Hubert Védrine Launches Kalorama Series

On January 6, former French foreign minister Hubert Védrine kicked off the “Kalorama Lectures” series at the Residence of France with a presentation of his latest book, "History Strikes Back: How States, Nations, and Conflicts are Shaping the 21st Century." Addressing members of the press, US government officials, members of the think-tank community, and other distinguished guests, Mr. Védrine explored European-United States relations.

The former foreign minister examined Westerners' assumptions and policies that have shaped their international politics for more than 20 years, referencing both academics such as Francis Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington, and statesmen such as Donald Rumsfeld and Henry Kissinger. He advocated a return to diplomacy, as well as an enduring partnership between the United States and Europe. Mr. Védrine submitted that the two powers should employ a non-cynical “smart Realpolitik” strategy to guide their relations with emerging powers, manage globalization, and handle environmental challenges, in which the West accepts that it lives in a diverse world. "In dealing with the new multi-polar world," Védrine writes in his latest book, “Americans have been too bellicose and Europeans too naïve.”

Discussing transatlantic relations in the context of President Obama’s presidency, Mr. Védrine stated that "Europeans [...] should above all aim to be partners with the new American President," and added that the Obama administration would most likely be more open to multilateralism. Joining former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, minister Védrine held a discussion earlier that day at the Brookings Institution, the publisher of his latest book.

French Counterterrorism Expert Addresses Washington Crowd

French Judge Jean-Louis Bruguière, head of the Counterterrorism Unit of the Paris District Court, explored the theme of “The U.S. and Europe Confronting Terrorism” during a Kalorama Lecture at the Residence of France on January 28, which was attended by US Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano, members of the press and think tank communities, and other distinguished guests. Characterized by French Ambassador Pierre Vimont as “an architect in cooperation between France and America,” Mr. Bruguière asserted that terrorism is a common challenge for Europe and America. Both countries are "chained by the evolution of the threat," stated Judge Bruguière in underscoring the importance of cooperation between the two nations, adding that "The transatlantic partnership is the backbone."

Drawing upon his field of expertise, the French judge stressed that though countries have independently faced terrorism, the solution must come from a global strategy. He referenced his investigations of hundreds of suspected terrorists, and how coordination between intelligence and law enforcement authorities foiled the plots to attack the World Cup in 1998 and the Strasbourg Cathedral in 2000. Mr. Bruguière also emphasized that the necessity for cooperation among nations is compounded by the radicalization and decentralization of terrorist cells, the difficulty in gathering intelligence autonomously, and the consequent complexity for law enforcement. Comparing the terrorist threat to a jig saw puzzle, Mr. Bruguière stated that "Each state has pieces but we must put all the pieces together."
President Sarkozy Calls for Greater Diversity in France

Nicolas Sarkozy called for greater diversity in France during a speech on December 17, 2008.

On November 10, 2008, the Council of the European Union approved the launch of the military operation code named "Atalanta," in support of UN Resolutions 1814, 1816, 1838, 1846 and 1851 to combat piracy in Somalia.

Atalanta entails the deployment of a naval force for a period of 12 months in a zone covering some 2 million square kilometres, extending from the southern part of the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, along the Somali coasts.

Altogether, 10 EU countries are participating, including 5 nations that bring a continuous operational contribution — Germany, Spain, France, Greece and the U.K. This naval force, EUNAVFOR, includes 4 to 6 warships, 3 to 5 aircraft (helicopters and maritime patrol aircraft), as well as some 1,200 military personnel. France contributes a destroyer on a permanent basis, as well as a Maritime Patrol Aircraft, "Atlantique 2." It also offers logistical support to the operation from its pre-positioned base in Djibouti. The Operational headquarters situated in Northwood, U.K., is headed by a British admiral. For the first four months, the force will be led by a Greek admiral deployed on a Greek warship.

