

FRANCE TODAY

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Gourmet Travels
in the Camargue

Surprising
Swiss Wines

A Country
Village in Paris

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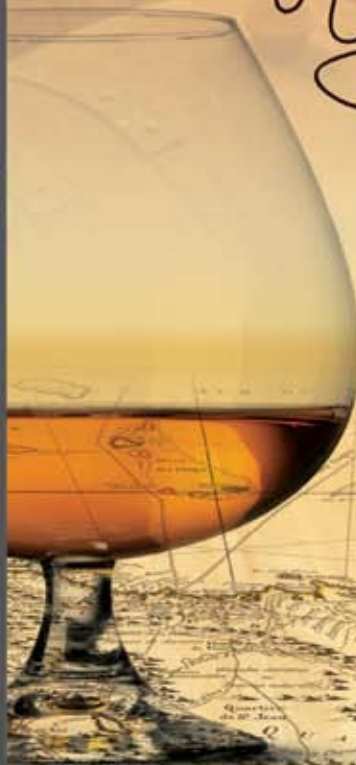


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CONTENTS

FEBRUARY 2013

- 4 CALENDAR**
What's On & What's Up
- 6 FAVORITE TABLES**
A Restaurant Roundup by
France Today Contributors
- 8 BOUTIQUE BEAT**
Seriously Sexy and Spirited
- 10 DESIGN NOW**
Wit & Whimsy
- 12 Gourmet Travels
in the Camargue:**
Getting Down to Basics
- 17 STREETS OF PARIS**
Surprising Mouzaïa:
A Country Village in Paris
- 20 WINE & SPIRITS**
Swiss Wines:
Coming Into Their Own
- 25 FRENCH KITCHEN**
Baking Sweet Treats
- 27 FILM PICKS**
Top Five French
Ski Resort Movies
- 28 RENCONTRE**
Singer/Songwriter
Nolwenn Leroy
- 30 LE MARCHÉ &
CLASSIFIEDS**

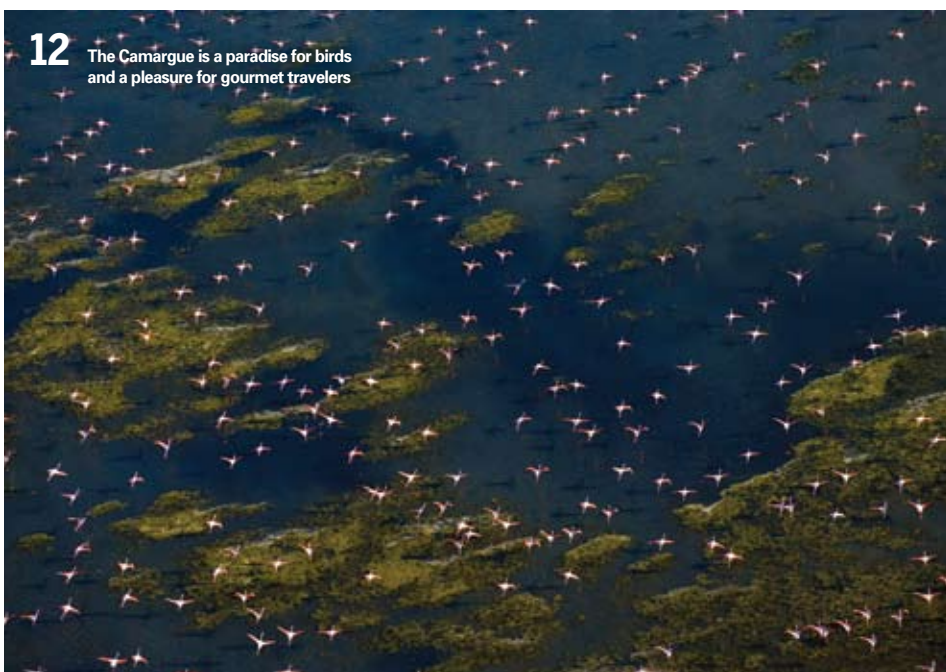


28 Breton singer-songwriter Nolwenn Leroy



10 Swing Chair by Patricia Urquiola for Louis Vuitton

12 The Camargue is a paradise for birds
and a pleasure for gourmet travelers



20 The vineyards of Valais, in Switzerland



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Cover: A tasting at winemaker Jean-Pierre
Pellegri's Domaine Grand'Cour in Peissy/Satigny,
Switzerland. Photo © Ellen Wallace

CALENDAR

What's On & What's Up

FOR YOUR NEXT TRIP TO FRANCE

PARIS

Chagall, Entre Guerre et Paix

More than 100 works by the Russian artist (born Vitebsk 1887, died Saint-Paul de Vence 1985), focused on the momentous period between 1917 and 1945, as revolution, two world wars, exile, peace and serenity in the south of France influenced but didn't change his singular, allegorical style.

Musée du Luxembourg, 19 rue de Vaugirard, 6th, Métro: Saint Sulpice, 01.40.13.62.00, www.museeduluxembourg.fr
€11 Feb 21–July 21

Fashioning Fashion

Subtitled "Two Centuries of European Fashion, 1700–1915", an exhibit assembled from important costume collections donated to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art by antique dealers Martin Kamer and Wolfgang Ruf—a sumptuous survey of sartorial finery.

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, 107 rue de Rivoli, 1st, Métro: Palais Royal, 01.44.55.57.50, www.lesartsdecoratifs.fr
€9.50 Through Apr 14

Eileen Gray

A major retrospective for the Irish architect, designer and decorator (1878–1976) who moved to Paris in 1906 and pioneered the modernist movement of the mid-20th century. The show traces her work from early lacquered furniture to the villa E-1027 with Romanian architect Jean Badovici on in Roquebrune-Cap-Martin.

Centre Pompidou, Place Georges Pompidou, 4th, Métro: Rambuteau, 01.44.78.12.33, www.centrepompidou.fr
€11–€13 Feb 20–May 20



The Lovers in Green, 1916–17, by Marc Chagall, at the Musée du Luxembourg, Paris

Quilt Art: L'Art du Patchwork

A collection of 25 quilts, dating from the 18th to the 20th century, representing the long tradition of patchwork throughout the United States, including Hawaii.

Mona Bismarck American Center, 34 ave de New York, 16th, Métro: Alma Marceau, 01.47.23.38.88, www.monabismarck.org
€7 Feb 13–May 19

PROVINCE

Carnaval de Nice

Parades, flower-decorated floats and revelers fill the streets as the city celebrates its traditional

two-week Mardi Gras Carnival. This year's theme: King of the Five Continents.

Nice, www.nicecarnaval.com
Feb 15–Mar 6

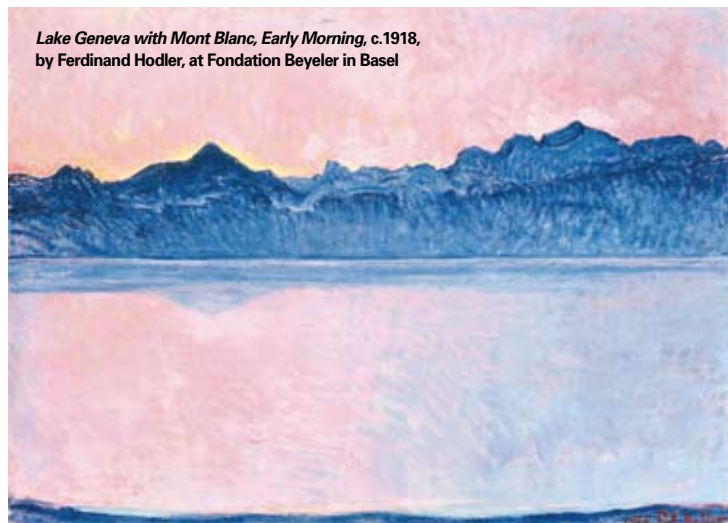
La Fête du Citron

More festivities on the Côte d'Azur with Menton's annual Lemon Festival—day and night parades, floats decorated with more than 100 tons of citrus fruit and giant citrus "sculptures" in parks and gardens. This year's theme: Around the World in 80 Days: Menton, the Secret Stopover.

Menton, www.fete-du-citron.com
Feb 16–Mar 6



Fête Gloanec, 1888, by Paul Gauguin, at the Atelier Grogard in Rueil-Malmaison



Lake Geneva with Mont Blanc, Early Morning, c.1918, by Ferdinand Hodler, at Fondation Beyeler in Basel

Le Trésor des Marseillais

The city of Massalia—today's Marseille—was founded by Phocaean Greek traders around 600 BC. Sometime between 530–500 BC, the colony offered a small temple, called a treasury, to the sacred site of Delphi on the Greek mainland. For the first time, fragments from the temple's dramatic battle-scene freize are on display in the donors' home town.

Centre de la Vieille Charité–Chapelle, 2 rue de la Charité, 04.91.14.59.18.
www.culture.marseille.fr
€8 Through Apr 15

Les Peintres de Pont-Aven Autour de Paul Gauguin

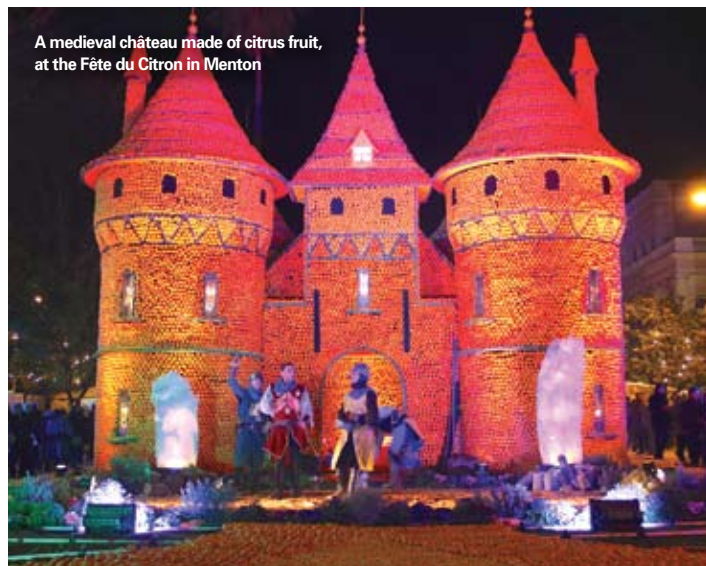
Nearly 150 paintings, drawings and graphic works rarely shown

in public documenting the coterie of artists that congregated around Gauguin, Paul Sérusier and Emile Bernard in the small Breton town of Pont-Aven between 1886 and 1920. A fine occasion to visit the Château de Malmaison, the favorite home of Josephine Bonaparte, right next door.

Atelier Grogard, 6 ave du Château de Malmaison, Rueil-Malmaison.
www.mairie-rueilmalmaison.fr
€5 Through Apr 8

Costumer le Pouvoir: Opéra et Cinéma

At the National Costume museum in Moulins, on the Allier River in Auvergne, a sumptuous show of opera, theater and movie costumes for grand and powerful characters,



A medieval château made of citrus fruit, at the Fête du Citron in Menton



Costume for the opera *Boris Godunov*, 1993, at the Costume Center in Moulins

from Greek gods and French kings to Astérix and Salome.

