENTS' (WO)MEN

BY MIKE MEADE



Félix Faure:
1895-1899



Valéry Giscard d'Estaing
1974-1981



François Mitterrand
1981-1995
LES DUSÉNAT



Jacques Chirac
1995-2007



François Hollande
2012

Valérie Kanceljea / State Chancellery

FRANÇOIS Hollande, the self-proclaimed “Président Normal” of irreproachable morals, was unlikely to be overly concerned when *Closer* magazine recently alleged his romantic affair with actress Julie Gayet. His bigger concern was likely to have been the effect on his relationship with his live-in girlfriend and stand-in First Lady, Valérie Trierweiler. French politicians – even those occupying the highest office – have a long history of philandering that has rarely harmed their popularity and in some cases even enhanced it.

President Félix Faure famously died while making love to his mistress in 1895. Much later, his namesake, National Assembly speaker Edgar Faure, had a secret door installed in the official speaker’s residence at Hôtel de Lassay, which he used to conceal his liaisons. Faure died in 1988.

Few countries protect a person’s right to privacy as completely as France but has this latest revelation finally broken the barrier between French political figures and the public’s “right to know”? The press is restricted both by privacy laws and a complaisant understanding dating back to 1968, a few months before Georges Pompidou replaced Charles de Gaulle as president.

Pompidou was believed to have been accessory to an affair that resulted in the murder of professional bodyguard Stevan Markovic, who was thought to hold photographic proof that high-ranking political figures participated in sexual orgies organised by the Secret Service agent François Marcantoni. The press remained

discrete about the scandal and once in the Presidential Palace, Pompidou fired Marcantoni and any other Secret Service agents linked to possible knowledge of the affair. The orgy allegations were never conclusively proven.

Strait-laced president Giscard d’Estaing, who succeeded Pompidou, acquired a reputation as a serial seducer and was once involved in an early morning traffic accident while driving Roger Vadim’s Ferrari back from an all-night “rendezvous galant”. No journalist thought it wise to dig for details and the incident was quickly sidelined, but again credible and widely believed.

No French president benefited from press discretion as much as François Mitterrand. Married to his loyal wife Danielle, in 1974 Mitterrand fathered a daughter – Mazarine – with Musée d’Orsay curator, Anne Pingeot. During his presidency he was regularly seen dining with his daughter in Parisian restaurants and he openly followed her life and education with pride and fatherly interest while the press kept their distance. Mazarine and Anne Pingeot stood alongside Danielle Mitterrand and her children at the former president’s funeral in January 1994. The French public were indifferent.

Perhaps the randiest (and quickest) French president was Jacques Chirac, dubbed “monsieur five minutes including a shower” by his entourage. His wife Bernadette made no secret of her ongoing jealousy in a candid 2001 interview with television journalist Patrick de Carolis.

Admitting that her husband indeed liked the ladies and had enough charm for them to like him back, she also confided that he never failed to return to the marital fold.

Closer has flouted French privacy laws previously in shrewdly calculated exposés, including the initial 2007 liaison between Hollande and Trierweiler when he was still in a relationship with Ségolène Royal, the mother of his four children. *Closer* was also the first to expose Nicolas Sarkozy’s budding affair with Carla Bruni and the only French publication to print the illicit photos of a topless Duchess of Cambridge on holiday in France with Prince William.

By ignoring Hollande’s legitimate right to a personal life, *Closer* took a legal risk but also made a financial calculation. French courts condemn invasion of privacy with notoriously low fines that are usually well covered by greatly increased circulation. Copies of the latest incriminating issue sold out quickly and circulation rose by 50% to 600,000 while traffic to *Closer*’s internet site doubled within a few hours.

Tradition has a way of eroding over the years and the French are now beginning to wonder whether their traditional privacy laws really should be applied to the taxpayer-funded public figures who put themselves forward as moral and exemplary leaders. Public reaction to the Hollande-Gayet affair could well be a salutary nail in the coffin of obligatory press discretion regarding the French political class. But even if the “right to know” changes, the question remains: is there a want to know? ■

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CONTINUED FROM PG 5

In contrast, Sarkozy's Prime Minister François Fillon had 15 ministers and four secretaries of state.

"Newsweek" and a gallon of milk

FRENCH bashing by Anglo-Saxons has been a tradition from Vice-Admiral Nelson in 1798 – "my blood boils at the name of a Frenchman" – to the *Sun*'s memorable front page headline "Up Yours Delors" in November 1990.

French ideologies are different from more pragmatic mindsets but inventing "facts" does nothing to corroborate otherwise credible stories of French economic decline. The CEO of American tyre manufacturer Titan, Maurice Taylor, claimed that French workers only put in "three hours a day". Yet Dr Bob Hancké reported to the London School of Economics a year ago February that French workers are more productive than their German counterparts and only marginally less productive than the top-ranked Americans. The UK comes sixth in what he calls the "low-productivity trap".

France is often criticised for its 35-hour workweek but OECD studies show that French workers put in an average of 1495 hours annually compared to just 1431 in Germany and 1393 in the Netherlands.

France is faltering and

has been called the new "sick man of Europe", a title that had previously been attributed to Britain (which recovered under Margaret Thatcher) and to Germany (rescued by the courageous Social Democrat, Gerhard Schroeder).

Newsweek's Janine di Giovanni may have thought she could illustrate the current "Fall of France" with a few unchecked "facts". Milk costs \$4 for a half-litre, rents in Paris are higher than in London, and a "great many" Frenchmen pay 70% in tax.

The unsettling truth about French bureaucracy, public debt, high unemployment, rising business taxes and shrinking welfare advantages is proof enough. Di Giovanni's inventions were neither necessary nor helpful.

As it was ... today

NICE once had a magnificent Belle-Époque pier with a casino, arcades, salons and a restaurant – la Jetée-Promenade that extended into the sea from the current location of the Plage Ruhl. It was dismantled by the Germans in 1944 but you can still come across black and white snaps in Gilletta books or on flea market postcards.

Mario Basso, a young architect from Cagnes decided it was time to rebuild a virtual 3D colour model of the edifice as it was in 1891, the year it was completed. The result of his 5000 hours of meticulous work shows how today's promenade would look (below). See also <http://casino-jetee-promenade-nice.blogspot.fr> ■



SHOULD WE STAY OR SHOULD WE GO?



THE faltering French economy has given some Riviera expats reason to think about moving back to the UK. We spoke with two families who did ... or almost.

After 18 years of living in France, 62-year-old Glenda decided to move back when her husband passed away suddenly two years ago. He had recently retired from a position with a French company and under French retirement rules she was granted the surviving spouse's share of his modest pension. But she hadn't counted on the real cost of life in the UK and ended up sleeping on her sister's sofa while looking for affordable accommodation in a decent area. "Rents around the major English cities are much more than we were paying on the Riviera," she found.

Then came the healthcare problem. "As I'd been living out of the UK for more than two years and am too old to get a job, I didn't qualify for NHS." Having had the French *Carte Vitale*, she thought it would be easier but met problems from a health service hit ever harder by government

austerity measures. She found that in Brighton the waiting time for a simple GP appointment was weeks. "In Grasse we could see our GP within a day and never had to wait for scans or X-rays."

Glenda had kept up the rental on her little flat on the ground floor of a villa in Grasse because her sister, brother, nieces and nephews were all willing to chip in for the flat to remain available to them for weekend breaks and holidays from the UK. "I managed to keep my *Carte Vitale*, too, and my mail still goes to the flat so for the French, I've never left." After spending Christmas in the UK with her family, she has moved back to Grasse for good.

Dave and Sue, in their thirties with two young children also thought they'd be moving in light of ever-rising taxes on their little French gardening business. Their main concern was France's unfriendly business culture and dubious economic future under the current government. They've since looked at things in a more considered way and decided to stay.

One of their main concerns was property prices. The value of their French house has remained stagnant for several years and Britain's rising property prices meant that they would get nothing comparable in the UK for the euro price they could expect on the sale of their house in the Var, where according to Dave, "It's a buyers' market but we would have been sellers."

"We looked at that, plus the cost of decent private UK healthcare coverage for the whole family and good private education for the kids. In our case, after making all the calculations, France won, hands down."

The clincher came when they spoke to Sue's sister in Manchester who told them that a quarter of the family budget went for childcare for her two children and her husband's annual rail commute from their semi-rural home to his job came to more than £3500.

So Dave and Sue decided to stay and confided, "We don't expect Hollande to be in office for long."

We found a few expats who were happy to have returned, if only to escape the melancholy of French moods at the moment. "It was either glum people or glum weather," said one 65-year-old retiree who had lived in Menton and worked for 27 years for a Monaco bank. "Better weather is just a short flight away, but these gloomy attitudes cling on like cobwebs."

Our conclusion? It's like crossing the road. Look both ways first.

British austerity hits expats where it hurts

CUTTING costs is at the forefront of the British government's efforts to reduce the annual budget deficit (£121 billion in 2012) and national debt which represents around £33,000 per person in employment – far above the government's sustainable investment wish not to exceed 40% of GDP.

When it comes to cost cutting, expats are easy targets. Two issues ago (No 159) we looked at the government's attack on the Winter Fuel Payment for retired Britons living in countries such as France. Now it's healthcare costs for early retirees that are on the firing line. Until now, the S1 form meant that the NHS covered British expats for their use of the French healthcare system for up to two-and-a-half years from the time they settled abroad.

Soon (the suggested date is April 2014) changes will mean that only British state pensioners will be covered in France, and Britons who reside here but travel to the UK for care on the NHS will be expected to pay for their own care or take out private insurance under plans to curb "health tourism".

Those who qualify for French healthcare through their *Carte Vitale* should nevertheless be able to claim emergency care and free GP visits when visiting Britain on their French CEAM card. However, the UK Department of Health would like to stop all non-residents from getting free A&E care from 2015 and this will no doubt result in further uncertainty about who is covered and how.

In theory, any French resident who is not a state pensioner or employed or self-employed in France will not be covered and will need private insurance under the changes. Early retirees can qualify for a *Carte Vitale* on a case-by-case basis after they have been a French resident for 5 years and until now have used the S1 form when first settling here. The European Commission questions the legality of the five-year limitation, which leaves a long gap between the initial two-and-a-half year coverage and accessibility through the five-year requirement.

Even current rules are

diversely applied and often misinterpreted so the revised system will only bring more confusion. More complete information is expected to become available between March and April. In the meantime, a consultation document is available from the Department of Health website at consultations.dh.gov.uk

Is the improved economy a Pyrrhic victory for Cameron?

AS the British economy under Conservative management recovers quicker than many others, some voters are wondering whether it will again be "safe" to vote Labour or perhaps back UKIP for a first time. The EU referendum promised by Cameron for 2015 enjoys considerable popular support from Britons who see the EU as a bureaucratic meddler but some doubted his real intentions to offer them a vote until recently when George Osborne announced that European reforms were not going quickly or far enough.

Many businessmen fear that a referendum will lead to an EU exit that would put Britain outside the inner European circle of deciders and severely hurt trade.

Steve Odell, CEO of Ford's European operations – one of Britain's leading foreign investors – has said that an EU exit would lead the car giant to "reassess" its plans for British operations which now employ 15,000 people. He claims that Britain would be left in a "calamitous" situation, obliged to comply with EU legislation when trading with Europe without having a say in what the legislation contains. The CBI, many British exporters and the main political parties (except for UKIP) agree but Odell regrets that "If the British voted today, the common vote – unfortunately – would be to leave Europe." ■

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MEET ME IN ST-RÉMY

Julie Mautner guides Americans to Provence

BY PJ HESLIN



Julie Mautner at a château-cum-apartment building in St-Rémy-de-Provence.



Van Gogh's room at the Monastère Saint-Paul-de-Mausole where he painted *The Starry Night* (above).



Photo: Marianne Casamance

BIRTHPLACE to history's greatest know-it-all, Nostradamus, the town of St-Rémy-de-Provence is only about 20km south of Avignon. Probably the town's most famous "recent" visitor was Van Gogh who spent a year from May 1889 as a self-admitted patient at the Saint-Paul Asylum, where he coined the phrase, "You don't have to be crazy to stay here, but it helps", and painted by day his famous work *The Starry Night*. (The latter is estimated to be worth over \$100 million and the former – priceless.)

Yet for most Americans, St-Rémy is not a destination on the Provence map, or as alluring as say Cannes or Monaco. So just how did Julie Mautner, 54, end up in this small French village with a population hovering around 10,000?

Unlike Van Gogh, Julie arrived in St-Rémy under happier and healthier circumstances. In 1998 she took a two-week photography class in St-Rémy and

became smitten with the area. She knew she had to come back somehow. At the time she was living in New York but that trip to France changed her view of the Big Apple.

"I love New York but I fell for the peace and tranquility that I found in St-Rémy. I wanted to be around nature again in a way that you can't easily access when living in New York."

Fortunately, Julie was then working as a freelance writer so the possibility of picking up and moving to another country was a little more feasible than had she been chained to an office chair.

Born and raised in Milwaukee, Julie received her journalism degree from the University of Wisconsin and spent the following fifteen years in Chicago before working as a magazine editor of food magazines in New York, and eventually becoming founding editor of Food Arts Magazine. With such a professional

background in food, it seems inevitable that she would find her way to France. Like many expats, Julie originally thought she would stay for a few months but has ended up calling the area home. She recalls nervously signing a lease for her first French apartment, which was a standard three-year agreement, as she was certain that she wouldn't be staying that long. Nearly fourteen years later, she's still in the same apartment.

Even though she loved the peace and serenity of her new home, moving from a city of eight million to a town of ten thousand required a little life tweaking.

"There were everyday adjustments like shopping to the big cultural differences ... and, of course, not speaking the language."

Driving was one of the biggest changes for Julie. Even now, she finds the French very aggressive behind the wheel and instructs friends and visitors

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to be nonplussed by the way drivers will honk on local roads telling the slower out-of-towners to get out of the way.

Closing times for shops also took some getting used to, especially after having lived in New York where almost everything is available at any hour. "There are very distinct morning and afternoon periods. You have to plan your day around the mid-afternoon closures as well as get used to the limited opening hours on the weekend at the post office and bank."

One aspect Julie admits she hasn't fully adapted to is the language. "I still struggle with the language even though I operate in French. Each year it gets easier and better though." She admits to enlisting the help of friends who speak better French when she's in a real pinch.

After her first trip to France on the photography course, Julie stayed in touch with one of the French teachers from the course. That teacher decided to open up a hotel catering to photographers and artists. Julie came over for the opening and that's when she made the leap to stay.

In 2011, a travel agent phoned her to help plan activities for an American group coming over to France. She loved the

work and decided to launch Provence Post Travel (theprovincepost.blogspot.fr), which arranges vacation packages in Provence and the Côte d'Azur. While most visitors are familiar with the coast, few are aware of how stunning the interior can be. Sharing lesser-known corners of beauty with others is what Julie loves about being a travel planner. It also gives her the excuse to better discover the area. "I can get in my car and even though I've been living here for thirteen years, in half an hour I can find something that gives me a new joy of the region."

