World’s first olfactory museum opens in Paris

A message from
Ambassador Gérard Araud

Dear Friends,

As the United States bade farewell to President Obama, I attended the inauguration of the 45th president of the United States, Donald Trump. President Trump has demonstrated his openness to working with France to advance our shared goals, and we look forward to collaborating with his new administration.

France expects to continue promoting the principles of freedom, democracy, and justice. The fight against terrorism, led jointly by U.S. and French forces around the world, will continue to be a major area of cooperation. We will not tire in our efforts to defeat Daesh, and I am confident that the new administration is fully with us in this commitment.

Outside of D.C., we made great advancements in the tech industry. France was proud to bring the largest delegation of startups to the CES 2017. This event is an important opportunity for French and American technology firms, businesses, investors, and startups to meet, form partnerships, and learn about one another.

French tech stood out at CES in several different areas, including the Internet of Things, the connection of everyday objects to the Internet. I find it fitting that with our long history of excellence in design, French startups are making a name for themselves in this field that combines function, aesthetics, and technology.

A new French Tech visa was introduced to make it easier for startups to gain a foothold in France. Station F, the world’s largest startup incubator, opens in February, and will become the home to Facebook’s startup incubator among many others. We hope to welcome many Americans to France’s thriving tech hubs.

To start 2017 on a dynamic note, we held several events at the Embassy. On January 18, we celebrated the D.C. launch of France Alumni USA, a new web platform to connect alumni of French universities, study abroad programs and the French Department of Education’s Teaching Assistant Program in France.

We gathered again on January 26 to discuss the role that we as individuals can play to combat climate change. We were delighted at the creativity and commitment displayed in Cyril Dion and Mélanie Laurent’s film "Tomorrow" and in the discussion between panelists and audience. We hope that you will join us in taking action for the planet this year.
New email law gives French workers the “right to disconnect”

CONNECTED DEVICES LIKE SMARTPHONES are making our lives easier. With the swipe of a finger, one can explore the entire world or answer one’s emails.

Inevitably, this technology has made its way into the workplace, allowing employees to be on call at any time. In the hope of improving quality of life for workers, the French Ministry of Labor drafted a bill that grants workers the “right to disconnect.”

The first BlackBerry email-ready devices became popular in the mid-1990s, giving health specialists a few decades worth of data on the impact of this technology on our lives. Studies show that work-related stress is at an all-time high, and that this stress is constant throughout the year, most likely due to the constant connection permitted by these devices.

The new French law requires companies of more than 50 people to draw up a charter of good conduct, setting their own parameters of what is considered “time disconnected from work.” The goal of this law is to reduce long-term work-related stress and to increase happiness in and outside of the office. Companies are expected to comply voluntarily with the new legislation.

France is hopeful that the new law will effectively tackle one of the biggest public health challenges of our day. Studies indicate such policies will also have beneficial impacts on overall productivity.

Scientists believe that working too many hours is also detrimental to productivity and that companies should aim at greater efficiency rather than increased hours.

World’s first solar-paneled road inaugurated in Normandy

THE SMALL VILLAGE OF TOUROUvre-Au-Perche in Normandy, France, recently inaugurated the world’s first solar road. Literally covered in solar panels, the road harnesses energy from the sun to power street lights without affecting driving conditions.

The panels are covered in a silicon-based resin that allows them to withstand the weight of passing vehicles. So far, one kilometer of road has been converted. Though these flat solar panels such are less efficient than the slanted solar panels used in solar roofs, the road is expected to generate enough electricity to power roadside streetlights.

French Environment Minister Ségolène Royal would like to see this innovative technology expand to longer stretches of road and nationwide, if proven effective. With this project, Colas, the company responsible for the roadway, and the French government are evaluating this technology. Such installations are also expected to become less expensive over time, especially considering the energy return produced by ever more efficient panels.

There are currently more than 100 similar projects in the world, including one in Missouri. The state’s Department of Transportation has begun constructing a solar road at a welcome center on the iconic Route 66. The road will be the first of its kind on a public right of way in the United States. If the project meets expectations, the state would like to build more such roads.

Governments and businesses hope to see the process streamlined in the coming years, thus reducing costs. The sun beams more energy toward the Earth in an hour than humanity consumes in a year—all we need is the technology to harness its power.

Marie-Hélène Fasquel-Erhart is one of 50 finalists for the Varkey Foundation’s Global Teacher Prize, a $1 million award presented annually to an exceptional teacher who has made an outstanding contribution to the profession. She teaches American literature to adult and high school students in Nantes, France. Fasquel-Erhart always looks to motivate, and has successfully pioneered the “flipped classroom” in her school. In this instructional method, students watch instructional material at home and then use class meetings for debates, discussions, and creative tasks, rather than the traditional French method of receiving information in class and then completing homework assignments based on lectures.

