French Finance Minister in the Limelight

Finance ministers and officials from around the world congregated in Washington, D.C., for the IMF and World Bank Spring Meetings during the weekend of April 25. During the meetings, the finance ministers discussed the state of the global economy, about which French Finance Minister Christine Lagarde reflected that "we reached a level of stabilization in the world recession."

In addition to the Spring Meetings, representatives from the leading industrialized countries also met during the Group of Seven (G-7) summit. Minister Lagarde met US Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner and their counterparts from Britain, Canada, Germany, Italy, and Japan. They announced that the worst of the financial recession may be over, and while recovery is not completely secure, their aim is to assure a stable base for economic revival through sound financial institutions and systems worldwide.

The French minister also joined the Finance Ministers’ G-20 meeting, where top finance officials recalled the concrete objectives set by the Group's London summit earlier last month (see NFF 09.03). The weekend’s main goal: to get banks worldwide lending again, about which Lagarde asserted, "Implementation is the priority."

Prior to her appointment as finance minister, Mrs. Lagarde lived in the U.S. serving as the chairman of the international law firm Baker & McKenzie. Confident with her level of fluency in English, she shared her insights with the American media. The French finance minister appeared on The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, where she expressed France’s view of the economic crisis in a cordial and light-hearted exchange with the American comedian. Mr. Stewart commented on the beauty of the French language, and noted that if the crisis were taking place in French, there would not be as much concern because the minister’s language is so “beautiful.”

Fueling the convivial interaction, Mrs. Lagarde gave Jon Stewart a beret in a comedic gesture — which he fully embraced, and proudly sported the iconic French symbol as the two posed for photos. Before leaving the nation’s capital, the French minister was also a guest speaker on The Charlie Rose Show and GPS with Fareed Zakaria.

Vanity Fair and Bloomberg Bring Top Politicians and Hollywood Glitz to the French Residence

Washington, D.C., was abuzz with “firsts” the second weekend of May as President Obama, accompanied by the First Lady, delivered his first address to the White House Correspondents Association at their annual dinner. Also for the first time, Vanity Fair and Bloomberg hosted their “joint” after-party at the French Ambassador’s residence, bringing together the worlds of glamour and politics with panache. From 11 p.m. to 3 a.m., Hollywood stars, prominent figures of the Administration, and journalists mingled and enjoyed the glittering atmosphere in the company of their French colleagues.

Rahm Emanuel, David Axelrod, Jon Favreau, Peter Orszag and many more White House top advisors or cabinet members such as Larry Summers and Eric Holder conversed with actors Demi Moore and Ashton Kutcher, Natalie Portman, Glenn Close, Jonathan Rhys Meyers, Owen Wilson, Rashida Jones, Elizabeth Banks, Eva Longoria, Amy Poehler, Jon Bon Jovi, Ed Westwick, Ludacris, Denis Leary, and media personas such as Katie Couric, David Gregory, David Brooks, David Carr, Steve Kroft, Lara Logan, John King and Chris Matthews.

The “soirée,” which was considered the most exclusive in town with only 200 guests, was an occasion for officials to talk about their activities, for celebrities to engage in politics, and for journalists to interact with famous personalities — enabling a "behind-the-camera" glimpse into their insights on myriad topics. In an elegant, yet relaxing setting, connecting seemed all the more conducive that the stars had somewhat laid down their guard: from Demi Moore discussing political activism with some Washingtonians, to Rhys Meyers and Owen Wilson, warmly greeting all the ladies in the place.

Haiti Donors' Conference Assembles International Dignitaries

Secretary Yade addresses audience members at the IDB.

French Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Human Rights Rama Yade visited Washington, D.C., on April 14 to attend the Haiti Donors’ Conference. The event took place at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and was co-sponsored by the Haitian government and the IDB. The global financial crisis has exacerbated the state of the economy in Haiti, stirring up unrest over food shortages and prices, and the of goal the conference was to align the international community’s solidarity for the country.