One such recent find was the winter truffle market in the village of Richerenches, north of Avignon. The Saturday morning market is held from mid-November until the end of March. "I went for the first time a few weeks ago and loved it. The smell of the truffles hits you even before you set foot into the market." Every weekend truffles worth tens of thousands of dollars are sold out of vans and cars, along with everything from truffle saplings to truffle hunting hounds.

American tourists enjoy visits like the Richerenches market because, as Julie points out, "They really love how the

French embrace tradition." Plus there is just so much visible and tangible history in the area. "They respect how the French revere their history." And like many a tourist before them, they're pleasantly surprised at how the stereotype of the snobby Frenchman is not the norm where she lives.

An ideal Sunday in St-Rémy for Julie is meeting friends for coffee at the friendly Café de la Place, followed by a sunny, leisurely lunch of *moules frites* at Café du Nord au Sud (27 quai du Général de Gaulle, 04 66 59 02 55), one of the canal-front cafés in Beaucaire, about 15 minutes west of St-Rémy. Even though they serve a full menu Julie always goes for the *moules*, prepared in a variety of ways and served in a large crock with terrific fries and bread for dipping. All for €12-€13, plus you get a great view of the rag-tag collection of boats that come down the canal from all over Europe.

With no plans of moving in the near future, Julie describes St-Rémy as "very special." "I'm extremely happy and this is the place for me. I still have the feeling that I'm on vacation." ■

Photos below courtesy of OT St-Rémy-de-Provence.



Fête de la Transhumance.



Rue de la Commune



Les Antiques

A national treasure

BY MOLLY BROWN



Molly Brown at the Historic Grand Prix of Monaco in 2011.

ONE expects a few surprises in the New Year, but I received a horrific shock. I realised that I have been murmuring about Monaco for a quarter of a century! My first article was criticised for portraying Monaco through rose-tinted spectacles ... it was "all too frivolous and unspecific". A few years later, someone asked how I managed to find so many positive things to say about a tiny Principality! Well, that has certainly changed over the years. It could be the influence of our founder and editor, Mike Meade, who believes a bit of controversy generates interest and is good for business. Certainly, the *Reporter* is still in print and I am still happy to be here, still finding life in two square kilometres of Mediterranean coastline interesting ... a small, safe and very well run Principality with lots of sunshine, an ever-changing scenario and an international flavour ... but looking back over the years, certainly *plus ça change, tout c'est la même chose*.

The good olde days

IN 1988, you could have a 3-course dinner in Monaco with wine and coffee at Le Grillardin restaurant, 2 minutes from Barclays Bank, for 65 francs (€10)

and 60,000 fans came for the Grand Prix, paying "up to 850 francs for the privilege of suffering hours of ear-shattering roars" ... and seeing Alain Prost win the race after Ayrton Senna crashed into a barrier. The new, improved Café de Paris opened, the event commemorated by a special coffee table book ... "and for forty or so thousand francs, you can have your name printed in it (in gold, surely)".

The summer open air cinema was then near the Sporting d'Été where Peppino di Capri, Sammy Davis Jr and Whitney Houston were highlights that year and Yannick Noah was best man at an "absolutely fabulous" local wedding in the Salle des Étoiles, with 1000 guests, a live band and fireworks galore.

After raising the rents by an astounding 30%, a nearby elite apartment building relegated anyone carrying a white plastic bag to the back entrance ... only those with gold Gucci-style bags could pass through the front door. "If it's magical, it must be Monaco," I proclaimed, "but ... for the price of a studio by the sea in Monte Carlo, you could buy a 34-room chateau and 12 hectares in the centre of France ... only 3 million francs!"

When faxing was the new thing

I SENT my articles by fax in 1989, then *la grande vogue* – no emails and no mobile phones. The 24-hour English Sky News arrived on our TV and 2500 people from 82 countries took part in a star-studded 29th International TV Festival, created by Prince Rainier to reward the best TV programmes, directors and actors. Loni Anderson, Alain Delon, Ben Kingsley, Yehudi Menuhin, Montserrat Caballe, Renata Scott and Robert Altman were in town for the festivities. In addition to the men's Grand Prix tennis tournament, there was a women's event at the Country Club, with Steffi Graf and Navratilova competing for the Coupe des Dames.

After celebrating 700 years of the Grimaldi dynasty, this tiny Principality continued to grow. Old buildings were replaced by apartment blocks and after 10 years' work the Grimaldi Forum changed Larvotto's seafront forever. There were so many cranes that I named the crane as the national bird; a heliport, apartment blocks and the Chapiteau in Fontvieille, the Metropole centre, Monte Carlo Bay Hotel and a revolutionary new jetty to protect the port, an amazing transformation. Then the railway station was moved underground so they could build on the tracks.

A Russian invasion

TODAY, Prince Albert is head of a modern city. 35,000 people travel daily from France to work and hundreds of wealthy Russians are allegedly eager to move here; so many, in fact, that an appreciative Monaco, happy to have survived the economic crisis thus far with a useful influx of their billions, is to celebrate all things Russian for the whole of 2015. How sad that the lovely art deco Sporting d'Hiver, centre of life and glamour in the halcyon days of Diaghilev and Les Ballets Russes, is to be demolished and the fabled Golden Square will be a building site. I wonder what the Principality will look like in another 25 years. ■

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New UK Capital Gains tax to hit UK property owners in France

FINANCE

BY ROB KAY, SENIOR PARTNER, BLEVINS FRANKS

MANY British expatriates living on the French Riviera retain UK property for one reason or another. You may be waiting for property prices to improve before selling, or want to be sure that life in France suits you first.

But is this the most tax efficient way of holding your capital? How well does owning this property fit into your overall wealth management?

Under current UK legislation, non-UK residents escape capital gains tax on UK assets if they sell after they leave the UK and remain a non-UK resident for five complete and consecutive UK tax years. If you return at any time during this period, you will pay the full amount of tax.

However, this will change from April 2015, when non-UK residents will start to be taxed on gains made on the disposal of UK property. This will apply regardless of how long you have been a non-UK resident and whether or not you return to the UK.

This measure was confirmed during the Autumn Statement in December, but until the government holds a consultation, the details won't be known.

Under the current UK rules for residents, the chargeable gain is taxed at 18% or 28%. There is an exemption of £10,900

per individual. It is quite possible, however, that non-residents will be charged a different tax rate, perhaps without an allowance.

Another key pending issue is whether tax will be charged on the gain since acquisition or only on the gain from April 2015. The Autumn Statement and accompanying documentation referred to "future gains", but confirmation is needed.

You may be affected by a second announcement in the budget, which is the change to the Private Residence Relief. The main home is tax free in the UK, and this relief basically gives home owners 36 months' leeway to sell their home after they move out before they are hit by tax.

This grace period will be halved to 18 months, also from April 2015. Expatriates who wait until they have settled in France before selling their UK property would be particularly affected.

As a resident of France you also need to consider the local tax implications, since you are liable to French tax on your worldwide gains.

French capital gains on the sale of property, including social charges, currently ranges from 34.5% to 40.5%, depending on the amount of gain. France does provide some taper relief the longer

you have held the property.

You will not need to pay tax twice, but you need to understand how the French and UK tax regimes interact and impact you.

If you rent out the property you need to consider the income tax implications. Rental income on UK property is taxable in the UK. While it is not directly taxed in France, it does affect your marginal rate of tax. There are more tax efficient investments available that can also provide income.

With the new UK capital gains tax not starting until 2015, you have a window of opportunity to review your assets, consider their tax efficiency and take steps to avoid tax where possible.

Tax involving two countries is very complicated, and how your assets are structured affects your wealth. You should consider your cross-border tax issues, as well as your welfare needs, and develop a bespoke, worldwide, wealth management strategy. ■

Any statements concerning taxation are based upon our understanding of current taxation laws and practices, which are subject to change. Tax information has been summarised; an individual is advised to seek personalised advice. For the latest developments, see www.blevinsfranks.com



STRIPPED BARE BY A SWINDLER

BY NANCY HESLIN

LARA is about to speak, but then her eyes well up with tears and a lump in her throat stops the words getting out. She looks away.

"I'm sorry. I didn't know I was going to cry again. I just never know when it's going to come on, it's such a weird kind of trauma."

Lara, not her real name, came to France about twenty years ago as boat crew. After a few seasons of living on yachts, she was able in 1995 to buy an apartment in Cannes, which she sold ten years later as her "little nest egg". Unfortunately, although not exceptionally in this region, her life savings are currently being enjoyed by someone who scammed her.

I have known Lara for ten years and only recently learned of her story. Smart and with her feet firmly planted on the ground, she is the last person I would have expected to see in this situation.

"You don't believe this kind of thing can happen to you but I think it's because people don't openly talk about the subject. As a victim, you are humiliated and want to hide from others the fact that you've been scammed."

So how did it happen? "In 2010, I was tutoring two children at their home in a gated domaine in Mouans-Sartoux. I was friendly with the family. The father, "Abe", always presented himself as a financial expert and was never short of stories about

his investment dealings. His wife "Anne", would make me soup and we would talk about lots of different subjects together."

When Abe learned that Lara had sold her apartment and consequently had some money in the bank, he put forward an investment opportunity. Lara told him she was not interested.

"I have always been very careful with my money but he worked on me, as these people do. They are very clever, very charming, always throwing in 'I'm doing you a favour'. So I decided to make an investment, €100,000, on which he promised a high return."

Supposedly he was exporting containers of Levi jeans to Russia and making huge profits. Initially, fifty-year-old Lara was paid monthly interest on her investment, and her confidence in Abe grew. So she invested again, and her returns were higher ... until the interest payments suddenly stopped within less than a year after her original investment.

But this, incredibly, wasn't the worst of Lara's problems. She was diagnosed with a life-threatening disease and needed access to her funds. Abe was not forthcoming with her money.

Discussions, heartache and eventually threats ensued: "He said to me 'Here's a photo of my son who's in the SAS, and no one would want to have a visit from him in the middle of the night, would they?'"

Lara took the threat to the police in Mougins, and then it hit her that she had been scammed. "I told the officer I couldn't believe how stupid I'd been, how greedy. And he responded by saying they hear so many of these stories and this is what everybody says."

Lara launched an official *action de l'escroquerie* (fraud) against Abe.

In the meanwhile, the abusive phone calls and emails from Abe continued. He was asked by the police nine times to come in for questioning but, in the end, he left the country and moved to Luxembourg.

"I know of two others who were scammed by this man but the police left it too long. Things work differently in France, and they weren't able to seize his passport. I contacted the Luxembourg police who said they were ready to collaborate with their *confères* in France but needed a warrant for his arrest. After a year the case was dropped in the Grasse courts because they couldn't find Abe. At that point, I had spent €10,000 on legal fees and couldn't afford to keep going, nor did I qualify for legal aid. I've gone as far as I can in the system without investing more time and money. I know of another scam victim who has spent a great deal of money on lawyers and is no further ahead.

"I'm extremely traumatised but I have to now focus on getting my life back on track."

Trying to accept what happened, Lara began speaking with friends and contacts – business professionals, people who are highly educated, worldly, and well travelled – and it turned out that many had also been conned but kept silent because it's such a shameful experience. "Some of them need the money and others don't, but we all look back and wonder how we could have been so naïve.

"After hearing their stories, I didn't feel as bad for falling into the physiological trap of the conman but it's difficult to forgive myself and move on. There are days I can live with it, and there are days I cannot. My biggest fear is being old and poor and I now have no security for my retirement; Abe got a total of €290,000 from me. Today I can survive, I can work, but how I'm going to sort out my future I have no idea.

"Maybe I would have been more aware if people had shared their stories, like I'm trying to do with this article. The more we hear about the real life stories, the more we can be forewarned. You think that it can't happen to you. But it can." ■



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When the going gets tough

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BUSINESS

BY PETER JOHNSON



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HARDLY has the Christmas turkey been digested than we're straight back into what will surely be the most miserable year yet in France, with unemployment still rising, the economy going nowhere, competitiveness a joke, and a bunch of idiots in charge of this out-of-control ship.

Where to start? The endangered species – the small business – has launched a heartening campaign *Sacrifié mais pas résigné* (sacrificed but not giving up) with the slogan “Too much tax kills business”. You can sign up to their (already 800,000 strong) petition at sauvonslaproximite.com

Whereas in the past it was the students and the down-trodden factory workers who would have taken up the fight, now it's the business owner (*le patron*) who is out on the street, fighting for survival against the continuing rise in social charges

and taxes. When the *bonnets rouges* were demonstrating in Brittany at the end of last year, it was comforting to see how the assorted stratum of society were federated under this one banner – farm workers, lorry drivers, business leaders, students, the unemployed, union representatives from all walks of life – expressing a general *ras le bol* (they are fed up).

And in the light of this public pressure, the unpopular carbon tax was indefinitely suspended in December. As *The Times* commented, Hollande's government “has lurched from controversy to crisis, abandoning policies when the going gets tough. And having suspended the carbon tax ... as always happens with revenue forgone, someone else will pay. In this case, it is the taxpayer who will have to find the €1 billion for improvements to France's rail and road networks that the levy was intended to fund.”

Having already introduced €27 billion of new taxes (still not sufficient for France to meet EU budget reduction targets), there is very little scope for raising further tax.

Is it any wonder, as we've already commented in the past, that more and more workers are going “onto the black” to avoid paying further high tax and social charges? In 2013, the PACA region noticed massive increases in “black”

workers in the hotel/restaurant trade, small grocery shops, builders, hairdressers, and beauty salons. The estimated evasion of social charges is the equivalent of 3305 full-time jobs paid over one year. URSSAF (the government body that collects social charges) estimates that 70% of its work is rounding up non-declared (black) workers. Hence the recruitment in 2013 of an additional 130 inspectors in the PACA region and a dozen “super investigators” specialising in transnational cases where French businesses have taken on cheaper foreign labour (notably from former Eastern European countries), but have not paid the going rate of French social charges on these workers.

In its last issue of 2013, *The Economist* ran an article entitled *Bleak Chic*, asking “How can the French, who invented *joie de vivre*, the three-tier cheese trolley and Dior's jaunty New Look, be so resolutely miserable?” Polls suggest that the French are more pessimistic about their future than Albanians or Iraqis. A global Barometer of Hope and Happiness puts the French second to bottom of a 54-country world ranking. Looking at the tragic-comedy that is Mr Hollande with his approval rating of 15% – “the worst since records began” – is this any surprise? ■

Construction losses may top €5M

Ian Brodie, editor of monacolife.net, has been following closely the collapse of JP Construction because although most of the victims live outside Monaco, the firm's sudden closure has important implications for the Principality. JP Construction was licenced to operate by the Monaco authorities, and this gave the company a certain credibility, which in some cases was the determining factor in customers choosing JP Construction over its competitors



THE scale of losses involved in the collapse of Monaco company JP Construction is becoming clear as new victims come forward. The total sum is now believed to be in excess of €5 million, most of it owing to clients with a significant proportion outstanding to suppliers and sub-contractors.

