THE RIVIERA REPORTER

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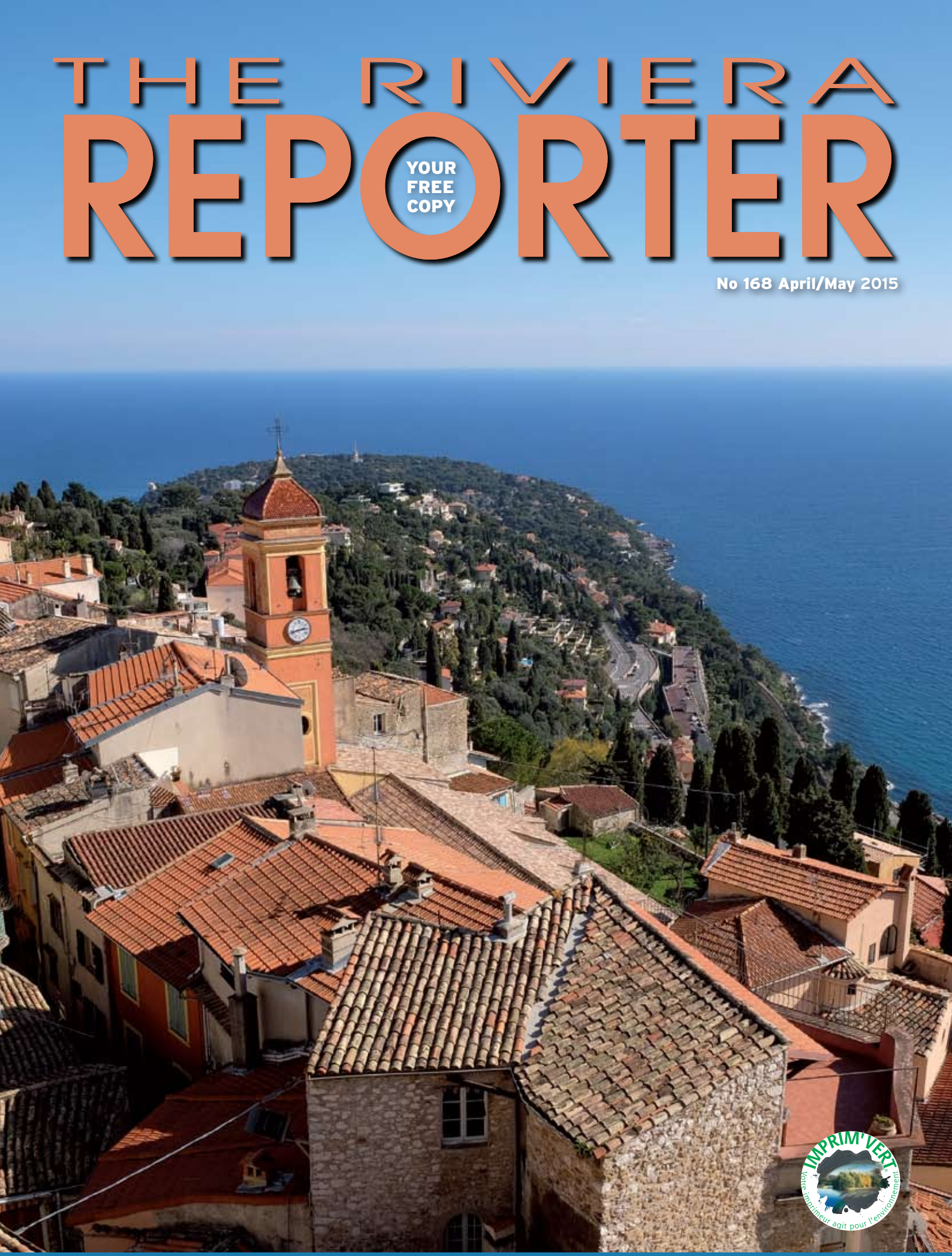

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In this issue ...

The Insider

OUR cover idea this issue comes, indirectly, courtesy of Richard McCreery, who contacted the *Reporter* about his events association in Roquebrune (page 24). What struck us as exceptional is that Richard has the honour of being the first English-speaking person to join *Les Coqs Roquebrunois* since its inception nearly 90 years ago.

Outsiders associate the French Riviera with the Cannes Film Festival and Monaco Grand Prix but the real stars are the extraordinary individuals, like Richard, that make up the international community.

This includes the Mimosa Committee (page 22), formed in 2014 by eight local expat women who wanted to do their part to raise funds and awareness in English for La Ligue Contre le Cancer (French Cancer Research Association) in Nice. Their inaugural Mimosa Ball at the Royal Mougins Golf Club last year raised €40,000. With a second cancer centre due to open soon in Antibes, the gals want "to help even more people – both Anglophone and French – as not everyone can make it to Nice".

This year's Ball is on April 17th.

Tim Clarke, our property contributor, signed up for The Maisie 100 – a 100 mile charity bike ride around Lake Como, Italy, on May 15th ... and he's never been on a bike (page 45). Last year Maisie, 16, was diagnosed with Ewing's Sarcoma, a very aggressive primary bone cancer, and her treatment involves removing her own stem cells so that, following her intensive chemo, these can replace the damaged bone marrow. Tim's training is tough but he knows it's a heck of a lot easier than what Maisie is going through.

And what about the trained volunteers at the Bereavement Support Network of the Var, whose free counselling now extends to those who have lost a beloved pet?

These people are the Riviera's shining stars.

So during this year's Film Fest, I call for an antiselfie phone-in (a modern day sit-in): take snaps of everyday people doing something good for others and post them at #anythingbutmyselfie.

Nancy Heslin, Editor

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Cover: Roquebrune-Cap-Martin ©Riviera Reporter

CANNES SEES RED PAGE 16

riviera reportage

La Belle comes with helipad ... but gold helicopter not included. Photo: Lidia Bersani

NO NEED TO LUNCH LADIES

... when you can cruise. Monaco-based interior designer Lidia Bersani has conceptualized *La Belle*, the "first luxury mega-yacht designed for a lady", which can accommodate twelve lucky gals.

Lidia saw a gender gap in the yacht market for female millionaires who might like to splash out on a toy of their own.

Catering to the lavish taste of today's women, the 80-metre super-yacht's romantic gold and ivory interiors are boldly accentuated by fur, flowers and Swarovski crystal chandeliers. State-of-the-art amenities include a library with fireplace, disco, cinema, as well as a few well-placed bars, while the beauty centre boasts a hydromassage pool, hammam and, *bien sûr*, a snow room and ice fountains. And the lift that carries you between the five decks confirms that *la vie est La Belle*.

Oh, and the price? As Lidia told one British publication, "The idea is to build the most luxurious yacht in the world with golden decorations, Swarovski crystals and some precious stones which we would like to use, it will be not cheap, I am sure."

€13.07 . That's the "fair price" for a pack of smokes in France to cover the "economic burden" of smokers on the economy, according to researchers Microeconomix. This 87% increase on today's average price is calculated from the €16.3 billion spent annually on healthcare for people who have fallen sick due to smoking-related illness plus an additional €16 billion for production loss as businesses have to replace smokers when they're sick.

The figure also represents a loss of €3.3 billion in tax revenues from premature deaths from smoking related illnesses but adds the €14 billion a year France earns from cigarette taxes – along with the savings of €6.6 billion in unpaid pensions for smokers who died early. Some 28% of the French say they are daily smokers while 34% say they smoke "from time to time".

le FLASH

THREE years ago, Verushka Danaci moved from California to France without knowing anyone, only her husband. She soon discovered the only way to meet people was through work, school, or associations, but this was all pretty limited. So Verushka decided to launch FRC – French Riviera Connect – a place that joins the French Riviera community, those who visit and those who just love it, married or single (of course, you must be over 18).

"I thought, why not create a Riviera network that connects people to either build friendships, create relationships or to go on dates?" Verushka tells the *Reporter*. "It is easier to approach someone on a social network and strike up a conversation than it is in person. The site offers private messaging, live chat, privacy, updates, and announces upcoming events.

"There is also a section for people to join groups and become part of a specific community. For example, one can join the Art Lovers group and converse with others about the latest art exhibits and organise a rendezvous. Join us today, the more the merrier."

See frenchrivieraconnect.com

NOT SO SUPER-MEGA

THIS year's Antibes Yacht Show April 23rd-26th was cancelled due to "lacklustre enthusiasm from exhibitors, their limited budgets and their tardiness in getting back to us," AYS manager, Angelique Ciurelo, told *Superyacht Business.*

The show has been replaced with "Antibes Celebrates Yachting", a two-day event put on by the Association to Support Port Vauban Evolution with reps from the yachting industry, an employment forum and seminars. Free entry. See *antibescelebratesyachting.com*

MDR in text talk, "mort de rire" is the equivalent of LOL.

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FRANCE IN THE NEWS

...in partnership with The Local

Is France's envied health care system threatened?

THOUSANDS of French doctors and health professionals took to the streets in Paris on March 22nd to protest against reforms they say will threaten the quality of France's renowned healthcare system.

For doctors in France the issue is clear. The reputation of the country's healthcare system as the best in the world is at stake.

In recent weeks France has seen doctors in hospital emergency wards go on strike over working conditions and a police memo warned that hospitals are at breaking point due to a shortage of beds and poor working conditions for staff, all exacerbated by a winter flu epidemic.

"It's like Thatcher's Britain," said the unions.

Health professionals have long demanded reforms but the minister of health's bill, set to be discussed in parliament at the end of March, has only served to provoke more anger among family doctors (GPs), who claim the quality of care they can offer will be severely undermined.

The reform prompted doctors to close their *cabinets* over Christmas as part of nationwide industrial action and they vowed to create a bureaucratic mess for the government.

Their main of bone of contention is Health Minister Marisol Touraine's plan to bring an end to a system, known as *tiers payant*, which sees patients in France pay upfront to see a doctor.

The money handed over by patients, normally €23 for a consultation, is then refunded mostly by the state's social security system and the rest by private insurance companies known as *mutuelles*.

The reform, which was an election promise of President François Hollande's and demanded by the public, will instead see doctors bill the state and private insurance companies for patients' visits.

Doctors say scrapping the system of paying upfront will see them lose their independence and will end up with them being "dictated to" by insurance companies who they will have to apply to for all reimbursements – basically their salaries.

Not only will it mean doctors having to spend hours filling in paperwork, but they will end up with less time with their patients and less independence to give the public the care they need.

"Having the patient pay upfront is the key to the system," says Dr Eric Henry who led the march to the Ministry of Health in Paris. "In France the quality of care is good because doctors are independent.

"Currently it's not the social security system that pays me, it's not the minister of health who pays me, it's my patients. I am responsible for their health," he said.

"What is the best for my patient?"

"If we change the system, it will be whichever insurance company pays me, who is responsible. The Social Security service will say to me, 'Dr Henry you are prescribing too many antibiotics', 'you are prescribing too many pills and sending people for too many tests' and they will tell me I have to prescribe less.

"I will no longer be free to ask the question 'What is the best thing for the patient's health?' I will no be longer be independent."

Henry also fears that without patients having to pay upfront they are more likely to visit the doctor "for any old reason", which will mean he will have less consultation time with each patient.

FRANCE NEWS, PAGE 6

FRANCE NEWS, FROM PAGE 5

"It will end up like in the UK," he says. "The Health Minister is not listening ... at the moment we are not sure what we will have to do to make sure she drops the reform."

Photo: Flebilis, Flickr

French bid to ban ultra-skinny models derailed

FRENCH lawmakers have rejected a proposal that would have seen ultra-skinny models banned from the catwalks of fashion-crazy France. However the MP behind the planned law has vowed the fight is not over.

Socialist MP and neurologist Olivier Véran had pushed for a ban on skinny models by proposing an amendment to Health Minister Marisol Touraine's recent reform package, which has already proved controversial and has seen doctors protesting across Paris.

Touraine herself backed the proposal that would stop model agencies being able to employ models whose Body Mass Index (BMI) falls below a certain level.

"I believe that models should eat well and look after their health. This is an important message to young women who see these models as an aesthetic example," she told French television.

Véran also proposed a new law that punishes the "glorification of anorexia", especially online.

However, both of the doctors' amendments were rejected this week by a parliamentary commission with lawmakers claiming that banning skinny models would lead to discrimination in the hiring process.

Véran had suggested that model agencies should be forced to provide a medical certificate for each model, proving that her BMI is above a healthy level or face punishment of up to six months in prison and a €75,000 fine.

French neurologist Olivier Véran claims up to 40,000 people in France are suffering from anorexia, around 90% of whom are adolescents.

However the doctor has vowed to take the fight on to the next stage.

"But we're not giving up!" Véran told French newspaper *Le Parisien* after the decision, adding that he plans to propose the law again when the reforms are discussed in parliament.

The MP doctor aims for France to catch up with other countries like Spain, Italy, Belgium, Chile and Israel, which have already passed laws against glorifying anorexia.

If France is to ban skinny models, it must also tackle stiff opposition from The National Union of Modelling Agencies (SYNAM), which complained that a law change would affect the competitiveness of French modelling.

"French modelling agencies are in permanent competition with their European counterparts. As a result, a European approach is needed," the union said in a statement.

French electrician guilty of hiding Picasso works

A FRENCH court handed down a two-year suspended sentence on March 20th to a former electrician and his wife, who hid 271 Picasso works in their garage for close to 40 years.

The court in Grasse found Pierre and Danielle Le Guennec guilty of possessing stolen goods, after a trial that made headlines in France and abroad.

The works have been seized by authorities and will be returned to the Picasso Administration, which represents the artist's heirs; there has been no value placed on the collection.

"We're disappointed," mumbled Pierre Le Guennec, now 75 and retired.

"We're honest people. Perhaps we don't know how to speak ..." he added, before his wife blurted out: "We're just little people. We don't have a great name."

Prosecutors had called for the couple to receive a five-year suspended jail sentence.

The couple's lawyer, Evelyne Rees, said she would appeal the verdict.

"At 10:00 am, we had a solar eclipse and this decision eclipses the truth," she said.

Pierre Le Guennec insisted throughout the trial that the art legend and his wife gave him the treasure trove when he was working on the last property they lived in before Picasso died in 1973.

"Picasso had total confidence in me. Maybe it was my discretion," Le Guennec told the court.

He said that one day, Picasso's wife Jacqueline came up to him and gave him a box with the 271 works inside, saying, "This is for you."

When he got home, he found what he described as "drawings, sketches, crumpled paper". Uninterested in the haul, he put the box in his garage and discovered it again decades later in 2009.

He went to Paris the following year to get the works authenticated at the Picasso Administration, but the artist's heirs promptly filed a complaint against him.

Maya Widmaier-Picasso, one of the artist's children, said: "It's a downright cheek to try and make us swallow that story."

"These works should never have been removed from the estate and from the history of art," said her half-brother, Claude Ruiz-Picasso.

During the trial, all 271 works, created between 1900 and 1932, were beamed onto a giant screen in respectful silence.

A lot of the evidence during the trial centred around why none of the works were signed, with several witnesses saying the artist would sign everything – partly to ensure against theft.

According to Gerard Sassier, the son of Picasso's long-time chambermaid, the artist once said after a theft attempt: "Anyway, nothing can be stolen as nothing is signed."

The defence argued that it would have been extremely difficult to steal from Picasso as the artist had "an amazing memory" and his property was heavily protected like a "fortress".

One of the few plaintiffs to have known Le Guennec when he was employed by the Picasso family, the artist's grand-daughter Catherine Hutin-Blay, acknowledged during the trial that the electrician did have a special relationship with the artist.

"We really trusted him. He was someone who was very familiar in the house and had an absolutely friendly relationship," she told the court. ■

French news: fast and fresh

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France's news in English

THE LOCAL fr

BUY NOW, LEAVE LATER

TELEGRAPH columnist Anna Nichols reports on a survey by the deVere Group that found 59% of Brits are giving serious thought to leaving the UK on retirement, a 10% rise since the same survey was conducted a year ago. The reasons cited were the UK's healthcare crisis, increased crime rates, benefits cuts, higher taxes and the rising cost of living. As always, "better weather" and a more relaxed lifestyle also figured. Hindrances to embarking on expat life include commitments to UK-based family and the need to remain in work longer to earn a better pension or to pay off their children's higher education costs.

At this writing, the euro is still falling. Combine the €1.40 to £1 conversion with falling property prices (even on the Riviera) and sterling earners have every reason to buy in France now. Conversely, it's the worst time in years to sell up your French property and move back to Britain. France is a buyer's market, but where are we moving to?

According to stats released to *The Local.fr* from France's National Statistics Agency INSEE, in 2011 British expats, of which there are almost 160,000 in total, assemble in certain parts of France while snubbing other regions altogether.

Some 21,000 Brits live in the Ile-de-France region, which includes Paris, making it the most popular area in France for Britons. Second place goes to Poitou-Charentes in the west of France – with its 2,400 hours of sunshine a year – where 16,300 Brits make up a third of the population.

Next most popular is Aquitaine (16,100) in the southwest, which includes the famous "Dordogneshire", and neighbouring region Midi-Pyrénnées (15,800).

There are 13,500 Brits living in Brittany and a similar number living in Rhône Alps.