Secretary Yade encouraged worldwide support for "the Haitian government’s economic recovery plan, a two-year program aimed at generating 150,000 jobs." She announced that her country would increase its aid to Haiti to 30 million euros, more than double the amount of what it was two years ago. "This assistance will finance education and infrastructure projects," the French secretary stated. Recalling the historical and cultural links between the two countries, Mrs. Yade underscored the relationship that France and Haiti continue to enjoy at both a political level as well as "the geographic proximity with the French departments of French Guiana, Guadeloupe, and Martinique, and the language."

The French secretary also asserted that the promised aid should "allow [Haiti] to pave the road to a deserved economic development."

Among the participants also attending the Haiti Donor’s Conference were Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Haitian Prime Minister Michele Pierre-Louis, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and International Monetary Fund Managing Director Dominique Strauss-Kahn. Participants added that another goal of the conference is to promote investments in the infrastructure and manufacturing sectors of the Haitian economy.
Itle-de-France is Most Dynamic Metropolitan Area

Despite the current economic crisis, Ile-de-France has continued to be one of the most prosperous and dynamic regions in Europe, according to recent studies. The region had the largest number of jobs created last year out of 15 of the biggest European metropolitan areas, including, London, Dublin, and Barcelona. Ile-de-France has also tallied the second-largest number of foreign enterprises in Europe. A PricewaterhouseCoopers study found Paris had the fifth-largest gross metropolitan product in the world. An annual study by Ernst & Young notes that despite the difficult times, Ile-de-France is “in a dynamic [period] of growth.”

All the World’s Knowledge

The United Nations unveiled last month its World Digital Library at the Paris headquarters of its U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), making accessible digitalized copies of historic documents to the world over. The fruition of an idea started four years ago by Librarian of Congress James H. Billington, the intellectual center started with approximately 1,200 documents in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, and Russian, but has room to house thousands more. “There are many one-of-a-kind documents. [...] There is no limit,” remarked Billington. A cornucopia of the world’s knowledge, the online digital library includes such world treasures as the Japanese text believed to be the first novel as well as the works of ancient Arab scholars that made revolutionary advances in mathematics. The Web site features the original documents in their native languages, but also offers explanations and additional information in all seven languages. “All of this is dependable, authoritative comment,” Billington explained. For more information, please visit: www.wdl.org

Current Events

A Pointed Anniversary of the Louvre’s Pyramid

Designed by Chinese architect I.M. Pei, the glass pyramid in front of the Louvre museum commemorates the 20th anniversary of the museum’s 20 years ago. Designed by Chinese architect I.M. Pei, the Louvre Pyramid was commissioned by then-President François Mitterrand to help greet the enormous amount of visitors who come daily to view the extensive collection of antiquities as well as fine and decorative arts.

To celebrate the 20th anniversary, American artist Jenny Holzer projected poetic texts describing human connection on to the glass structure and the surrounding classical façades of the former royal palace. In addition, I.M. Pei revisited the museum with other contemporary architects to host a symposium describing the challenges of successfully incorporating classical and contemporary design.

Completed in April 1989, the interlaced steel structure sheathed in reflective glass opens into a spacious underground lobby before ascending into the museum’s multiple galleries — an entrance technique that has since been replicated elsewhere, including the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago.

Since its construction, the transparent glass structure has become a landmark of Paris as well as a topic of urban legends and pop fiction. For example, during the pyramid’s construction, some newspapers suggested a dark symbolism behind the structure, claiming that exactly 666 glass panels were used. While in truth the Louvre states that 673 panels cover the pyramid, this legend is believed to have helped fuel the plot of the best-selling novel and later blockbuster movie “The Da Vinci Code.”

Cannes Film Festival: Reviews and Regards on the Riviera

The Cannes Film Festival is one of the oldest and most prestigious international film festivals. For the 62nd time, the festival combined glamorous movie stars and groundbreaking filmmakers for a 12-day celebration of cinema on France’s Riviera from May 14 to 25.