Atalanta has three objectives: the close protection of the UN World Food Programme ships delivering much needed food items to Somalia; the close protection of vulnerable vessels transiting off the Somali coasts; the surveillance of Somali waters and coasts to detect any threat to maritime traffic, and to deter, prevent and repress acts of piracy.

Since the start of Atalanta on Dec 8, many acts of piracy have been prevented. In early January, the French frigate Jean de Vienne foiled two piracy attempts in the Gulf of Aden, while French Navy commandos captured 19 pirates as they were trying to intercept a Croatian and Panamanian cargo ship.

In mid-January, France carried out a "remaniement," a process that describes government officials changing office. While much of the government positions remained unchanged, some government officials assumed new roles. Below is a list of current ministers and government representatives that changed titles or positions. For more information on the composition of the French government, please visit: www.premier-ministre.gouv.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Minister</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nathalie KOSCIUSKO-MORIZET</td>
<td>Minister of State to the Prime Minister, with responsibility for Forward Planning, Assessment of Public Policies and Development of the Digital Economy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric BESSON</td>
<td>Minister of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Mutually-Supportive Devlpmnt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brice HORTEFEUX</td>
<td>Minister for Labor, Labor Relations, the Family, Solidarity and Urban Affairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruno LE MAIRE</td>
<td>Minister of State to the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, with responsibility for European Affairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick DEVEDJIAN</td>
<td>Minister responsible for economic stimulus plan.</td>
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**New York Hosts a Festival of French Writing**

The Cultural Service of the Embassy of France teamed up with New York University (NYU) to host a conference this February in New York to honor French writing and to encourage cross-cultural dialogue between authors. The Festival of New French Writing will highlight French authors who illustrate the emerging diversity of genre and style found in contemporary French writing. The vast range of genre spans from novels and short stories to comic books and manuscripts. Highlighted authors include: Frédéric Beigbeder, Emmanuel Carrère, and Marie Darrieussecq, among others.

The festival also aims to strengthen relationships between French and American authors by addressing similarities and differences between writing in France and the United States. Select well-known American authors will present, discuss, and read excerpts from their French counterparts. Like the French participants, the Americans represent a wide range of literary interests, including “New Yorker” staff writers Philip Gourevitch and Adam Gopnik, and professors Edmund White, Francine Prose, and E. L. Doctorow, among others.

**“Lil’Easy” Offers Big Transit Solution for Low-Traffic Areas**

The Lil’ Easy, an innovative new service launched last month in New Orleans’ Lower 9th Ward by Veolia Transportation, provides an efficient public transport through low-density neighborhoods — making the Big Easy “a little easier” to navigate. Lil’Easy is a special on-demand circulator that brings accessible, affordable transit to every resident of the Lower 9th Ward. It operates across a network of 24 new neighborhood stops conveniently located throughout the Ward, and three main bus stops. The flexible stops offer public access in the Lower 9th Ward within two-to-three blocks of residents’ homes.

The first service of its kind in North America, the new 14-seat minibus (Dodge Sprinters) are fuel-efficient and have a capacity that is well matched to the demands of the lightly populated route, according to Veolia. The dynamic-routing service provides a convenient reservation system for passengers who need a ride by calling an hour in advance of their scheduled pick-up time. In addition, recurrent or daily reservations offer regular commuters reliable public transportation.

**Many Voices, Many Cultures…**

Every year, the Embassy of France sends approximately 1,500 Americans to France to teach English. Henri de Saussure, the insightful French theoretical linguist and founder of modern linguistic studies, defined language as a manner of “being” and “acting.” What could better incarnate this concept than the September 8, 2008, conference on the relationship between language and culture — “I Speak Therefore I Am. Languages of Europe: Unity through Diversity” — which was held in Washington, D.C., under the auspices of the Alliance Française and the Embassy of France. The conference, led by 16 embassy representatives, featured roundtable discussions exploring the vitality of European languages worldwide. Among the topics discussed were: the inevitability of globalization, the sovereignty of each of the members of the European Union, government linguistic policies at many levels, and the inescapable predominance of the English language. Throughout it all, however, education was the subject that shaped the discussion of the various themes.

