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In this issue ...

The Insider

QUITE a few friends have told me they're struggling with *la rentrée*. Whether it be adjusting to the post-vacation rhythm of work and school runs or perhaps a result of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), which affects at least one in 100 French. An IPSOS study last year carried out in a six-week period from the beginning of September claimed that 60% of the French admitted to being *fatigué* during this period. In other words, people are bummed.

I, *sigh*, find myself in this category, but for reasons completely different.

I spent the summer preparing for the SwimRun World Championship in the Swedish archipelago. My husband and I did a qualifying race in May, also in Sweden, and we spent the hottest summer on record in Nice getting up at 4am and, alternating between swimming in our running shoes and running in our wetsuits, trained as a team for the dawn to dusk race of 65km running plus 10km of open water swimming over 26 islands.

We were primed, fit. The weather forecast was cold and rainy but as race day approached, winds moved in. We are not fast people but we thrive in endurance competitions. Our kryptonite, however, is windy weather because we are solid swimmers and needed reasonably calm waters to balance out our slower running. There were six cut off times to meet during the day.

Alas, the swells were the worst in the race's ten-year history. We suffered a wetsuit malfunction from the first swim and that sealed our fate. With every minute that we fell behind, the water became more violent.

And so, for the first time ever, for either of us, we didn't cross the finish line.

It took us a few days to work through the disappointment, the humiliation, and the tears (at least on my end). I know, nobody died, no one got hurt; our lives are exactly the same as before.

I remember Paula Radcliffe telling me to give equal time to savour your victories as to process your defeats, and then move on. And in doing so, I've embraced that defeat is inevitable (so now I've checked that box) and also, it's impermanent. To quote Marilyn vos Savant, "Defeat is temporary but giving up altogether makes it permanent." So loss will not define me.

I think I'll give pickleball a go.

See page 20. *Nancy Heslin, Editor*

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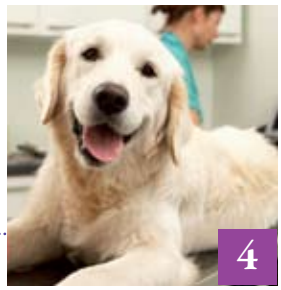

Cover: Monaco ©Riviera Reporter
Below: Monte-Carlo Beach Hotel, Elsa ©SBM

A MEAL THAT EXCELSA page 39

IT'S TRAINING CATS AND DOGS

LAUNCHED in September 2014, RééduCat & Dog is the first centre in the PACA region specialising in physical therapy, physiotherapy, osteopathy and acupuncture for animals.

Veterinian Hélène Fugier had the idea of opening the centre for pets – when their condition requires rehabilitation in addition to veterinary care – based on a clinic in Turin, Italy, that started 13 years ago.

Dr Fugier decided to specialise in osteopathy, and together with fellow veterinarian Nathalie Denais, they based their practice on a mix of treatments: laser therapy, ultrasound, electrical stimulation, Tecar therapy (electromagnetic waves), a hydrotherapy pool with an underwater treadmill, osteopathy and veterinarian acupuncture. From diagnosis to rehab sessions, everything is planned so that the animal recovers as well as possible and under the best conditions.

Since its opening last year, more than 110 patients, mostly dogs, have been treated for conditions ranging from osteoarthritis (the most common case) to herniated discs through hip dysplasia. Post-operative care also exists for pet accommodation or short to long-term hospitalization.

For Dr Denais, animals must be happy to be at the clinic, which is why games play an important role in rehabilitation: "Without their participation, our work could not be achieved."

For some "petients", the transition at RééduCat & Dog centre gives a new lease on life, as evidenced by the case of Laelynn, a small quadriplegic dog in long-term accommodation. "The vets at the RééduCat & Dog centre who take care of Laelynn are amazing. The resources and techniques established in this clinic are wonderful and we encourage anyone looking for rehabilitation for their pet following an accident, surgery or illness, to contact them."

See *http://reeducation-veterinaire.fr* or call 04 93 94 09 29.

le FLASH ...

SOUR GRAPES

PHILIPPE Guigal, CEO of Guigal cellars, historically located in Ampuis, home of the appellation Côte-Rotie, was "chagrined" the morning of September 10th. His team were preparing to harvest a prestigious plot on the Condrieu appellation only to find 850 feet – a third of the grapes – had been stolen.

Condrieu is the northern Rhone's most distinctive vineyard and Guigal commented that "This is a very qualitative plot, which we harvest late in a dry year in order to have residual sugars that give wine the particular balance."

"My neighbours and local residents are as appalled as I am ... this is a first in the region," added Guigal, who estimates the damage at around €40,000 – based on 1000 half-bottles of this wine only produced twice, in 1999 and 2003.

CITIZEN CANNES

A good citizen smartphone app has been launched in Cannes. So now you can report an illegal dumping on the street, a hole in the road, a broken streetlight ... by downloading the "Civique Cannes" real-time app on your mobile.

Simple to use: the user sends a photo, with location from the app's geotag, and adds a description of a few lines. The Âllo Mairie service will then receive the alert.

We're pretty sure there will be lots of complaints: Cannes was just voted the world's tenth most unfriendliest city in Condé Nast Traveler's Readers' Choice Awards. Marseille ranked Number 4.

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Accidents blight start of French hunting season

THE French hunting season began with a bang mid-September but no sooner had it started than the first accident was reported when a hunter shot his own brother in the leg trying to hit a hare. It promises not to be the last.

France has seen some tragic and freakish hunting accidents in recent years and things don't bode well for the coming season after a 72-year-old was badly injured on the opening weekend of September 12th.

The hunter was hit in the leg by lead pellets fired by another hunter, which unconfirmed reports said was his own brother.

The accident occurred near Montregard in the east of the Haute-Loire *département*, when the brother was reportedly taking aim at a hare.

The victim was taken to hospital where his condition is not thought to be too serious.

The stray shot is by no means the worst hunting accident in France in recent years, with around 12 people killed and 200 injured during each season.

In September 2013, an 82-year-old hunter shot two walkers after mistaking them for pheasants, and in October 2013 a man killed his son by mistake after thinking he was a boar.

On that same weekend a six-year-old boy was killed in a freak accident when a dog knocked over a loaded gun that set off the trigger.

In December 2012, a boy was left fighting for his life after being shot in the head while hunting with his uncle, and in December 2013 a teenager accidentally killed his father on a hunting trip.

Perhaps the most bizarre incident in recent years was when a French motorist was killed after a bullet fired by a hunter ricocheted off a wild boar, before travelling almost 2km across fields, through the driver's window and eventually striking the driver in the head.

Each incident has been used as ammunition by anti-hunting groups who argue that stricter rules need to put in place around a leisure activity that attracts some 1.25 million participants in France.

The Association for the Protection of Wild Animals (ASPAS), which is campaigning against a ban on hunting on Sundays and for more safety measures to be introduced, held protests claiming that five people had already been injured before the season had even opened – including a 16-year-old walking along a country road.

Pierre Athanaze, the head of ASPAS, said the laws needed to be changed in France to prevent more deaths.

"France is the only country in Europe where people can hunt every day, which is why we are the country in Europe with the most accidents.

"Hunting needs to be stopped on Sundays, because this is the most dangerous day. There are more and more people heading out into the countryside on a Sunday, whether it's walking, mountain biking or collecting mushrooms. We want an end to it," he said.

Athanaze also pointed to the fact that many people who go hunting in France

FRANCE NEWS, PAGE 6

France backs Germany's move to close border

PUBLICLY at least, the French government is backing Germany's decision to bring back border controls along the frontier with Austria.

The German Chancellor Angela Merkel "is not closing the door to migrants," Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve told French radio as questions mount over the future of the EU's borderless rules known as Schengen. "She is restoring border controls to ensure that those who come to Germany are those who have refugee status and to make sure the countries that border Germany comply with the Schengen rules.

"These rules, in particular, require the registration of migrants in the country where they crossed the (EU's) external borders," said Cazeneuve.

Because some countries have not kept to these rules, "Germany has decided to temporarily establish border controls," he added.

French President François Hollande once again called for "registration centres" to be set up in EU frontier countries like Italy, Hungary and Greece, to better manage the influx of refugees and "help avoid what is happening today".

Hollande and Merkel "share the same evaluation of the current situation of the refugees". France and Germany insist that the EU's obligatory refugee quota plan aimed at relocating 160,000 refugees must be implemented, but Eastern European countries like Hungary and the Czech Republic continue to object.

Germany made the decision to reimpose border controls after admitting it could no longer cope with a record surge of refugees. The city of Munich alone recorded an influx of 63,000 asylum seekers in two weeks.

The move effectively suspends participation of Europe's economic powerhouse in the 28-nation bloc's borderless system, one of the cornerstones of the European integration project since it was created in the 1990s. It's also seen as a tactic to put pressure on Eastern European countries like Hungary, who are so far resistant to the EU's plan to share the burden of refugees through a mandatory quota system.

France's influential anti-immigration National Front party were left rejoicing Germany's decision. In a statement signed by Marine Le Pen, the party said France needed to close its border "to prevent the overflow of illegal immigrants who couldn't get to Germany, from coming here".

But Interior Minister Cazeneuve dismissed her idea as "stupid", claiming very few refugees cross the borders from Germany into France. Photo: MPD01605

FRANCE NEWS, FROM PAGE 5

these days are elderly and are "not subject to any medical checks" to ensure they have their wits about them and are capable of spotting the difference between a pheasant and two mushroom collectors.

"They need to introduce medical checks for hunters," he said.

ASPAS is also demanding a change in the law whereby the organisers of hunts can be held responsible in the case of serious accidents.

This year's hunting season closes at the end of February.

Crackdown on guns after Marseille shooting

FRANCE'S interior minister has called for a comprehensive plan to combat arms trafficking in the country, after a shooting early on Sunday September 13th killed one man and injured five people in the centre of Marseille.

Two men opened fire with a 9mm automatic weapon outside of a 24-hour restaurant in the city's Opera district.

"It would seem that following a dispute, a vehicle facing the street opened fire with a Kalashnikov on people who were at the entrance to the bar," Marseille's deputy prosecutor André Ribes told news agency AFP.

"For now, we cannot call this a settling of scores," he said.

A security guard was killed and three of the five injured were seriously wounded, according to Ribes.

Some of the victims were "collateral damage" while others worked as security for the restaurant, including the slain guard, he said. There were 15 to 20 people present during the shooting.

The city in southern France and its surroundings areas are the scene of turf wars between multiple rival gangs battling for control of the drugs trade in the city's poorest neighbourhoods.

"There is always too much violence in this city," Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve told the French television news show "Le Grand Rendez-vous" on Sunday.

He said 6,000 weapons a year were being seized from criminal groups, of which 1,200 were combat rifles and other weapons of war.

"The disarmament of all criminal groups should be stepped up, and I propose that in the next five to six weeks ... there is a comprehensive plan to fight against arms trafficking and possession of weapons in our country," he said.

1,000 French restaurants sign up for 2 for 1 deal

THE reservation lines opened on September 14th for Tous au Restaurant – an initiative that was launched in 2010 by star-studded French chef Alaine Ducasse to get more people into restaurants in France – and saw almost 1,000 restaurants around France offering three course meals on a buy-one-get-one-free deal.

Foodies from the world over can book a cheap(er) evening out in France between September 21st and October 4th at one of 923 eateries offering two guests a full menu – starter, main, and dessert – for the price of one, and this marks the first year that a wine list is included.

The restaurants range from cheap eateries – where you could dine for two for just €25 ($28) – to the likes of Le Petit Nice in Marseille, which will set you back €395 for lunch alone. So what's the catch?

There doesn't appear to be one. Although people who took advantage of the initiative in recent years have taken to TripAdvisor to warn that it's only selected menus that are available – not the restaurant's usual full menu. And it might be tough to get a place. The official website has had an electronic countdown ticking down the minutes until the booking lines were open, suggesting the event may be as hotly anticipated as last year when around 500,000 people took part, according to the "L'Express" newspaper. ■

French news: fast and fresh

For current affairs, property, jobs and more, visit:

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France's news in English

THE LOCAL fr

ARE WE DOWN FOR THE COUNT?

IN this corner, appearing out of nowhere in only a few months, Jeremy Corbyn's rise to a 59% first-round victory for the Labour Party leadership was the biggest electoral mandate of any party leader in British political history.

What will this mean for expats? Less than enthusiastic about the EU, which is far too austerity-minded and market-driven for his liking, this bearded left-winger breaks ranks with most of his party by envisaging the previously unthinkable for a Labourite: Britain leaving the EU. The consequences of a possible Brexit (mostly negative) for expats in France have been outlined in previous issues and another push towards the door by the new leader of the nation's second biggest party will do nothing to help the cause.

The mood among some expats is restless and increased numbers are covering every eventuality by applying for French nationality. Figures are imprecise but there is a visible movement towards more dual-citizenship demands by British expats, who would like to remain resident in France without the administrative hassle that non-EU residents have to face.

The tendency is even more pronounced in the UK where a "Guardian" survey reports a rush of dual-nationality requests from continental Europeans, who are worried about the impact of an "out" vote in Britain's membership referendum. The hundreds of thousands of French immigrants, who were attracted to the UK by its favourable business environment, now share similar concerns as the estimated 2 million British residents on the continent – the return of working permits, non-reciprocal healthcare benefits, tighter restrictions on business and property ownership, the possibility of currency controls, increased taxation of their foreign pensions and longer queues at airport immigration.

Many European migrants to Britain grew into adulthood there and find it difficult to envisage returning to their home countries. For the most part, British businesses welcome the hard working Polish and the highly qualified engineers and medical personnel from the continent. The rise in the quality of restaurant cuisine and fashion can be also attributed to continental influence, much of it French. Leading entrepreneur, Sir James Dyson, worries that higher education students from the continent may find themselves in the same situation as non-EU nationals: "We take their money, we give them our knowledge, and then we kick them out."

Opting for British nationality is neither cheap, quick nor straightforward and even native Britons would struggle to pass the citizenship test, which focuses on British history and culture: "When was the current voting age established? Who defeated the Vikings? What is the official report of the Parliament's Proceedings called? When was the Victoria Cross introduced? Who is Boudicca? What are the powers of the Scottish Parliament? Can serving members of the Armed Forces stand for public office? When did civil war begin between the King Charles I and Parliament?"

These are far more difficult questions than Conservative Lord Tebbit's infamous "Cricket Test" about which side an immigrant's father or grandfather fought for in the Second World War. Germans would stand no chance with Tebbit but Poles, Czechs and Slovaks would find themselves on the right side of his bizarre citizenship criteria.

Corbyn has yet to formulate his feelings about western European migrants or British expats to Europe and their importance to British trade and world influence. It seems safe to presume that his Trotskyist mindset will

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view those of us who live abroad as the rich tax-dodging "lettuce eaters" once comically depicted in the French press.

Much is made of what Corbyn's hold on the Labour Party might really mean but the fact remains that he is leader of a party that is very unlikely to be in government before 2020 at the earliest, by which time he may well have been ousted by insiders who consider him unelectable in a national election. So let's not panic quite yet.

A loyal subject

QUEEN Elizabeth II, Britain's longest reigning monarch, makes no secret of her attachment to the "traditions, strength and majesty" of the Commonwealth. It now appears that her excellent command of French and her obvious affection for France may well have come in handy if history had gone differently in the 1950s. Surprisingly there was once a chance that the annoyingly overused phrase "*les sujets de sa gracieuse majesté*" would refer to French citizens also.