But only about 200 Britons call Corsica home although the figure doubles in Champagne-Ardenne and Franche-Comté (400) and is slightly higher in Lorraine (850).

Another area that the Brits avoid is Burgundy, where around 2,300 Britons live despite the fact it ticks most boxes for the ideal French home – "scenery, cuisine and great wine on offer".

Cheap as chips and less productive, too

ON March 14th, the most British of weekly publications, *The Economist*, put the French hourly GDP well ahead of the UK claiming workers are "not terribly efficient."

Scaling Britain at 100 on their graph, the most efficient workers are American at 130, followed by Germans and French at over 120. The *Economist* reports, "The French could take Friday off and still produce more than Britons do in a week. Confounding stereotypes, Italians are 9% more productive" ... before going on to say that "Britain's workers are a bargain all the same, because their pay is so pitiful. Of the 15 initial members of the EU, only Greece and Portugal now have lower hourly wages."

The *Daily Telegraph* writes, "Britain has suffered a calamitous collapse in productivity" and "a state of steady regression towards the low-wage, low-skill characteristics of much of the developing world".

But is this productivity gap compensated for by longer work weeks? Not according to the OECD which finds that although France has an official (but not legally-obligated) 35-hour work week, the average French worker really puts in 37.5 hours, an hour more than the average Brit.

According to the *Telegraph,* "British employers have chosen cheap and easy-to-get-rid-of man hours over the capital cost of investment. One of the reasons for relatively high rates of French productivity is that the labour market is so hedged around protections that there is a positive incentive for French companies to employ as few people as possible."

The *Economist*'s conclusion is explicit: "With the recovery nearly complete, the next task for the island of cheap workers is to work out how to become an island of rich ones."

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In the grand scheme of things

BRITISH pensions are accrued mainly by capitalisation, rather than by the repartition system favoured by countries such as France. The British state pension is notoriously meagre so Britons are well advised to top up during their working lives through company or private schemes if they don't want to face pension poverty or a lifetime of toil in their old age.

One plan involved purchasing annuities that allow future pensioners to accrue a tax efficient nest egg which, since the recession, has not performed particularly well at home. If the Conservatives are elected in May, George Osborne has promised a break for expats who have kept their pension pot in British-based annuities. Under the Chancellor's scheme, rather than having to wait to take regular withdrawals, Britons – including expats – will be able to cash in their annuities for a tax-free lump sum.

That's good news for some according to Angelos Koutsoudes, head of the Overseas Guides Company, who says, "Financially comfortable expats who accrued more than one pension could benefit from future measures that would allow annuities to be exchanged for cash without a punitive tax charge."

Expats often have complex and varied working careers and financial situations so the changes – when they are implemented – won't suit everyone. British expats should consult financial experts such as Blevins Franks for advice (see ad page 13).

British briefs

... BRITAIN ranks favourably (14th out of 175 countries) on Transparency International's global corruption index. Denmark is top-of-the-list and France ranks 26th. Unsurprisingly, North Korea is at the bottom *ex aequo* with Somalia.

... IMAGINE a country where the majority of lawmakers are unelected, unaccountable, unimpeachable and often hold their position by way of their religious function, financial contribution or political cronyism. Where would that nation stand on Transparency International's corruption index? The answer is 14th because the nation is Britain with a 825 member unelected House of Lords sharing power (albeit diminished) with a democratically elected 650 member House of Commons.

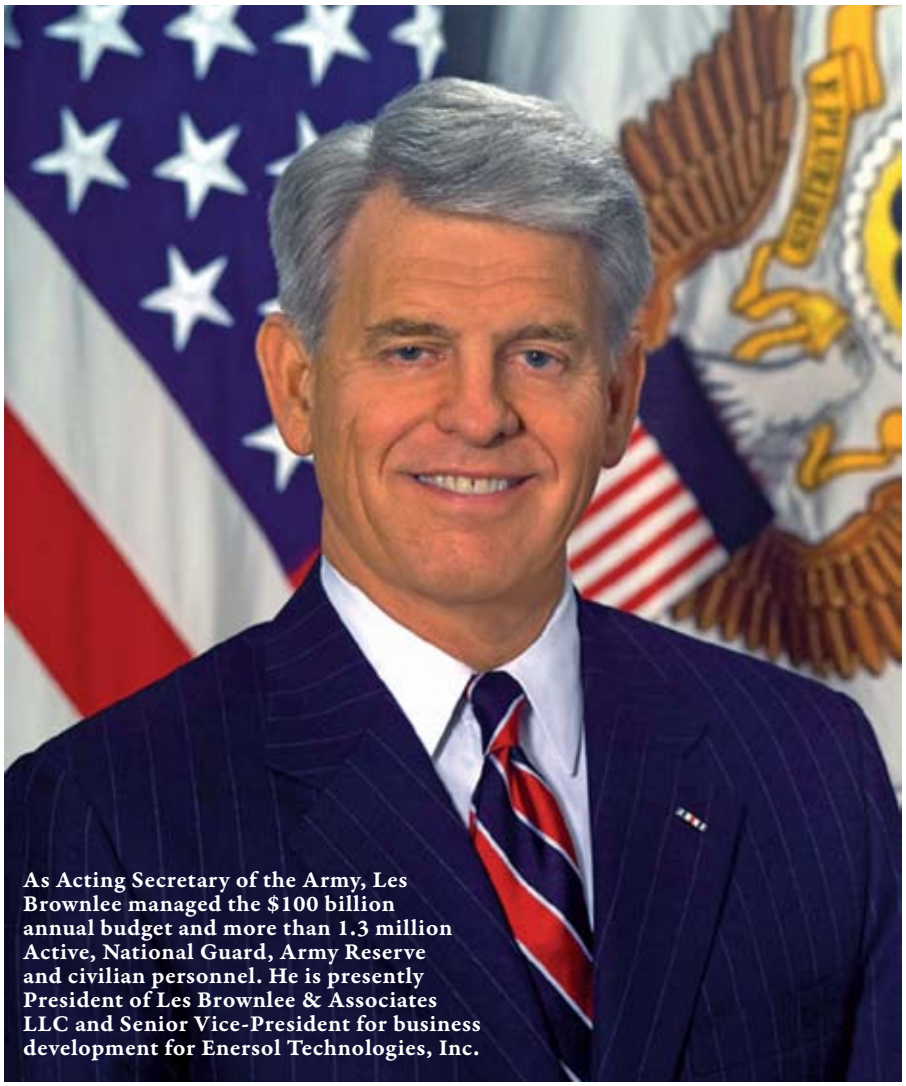
... BRITAIN was once America's closest military ally but Prime Minister Cameron's drastic cuts to military budgets have made short shrift of that long-established "special relationship" across the pond. America's new military friend is the once-maligned France, which stood alone with Washington in support of action against the Syrian regime over its use of chemical weapons and quickly joined in the air campaign against Islamic Terrorism in Iraq. Unlike Britain, France still has an aircraft carrier (the *Charles de Gaulle*) where American General Martin Dempsy held talks in the Gulf with France's top officer, General Pierre de Villiers. For the first time ever, the French flagship fell under American command in air strikes against the ISIS and American F-18 fighters have landed on the French carrier while French Rafales touched down on American carriers in the Gulf.

... SHE shares her name with the former royal yacht and was christened by that yacht's last cruise mistress, Queen Elizabeth II herself. The new 143,000-ton P&O *Britannia* (below) is the largest ship ever built for the British market and her cruise schedule will bring her and her consignment of 3647 passengers to Riviera waters on a regular basis. With her red, white and blue painted Union Jack bow, she'll be easy to spot in Villefranche. ■

Photo: Brian Burnell

THE MONACO US ECONOMIC FORUM

A lifetime of service



As Acting Secretary of the Army, Les Brownlee managed the $100 billion annual budget and more than 1.3 million Active, National Guard, Army Reserve and civilian personnel. He is presently President of Les Brownlee & Associates LLC and Senior Vice-President for business development for Enersol Technologies, Inc.

BY PJ HESLIN

THIS summer's inaugural Monaco US Economic Forum, which takes place June 8th to 12th under the High Patronage of H.S.H. Prince Albert, will see some of America's brightest business and political minds come together in the hopes of promoting "The Importance of Sustained Dialogue Between the Western and Eastern Worlds: A Public Peace Process".

And perhaps nobody knows better the dire consequences of a breakdown in international communication than Forum attendee Les Brownlee.

Les Brownlee has the distinction of having served two tours of duty in combat in Vietnam, coming home with two Silver Stars, three Bronze Stars and the Purple Heart. Following a 22-year career in the Army and retirement as a Colonel, he began a career of almost 18 years as a member of the staff of the US Senate. As a member of the professional staff and later Staff Director of the Committee on Armed Services, he was deeply involved in the national security and foreign policy issues of the United States, travelling throughout the world with members of the committee. He was appointed Under Secretary of the Army on Nov 14th, 2001 and became Acting Secretary of the Army from May 10th, 2003 until Nov 18th, 2004, serving in tandem as both Acting Secretary of the Army and Under Secretary of the Army for 18 months. Brownlee became the longest-serving Acting Secretary of the Army in history.

I had the pleasure recently to speak with the former Secretary from his home in Arlington, Virginia, about what he feels he can bring to the roundtable. He told me that when he was asked to participate, he asked himself the same question. "I'm flattered and honored to be included in this group. I'll be there to learn and contribute where I can on issues that I'm familiar with – like national security and perhaps in some areas of foreign policy."

Brownlee's answer was typical of the conversation we had: humble and forthright. Although a decorated soldier who has served his country with distinction, Brownlee seemed surprised that I would even want to feature him in this series, stating that he'd prefer to stay out of the limelight.

Given recent events in Ukraine, I was extremely curious as to how a former Secretary of the Army would feel about 2015 as the "Year of Russia in Monaco" and whether this influenced his participation in the Forum. His answer was tactful – but direct.

"I don't speak for the people of Monaco, but only as a private citizen of the United States. I do, however, believe Russian actions in Ukraine detract greatly from the good intentions of the people of Monaco to recognize Russia and the Russian people in this way. I believe that the takeover of Crimea, now by Putin's own admission, brought about by Russian troops under his personal direction and the aggressive actions by Russian troops, tanks and heavy weapons in eastern Ukraine, clearly violate international law. We haven't had boundary changes by force in Europe like this since World War II. With the other nations of Western Europe and the United States now imposing sanctions on Russia for their illegal actions, I am surprised, frankly, that

the 'Year of Russia in Monaco' has not been cancelled."

Brownlee furthered his point of view by adding that he understands that these sanctions cause hardships for the Russian economy and the Russian people and hopes the majority of Russians do not agree with what Mr Putin is doing and that summits like these might help lead to a decrease in tensions. "The people of Ukraine are fighting to defend their country and their newly-won freedom and the American people support their efforts. I believe we need to achieve a sustainable ceasefire, ensure the removal of all foreign forces, work toward restoration of international boundaries and allow the people of Ukraine to decide, without outside interference, how they wish to be governed. Otherwise, the Western Nations will have to consider increasing economic sanctions and providing lethal weapons and equipment to the Ukrainians."

Brownlee, who holds a Masters of Business Administration from the University of Alabama, hopes the Monaco US Economic Forum can help lead to positive change, especially when it comes to the area of free trade. "I would hope that the dialogue might provide a better understanding of issues which currently preclude and inhibit the free exchange of ideas and trade – trade among countries that might improve the lives of people and raise standards of living in many countries."

As a former Secretary of the Army, I wanted to approach Brownlee on his take on ISIS and what should be done. Before giving me an answer, he was always quick to point out that nowadays he was privy only to the same information I was, and constantly praised the efforts of those in the military (regardless of rank) who are presently serving their country. "The US military is working hard to defeat ISIS. ISIS is a dangerous menace to the world and we have to be prepared to support other nations who are threatened by these terrorists – to help train and equip their forces and, where necessary, be prepared to go to war along with them, not only to assist them but to protect our own security and national interests. But you can't do things half way. You have to apply enough of the right kinds of combat power to get the job done."

When you look at his record, it's no wonder that Brownlee doesn't believe in doing things half way. In 1962 he was commissioned as a lieutenant of infantry in the US Army after graduating from the University of Wyoming. Following parachute and Ranger training, he served the two aforementioned tours as a paratrooper in Vietnam. He later became aware of a problem of cohesion there within some Army units, due in large part to the way units and personnel were managed. Once units arrived in Vietnam, the units remained there for years, replenished by individual

MONACO US, PAGE 12

Tax it or leave it

ACCORDING to the US Treasury Department, a record 3,415 Americans renounced their citizenship in 2014, up from 2,999 in 2013 (which was already a 221% increase on the year prior).

And as of Sept 12th 2014, the cost of giving up a US passport or Green Card is fives times more expensive. Americans must now pay a fee of $2,350 compared to $450.

For many US expats, the question is no longer "if" but "when" to relinquish citizenship between the impact of America's global income tax compliance, the introduction of FBAR and FACTA – "the systematic turning over of American names by foreign banks all over the world".

In any case, locally-based US Tax Consultant George Donnelly (see ad below) reminds Americans living overseas that there is an automatic extension until June 15th to file taxes, and a request for a second extension to October 15th can be filed before this date. However, if anyone owes the IRS, they should pay on or before April 15th or an interest penalty will begin to accrue.

See George Donnelly's FACTA article in the next *Reporter* (June/July edition).

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A LIFETIME OF SERVICE. Left: April 1966, Les Brownlee commanding a rifle company of Paratroopers in Vietnam. Top: Christmas Day 2001, Under Secretary of the Army Brownlee at Bagram AFB in Afghanistan to visit the troops. Above: Brownlee shortly before speaking at the ceremonies welcoming soldiers home from war zones.

MONACO US, FROM PAGE 11

replacements. Experienced soldiers in Vietnam served with new recruits they didn't know. Soldiers were unfamiliar with each other, unit cohesion and esprit were adversely affected.

As Staff Director of the US Senate Armed Services Committee from 1996-2001, Brownlee was revered and respected by both Democrat and Republican Senators before his tour at the highest level of the Army at the Pentagon.

When he became Acting Secretary of the Army in 2003, he realized that an occupation force was going to be necessary in Iraq and was determined not to make the same mistakes that had plagued the Army in Vietnam. "I was not going to allow what happened in Vietnam to happen in Iraq. I directed the Army to plan to rotate by units not by individual replacements." His policy resulted in the controversial stop-loss program and while the relatively small number of soldiers negatively affected by stop-loss were not altogether happy with it, Brownlee believes that the change in rotation policy significantly improved unit cohesion and esprit, morale, combat effectiveness and resulted in fewer casualties overall.

Instead of shipping individual replacements to replenish units, the Army organized, equipped and trained units, then shipped intact units over to replace other units. These soldiers trained together for months in their unit before deployment. After a brief transition period, the soldiers in a unit, which had completed its tour of duty, redeployed, returning home together – as a unit. Brownlee left no doubt that he believed these units were better, more combat effective units because of this change in policy and gives all the credit for its success to the enthusiastic and exemplary way this system was executed by the Army.

Although his tenure as Secretary of the Army ended in 2004, Les Brownlee still has informed opinions on how the Army could meet today's challenges, especially in terms of technology. "When we go to war, we go to war as a joint force militarily. So all of our military services must stay on the leading edge of technology. We're doing a lot in the area of cyber threats but you have to constantly push the limits of technology. When it comes to communications, we have to be sure that our information is secure and on the right networks."

Finally, I address the issue of those who serve our country. Does he think there is enough support to help those in the armed services? "Improvements have been made to the GI Bill and the Veterans Administration has a lot of hardworking people there working on behalf of our Veterans, but when it comes to those who are seriously wounded in combat or training for combat, in my view, we can never do enough for them and the sacrifices they and their families have made." ■

The Monaco US Business Roundtable was cofounded by Mike Powers and Susan Feaster in 2014, and aims to build stronger relations between the two countries in the fields of education, government, business, culture and sport. For more information about the June 8th to 12th Economic Forum, contact President Susan Feaster at MonacoUS.BRT@gmail.com

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In a league of their own

IT was a first – even for the famed Carlton Hotel in Cannes, which thought it had seen it all, from hosting demanding A-List celebs to being victim to one of the biggest jewelry heists of all time in 2013. Yet in the hotel's California Room on February 28th, USN Commander Edwin Grohe was sworn in as a full captain following the AGM of the Navy League of the United States, French Riviera Council.

Captain Grohe, as he became that day, is the USN 6th Fleet Liaison Officer in Toulon, where he is stationed in proximity to the French Mediterranean fleet. He is a veteran of 2500 flight hours and over 640 arrested carrier landings, one of the most demanding tasks of a naval aviator.

The ceremony was performed by Vice Admiral James G. Foggo III, who had flown in from Naples where he commands the US 6th Fleet and NATO Naval Strike Forces. After the Admiral's keynote speech, the room was open for questions and perhaps the most telling came from a French guest: What to do about terrorism? Vice Admiral Foggo's answer was direct: "Negotiation doesn't work with these people. That leaves eradication." For a brief moment there was dead silence then an outbreak of applause – a point upon which American and French opinions converge.