JP Construction, registered as a *Société à Responsabilité Limitée*, was run by John Olsen, and in May 2012 he was joined as a director by Peer Pedersen, according to an entry in Monaco's official *Journal* on August 31st, 2012.

The company stopped actively working on November 20th, leaving several clients on the Riviera with barely-started reconstruction projects and large amounts of money lost in pre-paid deposits. The fact that the company had capital of €15,000 means that creditors will not be able to claim for more than a fraction of the sums they are owed, which could run into several hundred thousand euros.

A young couple with a house near Grasse were left with their home exposed to the elements. Not only did they lose the €30,000 paid as a deposit for the work to improve the stability of

their house, but have also had to find the money to complete the project.

A victim with a property in Nice said he had employed JP Construction, despite a high quote, because the company was registered in Monaco: "The fact that JP Construction had an address in Monte Carlo was the clincher." He reports that work was so badly done by JP's workmen that it had to be done again, at considerable expense. "There was simply no supervision," he said.

One victim of the company's collapse, also a Monaco resident, lost €53,000 he paid as a down payment for the raising of the roof of his house near Valbonne. Last month he told a victims' meeting in Monaco that he was very relieved that work wasn't started at the time JP Construction stopped work on its sites in late November. "All I lost was my money," he said.

Victims met to consider detailed options following the collapse of the company and the disappearance of its owners. The first step decided at the meeting was to spread the word in Monaco and across the Riviera in order to find more victims, with a view to appointing a lawyer and seeking damages.

According to statements made to me by a number of victims, they were told they could save money by paying cash, so avoiding TVA. Some of those who have lost money are unwilling to come forward to the authorities for fear of being implicated and subsequently prosecuted.

The Monaco government has opened an investigation into the collapse of JP Construction, and a report is due to go to the government Counsellor for Finance and the Economy, Mr Jean Castellini.

There is also a police investigation in Monaco, believed to be centred on possible tax irregularities. So far, the government has said it was aware of the collapse of a French company previously run by Olsen, but had issued the commercial licence in view of the possibility that Olsen could have sought legal redress.

Meanwhile, it is evident that the JP Construction workforce was comprised not only of 14 salaried Polish workers and a secretary in the office that JP Construction shared with John Olsen's ex-wife at 20 boulevard Princesse Charlotte in Monte Carlo, but also of about 60 more Polish workers who were working as Auto-Entrepreneurs, invoicing Olsen for their labour.

At the time of going to press, several of the Polish workers are occupying a property owned by Olsen near Vence and are refusing to leave.

More details have come to light concerning Olsen's purchase of two luxury vehicles in the months leading up to the collapse of JP Construction. In the first half of 2013, he took delivery of a red Ferrari 458, which sells for a base price of €170,000+. In September, he took possession of a Range Rover Sport, with a base value, before extras, of €61,000.

It is not known how long either the police investigation or the government's own probe into the collapse of JP Construction will take. Contact number for Mr Garcia, who is heading the Monaco police investigation: +377 93 15 32 59.

There is also a victims' blog on the *Reporter* website: forum.rivierareporter.com/topic/6082-what-happened-to-jp-construction ■ Ian Brodie

For updates on the story, see monacolife.net

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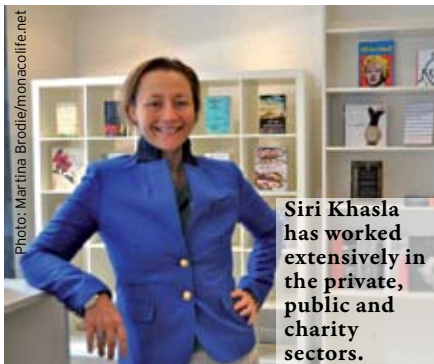


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BACK IN BUSINESS

SHOP TALK

Monaco turns the page while Nicky Hooper Headhunts in Valbonne



AFTER 25 years of selling books Jane France shut the doors of Scruples bookshop in Monaco in 2008. Then Cat's Whiskers in Nice closed, leaving an ever-bigger hole on the Riviera English-language bookshelf for those living east of Antibes.

But good news for those who still prefer to flip through pages than surf online. New York native Siri Khasla, a graduate of Harvard's Kennedy School, opened BOMO, the English-language bookshop in the Principality at the beginning of January.

"Monaco's only independent English-language bookshop has officially opened its doors for business," says Siri.

Located at 3 avenue du Port in La Condamine, the 60m² "book boutique" has a reading area dedicated for children, a sizeable selection of cookbooks and classic literature, as well as all the latest best sellers.

"BOMO is much more than a bookstore – it's a place where people can come together, explore new ideas and have a sense of community," Siri comments.

The shop is open 10h-19h Monday to Friday and 12h-18h on Saturday, and will host a busy schedule of events around reading, writing and story-telling for both children and adults.

For more call +377 97 77 94 73 or see facebook.com/BOMO.Monaco

Head start in looking good

AFTER selling the very popular Cutting Shop in Antibes, an institution in the English community for over 20 years, sisters Nicky Hooper and Sally Ryder decided to go into partnership and so in mid-January, they opened Headhunters, the hair and beauty specialists in Valbonne Village, just steps from the English Book Centre.

"It's really important when it comes to hair or beauty," Nicky tells the *Reporter*, "to explain exactly what you want without having to worry

about 'lost in translation' disasters."

With the promise of one-on-one service in a luxurious setting, Nicky will get back to her first love of hairdressing (instead of managing a big business) while Sally will take on beauty therapy with the help of Dermalogica and OPI brands.

"We intend to stay small and our goal is to put all of our efforts into quality and not quantity. Our aim is to work mainly by appointment, in a relaxed atmosphere, taking time to listen to each client's needs, discussing and finding ideas to ensure that every customer leaves with a boost in confidence that he or she is looking fabulous."

Open Tuesday to Saturday, 9h to 18h, by appointment only. Call 04 92 98 14 27 or follow Headhunters Valbonne on Facebook. ■



MISSING MITCH:

The Reporter's tribute to an artist who brought the Riviera to life

BY NICK KENT

HIS job was lighting up other people's lives and letting them see the world in a new and vibrant way. The great talent that was Mitch Waite is no longer around to share his vision with us, his life cruelly snuffed out at 56, just as his skill and his insight had reached the pinnacle he had striven towards throughout his career as a painter.

The chief guardian of the flame of his achievement is the woman he met at the Red Pear Theatre in Antibes fifteen years ago. She was working backstage, Mitch was painting the scenery, and at an after-show party given by Hilary King the chemistry took over.

"Mitch had spent five years painting in Africa before deciding that he needed to seek somewhere else to find inspiration," said Hanna when we met in Venice, her husband's spiritual home.

"In the South of France he found an artist's paradise. He was captivated by the light and the great tradition of the Riviera as a special place for painters."

Mitch was always ambitious, both artistically and as a businessman. With the help of a Danish financial backer, he set up the Maison des Arts, guiding would-be artists through his much-praised courses in an eight-bedroom house in La Colle sur Loup, with Hanna doing the catering and admin. They married in late 2000, and within a few years sons Anthony then Elton completed a very happy family.

The Maison des Arts moved house a couple of times before Mitch achieved his long-held ambition and opened Galerie Waite within the medieval walls of Venice in 2010.

"It was his dream, and it really worked," says Hanna. "Mitch always had a good number of commissions as a result of personal recommendations, but now that there was a lot of interest from people who knew nothing of his



"The most important thing for me is to connect to something in the subject that touches my emotions. That becomes the driving force of each painting: the light and atmosphere of a dramatic landscape or a busy street or the character and sentiment in a portrait. A painting can reveal so much. I never cease to be amazed, and I can't imagine that I could ever lose the desire to keep searching for more and to go deeper."

Mitch Waite, 1956–2013

work, passing trade was very good."

Mitch painted many scenes in and around Venice, an endless inspiration.

"Vence, St Paul, Tourettes ... His eyes were always alive, always looking to see how the changing light altered everything around him."

Success for Mitch didn't mean taking life at a slower pace. He was working harder than ever. Long days in the studio would run into the night.

"Mitch was quite obsessive," says Hanna. "High energy, always planning the next step. I sometimes missed having the kind of guy who would stay in bed with a cup of tea at the weekend. Having said that he was definitely capable of

taking time out and Sundays were always spent with the family. His art was very important but we always came first and towards the end, all he wanted to do was enjoy the simple pleasures in life with us, like having a hot chocolate together in the middle of the night."

Towards the end of 2012, Hanna started noticing some worrying changes in her inspirational, energetic husband. "He started losing things, becoming disorganised. That was totally unlike Mitch. He always kept things in order."

On Christmas Day Mitch collapsed while playing a football match. He was diagnosed with a brain tumour. It was an appalling shock, but there was plenty of room for optimism. "The doctors treating him at the wonderful Antoine Cassagne hospital in Nice were confident that this type of cancer would respond to a special kind of blood cell replacement chemo," explains Hanna. "But the treatment failed twice and it wasn't until September when the cancer came back that we knew he had very little chance. By the end of October we were told the illness was fatal."

How like Mitch to want to take life and his family forward rather than buckle under the weight of a premature death sentence. The Waites announced that they were selling the gallery – Mitch could no longer work – and moving to Sweden. Hanna is half-Swedish, an accomplished mosaic artist and instructor in her own right. A teaching centre would be set up.

"Mitch spent his last months fulfilling as many of his dreams as he could. We went to Venice where he painted nine paintings on the bridges and in Piazza San Marco. We took the boys to Disneyland and spent the summer in England where the whole family came together to see him and he walked barefoot on the sandy beaches near his hometown on the Lincolnshire coast.





Hanna and Mitch decided that their boys, now 11 and nine, should know the truth. The huge dark eyes in Hanna's elfin face for a moment lose their deep sadness, and she remembers a striking, happy scene from the last days.

"Mitch wanted to pass on the songs he remembered from his childhood, so when he was in bed at home we sang to him a song the boys particularly liked called *She Wears Red Feathers* by Guy Mitchell. We felt so together. It's my loveliest memory.

"It was so like Mitch to want to do something like that. Not a moment in his life was wasted. He enjoyed every minute of it."

On November 10th last year Mitch Waite died peacefully at home. For Hanna now there is the feeling of a big empty space where her man used to be. "The sad times come at night."

She has been deeply touched by the tributes that have poured in



from Mitch's former students, some have told her how he transformed the way they look at the world.

"Then there are the owners of Mitch's work who speak of 'the daily ray of sunshine in my sitting room.'"

An insight into an artist who never stopped evolving is provided by this recollection from Hanna.

"A customer commissioned a landscape of Venice, having seen an earlier painting displayed of the same subject in the

gallery. Mitch produced something that seemed to me to show the way he had found a balance between abstract and figurative painting. The client wanted a picture much more like the one he had originally seen – down to the last twinkly light – and naturally Mitch obliged.

"So now I have that very special painting with its beautiful loose brushstrokes, Mitch painting with more freedom."

Hanna, determined, honest, clear-sighted and not yet 40 years old, will now build a new life for herself and the boys in Uppsalla, although she is likely to return to the South of France to teach the occasional course.

"Mitch achieved what he wanted to achieve. I don't know if he would have done that without me. Someone close said to me the other day, 'There's only ever room for one artist in a family. Now it's your turn.' This is exactly what Mitch wanted for me, too." ■

HOW MONTE CARLO DANCED TO FAME

BY MOLLY BROWN



La Belle, prima ballerina Bernice Coppiters. Photo: ©Marie-Laure Briane

JUST the name, Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo, evokes memories of la belle époque in Monaco, when the crowned heads of Europe, American millionaires and great personalities of the day gathered there for the winter season; when champagne flowed and fortunes were lost at the Casino and the suites of the Hôtel de Paris were home to the wealthy of the world; when legendary stars of the opera and Les Ballets Russes gathered for midnight suppers at the Café de Paris ... Diaghilev, Nijinsky, Danilova, Karsavina, Chaliapine.

The beauty of Russian music and dancers brought to Paris by émigrés of the Russian revolution swept across Europe and brought Serge Diaghilev, Nijinsky, Fokine, Balanchine and Massine to Monte Carlo to weave their magic spells on the stage of the exquisite Salle Garnier as they merged music and dance to create the great classical ballets which continue to delight audiences today.

According to Arnold Haskell, a writer

and friend of Diaghilev, "... Diaghilev created through others. He prided himself on being a 'collector of geniuses'. He relied on his flair in the first place but... the artists must meet, talk, produce ideas ... the composer and the choreographer, with the aid of the piano, had to learn to speak the same language. Every season artists flocked to Monte Carlo, often as his guests. It was Versailles." He alleged that Diaghilev once remarked that "if the theatre burned down tonight, a large part of the world's creative artists would be wiped out".

The magic of Les Ballets Russes became a legend; Nijinsky's *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune* brought tears of rapture to the eyes of princesses and politicians alike. Danilova's dancing, the mysticism of Fokine's *Firebird*, and Stravinsky's strange, wild music fired the souls of poets. Though the legendary Pavlova never danced in Monaco, the elite of the artistic world gathered in the Principality in those carefree days before the war, which exiled the émigrés once

again, this time to America.

In the United States, one company of Les Ballets Russes, renamed Le Ballet Russe de Monte-Carlo, continued to prosper with prima ballerina Alexandra Danilova, Maria Tallchief, Frederic Franklin and Igor Youskevitch. It was there that Agnes de Mille created *Rodeo* and Balanchine his famous *La Sonnambule*. This company never returned to Europe.

The other company, known as L'Original Ballet Russe, crisscrossed Latin America through Brazil, Argentina and Mexico, acquiring a patron, the Marquis de Cuevas. They performed at the Metropolitan Opera in New York in 1946 with dancers Alicia Markova and Rosella Hightower. Diaghilev had left the company in 1938 and they were directed by Colonel de Basil. He dreamed of returning to Europe, of performing in Paris and London, and took the company to Spain, but he died there in 1951 and his company with him.

In 1942, Marcel Sablon, then theatre director in Monaco, founded Les Nouveaux Ballets de Monte-Carlo with ballet master Nicolas Zverev and young dancers Ludmilla Tcherina and Serge Golovine, but it did not survive in those troubled times. At the end of the war, Prince Louis II of Monaco asked Eugene Grunberg to try again. Le Nouveau Ballet de Monte-Carlo, with Serge Lifar as artistic director, dancers Yvette Chauviré, Janine Charrat, Renée (Zizi) Jeanmaire, Wladimir Skouratoff and Boris Trailine, created *Dramma per Musica* and *Chota Roustaveli*.

