French President Visits the United States

This year kicked off with several high-level visits of French officials to the United States. President Nicolas Sarkozy made his second visit to the White House on January 10 to discuss economic and security questions with American President Barack Obama on the eve of the G8 and G20 Summits, which France will chair this year (turn to page 2 for more information).

The two heads of state exchanged views on subjects crucial to the G8 and G20 discussions: specifically, the international monetary system and security. In response to concerns about the global financial crisis, President Sarkozy spoke about reform to the international financial system, a topic to be examined closely by the G20, a forum for developed countries to discuss the world economy. The two also vowed to continue their partnership on security, particularly regarding Iran, Afghanistan, and the Ivory Coast. Mr. Sarkozy reaffirmed Franco-American solidarity in the face of terrorism, stating: “Both the U.S. and France are determined to stand firm as allies on this issue of terrorism. Both of us believe that any show of weakness would be culpable, and we have no choice but to go after these terrorists wherever they may be.”

The French President was accompanied by Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Michèle Alliot-Marie, Minister for Economy and Finance Christine Lagarde, and his spouse, Carla Bruni-Sarkozy, who met with First Lady Michelle Obama for a working lunch.


Nearly a year after French President Sarkozy pledged to U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates to enhance cooperation within aeronautics and space, misters Gates and Juppé signed a non-binding agreement to cooperate on reducing the risk of accidents and collisions in space. The Space Situational Awareness declaration testifies “to the level of trust in our bilateral relations,” Minister Juppé stated during his speech. “Our objective is … to promote together the adoption of international standards to ensure the long-term security and safety of space activities.” The French Defense minister also addressed the importance of NATO and European defense, issues relating to nuclear non-proliferation, and reiterated France’s commitment to ensuring peace and stability in Africa, asserting that the continent’s continued instability threatened world security. A video of the speech is available at: www.ambafrance-us.org.

For more information on both visits, please visit: www.ambafrance-us.org and www.elysee.fr.

Stolen Degas Painting Returned to France

A 40-year old mystery has finally been solved! Stolen in 1973 from a museum in Le Havre, France, an 1870s Impressionist pastel painting by Edgar Degas was returned to French authorities on January 21 during a ceremony held at the Residence of France on January 21.

The painting, Blanchisseuses souffrant des dents (Laundry Women with Toothache), resurfaced last October in a Sotheby’s New York catalog for a pending auction of Impressionist and modern art. Property of the Musée d’Orsay, its estimated value is between $350,000 and $450,000.

According to French Minister for Culture and Communication Frédéric Mitterrand and an associate of Normandy’s Musée d’Art Moderne André-Malraux recognized the painting from the Sotheby’s catalog and alerted authorities. INTERPOL notified U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in New York. Special agents then tracked the provenance of the piece and authenticated markings on the back of the painting, including inventory marks by the Louvre, which confirmed the painting offered for sale was the stolen work. The painting’s previous owner, Carle Dreyfus, was a curator of Objets d’Art at the Louvre and bequeathed the painting to the Paris museum upon his death in 1953. “The return of this piece of artwork is another excellent example of what can be accomplished when law enforcement authorities in the U.S. and abroad partner to identify and recover historic, stolen works of art,” stated INTERPOL Washington Director Timothy A. Williams. French and U.S. authorities have worked together to ensure the painting’s return. “On behalf of ICE, it is a great privilege to return this painting that rightfully belongs to the people of France, and reflects a part of your nation’s history and rich heritage,” said ICE Director John Morton. Acting French Ambassador François Rivesseau, remarked, “What we are celebrating today is a gesture of friendship by the United States towards the French Republic.”
France Assumes the Presidency of the G8 and G20

France assumed the helm of the G8 in November 2010 and of the G20 on January 1, 2011. In a press conference on January 24, President Nicolas Sarkozy outlined France's objectives for the presidency of the G8 Summit in Deauville this spring and of the G20 in Cannes next November. The President emphasized the urgency of the G8 and G20's work: "Our aim is to tackle the essential issues that have waited long enough, so that we can present concrete results to an increasingly impatient public... Our presidency's ambition is simple: we live in a new world, so we need new ideas. These are complex questions... Yet France wants a debate, because this debate can no longer wait."