The day was also an occasion for Navy Leaguers – including their many French members – to meet Monique Quesada, the new US Consul General in Marseille. Ms Quesada, who recently replaced Diane E. Kelly, was born in Venezuela and was naturalized at the age of eight in Houston, Texas. She has been stationed in London, Afghanistan, Rome, Athens, Martinique and Morocco, and speaks an impressive seven languages including Arabic, Dari and Modern Greek.

When Navy League President Kees van Vliet presented her with a bouquet of tulips, she thanked him in Dutch and introduced herself to the assembly, taking questions in perfect French.

There have been diminishing visits by 6th Fleet ships to Riviera ports. In the Sixties and Seventies, hardly a month went by without a visit by a carrier group or the "amphibs" with their contingent of Marines. Sometimes love blossomed and Villefranche – home port of the 6th Fleet flagship until 1967 – especially is still home to many children fathered by American sailors, many of whom stayed on to marry their French sweethearts after their military service. ■

Edwin Grohe is sworn in as Captain at the Carlton Hotel in Cannes.

Monique Quesada replaces Diane E. Kelly as the new US Consul General in Marseille.

THE BEAUTY AND THE BULLDOZER

BY MOLLY BROWN

AS many local residents spend the winter months on the ski slopes or cruising in the Caribbean, and much of the heavy traffic goes underground through a maze of new tunnels, the streets were pretty quiet after New Year, so the government repaired a few roads, knocked down a few old buildings, built some new ones and pressed ahead with their ambitious future plans. In February, the government proudly announced a final income for 2014 of €1,111.4 million, compared with €945.1 million in 2013, a 17.6% increase, of which fiscal income was €849.1 million for 2014 compared with €695.9 million in 2013, an increase of 22.1%. Net results from TVA and taxes were the highest in 5 years, 25.2% higher than 2013. The receipts from the real estate sector were €97.1 million in 2014, 10.6% higher than the previous year and the government is confident that real estate is a good investment for a sustainable development in the future. Consequently, Monaco is on the march, onwards, upwards and soon to go outwards; the offshore "rig" which has been exploring the seabed has moved closer inshore, near the spot where the 6-hectare, €1 billion land extension will begin in the not too far distant future.

Progress or vandalism

HOWEVER, not only the government is focused on financial gain ... where does it all stop? After devouring half of the Hotel de Paris, currently being "reconstructed", a monstrous long-necked bulldozer with dinosaur-like jaws crawled down to the beach at dead of night and ruthlessly tore down the historic Palais de la Plage, a jewel of Belle Époque architecture, built a century ago so magnificently and with such style that it took the destroyers three nights and days to bring it to its knees. Its destruction has shocked and saddened everyone, particularly the grandson of the Italian who built it, who lives in the Principality. Unbelievably, the first palace to be built on the beach was not a "protected" building as it would be in Britain and most European countries and the only solace is that the government building permit only allows the owner, a wealthy local real estate developer, to construct a 10-storey building, instead of the tower block he envisaged, but many buildings behind will lose their sunlight and view. A thing of beauty is a joy but not always forever.

A silent spring

OTHER memorable events this spring: there was a partial eclipse of the sun and just as rare an event, AS Monaco beat Arsenal 3-1. Another brilliant success was Monte-Carlo Opera's production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and a sparkling Bal de la Rose on March 28th heralds the beginning of the summer season. Despite the occasional April shower, shops are ablaze with flowers and chocolate Easter eggs, so away with the little black dresses and out with Easter bonnets for springtime's main event, the Monte-Carlo Rolex Masters (Apr 11th-19th) at Monaco's glamorous Country Club, the players' favourite venue on the ATP tour. Centre court seats for the finals are like gold dust and sell out quickly, for the world's ten top players compete in this star-studded tennis tournament, as much a lively social occasion as an international sporting event. After last year's defeat by his Swiss friend Wawrinka, the many fans of the world's favourite tennis superstar, Roger Federer, are hoping he will win the single's title this year.

If you prefer wheels to racquets, check out the Grimaldi Forum where the first LikeBike exhibition – "the most glamour bicycle show on earth" Apr 3rd to 5th – kicks off with a night race on the port (Mar 29th). The fastest electric cars are EVER's main event (Mar 31st-Apr 2nd) while Top Marques Monaco always presents the most luxurious bespoke cars, with boats and luxury goods to match (Apr 16th-19th). Meanwhile hundreds of workers will be erecting the giant tribunes for the Principality's main car racing event, the Monaco Grand Prix. The youngest newcomer, Max Verstappen, at 17 years old is the talk of the town, but the real question of the moment is ... will Hamilton win again? ■

The demolition of the Palais de Plage started in the early hours of Wed Feb 25th. The building, seen as "the Coast's most beautiful", will be replaced by a 10-storey residence.

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Paying for others' mistakes

BY PETER JOHNSON

AFTER dealing with French bureaucracy for over 30 years, I have thousands of anecdotal stories to tell, not *all* bashing the French system, as I'm sure bureaucracies are inefficient in other countries all over the world.

The RSI, though, takes some beating. A couple of episodes in recent weeks high-light their problems. Client A, a Dutch national living in the Var, set up a small "micro" business in 2007, long before the advent of the *Auto-Entreprise*. In 2007, social security contributions were collected directly by the various individual factions: CIPAV for pensions, RSI/RAM for medical and URSSAF for family allowances, unemployment benefits etc.

Client A pays his bills on time every year until, in 2014, he receives a massive "extra" bill for €16,000. Why? Quite simply because someone somewhere had forgotten to send a bill for the URSSAF contributions. So, you surmise, not really the guy's fault and there must be a way of resolving this, with perhaps a helpful suggestion from the people who made the initial mistake.

Not a bit of it. After several visits from bailiffs chasing the "debt", Client A is at a loss as to what he can do. He's proposed paying off as much as he can per month, but URSSAF want him to pay nearly double, for *their* mistake. No hint of an apology from those responsible!

Client B lives in the Alpes-Maritimes and set up as a *Profession Liberale* (PL) in 2008, paying ad hoc as Client A, except no one forgot him. If anything, he seemed to be paying TWICE for everything

Having switched from PL to *Gérant* of his own company in 2010 it was quite possible that the RSI agencies from the PL days were still collecting, even though he was now supposedly paying RSI Nice as a *Gérant* of a commercial activity.

Having spent half a day at the RSI Nice office, it transpires that although RSI Nice can visualize Client B's existence in their computer system, they cannot access any data, because this is held by RSI PL in Paris! I thought, perhaps foolishly, that computers were meant to talk to each other. Anyway, Client B is still totally in the dark about his situation and thousands of euros light in his bank account.

These two stories are among thousands all of which contributed to a mass demonstration in Paris during the second week of March by self-employed people totally exasperated by the hopeless way RSI and URSSAF manage their social security. Many have even questioned the legitimacy of the RSI and have voluntarily "opted out". RSI offices will be "occupied" by protestors on April 9th unless something is done about their hopeless management. ■

"VICTOIRE" for second-home owners in France

LEADING on from the last edition, France has finally lost its war against British second-home owners, after the European Court ruled it "illegal" to charge social charges on gains from renting or selling (the infamous 15.5% of *prélèvements sociaux*).

France will have to reimburse tens of millions of euros to British and other EU non-resident owners.

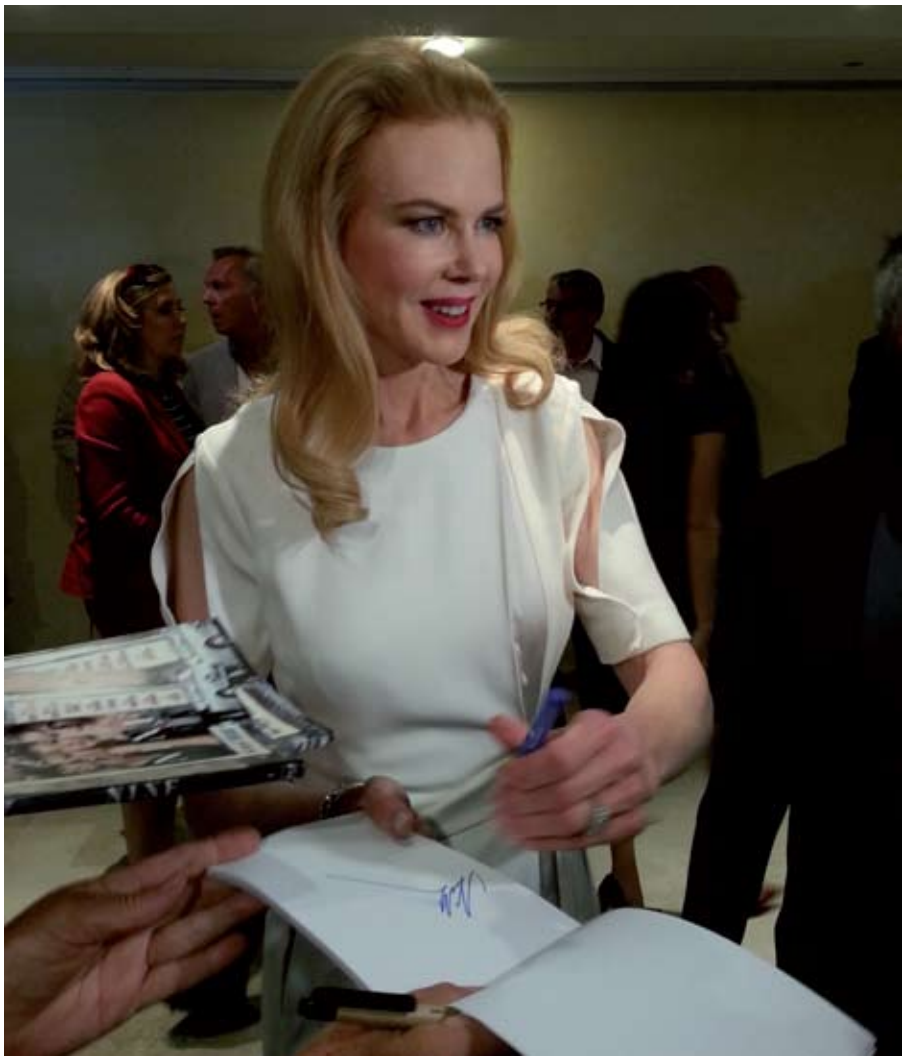
Anyone who has been charged over the last two years must put in a claim to the French tax office for a reimbursement by December 31st, 2015.

The first step in the claim process is to send a recorded delivery letter (*lettre recommandé avec accusé de réception*) contesting the social charges and requesting a refund as per the Regulation (EEC) No 1408/71. Send the letter to the Centre des Impôts des Particuliers Non-résidents, 10 rue du Centre, TSA 10010, F-93465, NOISY-LE-GRAND Cedex; the claim can also be made online directly from your personal account at *impots.gouv.fr*

A sample letter can be found easily online or via the *Reporter*.

Cannes and the French: "Je t'aime moi non plus"

BY ELODIE PEYRANO



AAH May. In France, one of the most anticipated months of the year. For students, there are only a couple of weeks till summer break; for those working, it's the month with the most bank holidays (five!); and for movie addicts it's the Cannes Film Festival. Cannes isn't the only film festival in the world but it's definitely THE one, as proven by the invasion of world media that suddenly rush to the French Riviera just to talk about films. But do the French actually enjoy it?

For the critics lucky enough to attend, the Cannes Film Festival – the 68th edition runs this year from May 13th to 24th – is twelve days of pure cinematic joy. They're watching movies day in and day out, and can discover some really wonderful indie titles, while pounding out reviews. Yet for film lovers, it can be quite frustrating as, unlike other festivals such as Sundance or Deauville, it's quite closed to the public. Okay, so the city of Cannes and Cannes Cinéphiles offer some lucky residents accreditation or tickets to see films in competition but meanwhile, for those not living in Cannes, well it's a matter of patience and tears. Except maybe if you're unemployed and thus have lots of time to spare standing outside the Palais de Festival every morning with other desperados holding "Tickets wanted" signs in the hopes that someone gives his ticket away; otherwise there's not much chance to see the films until they're officially released.

While la Croisette transforms into a moving billboard for the film studios – where else could you suddenly see the "Expendables" cast riding atop of a tank – Cannes can be quite a nightmare for the locals, a disruptive world that they're forced into. You can't drive easily and you can't park. Suddenly, for no reason, an entire road will be closed because they're preparing a festival event and your little café, where you love to sip your daily café crème, is suddenly overrun with crowds of people on computers or with tons of magazines talking only about DP, directors, shots, actors ... etc. And even if you can avoid the journalists, you'll have to endure the passionate celebrity hunters.

You see them every single year with their chairs, their stepladders, their cameras and, of course, their little notebooks for autographs. They wait all day long in the hope of seeing someone famous – even though many of them have no idea who they are. Celebrities ... perhaps the main reason why Cannes is widely followed by many media outlets worldwide; a compact paradise for fans and photographs but also the stars climbing the famous stairs.

More than for its prestigious Palme d'Or award, the festival is well known for its red carpet, that brief moment when it becomes the centre of the universe.

A spotlight so significant that many celebrities attend it without staying for the screening, but make sure the pics get out via social networks. This is why we can see more and more reality TV personalities at Cannes, making the festival more about showing off than celebrating films. And the French audience also shares this feeling. Many admit that they don't read the reviews of the film but avidly watch celebrities on the red carpet.

So what about the films, the reason why this festival was created? Well, despite being one of the most prestigious film festivals on the planet, Cannes isn't that helpful for the movies themselves.

To receive a prize in Cannes, including the Palme d'Or, doesn't equate to box-

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office success. Most of the winners tend to be a commercial failure in France once they're released. Of course, there have been some exceptions. "The Artist", the big surprise of the 2011 festival, was a commercial success, seen by, according to CBO box-Office, more than 3 million people in France but its Best Actor and Top Dog prize in Cannes had nothing to do with it. The film mainly benefitted from its popular duo Jean Dujardin and Michel Hazanavicius, as well as from its distributor Harvey Weinstein, well known from bringing small films to the firmament.

"Blue is the Warmest Color", which won Cannes in 2013, had about one million viewers and was the most profitable film of the year but, in terms of box-office success in France, it was less than "Les Profs" (3 million), "9 mois ferme" (1.997 million) or "Les garçons et Guillaume, à table!" (2.156 million). None of these enjoyed the Cannes' spotlight. Moreover, "Blue is the Warmest Color" was heavily helped by its political theme, LGBT rights, just as France passed its same-sex marriage law (exactly the same way Michael Moore's "Fahrenheit 9/11", winner of the Palme d'Or in 2004, was boosted by its theme and the political situation at the time of its release).

With a few exceptions, movies selected at the Cannes Film Festival seem to suffer from the curse. And the trend isn't limited to French cinema, even American films experience it. "Foxcatcher", awarded with the Best Director prize in Cannes, totally failed at the French box-office despite its great cast (Steve Carell, Channing Tatum, Mark Ruffalo), positive reviews and its five 2015 Oscar nominations. Ditto for "Maps to the Stars", for which Julianne Moore received the Best Actress award last year (see page 32), was only seen by about 100,000 moviegoers – surely a surprise for a film directed by David Cronenberg and starring (supposedly) bankable stars like Moore and Robert Pattinson of "Twilight" fame.

So can we presume that official films selected at Cannes are just simply not good? Absolutely not. In fact, when asked, the French admit they give the cold shoulder to these films mainly because "they seem boring" or "too intellectual" and they'll only put you to sleep.

In the end, apart from the image of celebrities, Cannes is mainly a professional event that leaves the rest of the world slightly neglected – and in the case of local residents, flustered. ■

Americanophile Elodie Peyrano is a graduate of Nice's École du Journalisme. This is her first series written in English.

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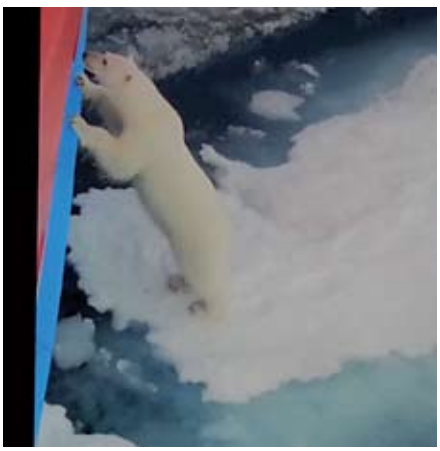
BEYOND THE ARCTIC CIRCLE:

In search of the polar bear

BY CAREN TRAFFORD

I LOVE wildlife programmes but I never believed that the photographs and videos – those close-ups of polar bears as they frolicked on pure white ice floes or ambled with their cubs across huge expanses of white snow – could be taken by someone other than a professional photographer. And yet, there I was, hanging over the side of a bright red, converted car ferry, across from the 80th parallel, only a few hundred kilometres south of the North Pole, with my pretty average camera. Not ten metres below me, a solitary, playful polar bear, sauntered along the edge of the ice pack, checking out the hull of our ship. It looked up at me and sniffed. Had it been attracted by the bacon, that only a few minutes earlier, the chef had been preparing in the galley? Now ... no one was left in the dining room. All the passengers and even the crew of our 124-passenger ship *MS Expedition* were dangling over the edges,

It was a moment that a wildlife photographer would've bragged about for years: the polar bear stood on its hind legs and put its paws on the ship.