Centre National du Costume de Scène, Quartier Villars, Route de Montilly, Moulins. 04.70.20.76.20.
www.cnscs.fr €6 Through May 20

SWITZERLAND Ferdinand Hodler

An overview of late works by the Swiss Symbolist artist, focused on portraits of his dying companion Valentine Godé-Darel, and landscape paintings pared down to radiant, intensely colored panoramas of mountains, lakes and sky.

Fondation Beyeler, Baselstrasse 101, Riehen/Basel. +41. 61.645.97.00.
www.fondationbeyeler.ch
25 Swiss francs Through May 26

AND DON'T FORGET these events and their closing dates:

PARIS

Canaletto et Venise Musée Maillol, Feb 10
Les Rothschilds en France au XIXe Siècle Bibliothèque Nationale/Richelieu, Feb 10
L'Art en Guerre, France 1938–1947 Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Feb 17
Les Couleurs du Ciel Musée Carnavalet, Feb 24
Et l'Homme Créa...le Robot Musée des Arts et Métiers, Mar 3
Art du Jeu, Jeu dans l'Art Musée de Cluny, Mar 4
Van Gogh/Hiroshige Pinacothèque de Paris, Mar 17
Des Fleurs en Hiver: Delacroix–Othoniel–Creten Musée Delacroix, Mar 18
Dalí Centre Pompidou, Mar 25
Les Mille et Une Nuits Institut du Monde Arabe, Apr 28
Cheveux Chéris Musée du Quai Branly, July 14
Léonard de Vinci, Projets, Dessins, Machines Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie, Aug 18

PROVINCE

Renaissance Louvre-Lens, Lens, Mar 11
Versailles et l'Antique Château de Versailles, Mar 17
Le Temps des Collections Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen, May 26
Marseille-Provence 2013 European Cultural Capital: Marseille, Aix-en-Provence, Arles, Aubagne, Gardanne, Istres, Martigues, Salon-de-Provence, all year

SWITZERLAND

Fenêtres: De la Renaissance à Nos Jours Fondation de l'Hermitage, Lausanne, May 20

For more Calendar events:
www.francetoday.com

Favorite Tables

A roundup of top picks by France Today contributors



Sardegna a Tavola

PARIS

Sardegna a Tavola

Paris boasts scores of Italian restaurants, from plain pizzerias to bastions of *alta cucina*. But few seem to have as much authenticity as Sardegna a Tavola. Opened in 1997 by Tonino Simbula and his wife Angela, the tiny restaurant is a must for lovers of Sardinian cuisine—a culinary realm of its own that has evolved from the island's historic cultural mix of shepherds and fishermen. It's easy to be charmed by the room's mellow yellow walls, the colorful graffiti, the shelves lined with Sardinian products and the traditional staples hanging from the ceiling—peppers, cured hams, dried sausages, olive branches. But the real treat resides in its (very) large plates.

Written in Sardinian—with proper French translation—the menu is only indicative, and the specialties found on it can vary from one month to another; most of the dishes on offer strictly respect the seasons. So if you're not in Paris at the right time, you might not be able to order the succulent orange-scented langoustines with tagliatelle. But the equally delicious spaghetti *alla bottarga* (in French *poutargue*: salted, dried mullet eggs) can be found all year long, and so can the traditional *malloreddus* (small, ridged pasta shells, like slender gnocchi) and the terrific roast suckling pig. As well as excellent Sardinian wines to accompany the meal—Vermentino or Cannonau, for example,

or the simple red or white house wine—you might also want to try one of the special after-dinner wines by the glass.

Except for the pastas, which vary between €18 and €22, all these fine indulgences are very pricey, and the tab can get sky-high. But then a flight ticket to the island would be quite a bit more.

1 rue de Cotte, 12th, 01.44.75.03.28. €60–€70.
Wines start at €28.

—Julien Bisson

PARIS

Le Chapeau Melon

The *cave à manger*—a wine shop that moonlights as a small restaurant—is becoming almost as much of a Paris institution as the bistrot. Le Chapeau Melon, one of the first and finest examples of the genre, was opened by Olivier Camus in 2002, a steep trot up

rue de Belleville in the 19th *arrondissement*. The shop window makes it very clear what you're in for. “*Spécialiste de vins naturels*”, it proclaims, followed by a definition: “Wines from vines free of insecticides, chemical fertilizers or any other synthetic product, and produced without chemical correctors.”

Camus chose his words well, as they describe more than just the wines he serves. Imagine Le Chapeau Melon as the Belleville apartment of your bon vivant, epicurean artist uncle, and you might start to imagine the decor, ambiance and cuisine—generous, uninhibited and without artifice. A few examples from recent menus: salmon tartare with soy sauce, olive oil and green apple; line-caught jack mackerel, sashimi style, in three marinades; sardine *tartelette* with tomato *confit* and dill; cream of asparagus soup with mint; squab from Racan, near Tours, with girolle mushrooms and celeriac purée; and slow-braised Pyrenees lamb.

The hundreds of bottles lining the walls come from small, often obscure winemakers, but fear not, put yourself in the hands of uncle Camus. A glass of rosé as an aperitif? Why not Domaine Mouressipe's Cuvée Galéjade, a mix of Grenache and Cinsault that's hazy and... orange! Galéjade is a Provençal word for a mischievous tall tale, but any worries will quickly subside with one whiff of the Cuvée's litchi, rose and mandarin bouquet. Would you like a light red to transition from fish to meat? You might try the biodynamic table wine by Domaine Le Briseau, made of 100% Pineau d'Aunis—a stunning Loire Valley varietal, here yielding a ruby-colored, surprisingly meaty wine redolent of black pepper and red cherries. Along with the fine food, this *cave à*



Le Chapeau Melon



Le Comptoir du Marché

manger will surely be enticing gourmets to go *au naturel* for years to come. 92 rue Rébeval, 19th, 01.42.02.68.60. Table d'hôte starting 8:30 pm Wed–Sun; four-course menu €34. Wines are at shop prices plus €9 corkage fee.

—Jeffrey T. Iverson

NICE

Le Comptoir du Marché

A few blocks from the Cours Saleya open-air market in Vieux Nice, the Comptoir du Marché was launched last winter by Armand Crespo, owner-chef of the Bistrot d'Antoine, one of the city's hottest tables. It's now almost six years since he and his wife Sophie took over a 1904 landmark restaurant near the Old Town's courthouse and revamped it into a wildly popular, affordable bistrot with a market-driven blackboard menu of classic French and Provençal dishes. Why open a second restaurant, just around the corner? "It's a smaller menu—five starters, five main courses, five desserts, and some daily specials thrown in," says the ever-gracious Crespo, who formerly worked with Jacques Maximin in Nice and Vence. "He's still my reference," Crespo says. "Maximin was really the first to give Mediterranean cuisine a contemporary identity."

With its winning combo of ultra-fresh ingredients, an extensive wine list, modest prices and a delightful decor—think cozy country kitchen circa 1950—the Comptoir is always jam-packed with local residents, lawyers and judges, and the trendy-meets-artsy crowd. Chef Lois Guenzati, 23, works in an open-plan kitchen turning out dishes as handsome as they are flavorful. We began by sharing starters: a small thick-crust pizza piled high with fresh tomatoes, ham, arugula and mozzarella; heavenly braised beef ravioli in a creamy truffled bouillon; and baby

artichokes *à la barigoule*. Among the main dishes, the *magret de canard* (duck breast) with small *grenaille* potatoes was terrific, and so were the seared scallops with artichokes, carrots and turnips. For dessert: featherlight panna cotta, crumble-topped chocolate pudding and a baked apple with chestnut mousse. Book well in advance. 8 rue du Marché, Nice. 04.93.13.45.01. A la carte €25–€30. Wines start at €15.

—Lanie Goodman

NICE

Chez Palmyre

Hidden in the maze of narrow cobblestone streets, Chez Palmyre was one of Vieux Nice's long-standing family-style institutions, presided over by the late, grandmotherly chef Palmyre Moni, who opened the 25-seat bistrot in 1926. In the old days, I used to drop in as Palmyre and her daughter Suzanne toiled away in their tiny kitchen, producing simple but tasty traditional Niçois dishes—three courses for €13—for local old-timers who gossiped in their *nissart* patois under the neon glare. It was homey food and a hole-in-the-wall atmosphere. Trendy it wasn't.

Taken over in 2010 by 28-year-old chef Vincent Verneveaux, who trained with Guy Savoy and Jacques Maximin, and his associate Philippe Terranova, the old favorite has seen a few changes: The three-course menu has gone up to €15, and the outstanding quality of the cuisine is nothing less than miraculous. "There's no freezer and no microwave," says Verneveaux, who heads for the market at 6:30 every morning.

The cozy brick-walled bistrot decor has been spruced up with cloth napkins, orange checked tablecloths, silver cutlery and a colorful vintage-style "grocery corner" behind the zinc bar. The menu, scrawled on an antique

mirror, now changes every two weeks. It's hard not to nibble on the delicious sourdough baguette while waiting, but doing it didn't stop us from tucking into our most recent meal with great gusto. We began with a warm potato salad with duck confit, a flaky girolle mushroom tart topped with a soft-boiled egg, and a terrine of smoked salmon and goat cheese. The generously served main dishes included beef *daube* with gnocchi; chestnut-studded sausage with lentils; and rabbit topped with tomatoes, peppers and olives—all simmered, tender and tasty. Desserts vary from homemade cakes—pear *clafoutis* with chocolate sauce—to such simple delights as *fromage blanc* with raspberry coulis or wine-poached pears. The regional wines are gently priced (pitchers are only €3–€5) too, so reserving far in advance is a must. 5 rue Droite, Nice. 04.93.85.72.32. Fixed price 3-course menu: €15. Wines start at €12.

—L.G.

Prices are approximate, per person without wine.

Alexander Lobrano is on temporary leave from his A La Carte column to finish his new book, *Hungry for France*, to be published by Rizzoli next fall.

For all our restaurant reviews, see www.francetoday.com

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Seriously Sexy and Spirited

by Jennifer Ladonne

Women of all ages on both sides of the Atlantic have associated the name **Lancaster** with quality handbags and fine craftsmanship since the company was founded in 1990. Lancaster bags are both chic and sporty, with an emphasis on practicality—notably the convertible shoulder-bag/backpack, one of the label's innovative recent creations.