According to recently divulged documents from the British National Archives, after talks with his French counterpart Guy Mollet in 1956, British Prime Minister Anthony Eden told his Cabinet Secretary, Sir Norman Brook: "We should give immediate consideration to France joining the Commonwealth."

Mollet's France was going through troubled times at home and abroad and, being a committed Anglophile and admirer of the emerging British welfare state, he looked to Britain as a natural military and economic ally. The situation in Suez was one of his main concerns.

The proposal was not met with enthusiasm on either side of the channel but French opinions were particularly hostile. Henri Soutou, Professor of Contemporary History at the Sorbonne in Paris, called the idea "preposterous" knowing that the French people would never accept a royal head of state.

When Britain lost the battle for Suez to Gamal Adbel Nasser, who the late historical writer Saïd K. Aburish called "The Last Arab" in his biography of the Egyptian leader, Mollet saw no further interest in pursuing the union. The proposal remains documented in British national archives but there is no known record of it in France. Instead, France joined Germany the next year to begin forming the EEC while Britain watched from the sidelines. ■

... Gun ownership and firearm abuse has never been seen as a typically British problem in a country where even the police are largely unarmed. In the US, there's an average of almost one gun per inhabitant while in Britain this figure is only 1 in 35. Legally registered firearms number 1.8 million (most of them hunting shotguns) for a population of 64 million. Nevertheless, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary has raised concerns as

UK BRIEFS

five-year licences often go unrenewed. They claim that mental health issues can be overlooked and say that "medical checks to weed out unsuitable bus drivers are more rigorous than those aimed at gun owners". See page 5 for more on guns in France.

... The size of the biggest British family is now one of the highest in Europe, with more having four children, more than at any time since 1970. A quarter of all babies come from foreign-born mothers.

... One in 65 British adults is now a millionaire, up 41% in the past five years. Much of this newfound wealth is not cash in the bank but can be attributed to the increased value of family-owned property, especially in London, which has more resident millionaires than all of Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Northern England. ■

LET'S BE FRANKS

THE Blevins Franks free seminars explain the implications of French residency by providing an update on important issues, from European Certificate of Succession to UK Pension Freedom, and from Automatic Exchange of Information to Assurance Vie (they're not all the same!).

Venues include: Mon Oct 5, 10h30: Lorgues, Château de Berne; Tues Oct 6, 10h30: Mandelieu, Riviera Golf de Barbossi; Thurs Oct 8, 10h30: Nice, Palais de la Mediterranée.; Fri Oct 9, 10:30: Menton, Hôtel Napoleón. Book on *blevinsfranks.com* or contact Rob Kay 04 93 00 17 80.

THE HOME STRETCH

An American living in France goes house-hunting

BY PJ HESLIN

OVER the last few years, my wife and I have been weighing the pros and cons of buying versus renting in France and going over the financial metrics, taking into consideration also that we are mid-lifers. So I was rather intrigued by a "New York Times" article in June – "More Americans Are Renting, and Paying More, as Homeownership Falls" – which cited a report by Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies stating "the nation's homeownership rate has been falling for eight years, down to 63.7 percent in the first quarter of this year". Consequently, the figure for rentals has seen its strongest 10-year growth period since the 1980s, with a large proportion of renters "paying more than 30 percent of their income on rent".

Meanwhile, research from the Council of Mortgage Lenders in the UK indicates that 71 per cent of people born in 1970 were homeowners by the time they were 40, but only 47 per cent of those born in 1990 will be able to buy property by the same age.

We opted to get our foot on the property ladder, which I thought would be a similar process to purchasing my condo in Los Angeles some years back. Well, I can sum up the experience in this country by borrowing a few words from John Gibson: The wheels of French real estate grind exceedingly slow.

First the similarities: both experiences are nerve-wracking, especially when you are buying with a partner. Just because you love somebody doesn't mean you share the same taste in what will probably be your living space for the next twenty years. But I believe a home, just like a dog, is not chosen but rather it chooses you. When my wife and I visited an apartment early July, we both knew within minutes, without saying a word to one another, that this would be our place.

Another parallel is the commission for the *agent immobilière* (real estate agent), which is about the same percentage as what I paid in the US and this was also factored into the asking price. So essentially the seller pays for the sale of the house in both cases.

That's where any similarity of buying properties in these two countries ends.

To start with, the behavior of real estate agents. When buying stateside, I dealt with only one realtor whereas in France we had several. In fact, every time we saw an apartment (*SeLoger.com* is a good start), it was with a new agent, but unlike realtors back home, none tried to give us the hard sell. In fact, all were so laid back and frank that they seemed to be protecting us from a potentially bad decision: "Always offer at least €20,000 less than asking price."

Making a formal offer is also completely different. As I said, within about five minutes of seeing one apartment, we wanted to buy it. We'd been told that another couple was coming to look at it for a second time after us (it was my wife who pushed to see the property before them), so I immediately let go of any notion of getting the place. I figured the other couple would put in a similar offer and we would get locked into a bidding war until we were outpriced. Since there wasn't much wiggle room on our budget, we had very little ammunition. The estate agent explained, remarkably, that if we put in an offer then that meant nobody else could, it would immediately be *sous compromis* (under offer) and therefore temporarily off the market.

So it would be difficult for France to have a housing bubble. When I purchased my condo in LA it was pre-crisis, when the housing market was nuts. Prices of one-bedroom condos I was looking at would literally rise by ten thousand dollars each week.

As soon as we put in the offer, we went back to the real estate agent's office and spent over two hours signing and initialing paperwork, including, as Tim Clark points out in his Property Column (see page 28), diagnostics, the building's AGM minutes, official charges and tax bills. We also signed a 10-page *Vente de biens et droits immobiliers sous conditions suspensives* – aka the *Compromis de vente*, an offer with conditional clauses. Here's where we had our first deadline, as this document gives you a certain amount of days, usually 45, to prove that you are in the process of obtaining a mortgage (and within ten days you must also show good faith about getting a loan).

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This is also the stage when the agent can recommend a notaire if neither the buyer nor seller has one; the buyer is then responsible to transfer a deposit of the notaire's total fee, which can be between 7 to 10 percent for older properties.

Also worth pointing out that anyone living on the property as a primary residence must sign the *Compromis*. So, for example, a boyfriend of the selling girlfriend; this serves as official recognition that the property is being sold, and so legally this non-owner must also leave.

Also, once the *Compromis* is signed, the seller is legally bound to the agreement and would have to pay a penalty, around 10% of the selling price, to pull out at this point.

For the buyer, there's lots of time to change your mind. The notaire will process all the paperwork you have initialed (*paraphé*) and signed, and eventually (for us it took 5 weeks) all that paperwork arrives by registered mail from the notary's office, from which point the buyer has eight consecutive days after signing to pull out of the deal without financial penalty. (However, the *conditions suspensive de financement* in your offer should also indicate that if a mortgage cannot be obtained then the deal is annulled without penalty.)

But this, as we learned, is still nowhere near the closing date, the *acte authentique*, which transfers ownership to you.

In parallel to the notaire's handiwork is the actual mortgage process. Be prepared: this is going to take awhile. It is said that the whole buying process, from the offer to the transfer of ownership, takes about three months, but after some investigating, it can take much longer.

We could have approached the banks directly to try to wrestle a deal but we went to a mortgage broker, *un courtier*, who, for a fee, finds the best mortgage rate possible from all the banks.

Mortgage brokers have become more popular in France with the rise of Auto-Entrepeneurs, or freelancers. For us, a broker made sense because we didn't have the time to make six appointments with every bank in the city, and also with the language, we felt he could better represent our financial case, which in the eyes of French banking institutions isn't typical. My wife had already visited a few brokers to get an approximate budget so that we wouldn't be wasting anyone's time but we decided to go with the one that was recommended to us by our agent; a dapper young man who worked in a big, bright, professional-looking office steps from Place Wilson. What we liked about him is that he was up front about all of the mandatory costs involved above the mortgage, like the *frais de dossier* – a processing fee paid to the bank that can range from €150 to €1500; the *frais de garantie,* which if, I understood correctly, is a non-refundable security deposit that covers the processing cost to the lending institution to recover your property should you default repayment; and of course, the broker fee (*frais de courtage*).

The other point about negotiating your mortgage is, unlike in the US, the question of compulsory life insurance, which can be taken from the mortgage institution or separately from another insurance company. In addition, depending on your age and the size of your down payment, you are obliged to take out a heftier percentage of insurance (the minimum is 50%). This is something my French lessons at Alliance-Française Nice did not cover.

Anyway, when we met with our broker to provide the stack of required documents, we were feeling a bit of a time crunch. Even though we put the offer in on July 2nd, August was creeping up: *les vacances*. Since all of France basically shuts down for holidays, we knew we had to get the mortgage ball rolling before *les vacances*.

It seems strange to me that the mortgage process in France starts after you make an official offer. And so lies another difference between France and America. Back in California, when I purchased my condo, I went to my mortgage broker armed only with a driver's licence and bankcard. With only these two pieces of information, the broker was able to access all my financial information and approved me not only for the amount I was seeking but said I qualified for double. Granted, this was the lead up to the crisis when kids with newspaper routes could qualify for six-figure mortgages, so I hope lenders are a little more cautious now.

What happens next is another story but let's just say that the first ten days of September have passed and, fingers crossed, we'll have a mortgage approved for a move to the new place ... before Christmas. ■

See next issue for more on the loan offer process and transferring ownership in France.

The US Consular Agency in Nice has closed its doors permanently. See page 46 for details.

Smooth Sailing

On Oct 4th, the world's biggest training tall ship, the *Sedov* windjammer that celebrates its 95th anniversary in 2016, will pay a visit to Monaco. Photo: Christian Ferrer

BY MOLLY BROWN

IT was the hottest July on earth since records began and scientists at the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) say they expect 2015 to be the warmest year on record: "The world is continuing to warm." Sun lovers and beach bunnies quite like the idea, but Prince Albert has been travelling the world for some years, advocating the urgent need to protect the planet. In 2005, on a scientific expedition to the North Pole and the Arctic regions, he took a photograph of the glaciers in Spitsbergen. When he showed it to the Norwegian scientists alongside one taken a century ago from the same spot by his great-great-grandfather, the explorer and oceanographer Prince Albert I, they were amazed to see how far the glaciers had receded; the effect of global warming on the environment was clear to see.

Plastic pollution

MONACO promotes electric cars, cleaner fuel for buses and even the F1 Grand Prix cars; tunnels taking traffic under Monaco underground has helped lessen the air pollution, but it is a small country with too many cars for its narrow streets. Plastic bags are being phased out in the Beausoleil market, but everything in the supermarkets is plastic wrapped while a dwindling population of sea turtles continue to mistake plastic bags for jellyfish and choke to death. Nature's revenge is an invasion of jellyfish every summer.

After a season where hundreds of yachts cruise the Mediterranean coast, do you wonder what ends up in the sea? Some Monaco school children were invited aboard a visiting American battleship some years ago and on a tour of the ship were impressed when the torpedo tube was fired. Later, at question time, a small voice asked: "What do you do with all the garbage when you are at sea?" The captain reluctantly admitted that it was fired way out into the ocean deep ... in the torpedo tube!

Routine diving inspections of Port Hercule have retrieved everything from champagne bottles to shopping trolleys, and when members of Monaco Diving Club clean out the sea at Larvotto at the end of summer, they bring up an amazing collection of objects lost by swimmers or brought in by the waves.

Many beach resorts virtually close down in the winter when ski season starts, but Monaco never sleeps. Fewer Ferraris roar around the Grand Prix circuit in the middle of the night, but work on underground car parks in Port Hercule and Place du Casino never stops. Some residents are taking a long winter vacation and double-glazing salesman must be doing well. Will humans ever develop ear lids? They would be a sell out fashion accessory in Monaco. The good news is that although the contract for the 6-hectare €2 billion land reclamation project was recently awarded to the Bouygues Group, the local developer J. B. Pastor et Fils and four architects, work will not begin for another year. The extension will be set on eighteen 26m-high concrete caissons weighing 10,000 tonnes each and involve an extension to the Grimaldi Forum, which itself took ten years to build, as there were problems with flooding in the foundations. As the car park, theatres and exhibition space were to be beneath sea level, advice from Dutch experts was necessary at the time.

From Russia with love

CELEBRATING its 15th anniversary this year, the Grimaldi Forum has launched a new logo and website and its summer exhibition of Russian art attracted 30,000 visitors. Its autumn programme includes concerts, exhibitions, music and dance and celebrates Monaco's *Fête Nationale* in November with Opera Monte Carlo's new production of Puccini's "Tosca" with Martina Serefino and Bryn Terfel.

Celebrations of Russian culture continue with a visit by the Russian sailing ship *Sedov*, a chess exhibition and a Russian food fair in October. The Monte Carlo Philharmonic Orchestra's concerts echo with wonderful Russian names ... Tchaikovsky, Khachaturian, Shostakovitch ... and Russian musicians add to the eclectic theme of the Monaco Jazz Festival in November. Let's hope we do not have a Russian winter. ■

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BUSINESS

TOP 5 TAX BREAKS

BY PETER JOHNSON

Photo: Fibonacci Blue

TAX bills came early this year; Bercy must need the money. In previous years, French tax statements had started arriving in September and a second batch might have come out in October, while for some nonresidents it would be early in the New Year.

Having paid or contested it (as many S1 holders have successfully done in respect of the social tax or *prélèvements sociaux* – see last issue), one's mind is concentrated between now and the end of the year in reducing the next bill. Here are some tips:

PENSION PLANNING: for those who are still working, there is plenty of encouragement from the French government to ease the State burden by topping up your pension provision with a tax-efficient pension plan. The self-employed have the disposition of the *Loi Madelin* while employed people can use the PERP; both programmes offer a handsome degree of tax deductibility whereby premiums paid are deducted from taxable income.

PROPERTY INVESTMENTS: under the *Loi Pinel,* one can invest up to €300,000 in a new build project giving an annual reduction in your tax bill of €5,500 for 12 years. The property must be rented out on a permanent basis with government-decreed guidelines on the maximum amount of rent you can receive. The advantage, therefore, is not so much in rental income but in the tax deductibility.

HOME IMPROVEMENTS: anything that can save energy is looked upon with a favourable eye by the tax office; up to 30% of your energy-saving home improvements give rise to a tax credit, up to a maximum ceiling of €8,000 for a single person, €16,000 for a married couple. Lots of items are eligible, from double-glazing to heating to roof insulation to hot water heaters. Be warned, however, the work must be carried out by a qualified professional and it's only the material that gives rise to the tax credit, not the labour.

DONATIONS: we all give a few hundred euros a year to the Red Cross or Médecins sans Frontières, but few people see the tax efficiency of this. Effectively, 75% of your donation is tax deductible up to €529 a year. So well worth doing, for lots of good reasons!

INVESTING IN SMALL BUSINESS: any business with less than 50 employees and an annual turnover of less than €10,000,000 is eligible and you can invest up to €50,000 as a single person or €100,000 as a couple with a tax deduction of 18% of the money invested. The only condition is that you need to hold onto your shares for a minimum of 5 years. Many Business Angel platforms can guide you to worthy causes!