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on all deck levels, trying to capture the moment on film. And then it happened. The polar bear, stood up on its hind legs, and put its paws on the ship. It was a moment that any wildlife photographer would have bragged about for years. And I captured it on my little camera.

One of the last unmapped areas of the globe in the late 19th century was the North Pole. So what better place to explore at the beginning of the 21st century, than a land that even Google hasn't covered.

A trip beyond the Arctic Circle would be one of the greatest wilderness trips on anyone's bucket list. And for nature lovers, such as our group, it was a very special week. Leaving from the island of Svalbard, the most northerly reach of Norway, the trip to the starting point is an adventure in itself. A three-hour flight north from Oslo, Svalbard is a series of islands in the middle of the Arctic Ocean. A part of Norway, this archipelago is the northernmost point in the world with a permanent human population. Aside from scientific research, the only other reason that planes are full to capacity in the summer is that from here is your best chance to see polar bears.

The Arctic casts a very special spell and during the summer months, when the sun never sets, there is no better time to explore this harsh land. From Longyearbyen, we took an 8-day cruise around the islands, and encountered polar bears, walrus, seals, arctic fox, grazing reindeer, whales, and a variety of birds that all coexist here for a few brief months in summer.

Over the eight days, we sailed at the top of the world, past spectacular scenery. Ice gouged fjords, multicoloured rocky cliffs covered with breeding colonies of terns and dark blue icebergs carved fresh from gigantic glaciers. The immense grandeur of the scenery is unforgettable.

And if photographing wildlife from the safety of the cruise ship wasn't enough of a drawcard, we were encouraged to get active and go overboard! Twice a day, we donned bright red parkas, waterproof trousers and large wellington boots and climbed down into small but fast and stable zodiac speedboats, for some up close and personal encounters with nature.

We meandered past seals, sleeping soundly on the ice pack carpets, gazed up at mammoth glaciers and icebergs and explored the coast on foot. Covered in ice pack for most of the year, it is during the short summer months that the wild flowers on the tundra make their appearance.

Some days we navigated the zodiacs through dozens of smaller icebergs bobbing happily in the bays. Other days we climbed ashore and walked up the shale beaches to photograph sleeping mounds of belching walruses, some so large (above) they couldn't walk. Rather, they had to roll down the stony shore and into the sea.

It was the perfect break from everyday life. For just over a week we immersed ourselves in the beautiful territory of the North. Although we were at the top of the world, it was like being on a different planet. A place where only the immediate surroundings had any meaning. No internet, no telephones (it really was a different world); only our cameras, the wilderness and immense sheets of ice glittering in the ever-present rays of the sun. ■

For more information on this cruise, see: cruisenorway.com/8-day-realm-of-the-polar-bear-voyage.

Caren Trafford writes environmental books for kids – see planetkids.biz *– and lives in Provence.*

ORGANIC MATTERS

BY SCOTT BELL

THESE days it's difficult to avoid the word "organic" – or *bio* in French – and seeing the European organic logo, that green flag with its 12 white stars in the shape of a leaf, popping up on food and beverage packaging.

Products sold in France additionally have the green square "AB" logo, which stands for "Agriculture Biologique". A product bearing this label means that one of the several authorised certifying agencies in France has audited and approved the company and its production processes behind the product to claim that the product has been produced in accordance with European organic regulations.

What the heck is "bio"?

AS defined on the official EU agriculture website (*ec.europa.eu/agriculture/organic*), "Put simply, organic farming is an agricultural system that seeks to provide you, the consumer, with fresh, tasty and authentic food while respecting natural life-cycle systems."

How does a farm get recognised?

EU Agriculture and Rural Development has specific requirements including wide crop rotation, restrictions of chemical pesticides, synthetic fertilisers, antibiotics and other substances (genetically modified organisms – GMOs –are banned) and livestock must be raised in a free-range, open-air environment with a diet of organic fodder.

Do we really care if it's organic?

A DEFINITIVE answer is outside the scope of this article. That said, it is probably fair to say there exists more than a casual link between the growing rates of chronic disease in Western society and the ever growing dependence on industrially grown, factory-processed, nutrient-poor and pesticide-laden foods and beverages.

Personally, I am convinced that adopting a diet primarily made up of organically grown foods is essential and, having weighed the options, more and more people are in agreement.

According to IFOAM, the European umbrella organization for organic food and farming, European retail sales of organic food totalled €22.8 billion in 2012, more than double since 2004. The three largest markets for organic food were Germany (34%), France (19%) and the UK (10%). During the same period, European farmland used for organic agriculture has also doubled and, in 2012, made up 5.6 % of total EU farming area.

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Where can we find organic products on the Côte d'Azur?

ALL major supermarkets such as Carrefour, LeClerc and Casino, are rapidly increasing their offering of organic products. In fact, according to IFOAM, almost 50% of all *bio* labelled products are sold in the *grande surface* supermarkets.

However, the most effective approach is to go to a specialised organic store. In most towns along the Riviera there are independent shops as well as several chains like BioCoop, La Vie Claire and others that provide a wide and generally price competitive offering.

A good local example is The BioCoop in Mouans-Sartoux. The store was opened over eight years ago by Patrick Louvet and his partner. Patrick arrived from Nantes with the specific goal of opening an organic market. He first tried to find the right combination of affordable space, receptive community and good local suppliers in Nice. After a less than fruitful search, he found himself meeting up with the mayor of Mouans-Sartoux, Mr Aschieri, who as a long-term ecologist and in office since 1974, was eager to have an important organic market in his town. So with some speedy cooperation, BioCoop was up and running in 2007. Now with close to 500m^2 Patrick is again in discussion with Mr Aschieri to find an even bigger location.

According to Patrick, his client profile is made up of three typical consumer types: first, the "committed" and long-time organic customer that will only eat high quality organic food; second, people not particularly well off, but who are committed to improving the quality of the food they are eating; and last, those with disposable income that may be vacationing in the area or have a second residence close by and want to obtain the same high quality food as in their home regions.

Independent *bio* shops are also adding ever more local and imported organically labelled products to their stock. Most of the staff in these smaller shops tend to be well informed and take the time to help you with selecting the ideal product.

Look at Opio Nature, at the Centre Commercial Font-Neuve, where Celine, Matthias, Nicole and Maurice have created a real family affair and their reputation for quality and exceptional service brings clients from as far as Grasse and Nice.

Then, in the Alpes-Maritimes you have several organic farms, with farmers like Jean Louis Ruggeri and Joelle Zeraffa from La Raiola in Nice, who frequently sell their produce either on site or at their local farmers' markets.

Jean Louis and Joelle have been farming organically for over 25 years. "It is the only way we know and we intend to keep growing like this for as long as possible." They supply produce to some of the finest restaurants on the Riviera, but derive great satisfaction selling at the famous Cours Saleya market in the Old Town of Nice on the weekends.

6 out of 10 French regularly consume organic products (62 % vs. 49% in 2013)

1st estimate: the market for organic products hit €5 billion in 2014

1.1 million hectares for organic cultivation in 2014 (+ 4% from 2013)

Source: agencebio.org

Over the last several years, certified organic restaurants have been popping up in the region as well. Helen Walker from Chez Helen in the old town of Antibes (35 Rue des Revennes) is one of the pioneers on the Côte d'Azur for organic dining. A passionate vegetarian who has travelled and worked on organic farms and restaurants throughout Europe and the Far East, Helen does all the cooking, and with manager Sebastian Gaucherand, they serve a range of vegan and *bio* dishes that change with the season and local offerings of the region.

Is organic worth the extra effort and cost?

"MY Uncle Guido's fresh garden tomatoes are better than anything organic."

That may well be but, again, the *bio* certification is intended to keep food natural and free of poisonous chemicals. It is not a stamp of quality.

Like "Uncle Guido's tomatoes", which have probably been grown organically for many generations, getting food locally from producers that you know and trust is one of the healthier life choices you can make.

In the absence of knowing the source and producer of your food, the *bio* label is one of the best ways to ensure that you and your family are eating clean, wholesome and nutritious food. ■

For more on Scott, see pureflowcoco.com

Scenting success in beating cancer

BELLES OF THE BALL: Expats helping the cancer cause locally (L-R) Juliette Clarkin, Sara Parks, Ellie Goblet d'Alviella, Gemma Bishop, Anissa Perkins, Sophie James, Emma Nyman and Marilen Kenington.

BY KAREN HOCKNEY

ONE in two of us will be affected by cancer at some point in our lives. A frightening statistic that has inspired eight expats to pool their considerable talents and create a unique fundraising event that will benefit cancer sufferers throughout the Riviera.

The Mimosa Ball was first held in the spring of 2014 and raised an astonishing €40,000. Originally planned as an every other year benefit, the Mimosa Committee received such overwhelming feedback that they have organised a second event, to be held once again at The Royal Mougins Golf Club on April 17th.

The combined funds from the two charity balls will go directly towards the opening of a new Espace Ligue centre in Antibes – where cancer sufferers and their families can receive free counselling, support and alternative therapies – as part of *La Ligue Contre le Cancer* (a French Cancer Research Association).

Committee member Juliette Clarkin tells me: "Like many people, all of us on the committee have been touched by cancer. Currently, there is one Espace Ligue in Nice and of the 8,000 cancer sufferers annually in the department, around 500 people go through their doors to avail themselves of different therapies or just drop in to have a cup of coffee and a chat.

"Unfortunately when you are undergoing treatment for cancer, not only does it affect you physically, it isolates you and strips you of who you are in every way. You can become housebound and not want to go out and socialise. The Espace Ligue is a safe haven to go to meet other people who are experiencing the same thing.

"The Alpes-Maritimes' second Espace Ligue in Antibes is due to open in September 2015 and will be able to help even more people – both Anglophone and French – as not everyone can make it to Nice."

There are efforts to increase the availability of leaflets and information booklets available in English, and Juliette and the rest of the committee – Ellie Goblet d'Alviella, Sophie James, Sara Parks, Gemma Bishop, Anissa Perkins, Marilen Kenington and Emma Nyman – plan to organise a rota for manning the reception at the new centre whenever possible so that English patients feel at home on arrival.

"We are committed to growing our network and enabling volunteers to meet and greet at the new Espace," adds Juliette. "There is a wave of enthusiasm and support and we hope we will have volunteers to help furnish and decorate the Espace ready for its planned opening.

"I'd like to add that the Riviera business community has been over the top generous with their offers of support. We have been totally overwhelmed by the response."

Next month's elegant black tie dinner and dance has already attracted several blue chip sponsors including Currencies Direct (who have donated champagne), Blue Square, Chapoutier wines and Spectrum IFA Group. With entertainment provided free of charge by acoustic duo Lizzy and the Gentlemen, along with DJ Thomas Dusseune, and all printing and design work produced and donated by Cannes-based Pure Design International, the night promises to be an even bigger success than last year thanks to such combined and benevolent efforts.

The auction – hosted by Christie's of Monaco – features a glittering array of money-can't-buy lots, such as a hedonistic weekend away by private jet, a fully-catered party for you and 40 friends, an unforgettable trip to Transylvania and a glamorous weekend break closer to home at Le Mas Candille, as well as a four ball and lunch at three of the region's finest golf courses. ■

For ticket information or opportunities to sponsor or support the charity event, please contact Mimosa Matters on Facebook or Mimosaball@gmail.com

PETS

PUPPY LOVE

Photo: ©Jilly Bennett / jillybennett.com

ACCORDING to the UK's Pet Food Manufacturing Association (PFMA), a report on pet ownership trends sampled over two years estimates that 13 million UK households (that's 46%) have a pet, while across Europe, the figure is around 70 million (25% have dogs and 25% cats).

A survey in the US indicates at least half of all homes in America have either a dog (78.2 million), or cat (more than 86.4 million). More significantly, 91% of owners say they consider their pet to be a member of the family.

With such close bonds to our furry friends, especially for expats who find themselves with less human contact in their adopted country, it's no wonder that when a pet dies it can be traumatising. For those who are neither a cat nor a dog person it's difficult to grasp, but such a loss can equal that of a close relative or even a spouse.

The Bereavement Support Network of the Var (BSN) has a team of trained volunteers that, across the year, offer support to the bereaved and terminally ill. Recently they have addressed the subject of pet bereavement support.

BSN President, Mim Kay, explains. "When a beloved pet was your only living companion, it adds a further dimension to the loss. Loneliness and, perhaps, a sense of no longer being needed can also be felt. Suddenly there is no necessity to get up early or to go for a walk. The house is full of reminders.

"Members of BSN can lend a sympathetic ear. Several of us share, and have shared, our lives with pets and have experienced the pain and intense sorrow that follows their death. For many, the feelings of grief, emptiness and desolation are every bit as intense as those felt following the loss of a partner or parent. These emotions can be further compounded by guilt if a choice had to be made to put the animal to sleep.

"Some feel it necessary to bury their feelings when friends and relatives, sympathetic at first, become impatient and say things like 'it was just an animal'. Yet grief is perfectly natural. Many people have shared their lives with another living being – a cat, a dog, a rabbit – and have enjoyed a relationship with them, which was two way. When that relationship ends it can bring deep sadness with it.

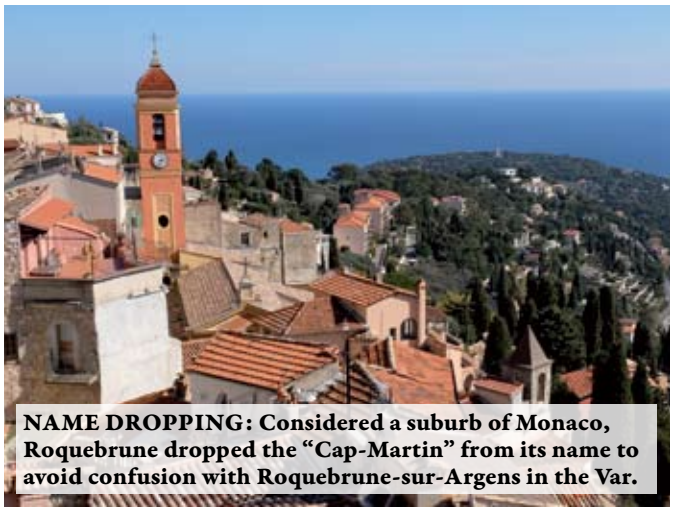
"Relief can be gained from talking with someone who is prepared to listen in a non-judgmental way and offer assurance that the feelings involved are normal. Remembering your pet with someone who understands your feelings can help start the mental healing process, although there is no formula and no set time scale to overcoming heartache.

"As a group, the BSN volunteers offer their support to any English-speaking adult who is suffering the pain of a loss, regardless of whether that loss involves a partner, relative, friend or a pet." ■

Contact BSN on 04 94 84 64 89 or see their website bsnvar.org

ROQUE AROUND *LES COQS*

BY RICHARD McCREERY



NAME DROPPING: Considered a suburb of Monaco, Roquebrune dropped the "Cap-Martin" from its name to avoid confusion with Roquebrune-sur-Argens in the Var.

NESTLED between the Principality of Monaco and Menton, Roquebrune-Cap-Martin's oldest part is the perched village, overlooking the sea, with its 10th-century castle built to protect the western border of Ventimiglia. Roquebrune's history is like watching a tennis match between Monaco and France: between 1355 and 1793 Roquebrune was part of Monaco under the rule of the Grimaldi family. It then became French until 1814 before returning to the Principality. Finally in 1861, locals voted to join to French rule, where it has remained until present (with the exception of WWII when it was administered by the Kingdom of Italy).

Today, a thousand year old olive tree in the old village, along with its beautiful sea views (as pictured above from the chateau) and narrow cobbled streets make Roquebrune a frequent destination for tourists. In winter the village is fairly quiet, although Roquebrune's more than 230 nativity scenes, some of which are no larger than a shoebox, make for a pleasing way to explore the streets at Christmas. As spring arrives, the village comes alive when many fêtes attract thousands of people.

Since 1927 the village events association, Les Coqs Roquebrunois, has been organising festivals, meals and other activities that are social, cultural and educational, with the aim of bringing the local community closer together. It is a voluntary organisation of 22 active members who take it upon themselves to plan and implement the programmes each year, as well as some 50 club members who enjoy the social side of the club and help out whenever they can. After seeing how much these people do for their village, I wanted to do my bit and so this year I became the first English active member to join. Although I'm only a trainee for the first year, at my first village event in November, the Fête de la Châtaigne, I learnt how to roast chestnuts for several thousands of visitors and we sold 350 kg during the day.

The Coqs' current president is Jean-Pierre Cognet, a veritable ball of human

Les Coqs Roquebrunois was founded in 1927. With over 70 members, they promote through various festivities across the year, including the Fête des Genêts (pictured left, with children in costume) and the Soupe au Pistou tasting (pictured below), which serves up some 650 litres of soup in August.

energy who joined in 1965 and took over the reins in 1982, and ever since the association and the life of the village has gone from strength to strength. The principal aim is to attract as many visitors as possible, while having as much fun as possible, and any profits that are generated are ploughed back into future events with the aim of enticing even more people to come and enjoy our village.