That Lancaster chose Paris's posh rue Saint Honoré for its first dedicated boutique, and French designer Ora-Ito to create the decor, speaks volumes about the company's vision for the future. Or maybe make that futuristic vision, since the new shop resembles a spaceship. All in black, with accents of chrome and mirror, the sleek, undulating walls provide a backdrop for Lancaster's hallucinatory color palette—one of the company's great strengths. Take the crossbody Versailles bag, in patent leather or soft cowhide, a versatile little bag that comes in 15 colors, ranging from intense lipstick pink to a lovely muted papaya—a comely shade of orange that works perfectly with pretty much any outfit you throw at it. The jaunty Inès Sixties bag, in supple calf with a long chain handle, is a great day-into-evening bag, and the Exotic tote in burgundy or black *faux* croco is Lancaster's answer to the classic Hermès Birkin bag. The range of styles is impressive, from tiny evening bags and clutches to oversized satchels and totes, including limited-edition models with

reptile insets that are available only in the new boutique. They're all engineered for comfort, maneuverability and practicality, at irresistible prices. 422 rue Saint Honoré, 8th, 01.42.28.88.88. www.lancaster-paris.com

SERIOUSLY SEXY

Will we ever tire of French lingerie? Not if undies this good keep coming along. There's nary a pinching pushup bra or silver G-string to be found in the beautiful new **Insensee** boutique on Paris's Left Bank that opened last fall to much acclaim. The cozy boutique, designed like a Paris apartment, displays a dozen or more bra-and-panty sets carefully engineered for “comfort, comfort, comfort,” say the company's three founders, all veterans of the French lingerie industry and, incidentally, all male. Two, Michael and Kevin Hiridjee, are sons of the founder of Princesse Tam Tam, and the third, Gaël Moreau, worked with that company for many years.

These “*hommes féministes*”, as they call themselves, went to great lengths to create

a line of lingerie that functions, they say, like a “second skin”—light, sensual and elegant. Their designer, whose résumé includes Erès, Princess Tam Tam and Dior, has focused on the highest quality, most technologically advanced fabrics available. The boutique also has a made-to-measure service for hard-to-fit sizes, small or large.

Although the *Insensee* collection dispenses with tacky clichés of “sexy” lingerie, it certainly doesn't lack sex appeal. Lace is used as a design element in insets that follow the contours of the body; alluring transparent fabrics and satiny floral prints are more feminine than *fatale*. It might be described as the thinking woman's underwear, aimed at *la femme d'esprit*, both spirited and intelligent—note the in-store library stocked with books about women, by women. After all, what could be sexier than a smart woman who's totally comfortable in her second skin? 89 rue du Bac, 7th, 01.45.44.32.48. www.insensee.com

AUX ARMES, CITOYENNES

Fauré Le Page, armorer to 18th and 19th century French royals, nobles and revolutionaries, is the latest entry—and one of the best—in the race to resurrect ancient pedigreed French companies and elevate them to 21st-century luxury status. Like well-known 19th-century luggage-makers Goyard and



The new *Insensee*
boutique in Paris

Insouciant, in
black lace,
by *Insensee*



Moynat, whose prestige bags vaunt their historic legacies, Fauré Le Page's distinctive bags and *maroquinerie* (small leather goods) reflect the firm's unique place in French history.

Founded in 1717, the company lasted through seven generations over more than 200 years, and was once considered France's firearms manufacturer par excellence. Commissioned by French kings starting with Louis XV, the company also supplied Napoleons I and III as well as the Italian and Russian aristocracy. The new Fauré Le Page boutique, just off the rue Saint Honoré (where both Goyard and Moynat are also found), winks rather than genuflects at its illustrious past: display tables rest on armored legs, handbags are suspended from armor gauntlets or shown with becoming chain-mail dresses. The leather goods and signature linen-and-leather totes are displayed alongside real antique *pistolets*. While humor and whimsy may elevate Le Page from the rest of the bunch, the company is dead serious about quality; everything from adorable dog collars and leashes to a gorgeous metal-and-crocodile clutch bag is handmade with meticulous care. Hunting chairs and flasks, a superb shopping cart and pistol-shaped *pochettes* in three sizes make great gifts for sporty folks and/or lovers of French luxury and history. 21 rue Cambon, 1st, 09.82.50.92.30. www.faurelepage.com

IN BRIEF...

To mark its 160th anniversary, the **Bon Marché** department store offers two sparkling *nouveautés*: First, a newly expanded men's shop, now covering the entire basement floor and featuring a huge selection of designer and luxury menswear. And second, a stupendous new wine cellar.



Smack in the center of the store's huge **Grande Épicerie** food hall, a monumental stairway leads down to the gleaming 6,000-square-foot cellar that's poised to rival Paris's top wine shops. Director Hugues Forget scoured France for some 2,000 of the best wines and spirits from every region, at every price point, including 400 champagnes and 1,000 eaux-de-vie, whiskies and liqueurs, with an astounding 200,000 bottles in reserve. There's also a large climate-controlled area for rare and prestigious vintages, with experts on hand to guide customers and conduct wine tastings open to the public. The lovely new restaurant-wine bar allows shoppers to taste the wines paired with food or just take a pleasant and convenient shopping break. It's a most welcome newcomer to the Paris wine scene.

Bon Marché, 24 rue de Sèvres, 7th, 01.44.39.80.00, www.lebonmarche.com; *Grande Épicerie*, 38 rue de Sèvres, 01.44.39.81.00. www.lagrandeepicerie.com

Galleries Lafayette is helping to disperse the doldrums of winter with hints of what's to come this spring. The second-floor **Espace Luxe** presents top new previews, including samples from Salvatore Ferragamo's Louvre Collection, Proenza Schouler, House of Holland and Roksanda Ilincic. Just in time for Valentine's Day, the ephemeral **Le Pantes Bar** offers special models from Chantal Thomass, Etam, Aubade, Lejaby and other French lingerie faves all designed with Swarovski crystal trimmings (Feb 4-23). Through February, the second floor **Bar à Clutch** presents the best of the best in tiny jewel-like evening clutch bags. And finally, there's also a great new selection of cutting-edge designer bags, with fabulous models found only at Galleries Lafayette by French designers Tila March, Vanessa Bruno, Damir Doma, Zilla and Halaby.

40 blvd Haussmann, 9th, 01.42.82.34.56. www.gallerieslafayette.com ■

For more of the best French boutiques and shopping: www.francetoday.com



Wit & Whimsy

by Jean Bond Rafferty

French design has kicked off 2013 with wit and whimsy. In one of those unexpected Gallic twists, the number 13 is considered lucky in France, so to find a clever collection of furniture and lighting produced by a new young company called **La Chance**—French for luck—is right in tune with the times.

Dedicated to promoting the effervescent *Nouvelle Vague* of French design, the world-traveled founders Jean-Baptiste Souletie and Louise Breguet, both architects and financiers, have rounded up an international slate of top designers to create a playful panoply of objects in metal, marble, wood and glass.

Almost everything is produced in split personalities: the sober, natural, chic, subtle and classic Jekyll, or the optimistic, colorful, theatrical, arty and naive Hyde. Take the Swedish **Note Design Studio's** Tembo stool, a modern totem of stacked wood, metal and cork with toy-like appeal and more or less the shape of an African tom-tom—Tembo is Swahili for elephant foot. Get it in cool

Jekyll—natural cork, black lacquered MDF and black matte wood—or joyful Hyde—natural cork, light green

wood and orange, yellow and blue lacquered MDF.

The sculptural steel credenza called **Rocky**, by Beirut-born, Paris-based **Charles Kalpakian** comes in Jekyll's steely gray or Hyde's two tones of blue. The **Pool** team (Léa Podovani and Sébastien Kieffer) has updated their Vulcain lamp with a laser-cut dotted metal shade (Jekyll copper or Hyde white) and a metal or Corian base with a key on-off switch—white Corian or aluminum with black key, or gray anodized aluminum with yellow key.

Israeli **Dan Yeffet** and Czech **Lucie Koldova**, who trained with Arik Levy in Paris, imagined **Iconic**, a statuesque full-length oval mirror on a pedestal with a white Carrara marble base and white mirror back—Jekyll—or a solid oak base with lipstick-red mirror back—Hyde. The cushions of Paris star designer **Noé Duchaufour-Lawrance's** steel and foam **Borghese** bench echo the shapes of the parasol pines in the famous Roman garden, with a choice between a chic carbon-black structure with gray cushions or a white base with cushions in shades of green. Hot or cool, the La Chance collection is irresistible. www.lachance.fr

DEFYING GRAVITY

His fans include Madonna, Tom Ford, Mick Jagger and Diane von Furstenberg; his limited editions stand out in interiors by high-flying decorators, among them Jacques Grange, François Catroux and Peter Marino. **Hervé Van der Straeten** is a French

Atelier O's hammock for Louis Vuitton's Objets Nomades collection



The Illusion bench by Jean-Claude Cardiet of 22.22 Edition Design



Noé Duchaufour-Lawrance's Borghese sofa for La Chance

master of asymmetrical designs in marvelous mixes of materials: bronze and alabaster in the *Virevolte* chandelier, Plexiglas and bronze in the *Lollypop* mirror and blocks of lacquered wood whose painterly surfaces offer changing reflections in the *Console Chaos*. A captivating pair of witty end tables called *Inclination*, whose gilded bronze legs support burnt-orange lacquered-wood tops in a gravity-defying diagonal, will debut in the US at New York's Galerie Ralph Pucci

this spring (Jan 31–May 15). www.vanderstraeten.fr

LIGHTHEARTED LUXURY

When **Louis Vuitton** does whimsy, you can count on



Louis Vuitton's Objets Nomades beach chair by Maarten Baas

some extravagant results. Harking back to their historical tradition of special commissions, LV called on a star-studded cast of name designers to create a collection of luxurious travel-ready *Objets Nomades*. Inspired by Joy Adamson's *Born Free* and the lightweight structure of 19th-century artist's easels, **Christian Liaigre's** folding Travel Desk is made of maple and leather; **Patricia Urquiola's** Stool and Swing Chair both fold up to look like handbags; **Maarten Baas's** Beach Chair, with cotton straps and a hand-sculpted, resin-coated clay frame, is not only stylishly transportable, it also bears its author's fingerprints.

Most beautiful: Swiss **Atelier Oï's** hammock made of woven Nomade leather strips and gold-plated rivets with a detachable headrest is in the lineage of the legendary Vuitton trunk bed made for the 19th-century French explorer of Italian origin, Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza (founder of the settlement that became Brazzaville). Most covetable: **Thierry Gaugain's** "O" Handbag Lamp, powered with innovative, low-energy OLEDs, whose warm glow illuminates the mysterious recesses of a woman's purse; when turned off, it doubles as a makeup mirror. Most spectacularly whimsical: **Fernando and Humberto Campana's** Maracatu foldaway travel cabinet made of recycled leather off-cuts from the LV workshop



Madame O chair by
Marcello Ziliani for
Roche-Bobois



The Tembo stool by Note
Design Studio for La Chance

in Asnières. In a limited edition of 12, the three-shelf, flamboyantly hued "cabinet", a hanging pouch, is an echo of an imaginary fruit on a solitary baobab tree that the Brazilian brothers spotted in the Namibian desert, crossed with the feverishly contagious rhythms of their home country's Maracatu dance music. www.louisvuitton.com

SIGNS OF SPRING

If winter comes, can spring be far behind? French designers are ready for the first balmy breezes with kicky outdoor furniture to brighten terraces and gardens with pizzazz. **22.22 Edition Design's** Jean-Claude Cardiet created the hand-crafted, epoxy Illusion bench, whose three-toned Skaï covers in mint green, eau de Nil and white produce a trompe-l'œil 3-D effect. It also comes in canvas, fabric or leather. www.2222editiondesign.fr

French manufacturer **Roche Bobois** also offers some high-spirited solutions for al fresco living. **Cédric Ragot's** Precious tables with diamond-faceted, steel-wire-cage bases come in a colorful selection of gueridons and coffee tables, while **Song Wen Zhong's** stackable polycarbonate Ava chair comes in transparent tints—sky, crystal, amber, graphite and ruby. The most droll chair on



The iconic full-length mirror by Dan
Yeffet and Lucie Koldova for La Chance

the deck: **Marcello Ziliani's** Madame O multicolored wrought iron chairs. It's like sitting down inside an exuberantly hued hula hoop. And finally Fabrice Berrux's cut-out four-leafclovermetal Bonheur stools definitely confirm 2013 as a year of good luck. www.roche-bobois.com ■



Precious table by Cédric Ragot
for Roche-Bobois



Inclination end tables by
Hervé Van der Straeten

Gourmet Travels in the Camargue

by Agnès Lascève



The Camargue—that wide strip of land between sky and sea that stretches across arms of the Rhône—is not just a paradise for birds and white horses. Its marshes are put to work producing crystalline salt, its broad flatlands produce some of the world's finest rice, and its grassy fields are home to black cattle whose lean, delicious meat is recognized for its healthful properties.