Be careful not to get too carried away, as some of the above measures come under an overall cap of €10,000 of deductibility and obviously there are only a few months left of 2015 to reap the benefit in next year's tax return. *Allez, hop!* ■

One asset short of a tax-treaty calamity

BY BARTH HULLEY

When setting up his business in France, Barth Hulley tells Deloitte accounting, "My assets [pictured] are in the process of being transferred to France, no commercial value."

SO there I was, January 2006, sitting in a state-of-the-art conference room at Deloitte's plush new home in the Euro-district of Strasbourg, an area that can only be reached by a lengthy drive from the city centre. Judging by the swanky-looking automobiles lounging around outside, the bus, cutting through some of the more deprived districts of the western suburbs, was clearly not the chosen means of transport for most employees of the firm.

Inside one of the offices, I was conscious of my scruffy self in slacks and polo shirt sitting opposite a couple of razor-sharp suits, no doubt owners of at least two of the shining vehicles parked out front. He was the tax lawyer with whom I had an appointment and she was the young, thrusting executive assistant, who no doubt did all of the actual work; they were both bilingual, *bien sûr*. As for why I was there –I still wasn't sure, but their attentive stares seemed to suggest that I was rather important. I didn't feel important mind you; I felt like an idiot.

The only reason I had made the trip was on the seemingly sage advice of my bank manager, also bilingual. "You'll need a tax lawyer," he'd said a few short seconds after I had told him that I wanted to transfer my UK business activities to France, and he'd handed me the business card of our man at Deloitte. "He speaks very good English," he added, clearly appreciating my need for some linguistic assistance. I was of course in no position to argue. I had been in France for little more than three months and in that time had spent the best part of my energy on learning the language. Getting my head around French business legislation was still way down on the To-Do list, so any advice I could get I had a tendency to swallow whole with a grateful smile, regardless of its reliability.

After introducing the credentials of one of the world's biggest financial services firms, of which I was already familiar, *Monsieur le Tax Lawyer* struck the ball firmly into my court: "So, tell us about your company." It was at this point that I should have apologised for wasting their time and got out of there before embarrassing myself, but hindsight is a wonderful thing. Feeling completely out of my depth, I nonetheless stumbled through a brief executive summary, dressing up the current state of my cottage-sized activities to make me sound more of an entrepreneur than I could ever possibly hope to be, finishing, professionally, with a projection of my organic growth potential: somewhere between *un petit peu* and naff-all.

While the suits solemnly considered my position, I had time to marvel at an unseasonable ball of tumbleweed rolling past the window to the chimes of a distant church bell striking thirteen o'clock. "There must be some mistake," he said, breaking the awkward silence. It was hard to argue otherwise.

Do I really need a tax lawyer?

I was but a simple, home-working freelancer, who happened to have a company registered in the UK in order to charge VAT to reinvest in the business. I had precisely no intention of employing people, renting office space or becoming a multimillionaire through buying low and selling high. Common sense told me I had no need for a €300 an hour tax lawyer, and I'm sure the prospect of myself as a client was far from appealing from their perspective, but it was in that conference room that I realised my bank manager had made the spectacularly wrong assumption that I was on the Forbes Rich List; the only situation in which you'd require a tax lawyer is if you were transferring significant assets to France.

A couple of PCs, some pocket money and a beat up, old, right-hand-drive Volkswagen Polo did not constitute an international, tax-treaty conundrum requiring significant man hours from one of the world's greatest audit firms.

The meeting ended as swiftly as it had begun with a mumbled promise of a proposal to be stuck in the post forthwith. The proposal never arrived, of course, but in the end it didn't matter. A few weeks later, I had found myself a bilingual accountant who could guide me through endless form-filling and explain the countless *communiqués* arriving in my mailbox as I entered the

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self-employment hell that is *Entreprise Individuell – Travailleur Independent*.

It would perhaps be unfair to place the responsibility for this episode squarely at the feet of Peter Mayle, whose "Year in Provence" set the impression that all anglophones moving to France did so with their pockets stuffed with cash and little regard for where it goes, but I have yet to find a more convincing explanation. Why else would my bank manager believe I was wealthy beyond measure?

Today, thankfully, attitudes have changed: now everyone knows you should trust a banker just about as far as you can throw him. ■

Barth Hulley from Somerset has been a freelancer in France for ten years. His most recent book, "Freelance in France 2015" offers practical advice on the variety of ways of working for yourself in France. A fluent French speaker, he lives in Strasbourg and divides his time between writing, teaching and quietly sniggering to himself. See freelanceinfrance.fr

Singing a different tune

THE Ars Vocalis choral ensemble of the Cannes Conservatoire (above), conducted by Florence Daly, is recruiting new members, who are, preferably, experienced, and especially fond of Choral singing which requires personal dedication and assiduity at rehearsals.

The major work for the next season will be "Elijah", Mendelssohn's Oratorio, to be sung accompanied by the Regional Provence Côte d'Azur Orchestra of Cannes in April 2016. There'll also be carols from around the world with orchestral accompaniment, and preliminary study of Handel's "Messiah" for 2017.

Rehearsals are on Tuesdays from 8 to 10:30pm in the Salle des Arlucs (The PACA Orchestra rehearsal rooms), Ave. Des Arlucs, Cannes La Bocca, plus one Sunday morning a month and one annual October weekend in Valdeblore. For details, see *arsvocalis-cannes.fr* or contact 06 12 75 27 56.

Last issue we incorrectly noted that the Ensemble Vocal Syrinx performs under the direction of Errol Girdlestone. Girdlestone founded EVS but has since handed over the baton to Francesca Tosi (left), who is assistant director of the Nice opera chorus. Under Tosi, EVS, with a 40-strong ensemble, comprising a number of different nationalities, has a repertoire that includes many jazz pieces, some folk music and, of course, classical music. More at *ensemblevocalsyrinx.com*

For more on regional choirs, see "Finding your voice on the Riviera by joining a local choir" on *RivieraReporter.com*

WHY FRENCH KIDS DON'T HAVE ADHD

BY MARILYN WEDGE PH.D.

IN the United States, at least 9% of school-aged children have been diagnosed with ADHD, and are taking pharmaceutical medications. In France, the percentage of kids diagnosed and medicated for ADHD is less than 0.5 percent. How has the epidemic of ADHD – firmly established in the US – almost completely passed over children in France?

Is ADHD a biological-neurological disorder? Surprisingly, the answer to this question depends on whether you live in France or in the US. In the United States, child psychiatrists consider ADHD to be a biological disorder with biological causes. The preferred treatment is also biological – psychostimulant medications such as Ritalin and Adderall.

French child psychiatrists, on the other hand, view ADHD as a medical condition that has psychosocial and situational causes. Instead of treating children's focusing and behavioural problems with drugs, French doctors prefer to look for the underlying issue that is causing the child distress – not in the child's brain but in the child's social context. They then choose to treat the underlying social context problem with psychotherapy or family counselling. This is a very different way of seeing things from the American tendency to attribute all symptoms to a biological dysfunction such as a chemical imbalance in the child's brain.

French child psychiatrists don't use the same system of classification of childhood emotional problems as American psychiatrists. They do not use the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders or DSM. According to Sociologist Manuel Vallee, the French Federation of Psychiatry developed an alternative classification system as a resistance to the influence of the DSM-3. This alternative was the CFTMEA (*Classification Française des Troubles Mentaux de L'Enfant et de L'Adolescent*), first released in 1983, and updated in 1988 and 2000. The focus of CFTMEA is on identifying and addressing the underlying psychosocial causes of children's symptoms, not on finding the best pharmacological Band-Aids with which to mask symptoms.

To the extent that French clinicians are successful at finding and repairing what has gone awry in the child's social context, fewer children qualify for the ADHD diagnosis. Moreover, the definition of ADHD is not as broad as in the American system, which, in my view, tends to "pathologize" much of what is normal childhood behaviour. The DSM specifically does not consider underlying causes. It thus leads clinicians to give the ADHD diagnosis to a much larger number of symptomatic children, while also encouraging them to treat those children with pharmaceuticals.

The French holistic, psychosocial

approach also allows for considering nutritional causes for ADHD-type symptoms – specifically the fact that the behaviour of some children is worsened after eating foods with artificial colours, certain preservatives, and/or allergens. Clinicians who work with troubled children in this country – not to mention parents of many ADHD kids – are well aware that dietary interventions can sometimes help a child's problem. In the US, the strict focus on pharmaceutical treatment of ADHD, however, encourages clinicians to ignore the influence of dietary factors on children's behaviour.

And then, of course, there are the vastly different philosophies of childrearing in the US and France. These divergent philosophies could account for why French children are generally better behaved than their American counterparts. Pamela Druckerman highlights the divergent parenting styles in her book, "Bringing up Bébé". I believe her insights are relevant to a discussion of why French children are not diagnosed with ADHD in anything like the numbers we are seeing in the US.

From the time their children are born, French parents provide them with a firm *cadre* – the word means "frame" or "structure." Children are not allowed, for example, to snack whenever they want. Mealtimes are at four specific times of the day. French children learn to wait patiently for meals, rather than eating snack foods whenever they feel like it. French babies, too, are expected to conform to limits set by parents and not by their crying selves. French parents let their babies "cry it out" (for no more than a few minutes, of course) if they are not sleeping through the night at the age of four months.

French parents, Druckerman observes, love their children just as much as American parents. They give them piano lessons, take them to sports practice, and encourage them to make the most of their talents. But French parents have a different philosophy of discipline. Consistently enforced limits, in the French view, make children feel safe and secure. Clear limits, they believe, actually make a child feel happier and safer – something that is congruent with my own experience as both a therapist and a parent. Finally, French parents believe that hearing the word "no" rescues children from the "tyranny of their own desires." And spanking, when used judiciously, is not considered child abuse in France. (Author's note: I am not personally in favour of spanking children).

As a therapist who works with children, it makes perfect sense to me that French children don't need medications to control their behaviour because they learn self-control early in their lives. The children grow up in families in which the rules are well understood, and a clear family hierarchy is firmly in place. In French families, as Druckerman describes them, parents are firmly in charge of their kids – instead of the American family-style, in which the situation is all too often vice versa. ■

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Marilyn Wedge Ph.D. is a family therapist and author of three books and numerous professional articles in the field of family therapy. See marilynwedgephd.com

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WANT YOUR KIDS TO EAT BETTER?

It's a piece of *(sugar-free)* cake

BY SUSAN TOMASSINI

BOOKS, backpack and uniform – what more does your child need to shine at school? How about a diet enriched with vitamins, minerals and fatty acids? Nutrition has a vital role in supporting a child's physical, emotional and cognitive development, so making informed food choices can be fundamental in helping kids of all ages achieve their potential. You can start by swapping the usual sugary snacks and drinks and help to develop a healthier relationship with food.

The link between food and wellbeing is well documented. Numerous studies show that healthy eating habits established early in life will encourage more of the same as an adult. As a result, the food that children eat now will undoubtedly influence their attitude towards healthiness in later life.

However, growing up and finding independence means children are making their own food choices – and they're not always healthy. The media is full of contradictory and confusing messages about food, dieting and body image based on scientific "facts" that are often superficial and inaccurate. This comes at a time when a child's connection to food can be at risk:

Eating disorders are on the rise. Adolescents are highly concerned with their weight due to self-image insecurities. Girls especially (although with the rise of social media boys, too), often restrict their eating to deal with increased pressure of being thin and the quest for the "thigh gap". This is detrimental to their health as a lack of nutrients makes normal bodily functions impossible, and can bring on a host of undesirable consequences – seizures, intolerance of cold (who wears gloves on the Riviera in spring?), irregular heart rhythm, low blood pressure, dehydration and osteoporosis.

Picky eating is prevalent in all schools. Children have become selective, not just about fruit and veg, but also protein sources. Some have learned that being "picky" allows them to get the foods they want. Waiting for the problem to resolve itself can cause nutrient deficiencies as well as worsen the dynamics at the dinner table.

Adolescent anxiety has risen drastically over the last decades. Children have all their activities planned out for them and have little freedom to express themselves. Stress pushes them towards sugary comfort foods that blunt apprehensive feelings and make them feel temporarily better.

Teenagers consume too much junk food and not enough fruit and veg. Many fail to eat enough calcium, zinc and iron, essential for strong bones, growth and to prevent anaemia. Drinks loaded with artificial additives and sugar may contribute to ADHD, hyperactivity and digestive issues.

Food intolerances to dairy and gluten can deplete important antioxidants and may be triggering mood swings and aggression.

The rate of obesity amongst children and adolescents has tripled in the last 20 years. This is strongly associated with heart disease, diabetes, underachievement and low self-esteem.

The main way children discover the difference between nutritious foods and unhealthy foods is through developing knowledge and educational activities. Knowing where food comes from, how it is grown, and how food production affects their environment helps children take responsibility for their wellbeing and increases their confidence in their ability to make healthier food choices.

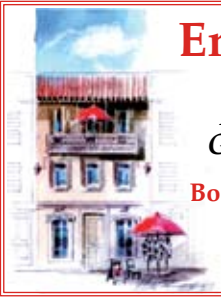
Fortunately children enjoy learning about food – especially if it involves practical work. That's the inspiration behind "Get Smart and Get Healthy", an initiative focused on making healthy eating fun, simple and illuminating.

The idea comes from The Clever Kitchen's licensed nutritionist and Melanie Gulliver, recipe creator, who are teaming up with Stars'n'Bars in Monaco to present a series of workshops aimed at raising awareness about healthy eating in the Principality and the surrounding community. With the support of local schools, The Clever Kitchen aims to encourage children and teens to develop lifelong healthy eating habits – for themselves and for the environment.

The workshops will be dedicated to nourishing the brain and the body, with a spotlight on foods that support energy levels, concentration, immune function and mood – no matter what age!

Investing in your child's nutrition is a smart strategy; the returns are incredibly high. ■

See theclever.kitchen *or contact melanie @theclever.kitchen for more workshop details.*



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COMMERCE

Why size matters

When it comes to storing personal belongings, do your research

SQUARE Foot Self-Storage began nine years ago with its first warehouse in Biot, where different sized units, ranging from 2m sq to 45m sq, plus smaller 1 or 2m cubed lockers ideal for short-term storage, were installed. Founder Penny Taylor soon realised there was a need for storage of large items such as tenders, cars, motorbikes, jet-skis and containers, so Square Foot took a second warehouse in Cannes, which can store larger items and has an overhead crane capable of lifting up to 8 tonnes but also has units of various sizes.

"There was a gap in the market for varied storage solutions with a back up service," Penny tells us about why she started the business. "For example, allowing people to send items to their storage units and know that they could be put away safely or if they needed an item forwarded on or even have all their goods shipped to their final destination. It's difficult to find good packing or protection materials and we offer a large selection and can pack the items for people if required."

What do people overlook when it comes to storage? "Most people have some difficulty knowing just how much storage they will require, our website can help with the 'size estimator'. Alternatively, when it's not a problem to decide, on arrival clients can always change size as needed. Appropriate packing for transportation, especially when shipping, is also important."

Anyone looking for self-storage can expect a friendly, approachable service from Square Foot – and in English, German and Dutch. Their offices are open all day from 8:30am to 5pm and have a "can do" attitude to accommodate most storage, shipping or transport requirements. Security, always a concern, is paramount and both warehouses have security and smoke alarms, CCTV and each is linked to a 24-hour surveillance company. Units can be accessed seven days a week from 7am to 8pm, by use of an electronic swipe badge.