Disney-Pixar’s production "UP" featured the work of some French artists and opened the festival; the first time an animated film presented in three-dimensions was screened at the opening gala. Other highlighted films during the festival included: "Taking Woodstock" by Ang Lee, "Inglourious Basterds" by Quentin Tarantino and "Antichrist" by Lars von Trier.

Prior to each Cannes Film Festival, the event’s board of directors appoints four juries from an international pool of actors, directors and producers tasked with awarding honors to feature and short films by established and emerging filmmakers.

French actress Isabelle Huppert was the president of this year’s official feature-length film competition — only the fourth time a woman held the honor. Other members of the jury included American actress Robin Wright Penn and American director James Gray. Out of 21 selected films, the jury awards le Palme d’Or, Golden Palm, which is widely considered to be one of the most prestigious honors in cinema.

Other events at Cannes include: "Out of Competition," category deliberately left undefined for films that are not judged but honored with a screening at Cannes; "Un Certain Regard," a selection of films that survey current world cinema; "International Critics’ Week," for shorts by emerging filmmakers; and "Director’s Fortnight," a presentation of films by little-known filmmakers and emerging national cinemas.
An American Celebration in Paris

Le Jardin d’acclimatation in Paris hosted a star-spangled spectacular of Americana from April 11 through May 10. Titled "Des Américains à Paris," the celebration provided a colorful cross-section of American culture, featuring various activities and symbols representative of the United States. Baseball workshops, football games, and skateboard demonstrations showcased American sports, while gospel, country, blues, jazz, and Native American pow-wows evoked some of the sounds and musical traditions of the U.S. Donut- and muffin-making workshops gave Americans abroad a taste of home. At the end of each festive week, une grande parade featuring cheerleaders and pep rallies took to the 49-acre park’s main walkway, which was lined with Fords, Cadillacs, and even a yellow New York taxi cab.

A special guest appearance at the month-long event was made by a replica of the Statue of Liberty, which had to be carefully hoisted by crane from its permanent foundation in the Luxembourg Gardens. The nearly 10-foot bronze structure was made by French sculptor Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi, who designed the Statue of Liberty that resides on Liberty Island in New York Harbor. The smaller version was carefully repackaged and returned to its customary location only after remaining in le Jardin d’acclimatation until the close of "Des Américains à Paris."

Al Pacino's Napoleon Complex

Having been long fascinated by taking on the persona of Napoleon, Al Pacino will now get his chance to portray the famous emperor, according to the Hollywood Reporter. Based on Staton Rabin’s “Betsy and the Emperor,” the silver screen adaptation of the children’s book Etoiles, having been long fascinated by taking on the persona of Napoleon, Al Pacino will now get Al Pacino's Napoleon Complex Their unlikely friendship spawns rumors, and while their romantic entanglement was never proven, the saga laborates on their rapport. Betsy’s relationship with Napoleon ardently rebellious teenager Betsy, who, unimpressed by his military feats, captivates him. Girl living with her family on the island of St. Helena, housing the notorious Napoleon, the Emperor” will begin filming late this fall.

Etoiles Get Mixed Into Houston's "Dance Salad"

French Etoiles Marie-Agnès Gillot and Kader Belarbi of le Ballet de l’Opéra National de Paris leaped across the Atlantic to participate in Houston’s annual Dance Salad Festival this April. Gillot performed Jiri Bubenecík’s "Rencontre" on April 9 and 10, and partnered with Belbari in l’Esprit du bleu,” a section from Carolyn Carlson’s "Signes,” on April 9 and 11. After a 2004 performance of "Signes" that Gillot was promoted to Etoile, or principal dancer. Combined, both Etoiles brought around 50 years of experience to the festival. The world-renowned leading dancers represented France in a weeklong celebration of dance that also included delegations from the United Kingdom, Denmark, Sweden, and Germany. Beyond performances, the Dance Salad Festival included a choreographers forum — a discussion featuring internationally acclaimed choreographers such as Mats Ek from Sweden — as well as master classes, from intermediate to advanced levels taught by expert festival participants.
The Caribbean was the storied home of yesteryear’s privateers, but it is the waters off of the coast of Somalia that have been disturbed by today’s pirates. With approximately 20,000 ships a year passing by the horn of Africa, the blue stretch from the Gulf of Aden to the Indian Ocean represents one of the busiest and most dangerous shipping routes in the world due to the political instability of Somalia and the potential for sea-faring pirates to hijack and demand up to $3-million ransom.