The season really gets going with the May Ball, followed shortly after by the Fête des Genêts (June 27th & 28th), which honours the plant that, legend says, saved Roquebrune from sliding into the sea during an earthquake. Today, children compete for the prize of best costume and dress up in outfits and garlands made from the bright yellow leaves, while the evening gives way to a disco (free entry for all). There is a very flexible attitude to children's bedtimes in France and the ball is usually a mix of kids and adults dancing the night away.

Then, of course, is the Fête Nationale, July 13th and 14th, celebrated with a procession of burning torches through the streets of the old village, as well as an *aperitif d'honneur*, games for the children, and a ball – entry is free and drinks and food are reasonably priced.

Over 2,000 *barbajuan*, a local delicacy of a triangular ravioli stuffed with *blettes*, orange squash and meat that originates from Monaco, are handed out as a gift from the Coqs to the hundreds who come to join the celebrations. On August 5th the tasting of the *soupe au pistou*, offered free to all-comers (BYOB: that's bring your own bowl), is a Herculean venture that relies on the 70 plus volunteers who come the day before to chop vegetables and help prepare 650 litres of soup. In June and September the streets are taken over by stallholders and artisans for the *brocantes*, which are very popular.

This ancient association of villagers injects so much life into the local community and does a great job of encouraging residents to enjoy their village and its traditions. The Coqs Roquebrunois website (*lescoqsroquebrunois.fr*) contains details of the year's events. If you are looking for a taste of French village life, come and visit the old village of Roquebrune. ■

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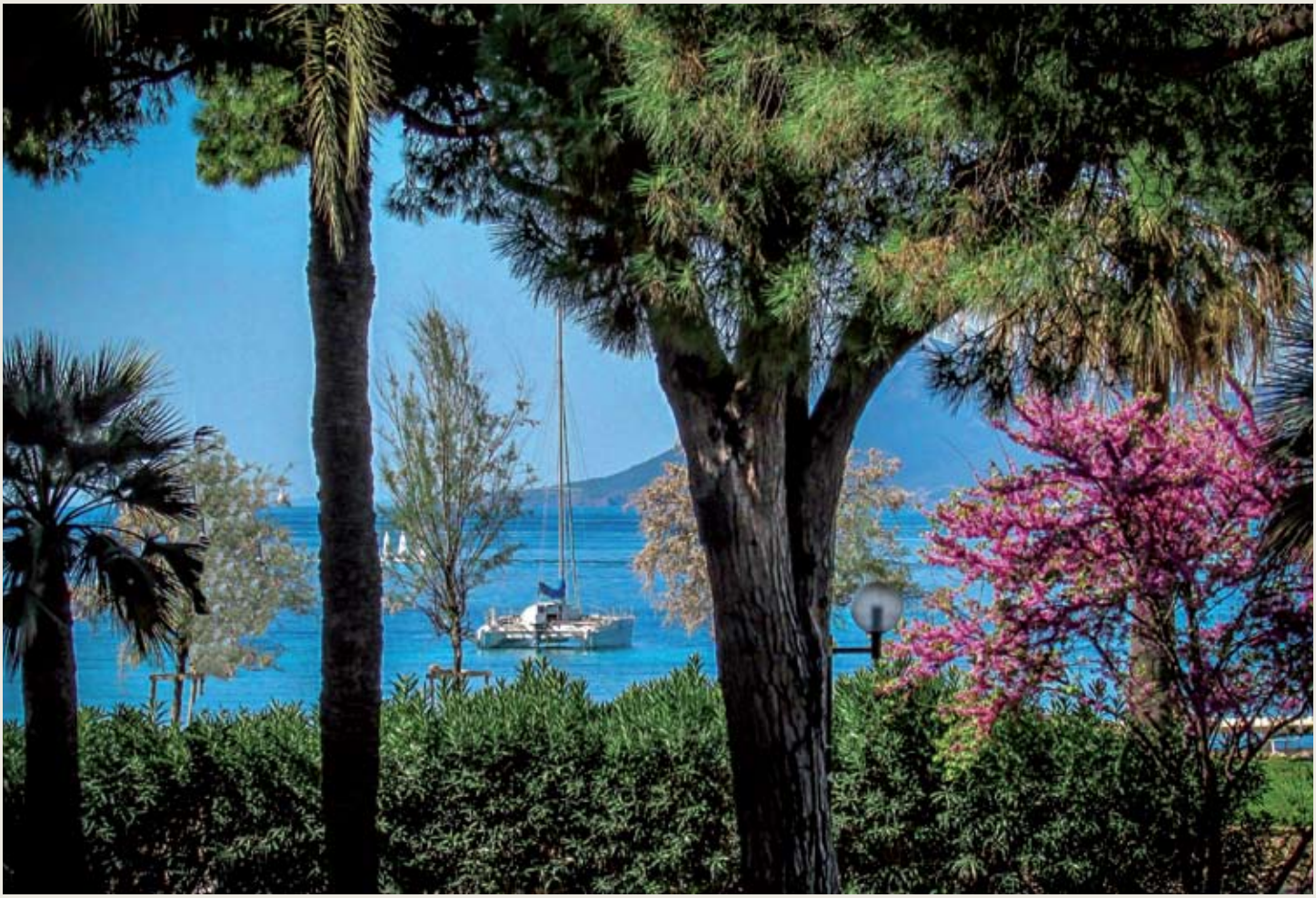
POINTING TO THE CALMER CANNES



IT'S clearly part of Cannes, but only up to a point.

The Pointe Croisette area is in fact a "principality" in its own right, the land of the *quartier* owned by the residents themselves rather than by the Cannes authorities. For practical reasons, the citizens of the Pointe Croisette *principauté* have ceded the administration of their domain to the Cannes *mairie*.

This is just one of the things that sets the southeastern part of La Croisette apart from the rest of the famous festival town. The area is renowned locally for its special calm beauty. Just fifteen minutes on foot from the centre of Cannes and its buzzy bustle, nightclubs and festive high jinks, this is an area of beautiful public gardens and open spaces, generally less crowded beaches and a few select restaurants.

The Pointe Croisette is attractive to those film festival-goers who have been round the block and value a place to stay where partying is not an all night affair, yet is only a short stroll – or a pleasant hop aboard the open-topped No. 8 bus – from the Palais and its associated fleshpots.

It is here that Maurizio Boschi has made his home over the past 30 years. He has been blissfully happy in the two-bedroomed apartment that his parents bought new in 1958.

"The Pointe Croisette has a special atmosphere," says Maurizio, who is moving to a larger apartment in the Montfleury district as accommodating a growing family makes more bedrooms a necessity.

"One feels much more connected with the sea than in central Cannes. I lie in bed at night being lulled to sleep by the waves on the beach. The peace and quiet we enjoy in this *quartier* make it a heavenly place to live."

Maurizio's pad in paradise benefits greatly from being built in an era when architects and builders were more generous with living space than is now the case generally. Observe the terrace, deep and extensive to maximise the stunning view west across the Bay of Cannes to the Esterel mountains, Maupassant's "suite of bluish hills".

Maurizio can walk across from his apartment to a beach restaurant that is high on the list of favourites of the Cannes cuisine cognoscenti. Bijou Plage is indeed a jewel in the crown of the town's eateries.

Next door to Bijou Plage is a summer institution of which Cannes can be justly proud – Handiplage. Here disabled sun-worshippers can enjoy superb facilities, which allow them safe access to the warm Croisette sea, all under the discreet supervision of trained helpers.

Maurizio's Residence l'Amiral was built by an Italian architect and has been

properly maintained since it was constructed. The apartment offers 83m² of living accommodation, not including the large terrace.

The apartment consists of 2 bedrooms, the master bedroom has its own access to the terrace. There is a fully fitted kitchen and a large open plan lounge, as well as a bathroom and separate WC although both of these are in need of modernising. In the lounge there are 2 large open panel sliding doors, which bring plenty of light to the room. Heating is via electric radiators and costs are minimal due to the southwest aspect of the building. Hot water is provided via a gas boiler. The monthly maintenance charges for the building are very reasonable at €220. The residence has a shared path at the back of the building that leads on to a charming square. Here you will find several restaurants, grocery shops, a fishmonger, pharmacy and newsagent. Off-street parking is not included in the price but there is an opportunity to rent a parking space nearby.

In sum, this apartment offers a wonderful opportunity for investors who want to buy an apartment on the world famous Cannes Croisette. ■

For more info contact Peter Horobec at phorobec@leggett.fr or on +33 06 87 49 50 94.

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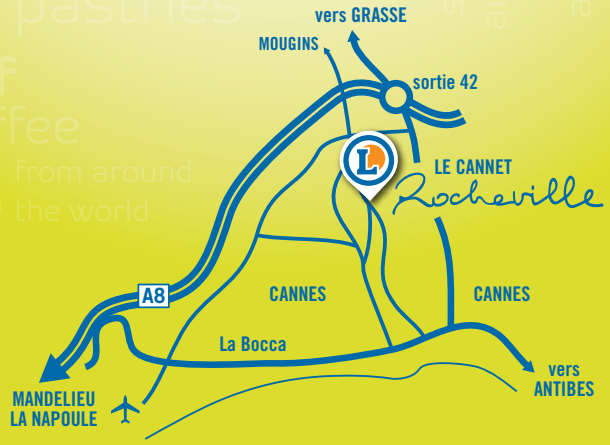

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Buying Your French Home

... one step at a time

BY TIM CLARK

HERE at Leggett Immobilier, we've helped thousands of overseas clients to purchase property in France over the past two decades and know that the different buying process, language and laws can be confusing. Our free buyer's guide gives an overall understanding to help you feel comfortable and confident with your purchase from the start.

The French property purchase process may be different to what you are used to, but it isn't usually complicated. As with anything, once you understand how it works, it becomes less daunting. Having an outline knowledge of the process from the outset, will help you to feel more at ease with your purchase, from initial search to final signing.

Step 1. Defining your search

WE all start somewhere and getting our search criteria clear in our own minds is the beginning of the process – it isn't always easy! Some of us are very logical; others make emotional choices. A list is a good place to begin when trying to clarify what is important.

When you have defined your search, talk to your agent and give a full outline of your requirements. Agents should know their portfolio and it will make it easier for them to introduce you to suitable properties and prevent hours wasted looking at unsuitable properties.

Step 2. Visiting France and viewing properties

I KNOW that property viewings can be exciting and sometimes a little stressful. In France your agent will accompany you on every property viewing, guiding you through the process. A good agent can give you the inside track on local schools, restaurants, tourist spots and community life. This will help you to feel better informed about the area in which you are considering buying property and set you out on the right track from the start.

I stress that it is also important that you have considered how you plan to fund your purchase. If you require a loan, make sure you have spoken to mortgage providers before coming to France. Lending criteria can be different here and it makes no sense to come all this way, fall in love with a house if you later find out you can't borrow in France.

I also understand that potential buyers need to get a feel for the market before taking the plunge, but am constantly amazed at how often people get angry because we won't show them 25 properties when they have informed us they need to sell their home first to buy here, and haven't even put it on the market yet. This is simply not fair on vendors here, who are clearly trying to sell their house and expect viewers to at least be in a position to proceed if they like what they see.

Step 3. Making an offer

THIS is the most exciting time. When you find that dream home in France, it is time to make your offer. Once again it is important to have your finances in order before making the offer for two main reasons. First, it is more difficult to link the purchase here with the sale of a property abroad and, second, if you are looking for the best negotiating position, having your financing agreed or in place makes your position stronger.

If you have any conditions to your purchase, for example, you wish to fund the purchase with a mortgage or only proceed with the purchase if you are able to put in a swimming pool or convert an outbuilding, you should discuss with your agent at this point.

You should feel committed to a house prior to making an offer on it, and only ever offer on one property at a time. Once you have made an offer you should stop viewing other properties.

Discuss your offer with your agent, they may have knowledge on whether the offer is likely to be viable.

Your agent will negotiate on your behalf and will keep you informed on negotiations as they progress.

At this stage, your agent may ask you to sign an *Offre d'achat* to show your commitment to purchase the property.

Once your offer has been accepted by the vendor, it is usual that they will not show the property to any other potential purchasers and will feel completely committed to selling their property to you. Your agent will immediately begin gathering the information required to draw up the initial sales document, which is called the *Compromis de vente*.

Look for "Buying Your French Home: Part Two" next edition, which takes you all the way to completion of the sale. ■

Contact local expert Tim Clark of Leggett Immobilier at tim@leggett.fr

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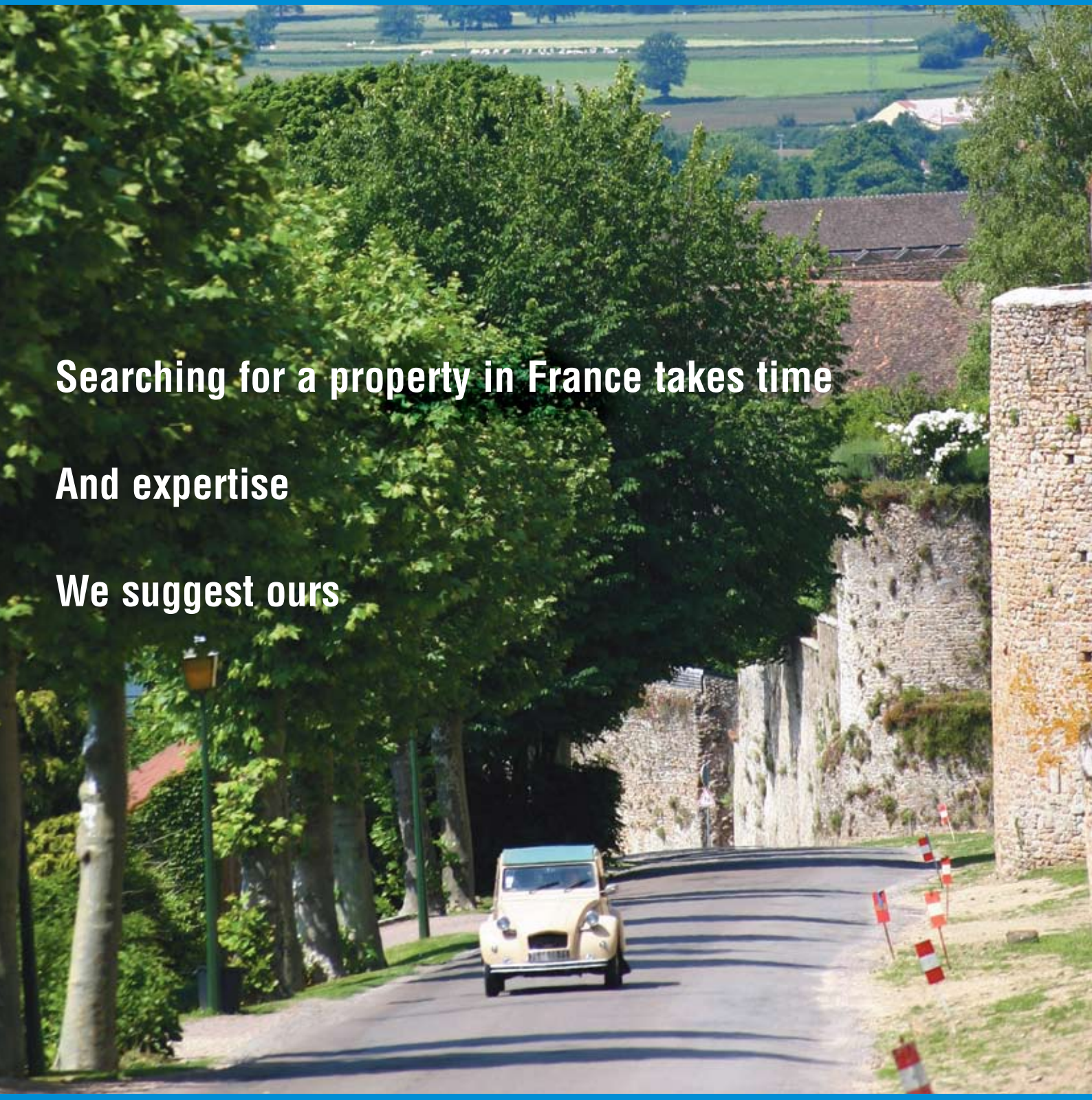

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Sirens of the South

BY LISA PEPIN

Delana Nelsen is an all American girl from Minnesota, who has lived in Aix-en-Provence since 2009, a slight extension of her one-year "sabbatical" to live her dream of learning another language.

AFTER writing a blog about her adventures, Delana Nelsen realised that other women wanted to do the same thing but didn't feel equipped. So she started Travel Solo Bootcamp (*travel-solo-bootcamp.com*). With a company motto "We won't hold your hand, but we've got your back", Delana teaches fellow females – single, newly divorced, widowed, or who just want to travel alone – how to become solo travellers.

Her week-long "camp" in Aix-en-Provence combines the right amount of structure, freedom and support to allow women to feel comfortable and confident exploring the South of France alone for the first time.

Here is Delana's Insider's Guide.

MOST BREATHTAKING COASTAL VIEW:
The overview from the Route des Crêtes between Cassis and La Ciotat.

CASUAL MEAL OUT:
Le Vin sur Vin (18 bis rue Biscarra) in Nice has good, fresh food, decent prices, and it's always full of locals.