Before the creation of the G20, the G8 agenda also included global finance issues, but the "new G8" is changing its focus in a view to foster an informal and direct conversation between leaders on new challenges shared by G8 countries (such as the Internet) and on geopolitical and security issues, in particular: infrastructure in Afghanistan, nuclear non-proliferation, and the economic and political partnership with Africa. Several leaders of African countries and organizations will be invited to participate in the Deauville Summit.

Since its creation, the G20 is used as the premier forum for economic and financial coordination. France's goals for the G20, the French president explained during the January press conference, include coordinating economic policies, strengthening financial regulation, launching a debate on the future of the international monetary system, discussing commodity price volatility, and improving global governance on behalf of development. "To view the speech in its entirety, please visit: www.ambafrance-us.org."

France recently launched a website detailing its ambitions for the G8 and G20. For more information on France's presidency of both organizations, please visit: www.g8-g20.com. Additionally, to learn more about France's objective of combating commodity price volatility, please see the Interview With the Expert below.

President Sarkozy outlined France's objectives for its presidency of the G8 and G20 during a speech on January 24.

En bref

France bestowed its most prestigious distinction, the Legion of Honor, upon Captain Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger in December at the Residence of France in Washington, D.C. Two years ago, the retired US Airways pilot successfully landed a disabled passenger flight on the Hudson River, west of Manhattan.

During the award ceremony, former French ambassador Pierre Vimont lauded Sullenberger for the heroism he exhibited during the emergency landing of an Airbus A320 commercial jet, stating, "You have achieved one of the rarest and most technically challenging feats in commercial aviation: landing on water without fatalities... saving the lives of 155 people."

Reflecting on the events that took place, Sullenberger remarked during the ceremony that "it was the most intense 208 seconds of my life... I accept this award on behalf of all those who were [aboard the flight]... Courage is the ability to have the discipline to do what is necessary in the face of fear... A lot of people did their jobs extremely well," including "the passengers as well as the crew."

Sullenberger was forced into an emergency landing on January 15, 2009. Shortly after takeoff, the Airbus plane struck a large flock of geese, causing both engines to fail. Within minutes, Sullenberger quickly assessed his options and executed the emergency water landing. Miraculously, only a few of the passengers sustained injuries, and all were brought to shore by emergency boat crews.

France does not have ready-made answers for reducing this excessive and harmful volatility but rather thoughts that she wishes to submit to the G20 members for debate that will help us reach concrete propositions during a meeting of agricultural ministers that will be organized during France’s presidency of the forum. We consider there to be four domains in which we could improve the current state of affairs and contribute to a larger stabilization of prices:

1. The sharing of any information that each State possesses concerning production, consumption, stocks, and forecasts, with an aim to increase market transparency and to prevent, if possible, further food crises.
2. Regulation of financial commodity markets in order to avoid market abuse and price manipulation.
3. Better protection against price increases in vulnerable countries by putting in place new financial insurance instruments.
4. Encouragement of agricultural growth in both northern and southern countries because agricultural needs are increasing.

What is "speculation" on food markets? How does it threaten food security?

We refer to speculation in a situation when a dealer buys or sells a financial product with an agricultural underlying without being the primary producer or user of a raw agricultural resource. These dealers are useful in assuring the market liquidity, but only up to a certain point. Too much speculation can threaten food security because derivatives and physical markets that deal with commodity markets are not self-contained; on the contrary, there are many interactions. An excess of price speculation in financial markets has a high chance of repercussions on physical markets and could make food so expensive that it is no longer affordable for poor people.

Recently, during bad crop times, some developed nations have imposed export bans. How does France propose to deal with such crises in the future?