In 1974, Serge Lifar joined the Paris Opera and the Marquis de Cuevas took charge of the troupe – again renamed, now the Grand Ballet de Monte-Carlo – but three years later it became the Grand Ballet du Marquis de Cuevas and Monaco was without its own ballet company until HSH Princess Caroline of Monaco founded the present company in 1985, in memory of her mother, Princess Grace. Pierre Lacotte was artistic director for the first three memorable years but left to become artistic

director of the Ballet National de Nancy et de Lorraine. The second ballet director, Jean-Yves Esquerre, took over, but left after two and a half years. Pierre Lacotte returned to direct a brilliant *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* and *The Firebird* in the 1992 Christmas season, but Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo was left without a ballet director.



In 1993, Jean-Christophe Maillot, a student of Rosella Hightower's International Dance Academy in Cannes, who had won the Prix de Lausanne in 1977 and become soloist in the Hamburg Ballet, then choreographer in the Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Tours, came to Monaco as the new director of Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo. Since his arrival, he has created 30 new ballets, initiated the Monaco International Dance Forum and taken the Princess Grace Dance Academy under his wing. Maillot introduced new, innovative choreography in his own particular style of dance, working with composers and giving his dancers new challenges, with exciting, new productions every year. The company has performed his *Romeo and Juliet*, *Cinderella* and *La Belle* around the world to great acclaim.

Every year, young dancers come to Monte Carlo for the magic ... to dance in the footsteps of the great. Entranced by the history, the romance, the heartbeat of the world of dance, they find its soul amid the whispers and memories and tradition of Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo. For it was here that the seeds of Russian ballet came to fruition; here that the fairy godmothers of dance wove their magic spells and bestowed on the infant dance their own particular gift of talent, of expressionism, of inspiration. This child of dance grew and prospered and became the magical creature it is today... such stuff as dreams are made of.

Each dancer has his or her

reasons for joining the Corps de Ballet. They stay for varying periods of time ... some for a lifetime. Others move on to further their career, to experience other disciplines, to stimulate their talents. If they wish to travel, there is no need to look further, for Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo is a travelling company. With its tons of costumes, scenery, props and vast entourage, this great company of 50 dancers of 18 different nationalities dances around the world each year. Unfortunately the talent scouts are waiting and many dancers are lured away to other companies. This makes it difficult to sustain a confident, efficient Corps de Ballet, experienced in dancing together, but each year a long list of professional dancers, as well as younger ones, apply for a place (over 1000 applications a year).

In December 2013, Maillot celebrated 20 years as director of Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo by re-inventing the *Nutcracker* ballet for the Christmas Season. *Casse-Noisette Compagnie*, a colourful and lively medley of all his productions was an instant success. 2014 will truly be a memorable year, for in April, the company will tour in China, the United States, Spain and France and perform *Lac*, Maillot's tempestuous version of Swan Lake, at London's Coliseum. Jean-Christophe Maillot will also travel to Russia, where he has been invited to create a new ballet for the Bolshoi ... to be premiered next June. Under the patronage of HRH Princess Caroline of Hanover, and with the support of many enthusiastic patrons and friends, the future is brighter for Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo than for many dance companies, who struggle to survive. We, who can only marvel at the magic and beauty of dance, can breathe a sigh of happiness that the Principality of Monaco has kept alive the love of dance. ■


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Secrets of success for a serial swapper



The Promise of Provence by Patricia Sands (right, with Heidi Lee) was a finalist in *The 2013 USA Best Book Award*. Patricia is working on a sequel to be published in the summer.

ROMANCE and travel are intertwined in Patricia Sands' latest novel *The Promise of Provence*. The heroine, Katherine, pitches up amongst the summer sunflowers and lavender fields of the South of France. On the spur of the moment she had agreed on a house swap, but will it work out? More importantly, after a year of heartbreak, can Katherine find the key to restart a life blighted by heartache?

Patricia's charming and insightful novel envelopes the reader in the sights and sounds of Provence as this stranger in paradise struggles to answer the question: Is it too late to begin again?

There is more than a little of Patricia in Katherine, particularly when it comes to home swapping. This gifted, 68-year-old Canadian writer is something of a serial swapper.

"I read an article on home exchange about 14 years ago and did some investigating," said Patricia when the *Reporter* caught up with her at a well-attended book signing at Heidi's Bookshop in Antibes.

"Everything sounded well-organised and the testimonials from experienced exchangers convinced me and my husband to give it a try. We love to travel and were at a point in our lives where longer stays in one place appealed to us. Home exchange

certainly makes a difference in travel costs.

"We advertised our two-bedroom/two-bathroom, detached home with private pool in southeast Florida. It's in a tennis/golf community and a 15-minute drive from fabulous beaches. We use Homelink.org but we also are listed with HomeExchange.com and Home Base Holidays, which are UK-based.

"Our first experience was three weeks in the Algarve in 2000. We also exchanged cars. When I asked our exchange couple to recommend a hotel in Lisbon, since we wanted to spend a few days there as well, they insisted we use a family condo they had. They picked us up at the airport and we had dinner with them twice in Lisbon.

"This to me demonstrates the attitude of people involved in home exchange – thoughtful, friendly, trusting. We have found this to be the case with every exchange and have remained in touch with most of the people. One couple in France have become good friends whom we see every time we are there.

"Our exchange in Nice last summer was our ninth. Our travel plans for 2014 include a two-week exchange in Switzerland before we go on to another one-month exchange in Nice. We know people who organise exchanges for several consecutive months when they plan extensive trips. It's

important to remember, too, that you can just as easily organise a weekend exchange. It doesn't have to be long-term."

What was the best-ever swap? "They have all been great but perhaps the most unique was a lovely villa in the middle of a vineyard in the Var. We were there for two months and joined in harvesting the grapes at *vendange*."

Patricia reports only minor niggles from the many exchanges.

"There have been a couple of occasions where the bed was perhaps not as comfy as ours at home or, in the early days, where internet reception was not great. The latter has changed dramatically, which is an important aspect for us due to the nature of my work as an author.

"We have had absolutely no problems with anyone who has stayed in our home. I always have a housekeeper come in right after they leave and arrange for our exchangers to do the same for us. I don't want to spend the last days of our holiday cleaning a house and doing laundry. Having said that, of course we clean the house daily during our stay as we would our own.


"On the practical side, as well as preparing a booklet about your house with all the info as to how everything works, where to find a doctor, dentist, shopping ... you need to arrange to have a friend or family member be on hand to welcome the people or call the day after they arrive to see if they have any questions.

"I think individuals will decide for themselves whether this type of experience appeals to them or not. Read everything you can about it, check out the websites and communicate clearly with the people to whom you send your enquiries.

"It's a bonus that you can specify things like 'no smoking' and 'no pets'. My husband has serious allergies so this is very important to us. However, let's say you have a pet. You can also arrange exchanges with people who have pets that need care and you help each other in that regard. There's something for everyone." ■

In June, Patricia will lead two women's tours, based on her novel, spending four days in Nice and six in Avignon with day trips throughout the countryside. Nice-based author Ted Jones will be giving talks to both groups. See womenstravelnetwork.ca/promenade-en-provence

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FULL LIFE OF LORD

BOOKS



GRAHAM Lord boasts a journalistic career spanning 50 years, and his book, *Lord of the Files*, attempts to give readers a cross-section of his output.

It's no easy task, as Mr Lord has written 19 books, plus newspaper articles too numerous to count. In this collection, which runs to almost 500 pages, there are short stories, excellent pieces of travel writing, personal reminiscences, opinion pieces for daily newspapers, and book reviews.

His longest period of employment was at the *Sunday Express*, where he was Literary Editor for 23 years (1969 to 1992) and he describes an idyllic existence of expense accounts that would cough up for foreign travel to interview literary figures anywhere in the world.

Even the UK writers were generally interviewed in Cannes or New York,

although Graham made an exception for the tyro thriller writer Douglas Hurd MP, who had an office in 10 Downing Street.

Graham Greene in Antibes, Robin Maugham in Capri, Nicholas Monsarrat in Malta, Muriel Spark in Rome; the only reason to come back to the *Express* offices was the occasional tempting PR girl!

This is not a book to read if you are prone to envy.

However, on page 365 Graham says it could not go on, and financial controls came in as Fleet Street had a dose of fiscal reality. He left the *Express* to pursue a more individual writing career – and this started disastrously.

He found himself being sued by John le Carré – not for something he had written, but for something he was considering writing! It would have been interesting to know more details, but I assume the lawyers are still taking a view on that. The legal fees almost derailed his new life, but Fleet Street friends commissioned some opinion pieces that helped him keep his head above water.

He has included some of these in the collection and, to my mind, they are the weakest. There are several “what’s the world coming to?” rants. Health and safety, *what’s the world coming to?* Political correctness, *what’s the world coming to?*

Richard Littlejohn is still getting plenty of laughs out of these, but

Graham’s, which are more serious, haven’t stood the test of time.

There are many areas that are much more interesting. Short story lovers will enjoy the examples included, and, when it comes to travel writing, he has the knack, with his eye for detail, of making the reader really feel that he is in some far-flung country.

However, Graham Lord is a Fleet Street man through and through and that is where the pieces really come alive.

There are several chapters devoted to the incorrigible Jeffrey Bernard (Graham wrote a biography, which Bernard did not exactly enjoy) where characters such as Keith Waterhouse and Bernard himself are vividly brought to life.

There are pieces of reportage covering a by-election in Newbury, the secrecy that marks Who’s Who, and a fascinating insight into what became of Graham Greene’s library after his death. An Ian Smith obituary features some startling information about the relationship between the Rhodesian ruler and his successor, Robert Mugabe.

There are more than 60 articles/stories in this book, so there has to be something for everyone. Lord, who spends part of the year in St Cézaire-sur-Siagne, has lived a full life and the varied works in *Lord of the Files* reflect this. ■ Philip Irwin

Available from fernhillbooks.co.uk and for Kindle from amazon.co.uk

HIGH SOCIETY

We visit the Swede's new home



The car rally queen. Ingeborg Stille participated in her last Monte Carlo Rally in 1950 when she was 52.

A HIDDEN hand flicks a switch and the *Reporter's* limousine sweeps through the imposing gates into an elegant park in Cagnes-sur-Mer, coming to a halt at the base of a 10-metre flagpole topped by the blue and yellow of the Swedish ensign. On a terrace above stands a distinguished villa.

Are we in the right place? We've come looking for the Swedish Club of the Riviera, but this looks more like an embassy. A welcoming hello from Kerstin Snellen, the club's head of admin, confirms we are indeed at the Villa Ingeborg, new home of the *Svenska Rivieraklubben* at 40 avenue de Verdun, owned by the Swedish Church of the South of France and Monaco.

A great deal of money has been spent on converting the villa into a bespoke centre for the Swedish community on the Riviera. The Villa Ingeborg is slap-bang in the middle of bustling Cagnes-sur-Mer, its purchase financed by the sale of the smaller Stillegården property a little way up the hill. Stillegården was the Riviera house of Swedish socialite Ingeborg Stille, who gifted her home to the Swedish Church of the South of France and Monaco.

The Swedish Club has come a long way since its first meeting at Nice airport in 1975. Its original purpose was to provide a mutual exchange of information about living in the South of France and to be of assistance to both residents and newcomers to the country.

"We have 2700 members, with a range of ages from 24 to 94," says Kerstin. "It's the largest Swedish association in France, and our members live right across the south, from the Italian Riviera



The Swedish Club of the Riviera's new villa in Cagnes-sur-Mer. Below, Kerstin Snellen is the head of admin.



to the south-western French coast.

"What unites us is not only our nationality but a shared attitude: we love this part of France and try to do the best we can to take advantage of everything on offer."

At Villa Ingeborg, the Swedish Church holds a service every Sunday, there's a weekly meeting for au pairs and students as well as a Kids' Club on Wednesdays at the same time that the Swedish School gives lessons in ... Swedish. So together with *Rivieraklubben's* activities, Villa Ingeborg offers a real Swedish playground, as well as being the home of *Riviera Nytt*

(news), a classy publication edited by Jessica Holmertz. "There is exhibition space, which includes a large room that is used as a chapel but converts easily into a mini-cinema," says Kerstin. "Now we can organise themed lunches, cultural events or musical concerts knowing we have the space to accommodate all comers. We also have a large terrace area, which is perfect for receptions – and aerobic classes.

"I believe that we are the only foreign community in the South of France with an office that helps members with the different departments of French administration, in addition to running French courses. Together with the Swedish Consulate in Nice, the Swedish Chamber of Commerce and other different Swedish organisations, we have become THE Swedish network in the South of France. And as we have a significant number of members, we can offer very good health insurance and have a protection insurance included in the membership fee.

"Our members are active in different ways. Some work in France while others help organise – and participate in – our club events, everything from *boules* to bridge, from tennis to wine tasting, plus food classes, golf and excursions. And, last but not least, creating a Swedish stand when Zlatan comes to Monaco and Nice this spring!"

The success of the Swedish Club of the Riviera, now under the presidency of Bo Dimert, shows how a community can come together to build a home away from home that is open house to all. *Välkommen!* ■ N.K.

For more call 04 92 13 15 34 or see rivieraklubben.com

On course for Europe's finest



IN what seems like the blink of an eye, truly great courses have sprung up in our neighbouring lands, becoming the best golfing destinations in their countries.

Here we focus on some of these tempting destinations, but just remember that going in style may require a bit of budget-bending if you go for the packages we mention below.

In Turkey, all the golfing action is based around Belek, near Antalya. The quality of the major courses is exceptional. The most interesting is the Carya, an inspired creation by the great Australian golfer and designer Peter Thomson.

When he saw the site he was reminded of the heathland courses near London where he had enjoyed success. With the aid of a nursery that grew hundred of thousands of heather plants, Sunningdale and Swinley Forest seem to have migrated to the Mediterranean shore.

The PGA Sultan and Pasha courses make for a terrific golfing experience. Both designed by David Jones in the late Nineties, they take you through forest, across sandy banks – and to the water. Half the holes on these courses feature a water hazard of some sort. Oh, and watch out for the pot bunkers.

The National is a stunning course, to which David Feherty has lent his name. It meanders through undulating countryside of mature pine and eucalyptus trees, the Taurus mountain range rising in the distance. The 6279m track has hosted the Turkish Seniors Open.

In Portugal, Oitavos Dunes is a magnificent course incorporating some

endless sand dunes on the coast west of Lisbon – The Portuguese coast seems to have more sand than the Sahara.

Oitavos Dunes (pictured above) sits on the most westerly point of Europe, and the mighty Atlantic is a constant presence. Inland, the Sintra hills present a beautiful backdrop. Par 71 and measuring 6300m from the back tees, it's certainly testing enough to have hosted the Portuguese Open, but is enjoyably playable for someone with only modest golfing talents.

The course, which opened in 2001, is one of only two in Europe designed by Arthur Hills, famous for his courses in the US. But there isn't a hint of the American "target"-style course design here, each hole has a rhythm that blends into the natural contours. A delightful mix of woodland and links holes, with well-placed hazards and fast, sometimes tricky greens with many slopes and borrows to master.