Mr. Pascal Saura, Deputy Delegate General of the Alliance Française USA, accompanied by Dr. Catherine Pétillon, Attaché for Educational Affairs to the Embassy of France, presented the effectiveness of a strong commitment to the ideal of “unity through diversity” embodied by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFIR). This framework, created by educational and linguistic specialists, aims to establish a solid foundation for the maintenance of European languages and, subsequently, to preserve European linguistic and cultural diversity. One of the principal ways in which the theoretical becomes practical is through the existence of various language assistantship programs, which prompt a universal exchange of native speakers between countries. The Embassy of France, in cooperation with the CIEP, annually sends approximately 1,500 Americans to France to teach English. The program represents an investment that is greater than the sum of its parts: not only does each participant bring something of intrinsic value from their home country, but their active presence in the host country also has far-reaching cultural effects, resulting inevitably in a better mutual understanding between peoples.

For more information on teaching assistantships, please visit: www.frenchculture.org and click on the education rubric.

**NEW ORLEANS HOSTS FIRST ANNUAL JOAN OF ARC PARADE**

On the day of the Epiphany, January 6, Joan of Arc admirers gathered in the French Quarter in New Orleans to take part in the first annual parade honoring the life and contributions of the French heroine, who died two years following her success at the Battle of Orléans during the Hundred Years’ War. Featuring Joan of Arc-inspired performance monologues as well as musicians and participants dressed in medieval garb, revelers of all ages paraded down Decatur Street to the St. Joan statue in the New Place de France where they commemorated the 597th anniversary of the French patriot’s birth with a toast.

Born in Domrémy, France, on January 6, 1412, Joan of Arc led the French army to crucial victories over the English during the Hundred Years’ War, claiming divine guidance. Captured by the English and burned at the stake at the age of 19 for heresy, the young heroine is considered by some as the unofficial Patron Saint of New Orleans. Twenty-four years after her death, the Holy See found her innocent and declared her a martyr. Canonized in 1920, Joan of Arc represents to many people a faithful servant of God, a female warrior, and the rescuer of France.

For some, the parade has perhaps taken on a second meaning, a symbolic call to Joan to help “save New Orleans.” One participant commented, “Since she saved the old, why not the new?,” making reference to the city’s namesake. In future years, the city looks forward to expanding the event into a Joan of Arc festival, featuring films, theater, musical performances, and Renaissance Fair style events reflecting the times in which Joan lived.
Ten years ago the European Central Bank (ECB) introduced a common currency called the euro throughout participating European Union (E.U.) member states, effectively binding together a multilingual continent of distinct cultures, economies and governments with a common tender. The euro has become the national currency of 16 countries and is used daily by 500 million people — giving it the highest combined value of cash on the world market. Along with facilitating trade in the E.U., the euro is also a symbolic and tangible daily reminder of a political and economic cohesion forged over 50 years ago with the Treaty of Rome (see NFF 07.04).

Introducing the Euro to Europe

The Maastricht Treaty of 1992 established the Economic and Monetary Union of the European Union (see NFF 03.08). Seven years later, on January 1, 1999, the euro was introduced in 11 member states — creating the area known as the euro zone — that met several criteria: little debt, low inflation and stabilized interest rates. France was one of the original participants along with Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain.

Initially an electronic banking currency, the euro was used for accounting purposes, computerized monetary exchanges, and denoting value on traveler’s checks. In 2002, hard banknotes and coins entered into circulation, with the ECB printing a total of 221 billion euros.

Because many people in the euro zone had never seen the money prior to its introduction, an education program about the new currency was launched in preparation for the changeover. Posters, t-shirts, and even playing cards were printed with the design. Retailers, restaurants, and post offices listed prices in both the national and euro values to facilitate conversion between the two currencies — a practice that continued even after the euro’s inception. Banks began issuing “euro starting kits”— plastic pouches with a selection of coins and bills to familiarize the public with the shapes, colors, and corresponding values of the tender.