Life is harsh in the Camargue. The delta isn't the most hospitable place—the soil is poor and corroded by salt, and the mistral, that famous wind from the north, gaining strength as it races down the Rhône, has nothing to stop it as it sweeps glacially over the flat land. Sometimes it blows hard enough to take your breath away, and, they say, it can rage for three, six or nine days straight. The marshes are a perfect habitat for mosquitoes and in summer, when the wind lets up, they take over, especially at sunrise and sundown. But the beauty of the landscapes and the singular “end of the world” atmosphere make you forget the inconveniences that—as the Camarguais say—also protect them from mass tourism.

The gastronomy here resembles the *terroir*: it gets right down to basics. The region's products are so elemental that their simplicity becomes their richness; there's no way to cheat here. Rice, beef, salt, wild fish and the tiny shellfish called *tellines* are the stars; among processed foods, the *saucisson d'Arles* made by the Maison Genin leads the way, closely followed by the beef sausage of Diego Gimenez, the tapenade of Jean Martin and the fougasse of Aigues-Mortes—especially those made by Alain Olmeda and Laurent Poitavin.

Camargue rice IGP

Camargue rice was granted the status of IGP (*Indication Géographique Protégée*) a dozen years ago, the first time the official label was granted to a grain. It has a strictly limited geographic territory, and a very precise list of regulations governs, among other things, mandatory leveling of the soil, irrigation and drainage. Irrigation water must be pumped from the Rhône and only used once, and crop rotation is obligatory every two or three years, mainly alternating with wheat and potatoes. This mosaic pattern of agriculture around the Vaccarès pond, combined with livestock and other crops, served for



Harvesting the salt at the Salin d'Aigues-Mortes



Chef Armand Arnal
of La Chassagnette in
Le Sambuc



The black taureaux de Camargue



Tellines, the delicate shellfish
of the Camargue



Camarguais rice

a long time as a natural corrective for soil laden with salt. It was originally an idea of the Duc de Sully, minister of Henri IV. Initially the rice served only as a curative for the soil—it wasn't edible, because varieties suited to the region had not yet been found.

In the early 20th century, farmers were inspired by the example of Italian rice growers, and finally, during the Marshall Plan period after WWII, rice cultivation really boomed—but only after a largely unknown and not very glorious incident. During the Nazi Occupation, Indochinese workers were forced by the Vichy government to work in the rice fields. Their know-how helped to improve production, a fact that was never mentioned until 2009, when the mayor of Arles finally gave them long-overdue credit.

Today the entire Camargue is classified as a Natura 2000 site, and it's on the official Tentative List to be named a UNESCO World Heritage site. That means the territory is bound by strict, non-negotiable regulations—and the environmental constraints are enormous.

Some 250 rice growers in the Camargue now produce 110,000 tons of rice a year, in fields spread over nearly 50,000 acres, about 6 percent of which is devoted to organic agriculture. Research on



Fields of rice along the Rhône River

rice varieties is ongoing and 40 varieties are currently grown. White, brown, red, black, perfumed, long, very long or round, Camargue rice is mostly grown on small parcels of land and accounts for 30 percent of France's rice consumption.

Every Saturday morning a colorful Camargue character named Robert Bon can be found at the famed outdoor market in Arles, where he sets up his immense rice cooker and urges passing shoppers to sample his newest recipe du jour. He's so convincing it's almost impossible not to buy his organic rice. If you have the time, go ahead and tackle him in conversation—he's unstoppable once he starts expounding on the subject of Camarguais rice.

Le taureau de Camargue

Taureau de Camargue, or *raço di bioù* in Provençal, is an ancient bovine race indigenous to the Camargue, still semi-wild, that now has an AOP designation (*Appellation d'Origine Protégée*). Contrary to popular belief, Camargue bulls were not originally kept for meat but for Camarguais bullfights, in which the bull is not killed, just taunted by teams of unarmed young bullfighters as they try to snatch a rosette strung between its horns, then sprint away and leap out of the arena as the bull charges—a sport not unlike the games depicted on ancient Greek and Roman vases. The sport requires bulls almost as agile as the bullfighters and, above all, undomesticated.

Because the bulls spend their lives outdoors in spacious pastures on ranches called *manades*, ranchers (*manadiers*) came up with the idea of commercializing the meat from the part of the herd not headed for the bullring. They created a set of strict standards and obtained an AOC (*Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée*) in 1996, the first for bovines, which became an AOP (the European equivalent of the AOC) in 2001.

Certified Camargue cattle can only come from a certain area within three *départements*—Gard, Hérault and Bouches du Rhône. The animals must be born, raised and slaughtered in the area, which is divided into the humid zone for summer pastures and what is called *les terres hautes* (high pastures) the rest of the year. The designation is relative, though, because the entire area lies more or less at sea level.

In addition, for six months of the year no additional forage may be given to the animals, and what is supplied in the remaining months must come from the same geographic area. The livestock area is enormous—all year long the bulls remain outside, in huge fenced pastures. The first objective is to produce bulls for sport and thus, above all, not to fatten them—they are semi-wild animals whose

very lean, tender meat has fabulous flavor.

Florence Pidou-Clauzel is a good example of a Camarguais *manadière*, sharing the passion for a way of life in harmony with nature. She, her father and her brother spend most of their time on horseback—the horses also are born on the manade—tending the herd, which averages 200 head, and overseeing 30 to 35 births a year, all naturally conceived. The liveliest males are destined for the bullfights, which they might enter several times, depending on their talent. About 70 percent of the remaining herd is headed for the table, at three, four or five years of age. The manade, Mas des Grandes Cabanes du Vaccarès, now has three *gîtes* (guest cottages), and a stay at this lovely place will let you experience Camarguais life first-hand.

Old salts

The town of Aigues-Mortes, built by Louis IX in the 13th century to establish a Mediterranean port and still enclosed within spectacular medieval walls, is surrounded by nearly 250,000 acres of salt marshes, open to sun and wind. The salt fields here have been exploited since Roman times, and the salt farmers, called *sauniers*, are the heirs to a savoir faire more than 2,000 years old. Salt from the Salin d'Aigues-Mortes is naturally white, thanks to the soil on which it is deposited. Salt crystals form in summer, when the mistral stops blowing, and the delicately perfumed *fleur de sel*—the top of the crop—is harvested very carefully, by hand. The coarse, untreated salt that remains is ideal for recipes that call for cooking in a salt crust, and the salts to which organic herbs and pepper are added are culinary treasures that belong in every pantry. Those produced at Aigues-Mortes, under the label Le Saunier de Camargue, are found throughout France.

Tellines

One of the most emblematic foods of the Camargue is the telline, a small, flat, pearly shellfish, pale yellow and violet inside, found in estuaries providing a mix of salt and fresh water. According to tradition, these delicious mollusks were first fished and eaten right here, so long ago that no one remembers when. They were traditionally found buried two to three inches down in the sand and gathered by workers walking backwards, dragging baskets with built-in rakes. Harvesting tellines is not only backbreaking, but also more and more difficult because they are getting much harder to find.



Butcher and charcutier
Diego Gimenez

CAMARGUAIS RESTAURANTS

If you have time for only one restaurant in the Camargue, it should be Armand Arnal's **La Chassagnette**. Seemingly out in the middle of nowhere, the tall, quiet chef presides over a restaurant both simple and sophisticated.

Simple, because he uses only fruits and vegetables from his own organic garden, no matter the season. His immense *potager*, which inspires rapt admiration in most visitors, produces treasures he transforms into the most elegant of dishes. For Arnal, vegetables are not an accompaniment but a noble product, worthy of all his attention, and ours.

It's sophisticated, because he knows how to take a fish, caught that morning or the night before, and use it to compose a dish that seems quite unpretentious but is the



result of some fairly profound thought. Take the marinated *lisette*, a small mackerel that he serves with a broccoli purée, black sesame and preserved lemon; or the duck raised in the rice fields, served with ribbons of root vegetables in a sweet-and-sour sauce and a sprinkling of caramelized pine nuts; or the dessert of fennel sorbet, vanilla *granité* and fennel *confit*.

Born in Montpellier, Arnal formerly worked with Alain Ducasse, notably in his New York restaurant for several years. Arriving at La Chassagnette in 2006, he won a Michelin star in 2009. Although he's proud of it, he says a star was not his primary motivation—what he likes is creating cuisine tied to its locality, and in the Camargue he has found his niche. *Route de Sambuc, (between Arles and Le Sambuc), 04.90.97.26.96. www.chassagnette.fr*

L'Estrambord is a real country restaurant, the kind you just don't find much anymore. The welcome is the warmest possible, and the cuisine, solidly and enthusiastically based on regional products, is simple and delicious. Don't miss the house specialty, Camarguais beef cheeks braised in red wine. *7 rue de l'Abrivado, Le Sambuc, 04.90.97.20.10. www.lestrambord.fr*

Only a decade ago a *tellinier* could gather some 90 pounds a day; today he can hardly find half that amount, and because there are almost no more of them along the shoreline, he must swim out into the sea and search off sandbanks. Depending on the season, sometimes the tellinier is waist-deep in the water, sometimes up to his neck, working with a snorkel. Knowing how difficult they are to harvest makes it a privilege as well as a pleasure to eat these delicate shellfish. They can be found in regional markets, washed and cleaned of sand, and on the menus of many restaurants. They're often served as a nibble with aperitifs, or as a starter, with an olive-oil mayonnaise thinned with a little of the cooking water. Unforgettable.

Saucisson d'Arles

The famous saucisson d'Arles, a traditional dried sausage, is made by many *bouchers/charcutiers* in the region, but one of them, quicker off the mark than the others, registered the name, meaning that the Maison Genin is the only one officially authorized to call his the "*véritable saucisson d'Arles*". Half beef and half pork, Genin's saucisson is made with red wine, spices and peppercorns. Dark red in color, it has a strong, unique flavor and many devotees. Another variation is the saucisson made by Diego Gimenez—everything he sells he makes himself, and his sausage, half Camargue beef, half pork, is more classic but no less delicious.