President Nicolas Sarkozy expressed France’s resolve to combat the sea-borne scourge: “France will not allow crime to pay,” he declared. From taking military action to rallying international determination and aiding the government and people of Somalia, France is aggressively combating both the piracy that plagues this region, and the underlying problems that have given rise to it.

Troubled Waters

France is taking direct military action against the Somali pirates. Early last month, French commandos intercepted a 33-foot “mothership” in the Indian Ocean, detaining 11 pirates. French frigate Nivose caught a “mothership” 500 nautical miles off the Kenyan coast after tracking them from a failed attack on a Liberian-registered vessel. “The frigate spotted the pirates on the evening of April 14 when its helicopter intervened to thwart an attack on the merchant ship Safmarine Asia. It followed their boats overnight and intervened at dawn,” stated a French Defense Ministry spokesman.

In addition to executing several solo anti-piracy missions, France joined nine other EU countries in launching the first European naval operation named “Atalanta,” on November 10, 2008. Atalanta entails the deployment of a naval force for a period of 12 months in a zone covering some 2 million square kilometers, extending from the southern part of the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. The mission has the following objectives: the close protection of the UN World Food Programme ships delivering much-needed food items to displaced populations in 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.

France is among the five nations bringing a continuous operations contribution (Germany, Spain, Greece, and the U.K. being the other four) to EUNAVFOR, the operation’s naval force, comprising four to six warships, three to five aircraft, and some 1,200 military personnel. Specifically, 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. Since the start of Atalanta on December 10, 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. Overall, France has arrested over 70 pirates, and no vessel directly protected by Atalanta has been attacked. As Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Bernard Kouchner affirms in a recent article published in Le Figaro, “our determination is still as strong as ever.”

French special forces captured 19 pirates and handed them over to Somali authorities on January 4.

The Diplomatic Push

This military measure comes after increased French efforts to rally the world against the Somali pirates through the medium of international institutions. Operation Atalanta was launched in support of UN Resolutions 1814, 1816, 1838, 1846, and 1851, which France played a leading role in crafting. UN Resolution 1838, for instance, was drafted by France and the United States, and approved unanimously by the 15-member UN Security Council on October 7, 2008. It “calls upon all states interested in the security of maritime activities to take part actively in the fight against piracy on the high seas ...” and urges states to “use the necessary means, in conformity with international law [... ] for the repression of acts of piracy.”

French Ambassador to the United Nations Jean-Maurice Ripert emphasized that the resolution sends “a clear signal to the pirates,” and “states very clearly that [nations seeking to suppress piracy] can use force.” More recently, France joined Spain in proposing on April 27 an international conference on the situation. President Barack Obama echoed French President Nicolas Sarkozy’s sentiments when he recently declared that America is “resolved to halt the rise of piracy.”

Reaching to the Root of the Instability

Minister Kouchner further notes that “to fight this evil [of piracy], we can’t just confine ourselves to naval action.” Rather, he insists, “helping Somalis to rebuild a State […] is the second prong of our action,” as the pandemic piracy is “first and foremost the symptom of the failure of the rule of law which has been sapping the country’s strength since 1991.” It was this focus on development that inspired Atalanta’s aforementioned goal of protecting World Food Programme (WFP) ships, as well as France’s earlier Operation Alcyon (December 2007-January 2008), which served the same purpose. France was the first country to escort and protect WFP ships. In the first four months of Atalanta, EU ships escorted more than 120,000 tons of food to Somali ports, enabling the WFP to feed around 1.6 million people a day. France has also sought political stability though encouraging dialogue between the different warring factions in Somalia, and Minister Kouchner asserts that “January’s election of a moderate Islamist president confirmed the pertinence of [this approach] […] for the first time since 1991, a national unity government leads Somalia, bringing promise of hope and stability.”