The currency became legal tender on midnight January 1, 2002, to the backdrop of a celebration outside the ECB headquarters in Frankfurt, Germany. Because the euro was valid on the French island of La Réunion in the Indian Ocean three hours ahead of continental Europe, the first official purchase was a kilogram of litchis — a tangy tropical fruit.

Since then the euro has expanded to five more countries: Greece in 2001, Slovenia in 2007, Cyprus and Malta in 2008 and Slovakia which joined the euro zone last month.

Designing Europe's New Currency

The ECB named the E.U.’s new currency the euro — a moniker that represents the entire continent and is easily pronounced in all languages spoken within the euro zone. The ECB also oversaw the design of the euro’s symbol, banknotes and coins.

For the symbol, the ECB narrowed the choice to two options and then let a public polling select the winning design. According to the European Commission, “Inspiration for the euro symbol itself came from the Greek epsilon — a reference to the cradle of European civilization — and the first letter of the word Europe, crossed by two parallel lines to ‘certify’ the stability of the euro.”

The ECB also redesigned its logo to include “The First 10 Years” — reminding Europeans of their collective past and shared future.

For designing the banknotes, ECB mandated an appealing currency readily accepted and usable by all in the euro zone including, visually-impaired persons. Additional guidelines stipulated that the currency avoid national biases as well as incorporate security features.

Out of 44 submissions, the ECB selected the design by Austrian artist Robert Kalina for the seven denominations of the banknote. Based on the theme “ages and styles of Europe,” each note is dedicated to a different period in European architectural style but does not represent actual physical structures, to enforce the collective identity of the entire continent. The front of each banknote depicts windows and gateways, symbolizing the “European spirit of openness and cooperation.” The reverse side of each note depicts a bridge representing “cooperation and communication between Europe and the rest of the world.” The architectural depictions progress in time with increases in banknote value. The lowest five banknotes depict classical structures, whereas the highest denomination — 500 euros — showcases 20th-century works with glass and steel.

The banknotes boast a variety of features to aide the seven million visually-impaired persons in the euro zone: the sizes of the bills increase with their value; the denomination of each note is printed with raised ink, allowing value determination from touch alone; and the alternating of coloring of each note between warm and cool hues on adjacent denominations helps to avoid mix-ups and confusion.

In addition, the banknotes contain multiple security features to protect against counterfeiting. On the lower-right corner, notes of 50 euros and higher feature color ink that changes from purple to green at various angles. All banknotes are also printed on uniquely watermarked paper that depicts the circular constellation of the EU flag for extra protection. For added security and anti-counterfeiting measures, black magnetic thread runs through the middle of each note, and is visible only when held up to the light.

While the banknotes are harmonized across the euro zone, coins contain elements of both the European Union and individual national identities. There are eight coins of the euro that range in value from one cent to two euros.

Each coin has a common side depicting a map of Europe as well as a unique design on the opposite side representing an EU nation. For example, the one- and two-euro coins minted in France feature the outline of the country surrounded by “Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité” — Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood — the national motto.

Some coins have become collectors’ items and fetch prices well above their denomination, such as those from European microstates like Monaco, San Marino, and the Vatican City State.

In addition, every year all euro zone member-states are allowed to issue one commemorative piece. Last July, France launched a two-euro coin to celebrate the start of its presidency of the Council of the European Union (see NFF 08.07). The ECB also frequently mints commemorative two-euro coins. Past coins have celebrated the 2004 Athens Olympics, and the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome.
Green Piece Brings New Meaning to Environmental Watch

French environmentalists just found a new meaning for keeping watch on the environment. Catering to the population’s desire to monitor and decrease their ecological footprint, Citypulse is introducing “la montre verte,” or green watch. Along with measuring time, the internal mechanisms gauge both CO₂ and noise levels, and determine location through a GPS system. While AirParif is a nonprofit that surveys the air quality in Paris with ten sites throughout the French capital, Citypulse’s model gives citizens the ability to keep a “hand” on the environment themselves. Each digital watchdog transmits data on atmospheric conditions to a centralized database, which collects similar statistics from other participants. The results are then analyzed for differences in pollution levels across the city to improve public health and environmental interests.