Fougasse d'Aigues-Mortes

In Provence, every village claims to have the only authentic fougasse recipe, whether it's the savory variety with bits of bacon or the sweet style flavored with orange-blossom water. But there's general agreement that two bakers in Aigues-Mortes are among the very best, and each is defended by fans ready to fight for their favorite. Both make sweet fougasse with a highly perfumed brioche dough, covered with sugar and melted butter. After a recent sampling of several from each of them in a comparative tasting, the verdict was unanimous: neither was better than the other, and both are completely addictive. One piece of advice, though, would be to choose the one that's most *bien cuit*, baked to a golden brown. ■

CAMARGUE NOTEBOOK

WHERE TO STAY

Le Mas de la Fouque

Luxury hotel with contemporary rooms and old-fashioned gypsy caravans, spa and swimming pool. *Route du Petit Rhône, Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, 04.90.97.81.02. www.masdelafouque.com*

Hôtel de l'Amphithéâtre A delightful, reasonably priced small hotel next to the 1st-century Roman arena. *5-7 rue Diderot, Arles, 04.90.96.10.30. www.hotelamphitheatre.fr*

Mas des Grandes Cabanes du Vaccarès *Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, 06.03.67.72.80. A working manade with 3 guest cottages. www.masdesgrandescabanes.com*

LOCAL SPECIALTIES

Maison Genin *11 rue des Porcelets, Arles, 04.90.96.01.12. www.maisonngenin.com*

Gimenez et Fils In his truck at weekly markets: Tue: Tarascon, Thu: Saint-Gilles, Sat: Arles, *04.66.74.57.21*

Maison Jean Martin A family enterprise producing olive products of all kinds, tapenade, eggplant purée, ratatouille and many other marvels. *9 rue Charloun Rieu, Maussane-les-Alpilles, 04.90.54.30.04. www.jeanmartin.fr*

Olmeda *19 ave de la Liberté, Aigues-Mortes, 04.66.53.66.77. www.patisserie-olmeda-30.com*

Poitavin *8 Grand'Rue Jean Jaurès, Aigues-Mortes, 04.66.53.73.15*

Maison Méditerranéenne des Vins An immense selection of regional wines and gourmet groceries at reasonable prices. *Domaine de l'Espiguette, Le Grau-du-Roi, 04.66.53.07.52. www.maisondesvins-lespiguette.com*

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The colorful facades of the Villa de Bellevue

Surprising Mouzaïa

by Richelle Harrison Plesse

Far removed from Saint Germain des Prés and the Champs-Élysées, the Quartier Mouzaïa in the far 19th arrondissement is a country-village enclave straight out of a storybook

Nestled on a gentle slope between the Buttes Chaumont park and the Square de la Butte du Chapeau Rouge, the Quartier Mouzaïa is a warren of *villas*—and in this case the word means narrow, cobblestoned and tree-lined alleyways or cul-de-sacs lined with candy-colored, individual *maisonnettes*.

The picturesque pocket of northeastern Paris remains largely undiscovered by tourists, and by many Parisians as well. The small streets tumble downhill in almost symmetric formation from the rue de Bellevue and stop just beyond the rue Miguel Hidalgo. The houses cling to each other, some with bold, cheerful facades, others more discreet, partially hidden behind neat hedges, climbing ivy or wild, untamed gardens. The early days of spring bring fragrant roses, wisteria, lilac and honeysuckle—scenes of a rural village, a rare reserve of calm.

From the Middle Ages until the 1860s, the area served as an enormous open-air gypsum quarry known as the *Carrières d'Amérique*; the gypsum was made into plaster of Paris, used in the construction of many city buildings. Supplies eventually dwindled, excavation ceased and authorities mulled over what to do with the land, described then as a “haunt for hobos and prowlers”. After attempts to establish a horse market failed, and in efforts to eradicate the wretched poverty of Paris’s outer villages, the city began plans for a subdivision of modest homes to house local workers.



One of the charming streets off rue de Mouzaïa

The first houses appeared between 1889 and 1892: a few dozen red brick cottages, almost identical, overseen by architect Paul-Casimir Fouquiau. The unstable nature of the ground dictated certain rules for their construction: no higher than two stories, built according to one of four standard plans that included small gardens in the front and courtyards in back. Over the years, other building materials were used, facades were plastered and painted in sorbet shades and wrought iron gates were given bright makeovers. Today's residents may have added personal touches by way of whimsical trimmings, but the cobblestones and street lamps remain.

Mosaics and trompe-l'oeil

"We must protect this neighborhood—there is nowhere else in Paris like it," says Colette Bourdache, Mouzaïa resident for more than 40 years and president of the Syndicat des Intérêts Généraux des Villas du Quartier d'Amérique, the community association. Despite its status as a picturesque site, granted by the Ministry of Culture in 1975, Mouzaïa rarely appears in guidebooks. "I'm often congratulated for living in such a beautiful neighborhood," says Bourdache. "It's

unique because it's the largest of its kind—there are 400 houses here," she says, "and we have more green space than other neighborhoods. Houses are rare in Paris, and even fewer have gardens."

Rumors that the area was dubbed *Amérique* because the gypsum plaster was used for the Statue of Liberty and the White House are simply "not true," says Bourdache. "There is evidence that the area was known as *Amérique* as early as the 17th century," she says. It's now usually called Mouzaïa—the name of one main street, commemorating a colonial battleground in Algeria. The first houses built were in the *villas* closest to the rue de Bellevue, which separates them from the grim social-housing towers of the Place des Fêtes ("a disaster!" says Bourdache).

The most colorful facades are found in the Villa de Bellevue and the Villa des Lilas, while the original 19th-century brick exteriors and mosaics are clearly visible in the Villa Emile Loubet. On the leafy rue de Mouzaïa, the canary yellow and wintergreen house at No. 42 has a quirky trompe l'oeil window. Farther west the Saint François d'Assise church has a big Byzantine-style mosaic surrounded by painted murals. A few doors down, Chez Kim is a local favorite for its

authentic and reasonably priced Vietnamese cuisine.

Cafés and hipster hangouts

Although there is a smattering of shops, Bourdache laments the lack of the vibrant community atmosphere created by local businesses. "It's a real shame," she says. "The butcher, the grocer, the tailor—they all disappeared after World War II." Nostalgic for the movie theaters that once animated the neighborhood, Bourdache says that after the arrival of television, they too disappeared. Today the Quartier Mouzaïa is largely residential, home to a mélange of old timers and *bobos*. As Bourdache remembers it, waves of *nouveaux riches* residents began arriving in the early 1990s, when property prices skyrocketed and local artisans moved out. "One, a lawyer, has an elevator, in his two-story house," she chuckles. "Another one claims to have the same landscape gardener as Carla Bruni-Sarkozy!"

But while artisans and shopkeepers have moved on, the charming houses remain. On rue de la Liberté, No. 6 stands out for its millstone exterior, mauve wrought iron trim and Art Nouveau doorway. Steps away, the houses of the Villa du Progrès and the Villa



The lookout rock island in Buttes Chaumont park



A maisonnette in the Villa Sadi Carnot

Renaissance are easily visible—the overgrown gardens of older *villas* are absent here. On the Place Rhin et Danube, the brasserie Le Danube is popular for its bargain *plat du jour* and delicious homemade pizzas. The Café Parisien is tucked into one of the oldest buildings, but its original brick-and-beam exterior remains in good shape; on summer days residents compete for a prime spot on the terrace.

Remnants of the gates on either end of Villa d'Hauterive, between the rues Général Brunet and Miguel Hidalgo, are reminders of the days, prior to 1959, when the *villas* were private—note the handsome cornflower-blue house at 13 rue Miguel Hidalgo. The street's northern offshoots—Villas Rimbaud, Paul Verlaine, Jules Laforgue and Claude Monet—claim the most modern houses, although No. 7 Villa Paul Verlaine is worth

a look for its dark, brooding, almost medieval style. One of the grandest brick houses, flanked by lush hedges, stands at the corner of Villa Marceau and the rue du Général Brunet, not far from La Table de Botzaris, which serves sophisticated (and pricey) French cuisine—a cozy retreat for a romantic tête-à-tête well off the beaten path.

At the end of the block sits the marvelous Buttes Chaumont park, where Parisians from farther afield come to stroll, jog, picnic or lounge in the beer garden at the hipster hangout Rosa Bonheur. Commissioned by Napoleon III and designed by civic engineer Jean-Charles Alphand in the 1860s, the park's steep slopes and uneven terrain are testament to its past life as a gypsum quarry. Wild and rugged, the park boasts cliffs, caves, streams and waterfalls, many of them man-made.



At the heart of its 61 acres a craggy island towers over a lake, and a panoramic lookout provides sweeping views all the way to the basilica of Sacré Coeur atop Montmartre. ■

MOUZAÏA NOTEBOOK

Chez Kim 3 rue de Mouzaïa,
01.44.84.00.14

Le Danube 3 pl Rhin et Danube,
01.42.38.66.10

Café Parisien 2 pl Rhin et Danube,
01.42.06.02.75

La Table de Botzaris 10 rue du
Général Brunet, 01.40.40.03.30

Rosa Bonheur Parc des Buttes
Chaumont, 2 allée de la Cascade,
01.42.00.00.45 (opening days vary
seasonally)



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Swiss Wines

by Ellen Wallace



Torches light the lovely 15th-century cobblestone courtyard, once a two- or three-hour carriage ride from Geneva. A hum of voices carries from an open cellar door where soft candlelight offers a glimpse of amphoras and barrels. Upstairs, in a renovated area of the old Grand'Cour château, Jean-Pierre Pellegrin describes what makes his latest trademark “P” wine—a single-grape Pinot Noir—so special. Listening attentively: sommeliers from world-class restaurants, friends from the nearby village of Peissy/Satigny and clients from the city—now just a short drive away.

“P” will soon be sold out. Given that Pellegrin makes it only when all the conditions for this old-vines wine are right—on average every other year—we treasure the

glasses in our hands at his annual open-house evening.

Pellegrin is one of 50 winemakers from Ticino to Neuchâtel who constitute the *Mémoire des Vins Suisses* (MVS), created in 2002—a remarkable storage bank of some of Switzerland’s best wines, selected for their aging potential. The by-invitation-only group meets at least once a year at a member’s winery for vertical tastings (several vintages of the same wine) and professional discussions, as part of a concerted effort to explore how to create more fine Swiss wine with greater longevity.

If you’re traveling anywhere near the Franco-Swiss border, consider this: France’s little neighbor, with its four official languages, its varied landscape and its scores of contrasting microclimates, is a jewel box of wonderful wines and small but superb wineries.

Wines, including fine wines, are one of the country’s best-kept secrets—a fact those who make them would like to change. The Swiss drink some 40 liters (10.5 gallons) per inhabitant a year (although consumption is slowly falling, as it is elsewhere in Europe). Fine examples of the famous Swiss excellence that makes its watches and chocolate world famous, Swiss wines are also excellent value for the money, compared to many French wines. But the French next door are barely aware they exist, partly because so few are exported. Of course, some might argue that the French have never made a point of knowing anything about anyone else’s wines.

Magnifique!