Teaming up with African Union peacekeepers, African Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), France will seek to support the rule of law in Somalia and its security capabilities by training Somali security forces through French forces based in Djibouti. However, Mr. Kouchner maintained, “While providing support for the consolidation of the State, we will never, ever compromise when it comes to respect for human rights — and the rights of women.”

The waters of Somalia continue to pose a threat to passing vessels. Some 260 sailors remain captive by various Somali organizations, and Somali pirates have vowed revenge. However, France’s approach to the situation has gained respect — even among the pirates themselves. John S. Burnett, the author of a recent study of modern piracy, attests that in Puntland, a province of Somalia, the pirates talk of “avoiding the French option.” Whether or not the Somali pirates see themselves as modern incarnations of Blackbeard or Henry Morgan, Burnett says that today’s Kalashnikov-toting buccaneers tread more carefully than they used to: “They know the French commandos will come after them.”
French Surgeons Perform Groundbreaking Procedure

A team of French surgeons performed the world’s first combined face and double hand transplant at the Henri-Mondor Hospital in Créteil last month. The procedure lasted nearly 30 hours and involved a team of around 40 people, led by doctors Lantieri and Meningaud (Henri-Mondor University Hospital) in the face transplant and Dumontier (Saint-Antoine Hospital, Paris) in the double hand transplant. The patient was a young man who had suffered from third-degree burns; a single donor enabled his operation to be carried out.

The surgeons used procedures that pushed back the boundaries of current practices. Though there have been six face transplants in the world, this was the first simultaneous hand and face transplant. The French surgeons also performed the first-ever eyelid graft, adding to the challenges already associated with transplants — such as achieving the essential biological compatibility between recipient and donor or the need to reconnect all nerves, tendons, arteries and veins. Dr. Lantieri spoke of the passion he felt for his work: “It was never my aim to achieve a technical feat […] The only thing that interests me is to improve the comfort of my patients.”

The operation built on the work of French doctors completed since 2005, when the first partial face transplant was performed on Isabelle Dinoire, who had been mauled by her dog. Three years after the operation, Dinoire commented on the sensitivity restored as a result of the transplant: “It’s like me,” she marveled, “like my skin.”

French computer animation has garnered critical acclaim as well: the two minute and 27 second “Oktapodi” was nominated for the Academy Award in the “Best Animated Short” category.

“Our animated creations are formidable export products,” affirmed Antoine de Clermont-Tonnerre, president of Unifrance, the organization responsible for promoting French cinema abroad. The style and stories of such products are varied. “Oktapodi” tells the charming and comical story of an octopus heroically rescuing its lover from a dogged restaurant cook, while “Arthur et les Minimoys” and the upcoming “Arthur et la vengeance de Mathazard” recount the adventures of a young boy delving into magical fantasy worlds. Most recently, “La Véritable histoire du chat botté,” released in France on April 1, updates the classic fairy tale of the fiesty cat whose mischievous ways help his impoverished master gain riches.

Le Figaro Magazine Plants for the Planet

Easter weekend, French weekly Le Figaro Magazine teamed up with the Yves Rocher Foundation for operation “Plantons pour la planète” (Let’s Plant for the Planet). The publication mobilized its readers in helping with the international endeavor of combating deforestation. Every year, approximately 39 million acres of trees disappear, writes the magazines daily counterpart, French newspaper Le Figaro. Much of the deforestation affects third world countries in Africa, but France too has recently been affected as disastrous storms earlier this year in les Landes devastated nearly 800,000 acres of the landscape. For each magazine sold in kiosks, Le Figaro Magazine planted a tree in Senegal and les Landes. In addition, 50 cents from the 4.50 euro magazine was donated to the Yves Rocher Foundation, and thanks to this operation, more than 200,000 trees were replanted.