What does it mean to you to be the first French teacher to be a finalist for this prize?
It is a huge honor to represent France. The thousands of teachers here do an amazing job, and unfortunately are not told so often enough. I really want this to honor all teachers and the work they're doing.

Describe your teaching style.
What characterizes my style is the way I feel toward the students. I’m always listening to the needs of my students, and I’m very patient with them. I have so much ambition for them—I try to make them be their amazing selves and find their best potential.

Because I teach American literature, I am supposed to teach the American way. We have lots of debates and flipped classroom sessions. I also like to use new technologies, such as Google docs. The students take notes during class every day, then every night I annotate these and give them feedback.

What are some examples of projects that students work on in your classroom?
About once a month they interview a writer whose work they’ve already studied at least an excerpt of, so we can analyze the work and then discuss it directly with the writer. The students are very enthusiastic about this—once when I was away, the first thing they said, after inquiring about my health, was, "This means we're going to miss one interview!" Clearly, it means a lot to them.

We’re also creating a magazine where two classes of senior and two classes of junior high school-level students all work together to help future teachers and students.

The third big project I’m doing this year is having my students translate a book by a French writer, because a school in the U.K. needs to study it, but they don’t have any French speakers.

How have you learned from your students?
The primary thing is, if you give them ambition they will be ready to do anything. I worked with students who have told me, "I can’t write 10 lines." I made them write short stories, which were ultimately published online and read by people from all over the world. I am also just amazed at how good they are upon completion!

Another thing I do is to encourage a lot of competition in my classes, where students can submit their work for prizes. They really enjoy that.

We also participate in an online creative writing competition called Paper Planes. The first year I taught American literature at this school, two of my students won third prize for short stories. Then last year—my second year—a student won the second prize for a beautiful poem about American literature. This year, you can guess what we’re aiming for!

Finally, I try not to give too many rules in the classroom so my students can be as free as possible to come up with amazing ideas that I have not even thought about.

How have environmental concerns and climate change been a part of your classroom?
The environment has always been an area of interest for me. In my class, we are trying to eliminate our own waste and become a paperless classroom.

A recent example of something we have done in my classroom was my students wrote short stories about the environment as part of an international project with Turkish and Italian students. The beginning of this project was about looking at your own environment, so I asked them to take photos.

Some took pictures of beautiful places they don’t want to see spoiled, while some took photos of secret spots, and others showed things that they want to change—the differences were interesting.

From there, we wrote about the whole world and everything that could be done. This topic is so important to me because if we don’t take care of the environment, we are going to disappear—it’s getting very dangerous, scary, even.

If you win the global teacher prize, what are your plans?
It’s difficult to envision winning the prize because everyone is great. If I did win, I would set up a new, small school to help people who have struggled and left the school system without a degree. The goal would be to help them find their talents—because I do believe everyone is good at something. I would use alternative ways of teaching, because these individuals have not managed in a regular system.

This prize is not just for one teacher, not for 50 teachers, but to value all teachers in the world. That’s really the aim of the Varkey Foundation. I’m very proud to represent French teachers and my aim, whatever happens now, is to make them feel valued.

En chiffres...

30% The percentage of perfumes on the world market exported from France, making it the undisputed leader in the sector.

55 Million The number of skier days sold in France, the world’s top skiing destination. The French ski resort La Plagne is also the most visited resort in the world.

27 The number of French universities counted among the best universities in the world, according to the Times Higher Education World University Rankings.
France’s fight to protect the world’s cultural heritage

PART OF THE DRAW THAT BRINGS the most tourists in the world to France each year is the country’s celebrated cultural history. France boasts 38 UNESCO cultural heritage sites, and many come to visit its prehistoric caves, Gothic cathedrals, and modern architectural marvels.

With numerous sites on all five continents under threat, France is leading a global movement to better protect the world’s cultural heritage in times of crisis.

After a February 2013 visit to Mali with Director-General of UNESCO Irina Bokova, President François Hollande made protecting cultural heritage a theme of French cultural diplomacy. During that visit, he and Ms. Bokova met to discuss the protection of the precious mausoleums and manuscripts of Timbuktu, which were damaged by terrorists in 2012.

French initiative aims to promote archaeological missions
Since the 19th century, archaeology has been a part of France’s cultural diplomacy. Starting in December 2016, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched a campaign to share the work of French projects around the world. Archaeological missions work in close cooperation with host countries, involving many local researchers and promoting an international network of archaeologists. France has made important contributions to some of the world’s most celebrated archaeological discoveries, such as the Tomma man in Chad, and flagship sites like Angkor in Cambodia and Petra in Jordan.

One of the new missions to begin this year is on Sai Island, Sudan. A huge span of fascinating human history, from prehistory through centuries of Egyptian occupation, is contained at this site first excavated by French archaeologists in 1954. The new project beginning in 2017 will aim to bring greater understanding of largely undocumented periods in the history of Sai Island’s fortified New Kingdom city overlooking the Nile.