France wishes to address these questions pragmatically and realistically. A step-by-step approach would be suitable. We think that a first stage, by the establishment of a code of good conduct, for example, would be to communicate to our G20 partners that commitment to export restrictions must not apply to the purchase of international food aid.
Pinball Museum Highlights French Influence on American Pastime

Pinball machines have long been an institution in American arcades. From the earliest machines with hand-operated components, to the complex computerized games of the modern era, pinball endures as an enjoyable diversion for the old and young alike. Despite the game’s popular appeal and unique place in Americana, even the most ardent pinball wizard might find the true origins of this pastime surprising. Pinball as we know it today evolved from a French game popularized in the 18th century.

The National Pinball Museum, located in the Georgetown district of Washington, D.C., currently features an exhibition on the origins of the modern game, tracing its evolution from the halls of French nobility to its arrival in arcades and other venues across the United States.

According to the museum exhibit, in 1777, members of the French noble class threw a party for King Louis XVI at a newly-built hunting lodge in the north of France called the Château de Bagatelle. At the party, the French Count of Artois introduced a table-top game in which players used a slender cue to shoot ivory balls up an inclined playing field littered with holes worth a predetermined amount of points. The new game, dubbed Bagatelle (after the lodge), closely resembled the pre-existing game of billiards, but was much more compact, even folding up for easy storage and transport. As the success of this new game grew, clever inventors began applying increasingly complex features to the playing surface, eventually giving birth to the modern arcade game with which most Americans are familiar.

In an interview with News from France, National Pinball Museum Curator David Silverman highlighted the French historical influence on pinball in the U.S.: “The American Revolution provided a unique opportunity for the game of Bagatelle to reach the United States aboard the ships of French troops arriving to assist the Colonies. Had the game not been popular amongst French nobility and high-ranking military, the United States almost certainly would not have been exposed to Bagatelle in the same way.”

For more information, please visit the website of the National Pinball Museum at www.nationalpinballmuseum.org.

French Dance Company Tours U.S.

Franco-Algerian dance company La Baraka is returning to the United States this spring to perform its latest work, Un monde en soi (A World in Itself). The piece explores the theme of the universe’s creation, interweaving the staccato string instrument accompaniment of the Debussy Quartet with the dancers’ creative movement.

Compagnie La Baraka first came to the U.S. in 2006 for the Fall for Dance Festival at City Center Theater in New York. Since its inception in 1997, the dance troupe has received international acclaim for continually innovative, energetic, and imaginative dance performances. Choreographer Abou Lagraa and co-founder Aurelia Picot have cultivated the ethnically diverse troupe of 10-12 dancers to present a dynamic combination of hip-hop, contemporary dance, ballet, and myriad other styles. While the troupe is based in Annecy, in the French Alps region close to where Lagraa was born and raised, the group has worked on projects all over Europe, Asia, and most recently in Tunisia.

Lagraa started to garner attention in the dance world from a young age, eventually choreographing for the Ballet of Lorraine in Nancy and the Angers National Choreography Center. However, his success in France has not eclipsed his Algerian heritage. During the troupe’s first U.S. tour, they performed Allegoria Stanza, a piece set to music with a North African flavor. Additionally, the name La Baraka, an Arabic loanword, means “wisdom” or “blessing from Allah.”

The company will perform in Houston, San Diego, and Seattle from February to March. For more information, please visit: www.aboulagraa.com.