The watch screen displays three clear measurements of air quality: good, fair, and poor. Such indicators help identify the areas most conducive to physical exercise and outdoor activities. The initial launch will produce at least 200 watches, thus increasing surveillance sites in Paris by twenty-fold.

Bicentennial of Louis Braille, Revolutionary Inventor

This past month, the bicentennial of Louis Braille’s birth gave visually impaired people and their advocates the world over cause to celebrate. The Frenchman who invented the revolutionary writing system which bears his name was born on January 4, 1809, in a small village impaired people and their advocates the world over cause to celebrate. The Frenchman who invented the revolutionary writing system which bears his name was born on January 4, 1809, in a small village.

Braille’s invention was a story of personal triumph. Braille himself became blind at age three after injuring himself playing in his father’s workshop. This tragedy set the resilient young Braille on the path to his creation. At the Royal Institution for Blind Children in London, Braille began to work on improving technologies, and by 1837 it was finalized.

“Today Braille” is a universal benchmark. 200 years after Braille’s birth, the visually impaired can now read, work, and even cope with his maps. Braille also enables people to take full advantage of new technologies — for instance, computer text can be deciphered using a Braille panel fitted to the side of a keyboard. Although Braille’s initial invention has undergone subsequent incarnations, his memory lives on as well. “People with a visual impairment have a particular connection to Braille,” says Marc de Botton, brother of a “big brother,” the one who gave them the alphabet.

French Embassy Hosts Space-Awareness/EU Presidency Soirée

The Embassy of France in Washington, D.C., hosted a closing ceremony on December 18, 2008, for the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union as the baton of Europe was passed from France to the Czech Republic. The ambassadors of the 27 nations of the Union and their principal American interlocutors in embassy services were invited to the reception, which focused on France’s successful transatlantic cooperation in the realm of space exploration.

The embassy’s space attaché, Emmanuel de Lipkowski, organized an out-of-the-world display on satellite data gathered as a result of the successful collaboration between France and the United States. The presentation made use of the “Science on a Sphere” system, developed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) — a spherical screen of two meters in diameter which reproduces the findings of satellites, such as climate change, on a model world with great realism. Mr. Lipkowski paid special thanks to principal partners of France’s National Space Agency in the United States, specifically NOAA and NASA, who have been developing close relations with the French space agency for several decades.

Similarly, French Ambassador Pierre Vimont reflected on the recent major accomplishments in the framework of transatlantic space cooperation — notably, the successes of ATV (Automated Transfer Vehicle) missions, the Columbus lab onboard the International Space Station, and the launching of the ocean-researching satellite, Jason-2. Petr Kolá, Ambassador of the Czech Republic to the United States, also paid homage to the dynamism of French leadership before revealing the logo of the Czech presidency of the European Union as the baton of Europe was passed from France to the Czech Republic. The partnership strengthens the outlook of both companies, and fosters their development on the world stage. While the passengers may see no difference during flights, they will be offered more of them. The partnership brings AirFrance-KLM to the top of the airline industry in terms of size, soaring to new heights.
_[Society]_

**Dual French-American Citizen Crowned Miss France**

Last December 19-year-old French-American Chloé Mortaud won the Miss France 2009 competition — becoming the first dual citizen to win the title. Mortaud represented her home department of Albigois Midi-Pyrénées in southwest France.