Aphrodite Hills in Cyprus, just a short drive from Paphos airport, is reputed as one of the best courses in the Mediterranean. The fairways wind through native olive and carob trees. Pot bunkers and tiered greens are a feature of the Cabell Robinson-designed course. It is famous for its spectacular ravines, which make the beat a bit faster when you stand over your tee-shot.

John Norsworthy, the Cannes-based pro who has been organising golf breaks to some very special destinations for several years, makes sure his groups have the best of everything.

"I only take small groups to make sure everyone gets all the attention

they need," says John, who runs his golf excursions in conjunction with Thomas Cook and Golf Plus Voyages.

John is on hand throughout the stay to give lessons on the driving range, and playing lessons too, without extra charge.

All the breaks listed below include flights (as well as golf bag carriage), transfers, unlimited practice balls. Prices are per person, sharing a double room; breakfast and dinner included. ■

CYPRUS

March 19 – 26

Stay at the Aphrodite Hills five-star hotel. Five rounds at the Aphrodite Hills Golf Club, one round each at Elea Golf and Secret Valley. €2850 (based on group of 6) €2710 (based on group of 8)

TURKEY

May 17 – 24

Stay at the five-star Kempinski, the Dome Hotel. One round each at the Pasha, Sultan, National, Tat and Carya courses. €2690 (based on group of 6) €2390 (based on group of 8)

PORTUGAL

June 14 – 21

Stay at the five-star Hotel Oitavos. Five rounds at the Oitavos Dunes course. €2450 (based on group of 6) €2350 (based on group of 8)

For details contact John Norsworthy on 06 80 74 42 86.



TERRE-IFIC

BUBBA Watson, Thomas Bjorn, Matt Kuchar, Ian Woosnam. These big name, big game golfers and a hatful more have played at Terre Blanche and given the thumbs up to this elite golf resort. What turns them on about the Château, the course usually in play for international competitions?

“They love the quality of the greens, and there is praise for the Dave Thomas design,” says golf director Jean-Marie Casella. “They find the Château very challenging, with varied holes, fantastic greens and wonderful views over the wooded hills. You need to play strategically to avoid hazards.”

It's true. It's no use a big hitter blasting away from the tee box assuming length will win through either on the Château or the Riou, the course normally

reserved for members and their guests. These are long courses for sure, even off the forward tees, but the excellent bunkering, plus the lakes, streams, gullies and often curving fairways, make the use of brain over brawn compulsory.

Terre Blanche golf, near Fayence in the Var, has gone from new kid on the block to international golf destination in just 10 years. Jean-Marie, 51, has been in charge since 2009. He started his career helping to create Golf de l'Estérel outside St Raphaël, then moved on to Golf du Médoc and Pont Royal near Aix before taking up the reins at Fayence.

“My best moment so far at Terre Blanche was when we won the Best Golf Resort Europe 2013 award,” says Jean-Marie. The accolade came from the International Golf Travel Market,

the top golf-and-travel gathering, and confirmed the resort's position as a magnet for the well-heeled golfing traveller – one in five rounds at Terre Blanche is played by a “resort golfer”.

“Terre Blanche Golf is just one of the parts of the Terre Blanche Hotel Spa Golf Resort. People who stay with us can combine a whole range of fantastic experiences,” says Jean-Marie. “They can enjoy gastronomy – there are four restaurants. Well-being – the spa has a big range of treatments and massages, and we have started aquabike sessions. Relaxation by the swimming pools and there is even a Kids' Club so that everyone in the family can have fun.”

Jean-Marie and his team may have grabbed a big slice of the international golfing crowd, but competition for



local players remains keen. Half of the rounds played in a year are by “green fees”. Terre Blanche’s “Canton Programme” is a hit with local players.

“This scheme applies to residents of the Canton de Fayence, there is a handicap limit of 35. A local player can play once a month on the Château course for a half-price green fee. The Riou course is reserved for members and hotel guests.”

Quite a saving on a pay-and-play option that normally costs over €100, even in the low season between the end of October and the beginning of April. Included in the fee is access to a practice and teaching centre where most players would be better off watching the guy or gal next to them than duffing drives before tee-off time. It’s a popular

place for pros on the European tour.

“The tour pros can benefit from excellent facilities all year round,” says Jean-Marie. “We have the first high-tech European Tour Performance Institute. This is also the winter training base of the young amateurs of Pôle France Elite, who we hope will be following in the footsteps of our touring pro, Raphaël Jacquelin.

“The training centre is also there to encourage amateurs of all levels to practice and benefit from the advice of our biomechanics experts.”

Back on the courses, I have heard murmurings of discontent from golfers who object to the compulsory buggy policy operated by Terre Blanche in the warmer months.

Jean-Marie insists this is the right policy. “The courses are long and physically

demanding to play – there are plenty of slopes! Having compulsory buggies enables us to shorten the time it takes to play a round. The buggies have bottled water and are equipped with GPS which players find very useful, especially if it’s their first time playing here.”

More and more pro golfers are paying their first visit to Terre Blanche as it establishes itself as the centre for top-flight competition. The Château course hosts the French Riviera Masters, the only event on the European Senior Tour played on French soil. Last year saw the first Richard Mille Invitational, with Bubba Watson joining top French pros for a match play event.

That tournament combined great golf with good fun. For the Terre Blanche of the future, that’s the way to go. ■



Imagine a land which has never ceased to vibrate in rhythm with your emotions

In 2014 Terre Blanche Hotel Spa Golf Resort launched a new membership scheme with competitive rates combined with numerous exclusive advantages, which include:

- Unlimited access to two internationally renowned golf courses, open all year
- The Château, Par 72, 6616m, ranked No 14 in Continental Europe by Golf World, host to the French Riviera Masters, the only French competition on the European Senior Tour
- The Riou, Par 72, 6005m, reserved for members, their guests and hotel guests, host to the Terre Blanche Ladies Open (Ladies European Tour)
- Unlimited access to the Albatros Golf Performance Center with reserved space and unlimited pyramids of practice balls
- Installations and spaces reserved for Members:
 - Secure members' parking
 - At the Clubhouse: Members' Lounge (with daily newspapers, coffee, tea and pastries every morning)

- Private terrace
- Changing rooms with the possibility of renting a personal locker
- Reserved space for golf bag and caddy in the caddy master's storage room
- Preferential rates for members' guests on green fees and practice access
- Preferential rates for members at the Terre Blanche Hotel, Terre Blanche Spa and the four restaurants, at the two Proshops and the boutiques at the hotel and the spa
- Preferential rates at the David Leadbetter Academy and the Biomecaswing Center
- VIP access to the Open competitions organised by the European Tour and to several prestigious golf clubs:

Jumeirah Golf Estate (Dubai)	St Leon-Rot (Germany)
PGA Catalunya (Spain)	Fleesensee (Germany)
Quinta do Lago (Portugal)	Kungsängen (Sweden)
Golf National (France)	Linna (Finland)
London Golf Club (UK)	Estonian Golf (Estonia)
- Invitations to Wentworth Golf Club (UK)

Becoming a member at the Terre Blanche Golf equally offers the possibility of:

- Participating in major golf events
- Becoming a member of the Terre Blanche Golf Sports Club and, as such, representing Terre Blanche at inter-club competitions
- Benefitting from free access to the fitness facilities at the Albatros Golf Performance Center
- Practicing with the best European Tour pros
- Benefitting from advantages for the family (access to the tennis courts, the golf school and the Kids' Club.)
- The Cost:
 - 1/ Admission fee: €15,000 (the admission fee can be transferred)
 - 2/ Annual subscription fee: couple €9450
 - 3/ Under 18: €1250 including classes at the golf school
 - 4/ Between 18 and 24: €2350

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For details of membership, please contact Olivier Villaeys.
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Phone: 06 85 93 52 89.



Taulane, one of the courses we play regularly

MONACO'S FLOATING WEALTH

BY MICHAEL HEALY

THE news from Monaco this spring has been very upbeat about the prosperity of this unconventional city-state. NO external debt, NO income tax (for most residents), NO unemployment, NO crime (relatively), NO riots (or water cannon!), NO illegal immigrants, NO beggars; and NO fog!

But Monaco is not just a success story ashore – it is also a safe haven and pole of attraction for a large number of mega-yachts, either home-ported or just visiting. It used to be extremely cheap when I kept my small boat in what is now a 50-metre stern-to berth (2014 daily rate high-season €916 TTC) but had sparse facilities and was very uncomfortable in southeast storms. Recent developments such as heavy-duty shore-power connections, water supplies, internet, Wi-Fi, TV and pump-out stations mean comfort for crews and passengers. But the main difference is provided by Quai Rainier III – the 352-metre floating breakwater constructed in Algeciras, Spain, and attached in September 2002 near the Yacht Club de Monaco with a huge 770-ton joint designed to give way in case of earthquake. The quay cost €150 million – a good investment to shelter Port Hercule, provide more large deepwater berths and park 400 cars, and surely one of the Seven Wonders of the Modern World!

To match this dramatic improvement in berthing facilities in the Principality, the new generation of huge luxury yachts has arrived, and their

owners want to visit Monaco more than anywhere else. There are plenty of events round the port to attract them, notably the Formula One Grand Prix and the Monaco Yacht Show. But the yachts themselves match all this, in size, speed, equipment and luxury. Fleet-owner Abramovich's latest flagship *Eclipse* at 163.5 metres has just been neatly "eclipsed" by the Arab-owned *Azzam* – a full 180 metres (590 feet). There are few yachting ports which can accommodate these big beasts and their needs, but Monaco is one of them. Demand outstrips supply in summer, but these floating palaces can usually anchor outside. No more space is available for large yachts without reducing the berths for the "normal" small yachts, more my size.

Yet billionaires are still ordering their dreamboats: the authoritative 2014 Global Order Book lists 735 super-yachts (average length 37 metres) in build or on order, giving a total end-to-end length of over 27km! At an average of €20 million, they represent a staggering wealth, openly on display in Port Hercule, Monaco. But all along the Riviera they will face the same penury of slots as the much smaller boats.

Unlike France, Monaco has invested wisely in attracting these lucrative floating cities. And indeed also the Cruise Liners: 241 ships alongside in 2013, bringing in 249,806 passengers who have to pass through the X-ray machines of the new *Gare Maritime* on Quai Rainier III. A commendable success story. ■



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When the wind blows ...

.. what's it called and what does it bring? We clear the air



FOR a northern European, apart from the sunshine, the oddest part of the weather in our patch of France is the wind. The reliably wet westerlies that dominate the maritime climate of the UK and much of Scandinavia are replaced by an assortment of *vents* that can jump out of the sky at any moment. Here is our blow-by-blow account of the winds of the South of France.

Le Mistral

THE most talked-about. A cold and generally dry wind that has an average speed of 50km/h with gusts that can exceed 100km/h. The mistral blows down the Rhône valley before invading Provence. It comes from the northwest at Marseille, then due west as it reaches the Var. Its effects can be felt as far south as Corsica. The Esterel mountains to the west of Cannes are said to protect the eastern Côte d'Azur from the worst of the mistral, which according to legend blows for 3, 6 or 9 days. The strongest winds occur in the winter months. Want some warning? Look on the weather charts for a cold front crossing all of France from the northwest to the southeast, then hang on to your hat.

La Tramontane

THIS violent, cold wind from the north that can feel chillier than its temperature when it hits a warm region. Like the mistral, the tramontane (*tramontana* in the Nice area), blows hardest in the colder months. Occurs generally when a high-pressure system has installed itself over Spain/the Azores as a low pressure builds in the Gulf of Genoa and a cold front crosses France from north to south.

Le Levant

GENERALLY warm and moderate in strength, the levant is an east wind that brings much cloud and rainy conditions to the Côte d'Azur. Most common at the end of autumn and the beginning of spring. By the time this wind reaches Provence proper, most of the moisture has gone and it is known as the *levant blanc*.

Le Marin

OCCURRING mostly in autumn and spring, the marin blows from the southeast on to the Mediterranean coast and brings rain. It's a warm wind that can be violent, especially in the coastal mountain ranges,

where it can be dangerous and chaotic in its direction. Called *le marin blanc* when it fails to bring rain. Usually occurs when a low-pressure system over Spain coincides with an anticyclone over the Alps.

La Lombarde

VARIES in direction from southeast to northeast, and blows across the Italian frontier into France. More common the further north you go in the Alps, this wind is known for its violent gusts. The Foehn effect means the lombarde brings rain or snow to the Italian side of the mountains, but is dry by the time it descends the French slopes.

Le Grec

THIS goes by a variety of names in our region – *grécal*, *grégat*, *grégau*, *grégou*. A cold, dry wind from the northeast blowing right through the Riviera and Provence. This wind can bring freezing conditions in early spring. When it reaches the Mediterranean, *le grec* picks up moisture and can be responsible for snow right down to sea level. Coincides with a low-pressure system over the western Med.

Le Libeccio

A HOT, dry wind that blows from the southwest on to the Côte d'Azur and Corsica, often producing violent blasts in the northeast of the island, with thunderstorms.

Le Sirocco

DISTINCTIVE and pretty rare, but once experienced never forgotten. The sirocco blows from the south in summer, invariably hot and dry. It brings with it scorching temperatures, also the fine red sand particles from the Sahara desert that stain our cars and buildings. Caused by high pressure over the Balkans coinciding with a low-pressure system stretching from the Balearic Islands to North Africa. ■

BEACHY CLEAN



TAKING OUT THE TRASH: Nice resident Jonathon Lippman is trying to make a difference.

AT the retirement party for Janet Ruiz (see last issue), Jonathon Lippman, former American Consul in Geneva, approached the *Reporter* talking trash, literally.

"I live near the beach and almost daily go down to swim in season, to walk or just to sit and take in the scenery. I see garbage on the beach and sometimes floating in the water around me when I'm swimming. I find it disturbing.

"And so three and a half years ago, soon after I moved here, I decided to do something about it. Four or five days a week I clean the beach of Nice from Castel Plage to the Paillon River. You name it, I pick it up – from bottles to beer cans, paper to plastic, metal objects, newspapers and cigarette butts. Just an hour to 75 minutes each time, carrying a plastic garbage bag and dumping the bag at the end, either in the summertime bins on the beach or in winter in the garbage cans on the promenade."

Jonathan is looking for

ten or twelve like-minded people who live near the beach along the Bay of Angels in Nice, and who would be willing to go down to the beach – from Castel Plage across to the airport, depending on how many volunteer – for an hour or so a couple of times a week, at their leisure, and clean up a designated small area.

"I'm willing to head up the project of unofficial volunteers" he tells us, "I suggest we each have an assigned segment – like Castel Plage to Opéra beach, and then the next person could take Opéra to the Paillon River after Beau Rivage and so on. We could meet at my flat in Old Nice once a month for cocktails to talk about it.

"I realise that I am only making a dent but would like to find a group of equally-inclined people who would be willing to help me." ■

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“BRO, YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN HERE AN HOUR AGO”

BY FLORIAN BREHIN & SCOTT BELL

Bostonian Scott Bell has been a Riviera resident for nearly 20 years. Says Scott: “Although not a formal organization, there’s a local surf community made up of mostly Australians and Americans. And for about twenty days out of the year you can find a good swell off the island of Ste Marguerite in winter.”