French Radio Lights Up The City by the Bay

Beach-goers are not the only ones hitting the waves in California this year. Saw Sud Culture, a radio show on French Culture in the Bay Area, recently debuted, broadcasting on KUSF 90.3 FM every Saturday from 4:30 to 5:00 p.m. The show features interviews with French-speaking authors, diplomats, and artists, and reports on contemporary French art, literature, and music. Past guests include Pierre Vimont, former French ambassador to the U.S., and Moïse Touré, a stage director whose work has been shown from Grenoble to Tokyo. Other guests, such as Franck Bedrossian, a composer who teaches at Berkeley, and Michel Serres, a philosopher currently at Stanford University, reveal the deep relationship between French professors and California academic institutions. The program is hosted by the French American Cultural Society and the French Cultural Services. For more information, and to listen to past broadcasts, please visit: www.consulfrance-sanfrancisco.org.
Since antiquity, bread has sustained human civilization, serving as a staple in daily diets of people all over the world. Unleavened bread can be traced to the Neolithic period, as far back as 30,000 or 40,000 B.C.E. Beyond nutrition, bread has played a significant role in culture and politics throughout the course of history, particularly in France. A symbol of sustenance and prosperity, the high price and scarcity of bread in the 18th century were a contributing factor in the French Revolution. While bread today is no longer the principal means of nourishment for the French population, bread remains a link between the nation’s past and present and a product of international regard.

From Oven to Table

In the last thirty years, the commercial market for bread in France has undergone several changes, which scholars believe have increased the overall quality of the product. While technology has evolved, most bread available today in boulangeries (bakeries) remains rooted in the French baking traditions of centuries past, partially due to quality control legislation. A 1993 governmental decree created two commercial designations for artisanal bread: a bakery can only sell pain maison (“house bread”) if its entire bread-making process, from start to finish, occurs within its own bake-rooms, while the slightly less stringent “bread in the French tradition” requires certain techniques à l’ancienne, such as a longer fermentation period, and prohibits additives like ascorbic acid. These categorizations have led to widespread artisanal techniques—French supermarket chains like Carrefour and Auchan, as well as small boulangeries, produce their own “bread in the French tradition.”

In addition to government regulations, the private sector has undertaken several self-regulatory initiatives that have contributed to elevated bread quality. In the early 1980s, a large group of millers, concerned by a decrease of bread consumption attributed to compromised quality in many steps of the baking process, formed Unimie, now Banette, a consortium of mills dedicated to higher quality flour. Banette later partnered with small bakeries, providing them with high-quality flour in exchange for the “Banette” label and adherence to certain artisanal practices.

Today, French artisanal bread has become an international commodity. Baguettes are sold as a chic product in grocery stores and other venues worldwide. Foreign consumers are even willing to pay for the real thing, straight from Paris. Poilâne Bakery has capitalized on the international demand for French bread, shipping loaves daily from France to customers in New York, Los Angeles, Berlin, and Tokyo. In addition to importing bread from France, many countries have begun producing high-quality bread in the French style. The Coupe du Monde de la Boulangerie, an international baking competition held every three years in France, invites teams from 12 different countries to compete in four categories: Baguettes & Specialty Breads, Artistic Design, Viennoiserie (pastry), and Savory Selection. In 1999 and again in 2005, the American team demonstrated their mastery of artisanal baking by bringing home the gold!

Daily Bread

Daily trips to the local boulangerie for a fresh loaf of bread remain typical of the French lifestyle, and bread is consumed in a variety of ways. A tartine spread with butter and jam is a common French breakfast, and for a special treat, pain perdu, (literally “lost bread”), is what Americans know as “French toast.” When used for sandwiches, a baguette is sliced once lengthwise and filled with various ingredients. At dinner, bread is often used to absorb sauces on the plate. Unlike the appetizer rolls often found in American restaurants, the French treat bread as an integral part of the meal.

Each year, France celebrates the annual Fête du Pain (Bread Festival) during the week of May 16, the feast of Saint Honoré, the patron saint of bakers.

The significance of bread to the French is even evident in the language. Many bread-related phrases have taken on idiomatic, even proverbial, meanings. An elderly individual “has baked more than half his bread (1)” An honest and reliable person is “good as good bread (2)” Purchasing something “for a mouthful of bread (3)” suggests a serious discount, but “to have bread on your plate (4),” indicates having plenty to do. If a situation that begins badly turns out alright, you have “succeeded better in bread than in flour (5).”