It's worth noting the Square Foot offers more than just self-storage. Other services include shrink-wrapping for boats, acceptance of outside deliveries and relocation to unit, national and international courier service, tender and container transportation and storage, as well as delivery address in the UK and a mailbox plus forwarding service. ■

For more see squarefootselfstorage.com

In a real pickleball

BY PIERRE OBOZINSKI

Pickleball France-Pays de Fayence (L-R): Paul Fisher (British, Secretary), Pierre Obozinzki (Belgian, President), and André Vial (French, Treasurer).

PICKLEBALL? It may sound like a funny name for a game, but it's one of the fastest growing sports in the US and Canada with more than 200,000 players. The USA Pickleball Association saw its membership jump 84% in over two years.

Pickleball started some 50 years ago when two dads living on Bainbridge Island, near Seattle, were trying to entertain a bunch of bored kids. Lacking the equipment to play one sport, they made up the game using Ping-Pong paddles and a Wiffle Ball. Today, there's an entire website dedicated to the sport: *pickleballchannel.com*

Naturally, pickleball is now gaining a foothold in Europe, notably Spain, Holland, the UK and, *bien sûr,* France.

I discovered the game in Canada a few years ago and brought it to France in 2013. With the support and help of a few others, the association Pickleball France-Pays de Fayence (*pickleballfrance.org*) was founded in order to spread the word about this activity to the widest possible audience. About 50 players have joined up so far, with more coming along all the time

thanks to word-of-mouth, articles in local newspapers and magazines, and social media, like Facebook (*facebook.com/pickleballfrance*).

So what is it? Well, imagine Ping-Pong played on a badminton court or tennis played on a smaller court, with oversized paddles instead of string racquets. Pickleball is a little bit of both but a lot of fun – easy to learn and as competitive (or not) as you want it to be. Usually played in doubles, its close-to-the-net rallies are fast-paced and exciting although you can simply play a more classic tennis-style game from the baseline. Watch a game live or on video (see our website), and you'll see what it's all about.

Pickleball is not only enjoyable but also seriously addictive. There's something about the camaraderie on and off the court, the at-times lightning-fast play, and the distinctive "thok" of the hollow Wiffle ball that makes it more than just appealing. The learning curve is short – it doesn't matter if you've never played racquet sports – it's a game for all ages.

As with any sport, you need to have a certain ease of mobility and good balance. With a lightweight paddle that is somewhat larger than a Ping-Pong paddle and more square, and a lighter ball (about 250g and 5g respectively) far less effort than tennis is required, but you're in motion a lot of the time, which still gives your cardio a workout without being exhausting or difficult. As with any racquet sport, there are techniques and strategies to learn if you're inclined to be competitive.

The rules are simple. A game is played to 11 points (but you must win by a two-point spread) and, like tennis, points are scored when an opponent is unable to return a shot or hits the ball out of bounds. Unlike tennis, however, the serve must be underhand.

The court is about a quarter that of a tennis court. The non-volley zone – "the kitchen" – is an area in front of the net where you can't set foot unless the ball has already bounced there. Playing just outside this area is where the fast-pace – and funniest – exchanges happen; the better your reflexes and finesse, the longer and more hilarious the rallies. A game lasts between 10-20 minutes, before players rotate to get a chance to play with a new partner.

Have I *piquled* your interest? Come on a Saturday morning and try for yourself in Fayence. Take the main road up towards the village, you can't miss us playing at the municipal open-air sports grounds just after the second hairpin turn. Visitors are always welcome and we offer drop-in fees – a great way to get a taste for the game – plus you can rent a paddle for the morning.

Membership at Pickleball France-Pays de Fayence is a very reasonable, €45 per year but a 50% reduction applies for the second-half of 2015. Paddles can be purchased through the association (€50-€80, wooden paddles €20). You might be so enthused you'd want to set up pickleball in your own area, portable nets are available for €150, along with one dozen balls (€18-€25). All you need to set up in your community is an accurately sized badminton court, handball court, tennis court, a sports hall ... or any firm surface. A few drawn lines and away you go!

As the sport is still in its infancy in Europe, equipment is not available in sporting goods stores, but we have models you can try out, and we can deliver pickleball merchandise anywhere. Pickleball France can also help you become a local pickleball "Ambassador".

Tell your friends, your hiking group, your yoga classmates, your butcher ... pickleball is growing by 30% a year in the US and Canada, and our players know why! ■

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A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

Peter Bills gives the inside scoop on sports journalism

Sports writer and local resident Peter Bills has known many of France's leading rugby players for best part of 40 years.

WHAT on earth is it about the French?

We live in among them, hugely enjoy their company, marvel at their food and our taste buds salivate at their wines. But do we really know them?

Not in a million years, believes English sports writer Peter Bills. And he has known many of France's leading rugby players for best part of 40 years.

Peter, who has a long career in journalism and twice won awards for his writing on the oval ball sport, has just had published his autobiography entitled "400 Words at 5.30 with Nannies: Inside the Lost World of Sports Journalism" (UK: Pitch Publishing Ltd).

And with the Rugby World Cup, which kicked off in England on September 18th (it runs to October 31st when the final will be held at Twickenham), it is a propitious moment to release his fascinating life story.

By the first day of November, France could be rugby world champions. After all, they only lost the 2011 Rugby World Cup final to New Zealand, in Auckland, by a single point ... 8-7. Yet they could have slunk home to their clubs, Gallic tails between legs, weeks earlier.

That, says Peter, is the triumph of French rugby. You just never know what they are going to do next.

The author recounts his own times sharing the company of great French rugby men, like the late French coach Jacques Fouroux, known as "one of the most influential figures in French rugby history", and former captain Jean-Pierre Rives. The latter asked the Englishman to write his autobiography, a decision that went down like a lead balloon with the local French media.

"It was like Josephine going off for a night with a Lord from the English shires," Peter writes. The locals felt snubbed, abandoned.

But Rives was like most Frenchmen. Wonderful company, a charming host but extraordinarily unpredictable. You never knew what would happen next, claims Peter, citing the times he worked with Rives and stayed with him at his Paris apartment.

Jean-Pierre could never remember anything from his rugby playing days. It wasn't that he was being obstructive but he was no longer interested. He had moved on to other things in his life.

One day, he recounts, he was trying to fire up Rives's memory when the French rugby man announced they must go to the airport. They were having dinner in Geneva with a friend. But traffic jams held no interest for Rives. Thus, their hopes of making the flight on which they were booked, proved nonexistent, even with an English sports writer driving wildly and dangerously.

"You are a mad driver, just like the French," Rives announced at one stage of the journey. Peter took it as a badge of honour.

But, he points out, travelling with Jean-Pierre Rives in those days meant there was always a solution. Rives not only managed to persuade a charming young lady at check-in to switch Peter Bills and himself onto the next flight free of charge, he sweet-talked her into allowing them to drag Rives's golf clubs onto the plane as cabin baggage.

And when they got to Geneva? They drove for an hour up into the hills and tumbled out into an Alpine chalet where Rives's friend awaited. F1 motor racing driver Alain Prost. Just another day in the life of Rives.

Peter Bills's time with Jacques Fouroux was equally memorable, if potentially ruinous to the writer's health, given the industrial amounts of food and wine that were always shared on such occasions.

He has covered every Rugby World Cup to date, the 2000 Sydney Olympics, Ashes cricket tours of England, soccer Cup finals in England and Europe, US Open and Augusta Masters golf tournaments and other major sporting events. His book takes you inside a world of sports reporting which has always been the envy of most sports-mad males.

But Peter Bills met and interviewed so many more than just French rugby players. He once got an exclusive with former South African President Nelson Mandela at his home in Johannesburg, as well as Mandela's successor, Thabo Mbeki.

He interviewed English actor Oliver Reed and tells a hilarious story of how

Reed ended up pushing the journalist's car to jump start it in pouring rain at his Surrey mansion.

Peter's book also provides a revealing insight into the lives of the stars as he interviewed in person – Spike Milligan, Jack Nicklaus, Don Bradman, Gary Player, George Best, Denis Compton amongst a long list of others – and has written 16 books, including autobiographies with rugby legends like Willie John McBride, David Campese, Sir Gareth Edwards, former BBC rugby commentator Bill McLaren.

"400 Words at 5.30 with Nannies: Inside the Lost World of Sports Journalism", a great Christmas gift for any sports enthusiasts among family and friends, is a light-hearted read, full of funny anecdotes about his time touring the world to write and report on various sports. ■

Pick up a copy at Antibes Books or the English Book Centre in Valbonne. The e-book is also available from Amazon.com

The rest is history

MARGO Lestz's "Curious Histories of Nice" is not a city guide in the traditional sense. It won't suggest itineraries or give tour routes nor restaurant recommendations. However, the easy-to-read book is filled with engaging stories about the people and events that have left their mark on this Mediterranean city with its rather schizophrenic cultural roots.

Do you know the reason the Queen of England used to ride around Nice in a little cart pulled by a donkey or why the Apollo Fountain in Place Massena doesn't look very happy? No? Then keep reading.

The book has four sections: Before France; Trail of Tourism; Disaster and Dastardly Deeds; and Taste of Tradition. Flip through each part and you'll come across a subject overview, followed by several related short stories, most of which include "What to See" and "Fun Facts" offering additional tips and information. This is a read for those who want to get under the skin of the city, from the laundress who symbolises the spirit of Nice to dastardly crimes to its fiercely guarded traditions and celebrations.

Author Margo Lestz (pictured) has called Nice home for eight years. Her keen interest in history and research has enabled her to uncover these obscure histories that make the city what it is today.

Margo is also the author of "French Holidays & Traditions" and blogs as The Curious Rambler (*curiousrambler.com*). Copies of her books can be purchased in paperback from Antibes Books and the English Book Centre in Valbonne, or e-books from Amazon. See *margolestz.com* for more.

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Sirens of the South

BY DELANA NELSEN

"When you're 30, everything is an adventure," says American Lisa Pepin, who along with her French husband jumped at the chance to run his grandparents' farm in the Luberon.

Photo: Tobie Anderson

TWELVE years ago, when Lisa Pepin (right) from Hartland, Wisconsin, and her husband Johann moved to Les Pastras, the 11-hectare Garden of Eden where Johann was raised, which, as Lisa puts it, "was just enough for two people who knew almost nothing about farming", they discovered vines, olive trees, fruit trees, nut trees, beehives and ... those elusive black truffles.

In the hands of these two gentleman farmers-cum-adventurers, Les Pastras (*lespastras.com*) has taken on a life of its own, developing into a major tourist attraction for English-speakers seeking a unique Provençal experience: a truffle hunt with a degustation and champagne; olive harvesting and a poolside lunch; and their newest offering, grape stomping.

As Lisa explains, "Our guests get all the fun of Provençal country living but don't have to get up at the crack of dawn each day to do it. Some of them have never eaten fruit picked directly from the tree!"

MOST DIFFICULT THING TO GET USED TO ARRIVING IN FRANCE?
As a lifelong feminist, the idea that it is culturally unacceptable for me to serve wine in my own house if my husband is home was a shock.

BIGGEST CULTURE SHOCK WHEN VISITING THE US?
I'm from the Midwest, so when I've been away for a while, the level of friendliness there can be disarming at first. Then I remember that it's not a trick, it's genuine!

COASTAL FÊTE:
The Fête d'Oursin in Carry le Rouet and the Menton's Fête du Citron are always fabulous. I'm also partial to the recreation of Napoleon's landing in Golfe-Juan. This year was the bicentennial.

NECESSARY EXTRAVAGANCE:
Veuve Virey Champagne, a boutique brand my husband's family makes. The Cuvée Gabriel is my very favourite, with notes of white flowers and pear.

CASUAL DINING:
Boeuf Sur Le Quai in Fréjus.

PREFERRED ROSÉ:
Château Minuty.

BEST BEACH:
I adore Bandol. Even when it's crowded, it still feels private and secluded in a way that other beaches don't.

SIGHT-SENTIALS :
We always take visiting friends to Cassis for a boat tour of the Calanques followed by *moules frites* on the port with a bottle of Domaine du Paternel. A post-meal stroll and some ice cream are a given. I've never had one complaint about this itinerary!

UPSCALE RESTAURANT:
I can't resist the lavish Sunday brunch at the Carlton Hotel in Cannes.

DISCOVERY:
Ispahan cake from Pierre Hermé (right), from Galeries Lafayette Nice.

BOOK ON YOUR NIGHTSTAND?
I have two at the moment, "Picnic in Provence" by Elizabeth Bard and "Provence, 1970" by Luke Barr.

TO-DO LIST 2015:
Make my own scent at the perfumery in Grasse, visit the MuCEM in Marseille, and *finally* go to Club 55 (I fear I am too old for Nikki Beach).

BON APP:
Waterlogue and Instagram (of course).

ADVENTURES AT SEA: A sunset sail with Yvan at Coté Mer in St-Raphael. He'll take you for a dip at the Ile d'Or and even let you take the helm while he prepares the apéritif below deck. Or just grab a *matelas* and lounge on the bow while taking in the view.

TRUFFLE DISH TO DIE FOR: Restaurant Bruno in Lorgues. While we were underwhelmed with the quality of a few of the truffles we were served, the pastry with bacon, foie gras, and summer truffle in a truffled bordelaise sauce was divine.

PERFUME: Eau du Sud by Annick Goutal.

SHADES: Prada or classic Ray-Bans aviators.

LIPSTICK: Polished Up by MAC. It's their most universally flattering colour.

HIDDEN GEM: The island of Porquerolles. Take the ferry and rent a bike to get around the island or hire a sailboat and swim to shore for a truly indulgent Riviera experience. If you're not much of a swimmer, some restaurants will even send a Zodiac out to pick you up, upon request.

BEAUTÉ FRANÇAISE: Caudalie products. When we lived in Chicago, I could find a few things from their line at Neiman Marcus. But here, the brand is sold in every pharmacy. That's what I love about France: the everyday luxuries!

BAG: Vintage Fendi from my friend Alexa's Etsy e-shop, MyWalkInTheClouds, where she shares beautifully curated selections straight from her Paris closet.

WEEKEND GETAWAY: The Hotel Belles Rives in Juan les Pin. It's a gorgeous classic

1920s Art Deco a hotel with a marvellous restaurant and piano bar. No wonder that F. Scott Fitzgerald penned "The Great Gatsby" from there. Every corner exudes glamour and opulence.

TOP SPAS On the Riviera, you can't go wrong at the world-famous Château Saint-Martin Spa in Vence, with its luxurious Sisley and Bamford products. My other favourite spa in Provence is quite a bit inland, but not far at all if you have a helicopter (there's a landing space, naturally). La Coquillade in Gargas; 60 km from Aix-en-Provence (below), is well worth

the trip for any expat who has lamented the difference between massages in France and their homeland. ■

ROOMS WITH A VIEW

LOOKING for alternatives to a boring old apartment on the Coast? These character properties are ideal for lock up and leave holiday homes.

SPÉRACÈDES. (Above) In the heart of the Provençal village of Spéracèdes – about 45km to Nice-Côte d'Azur Airport – this renovated stone village house offers a surprising amount of internal space, as well as a private parking place, two open terraces, a glazed veranda and stunning vistas. Planning permission exists for a one-bedroom flat on the ground floor. €325,000. Contact Jenny Bagshaw on 06 30 24 28 83.