Born in Lisleux, France, the French-American beauty is an international business student at the University of Toulouse who hopes to enter the field of international trade. A woman of many talents, including dance, piano and theater, Chloé enjoys jazz and classical music. With a passion for adventure, the young Miss France is also an avid hang-glider and world traveler, as well as fluent in English, Spanish and Chinese.

The daughter of an African-American mother and Caucasian French father, Mortaud is also a testament to the cultural diversity of France, she emphasizes. "I want to go to people and explain to them that fear of the other is unfounded," she told the Associated Press the day after being crowned. "I want to incarnate [...] today's French diversity at international beauty pageants." Mortaud's mother was born in Mississippi and grew up in California, and her father’s French heritage goes "as far back as we could trace the family tree," the reigning Miss France stated. Mortaud will represent France at the Miss Universe 2009 and Miss World 2009 pageants.

Keeping in touch with her American roots, Mortaud attended a reception held in honor of President-elect Obama's inauguration at the Residence of France on January 18.

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**Monte-Carlo Historic Rally**

The Historic Monte-Carlo Rally will celebrate its 12th anniversary this month when the high-speed car race finishes in Monte-Carlo—the famed city in the Mediterranean principality of Monaco. Founded in 1997, the Historic Monte-Carlo rally is organized by the Automobile Club de Monaco and is one of the most strenuous car races in the world. Similar to the time-honored Rallye Automobile Monaco established in 1911 by Prince Albert I of Monaco, the Historic Monte-Carlo Rally follows analogous race routes but is reserved for vehicles built before 1980. Known for its dangerous stages in mountains and challenging terrains, participants in the Historic Monte-Carlo Rally are restricted to pre-determined maximum speeds during certain sections to ensure safety and account for differences in car makes.

Drivers start in various cities across continental Europe and race to a common finish line in Monaco. Driving teams select departure cities based on a first-come-first-served criterion judged by the successful completion of their registration. Past starting lines include Barcelona, Copenhagen, Reims, and Turin. It was held from January 29 to February 4.

**Navigo to Replace Carte Orange**

The Paris public transport system has recently switched from the Carte Orange to the new and improved Navigo card. The Parisian public transport operator, RATP, asserts that Navigo’s RFID magnetic microchip lends itself to more efficient recharging, replacing, and updating than its paper predecessor, and aims to streamline travel throughout the city. For instance, patrons of the Navigo pass are able to change their subscriptions according to varying schedules, so that cards may be canceled and reopened at any time. Additionally, the Navigo’s yearly rates amount to about 10 euros less than the Carte Orange, and the pass is more eco-friendly—reducing the consumption of paper passes. The Carte Orange, named for its recognizable color scheme, revolutionized public transit when it was first introduced in 1975. Prior to its inception, five tickets might have been necessary to traverse Paris. The Carte Orange simplified commutes by giving passengers unlimited access to all of the region’s public transportation for a flat rate and during a specified time period. Navigo seeks to build upon Orange’s success. Even those new to the Paris public transit system can obtain the Navigo pass online at no extra cost if they live or work in Ile-de-France. While Navigo is intended for residents and commuters, “le passe Navigo découverte” is also available for those who live outside of the area and can be purchased at any metro ticket window for immediate use.

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**“Winter Respect” Raises Ever-Green Awareness for Outdoor Activities**

Operation “Winter Respect” educates the public about the basic safety and eco-responsibility in the mountains.

The French Office of Tourism launched an educational initiative, Operation “Winter Respect,” that teaches basic safety and eco-friendly guidelines for outdoor activity through a series of workshops and interactive programs. The operation aims to cultivate a better sense of understanding and maximize the enjoyment of winter sports in France’s mountainous regions while promoting safety and environmental responsibility.

“Winter Respect” offers a creative learning approach that includes shows, experiments and obstacle courses for all ages during the ski season in France. Theatrical performances teach children the responsibilities that come with trekking across the mountain environment, such as instruction on avalanche rescue protocol. At various resorts, participants can play games focusing on environment and mountain safety during the day. In the evening, the winners are awarded prizes — hot chocolate for children and mulled wine for adults.