Conference on Safeguarding Endangered Cultural Heritage
Together with the United Arab Emirates, France hosted a conference in Abu Dhabi in December on safeguarding endangered cultural heritage. “It is the cultural aspect of the fight already being waged against terrorism militarily and politically” according to an Elysée press release.

The conference began the process for the adoption of a resolution at the United Nations Security Council, putting in place new tools to safeguard heritage under threat from terrorism and armed conflict.

During the conference, President Hollande announced France’s commitment of $30 million toward protecting cultural heritage sites during wartime. “What we have to do today, and what we have managed to do, is to ensure the future of what is precious to humanity,” Hollande told dignitaries at the conference. “It is already late.”

Backers of the fund hope to raise an initial $100 million, which will be used to prevent the destruction of historical sites, reclaim stolen historical artifacts, and restore sites damaged by war, especially in Iraq and Syria.

Palmyra
Destroying ancient sites has been a facet of the strategy of Daesh (the Islamic State) in Iraq and Syria, due to its potent symbolism as well as the potential profits to be made by selling looted artifacts. Palmyra, an ancient Aramaic city in the Syrian desert that was the scene of fighting between Daesh and the Syrian government forces, has been a major locus of this ideological battle.

In addition to searching for diplomatic solutions to protect the civilians besieged by Syrian government forces, the French government has also conducted efforts to protect the country’s cultural heritage.

The exhibit “Eternal Sites: From Bamiyan to Palmyra,” inaugurated by President Hollande in December, aimed to raise awareness of the threats to sites of cultural significance. At the opening of this exhibit, President Hollande explained the importance of this mission. “One might ask… ‘What is more important, saving lives or saving stones?’ But the two struggles are inseparable. We must at the same time save lives and save stones. Because what terrorists want, is to destroy everything. To destroy all traces of the past and at the same time, all possibilities of a future.”

New 3D images of Palmyra’s ruins, taken by drone in April 2016, were projected in a 360-degree view to create an immersive experience. The exhibit ran through January at the Grand Palais and featured virtual versions of the ancient capital of King Sargon in Khorsabad, Iraq, the ancient city of Damascus, Syria, and the well-preserved crusader fort Crac des Chevaliers, Syria, in addition to the ruins of Palmyra.
Clockwise: Minister of Foreign Affairs Jean-Marc Ayrault and President François Hollande at the conference in Abu Dhabi; the archaeological site of Sai Island, Sudan; The Aramaic ruins of Palmyra, Syria; the archaeological site of Petra, Jordan; a fire-damaged manuscript from Timbuktu, Mali.
France’s tech industry impresses at CES

FRANCE MADE AN IMPACT at the 2017 edition of CES with an impressive delegation of about 260 enterprises, the third-largest delegation at the convention after the U.S. and China.

France was “the unexpected powerhouse of CES 2016,” last year’s convention in Las Vegas, Nevada, with 10 young companies winning awards for their innovative products. Capitalizing on this momentum, this year’s group of entrepreneurs wanted to hit the ground running.

La French Tech Corner at Eureka Park was the center of attention at this year’s convention for those wanting a closer look at the best of French innovation. 188 French startups were on display with new products, an impressive 160% increase over the 2016 edition. The French delegation organized a plethora of activities throughout the week to encourage discussion and the development of partnerships.

La French Tech is recognized as being very innovative, passionate and accomplished. It is one of the fastest growing tech ecosystems in the world. With support from the French government in the form of investments and the creation of a business-friendly environment in France, the new startups impressed in a variety of fields such as the Internet of Things (the connection of everyday objects), artificial intelligence, big data, autonomous mobility, cybersecurity, mobile communications, and fintech (technology for financial services).

Within France’s business ecosystem, young entrepreneurs have the opportunity to cooperate with some of La French Tech’s largest enterprises like long distance carpooling service BlaBlaCar, Sigfox - a company that builds wireless networks to connect low-energy objects, and high end integrated audio amplifier maker Devialet.

CES is followed religiously by tech enthusiasts around the world, and is a strategic event for businesses, especially startups, competing for limited consumer attention. One can only be thrilled by what French innovators will be bringing to the market in 2017 and beyond.

The impact of devices on memory in the digital age

THE BRAIN IS AN IMMENSELY complex organ that has adapted to help humans survive and accomplish increasingly complicated tasks. Scientists at the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) have recently wondered if the advancement of technology we rely on every day has had a negative impact on the capacity of the human brain to access and store information.

According to philosopher and Director of the Institute for Research and Innovation at the Georges-Pompidou Center in Paris, Bernard Stiegler, “our memory is slipping away from us.” We trust technology with more important information every day, from phone numbers to addresses and appointments.