1) Avoir plus de la moitié de son pain cuit, 2) Bon comme du bon pain, 3) Pour une bouchée de pain, 4) Avoir du pain sur la planche, 5) Réussir mieux en pain qu’en farine

A Recipe for Success

With minor variations, the bread-making process has remained the same for centuries in France.

1. The baker kneads together flour, water, and salt. In this initial combination, the gluten molecules in wheat begin to bond to each other.

2. Once kneaded, the dough must then be left to ferment, in a stage known as pointage, at which time carbon dioxide is produced and trapped by the network of gluten bonds, causing the dough to rise. Fermentation techniques have evolved over time—originally, bakers created a sourdough of flour and water, left to ferment in bacteria from the flour or the baking room. A part of the original batch would be added to new dough, left to stand for three hours, and then a part of the new dough would be added to another batch, in a process lasting several days. The use of old dough as a fermenting agent, while effective, was incredibly time-consuming and labor-intensive. As early as the 19th century, bakers began to incorporate yeast into the process, and by the 1930s, this became standard practice.

3. After the dough has fermented for the first time, the baker kneads it a second time to incorporate air and stop the fermentation process. The baker, often aided by a machine, then forms the dough into pâtons, shaped but unbaked loaves. These can take the form of baguettes, bâtards, or other less common shapes.

4. The pâtions must then ferment during a second resting period.

5. Just before baking, the artisan then marks each pâtón with several slashes, creating pathways for carbon dioxide to escape while baking. Without these cuts, the carbon dioxide would burst the bread open in the oven. Certain bakeries use machines for this step of the process as well, although recently there has been a move to give a final, human touch to the shaping process.

For many families in France, the purchase of fresh bread is a daily ritual.

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4 NEWS FROM FRANCE
Toulouse Aims to Alleviate Parking Woes

Drivers in the southern city of Toulouse will soon be introduced to a new technology designed to alleviate some of the struggle of their daily commute. It comes in the form of a network which helps drivers locate empty parking spots by contacting them on their cell phones. Originally developed to land scientific equipment on the planet Venus, the technology will now aid drivers in urban France.

The innovation is the brainchild of Toulouse deputy mayor Alexandre Marciel, who hopes that the new measures will help reduce driver frustration, limiting gridlock and pollution within the city. The objectives are supported by recent studies demonstrating that over 60 percent of urban pollution in France is directly attributable to idling cars, many searching in vain for available parking. “It can reduce the waste of time; It can reduce [gasoline use]… It’s very important I think for the planet,” said Marciel about the project.

The prototype now in testing, Lybertha, functions by way of sensors implanted in the pavement under parking spots. These receptors transmit information to a central server that provides clients real-time assessments of parking availability directly on their cell phones. The server can transmit a variety of information, including the status of any given parking space, how long a car has been in a particular space, and even how much time remains on the space’s parking meter. Preliminary testing is already underway, with plans to install an additional 70 sensors by the end of the month. Planners hope to cover the entire city with the Lybertha technology by the end of 2011, creating a fully integrated parking network.

Although other cities around the world are exploring similar technologies, Lybertha is the first of its kind to use a communications network free of satellite transmission. This type of network is extremely important in urban environments, where tall buildings and narrow streets can often block signals from traditional GPS technology. Lybertha’s network relies on technology first pioneered by France’s National Center for Space Research (CNES) to help stratospheric balloons carrying scientific instruments land on the planet Venus and communicate with each other without the use of heavy-duty transmission equipment.

The Future Is Nao

Standing at just 23 inches tall, it is capable of many of the same highly developed functions as humans: speech, hearing, and sight. And to make things easier, it is even compatible with your personal computer. Nao, the robot developed by the first French humanoid robotics company, Aldebaran Robotics, is a taste of the robotics industry of the future that has already stolen the spotlight on the world stage.