This public awareness campaign also conducts a variety of conservation programs. “Eco-DIY” demonstrates innovative and creative ways of reusing refuse, thereby eliminating trash buildup on peaks and valleys. Children’s “eco-experiments” workshops teach children basic phenomena about the environment through simple water and earth field tests.
Age-Old Drink in a Fresh New Light

Barrels of Courvoisier age quietly in the house’s expansive cellar in Jarnac. Cognac’s transformation is whetting the palettes of a new generation.

Cognac is not solely a stiff digestif to settle stomachs. Traditionally served with water at room temperature or chilled, the king of brandy is experiencing a resurgence in popularity among premier mixologists who incorporate the time-honored spirit into fresh cocktails. New recipes have been concocted, such as a drink created by the Bureau National Interprofessionnel du Cognac combining Cognac with ginger, lime and lemonade, plus cucumber peel. The recent winter edition of France Magazine traces the history of this 400-year-old brandy.

Exclusively produced in the Charentes region of France, Cognac is created by distilling Ugni Blanc grapes and allowing the resulting mixture to age in oak barrels for various amounts of time—a period that ranges from a minimum of two years to nearly 200 years—prior to blending. This process allows for the development of the distinct flavor that is praised for its fruity and earthy tones.

While previously the stereotypical nightcap of elderly grandparents, the drink is becoming progressively more popular among younger generations thanks to the increasing availability of premier vintages. In the 1970s, Cognac production underwent major renovation. Vineyards were restricted to the best terrain and improvements in distillation as well as the aging processes allowed for optimal taste. Also some 400 distinct brands suiting every taste are increasingly available on world markets.

In addition, long-established manufactures such as Rémy Martin are attracting new patrons by revamping bottle designs. New presentations include a work by American artist David LaChapelle that honors jazz-era performer Josephine Baker.

For more information on Cognac, as well as a list of hot spots throughout the U.S. to enjoy it, please refer to France Magazine’s winter edition. To purchase a copy, please visit: www.francemagazine.org, or contact Rachel Beamer at 202-944-6069.

Incentives to Attract Foreign Filmmakers

American director Woody Allen kicked off the year by announcing plans to film a “charming comedy” taking place throughout France and particularly in Paris. While plot and actors are not finalized, Allen hopes to incorporate French talent and engage the expansive fan base in the country where he is described as “the most French American director” by French daily Le Figaro.

Allen’s decision to film in the City of Light complements a recently launched incentive to lure more foreign filmmakers. France’s time on the silver screen could double in coming years thanks to a new tax incentive designed to attract foreign film production companies. Some filmmakers can cut as much as $5 million out of their budget by claiming tax credit for 20 percent of production expenses incurred in France in exchange for including scenes that are universally recognizable as French.

Indeed, France is no stranger to the big screen—it has a long cinematic tradition and developed many of the early advances in movie pictures. Late 19th century French film pioneers such as brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière developed early filming and projection techniques. Their 46-second short film “Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory” (1895) was the first film ever publicly screened.

Today France sponsors numerous filmmaker development programs and has become a popular place to make movies. Last year alone Paris hosted 840 film shoots, which averages to nine films shot per day and nearly 3,500 total days of filming. In recent years, France has hosted numerous feature-length American films, such as 2006 summer blockbuster "The Da Vinci Code" showcasing the Louvre Museum in Paris and "Marie Antoinette" which uses the Versailles Palace as a backdrop.

Waived Admission Fees Draws Young Crowd

French President Nicolas Sarkozy unveiled a plan last month to grant French youths under the age of 25 and professors free admission to 50 national museums in France. Expected to take effect in April, the plan is part of an initiative to entice the public, especially young people, to visit the museums and national heritage sites.