CAGNES-SUR-MER. (Left) Historic village house in the heights of the old town features two double bedrooms, two bathrooms and a terrace. Renovated but retaining all of its original charm, you'll find new electrics, plumbing, heating as well as . A bonus are the double-glazed windows throughout the entire house and a large storage cellar under the master bedroom, which offers dry storage. A wonderful holiday home, with masses of personality and a great location within walking distance of all amenities. €399,900. Contact Tim Clark: 06 76 59 25 88. ■

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SEPTIC SHOCK

BY TIM CLARK

THERE is an old English saying, "Where there's muck, there's brass."

Nothing is truer when talking about ... septic tanks. Okay, I hear a collective groan of "here he goes again" (or is it just the thought of wastewater as you sip your morning coffee?), however, allow me to explain.

There have been suggestions from the powers that be, that we may see a tightening of existing rules and regulations about septic tanks when properties are for sale: being forewarned is to be forearmed.

It is well known that when selling a property that has a septic tank, it's necessary to have this inspected as part of the pre-sales process and the subsequent report is given to a prospective buyer as part of the purchase contract (*Compromis de vente*). I have always found it interesting that according to the Civil Urban Code, it is the responsibility of the buyer within one year of purchase to then bring the tank up to norms if there are any anomalies noted.

It has been implied a change may bring the onus back onto the vendor to ensure when selling a house that the septic tank is up to par at time of sale. (I must stress this is absolutely NOT confirmed and in its current proposed form, may even be unworkable.)

My warning is based on the fact that once again we have experienced sales falling through due to lack of pre-planning when selling a house with a septic tank.

I am constantly amazed at how often vendors tell us they will wait until a buyer is found before having the test, the usual excuse being that because the report has a finite life span (valid 3 years), it may expire before a buyer is found. The reality is that most properties should sell well within this time span and having a valid report gives all parties an idea of what to expect *before* an offer is made. It also allows a current owner to gather together a quotation for any works indicated in the report, as the notaire will ask that the buying client be informed of this obligatory cost before signing a first contract. Without this, the *Compromis de vente* is unlikely to be signed by potential buyers, who would be committing themselves to an unknown cost.

If you wait until a buyer is found and an offer is on the table, the process is as follows: organise a *contrôle de la fosse septique*; each commune often has only one company registered to carry out reports, so if you do the math that's one individual to do all the tests throughout the entire commune. It's therefore very unlikely this is going to happen tomorrow.

After the control, sometimes weeks after your offer was received, several more days pass while the report is written.

Once received, if it outlines anomalies, one would think it straightforward to get a quotation for works required. Well, like much of the process of buying a house in France (see page 10), it isn't quite that simple. Likely a soil test is required before a quote can be given; guess what, there is only likely to be one person in your commune who carries out soil tests. So, after some time said person digs a hole, pours some water in, times how long it takes to disperse and presto, we now know the type of system required on your plot. Except some time has passed since your keen buyer made an excited offer, I imagine in most cases this enthusiasm is beginning to wear off a bit.

Now that we have the report and the soil test, we can approach the *fosse* installation company. That's right, the only one around who works in your commune. Yes, this is getting silly now, but stick with me. Our friendly *fosse* installer comes out, takes a look at your bits of paper and begins the process of creating a quotation for works.

Once received, we present this obligatory cost to your future buyer along with the *Compromis de vente* to sign, and lo and behold – once he has picked himself up off the floor – we normally go back to the drawing board. That's assuming he wants to continue his somewhat dwindled interest.

Alternatively, if you prepare all of this and have all of the information on hand as you bring the property to market, when a buyer does come along and makes an acceptable offer, he or she already has the facts about additional costs and a pre-sales contract can be signed much quicker without unforeseen problems and all parties are much, much happier: the vendor can sleep knowing they have sold, the buyer can sleep knowing they have their dream home and your agent can sleep knowing all of the work done to find a buyer won't be undone by lack of forethought. ■

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

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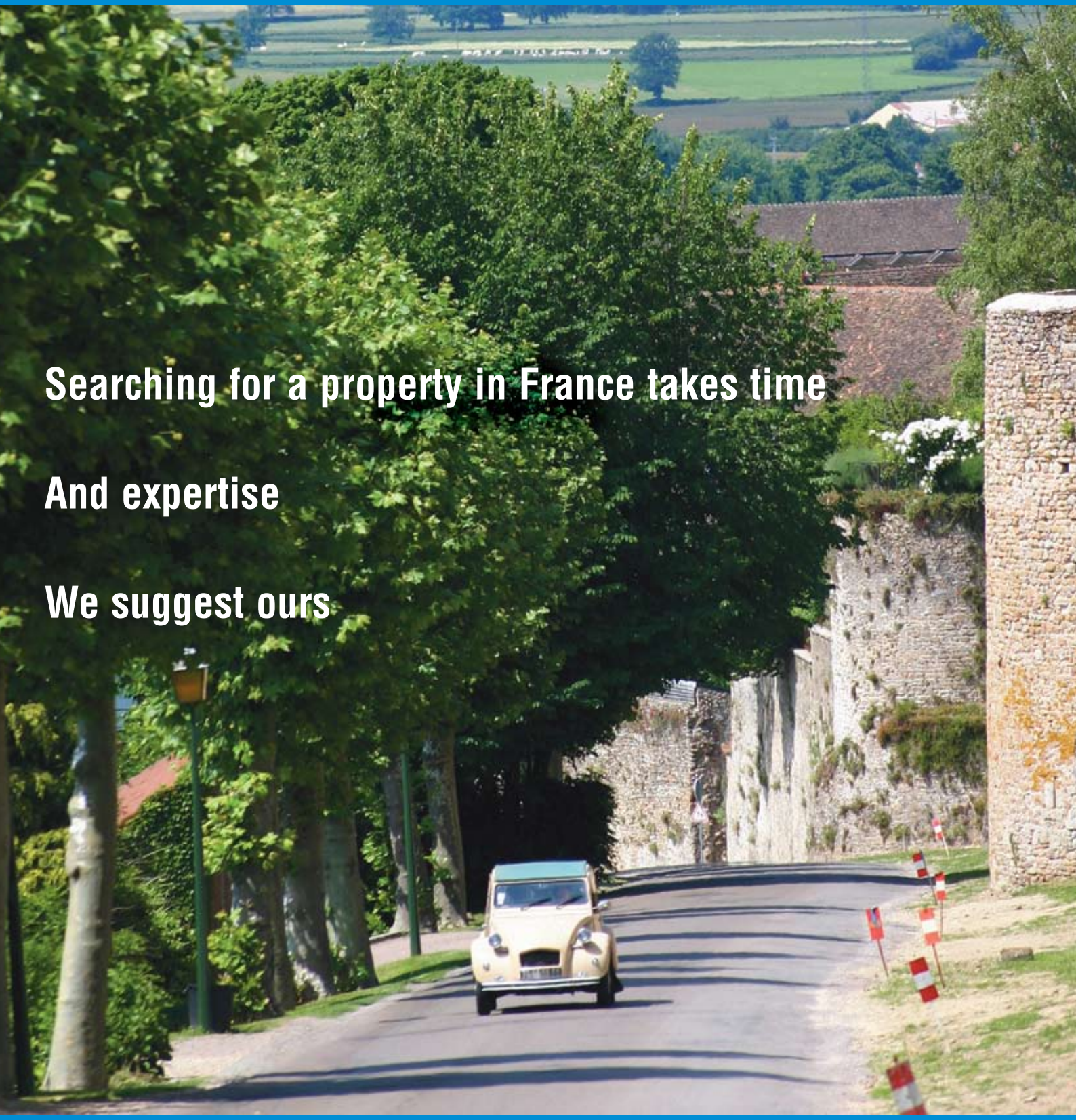

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LET'S DO LUNCH

BY FRANCES GRACE THOMPSON

Photo: RNLI/Kessock

ACCORDING to the inscriptions in our Grace family bible, we are descended from the Victorian heroine Grace Darling, the Longstone lighthouse keeper's daughter, famed for participating in the rescue of survivors from the shipwrecked Forfarshire in 1838 at the age of twenty-three.

My personal connection to the sea came via my maternal grandfather. With a small clinker built boat, oars and a tiny outboard, he would catch lobsters, crabs and the whole gamut of fish.

He and his brothers were part of the fishing community in Wyke, between Portland and Weymouth in the UK. All of our summers were spent there. As children we would sit on the stairs as the grown ups talked about lives lost and lives rescued, particularly on the notorious Chesil Bank.

From childhood, I lived by the sea in Southsea, part of Portsmouth. As a civil servant I worked in the naval base and we were always acutely aware what an unpredictable element the sea is.

Here in the South of France, where I have been based for 14 years, so very many people depend on the jobs and revenues created by the maritime leisure industry, myself as an onboard chef. There are the yachts of all sizes, with their crews and all the numerous support industries.

For all of us who use the sea and know others who do also, we are able to do so safe in the knowledge that there are those who are prepared to put their lives at risk in order to save ours.

The charity Royal National Lifeboat Institute – RNLI – is well known by UK expats for saving lives at sea. Funded only by charitable donations, RNLI volunteer lifeboat crews have saved at least 140,000 lives at sea since 1824 at a cost of 600 volunteers. "Let not the deep swallow me up" is their slogan.

Here in the France we have SNSM – the Société Nationale de Sauvetage en Mer, a French voluntary organisation founded in 1967 by merging the Société Centrale de Sauvetage des Naufragés (1865) and the Hospitaliers Sauveteurs Bretons (1873). The SNSM –with the motto *pour que l'eau salée n'ai jamais le goût des larmes* (so that salt water never tastes of tears) – is responsible for about half of all sea rescue operations and in one year saved 5,400 lives in 2816 call-outs and assisted 2140 boats in distress. Sixty-five percent of funding comes from the public with a third stemming from national government, departments and local communities.

I recently read with great enthusiasm that the RNLI is organising "a fish supper" fundraiser across the UK (*fishsupper.rnli.org*) and thought why not here? So on Sunday October 4th, I'm proposing to host a fish lunch in my garden for as many or as few wish to turn up, for a flat fee of €25, but you'll need to bring your own wine. There will be an all fish menu, *apéro*, starter, main and unfishy desert, but if anyone is a vegetarian or has allergies to shellfish I would be happy to provide an alternative. After only the basic costs of ingredients have been deducted, the funds raised will be split between RNLI and SNSM. ■

Contact Frances at fthompson@orange.fr or 06 81 98 60 29. Easy access from A8 exit Nice Nord with plenty of parking.

The Sea Route

BY MICHAEL HEALY

"OÙ *vous allez comme ça?*" was the challenge from a Police launch as I motored from Menton to Beaulieu. Luckily the sight of my privileged Blue Ensign reassured him, as I was not ordered to stop and show my papers or worse. It does not help official patrol vessels that almost all British-flagged megayachts are in fact owned by foreigners wishing not to register in their own country. But a Blue ensign is reserved for British owners alone. What French authorities think of yachts registered in St Vincent, Seychelles or the Marshall Islands I wonder, but they do know these are Flags of Convenience and therefore not to be fully trusted. But then, so is the Red Ensign.

But that encounter was 25 years ago, and there seem to be many fewer law enforcers in French waters than before. The many different agencies – Gendarmerie maritime, Affaires maritimes, douane, police nationale and municipale, sapeurs-pompiers and marine nationale – seem to have plenty of fine vessels but perhaps lack the people to man them. With conflict in many parts of France thanks to the migrant crisis, reinforcements have been dispatched to troubled areas like Menton and Calais. But the sea route seems to be overlooked. Open borders as required by Schengen are not helping to regulate the migrants, worthy or not, but the borders still exist. And so they do at sea, marked on the nautical charts of the British Admiralty and others. The generally accepted international rule for defining territorial waters is based on a distance of 12 nautical miles from land, which supersedes the old rule-of-thumb of 3 miles, supposed to represent the range of a defensive cannon shot. Even a tiny enclaved state like Monaco has its territorial waters defined, which were actually officialised in 1984 during a visit by French President François Mitterand to Prince Rainier III. It enabled the fish-farm enterprise Pisciculture Marine de Monaco to base the *Labrax* in Monaco waters in the 1990s while avoiding the high taxation that would be due in French waters a mile away.

Migrants know how difficult it now is to cross from Italy into France, where the police aux frontières will stop them in the trains at Menton, or in the trunks of cars. But it is surprising that there have been recently no reported thefts of boats in Italy to outflank the land borders by making the journey by sea. In Bodrum, Turkey, the French honorary consul was recently suspended for being the owner of a shop selling inflatable boats to migrants wishing to cross the sea border to Lesbos in Greece – a respectable activity but not appropriate for a consul.

A spectacular example of unwatched borders was the night-time stranding in February 2001 near St. Raphael (Var) of the *East Sea*, a small cargo ship under Cambodian flag carrying over 900 Syrian migrants, who had claimed to be Kurdish in the hope of a better reception. There was no identity detected of this ship as it slowly navigated along the French coast. And the *police aux frontières*, while apparently being tasked with preventing all clandestine immigration, has no patrol boats!

Italian yacht-owners in Liguria: Lock up your boats! ■

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CHESTNUTS OF PROVENCE

"I'm so glad I live in a world where there are Octobers"

BY CAREN TRAFFORD

Photo: H. Zell

AS Anne of Green Gables, the beloved character created by L.M. Montgomery, said, "I love October." The air is crisp, the light is intense and the leaves crunchy. What better way to celebrate the tenth month of the year than enjoying an autumn day filled with all things chestnut? So here's a two-minute guide to everything you need to know about this wonderfully versatile nutty fruit.

To start with, a pop quiz: What do chestnut trees produce – chestnuts or marrons? It's a trick question because the answer is both, in varying quantities.

This is how it works: if a chestnut shell contains one large nut, it's a marron, whereas if it contains three smaller nuts they are chestnuts or *châtaignes*. So a chestnut tree is only so named when there is more than 12% divided fruit inside the shell; if the proportion is less than this magic number, it's a marron tree. Why 12%? Only the French know!

In France, the largest production of sweet chestnuts comes from Corsica, the Ardèche and right on our doorstep, the Var, where the magnificent chestnut trees are located in the bewitching hinterland Maures hills that lie between Hyères and Fréjus. The highest point of the Massif des Maures is around 800 metres, but the quick succession of ridges, the sudden drops and views, and the curling, looping roads, are pervasively mountainous. Cyclists love it! In the centre of the Maures is Collobrières: known as the sweet chestnut capital. Surrounded by more than 5,000 acres of chestnut forests, it is this quaint hillside village that dedicates the last three Sundays of the month of October to the celebration of this small, sweet, versatile fruit.

Chestnuts have been part of tradition in these parts for more than 1000 years. The cultivation of the sweet chestnut tree was introduced by the Carthusians in the 10th century. The trees became popular as the fruit enabled the large poorer population to survive, as the chestnut was often the only food available during long periods of the year when nothing else could grow. Their versatility meant that chestnuts could be ground into flour and used in the preparation of many of the local specialties. Historically, as not all regions of France had access to wheat flour, the chestnut was one of the few readily available sources of carbohydrates because when dried it could be kept to provide meals through the year. The flour was also was used to make a thick, hard bread; nowadays, chestnuts are even used to make a rich, golden craft beer.

The thousand-year-old tradition of chestnut production threatened to collapse 50 years ago, when the collection fell from 4000 metric tons at the beginning of the 20th century to only 500 tons in 1980. Consumption declined after the Second World War, when many locals associated them with "war food": a little

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like the general public reaction to turnips in the UK during the same era.