And yet. At a small, elegant dinner party in a Saint-Emilion château near Bordeaux, held by a wine producer during the *vin*



The Lavaux vineyards overlooking Lake Geneva



Jean-Pierre Pellegrin in his Domaine Grand'Cour vineyard

primeur spring sales, I found it isn't that simple. I mentioned that I had just arrived from an area in Switzerland that produces some beautiful Pinot Noir wines, as well as the classic white Chasselas aperitif wines I hoped they might already know. A small silence followed: where can a Frenchman take a conversation like that?

To my surprise, the husband of our winemaker hostess, a highly successful Bordeaux businessman, leaped into a passionate and knowledgeable presentation of Swiss wines. His family had gone skiing in the Alps every year since he was a child, he said, and they had all fallen in love with the crisp white wines of the Lake Geneva region. As he got older his father insisted they explore Swiss red wines, too. "They have all those remarkable grape varieties and *terroirs*! I think those whites—*magnifiques*!—are still my favorites."

A lively discussion ensued. One guest,

a well-traveled photographer with more than a hint of ego and national pride, refused point-blank to believe the Swiss could make good wine, scoffing at what he called a nation of bankers. One couple in the wine trade was more open-minded and curious. An American woman recalled seeing Swiss vines once when flying to Geneva en route to Lyon. Then our hostess argued that, as a winemaker of some renown in Bordeaux, she could judge a good wine when she met one, and Switzerland's wealth went far beyond banks to include its fine wines, as her own ski vacations had proven.

In fact, Switzerland has everything it takes for a wine industry to thrive: investors, family businesses with a long history of winemaking, forward-thinking researchers, a knowledgeable and passionate client base and, most critically, very good *terroirs*. Weather, as everywhere, is undependable, but as a rule it's kinder than in many corners of the world.

Six regions

Switzerland has just under 37 million acres of vines—0.2 percent of the world's wine-grape growing area. (By comparison, Burgundy alone has more than 71 million acres.) Pinot Noir is the most widely grown red grape in Switzerland and Chasselas the most popular white.

The six wine regions, from largest to smallest in terms of area planted are: Valais, Vaud, Geneva, the three lakes region including Neuchâtel, German-speaking Switzerland and Ticino. In brief:

Valais is known for its many indigenous grape varieties, including the native white Amigne in Vétroz and Petite Arvine in Fully. It's even better known for the classy Pinot Noir wines of Salgesch/Salquenen (the

village straddles the language divide), and its late-harvest sweet wines, which are finding their place among the best in the world. Vacationers also know Valais for *après-ski fendant*, a simple Chasselas wine, so named in the 19th-century for the grape's tendency to melt in the mouth.

Vaud is famous for its UNESCO World Heritage site, the terraced vineyards of Lavaux that rise dramatically from the shores of Lake Geneva and which provide some of the world's most beautiful Chasselas white wines. But it covers a much larger area, from the Vaud Alps to the nearly flat border with Geneva, showing the impact of *terroir* on Chasselas, from the very mineral (with minuscule pétillant bubbles at the start) to elegantly floral or even a slightly bitter finish for more sophisticated tastes. In 2012 it was identified as the birthplace of the Chasselas grape.

Geneva has had a remarkable rebirth as a wine region over the past 20 years, after major structural changes that saw numerous grape growers turn to making their own wines and diversifying their grape varieties. Like Beaujolais, it had too many mediocre Gamays but, unlike its neighbor, it was free under the law to quickly replant and develop new markets. A well-educated younger generation is now continuing the initiative and today the canton has many award-winning wines.

The three lakes region is a curious area with two languages (French and German), three lakes (Biel, Murten, Neuchâtel) and four cantons, or states, but winemakers remain true to traditional Pinot Noir and Chasselas. Given that Burgundy is very close, it's not surprising that there are many fine Pinot Noir wines.

German-speaking Switzerland: just over 100 years ago Zurich was the largest



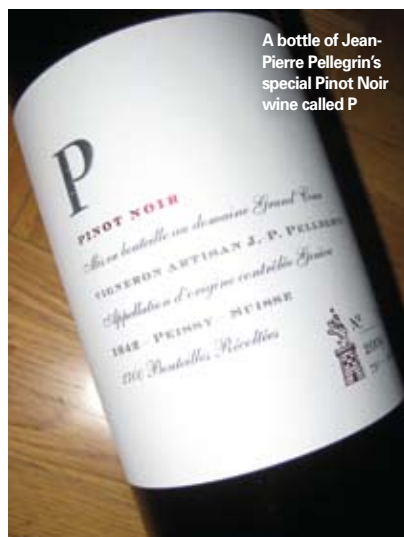
The vineyards near Jenins in the canton of Graubünden



Amphoras at the Domaine Grand'Cour



Costamagna from Claudio Tamborini in Ticino



A bottle of Jean-Pierre Pellegrin's special Pinot Noir wine called P



Raymond Paccot at Domaine La Colombe

wine-producing area in the country. Today production has shrunk significantly, thanks to urban and industrial sprawl, but Räuschling wines from around Zurich and canton Aargau near the German border regularly win top awards, as do Pinot Noirs from canton Graubünden.

Ticino: think Merlot, some of the finest, for this rainy area that shares a border and a language with Italy. An old indigenous grape, Bondola, possibly blended with Merlot, is used for simple “*nostrano*” wines found in smaller restaurants. Switzerland’s Winemaker of the Year 2012, Claudio Tamborini, is from Lamone, near Lugano.

Wind and weather

Climates vary hugely from one region to another and even within regions, with the mountains creating a surprising number of shifts in rainfall, sunshine, temperature and even daylight hours.

The southern Alps form a barrier for clouds that dump their rain over Ticino’s vineyards, so while Ticino has an annual rainfall of some 71 inches a year, Valais wines are protected by two Alpine chains that limit precipitation to only 20–24 inches.

Warm, dry *foehn* winds whistle down the Rhône River in Valais and keep grapes dry and fungus-free late in the year—the secret to its world-class sweet wines. Geneva and Vaud, on the contrary, suffer the damp cold winds off Lake Geneva, as well as benefits including reflected sun.

And thanks to the glaciers that scoured the land more than 10,000 years ago, leaving in their wake richly different residue, the soil is as varied as the microclimates.

Small is beautiful

Officially, Switzerland has 160 different grape varieties that occupy a minimum of 100 square meters (1,076 square feet) of land; of those, 50 are planted widely. (France, by comparison, has 250 officially approved varieties, but only about 40 of them account for 95% of all vineyards—and total Swiss acreage is only 2% of France’s.)

The incredible diversity of grape varieties is partly due to soil and microclimates, but also to the way Swiss wine is sold, mainly at home to local buyers. So each winery tries to differentiate its products, to fill a market niche in a country where foreign wines compete freely.

Buying locally means getting to know the winemakers, and the Swiss have a reputation for loving to try new things offered by their trusted favorite wineries. Winemakers say this explains the success of newly developed varieties that help growers improve products while cutting some costs. Gamaret, for example, is a popular cross between Gamay and Reichensteiner, developed in 1970, that resists rot and ripens early. It produces dark, purply red wine with aromas of blackberries and spices, and is widely used in blends.

Swiss winemakers also pioneered organic and biodynamic wines, with the vast majority using “integrated production”—close to organic—for years. Amphoras, instead of barrels, are very popular with organic producers. Either terra cotta or concrete, they are porous, allowing the wine to breathe well, thanks to micro-oxygenation.

What Switzerland doesn’t have is mass production and large producers. With a few exceptions, most of Switzerland’s 2000 professional winemakers work three to ten hectares, or roughly seven to 24 acres, producing 20–50,000 bottles a year—a mere drop in the barrel compared to French or Italian standards.

The unique 1895

The Swiss also don’t have a history of large-scale aging. Wineries are traditionally small family operations and land is expensive and hard to buy, so barrel rooms for storing wine have historically been a luxury. Medieval monks developed many of the vineyards; land-owning nobility, common in neighboring countries, made up only a small part of the social and political landscape over the centuries. Despite its current reputation for wealth, Switzerland was a confederated nation of poor farmers until the late 19th century.

The idea of stocking a cellar for the next generation was not part of Swiss tradition either, although this is changing. But there have always been a few good cellars and some very fine wines that age



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The wine-making family of Weingut Thomas Marugg in Fläsch, in the canton of Graubünden



well. The Clos, Domaines & Châteaux group of 15 historic wineries in canton Vaud have shown at a number of vertical tastings that well-aged Chasselas can be extraordinary and works well with fine cuisine. The region's star wine is most often drunk young, when it is notable for its refreshing mineral quality, but older bottles have a golden robe and rich aromas of toast, honey and beeswax, and the taste can resemble fine dry sherry.

During an old-vintage tasting in 2008, an 1895 Räuschling from the Reblaubé winery near Zurich was opened by friends who were startled by its remarkable freshness. Quick-thinking winemaker Hermann Schwarzenbach put the remains in a sterile jar and took it to the federal wine research institute. The Zurich experience is "unique" in the world of wine, says Juerg Gafner of the Agroscope research station, who led the project. The "1895" is the oldest dormant live yeast ever identified in a wine, and after three years of testing it has the wine world excited: the remarkable yeast's offspring will be marketed to winemakers around the world, starting later this year.

"Great wines by definition include the notion of longevity," Swiss journalist Michel Logoz recently wrote in the *Mémoire des Vins Suisses* newsletter, "... for a great wine must be in a position to triumph over the passage of time."

Look hard and you'll find Swiss wines that are one of a kind, special treasures. You'll also find wines to suit every meal, but start with the wine and ask the winemaker, wine seller or sommelier for food suggestions, not the other way around, and you'll rarely be disappointed. And without even trying, you'll find Swiss wines that are simply a pleasure to drink. ■

Journalist and wine writer Ellen Wallace publishes Swiss news site *GenevaLunch.com* and a blog, *Among the Vines*.

SWISS WINE NOTEBOOK

Recommended wines and wineries to visit:

NEAR GENEVA

Domaine Grand'Cour Jean-Pierre Pellegrin, top winemaker noted for precision, innovation and hard work, also restored this beautiful old château. Best choices: "P" and Grand'Cour Blanc, an aroma-rich, amphora-matured blend. *In Peissy/Satigny, visits by appt.* +41.22.753.1500.