MOST residents on the Côte d’Azur know the Mediterranean only for its warm and inviting summer conditions. But there is a more temperamental and wilder side of the Med that periodically visits the coast from September through May. The storm systems that arrive mostly from the south have been causing ever-increasing damage to the shoreline roadways and businesses. There was even a 10-meter rogue wave that severely damaged a cruise ship in Marseille in March of 2010. Yet while the majority of residents are mildly inconvenienced by such storms (they simply avoid the coast when the storms hit), there’s a small group of committed surfers that relish the arrival of these powerful weather systems and

the world-class waves they can generate.

Readers are probably not familiar with surfing, so it’s perhaps useful to provide some terminology prior to discussing surfing on the French Riviera. A surfable wave is one that can peel along a wave crest, ahead of the wave breakpoint, gradually breaking along the wave crest and allowing the pocket to move along the wave crest. This is termed as a peeling wave to right or left depending on the surfer’s point of view. The speed to which the wave peels along the crest determines the surfability and the degree of difficulty. When surfers follow the peel of the wave, they travel at speeds much faster than the wave’s forward-moving speed and therefore must complete

manoeuvres to reduce their speed and catch up with the wave. Surfing requires a steep unbroken wave face to create adequate board speed for performing manoeuvres, and a state of the art definition of a good surf break in a peeling manner is where the breaking region translates laterally across the wave crest.

Not generally regarded as a premier surfing region, the Mediterranean is a semi-enclosed basin with limited fetch length, but it can occasionally generate powerful wind swells and deliver top-notch waves to the numerous surfing breaks. Due to its geology and morphology, the coastline provides a great diversity of set-ups including beach breaks, reef and



sand point breaks, slabs – many of them could be considered as popular surfing breaks when conditions are favourable. The biggest problem is the frequency of the swell events and the long periods of flat spell, with most breaks turning on a couple times of year at most.

Good surfing windows are very short-lived because the wind swells are generated close to shore: it can be pumping at sunset and totally flat the next morning. But when all weather conditions come together, we see some of the best waves on the planet. In fact, when local secret reefs are firing, this is comparable to top breaks in Indo or Hawaii. So a true French Riviera surfer needs a flexible work schedule, a good car (as you may end up driving for two hours), advanced meteorological data interpretation skills and, most importantly, a good dose of luck ... One of the most familiar phrases among surfers here is: "Bro! You so missed it ... should have been here an hour ago."

Most of the surfing season is concentrated in fall/winter and occasionally spring. Mistral winds blow out of the west/northwest all year long, but tend to dominate in summer. Although they generate positive surfing conditions in other places along the French Mediterranean (the Blue Coast, for example, near Marseille), the mistral is not a swell maker for the surfing breaks of the Riviera. Neither are the east winds, which are dominant in winter and generate good conditions on the nearby western departments in the Var, all the way to Pyrénées Orientales in Languedoc-Roussillon. What really lights up the breaks on the Riviera are the rare south swells, called *coups de Sud* or *coups de l'Abbé*. This

optimal scenario happens when a depression, either travelling off the southern coast of Spain or generated in the Mediterranean basin, intensifies near the Balearic Islands. This type of weather event can generate a healthy fetch between Spain and Corsica creating a pumping surf for the French Riviera.

However, good surfing conditions are not all about wave climate. The geology and diversity of coastal morphology provides great setups for a variety of breaks from long peeling point breaks to heart-fainting reef breaks/ledges/slabs and off course mushy beach breaks. The geology is very diverse with several underwater canyon systems that enhance wave action. The swell conditions working in conjunction with a diverse set of bathymetric components such as underwater canyons and shoals can transform an average wave (1m/8 sec) into a total drainer. The similar wave enhancement processes due to submarine canyons can be found at Black's Beach (San Diego) and Hossegor (La Gravière).

The best waves usually come with foul weather – wind, rain, air temps around 0°C and water temps around 12°C. So in addition to possessing some decent surfing skills a quality wetsuit is definitely in order; a decent swell is not a wave for beginners.

So if you are up for it and adhere to some basic wave etiquette, feel free to paddle out for perhaps one of your most memorable surf sessions ever, right here on the Côte d'Azur. ■

Florian Brehin works at the Florida Institute of Technology (fbrehin@fit.edu). Scott Bell is founder of Oneplanetsurf.com, which promotes companies creating sustainable surf products.



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RIGHT PLANT, RIGHT PLACE

Lessons from landscape

BY JAMES BASSON, SCAPE DESIGN MONACO



Along a path, the vegetation should blend perfectly into the different growing mediums.

A GARDEN is typically made up of three main elements: hardscape – the pathways, driveways, paved surfaces and play areas; softscape – the vegetation within the landscape; and waterscape – the use of water on the grounds.

For the purpose of this article, I went back to nature to study how these three elements interact and to see what I could learn from the natural landscape for use in our own gardens. This led me to Le Bois de Gourdon, one of my favourite areas to walk with the family where stunted oak woodland, rocky outcrops and gentle slopes amble above the cliffs of Gourdon and below the cliffs of Caussols. Plant life here is rich and varied, as the hills roll and water springs from

a thousand tiny sources and runs down into parched limestone pavements.

There is a particular footpath that I regularly take cutting across a steep bank above the road to Gourdon from Pré du Lac. This trail, which is made up of stone laid not more than a metre away from where it was collected, had been used for hundreds of years bringing materials, animals and the post to the residents of Gourdon. As there were no machines used to create the walkway, it follows the path of least resistance, hugging the contours of the land and winding in and out of rock outcrops. The line of this pathway is always fascinating and unpredictable as it exposes and hides thousands of little vignettes of vegetation and landscape.

At one spot, the landscape opens up to a small clearing, which completely embodies what I'm trying to achieve in the gardens I create: the land slopes up from the pathway to a stunted woodland in the back of the space.

Underfoot the first crocus is appearing amongst the stones of the pathway, on the very fringes of the vegetation. Here they snatch the first opportunity they can to flower before deciduous vegetation gets going again in the spring. We rarely plant bulbs in pathways imagining that they will be damaged, trodden on and uncared for. In this natural setting, there is very little competition for these small, delicate plants and boars find it hard to dig them up amongst the stones. This is ideal as

opposed to the perennials being crowded out or dwarfed by the surrounding flowers.

Furthermore, the fringes of the path blend perfectly into the surrounding vegetation. This is demonstrated by plant life taking hold as the foot passage and stones diminish. As the path is made up of the same materials as the surrounding rocks, there is a unity of form, material and resources, so the vegetation blends perfectly the different growing mediums. For example, the thyme that dominates the fringes of the path gives way to grasses and Cistus shrubs as the ground rises and the soil becomes more plentiful. Where the ground flattens again the trees are able to get their roots in and this creates the back of the clearing, sheltering it from the cold air dropping down from the hills to the north.

What is so remarkable to a Mediterranean gardener is the stability of the vegetation. The range of different growing mediums creates a range of tones and collections of species. All these plants have reached a state of constancy, which to a gardener means no weeding, no pruning and in fact no maintenance, with the bonus of creating a landscape which is pleasant to be in. But just what creates this stability? Simply put, the lack of resources. There is very little water in the summer and in winter, and very little soil. (Add sometimes to this the searing summer heat and cold winter.) We spend a fortune improving our soils, removing stones and planting flora, which are chosen for their flowers not their situation. Remember, "Right plant, right place".

The last but equally central element of the garden is something people get all worked up about: water.

Personally, every time I find water in the landscape I am drawn to it. In the Alpes-Maritimes water is in abundance, not always obviously on the surface but stored in massive underground aquifers, coursing down and out at the base of cliffs and walls, down rapid runoff streams and rivers during the snow melt and seasonal showers.

But how can we incorporate this into the garden? By creating water features in the landscapes that provide that same plentiful sense. These water features should follow the language of the natural landscape, spilling out from the base of walls, coursing down impermeable areas, disappearing into the ground as soon as the ground becomes permeable again or finishing in pools. It is how the water flows that is the most important lesson to learn from the natural landscape. In the spring and the autumn the watercourses down the mountains and all sources run with fury. But in the depth of winter things slow down; in the summer months the cascading waterfall becomes a tinkling. This seasonal music of water is something to be recreated in our gardens bringing them back into the landscape and climatic conditions of the seasons.

The natural landscape really is a limitless source of ideas for garden design, be it for the interaction and combinations of plants in the hard landscape or the way water finds its course. The next time you take a walk or go for a drive in your local area, take a closer look at the various elements and be inspired for your own garden – you may be surprised at what you'll find! ■

James Basson is an international award winning Garden Designer.



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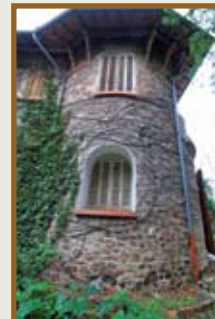
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DUN-ROMAN!

The tale of a house
built on history



The façade of the Butte St Antoine villa (left), the historic tower (right) and the “place next door” – a ruined chapel.



THERE are houses with history, and then there is the villa on the Butte St-Antoine at Fréjus. Among the previous list of *propriétaires* you'll find the Roman naval commander for the region.

The stone-built villa was constructed 150 years ago by the Régis family, who were looking for a nice spot for their seaside second home. They lit upon a grassy mound within sight of the sea and decided that was the ideal place.

Planning laws being a little less stringent in those far-off days, it didn't seem to matter a great deal that the villa was going up on what is now an important historic monument. The base of a Roman tower was even used as part of the distinctive building.

Today the Butte St Antoine is a 15-minute walk from the sea, but in ancient times the hill rose immediately above the old harbour of Fréjus, commanding the anchorage and also the mouth of the Argens river to the south. The Romans built an impressive defensive wall with several towers and within it their naval headquarters. One of the gateways leads towards the main settlement; the second to the anchorage of Agrippa's fleet.

The house on the little hill, having been in the same family since it was built, has been put on the market by the present generation of the Régis family. Now that Fréjus has spread in every direction around it, its site is truly extraordinary, an oasis sitting serenely over the bustle.

On a part of the coast where modern apartment blocks and concrete villas are the norm, the old house stands apart. It had clearly been much loved by successive generations of Régises, but is now in need of a major refurb. The buyer will be someone who appreciates owning an important slice of history, and having a Roman well on your property is not an everyday boast. The added fascination remains that although the northern part of the Butte has been scientifically examined, there have been no excavations on the private land.

The prospective buyer has two options. The entire property, which includes a two-bedroom bungalow of around 60m² (also in need of renovation), which sits in 4700m² of land, mature trees and shrubs adding to the general sense of quiet and seclusion. This has a price tag of €917,000. The main house plus 3500m² of land is up for €659,950.

The main house covers two floors and has a wide entrance hall with original tiles, shower room and cloakroom with WC. There are two reception rooms, used as a separate dining room and lounge, study/bedroom and fitted kitchen.

The first floor has four double bedrooms, bathroom and WC, one bedroom has a walk-in dressing room large enough to convert into an en-suite bathroom. There is a cellar under the house and a loft above.

The two-bedroomed bungalow is tucked away on the other side of the land. It has an entrance, lounge with feature fireplace, two double bedrooms, shower room, WC and kitchen. There is also a cellar under the main part of the house.

Both houses have garages that can be accessed independently.

The entire property sits on a plot of 4700m² or over an acre, which is very private with mature shrubs and trees along the ample parking space for either property, too.

There is one drawback to living with so much precious past beneath your feet: a sunken swimming pool is not an option. ■

Contact Tim Clark at Leggett Immobilier on 06 76 59 25 88.



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PROPERTY

STOP A HOUSE SALE FALLING DOWN

BY TIM CLARK, LEGGETT IMMOBILIER



SINCE I began selling property full-time in France in 2005, I have seen a strong market turn into a very tough market. However, one thing that has remained a constant over the years is the main reason for a house sale to fall through.

Given the nature of today's market and the fact you are unlikely to have buyers fighting over your beautiful property, it makes sense to stack the odds in your

favour. Yet having looked at statistics from 2013, the most common cause for an agreed sale to collapse was due to negative information being presented at the *Compromis de Vente* stage.

As readers are probably aware, when a house sale is agreed in France, it is obligatory for the vendor to provide a number of diagnostic tests to a buyer to check before they are obliged to sign the first contract. Unfortunately, except for the energy report (DPE), French law does not require a homeowner to have these tests in place prior to putting their house on the market.

Consequently, a buyer falls in love with a house, agrees to a price and is then presented with a contract to sign along with a huge wad of paperwork relating to inspections for termites, lead in paint, Asbestos, electricity installation condition and the dreaded *fosse septique* control.

It is at this point the potential buyer discovers all the flaws with the house they have fallen in love with. About now, pound signs are starting to flash before their eyes and before the cold sweats start, they run screaming from the *notaire's* office. (Okay, only once has this happened to me.)

The best advice, and I know many do take this on board, is to ensure you have all of the diagnostics in place prior to marketing your house for sale, and then if anything is reported as being non-conforming or in need of updating, you as the vendor can make an informed choice. Do I have the work carried out, at which point my agent will shout from the rooftops about how this property conforms to all current standards, or do I at least gather quotations for updating work, so that when I do have an offer on the table a potential buyer will already be in possession of the financial implications of certain anomalies in the house? Just remember, forewarned is to be forearmed. ■

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EXTENDING THE OLIVE BRANCH

Pickers find peace at Les Pastras

BY LISA PEPIN

November 1, 2013

AS Eleanor Roosevelt famously said, “You must do the thing you think you cannot do.” For us, that “thing” was getting people to pay us to pick our olives. They said it couldn’t be done. They unkindly said, “What you’re doing is a scam.”

But “they” were Provence natives who had never worked in a drab, featureless building or gone months without seeing a bird that wasn’t a pigeon. They didn’t ride a loud, cold train to work with the other corporate drones, who wished they were anywhere else but there.

If you had stopped by the Chicago office on the 50th floor where I worked ten years ago, and told me that for just

€50 I could spend the day picking olives on an organic farm in Provence, plus enjoy a traditional French countryside lunch of beef *daube*, saffron potatoes au gratin, ratatouille, cheese and dessert plus all the wine I cared to drink ... well, I would have signed up twice. And probably kissed you, to boot.

And as it turned out, the opportunity was indeed attractive to other city dwellers. A businessman from Ireland, a lawyer from LA and even a recent graduate of Le Cordon Bleu Culinary School in California – all among the folks who willingly paid to pick olives and have lunch with us. We picked 75 kilos of olives that day. And, as is often the case

with our tours, people who came to us as paying clients left as friends. For that alone, we consider the endeavor a success.

November 15, 2013

PEOPLE often ask how we got started hunting truffles. It began with our British neighbors, who heard that the former owners of their house used to find truffles on the property. They asked my husband, Johann, if he knew of any truffle hunters who could come to the house to see if the story was true. And as it happened, one of his childhood friends, Jean-Marc, is a third-generation truffle hunter with two trained dogs.