These days, however, the cultivation is being revived and the chestnut is now the principal product of the Massif des Maures.

And there's more good news for the sweet chestnut tree. Thanks to new medical findings, published in the Public Library of Science ONE online journal, the humble chestnut leaf is about to become a new superhero in the fight against skin disease and superbugs. Scientists found that the sweet chestnut leaf holds special properties that "disarm" the potentially fatal superbug MRSA, one of the most common germs picked up by patients in hospitals, which can cause a range of skin conditions and life-threatening lung infections. The discovery was made after researchers were inspired by traditional Italian folk remedies and the tales of healers talking about the use of leaves of the chestnut tree to treat skin infections and inflammations.

But back to the fruit.

Chestnuts are so versatile that they can be used in sweet or savoury dishes, salads or hearty yet delicate winter soups. It's the sweetness that makes them so decadent in desserts, yet so enticing in *liqueur de Châtaigne*. They appear in recipes like the *beignet aux châtaignes* (chestnut doughnut), a hardy dessert from Corsica, which consists of a mixture of honey, chestnut flour, eggs and milk – and La Marrouge, a local beer brewed from roaster chestnuts.

Fancy a little tasting of all things chestnut? If so, head to the Chestnut Festival in Collobrières, surrounded by 2200 acres of chestnut trees, October 11th, 18th and 25th, 10h-18h. It is a rural weekend festival with a grand market of artisanal handicrafts, local products – marron glacés, chestnut beer or chestnut honey – and all things dedicated to the humble chestnut: fresh, grilled, puréed, tinned and jarred. ■

See collobrieres-tourisme.com *for more*

*Caren Trafford is our Antique Diva for Provence. She also writes children's books (*planetkids.biz*) and lives with her two dogs and husband, in a mas covered with bougainvillea that over-looks the azure blue waters of the Mediterranean.*

Chocolate Chestnut Truffle Cake

CAN'T wait until the Chestnut Festival? Here's a mouth-watering chestnut recipe that I've adopted from chef and food writer, Hugh Fearnley-Whitingstall. Serves: 12.

INGREDIENTS

250g dark chocolate – not too dark or the cake will be bitter

250g unsalted butter

250g peeled cooked chestnuts (tinned if you like)

250ml milk

4 eggs

125g caster sugar

METHOD

Prep: 20 min – Cook: 45min

Preheat oven 170°C/Gas Mark 3

Grease and line a 9" diameter spring-form type tin.

Melt the dark chocolate and unsalted butter together in a pan over a very gentle heat. In another pan, heat the chestnuts with milk until just boiling, then mash thoroughly with a potato masher (or process to a rough purée in a machine).

Separate the eggs, put the yolks in a bowl and mix with caster sugar. Stir in the chocolate mixture and the chestnut purée until you have a smooth, blended batter.

Whisk the egg whites until stiff and fold them carefully into the batter. Transfer the mixture into the greased, lined cake tin and bake for 45 minutes, until it is just set but still has a slight wobble.

If you want to serve the cake warm, leave to cool a little, then release the tin and slice carefully – it will be very soft, like mousse. Or leave to go cold, when it will have set firm.

It can be served with double cream, especially when warm, but it is also delicious unadulterated.

TIP: It rises beautifully and is easy to eat with your fingers. It also looks great topped with chocolate shavings and chestnuts.

LIFE AT THE FRENCH SCHOOL GATES

Dan Briggs gave up his job as a journalist in the UK after his wife went on secondment to the South of France. Now he's a house dad in a foreign land struggling to cope with life at the village school gates.

PUT it this way, the first month has not been easy for any of us. Well, apart from Cathy, she's been busy splitting an atom, which is a cinch compared with what I've had to put up with.

So there we are at the school gates on the first morning.

"Smile they don't bite," I told my two boys.

But in reality it was worse than a savaging. Those boring eyes seemed to tear into us, our red hair, our freckles and our lily-white skin. I felt I could hear their voices in my head. Something like Voldemort does with Harry Potter. "Go back home, you are not welcome here."

I'd have introduced us all if I spoke a word of the lingo, but all I bothered to learn back at school was how to order a beer (which, incidentally, I mastered in 10 different languages, in case I boarded the wrong plane or train).

Pick-up time is the worst. In the morning I can just dump and run, but in the evening, I wait all alone. Norman No Mates. The English man who seems to have had his tongue cut out. Perhaps if Cathy were there with me it would be all right. The village school is a nice enough place. I sit on one out of a semicircle of ten or so, old, rectangular stones. The stones are from a local quarry and are disintegrating with age. Each one is just about big enough for two people to use as an impromptu bench. As I wait, eroded fragments of rock poke uncomfortably into my bum.

The guilt has been terrible. We plucked them from their nice little prep in Sussex and dumped them here in frog land. The tears are just transient. The tantrums will surely pass. I must remember the fastest way to develop a child's brain is for them to learn a second language. Cathy says they are the lucky ones, but she's not been there in the evening when they fly, wailing like banshees, out of the gates.

They're starving as well. And who can blame them. Here's a run-down of a typical lunchtime menu:
Monday: Moules marinière
Tuesday: Thumper (I mean rabbit)
Wednesday: Financière (cheap meat off cuts – gristle I think we'd call it in English)
Thurday: Pizza (oh relief)
Friday: Aïoli (boiled cod, vegetables, and garlic sauce)

And what's with all the kissing. No wonder nothing gets done in this country. It's like a snogathon every evening. There are maybe 40 parents waiting to pick up, and each time a new one arrives, she has to go around the lot of them, and kiss them on both cheeks. It takes about 10 minutes to complete the rounds.

Anyway, after a couple of weeks I decided to join the party. Big mistake!

I guess I picked her at random, big nose, big bum, blonde hair, always smiling. Got two kids in the same class as ours, and she

seemed to be trying to make eye contact. I lunged in with confidence. A little too much like a teenager at a nightclub.

Here's what happened: rather than offering her cheek she recoiled in horror. One step backwards was all it needed and I'm kissing thin air. My lips were searching for purchase, puckered and ready for social lift-off, instead carried forward by an unstoppable momentum, my face ended up in her cleavage.

It was mid-September but still hot, so she was not wearing much and before I knew it, I was kissing the flesh next to her nipple. In England this would be called gross indecency and it is an arrestable offence. I tasted salt. I can still taste it now. It was her sweat. Instinctively, my tongue did a circuit of my lips.

Only the fact that she fainted saved me.

Also, she turned out to be in the early stages of pregnancy.

This was fortunate.

I know what you're thinking – how can her pregnancy be a fortunate twist? Surely it makes the whole thing, viewed from the wrong perspective, as some of the Mums inevitably have, even more grotesque.

Here's the thing, everybody put the swoon down to the heat and her condition. I even ended up looking like a bit of a hero, catching her as she fell.

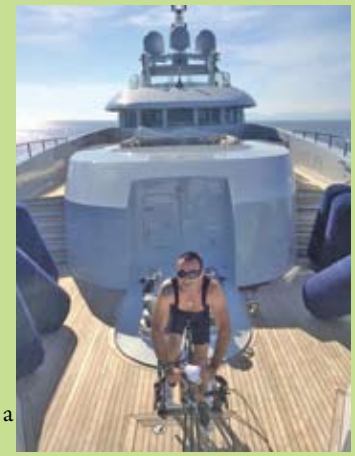
When she came round, she couldn't remember the bungled kiss. She even thanked me.

When they exited that evening, the children sensed my unease. They quietly got into the car. Not a scream.

I remember thinking, quite wrongly, that perhaps we had turned a corner. ■

To read more about the trials and tribulations of Dan Briggs visit provenceguru.com

Cogs4Cancer get back in the saddle



IN October, 24 riders will cycle 850km from Barcelona to Antibes with the aim to raise as much money as possible for COGS4CANCER, the only aid-organisation within yachting of its kind. Having already raised over €500,000 since founding in 2013, COGS4CANCER is recognised for having made significant contribution to the fight against the disease. The four cancer charities that benefit are Cancer Research UK; L'Archet Hospital in Nice; Cancer Support Group 06; Clinique Tzanck Wellbeing in Mougins.

COGS4CANCER is inspired by the story of those within the yachting industry who have been touched by cancer in one way or another. In March 2013, a group of like-minded personalities came together to form the charity with the ethos that every single penny raised goes directly to charity and all other operational costs are covered by the riders and support team themselves.

There are many events that form part of this year's program including two Tribute Rides with over 100 people expected to join on October 4th and 9th. All welcome. More on page 48 for Tribute Rides or see *cogs4cancer.org* for details.

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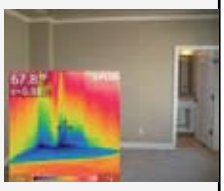

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A TALK IN THE PARK

BY MARGO LESTZ

WE'VE had a home in Nice for six years and for six years we've been meaning to visit Parc Phoenix, near the airport, but something always came up. Now we can at last say that we went, we saw, and we loved it!

A beautiful space with twenty themed gardens, it's home to one of the largest greenhouses in Europe. The park started with the idea of showcasing plants from around the world, but it has evolved to include an impressive assortment of small animals and birds, it make a great day out with children.

I thought I'd illustrate some animal and plant-related French sayings with photos from our park adventure. As Parc Phoenix has a large central lake, several water features (including a musical fountain), and an aquarium, let's start with fish expressions.

Marriage of the carp and rabbit

French: *Mariage de la carpe et du lapin*
Meaning: Since a fish and a rabbit are very different, this marriage is probably not going to work. This expression is used to describe putting two incompatible things together. It's similar to the British expression, "like chalk and cheese" or maybe as North Americans say, "as different as night and day".

To drown the fish

French: *Noyer le poisson*
Meaning: Drowning a fish? Now that could take some doing. It means to create confusion or a diversion to keep from answering a question. This is a good description of the way politicians sometimes respond to questions. You could think of it as drowning the question in a river of words. A close English expression might be to "beat around the bush" but the idea with "drowning the fish" is to make the other person forget all about the original question.

Read your duck this morning?

French: *Un canard*
Meaning: Until the 13th century, *canard*, which is French for duck, referred to those who talked too much and by extension to journalists who were covering events. So *canard* is slang for newspaper, similar to the English term, "rag".

To stand a rabbit up (to someone)

French: *Poser un lapin à quelqu'un*
Meaning: To not arrive for a date or appointment you have made with someone. In English we simply stand the person up and leave the little rabbit out of it.

Beautiful feathers make beautiful birds

French: *Les belles plumes font les beaux oiseaux*
Meaning: Don't judge by the outward appearance. This bird is quite handsome, decked out in his best feathers but he might have a nasty personality. We just can't tell.

WORDS

FLOWERS, FRUIT & VEG

Take care of your own onions!

French: *Occupe-toi de tes oignons*
Meaning: Mind your own business (and stay out of mine). It's not a very nice thing to say, which is a shame because it is so cute.

The carrots are cooked

French: *Les carottes sont cuites*
Meaning: It's finished, nothing else can be done. There is no hope of salvaging the situation. A similar English expression might be, "that's all she wrote".

Telling salads

French: *Raconter des salades*
Meaning: "Telling salads" means telling stories that are not true.

Are you a blue flower?

French: *Être fleur bleue*
Meaning: To be a blue flower is to be overly romantic and sentimental, naive even. A person who falls in love at every turn.

Cover someone with flowers

French: *Couvrir quelqu'un de fleurs*
Meaning: To give someone lots of compliments. In English we heap compliments or praise on someone. In France they cover them with flowers. That's such a nice image.

To fall into the apples

French: *Tomber dans les pommes*
Meaning: To pass out, lose consciousness. Be careful not to overexert yourself when you visit the park or you might just "fall into the apples".

To have the banana

French: *Avoir la banane*
Meaning: To "have the banana" is to be happy, to have a big banana-shaped smile on your face.

INSECTS

WE came across an exhibition of insect art scattered throughout. The metallic sculptures were mostly red and blue ladybugs, called *les coccinelles* in French. A little bit of trivia about the ladybug: In France the *coccinelle* is considered lucky (as it is in many countries) and is known as *la bête à bon Dieu* or "God's insect". One story to explain why this bug is thought to be lucky tells of a man who was condemned to death during the Middle Ages and, just as he was about to lose his head on the chopping block, a ladybug landed on his neck. The king believed it was a divine sign and pardoned him.

Ladybugs predict the weather

French: *Coccinelle qui va de fleur en fleur apporte avec elle la chaleur.*
Meaning: A ladybug that goes from flower to flower brings with her the heat. So when you see a ladybug flitting from flower to flower, a heat wave is on the way. ■

The Museum of Asiatic Arts is free and has direct access from Parc Phoenix next door. For more see curiousrambler.com

RED, WHITE AND BUBBLY

BY ALEX IGNATIEFF

AFTER a wonderful summer of too many friends, too much food, too many pink swimming pools, taxi trips to rival Phileas Fogg and altogether too much fun, life settles back into a more familiar groove: near empty beaches, restaurants have tables and most exciting of all, it's comfortable to put on long trousers. And long trousers absolutely means it's time for more than the obligatory bottle of rosé. Time to break out the whites of character and even those long forgotten reds!

Fresh into this newly re-established equilibrium, I was invited to conduct an evening tasting on a terrace behind the beautiful village of Seillans. Perhaps it was the gentle breeze at just the right temperature, or maybe that stunning view over the village and valley heading east past Fayence up towards the smart new *rondpoint* that even Christian Dior might have approved of, or quite possibly it was just the chance to relax with familiar old flavours put aside during the heat of the summer, but the wines were all on top form.

It's a funny thing and ever so frustrating that the same wines sampled a day apart or in a separate venue with a new crowd can taste so completely different. The atmosphere, physical or emotional, has a lot to answer for.

I structured the tasting to explore three contrasting pairs. A great chance to split the tasters and if, the wines are well chosen and truly reflect the essence of what is to be contrasted, a quick show of hands gets a good conversation going!

To start with we compared the world-sweeping phenomenon that is Prosecco with Champagne. Of course both these sparkling wines have a broad range of styles and prices but to keep it simple I put forward house versions of both. The Prosecco came from the hills just west of Venice, the *Colli Euganei*, rather than the Prosecco heartland further north around Valdobbiadene, in the foothills of the Dolomites. Unapologetically fresh, clean and pure, this is strawberries and cream in a glass. A great aperitif or base for any Prosecco-based concoction that grabs your fancy. The Champagne Fourtin contrasted perfectly, showing just the right amount of biscuity, yeasty secondary flavours and complexity, the essential difference between the two drinks. A pair that performed!

Next we compared two classic white varieties, Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay. Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé from Sauvignon's northern home on the banks of the Loire are always a safe and satisfactory solution. But we looked at a Bordeaux blanc to highlight the joys of this wonderful grape. Pezat from the stable of Jonathan Maltus and the team at Château Teyssier in St Emilion is made in a more international style – a halfway house between the Sauvignons of the Loire and those of the New World. It is slightly fuller and the addition of a hint of Semillon adds complexity. Great stuff and if you are hankering after a spot of New Zealand-style, this borrows from the book but with an appropriate old-world restraint. To contrast we looked at a straight Bourgogne, Chardonnay from the slopes around Macon and another favourite producer, the team at Collovray et Terrier. With a bit of age on it, the second wine again showed more secondary aromas and flavours. Chardonnay's diversity is impressive, it can be simple and fruit-driven but it evolves wonderfully in the cellar.