PREFERRED ROSÉ:
To answer that I'd have to pretend I'm a connoisseur. I rarely buy the same bottle twice because we have so much to choose from ... but I like 'em cold and pale! That being said, a good local rosé comes from Equilles, just next door, called Le Sieur d'Eguilles.

NECESSARY EXTRAVAGANCE:
A trip back to Minnesota at least once a year to see my family.

ESSENTIAL SIGHTSEEING:
Always to Cassis, where we drive the Route des Crêtes, and afterwards, if they've got the cash, a Bouillabaisse at Chez Gilbert on the port in Cassis. Depending on the time of year (the Calanques are closed to cars after June 1st), I take them down the winding road to the Calanque Sormiou just east of Marseille. I do it just because the road is so frighteningly awesome.

SEASIDE ADVENTURE:
Snorkelling in the fish reserve near Carry-le-Rouet. I never go to my beach without my mask and *tuba*. I suppose that's not an adventure, but for me it calms my soul.

GUILTY PLEASURE:
I can eat an entire *Tarte Tropézienne* (below) with no problem. And I'm not talking one of those mini *Tropéziennes* either!

Photo: Food Stylist/Tasha Powell

BEST BEACH:
I couldn't call either of them beaches; they're prime rock real estate. The first one is the calanque Port-Pin, just west of Cassis, and the other is in Carry-le-Rouet. I'm not telling where it is because I have to scale a fence that says *Interdit* in order to get there!

BOOK ON YOUR NIGHTSTAND:
Mondo et Autres Histoires by J.M.G. Le Clézio

COASTAL FÊTE:
The Fête d'Oursin in Carry-le-Rouet and the Festival d'Abrivado in Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer on November 11th each year.

SECRET DE BEAUTÉ:
Lilash Eyelash stimulator. I've actually had to cut my eyelashes using this wonder product.

2015 TO-DO LIST:
I absolutely have to go rafting in the Gorges du Verdun and take the Blue Train along the coast west of Marseille. And I want to help someone harvest his or her olives. I'll probably want to do that only once but ...

GEM OF A DISCOVERY:
The *panisse de Marseille* – those chickpea pancakes – at a little roadside stand in L'Estaque, just west of town. I will go out of way out of my way to stop there.

DINING UPSCALE:
I don't know how upscale it is, but La Madone de Peillon in Peillon is certainly succulent.

SHADE ESSENTIALS:
Maui Jim Sunglasses, always.

IDEAL PEOPLE WATCHING:
This is not coastal, but I do love sitting on the Cours Mirabeau in Aix, sipping ... something ... and staring. It seems to be a town pastime.

Photo: PRA

BEST HIKE: Cassis to Marseille through the Calanques. Okay, in truth, I've never done the entire thing. But I will. And climbing Cezanne's mountain, Ste-Victoire.

MY BAG:
I have a Cole Haan bag that is a workhorse and always looks great no matter how I torture it.

BON APPS:
Vivino, Waze and Flipboard.

GADGET GURU:
My favourite is always my newest, so my Canon Power-Shot G7X, which makes me look like I know something about photography. ■

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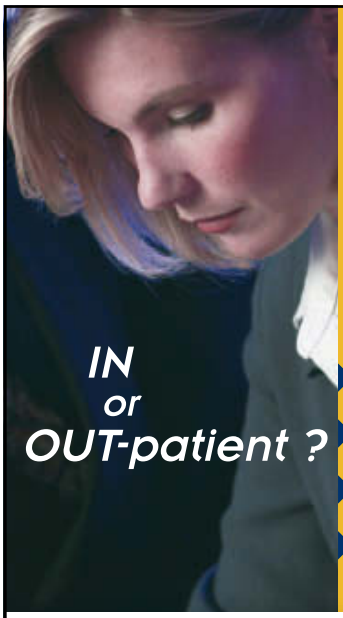

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FROM THE CANNES' SCREEN TO ICE CREAM

BY DAN SEEGER

SPECULATING about how the Cannes film festival might be different this year, with Joel and Ethan Coen (below) at the head of the feature films competition jury, is irresistible. For one thing, their very appointment to the task is historic: standing as the first time in the 68-year history of the venerated festival, the jury has been headed by a pair of individuals (surely it will happen again in the relatively near future with the Cannes-beloved Dardenne brothers getting the call). For another, the Coens have been well-awarded fixtures at the festival, continually returning with new efforts ever since their shared career sprung up five or six rungs on the respectability ladder when "Barton Fink" walked away with the 1991 Palme d'Or. It was just two years ago that they collected their latest hardware here, claiming the Grand Prize of the Jury for "Inside Llewyn Davis".

Photo: Rita Domaradzki

They clearly know their way around the fest. And yet their rambunctious style and burbling sense of humour has a very different texture than the stern, lovely, intense films that often dominate the festival's slate. There's certainly no guarantee that the head of the juror will tilt the decisions in the direction of their own artistic inklings (when Steven Spielberg was in charge, the Palme d'Or went to "Blue is the Warmest Colour", a film he'd never be able to wrap his head around if he'd been given the opportunity to direct it), but the Coens are such distinctive creators that it's intriguing to imagine them meeting films that, in every way, don't speak their language.

Of course, they hang their director's cone in a part of the cinematic world that can seem at odds with Cannes in a multitude of ways. It's been 60 years since the top prize-winner at Cannes also snagged the Academy Award for Best Picture (1955's "Marty" accomplished the feat). At least for now, the two esteemed awards-giving bodies (notably different levels of esteem perhaps, but esteem nonetheless) have the same reigning Best Actress, albeit for different films. Julianne Moore was named the *Prix d'interprétation feminine* at last year's Cannes film

festival for her work in David Cronenberg's "Maps to the Stars". She took the equivalent prize at this year's Oscars for "Still Alice", which recently opened in France.

Moore has been overdue for Oscar recognition for a whole time, so almost anything that accounted for her fifth nomination was going to lead to a win. Maybe Academy voters should have taken a lead from Cannes in picking out what that film would be.

PROVING that there's no shortage of artistic opportunity in exploring the intersections of food and romance, American novelist Elizabeth Bard's latest release, *Picnic in Provence: A Memoir with Recipes* (US: Little, Brown and Company) comes out April 7th. The follow-up to Bard's 2010 similarly pitched bestseller, *Lunch in Paris: A Love Story with Recipes*, her new book recounts the life changes stirred into motion by a trip to the village of Cereste. Of course, there's a whole new batch of culinary wonders to build even more temptation into the pages. Available from Antibes Books, the Cannes English Bookshop or the English Book Centre in Valbonne.

And here's a scoop: based in Cereste, Elizabeth (pictured) in 2013 opened Scaramouche, an artisanal ice cream shop that last year tied for fifth place on TripAdvisor's "Top Ten Ice Cream Parlours in France". See *glaces-scaramouche.com*

WORD is in that artist Jack Vettriano – featured in *Reporter* 160 and on our website – is shuttering Heartbreak Publishing Ltd. The Scottish-born painter and Nice resident launched the publishing house with great fanfare in 2009, taking a more ambitious approach than most artists who strike out with such a venture. Vettriano wasn't just producing and selling prints of his own work, he signed up a small pack of other artists to distribute their work under the Heartbreak banner, including Italian photographer Fredi Marcarini and self-proclaimed "ink evangelist" Johanna Basford. Framing the dissolution of the formal company as strictly a business decision designed to get some value back for his investors, Vettriano, who also closed the Heartbreak Gallery in London in July last year, indicates he's going to continue selling prints of his own work through his personal website, *jackvettriano.com* ■

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LET BIDONS BE BIDONS

BY JAMIE IVEY

Photo: SuSanA Secretariat

IT'S just possible that this is my last column for the *Riviera Reporter*. Either the mystery illness I'm about to write about will get me, or the editor will decide the column's content is inappropriate. If this is farewell, I'd like to say it's been fun.

You see it's been a month of visits to the local blood and urine test centre. Develop the slightest sniffle in our village and you end up there. The *generaliste* has a notorious hair trigger, so the odds are there's nothing wrong with me. Yet I have a nagging doubt.

It's been over two weeks since the last test and I've yet to get the all clear. Delayed results like this are usually due to anomalies in the testing process, or a stock interruption, which means a necessary chemical is unavailable. Very occasionally it's because something is seriously wrong and they need to double check.

Now I imagine in cities there are some rather pleasant testing centres, where the majority of "testees" wear suits and don't invade each other's body space. Oh to live near such a place. Despite my loathing of the congested outskirts of Avignon, I'm considering, if there is a next time, making the trip there.

You see the clientele at the nearest place to me is largely retired farmers. They're accustomed to being up with the larks and so by 7 am the queue is snaking around the corner. At first glance it looks as though they've brought along a vast amount of Cabernet Sauvignon to ease the wait. But nobody is sipping.

Now the average person when asked to give a urine sample takes home the small plastic receptacle offered by the lab, and at an opportune moment attempts to capture a few centilitres. Not my locals.

For whatever reason, the majority around my village opt for the old fashioned *bidon* – a large plastic container designed to be filled up with cheap wine from a vineyard pump. My personal theory for the *bidon* use is that this way "testees" don't have to get up from the table to go to the loo: "Doctor's orders, dear."

What amazes me is the vast quantity of pee these old people can generate. The *vrac bidons* hold over 5 litres of liquid and they are handed back at the centre half full. They are also universally stained red from their previous life as wine carriers. I'm no chemist but I would have thought that any tests on their new contents would inevitably churn out erroneous results.

A *bidon* is, as it turns out, quite simply the most powerful queue barging weapon ever invented. Not only is there the odour but also the fear that those frail fingers didn't screw on the cap as tightly as possible. Worst case scenario is a pensioner holding a *bidon* in each hand. This is a fearful obstacle, a barrier that prevents any possible plaintive eye contact with the receptionist.

When they are packing his and hers samples like this, the wind-milling arms are almost impossible to avoid. Without exception I return to the row of seats, meant for those who have already seen the receptionist. A more opportune moment to advance towards the desk is when the *bidon*-wielders *faire la bise*. Amazingly the urge to kiss hello outweighs all other considerations. *Bidons,* rather than barring the way forward, are wrapped into embraces. What's a slosh on your jumper between friends?

However, even choosing my moment like this, every time I've neared the front of the queue another pensioner has arrived, packing the threat of a geriatric golden shower if I don't step aside.

And so I've lost my nerve. The pain in my toe could be something terrible from the tropics, or just a recurrence of the gout that occasionally besets me. I'll never know because I'm too terrified to go back for the results.

The phobia is so bad that my dreams are filled with grizzly old farmers. There's also another nightmare. In it, I'm sitting at my computer typing away when an email arrives from the *Riviera Reporter*, informing me that 700 words about urine was not what they expected when they asked for a column about everyday life in Provence.

My excuse – I'm telling it how it is.

Their response – stop taking the p***. ■

Jamie Ivey is the author of Ten Trees and a Truffle Dog *and runs the website* provenceguru.com

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YACHTING

Lessons Learnt

BY MICHAEL HEALY

RESPONSIBLE seamen – that means all of us boaters – continue to reflect on the recent mass tragedies of the sunken Korean ferryboat *Sewol* and the *Costa Concordia* beached on the island of Giglio not far from the Riviera.

Reports of maritime disasters and lessons learnt are published in Britain's quarterly *Safety Digest* issued free by the Marine Accident Investigation Branch in Southampton (*maib.gov.uk*), which investigates all types of recent accident to or on-board UK-flagged vessels worldwide, and other vessels in UK waters. Thus far there is no section for mega-yachts (few of which visit Britain!) perhaps because of their exemplary safety record. But even these splendid creations or their boats and helicopters can suffer from collision, grounding, foundering, fire, and lightning striking. Here are a few victims with a Riviera connection; some readers will have vivid memories of one or two incidents: *Attessa IV, Brave Goose, Fantastique, Galaxy, Hemilea, Honey Money, Ilona IV, John John, Lady Candida, Lady Christine, Lands End, Maltese Falcon, Midsummer, Mirabella V, Mohammedia, Nadine, Obsession, Ontario, Pari, Princess Tanya, Saharet, Tigre d'Or, Welsh Falcon, Welsh Liberty* and *Yogi*.

Good captains are trained and experienced in heavy weather, for which they could apply some of the following seamanlike measures: reduce speed, shorten sail, reef down, seek shelter, close watertight openings, furl awnings, stow furniture, rig lifelines, batten down the hatches, turn downwind, stream sea anchors, muster the passengers, jettison top-weight, double the watches, man the pumps, issue life jackets and EPIRBs, and *in extremis* transmit Mayday messages and abandon ship. At anchor they could veer more cable, increase anchor watches, start engines, clear a potential lee shore and maintain a good offing. And they frequently exercise their crews in fire fighting, life rafts and other emergency drills.

But what of totally unexpected disasters, which strike brutally, like a frontal collision in a car? These tend to happen to tenders, which are getting more numerous, more powerful, and bigger – some now longer than my yacht! One ran into an anchored yacht off Monaco on a calm but dark evening as the 2010 Monaco Yacht Show closed; the driver was catapulted into the hull and sank without trace. A similar night accident injured a captain and wife in a crowded anchorage in Antigua; while in Villefranche Bay more were injured as their speedboat ran into one of the two very solid mooring buoys. In Monaco waters one fine day two young honeymooners in a small sailboat were run down by a French flagged motor-yacht on autopilot with no lookout, and the bride was killed by the propellers. The husband was taken in charge by the British Association, lived on my boat for five days and flew home to Britain with his wife in a coffin. All because of too much speed without due care and attention.

Constant vigilance this season please. ■

CHAMPAGNE MOMENTS

BY ALEX IGNATIEFF

Photo: Victor Grigas

THIS is tasting season for the wine trade. A winter of watching snow reports is abruptly ended and the serious job of finalising your selection for the new season takes over. Prices need to be firmed up. Old favourites need to be tasted, with fingers crossed, to check that the new releases are up to scratch. But most important is the search for that new discovery with which to wow your friends and, hopefully, all of theirs too.

A preoccupied bolt to the latest tasting at the Negresco Hotel in Nice was interrupted by a very spring like sun and those magnificent blues of sky and sea along the Promenade des Anglais, a welcome reminder of a delight too often taken for granted. It was a day for such reminders as I reacquainted myself with the work of the Chiquet brothers of Champagne Jacquesson.

For me, Champagne is the quintessential wine region: the perfect combination of vineyard, wine and a little bit of magic. My first visit to the area followed fresh on the back of a farewell tour of the vine growing regions of Australia, capped by a stint on the magnificent sands of Margaret River. The ferry from Dover to Calais and lunch in Arras only served to heighten excitement and expectation. The vast sweeps of open farmland and memorials lent an appropriate air of majesty and occasion. But as we approached Reims, where were the vines? A growing sense that Reims was not a temple exclusively dedicated to producing heavenly fizz was dawning. Industry was evident, and too much of it. Quite deflated, we climbed the Montagne de Reims on our way to Épernay. As we crested the peak to emerge from the forest, there it was, a meticulous emerald carpet of vines stretching in every direction down to the Marne river and beyond Épernay, a city truly dedicated to champagne and its enjoyment. Expectations exceeded, I was hooked.

Breath recovered, to the right is the village of Hautvillers, with its abbey, resting place or more importantly, lifetime retreat of Dom Pérignon, creator, discoverer or exploiter, depending on your preferred history, of wine with bubbles. With its plantings of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir (and Meunier), Champagne is really a northern extension of the Burgundy vineyard. Climatic extremes mean still wines from Champagne will never have the ripe richness of their southern cousins, but the high levels of

Hautvillers is a commune in the Marne in northeastern France where you'll find the Abbeye St-Pierre, home of Dom Pérignon, the wine-making Benedictine monk (left) who became the patriarch of champagne. Photo: October Ends

acidity are perfect for making a vibrant sparkling wine that these same cousins could never rival. Whatever happy accident led to the discovery, Dom Pérignon certainly helped refine quality. He championed the use of white juice from red grapes and techniques of blending that would not be out of place in a modern champagne cellar.

Yet it is the concept of blending that still leaves me slightly puzzled. Different varieties and sites bring different flavours to their still wines. Throw in different conditions from the annual vagaries of the weather and you soon have a vast larder of flavours. Like all great chefs, the master blenders of each champagne house use these diverse ingredients to produce their own signature wines. Each house aims to achieve a blend consistent year on year that keeps you coming back to your favourite house for every special occasion or your daily *apéro* tipple. However, typically this is the route followed for the humble "non-vintage" offerings of the house. The grander Prestige cuvées tend to be vintage or site specific. I may be nitpicking but is this not missing a trick?

That sun-soaked day at the Negresco reminded me that I was not alone. For some twenty-five years the Chiquet brothers have been revelling in the joyous individuality of each vintage and its relationship with different sites. Their non- or rather multi-vintage blends are released under a batch number, a specific blend that captures the essence of time, site and house philosophy. As a result, their wines are wonderfully pure and focused; they make you search for house continuity. Wine to think about (if you are in the mood) or simply enjoy as you contemplate the Azur in our Côte.