Johann, Jean-Marc and his dogs paid

December 6, 2013

THIS was a big day for us. Les Pastras was mentioned in an article about epicurean experiences that make great holiday gifts in *USA Today*, a nationwide newspaper with six million readers. We’re not even sure how they heard of us, but feel that this bodes well for the future.



Photo: Walter Pfeiffer



After a day of picking olives guests enjoyed a delicious traditional French beef *daube*

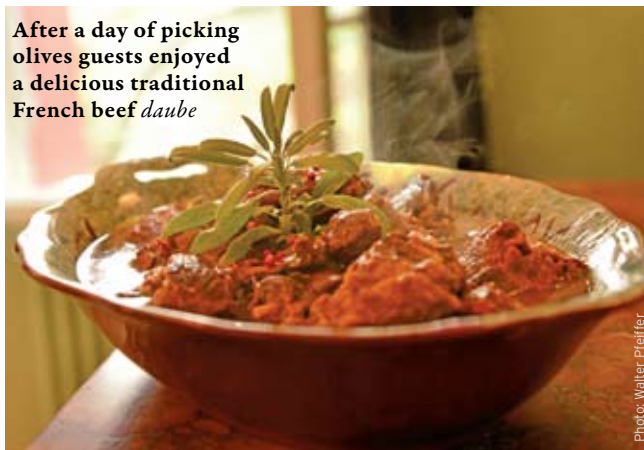


Photo: Walter Pfeiffer

them a visit and found some rather large truffles on their property. Word quickly spread (as it does in Provence!) and the services of two men and two dogs were soon in demand throughout the neighborhood. They developed a system whereby the hunters would visit the properties every weekend, splitting the spoils 50-50 with the landowners and cleverly managing to always end the day's work at the home of the neighbor known for pouring the most generously-sized pastis at apéro time.

One day, Jean-Marc mentioned to Johann that he had noticed some older oaks on our land that just might have truffles. They came back from that first foray onto our property with a truffle twice the size of a golf ball. I actually jumped for joy when I saw it.

Since the very specific conditions necessary to grow truffles already existed, naturally the next step was to maximize on our good fortune by planting more trees. In the meantime, though, the existing trees produced a weekly supply that was too small to earn enough by selling to

a restaurant. What could we do with such a meager amount? As more and more of our friends asked if they could tag along on our weekend hunts, the answer became obvious. And so, armed with a very basic website, we officially launched Les Pastras truffle hunting tours to the public in December 2012.

November 24, 2013

WITH so much land perfect for truffles in our neighborhood, you might think it strange that we are the only hunters. And you'd be right. Our uphill neighbor has a truffle dog but very respectfully hunts only on his own property. Wanting to keep it that way, Johann tries to be subtle about our tours and has only told this neighbor that we conduct "farm tours." As agritourism is arguably one of the fastest-growing segments of the industry, our lovely specimen of a Provençal farm makes it plausible.

The only problem is our guests. Nobody would ever believe that the fashionable folk who turn up with their fur coats, Mulberry bags, Prada loafers, and Frye boots are here

because they have a burning desire to learn about farming. (We didn't even know they made Hunter boots with a wedge heel!)

Today, as Johann led a group on a tour and saw the uphill neighbor's car approaching in the distance, he took one look at the chic entourage behind him and said, "You guys need to hide." The group of four obediently ducked behind the nearest row of trees until the car passed and then laughed like crazy when told the reason why.

December 20, 2013

AS the year draws to a close, and we reflect on 2013, our most important accomplishment was contributing to the One Family Orphanage in Dargout, Haiti. This has been the first full year of donating 50% of the profits from our olive and truffle oil, and thanks to the clients who purchased these products, we were able to send Christmas gifts for 75 children, ship 140 kilos of donated books (which they used to create a library), a brand new laptop and funds to assist the purchase of playground equipment. It's a start and we look forward to seeing what 2014 will bring. ■



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JEFF AND THE BEAN STOCK

BY MARGO LESTZ



WHILE eating his cake, Jeff pulled out a small white tile, the kind that might be found on a kitchen wall. He marched up to the counter and indignantly informed the server that they “had baked a tile into his cake”. The woman broke into a big smile and said, “Oh, you found the prize! You are the winner!” Then she handed him a paper crown, which he brought back to the table, looking confused.

It is indeed a French tradition to eat pies and cakes containing tiny hidden “prizes” in January. This can be traced back to Roman times and the winter solstice celebration. A loaf of bread was baked with a bean inside and the person who discovered the bean was crowned “King for the Day”.

The Christian Church changed the solstice celebration to the Epiphany and fixed the date as January 6th. With the King for a Day theme already established, it became the time to remember the kings who presented gifts to the baby Jesus. Over the years, a bean-in-the-bread turned into a bean-in-the-cake and became known as the *galette des rois* – the king cake.

Cake versus pie

IN 16th century Paris, this king cake was at the centre of a conflict between the *boulangeries* (bakeries) and the *pâtisseries* (cake shops), as each wanted sole rights to make and sell it. The cake shops won, but the bakeries weren’t about to give up so easily. If they were forbidden to make king cakes, then they would make

king pies. And this is why we have two distinct versions of king cake today.

The bakeries and cake shops have a better relationship nowadays and you’re likely to pass a window and see both versions displayed side by side. One is a round brioche which sometimes goes by the name of *gâteau des rois* and the other is more like a pie, but they both can be called *galette des rois*. Certain regions of France have their preference, but in the south we like to be inclusive, so we eat both.

The bakery-cake shop war wasn’t the only problem caused by this king cake. After the French revolution, the new leaders wanted to ban it. They’d just gotten rid of one king and didn’t want another one – not even a pretend one. They were seriously considering outlawing the token king custom and arresting anyone who dared to make or sell the king cakes but after considering what the public reaction might be, they came to their senses. They realised that you just don’t mess with a Frenchman’s food or holidays, so the cake with a bean in it was safe.

The bean evolves

THE item baked into the cake is called a *fève*, meaning “bean”, a broad bean to be exact, which was the original king selector. At the end of the 19th century, the beans were replaced by porcelain figurines (I can’t help but think that dentists must have come up with that idea), such as tiny *santons* (nativity figures) or cartoon

characters, but are still referred to as *fèves*; there are those who collect quite a stock of *fèves* and there’s even a *fève* museum.

The *fève* is a long-standing tradition and still very popular. At January gatherings, when it is time to serve the cake, the youngest child gets under the table. The hostess cuts the cake into as many pieces as there are diners, then she asks the child, “Who is this piece for?” The child calls out a name and the cake is distributed according to his or her instructions. This way there can be no cheating. Everyone chews their piece of cake very slowly, to avoid cracking a tooth, until the *fève* is found and that person gets to wear the paper crown, always supplied with the cake, and becomes King or (Queen) for the Day, with the responsibility of bringing another king cake to the next gathering – probably the following week because the French eat these cakes throughout the entire month of January. This way everyone gets an opportunity to be crowned King or Queen of the party.

The only person with no chance of finding the *fève* is the President of the Republic of France. Each year the baker’s association presents the Champs Elysée, “the home of the president”, with a giant *galette des rois* – but with one difference: There’s no *fève* inside and no crown to accompany it. The French dethroned their king a long time ago and they aren’t taking any chances. ■

For more see curiousrambler.com



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FOOD

Cook d'Azur

Chorizo & Paprika Cod

Katie Bills whips up a fresh yet quick and simple dish to put together, with maximum flavour and minimum washing up!



INGREDIENTS

2 white onions finely sliced	500ml chicken or vegetable stock
1 garlic clove crushed	1 tsp of smoked paprika
200g chorizo sliced	2 handfuls of spinach
500g cod (Loin)	Basil leaves to garnish
2 tins cannellini beans	Salt and pepper
2 tins chopped tomatoes	1tbsp olive oil

Fry onions and sliced chorizo in a teaspoon of olive oil till lightly browned. Add the crushed garlic clove, and teaspoon of smoked paprika. If you like more of a spicy hit, add another teaspoon.

Strain the cannellini beans and stir until everything is mixed together well.

Add the chopped tomatoes to 300ml of stock, stir together and season well with salt and pepper. Leave to simmer and reduce for 10 minutes.

Cut the cod into portion sizes, and place in pan. Cook for 5 minutes on each side. When the fish turns from translucent to white, and flakes easily, it's ready to be served.

Finally, sprinkle with roughly chopped spinach and garnish with fresh basil leaves.

You can serve with a side salad or simply with crusty warm bread to mop up all those lovely juices.

Serves four.

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MR PIGGY GOES TO MARKET



common here. They are a must-buy if you are making a raid across the frontier, to the Ventimiglia market, for instance. But be careful, the spines are super-sharp; they'll puncture a plastic bag if

MR Piggy is less than pleased if he doesn't find an artichoke in his trough at this time of year. This is the high season for this special vegetable; they make a first appearance in January at what seems a high price for what after all is a glorified thistle.

The "earlies" will usually come from Sicily, where the plant originated, but through February they become more affordable as locally grown artichokes come on stream, often sold in bunches of five.

These medium-sized artichokes are often best steamed upside down having first cut off the tops but leaving an inch of stem. Trim them down to get rid of the remaining coarse bits of leaves, and if you're keeping them to serve cold douse them with vinaigrette to prevent them from discolouring.

A particularly toothsome variation on our Mediterranean artichoke is the spinoso sardo variety, much grown in Liguria but not so

you do not handle with caution.

What we call the globe artichoke, the biggest of the family, is usually the Camus de Bretagne (Brittany also produces the similar Castel). These can fetch a handsome price. Normally steamed peeled and dipped as a starter, the hairy choke is discarded.

A treat to come is provided by a local speciality, the Violet de Provence, which comes into season in March in a warm year and is mostly eaten raw. Cut these little purple artichokes in quarters and dip in salt to experience the French *croque-au-sel*. Shaving them over a salad or a bowl of pasta adds a delicious crunch. ■

FANCY THAT!

THE artichoke has long been used as an aphrodisiac, and women in the Middle Ages were forbidden from eating them.

we've got mail...

RUSH TO JUDGEMENT

I WOULD like to set the record straight about British residents of Lorgues, Robert and Sharon Moses, who were wrongly accused of human trafficking. Some local expats made spurious judgements before all the facts were known and they should be ashamed. A French court has cleared Robert and Sharon of all wrongdoing and the domestic employee who made the complaint was found to have done so in order to extend her residency permit. Let the French judicial process do its job before condemning anyone hastily. Everyone is innocent unless proven guilty in a court of law.

*Name provided,
by email*

**Star
letter**

RUSH TO GET IT OVER WITH

I REMEMBER reading on your website that one of your staff found an MRI scanner in Cannes claustrophobic. There is a new scanner at the Lenval Hospital in Nice which has the widest tunnel available (74cm). It is very advanced so scans are faster and there is a mirror that reduces the feeling of closeness. Lenval is a children's hospital but the scanner is available to adults and is no more expensive than the procedure elsewhere. The scanner department number is 04 92 03 02 78 but you will need a prescription from your doctor.

Lauretta Chiles, by email

JOURNEY TO THE LANDS OF THE BIBLE

I WILL be escorting a two-week "Journey to the Lands of the Bible" in late October 2014. The tour offers the opportunity to walk the narrow streets of Old Jerusalem, stroll by the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and discover the magic of Bethlehem and Nazareth. Participants will visit the rose red city of Petra, the Dead Sea fortress of Masada, and Mt Nebo where Moses first saw the Promised Land. The tour provides first class accommodation and is organised by a company with nearly 50 years' experience in the region.

An electronic copy of the brochure is available on the St Paul's website: stpaulsmonaco.com. For more information or to enroll for the tour, please contact: walter@monaco.mc or on 06 43 91 69 58.

Father Walter Raymond, Anglican Chaplain in Monaco, by email

NICE PARKING NOT SO NICE

I SPEND quite a bit of time in Nice and one thing I love to do is walk and discover this incredible city. One thing that really bothers me is the number of abandoned cars left near a park or on the streets.

For example at the park Le Vigier across from the La Reserve area of the port, there are at least two cars – one a silver BMW Estate that has been there for at least 3 months. In my street there has been a Toyota parked on the paying side (the left) since at least September 2013. It has never had a parking fine on it. Walking up Avenue du Fabron

Cupboards bulging? Wardrobe too small? Why not donate to Sunny Bank?

Sunny Bank Charitable Association supports socially and financially the Anglophone elderly, especially the sick, the handicapped, and the lonely; at home and in Retirement Homes. Your unwanted clothes, accessories, small household items could help us raise funds. We accept donations every Thursday from 10h to 15h.

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LETTERS

there are numerous cars with flat tires, covered in bird excrement, yet there seems to be no parking tickets.

Once on my street there was an abandoned van with the window open. People kept jumping in the car to move it down the street. It was there for months until eventually someone moved out of an apartment and it was towed away because the removal van could not park.

Surely parking offences like the ones I have mentioned could bring in some much needed revenue to the city.

Michele Hutchinson, by email

BROKEN RING

I BOUGHT a ceramic ring from a shop near Carrefour at the end of August. It cost €113 so it was not cheap. The 7th time my wife wore it, it broke in two as she took it off. I went back to the shop (I had bought it only 3 months earlier) and they said it could not be repaired and that ceramic rings have no guarantee so they could not offer me a reimbursement or credit note.

As I was not informed that there was no guarantee on ceramic rings when I bought it and as it broke during normal use I feel I should be reimbursed for this product.

I feel your readers should be aware of my problem so that they do not get into the same situation as I now find myself in.

Paul Hughes, by email

THE HAT'S OFF!

WE are pleased to announce the merger of *The Hérault Times* and *The Aude Times* into the new publication *The HAT* from January 2014. *The HAT* is a free monthly English-language magazine available throughout Hérault and Aude and online. Forty-eight pages of intelligently-written articles, opinions and regular columns on the people, issues and culture of the region and beyond.

Emma Foulger, Editor HAT

POSTAL WOES

I DON'T usually complain but we are really upset at La Poste. In the few weeks before Christmas we posted several small items, about six or seven, as Christmas prezzies to friends and family in England, France and Belgium. It wasn't stuff that had much value, in

fact the postage on most of them was about €8, which was about the same as the value. These weren't sent by *recommandée* as that is too expensive and a big nuisance for the receiver if they have to go and get it from the post office.

None of them have arrived and the woman at the La Poste office just shrugged her shoulders when I went to ask what we can do about this. I know there is no proof of posting but we should be getting better service.

Also in November, I posted something to a friend in Paris with a proof of delivery and she never got it, but La Poste said it had been signed for but can't give me a copy of the signature. Well I know it wasn't my friend who signed for it, why would she lie? She lives in a block of flats so either someone else took it or La Poste is making this up.