Finally we signed off with a pair of reds, here contrasting two classic French regions, Bordeaux and the Rhône Valley. For the Bordeaux we chose a simple Graves, Château Pouyanne 2012. Charming cherry fruit over that classic gravelly, dusty character from the soils that give Graves its name. The wine sees no significant wood, it's all about fresh fruit character and that signature Graves earthiness, which it delivers in spades, perfect for a lunchtime red.

At a similar price point we contrasted it with the brilliant Louis Barruol's Côtes-du-Rhône. From his base at the family estate of Château de St Cosme in Gigondas, Louis offers a range of wines from his own vines and grapes brought in from sympathetic growers that meet his exacting standards. Unusually, Louis uses only Syrah in his Côtes-du-Rhône and this pedigree shines through in the wine. Louis is a master at marrying power with a velvety softness and finesse, something that is too often missing from southern Rhône Syrah. Again a brilliant contrast, this time between the lighter, earthy Graves with this much more effusive Rhône Syrah.

Three pairs that split the audience smack down the middle – job done! ■

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IT'S ORGANIC, ... WHAT ELSA?

BY SCOTT BELL

For Paolo Sari, using exclusively organic ingredients means whenever possible the daily menu is based on the seasonally fresh produce from his farm located in Roquebrune Cap Martin. Photo: SBM

ORGANIC food and cooking is becoming increasingly accepted and even demanded in our everyday lives. In addition to the many organic-only stores, most every supermarket has a dedicated *bio* section containing virtually everything from wine, fruit and veggies to meats and cheeses.

However it is quite a bit more difficult (and honestly rather frustrating) to find restaurants that are committed to offering organic dishes, let alone making a 100% commitment to the organic and locally-grown movement.

Being painfully aware of this fact made my discovery of the Elsa restaurant at the Monte Carlo Beach that much more delicious.

Elsa first opened in 1928 in cooperation between the Société des Bains de Mer (SBM) in Monaco and Elsa Maxwell, the famous US columnist, writer and socialite. According to Agnes Marsan, the SBM European press officer, Monte Carlo Beach became *the* place to meet for the artistic and cultural elite of the time.

In the spirit of recapturing the glory of the 1930s, that trendsetting commitment to food and fashion, designer India Mahdavi was brought on board to remodel the Relais & Chateaux establishment and Paolo Sari was enlisted to head up the Elsa team in 2012. Two years later, he was awarded with a Michelin Star, becoming the first and only chef in the world to get a star for organic cuisine, and holds a third level organic certification as well. "I wanted to change the culture of buying," says Paolo, who was born in Treviso, Italy. "I want to know everything about where the deliveries come from. From the meat and fish to the sage and garlic."

I had the pleasure of tasting one of Paolo's famous risotto dishes, which was truly exceptional. His passion results in an exquisite harmony between the taste and healthfulness that the Elsa guests can find in every one of his dishes, including the signature "Bio Sama" (below) – assorted

summer vegetables and radish from Paolo's garden, squeezed "taggiasca" olive, fleur de sel from camargue – that reflects the restaurant's culinary philosophy: "essentiality, simplicity and perfection".

Paolo is leading the way for the future of haute cuisine. "Organic is a true way of life for me. It represents excellence in both taste and health. It's wellbeing that satisfies our palate, our body but also our mind." ■

See montecarlosbm.com. *For more on Scott Bell, visit* pureflowcoco.com

The Six Vineyards of St Antonin du Var

BY ELIZABETH GABAY

By 1850, the hexagonal terracotta floor tile called *tomette* was exported around the world.

WINE writers and buyers often only see two or three vineyards briefly when visiting a specific producer, maybe a local restaurant. Invariably we get small snapshots of a region out of context of its history, people and dynamics.

For 30 years I have toured the vineyards of the Var. In the beginning, there was a greater sense of adventure as they were often reached down windy country lanes, seemingly in the middle of nowhere. The roads have slowly been straightened and widened, and now bypass many of those remote villages we would drive through that tempted us with cafés and bistros. Provence has sped up.

In August, at short notice, I planned a weekend in the central Var. Everywhere was booked, but I managed to find a cancellation in the small village of St Antonin du Var. This was symbolic: the very first vineyard I had visited in Provence was here, Château Mentone, in 1987.

St Antonin du Var is rather sprawling, with no central square (the bar of Hotel Lou Cigaloun, pictured below left, serving as a village focal point), no outstanding architectural beauty nor quaint laneways to explore. But I soon discovered that this village, just shy of 700 inhabitants, and its six wine domaines encapsulate the rich and varied history of Provence.

The name of the Château de Sarrins comes from the "Saracens", who are said to have occupied many villages around the Massif des Maures between the 8th to 11th centuries. According to folklore, a local Saracen chief was killed and buried in his golden armour and surrounded by his treasure in the area, which became known as Les Sarrins. The hills around the vineyard are dotted with hollows where locals have prospected for treasure over the years.

Château Mentone reflects the growing industrialisation of the region. Thirty years ago when I first met the charming elderly owner, Madame la Comtesse Gabrielle Marie-Renée Perrot de Gasquet, she happily chatted about her childhood, how her family would take the train from château to château, to visit friends and relatives, and how, during harvest time, whether of olives, fruit or grapes, the train was also used to move the harvest back to the château.

Tomettes

The Comtesse's father made his money through a local brick factory. Eleven kilometres to the north of Mentone is the small town of Salernes, where bricks, tiles,

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pipes and pottery were first produced in large numbers in the early 19th century from the local iron-rich clay. The soil at Salernes contains so much lead that it is forbidden to have vegetable plots or vineyards along the river Bresque.

By 1850, the hexagonal terracotta floor tile called *tomette* had become the town's principal product and was exported around the world. From the 1950s, new ceramic tiles in a wide range of colours started to be produced, and are now a fashionable product. Today there are some 15 tile producers situated along the main road south of Salernes.

During the 19th century, Château Mentone, like many other Provençal estates, also had mulberry orchards for the leaves to feed silkworms. In the 18th and 19th centuries, Provence experienced a boom in sericulture (silk production) that would last until the First World War, with much of the silk shipped north to Lyon. The large magnanerie at Château Mentone, where the silkworms were housed, is made of distinct patterned bricks with a high vaulted ceiling. Disease started to decimate the silkworms during the second half of the 19th century, and silk production declined.

St Antonin du Var is a village with long family traditions, as reflected in the third domaine, the family-run Bastide des Près, founded in 1891 by Franck Heraud's great-grandfather. Franck remembers how his father and grandfather sold their wine in bulk to wine merchants in the Alpes-Maritimes, who would then bottle it for their clients on the Côte d'Azur. He is the first generation to bottle the domaine's wine.

The rise in popularity of rosé wine over the past twenty years has provided the necessary funds to allow many vineyards in Provence to survive and move forward.

Les Treilles d'Antonin

The fourth domaine is in fact the local co-operative, Les Treilles d'Antonin (pictured) founded in 1923. From the end of the 19th century, when viticulture was in a crisis with over-production, the phylloxera crisis, mildew and oidium, followed by the First World War, co-operatives came into their own. Les Treilles d'Antonin is the smallest co-operative in the Var with only 8 members and 50 hectares, yet makes amazing value-for-money wines.

The modern world of wine in Provence is also represented in St Antonin du Var. In the latter half of the 1990s, three vineyards came under new ownership.

In 1995, the Château des Sarrins was purchased by the Champagne house Bruno Paillard, one of the first Champagne houses to form a link with Provence. Today, rosé wine and Champagne both play on the image of leisure and luxury in their marketing. Champagne ownership and an Alsatian winemaker result in wines, which are slightly atypical of Provence.

Domaine de Gavaisson, was laid out in the early 1990s with 6 hectares planted with olives and a landscaped garden. A bijou vineyard of 4 hectares was planted in 1996. Today, the owner is Emmanuel Gaujal, one of the stars in the world of Provence wine, who has created and set up many famous estates. Today, he produces only white wine for a small quality-conscious market.

In 1998, the Vancoillie family established the Clos d'Alari domaine with 8 hectares of vines, olive trees and oaks (for truffles) and a chambres d'hôtes. A lovely classic range of wines are produced and the early autumn rains in 2010 resulted in an experimental and delicious, sweet wine.

With the passing of the previous generation, many old family domaines moved into new ownership, often leading to sudden modernisation. In 2003, Château Mentone was bought by Marie-Pierre Caille, the daughter of a wealthy businessman, again reflecting a growing trend in the region of outside investment. Mentone is now an oenotourism venue with a spa, accommodation and restaurant as well. Winemaking has continued to honour the traditional styles. The old vines were kept and modernisation used to improve not change the wines.

These days, the one hotel-restaurant of St Antonin du Var, Lou Cigaloun, the social heart of the village, has the wines of all six village domaines on its wine list. The hotel and restaurant have been modernised to be bright and fresh. The small railway used by the Comtesse de Gasquet is no longer used, but the old railway track has been turned into a wonderful path for ramblers, linking Salernes, Lorgues and St Antonin.

Safely tucked away off the main road, St Antonin du Var remains quiet and self-contained, typical of much of modern Provence with its high number of foreign second-home owners, and villas for rental.

A charming region to visit in autumn when the weather is cooler to walk along the old railway line, enjoy the mushroom menus on offer, and try some of the wonderful old red vintages available at Les Treilles d'Antonin and Château Mentone. ■

For more on Riviera resident Elizabeth Gabay, Master of Wine, see elizabethgabay.com *or* belletwine.com

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VIVA L'ITALIA!

AUGUST/September – No 170, page 40: Sestri Levante. Thank you "Reporter" for this insight to what is almost on our doorstep and to where we would normally not go. Following on from this very interesting feature, a group of four of us set off by car to explore this picturesque town.

Sadly we only set aside 3 days, which was 2 nights in a B&B. We discovered a fabulous establishment run by two sisters, welcoming and friendly and impeccably clean in Sestri Levante at €80 per night. By recommendation from these two lovely ladies and referring to the aforementioned article, we explored the Cinque Terra by train and reached places almost inaccessible by road. The names Riomaggiore, Vernazza, Corniglia, Monterosso and my particular favourite, Manarolo [pictured].

This was in peak holiday season and although bustling with sightseers, this did not detract from this beautiful area. There is a coastal path linking all of these villages for hikers for which a small charge is payable, I assume towards the upkeep of the trail. The train linking these villages spends much of the journey in tunnels but when in the open and on the cliff side the views are breathtaking.
"hands_on", Riviera Reporter Forum

TALKING DIRTY

I AM a French lady and I read on your article on page 6 of issue 170: "France: 43% say no to daily shower."

This is very possible but I take two showers per day and wash my hair every morning, so reading this article made me laugh when I know that the British are worse: four out of five women don't take a shower every day in the UK.

It's not like the British have much to crow about. More than half of men quizzed in a June poll admitted they regularly skipped their morning shower, with a quarter saying they'd rather have the extra time in bed. One in three says they simply couldn't be bothered.

I lived for several months in Brighton and found that this reputation is quite real. My housemates lived like pigs and even had the dirty habit of leaving unwashed dishes around the place – and don't even think about the state of the loo!

I think you should write an article on the Brits not showering too often and not seeing the dentist too often either.
Ghislaine Sutton, by email

MARKET research by Kantar Worldpanel contradicts your item about washing habits. They found that the French shower 7.2 times a week, which is once more than the British or Germans. The Poles are the cleanest Europeans with 9.6 times and the Brazilians are world champions with 14 times a week.

SHOW ME THE MONEY

Star letter

THERE is some moaning about the French law which came into effect on Sept 1st under which cash transactions are now limited to €1000 rather than €3000 previously. Most countries have such laws although some put the limit much higher. In America it's $10,000, which is perhaps a measure of the country's vibrant economy. The largest US banknote in general use is now $100 and the highest denomination note for the euro is 500. Much larger US notes have existed in the past but were used principally for transactions between banks, which are now done electronically. The largest US banknote ever printed was $500,000.

As a retired professor of Economics, I can assure you that public opinion is wrong to think that the €1000 limit has something to do with controlling tax avoidance or funding of organised crime and terrorism. Fraud and illicit funding have never been hampered by legal limits, so exchanging suitcases crammed with banknotes will continue as before and people will still buy and sell used cars between themselves for amounts well over €1000. The bank of England estimates that more than half of British banknotes are held overseas or in the black market and about £5 billion are held in cash "under mattresses". Only a quarter of British cash is readily available for use at any one time.

So the real reason for the €1000 limit is to encourage other means of payment and thereby lessen the chances that banks will see damaging reductions in their cash reserves such as we have seen in Greece. This new limit is not a good sign because it reflects a lack of governmental confidence in France's economy.
Peter Hancock, Lorgues

LETTERS

An American report in "The Atlantic" says that the British only shower 5 times a week, while the French figure is 7. Some American doctors claim that is too much because the body's protective natural oils are washed away leaving us more susceptible to viral infections. Professor Sanjay Jain, Director of the Center for Infection and Inflammation Imaging Research at John Hopkins University says that showering once every two days is the best frequency.

The Kantar and Atlantic studies also found that Britons buy twice as much soap as the French. This beggars the question of what the French are doing in their frequent showers if they're not using soap?
Paul Martin, Nice

CANUCKS TOO, EH?

YOUR British readers that complain about the loss of their right to vote after 15 years might take solace in the knowledge that Canadian expats lose theirs after only five years. The one million Canadians that live abroad had hoped that a ruling restoring their voting rights would stick, but this was overturned by the Ontario Court of Appeal.

Canadian actor Donald Sutherland, who lives in America and also owns family property in Canada, notes that Americans never lose their right to vote and wants to see the same right granted to those who "have a Maple Leaf in their underwear".

A Supreme Court said: "Permitting all nonresident citizens to vote would allow them to participate in making laws that affect Canadian residents on a daily basis but have little to no practical consequence for their own daily lives."

Isn't that the same nonsensical argument that British opponents use?
Doug Nelson, Villefranche

HER MAJ AND MORE

I DO enjoy reading the "Reporter" and think some of the photos are superb, however, may I point out a couple of glaring mistakes in the last issue?

Page 16: Queen Elizabeth II is referred to as "Her Royal Highness"; since her accession to the throne over 60 years ago her title is "Her Majesty".

Page 35: There is mention of an essay written by Lewis Carroll in 1973: he died in 1898.
P. M. Cerrone

FOLLOW THE LEADERS

WHO would have thought that a leader of the second most important British party would be more left-wing than the current French president? While Hollande is preparing to attack ISIS, Corbyn wants to leave NATO and disband the military. While Hollande is reducing taxes (after raising them), Corbyn would like them raised. While Hollande would like to see a stronger EU, Corbyn wants Britain to leave.
Herb Wills, Sospel

DECEPTIVE DISTANCES

MY French neighbour has just returned from a visit to London with very weary legs. I should have warned her not to rely on the TfL Tube Map for overground accuracy. The map is designed to make underground connections clear and simple but the distances between stations and the city's sites and monuments are very deceptive. Transport for London has now produced an online map that

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LETTERS, FROM PAGE 45

shows the true distances for walkers. There is no printed version but you could download it and print it out yourself or store it on your mobile device.
Meg Havers, Fréjus

AMUSING AND CONFUSING

AS you are now printing amusing French signs I thought you would like this one, which may explain why some of us find it difficult to remember French vocabulary.

And here's another one for you. I do hope there's a fork further down this road!

Tim Watts, by email

IMPRIM'VERT FOR REAL?