A smaller-scale program headed by the Ministry of Culture in 2008 successfully increased the number of museum visitors by waiving the $9-to-$12 admission fee to view the permanent collections at 14 national museums in France. The experimental measure boosted the attendance of regular patrons as well as attracted foreign tourists who account for three-quarters of the museum visitors between the ages of 18 and 25.

In addition, President Sarkozy announced a 100-million euro budget increase for the expansion of culture programs, including the foundation of “Maison de l’Histoire de France,” Museum of French History. The president also proposed the creation of a Council for Artistic Creation, which will decide priorities for public arts funding. Co-chaired by the current minister of culture, Christine Albanel, as well as French filmmaker Martin Karmitiz, the Council will work “in close cooperation with artists, professionals and the public” to promote culture endeavors in France.

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A smaller-scale program headed by the Ministry of Culture in 2008 successfully increased the number of museum visitors by waiving the $9-to-$12 admission fee to view the permanent collections at 14 national museums in France. The experimental measure boosted the attendance of regular patrons as well as attracted foreign tourists who account for three-quarters of the museum visitors between the ages of 18 and 25.

In addition, President Sarkozy announced a 100-million euro budget increase for the expansion of culture programs, including the foundation of “Maison de l’Histoire de France,” Museum of French History. The president also proposed the creation of a Council for Artistic Creation, which will decide priorities for public arts funding. Co-chaired by the current minister of culture, Christine Albanel, as well as French filmmaker Martin Karmitiz, the Council will work “in close cooperation with artists, professionals and the public” to promote culture endeavors in France.

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LSU to Open "Rodin: A Magnificent Obsession" Exhibit

The French Consulate of Louisiana partnered with Louisiana State University (LSU) to showcase the life and works of French sculptor August Rodin in an exhibition titled, "Rodin: a Magnificent Obsession." The exposition displays the most comprehensive collection of Rodin’s work including, sculptures such as "The Gates of Hell," "The Kiss," and "The Thinker," as well as photographs and a short film that explore the creative and technological process behind his masterpieces.

Rodin is widely known for his work with bronze casting — a sculpting method where liquid bronze is poured into a plaster mold and solidifies. Using this technique, he was one of the first sculptors to express human emotion through physical manifestations of the body; depicting extreme pain or exuberance through hand gestures rather than facial expressions.

Rodin’s work includes lifelike human figures. He was meticulous with detail and accounted for the effects of light on bronze by coating his bronze figures with several layers of green patina. His technique produced such realistic sculptures that Rodin was occasionally accused of surmoulage, a technique where the plaster cast is directly molded on a live model.

"Rodin: a Magnificent Obsession" will be held at the Shaw Center for the Arts in the LSU Museum of Art. It is supported by the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation. For more information, please visit: www.lsu.edu.

French Films in the Spotlight at Atlanta Jewish Film Festival

The ninth annual Atlanta Jewish Film Festival (AJFF) screened several French films surrounding Jewish identity at various cinemas throughout Georgia’s state capital last month. Last year alone, the festival entertained over 15,000 people, showcasing 40 international works. Over the course of twelve days during this year’s edition, the festival featured 50 international films exploring various aspects of Jewish life, culture, and history. The following seven French films screened at the festival develop topics including the resonance of WWII as well as Jewish identity in France, titled: "Hello Goodbye," "Les Citronniers," "Faut Que Ça Danse," "Plus Tard, Tu Comprendras," "Un Secret," and "Nous Étions l’Exodus."

The organizers of the festival, the American Jewish Committee, maintain that film is one of the best mediums to spread understanding by relating a personal story that engages and connects with the public. The goal of the festival is to share cross-cultural experiences to encourage greater acceptance between different religious groups, ethnicities, and nationalities.

In addition to film screenings, the festival also included appearances from actors, filmmakers, authors, and various other experts in the field. Audience members had the opportunity to vote for the winners of the AJFF Audience Best Narrative or Best Documentary Award.

For more information, please visit: www.ajff.org.