Scientists at CNRS believe that the technological world we live in today affects the way memories are stored and accessed.

As we are constantly bombarded with ever more superficial information, much coming from the internet, we tend to stimulate the short-term memory section of the brain at the expense of other important memory-related tasks such as reflecting on the past, the future and our relationships with others.

Studies have shown that mental well-being is linked to the ability to turn our thoughts inward, and give in to daydreams and introspection, none of which are stimulated by an overuse of technology.

Exploring the complexity of the brain is not an easy endeavor. The most powerful tools we have today still do not allow us to come even remotely close to understanding fully how it functions.

It appears that finding the right balance between taking advantage of incredible technology and practicing simpler, quieter reflection may be the secret to a healthier brain.
The Ballet de Lorraine comes to the United States

AFTER RECOVERING FROM the Night of Philosophy and Ideas, join us in welcoming Nancy’s Ballet de Lorraine for its U.S. tour from February 7 to February 22.

The Ballet de Lorraine is one of the 19 Centres Chorégraphiques Nationaux (CCN) in France dedicated to supporting contemporary choreographic creation. Under the artistic direction of former Sadler’s Wells Royal Ballet principal dancer Petter Jacobsson, who has led the Ballet de Lorraine since 2011, the company will present exceptional programs in different cities.

With a focus on contemporary French choreographers, the repertory for this U.S. tour combines the twirling of “Devoted” by duo Cecilia Bengolea and François Chaignaud, the ferocious energy of Alban Richard’s “HOK solo pour ensemble,” and the mystery of “Unknown Pleasures,” a piece by five anonymous international choreographers that offers audiences the chance to experience dance unencumbered by preconceptions. The program also includes two revivals of Merce Cunningham’s works “Sounddance,” a masterpiece of organized chaos, and “Fabrications.”

Petter Jacobsson and Thomas Caley will offer an inside perspective on the mission of the Ballet, its repertory, and the many activities of the choreographic center located in Nancy at a talk hosted by the Cultural Services of the French Embassy, New York, on Monday, February 13 at 6:30 pm. Come one, come all!

Details

New York: February 7-12, at the Joyce Theater, 175 8th Avenue
http://www.joyce.org/performances/ballet-de-lorraine

Minneapolis: February 16, at Northrop, 84 Church Street SE
http://www.northrop.umn.edu/events/ccn-ballet-de-lorraine

Chicago: February 18-19, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, 220 E Chicago Avenue
http://mcachicago.org/Calendar/2017/02/Ballet-De-Lorraine

Portland: February 22, at the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, 1037 SW Broadway
http://www.whitebird.org/event/ccn-ballet-de-lorraine/

Paris opens world’s first museum of its kind

THE LATEST MAJOr MuSEuM in Paris is not designed to house works that catch the eye, but to appeal to one of our lesser-examined senses: smell. The new Grand Musée du Parfum, which opened in December, has given itself the “incomparable challenge of making the invisible palpable.” It is the first museum in the world to focus on the transmission of information through smell.

France has been Europe’s perfume capital since the 16th century, when Catherine de Medicis brought her perfumer with her to France to make the fragrances to mask the odor of badly tanned leather gloves.

The museum’s first section features the history of perfume-making, from the spiritual Kyphi of ancient Egypt to today’s haute couture scents, many of which can be smelled during the visit. This part of the museum also covers the ways that perfume has played a role throughout history.

The next section of the museum is dedicated to the olfactory sense, exposing visitors to a range of odors to focus the nose on the impression they make. This interactive area is made up of several experiments that highlight the role smell plays in our day-to-day lives and how it affects our emotions.

The third section explores the job of the nez, or nose, the perfume-industry term for the expert who concocts new scents.

The Cultural and Scientific Advisory Board of 16 experts from the perfume industry put their heads together to bring this project, which was first conceived two years ago, to fruition.
THE ÎLE DE PORQUEROLLES is the largest of the three islands in the Îles d'Hyères archipelago, located off France's Mediterranean coast. Accessible only by boat and protected by strict environmental laws, the island is home to unparalleled sites of natural beauty.

Porquerolles became part of the Port-Cros national park after it was purchased by the French government in 1971. The subsequent restrictions on driving, construction, camping, and even smoking have led to an extraordinary conservation of plants and wildlife. Due to the island’s small size, visitors can hike or bike their way across its white sand beaches, pine forests, and rocky coves. The most popular trail begins at Porquerolles’ only village in the north and traverses the island and ends at the lighthouse in the south.

Natural attractions are not all the island has to offer. After adventurer François Joseph Fournier bought the island in 1912, he planted hundreds of acres of vineyards that produced some of the first Côte de Provence wines. History buffs can check out the numerous 16th- and 17th-century forts scattered across the island, as well as the recently restored Moulin du Bonheur. Summer visitors can also enjoy the Jazz à Porquerolles festival.