DOES that logo on your cover actually mean anything or is it just a way to pretend how green you want us to think you are?
Kevin Eastwood, by email

We understand your concern because the Imprim'Vert logo is sometimes used abusively. Another local publication has been using it fraudulently without complying to the strict conditions necessary for its accreditation.

The Imprim'Vert logo means that our printer uses approved environmentally responsible techniques and is inspected regularly for compliance by an authorised agency.

There is a lot of inaccurate puff around the efficiency of various green initiatives. If you are serious about doing your bit to help the planet there are plenty of scientifically backed ways to discover how and the expert advice can sometimes be surprising. Who would have thought that eating less beef would be a good start?

We now believe that our constant attention to environmentally conscious methods affecting all aspects of the Reporter's production and distribution means that our environmental footprint is smaller than many electronic publishers of similar material. We do our bit.
Mike Meade, Publishing Director

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.

PUT THE PAPER IN THE BIN

THE British press is hopeless. Maybe we should stop believing everything they print about the EU dictating British laws and start thinking that perhaps it is how the UK chooses to do things that makes it somehow different from everywhere else.

The "Daily Mail" recently printed a headline saying that rubbish collections must not be more than once a month under EU edict. That is a surprise to those of us who live in Grasse. Our bin collection has just been increased from twice a week to three times.

EU rules apply to all 28 countries so why do so many papers claim the EU dictates these things, which only we Brits must obey? It is certainly not because Britain is the only country to follow the rules. The UK is one of the biggest receivers of contravention orders for noncompliance.
Joan Evers, by email

Nothing Nice about it: US consular agency closes its doors

It's been a bit of a waiting game since Janet Ruiz (pictured, right) retired from the Nice office in December 2013, but, unhappily, an official announcement was made this August of a consolidation of US consular services in southern France "in order to better serve the public and enhance security for customers and staff". And so, in reflecting "the US government's policy of providing the highest quality consular service to US citizens and foreign nationals in a location that offers a secure environment for all concerned", the US Consular Agency Nice has closed its doors permanently.

From now on, all US passport applications, reports of birth abroad applications, and notarial services must be scheduled at either the US Consulate General in Marseille (*marseille.usconsulate.gov*) or the US Embassy in Paris. For emergency services, US citizens in the Alpes-Maritimes, Var and Monaco are advised to contact the consular section at the US Consulate General in Marseille. For emergency services in other regions of France, contact the American Embassy in Paris.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

LA banque alimentaire Alpes-Maritimes – the food bank – is recruiting volunteers to help with a supermarket collection on November 26th and 27th, to get goods to the storage depot and organise foodstuff. Ongoing volunteers who can donate at least one morning a week are also needed. All skills welcome. Contact 04 92 10 05 31 or ba060@banquealimentaire.org – or see *facebook.com/alpesmaritimes.banquealimentaire*

Photo: Facebook Banque Alimentaire Alpes Maritimes

september

ALPHA COURSE

Thurs Sept 24, 19h30: 10-week Alpha Course in English introduces key ideas and experiences of the Christian faith, and tries to answer important "questions of life." All welcome, no specialist knowledge of the Bible or theology required. A study booklet and supper will be provided. Contact Holy Trinity Cannes 04 93 94 54 61. See holytrinitycannes.org

SWEDISH CLUB DANCING

Sat Sept 26, 17h: We meet to eat, talk and dance to live music, Villa Ingeborg, 40 ave de Verdun, Cagnes sur Mer. To sign up call 04 92 13 15 34 or email info@rivieraklubben.com

THANKSGIVING SERVICE

Sun Sept 27, 10h30: Harvest Thanksgiving Service. Also every Wed, English library from 11h and lunch 12h30. Every Thurs at 10h Keep-Fit. Holy Trinity Cannes. See holytrinitycannes.org

LUNAR FESTIVAL

Sun Sept 27: Dinner with the Association Niçoise Chine Horizon at China Park restaurant (30 rue de France, Nice). For members and all the public. Cost €30 (€25 for students). Please reserve on 04 93 80 31 09 or chinecontact@wanadoo.fr. See chinehorizon.com

BOULES

Tues Sept 29: Boules match at Mandelieu (pétanque) bowling site with Commonwealth Club of the Riviera. Details on commonwealthclubriviera.com

october

A LIFE IN PICTURES BY DOUGLAS KIRKLAND

Until Thurs Oct 15: an exceptional exhibition of the photojournalist, fashion and fine art photographer with images of Marilyn Monroe, Marcello Mastroianni, Sophia Loren, Brigitte Bardot, Romy Schneider etc at the Opera Gallery Monaco. See operagallery.com

CHARITY FISH LUNCH

Sun Oct 4: A fish lunch in a Nice garden for as many or as few wish to turn up, for a flat fee of €25, but you'll need to bring your own wine. There will be an all fish menu, *apéro*, starter, main and unfishy desert, but if anyone is a vegetarian or has allergies to shellfish I would be happy to provide an alternative. After only the basic costs of ingredients have been deducted, the funds raised will be split between the charities Royal National Lifeboat Institute and France's Société Nationale de Sauvetage en Mer. Contact me at fthompson@orange.fr or 06 81 98 60 29. Easy access from A8 and plenty of parking. See page 30 for more.

PAINTINGS BY TONY WAHLANDER AND GENEVIÈVE NICOL

Until Oct 15, 16h-18h, at Villa Ingeborg, 40 ave de Verdun, Cagnes sur Mer. Free entrance.

POSH PARAPHERNALIA

Thurs Oct 1 & Thurs Nov 5: Books, bric-a-brac, posh paraphernalia and light lunch from 12h30.
Sat Oct 17 & Sat Nov 21: Books, bric-a-brac, posh paraphernalia and 2-course lunch from 12h30.
At the Grange (815 chem Gourettes, Mouans-Sartoux).
The library is open every Thurs, 10h-15h (bric-a-brac and books). Easy parking and pets welcome. Do you know someone who would like to come and needs a lift? Please let us know on 04 93 47 94 20, or just bring them along. sunny-bank.org

EUROPEAN MASTERS GAMES 2015 IN NICE

Thurs Oct 1-Sun Oct 11: The Masters Games movement is all about "sport for all". 10,000 competitors in 27 disciplines held at 40 venues across in Nice. The age of participating athletes range from 25 to 100, depending on the age limit of each sport as defined by the international federation's regulations. For more see emg-nice2015.fr

BA CANNES REFERENDUM DEBATE

Fri Oct 2, 12h30: Referendum Debate at The Grange, Mouans-Sartoux. Come and join us for a Gourmet Lunch (€12 plus wine by the glass) followed by a debate. To book please call Giles on: 04 93 94 04 56 or email mel@emporiumduvin.com. See britishassocationcannes.org

OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE TCD SOUTH OF FRANCE AUTUMN LUNCH

Sat Oct 3: 'Les pieds dans l'eau" at Le Point de la Rague, Mandelieu-La-Napoule. Contact halfordoxbridge@yahoo.co.uk

PWN'S SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATION WORKSHOP

Tues Oct 6, 18h-21h: PWN Vice President and Mentoring Leader Valérie Ausseil on: why communication skills are so important; common communication mistakes; the 7 Cs of communication; how to set and reach a desired outcome; how to give effective feedback. Cost: €25 for members/€35 for non-members, incl. finger food buffet and beverages and a 2-hour training seminar. Location: Splendid Hotel , 50 bvd Victor Hugo, Nice.

BA OF THE VAR

Wed Oct 7: Le Tour de Finance with Spectrum Group Finance Seminar at St Endreol in La Motte.
Fri Oct 16: Fish n Chip Quiz Lunch in Flayosc. For more see baofthevar.com

CHINESE LESSONS

Oct: The Association Niçoise Chine Horizon offers Chinese language, painting and calligraphy courses. Please contact 04 93 80 31 09 or chinecontact@wanadoo.fr. See chinehorizon.com

DEMOCRATS ABROAD POLITICAL WINE

Wed Oct 7, 18h30-20h: The Riviera Chapter of Democrats Abroad hosts its monthly event in Nice at La Canne à Sucre, 11 Promenade des Anglais. All Americans are invited to join us as we engage in thoughtful discussions. There is no formal entry fee, we ask that you order at least one drink. Please RSVP (even "maybe") to dafrance.riviera@gmail.com.Future dates: Wed Nov 4 & Wed Dec 2.

SWEDISH CLUB REGULAR EVENTS

Every second Thurs of the month, 18h-20h: Swedish After Work at Hôtel Ellington, 25 bld Dubouchage, Nice. Every Mon, 16h-17h15: Qigong (in English) in the garden at Villa Ingeborg, 40 ave de Verdun, Cagnes sur Mer. To sign up call 04 92 13 15 34 or email info@rivieraklubben.com
Every last Thurs of the month, 19h-21h: Swedish After Work at la Nacional, 61 Place Nationale, Antibes.

AMIAC
Thurs Oct 8: Bleu Lavande restaurant in Valbonne. Phone Douglas Goldin on 04 92 94 02 47 to reserve. See amiac.org

COGS4CANCER TRIBUTE RIDE
Fri Oct 9: Last leg of the C4C 850km journey to raise money for cancer (see pg 35). The Tribute Ride (from Coglin to Antibes) is open to all riders for a charitable fee of €350. See cogs4cancer.org

MONACO IRELAND
Sat Oct 10, 20h-closing: Celebrating the first TradMod IrishFest in Monaco, Where Old Meets New. In association with MonacoUSA, join us at McCarthy's Irish bar for live Irish music, traditional Irish taster menu and, perhaps some Irish dancing! You never know who you might meet... No entrance fee. See monacoireland.com

AVIGNON BLUES FESTIVAL
Thurs Oct 15- Sat Oct 17: Details, tickets: avignonbluesfestival.com

2ND FRENCH RIVIERA CLASSIC MOTOR SHOW
Sat Oct 16-18: Collector cars, motorcycles and boats at the MIN Riviera Nice (2 mins from the A8 and airport with free parking). Nearly 150 exhibitors incl. "The Prince Collection" from Monaco and an exceptional Ferrari exhibition. €9/person on site or €7.50/person tickets online. Open from 10h, closing hours vary. See fr-cms.com

AMERICAN CLUB OF THE RIVIERA
Sat Oct 17: World-renowned glass in Biot and a Michelin-starred restaurant for lunch. See our website for full information: americanclubriviera.com or call Burton on 06 20 40 11 28.

1ST SALON CUISINE & FLAVOURS FROM AROUND THE WORLD
Fri Oct 23 -Sun Oct 25, 10h-19h: See salondelacuisine.fr

CHRISTMAS EVENTS TO NOTE

SWEDISH CHRISTMAS FAIR
Sat Nov 21 & Sun Nov 22, 10h-16h: The Christmas fair is held at Villa Ingeborg, 40 ave de Verdun, Cagnes sur Mer. A Swedish Christmas foodstand featuring salmon, herring, Swedish meatballs ginger snaps, Swedish candy, Jansson temptation, home made pastries and much more. Great handcrafted gifts and Swedish Christmas decorations. Flea market. Oysters and champagne. A bookshop selling books in Swedish. A big-ticket lottery with great prizes. The draw will be held at 15h on Sunday. Traditional Christmas food plate, "Glögg" (hot spiced wine), coffee, pastries and hot dogs. The Lucia procession, the bearer of light with candles in her hair and her handmaidens, all dressed in white, starts at 14h on Sunday. Tel 04 93 20 40 64.

CHRISTMAS FAIR CANNES
Sat Nov 27, 11h-16h: Various stalls, light lunch, tea and cakes, Christmas gifts. Holy Trinitiy Cannes, ave Branly, Cannes. Tel: 04 93 94 54 61. See holytrinitycannes.org

AMIAC CHRISTMAS LUNCH
Fri Dec 4: at The Carlton in Cannes. Reservation form from Secretary obligatory. See amiac.org

BA OF THE VAR
Sat Dec 5: Christmas lunch with VIAC at St Aygulf. See baofthevar.com

SWEDISH CLUB JAZZ
Fri Oct 23, 19h: Sweet Jazz Quartet at Villa Ingeborg, 40 ave de Verdun, Cagnes sur Mer. To sign up call 04 92 13 15 34 or email info@rivieraklubben.com

TEACHING MORNING
Sat Oct 24, 9h30: A Teaching Morning on John's Gospel Part I. Lunch provided. Reserve on 04 93 94 54 61. See holytrinitycannes.org

RADA PRESENTS TARTUFFE
Thurs Oct 29, Fri Oct 30 & Sat Oct 31, 20h: The Riviera Amateur Dramatic Association's sparkling and witty translation of Molière's popular satire by Liverpool's famous comic poet, Roger McGough at Mougins School. Admission: €10 (incl. a free drink). Three ways to book: new phone number 07 83 53 76 20, email (note new address) radabookings@free.fr or at the English Book Centre, 12 rue Alexis Julien, Valbonne.

TEN-PIN BOWLING
Thurs Oct 29: at Antibes bowling alley with the Commonwealth Club of the Riviera. Details on commonwealthclubriviera.com

november

AMIAC
Thurs Nov 5: AGM and lunch at Le Caveau Cannes. Phone Laurie on 04 93 56 34 92 to reserve. See amiac.org

BA OF THE VAR
Thurs Nov 5: Tax planning seminar and lunch in Villecroze.
Tues Nov 10: Coffee morning in Montauroux.
Thurs Nov 19: Lunch and talk in Cotignac. See baofthevar.com

BA CANNES QUIZ NIGHT
Sat Nov 7, 19h: At Holy Trinity Church Hall. Cost €15 includes wine and buffet supper. Please bring friends to this popular event with teams of 4 beforehand or on the night. All welcome. To book please call Giles on 04 93 94 04 56.

MARATHON DES ALPES-MARITIMES
Sun Nov 8, 8h: 42.195km Nice to Cannes. See marathon06.com

VIAC AGM
Sun Nov 8: AGM. More details at viac.fr

REMEMBRANCE DAY SERVICE
Sun Nov 8, 10h30: Remembrance Day Service at Holy Trinity Church Cannes.
Sat Nov 14, 9h30: A Teaching Morning on John's Gospel Part II. Lunch provided. Contact 04 93 94 54 61 to reserve. See holytrinitycannes.org

RAY CHARLES EVENING
Fri Nov 13, 19h: With the group Archibald at the Swedish Club, Villa Ingeborg, 40 ave de Verdun, Cagnes sur Mer. Call 04 92 13 15 34 or info@rivieraklubben.com

3RD CHOCOLATE FAIR
Fri Nov 13-Sun Nov 15, 10h-19h: Place Masséna in Nice. Entry: €5; under-12 free. See salon-chocolat.com

MONACO FÊTE NATIONALE
Thurs Nov 19: Monaco celebrates its national holiday with fireworks over the harbor the evening before and a mass in the Cathedral the next morning, and after it's off to the Prince's Palace where visitors can see the Princely family wave to the crowd from the windows of the palace. See visitmonaco.com

COMMONWEALTH CLUB OF THE RIVIERA ANNUAL DINNER
Thurs Nov 26: Annual dinner. See: commonwealthclubriviera.com

THANKSGIVING AT HOTEL HERMITAGE
Thurs Nov 26: American Club of the Riviera's famous and traditional Thanksgiving lunch at Hotel Hermitage, Monaco. We will also be honoured to have American Military Officers and personnel as our guests. See our website for full information: americanclubriviera.com or contact Mr Burton Gintell 06 20 40 11 28.

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