Alongside donating a portion of revenue and planting trees, Le Figaro Magazine featured a special edition on operation “Plantons pour la planète.” Inside the 20-page spread was analysis of the situation worldwide, portraits of persons committed to the cause, as well as interviews with Nobel Peace Prize winners and prominent humanitarians. The magazine continued its ecological motivation in printing with green technology. The paper is devoid of any chlorine and came from planted, not primary, forests; the printing process used no toxic ink and recycled all scrap parts. Editing director of Le Figaro Magazine, Alexis Brezet, commented, “This is also a way to show that in a time of crisis we can continue to take collective and positive initiatives.”

Veolia Invests in Historic Hong Kong Tram

Veolia will help operate Hong Kong’s famous “ding ding.” Veolia Transportation announced on April 7 that it has taken stake in the iconic double-deck tram in Hong Kong, reaching a 50-50 partnership agreement with local company Wharf Ltd. The agreement brings Veolia to Hong Kong for the management and operation of the Asian city’s famous “ding ding,” named for the sound its bell creates as the tram makes its rounds. First established in 1904, the picturesque double-deck tram has remained a classic symbol in a modern metropolis. The historic tram system runs in conjunction with the subway systems, yet still serves over 230,000 passengers a day who pay approximately 26 cents for per ride, and is a popular attraction among tourists as well.

French Preparations for Mars

After a months-long selection process, four volunteer “astronauts” have been chosen by the European Space Agency (ESA) for Mars500 — a simulated mission to the fourth planet from the Sun — as a step in planning future explorations there. German engineer Oliver Knickel and French pilot Cyrille Fournier are the two crew members who were chosen to work alongside four Russian astronauts. The other two chosen by ESA are French engineers Cédric Malbliote and Arnaudnna Gaillard, who will serve as substitutes, ready to step in if necessary. Mars500 will equally divide the participants’ days into eight hours each of work, leisure, and sleep. The mission will endure 105 days of flight simulation, pioneering a study before another team participates in a longer virtual journey later this year. The second mission will be extended to 520 days — mimicking the 250 travel days to Mars, the 30 days on the red planet, and the 240-day return. The European astronauts traveled to Moscow in late March to partake in the mission that allowed ESA to study and prepare for future flights to Mars. Psychological and physiological effects such as stress, hormonal regulation, immunity, sleep, diet, and mood are among the areas examined. Knickel and Fournier reiterated their commitment to this momentous mission in a joint press release: “We need to master every last detail of every experiment.”
**Kosher Cuisine with a Parisian Twist**

With the largest Jewish population in any city outside of Israel or the United States, Paris has become one of the most kosher-friendly capitals in the world. Kosher travelers value the city’s resources including kosher hotels, supermarkets, and over 150 kosher-certified restaurants. Stroll down the crowded streets of le Marais, lined with kosher delis and falafel stands, or venture outside of the Jewish Quarter to find kosher restaurants popping up across the various arrondissements.

Paris has also expanded the image of kosher food, with restaurants offering kosher-certified dishes from around the world. Restaurant-goers can enjoy traditional French plates at "O You" located in the Quartier de Bercy or "Kavod" on rue Jean Mermoz.

French restaurants are expanding kosher-certified dishes from around the world.

**A Day for Nights: Middle Ages in the Modern Era**

Jugglers, jesters, jousters — and that’s just to name a few! The medieval festival in Sedan attracts more than 40,000 spectators each May for the annual celebration of knights and damselflies of the Middle Ages, bringing to life the sites and spirit of the era. Taking place to the backdrop of Sedan's medieval fortress in northern France, the festival recreates the antiquated atmosphere of the city with flag throwing, fire-eating and sword fighting. The event also hosts music and acting ensembles, as well as feasts of roasted mutton and other staples of bygone medieval cuisine.

Highlights of the festival include "le marché médiéval" where artisans display their creations ranging from traditional Middle Age garb to dried foods. Many of the craftsmen also demonstrate their trades. Onlookers can watch glassblowers form jars, iron smiths make awnings, and weavers create tapestries, rugs and robe.