Champagne's terrain may not be unique, as growers on the South Downs rightly point out: their grapes are those of Burgundy, their climate not dissimilar to many, their techniques well borrowed and their history matched also. But for me it is the meticulous dedication to their vineyard, method and history, coupled with an almost contradictory commitment to the cutting edge, that keeps champagne unique amongst sparkling wines. Perhaps only with such history can the new come so easily. ■

For more information contact Alex or Melanie at L'Emporium du Vin on 04 93 49 27 01 or visit www.emporiumduvin.com

LEGENDS OF THE LOAF:

How the baguette took shape (and some of it may be true!)

BY MARGO LESTZ

WHAT could be more symbolically French than the baguette? At any hour of the day, on the streets of any village, town or city, you are likely to see the French strolling along with one of these elongated loaves tucked under their arm, ready to accompany their breakfast, lunch or dinner.

The word *baguette* means wand or baton and the term became attached to the thin, round sticks of bread we know today in around 1920. But the baguette's history may go back much further.

No one knows exactly when or why this French loaf took on its current shape, but there are several stories, and even laws, that give us clues to the baguette's heritage.

One patriotic tale links it to the French Revolution. Bread was the mainstay of the diet and those in Paris were tired of watching the nobility eat copious amounts of fine white loaves while the rest of them faced shortages and had to make do with barely edible bread.

After the Revolution, ensuring everyone had quality daily bread was high on the priority list. In 1793, the (post-Revolution government) Convention passed a law stating: *"Richness and poverty must both disappear from the government of equality. It will no longer make a bread of wheat for the rich and a bread of bran for the poor. All bakers will be held, under the penalty of imprisonment, to make only one type of bread: The Bread of Equality."*

Could this charming and very French theory of *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* have been the forerunner to our beloved baguette, enjoyed by rich and poor alike?

Another story claims that Napoleon Bonaparte passed a law decreeing that bread for his soldiers should be made in long slender loaves of exact measurements to fit into a special pocket on their uniforms. Since those measurements were close to the size of a modern baguette, some believe this might be when the bread first took on its current form.

Yet a different account maintains that when the metro was being built in Paris, the workmen from different regions just couldn't get along and the overseer of the project was concerned about violence in the dark underground tunnels. At that time, everyone carried a knife to cut their bread, so the supervisor went to the bakery to request loaves that didn't need to be cut. A loaf of bread was regulated by weight, so in order to make it thin enough to be easily torn, it ended up being long and slender.

Whenever and for whatever reason the first wand-shaped breads appeared, by the mid-1800s in Paris, they were everywhere. But these weren't the French loaves that we see today. No, they were baguettes "on steroids". Foreign visitors marvelled at the extraordinary lengths of the Parisian bread, describing loaves of bread 2 metres long. In the afternoon, young boys could be seen using these lengthy baguettes as pretend swords and engaging in mock battles before the bread made its way to the family table. One observer remarked that in a restaurant, the baker came in and stacked loaves 2 to 2.5 metres long in the corner like a bundle of sticks, while another saw bread having to be laid across the dining table because it was longer than the table was wide.

Those long breads that made such an impression on 19th-century tourists must have been the predecessors of today's more manageably sized baguette. The modern, shorter version seems to have come into being in the 1920s, when a law was passed prohibiting bakers from working between the hours of 10 pm and 4 am. The baker could start at 4 o'clock in the morning and the thinner baguette would be finished in time for the first customer's breakfast. It was during this

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time that the term "baguette" first became associated with the slender loaves that are seen everywhere in France today.

So now when you're walking home nibbling on the end of your baguette, you can ponder the French Revolution, Napoleon, and the Paris metro ... and be thankful that you're not trying to manoeuvre a 6 foot (2 metre) long loaf of bread down the street.

Les Porteuses de pain

AND while most of us stop by the *boulangerie* every day to pick up our baguette, if you were a bourgeoisie – the wealthy middle class in the nineteenth or early twentieth century – you wouldn't need to expend such energy; your daily bread would have been delivered before you even got out of bed. Oh, wouldn't it be wonderful to wake up to a nice fresh croissant or pain au chocolat ... but let's get back to the story.

The job of bread delivery usually fell to women who were called *les porteuses de pain*, which means bread delivery women. These ladies would start work about 5 o'clock in the morning – as soon as the bread came out of the oven. Some delivered the bread in baskets or wooden frames carried on their backs, while others carried the bread in their large, specially designed aprons. The lucky ones worked for bakeries that provided pushcarts.

These hard-working women could have up to 300 customers and they had to memorise all of their addresses, their likes and dislikes, and the amount of bread they required. Arriving at the client's home, they often had to climb to the top floors with aprons loaded with bread. Even though some of these buildings would have had elevators, servants and service people were not permitted to use them. Elevators were only for residents.

La Porteuse de pain is also the title of a book written by Xavier de Montépin. It started as a series in *Le Petit Journal* newspaper from 1884 to 1889 and tells the story of Jeanne Fortier, a young widow with two children who is wrongly accused of murder. She goes to prison for 20 years and, later in her life, becomes a *porteuse de pain*, a bread delivery woman. Of course, she has many adventures along the way, trying to track down her children, searching for the real murderer etc. This popular story has been adapted for theatre, inspired six films (made between 1906 and 1963), and became a television series in 1973.

Personally, I wouldn't complain if a *porteuse de pain* showed up at my door one morning. ■

For more see curiousrambler.com

1905 Paris Bakers' Fair: The bread-delivery women and their pushcarts.
Photo: Fêtes de la Boulangerie Française: Les Porteuse de Pain et leurs Pousse-pousse.

A no-Nansense Michelin meal

BY CAREN TRAFFORD

Photo: Yumyum

IT'S been more than 100 years since the tyre manufacturers André Michelin and his brother published the first edition of a guide for French motorists in 1900. At the time there were fewer than 3,000 cars in France, and the *Michelin Guide* was intended to encourage the demand for cars and, in turn, for car tyres. For that first edition, the brothers printed nearly 35,000 copies.

These guides were given away free to car drivers and chauffeurs and contained useful information for motorists, including maps, instructions for repairing and changing tyres, as well as lists of car mechanics, hotels and petrol stations.

The *Michelin Guide* today is better known for its starred restaurants; each listing is initially nominated and then reviewed a number of times by inspectors who remain incognito.

The general definition nowadays is:

... One star. Very good cooking in its category.

... Two stars. Excellent cooking, worth the detour.

... Three stars. Exceptional cuisine, merits a special journey.

The *2015 Michelin Guide* is now out and in France there are 26 restaurants with 3 stars. (There are a total of 111 in the world.) We also have 80 2-starred restaurants and a total of 503 one stars, including 37 new listings.

And on hearing that a one-star honour had been newly bestowed on a restaurant merely a stone's throw away from where I live, I decided that it had to be investigated.

La Table de Nans (also known as L'Auberge le Revestel) is on the coast road between La Ciotat and St-Cyr-sur-Mer. I went with a party of four, and we weren't disappointed. The restaurant, a mere 50 metres from the beach, is a *bastide* with several rooms upstairs that will one day offer accommodation. For the time being, chef Nans Gaillard is concentrating on his food and reputation. The restaurant has only been open for 17 months. "We worked hard in the first 17 months to gain a Michelin Star," the maître d' told me, "and we will work hard for the next 17 months to keep it."

We decided to try the 3-course Winter Menu, which at a very reasonable €42 is well worthwhile. All the dishes arrived with a splash of colour and the food is beautifully presented; fresh, appealing and full of flavour. Choosing is difficult. How does one decide between a starter of fish soup presented with a pyramid of croutons, or a medallion of crab on a lemon *confit* with Dubarry cream? I chose the first course of Provençal vegetables, beautifully cooked in a small pot with black truffles and served warm.

For the main course I enjoyed a dish of scallops, cooked till just golden and then encrusted in a fine hazelnut glaze. These were placed on a bed of spinach *jus* and apple pieces (pictured left). The rest of the table enjoyed the tender beef cheeks, the signature dish of the restaurant, served in a rich red wine gravy that had everyone asking for more bread to mop up the succulent sauce. The third choice, lamb cutlets with a caviar of aubergine and capers, looked equally inviting.

The desserts were as delicious. Paris Brest, a yummy cake with cream or fresh fruits of the season, cooked in a spice infusion, with a sorbet of margarita.

So what was the consensus at our table? As a one-star Michelin newcomer, this restaurant ticked all the boxes. Good service, beautifully presented food and delightfully intense flavours. If you're planning a visit, do try to come here in spring and summer to reserve a table on the terrace next to the sea. With the melodic waves accompanying your meal, there's no place that you'd rather be. ■

La Table de Nans is at 126 Corniche du Lioquet, La Ciotat - tel. 04 42 83 11 06. See latabledenans.com

Cook d'Azur

Katie Bills' decadent yet classic dish makes the most of the season's gorgeous fresh fish and shellfish to keep the whole family happy for a special Easter feast. Serves 8.

Fish & Shellfish Potato Gratin

INGREDIENTS

- 10ml olive oil
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 40g Parmesan cheese
- 2 fillets of white fish (sea bass – *loup* or cod - *cabillaud*)
- 2 fillets salmon
- 10 prawns shelled
- 8 scallops
- 4 baking potatoes
- 5 thin slices of pancetta
- Handful of fennel seeds
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 475 ml milk
- 1 onion
- 1 garlic clove
- 2 bay leaves
- 8 peppercorns

Finely chop one onion and fry with roughly chopped pancetta and one finely chopped clove of garlic in a little olive oil until lightly brown. Set aside for later.

Peel the potatoes and chop roughly. Boil in salted water until soft. Drain and mash with 1 tablespoon of butter. Season with fennel seeds, salt and pepper. Also set aside.

Bring to a simmer 1 pint of milk, with 8 peppercorns and 2 bay leaves. Cut the fish into bite size pieces and add to milk. Simmer for 5 minutes until the fish is no longer translucent. At the last minute, add the scallops and prawns, as they don't need as long to cook.

To assemble the dish, drain the fish and place into the bottom of a casserole dish. Sprinkle with the onions, garlic and pancetta, and then drizzle with a little of the bay leaf and peppercorn infused milk.

Add the rest of the milk to the potatoes and stir on high heat until combined. Pipe the potato over the fish mixture, and grate Parmesan over the top to finish. Note: overfilling the bag when piping potatoes makes it more difficult.

Bake at 180°C degrees for 15 minutes, or until the top had browned slightly. Serve with mixed vegetables tossed in butter and lemon juice. Enjoy!

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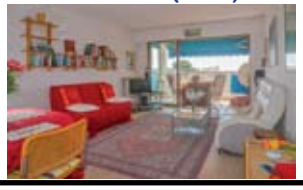

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PET PEEVES

OUR dog is part of the family and travelling with her has been much easier since microchips and Passports for Pets were introduced but expat animal lovers should be aware that the system changed somewhat at the end of 2014.

Pets must now be at least 12 weeks old before being vaccinated for rabies, after which there is a 21-day wait. All EU member states are now required to carry out checks on their national borders, like the UK has been doing for years. To combat animal trafficking, your pet must either travel with you (or with a designated carer within 5 days of your travel).

Existing Pet Passports remain valid. The basic rules concerning microchips, passports and vaccinations remain the same but with summer travel on the way, expat pet owners should be aware of the changes.

Ruth Copper, by email

PETS are indeed a part of the family. And for this reason The Bereavement Support Network of the Var (BSN) and its team of trained volunteers who provide free support to the bereaved and terminally ill, now also offer pet bereavement support. See page 23.

BOOKS BEHIND BARS

MANY years ago I remember the *Reporter* having some contact on the subject of donating books to prisons where there are known British or English-speaking inmates.

At St Johns Church in Saint-Raphael we have a large surplus of books covering a range of genres, which we are trying to thin down. We would certainly be pleased to make such a donation if a demand exists.

Peter Owen, by email

IT was an initiative that we were pleased to participate in at the time because many of the British prisoners were in nearby prisons such as Grasse, and a British Consular representative, who had access to these prisoners, was happy to pass them on during prison visits. Unfortunately these conditions no longer exist, especially since most English-speaking prisoners were transferred to Aix. It's a shame to throw away old books. We were told that even some French prisoners used the books to help them perfect their English. We welcome any suggestions. RR

ILLEGAL CHARGES, ILLEGAL DEADLINES

THE EU has forced France to backtrack on charging other European citizens 15.5% social charges based upon the capital gains on the sale or rental of their secondary French residences. British newspapers wrongly claim that it was a tax on "British residents" but it applies to all non-French citizens including Germans, Italians and Dutch (like me). Now we have until December 31st to ask for a refund.

As the charge was illegal under EU law, what right do the French authorities have to impose a time limit on reimbursements? It seems to me that this restriction must also be illegal.

Hank de Vonk, Biot, by email

For more on the subject, see page 15. RR

PROMOTING VOTING PETITION

I AM a member of the Anglophones Association Pau-Pyrenées centred around 64000 Pau. I have created an accepted e-petition to the UK government website which you may feel is worth publishing to your British readers, particularly those in the EU who have been out of the UK for more than 15 years – the current time limit to still be able to register to vote in UK elections. It is to be found at: *http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/74848*

Any encouragement you can give to your readers to support this campaign would be much appreciated.

Alan Thomas, by email

BREXIT

FORMER Attorney General Dominic Grieve has warned that Brexit [see last issue] would make two million Britons abroad "illegal immigrants overnight." That includes many of your readers.

I never thought I'd agree with Gordon Brown on anything but he is right that Brexit would leave the UK frozen out of political decision making and compromise business with Britain's biggest trading partner. Out in the cold with few friends, no influence, little new trade and even less new investment. Conservative estimates indicate that Britain would lose 2.2% of its GDP if it

LETTERS, PAGE 46

CAN I BLAME IT ON THE EU?

Star letter

NOT entirely, I suppose.

One of the few things of possible value to the ordinary person that the EU has done is to force providers to reduce cell phone roaming charges. However, since there's no gain without pain, or no credit without a corresponding debit, all it has really done is to distort pricing.

In the case of my UK provider, whereas roaming charges for using the phone within the EU but outside the UK have come down from arse-clenching to merely eye-watering, the international charges have shot up correspondingly, for example between 80p and £1.50 a minute to call from the UK to South Africa, or 60p and £1.50 to France. There are subscribed options to reduce those charges, but those are the standard rates they apply as they scrabble to make up the deficit that forcing lower roaming charges has brought about.

On a related matter, I know that Switzerland, happily, is not part of the stinking and corrupt EU, and long may that remain so, although for many purposes EU diktats apply. Recently I used my French phone there to make some calls and on receiving my monthly bill, found that the EU rates don't apply. Therefore while the normal roaming rate for calls from other EU countries is 23¢/min, from Chocolate Heaven it's 90¢/min, resulting in a large bill.

Of course I should have checked instead of assuming that EU rates applied, but it's a small price to pay for spending time in that beautiful and well-run country which to some extent is still able to operate without the interfering bullying from Brussels. Sadly though it's been press-ganged into joining the Schengen Union and is now suffering under the burden of unwelcome and unaccounted for visitors who can cross its borders and form gangs of pickpockets, housebreakers, pimps, and drug dealers.

The Swiss police are ruthlessly efficient at rooting out and dealing with offenders though, but it would be better that they were denied entry to the country in the first place.

Mike Preston, on Riviera Reporter forum

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READERS MAKE AN APPEAL IN AID OF CANCER RESEARCH

100 REASONS TO HELP MAISIE

SIXTEEN-year-old Maisie lives in Wymondham, Norfolk. She should be having fun with her friends, attending school and dreaming of life post-A Levels. But last year Maisie was diagnosed with Ewing's Sarcoma, a very aggressive primary bone cancer, found in her pelvis. This location makes surgery difficult and so she is currently in hospital for six weeks of intensive chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

Maisie has struggled amazingly well to attend school as often as she has been able to because this is her GCSE year, but since diagnosis in September she has had six chemotherapy sessions already.

Her treatment involves removing her own stem cells so that, following her intensive chemo, these cells can replace the damaged bone marrow, which will form into her immune system.

Both of her parents are paramedics although her mother has not worked since the cancer was discovered.

A family friend, Andrea Luchetti, decided to organise a 100 mile charity bike ride – The Maisie 100 – around Lake Como, Italy, on May 15th. Andrea tells us, "It has been amazing how much support The Maisie 100 has had. We have 35 confirmed riders flying to Italy, all of whom are taking the training very seriously. There are also 25 Italian riders taking part including a local small riding club.

"One of the best off-shoots of this ride is the encouragement and positive energy it is giving Maisie, even though she only knows a few of the riders. This is a good example of how Facebook can help bring people together and show their support to people who need it.

"I have found Maisie to be one of the most inspirational people I have ever met. She has never stopped keeping positive and will always find a smile for you even when she's feeling terribly poorly following chemotherapy."

Var realtor Tim Clark felt compelled to join the ride. "I have two daughters and the thought of something like this affecting one of them doesn't bear thinking about."

None of the riders participating in The Maisie 100 are professionals and most, like Tim, have taken up cycling this year to show their support.

"I am both looking forward to and terrified in equal measure and it has really given me a worthwhile goal to work towards. The added benefit is that it is improving my fitness dramatically, and at age 46 that is important, too."