Launched five years ago by Aldebaran Robotics, Nao has captured numerous high-profile endorsements. In 2010, Nao served as ambassador of French advanced technology at the Shanghai World Expo, where a group of robots performed an eight-minute synchronized dance routine to Maurice Ravel’s “Boléro” at the French Pavilion. In addition, Nao has been officially chosen as the robotics platform of Robocup, the world’s largest international robotics competition, which will be held in Istanbul this year.

Aldebaran Robotics highlights the practical applications of Nao’s technology in two specific areas: research and education. Harvard and Stanford Universities have already bought their own robots, and researchers at Notre Dame University are using Nao to teach autistic children to read non-verbal communication cues. “Between the highly sophisticated and steeply priced robots and the more affordable toy robots that are not very capable, only Nao enables research to be carried out at a reasonable cost,” says Bruno Maisonnier, president of Aldebaran. In the classroom, Nao’s versatility and adaptability make it well-suited for use by computer science and engineering majors, as well as young children. By 2012, Nao will also be available for purchase by individuals.
New Cheese Receives Geographic Indication

The Fourme de Montbrison cheese from the Haute-Loire region of Central France was recently awarded the appellation d'origine protégée (AOP) – or Designation of Protected Origin – by the European Commission. A cylindrical cheese with a distinct orange rind and a pâte persillé (blue cheese, or literally, veined paste), Fourme de Montbrison is the 44th French cheese to receive the AOP. The unique fraîcheur was originally crafted by the Avernes people of Gaul (Ancient France) even before Caesar’s conquest of the territory for the Roman Empire. The European Commission awards the AOP to agricultural products as a means of protecting the heritage of the manufacturing process, maintaining a high quality level across all products carrying the AOP sticker, and incentivizing local producers to continue working in their region and creating a legacy of traditional producers.

French National Team Handles the Competition

The French Handball Team has won four consecutive world titles.

The French Handball Team won its fourth consecutive world title on January 31. France beat Denmark 37-35 in overtime of a thrilling final match at the 2011 World Handball Championship, held this year in Sweden. Handball, a sport which can be described as a combination of basketball and soccer, has long been popular in France—played by both young and old, in clubs and recreational settings alike. Matches usually take place on an indoor court with teams of seven, requiring players to pass the handball (roughly the size of a small soccer ball) and earn points by throwing the ball into the opposing team’s soccer-style goal, measuring six by nine feet. The sport is offensive-minded, played at a rapid pace, and requires strategic and skillful passing. Players are forbidden from touching the ball with any part of their body below the knee, and must avoid making excessive contact with opposing players or risk penalization. Games are usually high-scoring, with teams routinely recording over 20 goals per match.

Ready Your Forks for La Fête de la gastronomie française

La Fête de la gastronomie française, to be celebrated annually on September 23, the first day of autumn. The communiqué from the Ministry expresses the hope that the festival, like the Fête de la Musique, will “reunite French people around the values of exchange, shared conviviality, and of pleasure.”

The decision comes after UNESCO recognized French cuisine last November with the distinction of “world’s intangible heritage,” marking the first time a country’s culinary traditions have received the honor. The popularity of cooking shows such as Un diner presque parfait (An Almost Perfect Dinner) and numerous food blogs are proof of France’s ever-evolving culinary scene. The festival is a reminder that French cuisine is a living, vibrant phenomenon founded in a rich heritage. La Fête de la gastronomie française links new and old traditions by informing consumers about healthy options and showcasing regional specialties.

Frédéric Lefèbvre announced in January the creation of a steering committee charged with formulating recommendations for the festival. Viticulturists, restaurateurs, artisans, and culinary schools will all be invited to participate in the committee.

New Law Puts the Breaks on Motorcyclists

The French government passed a new law, effective January 1, requiring drivers of motorbikes and three-wheeled scooters to attend seven hours of training in addition to holding an automobile license for a minimum of two years prior. The new requirements reflect France’s commitment to decrease driving fatalities; although motorcyclists represent just two percent of drivers, they account for twenty-eight percent of roadside deaths.