The cavalry tournament offers a chance to witness the excitement of jousting and combat as riders attempt to knock each other off their horses. Catapult demonstrations illustrate artillery capabilities and archers showcase their crossbow techniques by hitting apples from long distances — a "Tell"ing display of weaponry and precision force.

All these activities take place around the historic Château de Sedan, which dates back to the early 1400s and is one of the largest fortifications in Europe. The castle has played an important role in both medieval and more contemporary history. During the Thirty Years’ War, the French conquered the former principality and annexed the region. In 1870, the fort was the headquarters of the Prussian army and witnessed the deciding battle of the Franco-Prussian War.

Today, the Château de Sedan contains the region’s tourism offices, a three-star hotel and a museum dedicated to the Franco-Prussian War with an extensive exhibition of Prussian helmets left behind by troops. For more information on the festival and chateau, please visit: www.medieval-sedan.com.

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**Blogs**

**A French Gardener Shares His Green Thumb**

For those who feel their urge to cultivate a green thumb blossoming with the spring season, expert advice can be found at "Jacky la main verte," a blog offered by leParisien.fr. Every week, Jacky Guyon — a journalist for LeParisien.fr — posts entries with some of his gardening tips and tricks, whether for making a home-grown salad or planting potatoes. Jacky often includes videos with his posts, in which he illustrates everything from properly handling a bulb to preparing a plot of soil with a hoe. Aspiring gardeners in Paris looking for an interactive learning experience with a seasoned jardinier can also check the blog for weekly listings of weekend botanical workshops offered by l’association des jardiniers de France across the city.

Jacky Guyon began writing about gardening three years ago, with a passion that he says bemused his colleagues at Le Parisien. However, he declares, "For me, it’s truly in the middle of the lettuce, tomatoes, and geraniums that life has meaning."

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A Party that Doesn't Stink

What better way to celebrate French culture than with a festival honoring one of France's greatest contributions to gourmet cuisine — fromage! The 20th annual Fête des fromages will be held on May 31 in the medieval town of Rocamadour, located in the South of France. Beginning in 1990, the festival was created to promote regional cheeses and supporting the local market. The tiny village now welcomes over 10,000 visitors for the event.

Sampling from approximately 40 manufacturers in 15 southern regions, the open-air market allows visitors to taste and buy local French cheeses such as Cantal, Reblochon and Bleu d'Auvergne, as well as European varieties including Gruyère and Swiss. Rocamadour also highlights its own regional cheese, Cabécou de Roc-amadou. The famous goat cheese is a traditional product from the medieval town of Quercy, and is mentioned in archives dating back to 1451. The popular cheese is now primarily referred to as Rocamadour, a name used to distinguish the cheese from the other varieties of Cabécou.

Lest you think la Fête des fromages is only a glorified cheese market, Rocamadour offers an array of music and entertainment to complement the mouth-watering cheeses. This year's celebration includes traditional regional music, a petting zoo, and a presentation of local art from an exhibit devoted entirely to the celebration of dairy animals.

An additional unique component of this year's festival will be the focus on free-range dairy products, referring to the unique farming practice where farmers allow livestock to roam in open pastures. A free-range farming conference invites over 40 farmers to participate as honored guests and a separate market devoted entirely to free-range cheeses will be available to visitors as they peruse the open air market.

Petit Walks Tall Above the Rest

Under the cover of darkness and in total secrecy on a windy summer night in 1974, French tightrope walker Philippe Petit and his team of accomplices daringly tied a cable between the roofs of the World Trade Center Towers — 1,350 feet above the busy streets of New York City. Petit walked across the line the following morning. The bold event was unannounced to the public, though he spent years preparing for the impressive endeavor. But because Petit had not pursued permission from the city, he was immediately arrested and soon released.