Domaine Les Hutins Jean Hutin and his daughter Emilienne run this small family winery with a big reputation. Try Esprit de Genève, Gamay Vieilles Vignes and La Briva Vieilles Vignes. *In Dardagny, visits Fri 5–6:30 pm, Sat 9 am–noon, or by appt.* +41.22.754.1205. www.domaineleshutins.ch

VAUD

Domaine La Capitaine Reynald Parmelin is a delightful, creative three-time winner of Switzerland's Best Organic Wine award for his Johanniter. Also try Grand Cru Vaudois Chasselas, Collection Agénor, Gamaret-Merlot and Pinot Noir Vieilles Vignes. *In Begnins. Sat 9 am–noon or by appt.* +41.22.366.0846. www.lacapitaine.ch

Domaine La Colombe Maverick winemaker Raymond Paccot is considered one of the country's best. Try the Vigne En Bayel, Pinot Gris and La Colombe Rouge. *In the beautiful wine village Féchy. Visit Fri 4:30–7 pm, Sat 9:30 am–12:30 pm, or by appt.* +41.21.808.6648. www.lacolombe.ch

Domaine Louis Bovard Beautifully crafted wines, often from surprising grapes, by a winemaker who recently planted a vineyard parcel as a Chasselas conservatory. Try Dézaley-Médinette, Salix and Buxus. *In lakeside Cully, in the Lavaux area. Visit 8:30 am–noon, 2–5 pm and by appt.* +41.21.799.2125. www.domainebovard.com

THREE LAKES

Cru de l'Hôpital The winery belongs to the citizens of Morat, but young oenologist Christian Vessaz has put it on the map with wines like his Réserve des Bourgeois, Pinot Gris-Vully and Traminer-Vully. *In Môtier-Vully* +41.26.673.1910. www.cru-hopital.ch

VALAIS

Cave La Liaudisaz A tiny winery run by Marie-Thérèse Chappaz, who is becoming a legend with her limited-production wines. All the *vins de garde* are recommended,

especially her famous sweet late-harvest wines (available at the local Fol'Terre boutique/wine bar). *In Fully. Visits by appt.* +41.27.746.3537. www.chappaz.ch

Cave de la Madeleine A family winery where André Fontannaz, now joined by his daughter, consistently produces top wines, especially the beautiful white Amignes, from that indigenous grape. Also try the Cornalin reds. *In Vétroz. Visits by appt.* +41.27.346.4554. www.fontannaz.ch

Adrian & Diego Mathier-Nouveau Salquenén Another excellent family winery. Best bets: Cuvée Madame Rosmarie Mathier, the Pinot Noir collection and sweet Topas, which is matured deep inside the Rhône Glacier. Wine bar/tasting room. *Bahnhofstrasse 50, Salgesch/Salquenén Mon–Fri 8 am–noon, 1:30–5:30 pm, Sat see website.* +41.27.455.7575. www.mathier.com

ZURICH–GRAUBUNDEN

Weingut Zum Sternen Andreas Meier, a remarkable and passionate professional, runs this large winery, as well as a hotel and three restaurants. Try the Pinot Noir Kloster Sion Réserve, Sauvignon Blanc and Gewürztraminer. *Rebschulweg 2, Würenlingen. Mon–Fri, 8:30 am–noon, 1:30–5 pm, +41.56.297.1002.* www.weingut-sternen.ch

Weingut Thomas Marugg An award-winning winemaker currently making some of the finest Swiss Pinot Noirs, from a *blanc de noir* to oaked or sweet. *In Fläsch, Graubünden. By appt.* +41.81.302.1443. www.marugg-weine.ch

TICINO

I Vini di Guido Brivio Entrepreneur and oenologist Brivio runs a winery to admire on every level, with 600 barrels in his spectacular cellar chiseled out of the rock walls of Monte Generoso. Try the Sassi Grossi and Riflessi d'Epoca Merlots; the good-years-only Platinum; and the curious, lovely white Donnay, a blend of Chardonnay and—pressed as a white—Pinot Noir. *In Mendrisio. By appt.* +41.91.640.5555. www.brivio.ch

Tamborini 2012 Swiss Winemaker of the Year Claudio Tamborini heads this large family winery. Try the oaked Merlots SanZeno Costamagna Riserva, and popular classics Comano and Castello di Morcote. *Via Sertà 18, Lamone. By appt.* +41.91.935.7545. www.tamborini-vini.ch



Homemade walnut cake

Baking Sweet Treats

by Susan Herrmann Loomis

The French aren't avid bakers because they don't have to be. There are about 32,000 *boulangeries* to serve the needs of the French, about one per 1,800 inhabitants. As for *pâtisseries*, where frothy cakes and pastries line sparkling shelves, there are more than 7,000 to serve the national sweet tooth, and that doesn't count large enterprises, just neighborhood affairs. With that kind of floury wealth at the doorstep, why bake?

Why bake, indeed, yet most of the French cooks I know have their share of favorite baked desserts at their fingertips. None include the fluffy, multilayered delicacies

found in the *pâtisseries* and *boulangeries*; they are simpler, but have their own sort of sophistication.

High on the list of home-baked goods are those made with nuts that are ground as fine as flour. The most common are based on ground almonds and sometimes ground hazelnuts. Rich with butter, scented with either vanilla or almond flavoring and leavened with beaten egg whites, these cakes are often served just slightly warm. When they are baked in individual rectangular molds they are called *financiers*, named for the gold bars they are said to resemble; at other times they're baked as simple, round cakes.

Among my very favorites of the nut-based cakes is a moist, dense, richly flavored

version made almost entirely of ground walnuts. Extremely simple to make, it requires the freshest possible walnuts that are finely ground with a touch of sugar, a tablespoon of breadcrumbs and no flour at all. The resulting *gâteau aux noix* is delicate, tender and melts in your mouth.

Chocolate and choux

Another baked treat that I get to sample in many homes is the melting chocolate cake, currently No. 1 on the French dessert Hit Parade, at least according to a recent issue of a popular women's magazine. It has dozens of variations, but contains little or no flour, relying almost entirely on butter, chocolate and perhaps some ground almonds for its

substance. I say it's simple, and it is. But the chocolate must be excellent, and the baking timed to perfection for it to be a truly wonderful dessert.

Choux pastry is another typical home-baked treasure. This is the egg-and-butter-rich pastry which, when baked at a high temperature, puffs up to make what we call a cream puff. It has an illustrious history: It is said to have come from one of the chefs in the court of Catherine de Medici, though records of it are also found among the peasantry, who baked their *choux* in the ashes then used them in soup.

There are regional variations to *choux* pastry, too. The most famous among them is from Burgundy, the *gougère*. Flavored with Gruyère cheese, these crisp little *choux* are usually served with the traditional Burgundian aperitif, *kir* (white wine with a splash of *crème de cassis*). To be truly perfect, a *gougère* must be crisp on the outside, just slightly custardy on the inside and fully flavored with the cheese.

Without cheese, *choux* are most often used in sweet confections. Topping the list are *profiteroles*, for which the *choux* is slit open, then filled with vanilla ice cream (or sometimes pastry cream) and set in a pool of (or doused with) dark chocolate sauce. Antonin Carême, the 19th-century “chef of kings” made his name with creations using *pâte à choux*, most notably *profiteroles*. Of all the glorious, festive home desserts, it is perhaps the one that no one can ever resist.

Golden shells

Madeleines are another legendary home-baked sweet, neither a cake nor a cookie but both. Most know the *madeleine* because of its veneration by author Marcel Proust, but it had a life well before he ever tasted one. The origin of the *madeleine* is steeped in a sweet legend. In 1755, Stanislas, the king of Lorraine, suddenly found himself with a table full of guests, and an angry pastry chef who took his leave without preparing dessert. One of the king's servant girls, who was from the town of Commercy, stepped up to produce golden cakes in the shape of a sea shell, saving face for the king and delighting all diners. The king, an appreciative man, called the girl to him and asked her name. “*Madeleine*,” she replied. The king christened the cakes “*Madeleines*

de Commercy”. Since 1882, *madeleines* have been produced in Commercy and sold throughout the world.

Legends aside, those who truly love *madeleines* prefer to make them at home—they are exquisite still warm from the oven, and absolutely best eaten the day they are baked.

Macarons, the small, round almond-based pastries that took France by storm several years ago, are now creeping into the home kitchen, although they are notoriously tricky to make. (When I asked a pastry-chef friend if he had any tips to successfully making them his response was “Don’t”.) Home cooks can now buy molds that hold the batter in a round shape as it bakes, just in case the egg whites weren’t beaten quite enough, or the amount of sugar quite right. As for flavors and fillings, anything goes, so you can make inky-black ones and flavor them with licorice, or vivid purple ones and flavor them with violets, or color them caramel and flavor them with *foie gras*.

Finally, there is that most ubiquitous of baked French desserts, the fruit tart. Apple is the favored fruit, and any home cook worth her salt (remember, French home cooks are overwhelmingly female) can produce an apple tart made with her own pastry at the drop of a hat. Depending on the season, the tart might be flavored with red currant jelly, or a layer of chestnut cream. It might be a mix of pears and apples, with a slice or two of quince added. Open faced, glazed with sugar, a *tarte* is always a delight.

Baking *à la française* of this sort, done in the home kitchen, is a perfect antidote for the winter blues, should they come knocking at your door. While you will want to experiment with many different home-baked sweet treats, I highly recommend the following walnut cake. The recipe is from a friend who swears by its restorative, full-flavored substance. I couldn’t agree with her more. ■

Susan Herrmann Loomis teaches cooking classes in Normandy and Paris. www.onrueatin.com. Find her cookbooks in the France Today Bookstore: www.francetoday.com/store

For more food stories and recipes: www.francetoday.com

WALNUT CAKE GATEAU AUX NOIX

1-2/3 cups (280 g) walnuts
1 cup plus 2 tbsp (225 g) sugar
6 large eggs, separated
2 tsp vanilla extract
1 tbsp fresh breadcrumbs
Generous pinch of salt

1. Line a 9-1/2 inch (24 cm) spring-form pan with parchment paper, butter the parchment paper and the sides of the pan. Preheat oven to 350° F (180° C).
2. Process the walnuts and 2 tbsp sugar in a food processor until they are very finely ground. Be careful not to over-process as the nuts can become oily.
3. Reserve 2 tbsp of the remaining sugar for the egg whites.
4. In a large bowl or the bowl of an electric mixer, whisk together the egg yolks and remaining sugar (except the 2 tbsp reserved for the egg whites) until they are thick and pale yellow. Fold ground walnuts and breadcrumbs into egg yolk mixture.
5. In a large bowl or the bowl of an electric mixer, whisk egg whites with salt until they are very foamy and just beginning to create soft peaks. Whisk in the reserved 2 tbsp sugar and continue whisking until the mixture is glossy and forms soft peaks.
6. Fold egg whites into walnut and egg yolk mixture until thoroughly combined. Turn mixture into the prepared pan and bake until the cake is golden and puffed, and your finger leaves a slight indentation when you press the top gently, about 35 min.

7. Remove cake from oven and let cool 30 minutes on a wire rack. Remove cake from pan and let cool completely. Transfer to a platter and serve.

10 servings

FILM PICKS

Top Ski Resort Movies

Over the years ski movies have developed into their own genre, thanks to dazzling landscapes and high-altitude thrills. French ski resorts are among the best in Europe, and French directors have found them perfect settings for a wide range of cinematic stories, from zany comedy to dark mystery and drama

by Julien Bisson

MOST HILARIOUS

Les Bronzés Font du Ski Patrice Leconte, 1979

A year after the initial success of *Les Bronzés*, the troupe of actors and comedians from the Paris café-theater Le Splendid (which counted among its ranks budding stars Thierry Lhermitte, Gérard Jugnot, Josiane Balasko and Christian Clavier) was back on track for this new—and far better—comedy, a laugh fest unlike any other made in France. *Les Bronzés* (literally, the sun-tanned ones) recounted the antics of vacationers who meet at a Club Med on an African beach; this second adventure follows them up to the slopes of Val d'Isère for a ski trip that relentlessly goes wrong. It's packed with cult lines and memorable scenes, including an encounter with horny Italians in a remote cabin and Michel Blanc's repeated failure to "conclude" as he desperately pursues *les femmes*. It all builds up to a rescue by mountain peasants who ply the hopelessly hapless band of *bronzés* with a local eau-de-vie flavored with toad. It's a beloved classic in France, and its fans never tire of watching it again and again.