Offered at driving schools and other authorized locations, the mandatory training will inculcate in drivers the practical and theoretical aspects of driving a motorbike and the safety risks associated with operating such vehicles, according to Paul Barré, head coordinator of the Prévention Routière Association.

The law targets class B license holders, the standard license required to operate a passenger vehicle, who wish to operate a smaller vehicle. Previously, any holder of a class B license could drive a motorbike or scooter after only three hours of training. Beginning this year, they must undergo two hours in the classroom, two hours on a closed driving course, and three hours of guided driving on the road.

Drivers of motorbikes and scooters for over five years prior to January 1 can gain exemption with proof from their insurance company. For all others, failure to comply with the legislation will result in a 135-euro fine.

Blogs

Zucchini and Chocolate: A Match Made in Heaven

Chocolate and zucchini may seem like an unusual combination, but this pairing lends its name to the food blog of Parisian food writer Clotilde Dusoulier, who says that zucchini and chocolate are a “metaphor for her cooking style,” a love of healthy, natural foods, and of course, chocolate and baked goods. Only eight years after the blog started, Clohilde has written articles for major French and English cooking publications and has published her own cookbook. In an interview with News From France, Clothilde expressed the joys of being a full-time food writer, “The wide variety of topics and activities and people I get to be in contact with each day is my favorite aspect of the job.”

The blog, available in both French and English, features traditional French recipes and dishes inspired by Japanese, American, and Middle Eastern traditions. In regards to her inspiration for her diverse dishes, Clothilde stated, “I am chiefly driven by my curiosity and my appetite. A large part of my cooking inspiration comes from the ingredients I find at markets and stores around me, and from successful dishes I taste when I eat out: the ideas get filed away somewhere in my brain, and pop back out when I’m in the kitchen, or planning menus.”

The blog’s series on food-related idioms in French demonstrates the influence of the country’s food culture on its language. Phrases include retomber comme un soufflé (collapse like a Soufflé), which describes when a movement or phenomenon loses steam, and long comme un jour sans pain (long as a day without bread), used to describe something very long, such as a wait or a list.

For more information, please visit: chocolateandzucchini.com.
A Hotel Fit for a King Opens in Versailles

Starting in January of next year, the Hôtel du Grand Controle, a mansion built in the 1680s on the grounds of the Palace of Versailles, will open to the public as a 23-room luxury hotel. The mansion once housed the treasurer to the king, as well as his family and servants, but fell into disrepair after its abandonment during the French Revolution.

Once it is reopened as the Hotel de l’Orangerie, “all the modern comforts will be available,” Palace of Versailles Deputy Administrator Mikael Hautchamp stated. The five-star hotel will feature a spa, an intimate restaurant, a bar, a game room, and access to international media networks. Despite modern amenities, the hotel will seek to preserve the integrity of its 17th-century grandeur in structure and decoration. The hotel is named after the greenhouse where Louis XIV cultivated 1,700 orange and palm trees that can be seen from the hotel.

Belgian hotel company Ivy International is investing $7 million for restoration, and will run the Hotel de l’Orangerie for the next 30 years while sharing part of the profits with the Palace of Versailles. The current restoration of the mansion is part of a nationwide initiative to renovate heritage sites.

A New Grocer for Chefs of All Levels

The highest quality ingredients used by professional chefs and bakers can be elusive to the general public. French-born food photographer Philippe-Louis Houzé is changing that. One year ago, Houzé started selling chef-quality products from a warehouse in lower Manhattan. His company, L’Épicerie, caters to impassioned home chefs in New York and across the country.

Houzé learned to cook from his grandparents in Montparnasse, France, and continued to work in the kitchens of the greatest chefs in France and in the U.S. as a photographer. His personal connections in the world of fine food sparked L’Épicerie.