Over three decades after what some consider "the artistic crime of the century," the 59-year-old daredevil plans on organizing another outstanding line the following morning. The bold event was unannounced to the public, though he spent years preparing for the impressive endeavor. But because Petit had not pursued permission from the city, he was immediately arrested and soon released. Petit's unforgettable walk between New York's Twin Towers over thirty years ago, together with his other memorable acts around the world, was the subject of an Oscar-winning documentary, "Man on Wire," in 2008. Alongside tightrope walking, Petit spends his time as an artist and has his office in a cathedral on New York’s Upper West Side where he has performed over a dozen times. Because of his notable expertise with the highest of heights, his job at the cathedral often included changing the lighting fixtures high above, about which he joked, "Now you know how many wire walkers it takes to change a light bulb."

Avant-Gardens

The unconventional Le Festival international des jardins of the Chaumont-sur-Loire region puts a new spin on an otherwise traditional spring garden show. Described by the Loire Valley Center for Tourism as "strange, entertaining, futuristic and far-fetched," the gardens incorporate blue painted trees, mirrors, elaborately carved fountains, and unique plant formations to create something which resembles more of a work of art. Landscape designers, electronic engineers and architects join forces to capture one of the up-to-27 coveted finalist spots. This year 20 gardens were selected from nearly 300 proposals for the theme jardins de couleur — gardens of color.

Le Festival international des jardins was created in 1992 by the Conservatoire international des parcs et des jardins du paysage to monitor the renewal of design activity in gardens and landscaping. Now in its 17th year, the festival aims to incorporate how gardens change with the seasons. Viewers can admire the gardens in their different stages of growth, beginning in April with budding flowers and lasting until mid-fall when the vibrant hues of changing leaves will add color to the horticultural masterpieces.

Le Festival international des jardins will run from April 29 to October 18.
Brown University Honors Aimé Césaire

Brown University recently paid tribute to Aimé Césaire, the foremost black French intellectual-statesman-writer of the 20th and 21st centuries. A monthlong exhibit bookended by special events, "Commemorating Aimé Césaire" was held at the John Hay Library and showcased the Brown Library’s Césaire collections, memorabilia, and selected oeuvres et objets d’art of Césaire’s native Francophone Caribbean by Brown and affiliated faculty. A reception and Césaire poetry reading accompanied the opening of the exhibit on April 3, and a memorial symposium concluded it on April 17 — the first anniversary of the esteemed thinker’s death. Professor Abiola Irele of Harvard University, an eminent scholar on Césaire and the theory of "négritude" he inspired, delivered the symposium’s keynote speech on Césaire’s legacy.

Aimé Césaire was a legendary figure both in his native Martinique and the wider Francophone world. In Paris in the 1930s, he co-founded the négritude school of literature, which invited Africans to cultivate pride in their heritage. Later, he served for approximately half a century in the French parliament and as mayor of Fort-de-France, Martinique’s capital city. Césaire was the author of 16 books, plays and poetry collections, among the most famous being his poem "Notes From a Return to the Native Land." French President Nicolas Sarkozy attended Césaire’s funeral last year, and successfully led a campaign to rename Martinique’s airport in Césaire’s honor.

French Ladies Dazzle Atlanta

Art Space International in Atlanta, Georgia opened its doors last month to an exhibit that was entirely feminine and distinctly French. "The Ladies from France" showcased the work of five French women whose art differs in nearly all aspects other than national identity. Jacqueline Waechter works in unconventional media, including sculpture, engraving, and landscape architecture. Claudine Loquen experiments in texture to add depth to her paintings. DeBroeck combines originality, fantasy, and humor in a unique artistic method described as "Relief Art." Monique Bragard uses a line-engraving press technique adopted while working as an artist in residence in the US, and Anne Pourny adds color to the show with vibrant oil-on-canvas masterpieces.

Atlanta welcomed the French women, whose nationalities brought Art Space International back to its roots. Created by French artist Frederic Payet, Art Space combines the assets of a gallery, studio, and art school in what Payet has branded an "artistic community." This community offers both local and international artists classrooms to take and teach classes, around 30 studio spaces, and a gallery to show their works. Payet describes the space as, "a nurturing, synergistic environment, where art flourishes and artists engage and inspire each other."

"Ladies of France" ran from April 17 through May 14. For more information please visit: www.artspaceatl.com.