MOST SURPRISING

La Femme de Mon Pote (My Best Friend's Girl), Bertrand Blier, 1983
Thierry Lhermitte is back on the slopes as Pascal, a sexy winter-clothing shop owner in Courchevel. An ex-jock and very successful with women, he falls for the pretty Viviane (Isabelle Huppert) and introduces her to his best pal, the solitary and not-so-handsome Micky (the comedian Coluche). Micky too is charmed by the free-spirited beauty, causing him troubles with his conscience as a love triangle begins under the wooden roof of their lodge. Generally presented as a comedy, the movie nonetheless hits a bittersweet note, enhanced by its moving final scene. Directed by Bertrand Blier, the film is also well-served by catchy dialogue and fine acting,

including a surprising and wonderful Coluche, who snatched a César award a year later for his role in *Tchao Pantin*.

MOST SENTIMENTAL

Les Marmottes (The Groundhogs), Elie Chouraqui, 1993

Inspired by the films of Claude Lelouch, *Les Marmottes* brings together several generations of actors as members of a family reunited for a winter vacation. The senior member of the tribe, Léo (Daniel Gélin), hosts his Parisian guests for Christmas in his superb chalet at Chamonix. But tensions soon arise as old secrets are revealed, long-lasting relationships begin to fray and new loves emerge. Gérard Lanvin is perfect as the gloomy husband, and so are Jean-Hugues Anglade as a hysterical son, Jacqueline Bisset as the family femme fatale, and Virginie Ledoyen and Christopher Thompson—then newcomers—as teen sweethearts. The only negatives are somewhat weak direction and several unnecessary subplots.

MOST DISTURBING

La Classe de Neige (Class Trip), Claude Miller, 1998

With a screenplay adapted by author Emmanuel Carrère from his own much-praised novel, this stunning work by Claude Miller delves into the troubled mind of a boy poisoned by gloomy thoughts and scary dreams. Overprotected by his father, pale young Nicolas (Clément van den Bergh) is lonely and taciturn, seeming to connect only with his friend Hodkann (Lokman Nalcakan) and his teacher, Mademoiselle Grimm (Emmanuelle Bercot). When his class goes on a ski trip, his nightmares turn to morbid visions, and the frontier between reality and phantasm soon fades. But the worst is yet to come, as the class trip is clouded with sordid events and disturbing revelations. Awarded the Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival, this psychological

drama is more frightening than most horror films. And it remains a rare treat by great director Claude Miller, who died last year.

MOST CRUEL CONTRAST

L'Enfant d'en Haut (Sister), Ursula Meier, 2012

Twelve-year-old Simon (Kacey Mottet Klein) lives in a grim industrial Swiss valley with his flighty older sister Louise (Léa Seydoux), who can't hold onto a job. Struggling with poverty, the siblings survive thanks to Simon's prowess as a thief. Every day in winter, the young boy takes the cable car up from his drab valley to the sunny white-powder world of a wealthy ski resort and steals expensive equipment that he can later sell, and even sandwiches to take home for dinner. But while his activity begins to attract attention, Simon also grows incredibly jealous of the attention Louise pays to other men. Reminiscent of works by the Dardenne brothers, this second film by Franco-Swiss director Ursula Meier (*Home*) explores with subtlety the powerful relationship between its two main characters, remarkably well played by the two young actors. And an unexpected twist gives the film a new and fascinating dimension. After winning a Silver Bear at last year's Berlin film festival, it is Switzerland's Oscar candidate for this year's Best Foreign Language Film award.

TIED FOR SIXTH

Le Grand Elan (They Met on Skis), Christian-Jaque, 1940

Un Homme, un Vrai (A Man, a Real One), Arnaud and Jean-Marie Larrieu, 2003

Snowboarder Olias Barco, 2003

La Première Etoile (Meet the Elisabeth), Lucien Jean-Baptiste, 2009

Trailers of most of these films are on www.youtube.com

BOX OFFICE

The top 10 movie hits in France

- The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey** Peter Jackson
- De l'Autre Côté du Périph** (On the Other Side of the Freeway) David Charhon
- Jack Reacher** Christopher McQuarrie
- Life of Pi** Ang Lee
- Rise of the Guardians** Peter Ramsey
- Wreck-It Ralph** Rich Moore
- Ernest et Célestine** Benjamin Renner, Vincent Patar, Stéphane Aubier
- The Possession** Ole Bornedal
- L'Homme Qui Rit** (The Man Who Laughs) Jean-Pierre Améris
- Mes Héros** Eric Besnard

BEST SELLERS IN FRANCE

FICTION

Cinquante Nuances Plus

Sombres (Fifty Shades Darker) E.L. James (JC Lattès)

Cinquante Nuances de Grey (Fifty Shades of Grey) E.L. James (JC Lattès)

La Vérité sur l'Affaire Harry

Quebert Joël Dicker (De Fallois)

Dévoile-Moi (Bared to You) Sylvia Day (J'Ai Lu)

Heureux les Heureux Yasmina Reza (Flammarion)

CDs: Jazz & Blues

Autour de Minuit Various artists (Universal)

Wind Ibrahim Maalouf (Mi'ster Productions)

Alter Ego Yaron Herman (ACT Music)

Glad Rag Doll Diana Krall (Verve)

Einaudi Essentiel Ludovico

Einaudi (Music Development Company)

DVDs

Hugo Martin Scorsese

The Artist Michel Hazanavicius

Drive Nicolas Winding Refn

J. Edgar Clint Eastwood

The Help Tate Taylor

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When you order DVDs from France, you'll need a multiformat DVD player that can read Zone 2 DVDs.



RENCONTRE

Nolwenn Leroy

Ten years ago, the young Bretonne singer-songwriter won the French version of American Idol. Praised for her rich voice and seductive gaze, she has just released her first album in the US

by Julien Bisson

She bears an uncanny resemblance to French actress Isabelle Adjani, but excels in a different art. For ten years now, Nolwenn Leroy has been charming listeners with her rich, dark voice, her delicate delivery and sensitive songs, selling more than two million records in France. Dark-haired, blue-eyed and beautiful, she's now getting ready for a new challenge as she releases her first album in the United States, after a debut gig at the Drom in New York's East Village. "It's a wonderful opportunity for me," she said, just hours before hopping on the plane for her New York debut. "I know how tough it is to make it there, but I've been wanting to cross the ocean with my music for several years."

The 30-year-old *chanteuse* was born Nolwenn Le Magueresse in Saint-Renan, at the extreme western tip of Brittany. She moved often during early childhood, following the transfers of her father, a professional soccer player. After her parents divorced, she left her native region to grow up in the Auvergne, near Vichy. When she was

eleven, her music teacher noticed her talent and encouraged her to learn the violin (she also plays piano and harp). And the gifted teenager had still more strings to her bow: Two years later, she won a drawing contest called Les Ecoles du Désert (Schools of the Desert), and took part in a humanitarian mission in Mali, an experience that deeply influenced her. But the most important journey of her young life was still to come.

In July 1998, she was awarded a scholarship by the Rotary Club of Vichy to attend Hamilton High School, in Hamilton, Ohio, on the outskirts of Cincinnati. There Nolwenn—or Winnie, as she was called by her American friends—became fluent in English and took lessons at the Performing Arts School in Cincinnati. “I was spending every afternoon and every weekend rehearsing for the high school orchestra,” she recalls. “The experience changed many things in my life. I was immersed in American culture and language, in a small and traditional town. That year helped me forge my character, and it gave me a new confidence in myself and in my music. For the first time, I felt my dream was possible, if I had the strength to work hard enough. If there’s one thing I learned from American culture, it’s that everything is possible.”

When she returned to France, she enrolled in the music conservatory in Clermont-Ferrand, honing the vocal skills she had begun to master in Ohio. In the meantime, she began studying American law, aiming for a job in an NGO or diplomacy in case she failed at a singing career. Then fate intervened. In 2002, like a thousand or so of her peers, she auditioned to take part in the second season of the television reality show *Star Academy 2*, a French version of *American Idol*. Impressed by Armande Altaï, one of the show’s judges, Leroy had taken lessons at Altaï’s singing school before joining the young coterie of wannabe stars. After four months of tough competition—which included remarkable duos sung with Lionel Richie, Vanessa Carlton, Patrick Bruel, and Lara Fabian—she was declared the winner on the live show, with an audience of millions of viewers.

A year later she issued her first album, *Nolwenn Leroy* (using her mother’s maiden name), which sold more than 600,000 copies. “It was a peculiar debut for a young singer,” she says now. “I was only 20 at the time. Since then I’ve gotten stronger, and probably less naive. I had fulfilled a dream,

English, Gaelic and Breton. “A few journalists in France thought it was a niche album, meant only for a few listeners. I was glad to prove them wrong, and to show that pop music could blend with traditional Celtic tunes to reach a very large audience!”

Indeed, the album, for which she had written several original songs, quickly topped the charts, and has now sold almost a million copies. It even launched a large debate in France about regional culture and revival of folk music and folklore. “It’s an album full of nostalgia for my childhood,” she explains. “It was meant to express what Brittany meant to me. But I couldn’t expect that my most personal project would be approved by so many people, in France, and now—I hope—in the US.”

(Approval of an unusual kind has already come from the US, in fact. Between 2005 and 2007, an American research project in Texas studied the impact of music on the aged. Several Dutch and French singers were included in the study, along with Mozart and other classical music. One surprising result: Nolwenn Leroy’s music had the most impact in preventing falls in senior-care homes, prompting the researchers to call it “the Nolwenn effect”. For the scientists, her music “appears to have a different effect on brain-based modulation of gait and stance than other music tested to date”.)

The first American album, simply entitled *Nolwenn*, is an adaptation of the *Bretonne* album with a few new songs added. There are covers of some English-language classics, including *Moonlight Shadow* and *Scarborough Fair*, alongside the traditional Breton *Tri Martolod*, about three sailors who fall in love with the same girl, and the Irish Gaelic *Mna Na H-Eireann* (*Women of Ireland*). “I wanted to present Gaelic songs in English as well as in Breton, but there are none in French on the album. I needed the American audience, which is familiar with Irish and Scottish culture, to discover that there was also a Celtic territory in France, with its own identity.” They’ll also discover a rare and multifaceted talent whose beautiful, haunting voice should prove equally enchanting on both sides of the ocean. ■



but there were too many people telling me what to do. I needed to take back some control of my career. A few artists and musicians helped me along the way, and showed me how to build up something that looked more like me,” she says, citing especially French composer-singer-songwriter Laurent Voulzy.

Pop music, Celtic melodies

Despite critical appraisal, comparing her whimsical lyrics and the mystical atmosphere of her songs to Tori Amos and Kate Bush, her next two albums had more difficulty winning over the French public. That’s probably why she surprised so many people with the release of *Bretonne* in 2010—the album is a brilliant but unexpected homage to her Celtic roots, with songs in French,

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