To support Maisie, see themaisie100.com *or on Facebook:* facebook.com/maisie100

Read also details of the Mimosa Ball fundraiser in "Scenting success in beating cancer" on page 22.

Road around Lake Como for The Maisie 100 mile bike charity ... but hopefully minus the snow-covered mountains. Tim Clark (right) riding for the cause.

LETTERS, FROM PAGE 44

leaves Europe. That's £55 billion a year.

"We must tell the truth about the 3 million jobs, 25,000 companies, £200 billion of annual exports and £450 billion of inward investment linked to Europe; and how the 'Britzerland' or Norwegian alternatives (even Norwegians oppose the Norwegian option) leave us subject to EU rules, but denied a vote in shaping them." Well said, Mr Brown. Now if you could just get your fellow Scots sorted.

Brian McCall, by email

BETWEEN THE LINES

I WANT to thank you very much indeed for your article in the last edition of the *Reporter* announcing the opening of my new English Bookshop in Antibes. The opening day event on February 14th was a resounding success, despite dreadful weather, and we welcomed more than 80 people to hear Stephen Clarke talk about his new book *Dirty Bertie: An English King Made in France*, and to celebrate the opening with a glass or two of fizz.

Since opening, the shop has been very busy, with customers old and new, and we are astounded at the success of the first few weeks in business. Evidence, it seems, that there is still lots of room on the Riviera for a "proper" English bookshop!

Recent scientific evidence of the popularity of real books is now available and is astonishing. Sales of e-readers have fallen dramatically in the past six months or so, following the results of experiments that show that content read on a screen is retained in the memory of the reader for much less time, and that the information is memorised in no particular order, compared to the same content read on paper in a proper book, where the reader is able to recall a series of events chronologically several months after a single reading.

Furthermore, it has been shown that the front cover image, and the blurb on the back, often looked at and re-read many times during the course of reading of a book, assist in the process of memorising content.

While this loss of absorption may not seem so vital to an adult reading purely for pleasure, it is crucial when it comes to students, studying a set book for exams.

Fenella Holt, Antibes Books (above)

RIGHT ON THE MONARCH

OUR Queen does a wonderful job of her ceremonial tasks and diplomatic duties but it seems likely that her madcap son Charles, if ever we have the misfortune to see him accede to the throne, will be a very different story.

We all enjoy the pomp and elegance surrounding the monarchy but we shouldn't be blind to the fact that it has often been less than honourable and sometimes evil and repugnant. The abdicated and exiled King Edward VIII was almost certainly a Nazi sympathiser and was photographed smiling alongside his American wife in the company of Hitler in 1937. There is still much light to be shone on their alleged dealings with that regime as late as 1941.

Just this month we have seen the overdone and grotesque ceremonies involving the remains of King Richard III. When his bones (but are we really sure they are indeed his?) were discovered under a car park some five centuries after his death it took £2.5 million of taxpayers' money to prepare for an official burial in March. The NHS could hire many much-needed nurses for that.

Then came the hysterics surrounding the burial. The procession streets were lined with uneducated masses that quite obviously know nothing about the despot they were celebrating. The fact is that this detestable tyrant usurped the throne and so wasn't even legitimate – he was an impostor. Even Shakespeare knew that. To attain power Richard III murdered his nephew Edward V and had Lord Hastings brutally beheaded without so much as a trial. He slaughtered hundreds of his own subjects in cold blood and sent others to die in battles he knew couldn't be won. He murdered Henry VI's son and heir Edward and then forced his widow Anne to marry him. He killed two royal children; his nephews aged 11 and 13 who would have become the rightful King Edward V and Richard, Duke of York.

In short, he was a psychopathic serial killer who finally died in battle while trying to kill Henry Tudor who was by then a threat to his legitimacy. Richard III was no national hero and no proper monarch. He did not deserve the honours of an official burial.

Keep the monarchy, why not? But not just any monarchy as has too often been the case.

Vive la Reine, Vive la République et Vive la France!

Charles Howell-Wright, Beausoleil, by email

ABSTRACT ADMISSIONS

UNTIL January 2nd, entry to most [municipal] museums in Nice was free. Now we have to pay. No doubt this is due to the understandable need to finance running costs but for Riviera residents (I believe Nice residents still get in for free), the new payment system is illogical to say the least. For €10 we can visit all and any of the municipal museums for a 24-hour period. A week pass is €20. Or we can buy a 24-, 48- or 72-hour "French Riviera Pass" for more but which also gives access to other museums and attractions along the Riviera.

Limiting this rather expensive ticket to 24 hours or 7 days makes no sense. Those of us who have already visited most of the museums and want to visit a specific temporary exhibit now find ourselves paying €10 for a single access. Visitors who want to spend 24 hours visiting several museums are getting much more access for the same price, of course.

A far more logical system would be to use something similar to the bus card system. For a set price one would get a fixed number of entries with no time limit. Say, 5 entries for €10 (or whatever). We would still be paying but we could spread our visits out over weeks or even months.

Someone hasn't thought this through logically, but I guess logic is a lot to expect from politicians and civil servants.

R. Thomas, Roquefort les Pins

WRITE TO US: Letters to the Editor can be sent by post (see page 50) or email: info@rivierareporter.com. 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.

april

FRANCE-GRANDE BRETAGNE NICE

Wed Apr 1, 14h: Walk. TBC.
Thurs Apr 2: Tea, biscuits, conversation and Scrabble in English or French.
Thurs Apr 9: "Fauré's a Jolly Good Fellow". Presentation in English by Ian Woolf about the composer Gabriel Fauré.
Wed Apr 15, 14h: Game of Pétanque. (Tel: 04 93 07 67 04.)
Thurs Apr 16: Book Club: "To Kill a Mockingbird".
For more on any of these events: 04 93 81 76 74 - fgb-nice.com

POLITICAL WINE

Wed Apr 1 & Wed May 6, 18h30h-20h: Riviera Chapter of Democrats Abroad's monthly event at La Canne à Sucre, (11 Promenade des Anglais, Nice). All Americans are invited to join us as we listen to a brief presentation by one of our members before engaging in thoughtful discussions. No formal cost but we ask that you support our host by ordering at least one drink during the event. Please RSVP (even "maybe") to dafrance.riviera@gmail.com. We hope to see you there!

EASTER SERVICES CANNES

Thurs Apr 2, 20h: Holy Communion service for Maundy Thursday.
Fri Apr 3, from 12h-15h: Vigil at the Cross.
Sun Apr 5, 9h: Holy Communion, 10:30: Easter Day Family Service.
Holy Trinity Church Cannes, Avenue Branly. See holytrinitycannes.org
For more Easter Services see also St Paul's Monaco (stpauls-monaco.com) and Holy Trinity Nice (anglican-nice.com).

VISIT STATE APARTMENTS

Thurs Apr 2-Sat Oct 31, daily 10h-18h: The Prince's Palace in Monaco is the private residence of Prince Albert II but the State Apartments are open for public visits part of the year. Entry €8 adults; €4 children. See palais.mc

Swedish Club on the French Riviera, 40th anniversary

Photo: George Favios

Mon May 4, 19h: The Joe Labero Show marks the beginning of the The Swedish Club's 40th anniversary. The Rivieraklubbene invites you, the international community of the French Riviera, to celebrate with us. Joe Labero, 3-time recipient of the Merlin Award (the equivalent of the Oscars of the magic world) is coming to Cannes to perform for The Swedish Club. He is internationally famous not only for large-scale illusions but also for close-up magical acts. The show is in English! At Espace Miramar, Rue Pasteur (around the corner from La Croisette); tickets €55. For more info contact Svenska on 04 92 13 15 34 (Mon-Fri 9h-12h) or labero@rivieraklubben.com

SUNNY BANK OPEN HOUSE

Thurs Apr 2 & Thurs May 7: Books, bric-a-brac, posh paraphernalia and light lunch.
Sat Apr 18 & Sat May 16: Books, bric-ab-brac, posh paraphernalia and 2-course lunch. At the Grange (815 chem Gourettes, Mouans-Sartoux).
And of course the library is open EVERY Thursday as usual (bric-a-brac and books). Tel: 04 93 47 94 20 - sunny-bank.org

PAINTING EXHIBITION ITALIAN ARTIST GINO ARCIDIACONO

Thurs Apr 2-9, daily 10h-12h and 15h-19h: With Gino Arcidiacono's paintings one slips into a sublime Mediterranean paradise as he shares with us his fascination with the enigmatic quality of water, its movements, its reflexions, its transparency. Espace Neptune, Quai du Nouveau Port Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat.

HARPSICHORD RECITAL HENDRIK BOUMAN

Mon Apr 6, 16h: Solo harpsichord recital at St Jean Baptiste Church in the port of St Jean Cap Ferrat. Entrance free, donations welcome for the restoration of the Chapelle de St Hospice. Hendrik Bouman plays on a double-manual harpsichord, which he designed and built, and will be shown in public for the first time. Specialised in the music of the 17th and 18th centuries, Hendrik Bouman is among the very unique composers who today writes music in the styles of the Baroque and Classical eras. To date, he has composed over 120 works for a variety of instrumental combinations, works by Bach, Rameau, Scarlatti, Duphly and by the artist himself. Tel Anna 04 93 07 06 95 - hendrikbouman.com

SHEPHERD & DOG LUNCH

Every Wednesday, 11h, English library, Shepherd & Dog lunch at 12h30. Every Thursday, 10h, Keep Fit. Holy Trinity Church Cannes, Avenue Branly. See holytrinitycannes.org

ANNE REID CABARET

Fri Apr 10 & Sat Apr 11, 19h40 for 20h: They met here on the Cap and decided to put together a show about the magical lyricists Comden and Green, who gave us "Singing in the Rain" and "New York, New York", among a kaleidoscope of classics, all woven together with Annie and Stefan's humour and charm. They have just completed a sell-out week at London's glittering cabaret hub, Crazy Coqs, to wonderful reviews. Donations of €25. Reserve at magsaldridge@gmail.com or on 04 93 61 01 71

OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE SOUTH OF FRANCE SPRING LUNCH

Sat Apr 11: Spring lunch in La Motte. For more contact: halfordoxbridge@yahoo.co.uk

MONTE-CARLO ROLEX MASTERS TENNIS

Sat Apr 11-Sun Apr 19: See montecarlotennismasters.com

CONCERT NICE

Sun Apr 12, 17h-18h30: Concert *International du printemps et de l'amitié* at Holy Trinity Church 11, rue de la Buffa, Nice. See anglican-nice.com

TOP MARQUES MONACO

Thurs Apr 16-Sun Apr 19: The world's most exclusive supercar show. See topmarquesmonaco.com

INTERNATIONAL CLUB OF THE RIVIERA

Thurs Apr 16: Golf/Lunch Outing. Email: info@internationalclub.fr

VIAC

Thurs Apr 16: Boules in Les Arcs. More details on VIAC.fr

MIMOSA BALL CANCER BENEFIT

Fri Apr 17: Black tie evening of dinner and dancing with an auction hosted by Christie's of Monaco at the Royal Mougins Golf Club. For more about tickets or opportunities to sponsor or support the event, please contact Mimosa Matters on Facebook or Mimosaball@gmail.com

VALLAURIS WITH AMERICAN CLUB OF THE RIVIERA

Sat Apr 18: A fun day in Vallauris – town of ceramics – and a super lunch. All details: americanclubriviera.com or Jackie Pressman 06 98 12 89 00.

ANTIBES ART FAIR

Sat Apr 18-Mon May 4: See salon-antiquaires-antibes.com

CAR BOOT SALE NICE

Sat Apr 18, 10h-16h: Come to our up-coming Car Boot Sale/ Vide-grenier at Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Nice (11 rue de la Buffa, near the place Grimaldi). Should you wish to donate any items we would be very glad to receive these on Fri Apr 17 between 17h-19h at the hall in the church courtyard. See anglican-nice.com

AMIAC

Thurs April 23: Les Pierre Rouges in Valbonne. Please contact Doug or Anne on 04 92 97 50 72 or email dougattwood@orange.fr to reserve. See also amiac.org

BA VAR

Thurs Apr 23: Lunch at St Maximin. Fri May 22: Lunch at the Trout Lake, Entrecasteaux. Call 06 33 01 03 48 or see baofthevar.com

ANTIBES CELEBRATES YACHTING

Sat Apr 24 & Sun Apr 25, 9h30-18h30: After the last-minute cancellation of the Antibes Yacht Show, ASAP (Association to Support Port Vauban Evolution) is putting together a two-day program at Port Vauban, Bastion St Jaume and IYCA (Billionaires Quay), with representatives from within the yachting industry, including brokerage, charter, networking, employment forum, seminar. Free to public. See antibescelebratesyachting.com

FRANCE-GRANDE BRETAGNE NICE

Fri Apr 24: Guided Tour "Les Cèdres", the Marnier-Lapostelle private botanical garden at St Jean Cap Ferrat. For more: 04 93 81 76 74 or see fgb-nice.com

Mougins School fundraiser dinner

Fri Apr 24: At The Royal Mougins Golf Resort and in support of educatingcambodia.com, tickets are €65 per person. You will enjoy a champagne cocktail, three-course dinner with wine and coffee, with musical interludes by Mougins School students and dancing to a professional DJ as well as the opportunity to win great gifts from the tombola. A gastronomic evening for a great cause. Please contact Sue at marketing@mougins-school.com or 04 93 90 15 47 (Tuesdays and Thursdays).

COMMONWEALTH CLUB OF THE RIVIERA

Sat Apr 25: AGM.
Fri May 8: VE Day. Details on commonwealthclubriviera.com

may

IWC-VAR BOOK SALE

Fri May 1, 11h-18h & Sat May 2, 10-1: At the Salle la Renaissance in Fayence, 10 books for €5 with profits going to charity. Drop off Thurs Apr 30, 14-17h. See iwc-var.org

AU REVOIR LA TIMONERIE

Fri May 1 & Sat May 2, 20h: As Hilary moves on to Aix en Provence, La Timonerie asks you to join us for an apéro dinatoire of Cambodian fare prepared by London celebrity chef, Tom Norrington Davies, while we offer you a cornucopia of sound and vision spanning 20 years of professional English theatre on the Côte d'Azur and 8 years of our Cambodian project. Reserve at magsaldridge@gmail.com or on 04 93 61 01 71

VIAC

Mon May 4: A wine evening in Grimaud (info on website).
Wed May 13: Gourmet lunch. More details on VIAC.fr

BRITISH ASS'N CANNES

Sat May 9, noon: Spring BBQ. €25. Chairman's garden, Mouans-Sartoux. Reserve 04 93 75 65 17.

INTERNATIONAL CLUB OF THE RIVIERA

Sat May 9: Lunch/Monaco.
Thurs May 21: ICR Golf/Lunch.
Fri May 29: ICR/RBC Summer Wine Grill/Networking Party.
Call 06 21 20 60 10 or email info@internationalclub.fr

AMIAC

Tues May 12: Le Pearle St Laurent du Var. Please contact Laurie on 04 93 56 34 92 to reserve. See also amiac.org

CANNES FILM FESTIVAL

Wed May 13- Sun May 24: See festival-cannes.com

RADA, *EDUCATING RITA*

Thurs May 14, Fri May 15 & Sat May 16, 20h: The Riviera Amateur Dramatic Association presents the famous comedy by Willy Russel at the Mougins School. Admission: €10 (incl. a free drink). Book by phone: 09 53 73 56 70, email: bookings@rada.freeservers.com or from the English Book Centre, 12 rue Alexis Julien, Valbonne.

ENSEMBLE VOCAL & INSTRUMENTAL RISTRETTO

Sat May 16, 20h: Bass soloist: Jean-Luc Ballestra and conducted by Errol Girdlestone. Orlando Gibbons *O, clap your hands*; JS Bach *Ich habe genug* (with Jean-Luc Ballestra); Charles Villiers Stanford *Coelos ascendit hodie;* JS Bach *Der Geist hilft unsrer Schwachheit auf.* At St Paul's Anglican Church, Monaco (22 ave de Grande Bretagne). For ticket information, please see facebook.com/ensembleristretto

CANNES FILM FESTIVAL LUNCH

Sat May 16: Lunch on the beach with the American Club of the Riviera during the Cannes Film Festival, with insights from industry professionals, and the famous film quiz. All details: americanclubriviera.com or Burton Gintell 06 20 40 11 28.

MONACO GRAND PRIX:

Thurs May 21-Sun May 24.

LES MISÉRABLES

Tues May 26 and Wed May 27, 20h: Mougins School presents *Les Misérables*. To purchase tickets – Adults €10 and children €5 – contact 04 93 90 15 47 or information@mougins-school.com

RACE FOR LIFE MOUGINS

Sun May 31, 8h30: At the Parc de l'Etang de Fontmerle in Mougins, and open to all women and girls and is a 5km walk, jog or run. The entry fee and the sponsorship money will go to Cancer Research UK. If you are interested please contact Angela Anderson +33 6 48 50 36 46 or email: raceforlifefrance06@gmail.com or see cruk06.wix.com/cruk06

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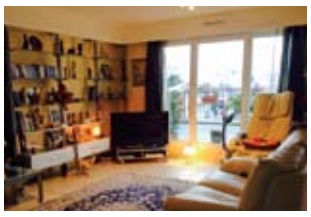

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