The philosophy behind L’Épicerie is simple: “Only the best products and freshest ingredients will help create the best dishes. It is our goal to provide chefs and bakers at home with the best ingredients and products that are only available to chefs and restaurants. We do not carry products easily available in supermarkets unless the brand is not readily available,” explains the company website.

With fast turnover, a temperature-controlled warehouse, and without the constant light of typical grocery stores, L’Épicerie can ensure that its products stay fresh. The business also re-packages many of its imports, which are usually sold only in bulk, into more manageable sizes suitable for home cooks. Professional chefs in the States have started taking advantage of the smaller packaging to sample new ingredients.

For more information, please visit: www.lepicerie.com.

French Cultural Institutions Come Together

January 1 marked the creation of the Institut Français, a new government agency formed to promote French language and culture outside of l’Hexagone. Ambassador for External Cultural Action, Xavier Darcos, will head the new venture, which will consolidate all of France’s cultural networks under the supervision of one agency within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Nearly 150 cultural centers abroad, both government-owned and private, have agreed to adopt the I.F. logo.

The Institut will also work closely with the cultural departments of France’s embassies, as well as domestic institutions, including museums, theaters, and festivals. By facilitating cultural exchange through theater, visual arts, cinema, and literature, the Institut hopes to promulgate French values of free expression throughout the world, reaffirming the “idea that there is a universal culture, formed of works to admire, knowledge to share, and principles to respect,” said Bernard Kouchner, former Minister of Foreign and European Affairs.
100-Year-Old Water Lilies Bloom in the Midwest

For the first time in 30 years, three large paintings of water lilies by famed French Impressionist painter Claude Monet will be reunited on the other side of the pond. The Cleveland Museum of Art in Ohio is providing the central painting in the triptych, or three works meant to be displayed side by side, with the Nelson Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri, and the St. Louis Art Museum providing the other two. All three museums will host Monet’s paintings in a touring exhibit.

Monet began painting water lilies in 1890 when he moved to Giverny, France. There he created a large garden, which contained the famous water lily pond and Japanese bridge that are prevalent in his later works. He worked prolifically in this garden, producing several series of *Nymphéas* (Water Lilies).

Although he intended to donate the triptych to France after World War I, Monet worked on the triptych until his death, when they were sold separately and eventually bought by Midwestern museums in the 1950s. The paintings will travel to Kansas City from April 9 to August 7 and to St. Louis from October 2 to January 22, 2012. The Cleveland Museum of Art will host the exhibit in 2015 and 2016 as part of their centennial celebration.

For more details on the upcoming exhibit, please visit: www.nelson-atkins.org or www.slam.org.

Medieval Mourners Come to the States

For the first time, seven American cities will receive The Mourners, some of the most famous French sculptures from the late Middle Ages. The 39 figures adorn the tomb of John the Fearless, the second Duke of Burgundy, who ruled from 1404 to 1419. The tomb itself, which features life-sized effigies of John the Fearless and his wife, Margaret of Bavaria, is surrounded by the procession of mourners through a gothic arcade. Each figure is shown frozen in a moment of acute sorrow; one contemplates a book, another dries his eyes on his cloak. For sculptures so small (only 16 inches in height), each is a masterpiece of expression in marble.

The Valois ducal family of Burgundy, centered in Dijon, France, had tremendous influence over both the politics and the arts of Luxembourg, Belgium, the Netherlands, and large territories of France during the 14th and 15th centuries. Their continued patronage of medieval artists turned Dijon into a creative center.

The Musée des Beaux-Arts in Dijon is lending the sculptures to the United States while undergoing renovations; this is the only time in the history of the tomb’s creation that the sculptures will be on display outside of France. So far, The Mourners have visited New York City, St. Louis, Missouri, and Dallas, Texas; the tomb itself will not be travelling.

Upcoming exhibits through 2012 will be held in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Los Angeles, California as well as San Francisco, and Richmond, Virginia.