Also stuff that was posted to us has not arrived from England. "HappyToBeHere" on Reporter forum

Others have given their own experiences (some similar to yours) on our website. See: forum.rivierareporter.com ➤

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NICO & THE AMAZING DUCIS FOUNTAINS

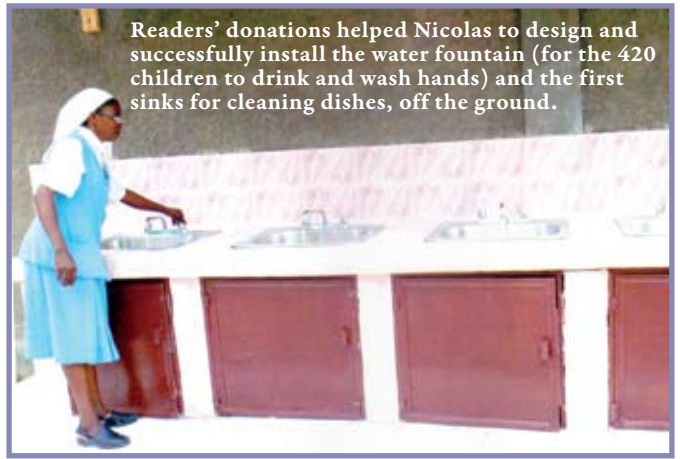
IT'S with great emotion that I can forward all of you the first incoming pictures I just received from Sister Margarete, along with a sweet letter of gratitude from her, the sisters and all the school children in Ducis. Knowing before there was just ONE 12-inch high faucet in the middle of the dirt playground. What a great blessing!

Although *Nourrir les Enfants Haiti* is just a small association, it is only with the help of all of you that we can truly help these impoverished children.

Everyone's donations, love and help

have put Nicolas (see *Reporter* 156) in the forefront to design and be able to successfully install this great water fountain (for the 420 children to drink and wash hands), first sinks for cleaning dishes (off the ground) and upgrade the bathrooms (with closing doors! Yes, I am incredibly proud of Nico and his courage to carry such an important project so far!

This is the first step to have access to clean drinking water and to really understand the importance of washing hands – as Cholera is still threatening this mountainous area. This has been the “DREAM” project of Sister



Readers' donations helped Nicolas to design and successfully install the water fountain (for the 420 children to drink and wash hands) and the first sinks for cleaning dishes, off the ground.

Margarete since the earthquake.

Again thank you for all your support and know that although it's just “a drop in the ocean, if it wasn't there the ocean would be missing something” (Mother Theresa). We really ARE making a difference.

Kate Paltbey, by email

WRITE TO US

Letters to the Editor can be sent by email to info@rivierareporter.com or by post (see page 50). Unless specifically marked “not for publication”, letters may be published in our Letters pages and may also be added to our website forum. Names are withheld when requested but please note anonymous letters will not be considered.

THE PRESIDENTIAL CLOWN

ALONGSIDE the road between Valbonne and Opio, not far from the English Car Mechanics, there is a corner that looks like a graffitied bus stop. A grossly painted face on the wall is surrounded by wilted flowers and strange tokens left at the scene.

This is a shrine in memory of the French humorist Michel Gérard Joseph Colucci whose stage name was *Coluche*. To many of the French, especially bikers, it remains a sacred place. He died on that spot in a motorcycle accident in 1986 and conspiracy theorists still maintain he was “accidented” due to his critical humour about the French elite – politicians, journalists and the police – who wanted him silenced. No evidence that he was murdered has ever been proven but the rumour persists.

With his red nose and *salopette* trousers, Coluche looked like the clown he professed to be – an image that didn't sit well with the high-minded political elite of the time. He snubbed them by announcing his candidature for

presidency in 1980 and easily obtained the 500 endorsements required to run.

The establishment was quick to react. Interior Minister Christian Bonnet cited Coluche for insults to the police and he was fined 3000 francs. Attempts were made to discredit him whenever possible but his popularity continued to grow. By the time polls gave him 15% of the vote he was receiving anonymous death threats and daily harassment. In November 1980, his theatrical manager was found murdered by two shots to the head from an assassin that has never been found. Coluche then decided to pull out of the race, which was only intended to be a demonstration of just how disconnected and ruthless the political class were. He had made his point and in May 1981 François Mitterrand was elected president.

The secret to Coluche's immense popularity was that his anecdotes and punch lines were not only funny, but rang painfully true to the French public. The only other French comedian to dare

strike as close to the bone was Thierry Le Luron who also died in 1986, of throat cancer – a diagnosis that some conspiracy theorists also question. Le Luron made no secret of his contempt for French politics, notably President Mitterrand's ruling Socialist Party.

“A French administration is a place where those who leave early pass in the hallway those who arrive late.” Coluche

Until his death, Coluche openly challenged political inadequacy in dealing with the French social problems of the day. He maintained that these were indeed solvable by anyone who would really try. He was met with political guffaws and accusations that he simply didn't understand the difficulties in resolving important issues like how to feed the poor. He quickly proved them wrong by founding the *Restos du Coeur* food banks (restosducoeur.org) that to this day still distribute some 1.3 million meals to the needy in winter, with help from 66,000 volunteers. **M.M.**

january

AUSTRALIA DAY

Sat Jan 25: With the International Club of the Riviera. See internationalclub.fr for details.

BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF THE VAR

Thurs Jan 30: Lunch at Bastides Des Moines, Montferrat.
Contact: events@baofthevar.com or 06 33 01 03 48.

february

ASSOCIATION NIÇOISE CHINE HORIZON

Sat Feb 1, 12h30: To celebrate Lunar New Year, we will hold a Chinese feast together with lucky draws. At Restaurant Wokshop 1, rue Cassini Nice (very close to Place Garibaldi). Cost: €30 meal per person. Please contact to sign up: 04 93 80 31 09 – chinehorizon.com

MIDEM

Sat Feb 1-4: Midem at the Palais des Festivals in Cannes, with more than 50 gigs of emergent and confirmed artists from all over the world, focused on the creative energy of today's live scene. See midem.com

POSH PARAPHERNALIA

Thurs Feb 6, 10h-15h: 2nd hand clothes, books and accessories, bric-a-brac and a light lunch. Future dates: Thurs Mar 6, Thurs Apr 13 & Thurs May 8. For more info see: sunny-bank.org or call 04 93 47 94 20.

MEDITERRANEAN NATURE IN FRANCE EXHIBITION IN 3D-RELIEF

Until Mar 30: At Serre de la Madone (74 val Gorbio, Menton) from Tues to Sun, 10h to 17h. Cost €8/person. Tel: 04 93 57 73 90

THE KING OF GASTRONOMY



For a behind the scenes look at the Maison de Carnival and an interview with Denis Zanon, Nice's Director of Tourism, see "Carnival – the DNA of Nice" at rivierareporter.com

FRANCE - GRANDE BRETAGNE NICE

Thurs Feb 6: Tea, biscuits, conversation and Scrabble in English or French.
Thurs Feb 13: "Derby – then and now" Presentation in English by Richard Palmer.
Fri Feb 21: Guided tour of the Fernand Léger National Museum in Biot. For more info: 04 93 81 76 74 or see fjb-nice.com
Also **NEW FRENCH CLASSES** for beginners on Mondays 10h-11h30 at Holy Trinity Church Hall, 11 bis rue de la Buffa in Nice.

THE LOW BUDGET MEN & ASSOCIATION 20,000 VIES CHARITY

Fri Feb 7: Casino Terrazur (Cagnes-sur-Mer) with special guest Paul Casey. See lowbudgetmen.com

CHRISTIANITY EXPLORED

Every Tues from Feb 11, 20h: Holy Trinity Church Cannes is running a 7-week course entitled "Christianity Explored", a deeper look into the life, the message and the person of Jesus Christ as told in Mark's Gospel. A book will be provided as part of the course. No prior theological knowledge required. Holy Trinity Church Cannes Avenue Branly. Tel: 04 93 94 54 61. See holyltrinitycannes.org

BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF THE VAR

Thurs Feb 13: Lunch and quiz at Restaurant de la Tour, Roquebrune sur Argens. Contact: events@baofthevar.com or 06 33 01 03 48

CARLA BRUNI CONCERT

Fri Feb 14, 20h30: Théâtre Debussy in Cannes.

NICE CARNIVAL

Fri Feb 14-Mar 4: King of Gastronomy. See niecearnaval.com/en for ticket information.

MIMOSA FESTIVAL

Fri Feb 14-23: Takes place in Mandelieu-La Napoule. For more see mandelieu.com

CITRON FESTIVAL IN MENTON

Sat Feb 15 to March 5: 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea. For ticket info see: fete-du-citron.com

ASSOCIATION NIÇOISE CHINE HORIZON

Sat Feb 15, 19h: Evening feast for Lantern Festival. Master Jiang, owner of the At Restaurant Wokshop (1, rue Cassini Nice, very close to Place Garibaldi), will demonstrate how to make glutinous rice dumplings, introduce the arts of Chinese culinary delights and provide special Chinese meals. Cost: €26 meal per person. Please contact to sign up: 04 93 80 31 09 - chinehorizon.com

OPEN HOUSE AT THE GRANGE WITH LUNCH

Sat Feb 15, 10h-15h: All areas are open to browse, including Posh and Not-So-Posh Paraphernalia and books. Weather permitting, sit in our lovely garden with a glass of wine and friends. Future dates: Sat Mar 15 and Sat Apr 19 & Sat May 17. For more info see: sunny-bank.org or call 04 93 47 94 20.

AMIA & VIAC LUNCH

Thurs Feb 20: Joint lunch with VIAC at Le Chantegrill, Le Tignet. Price €40 all in. To reserve please ring Douglas Goldin on 04 92 94 02 47 or douglas.goldin@wanadoo.fr. See also viac.fr

THE STAR SPANGLED BANNER

Sat Feb 22: With the International Club of the Riviera. See internationalclub.fr for details.

COMMONWEALTH CLUB OF THE RIVIERA

Sat Feb 22: Horseracing and lunch at Hippodrome, Cagnes-sur-Mer. Details on commonwealthclubriviera.com

RADA 50TH PRODUCTION

Thurs Feb 27, Fri Feb 28 & Sat Mar 1, 20h: The Riviera Amateur Dramatic Association is proud to present *Not Now Darling*, the hilarious farce by Ray Cooney and John Chapman. Performances will take place at Mougins School. Admission: €10 (incl. a free drink). Three ways to book – phone: 09 53 73 56 70, email: rada06@yahoo.com or at the English Book Centre, 12 rue Alexis Julien, Valbonne.

FESTIVAL INT'L DES JEUX 2014

Fri Feb 28-Sun Mar 2: At the Palais des Festivals in Cannes, the largest francophone games event – traditional, classic and video games. Free access! See festivaldesjeux-cannes.com

march**ASH WEDNESDAY**

Wed Mar 5, 19h30: Ash Wednesday Holy Communion. At Holy Trinity Church Cannes, Ave Branly. Tel: 04 93 94 54 61. See holytrinitycannes.org

AMIAc

Thurs Mar 6: Le Peyrebelle in Valbonne. To reserve please ring Kim on 04 93 01 20 37 or kimandgary@sky.com

COMMONWEALTH CLUB OF THE RIVIERA

Mon Mar 10: Commonwealth Day cocktail dinatoire. Details on commonwealthclubriviera.com

EASTER SERVICES

Thurs Apr 17, 20h: Maundy Thursday Holy Communion.
Fri Apr 18, from noon: Good Friday Vigil at the cross until 3pm.
Sun Apr 20, 9h: Easter Sunday Holy Communion.
Sun Apr 20, 10h30: Easter Sunday Family Communion 10h30.
At Holy Trinity Church Cannes, Ave Branly. Tel: 04 93 94 54 61. See holytrinitycannes.org

FRENCH MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Sun Mar 23 & Sun Mar 30.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY MONACO-IRELAND ARTS SOCIETY

Mar 14, 20h30: 2014 is a landmark year for us because we are celebrating our 20th anniversary (1994-2014). Our next performance on March 14th (as part of the St Patrick's week) will consist of a retrospective of pieces from our best shows featuring the most well known Irish playwrights and writers. Performance at the Auditorium du Collège Charles III, avenue de l'Annonciade, Monte-Carlo, Monaco. Telephone 04 93 41 97 22 or see website: monaco-ireland-arts.org

**COMING RIGHT UP!**

If you still have a 2003 calendar on the wall, the days and dates correspond for 2014 as well. Or you can keep your 2014 calendar until 2025 and 2031 when the days will also correspond.

2014 is a "common year" which means January and October look the same. In leap years, January and July look the same.

Valentine's Day 2014 will fall on a Friday, the Fête de la Musique on a Saturday, Bastille Day on a Monday and Christmas Day on a Thursday. Also coming up in 2014:

NICE CARNIVAL:

February 14 to March 4

CITRON FESTIVAL IN MENTON:

February 15 to March 5

FRENCH MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS:

March 23 and 30

CLOCKS CHANGE:

March 30

MONTE CARLO ROLEX MASTERS TENNIS:

April 12 to 20

TOP MARQUES MONACO SUPERCAR SHOW:

April 17 to 20

ANTIBES ART FAIR:

April 19 to May 5

ANTIBES YACHT SHOW:

April 24 to 27

CANNES FILM FESTIVAL:

May 14 to 25

MONACO FORMULA 1 GRAND PRIX:

May 22 to 25

EUROPEAN ELECTIONS IN FRANCE:

May 25

IRONMAN NICE:

June 29

SUMMER SALES ALPES-MARITIMES:

July 2 to August 5

NICE JAZZ FESTIVAL:

July 7 to 11

JAZZ FESTIVAL IN JUAN-LES-PINS:

July 12 to 20

FESTIVAL NUITS DU SUD IN VENCE:

July 12 to August 10

JAZZ FESTIVAL IN RAMATUELLE:

August 15 to 19

CANNES BOAT SHOW:

September 9 to 14

INTERNATIONAL GASTRONOMY FESTIVAL LES ETOILES DE MOUGINS

September 19 to 21

REGATTES ROYALES CANNES:

September 20 to 27

MONACO YACHT SHOW:

September 24 to 27

LES VOILES DE ST TROPEZ:

September 29 to October 5

LES GRANDE BRADERIE ST TROPEZ:

October 24 to October 28

CLOCKS CHANGE:

October 26

NICE-CANNES MARATHON:

November 7

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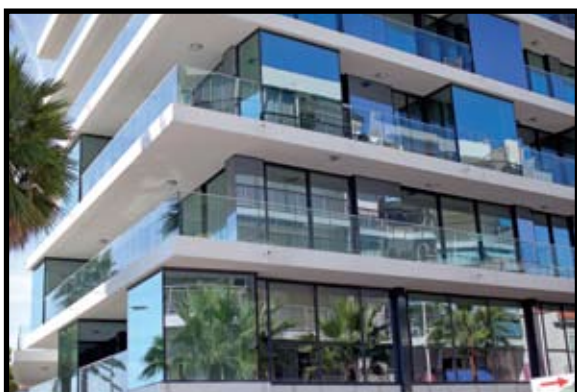
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