From Alsace to Bordeaux:
an introduction to French wines

Over the centuries, France has developed a sophisticated culture of wine growing, classification and tasting!

Right: A vineyard in the Bordeaux wine region of Blaye.

Dear Friends,

Spring is almost upon us, and we are preparing for some exciting new ventures.

Throughout March, Washington, D.C. celebrates the Francophonie Cultural Festival. A range of cultural activities will explore the great diversity and creativity of the French-speaking world. There are 57 members of the International Organization of La Francophonie, and most of these countries will be represented in some way during this exciting festival.

On March 8, we celebrated International Women's Day. The international holiday grew out of labor movements in North America and Europe. In fact, the first women's day, organized in solidarity with garment workers, was celebrated in the United States in 1908. France and the United States have both committed to the U.N.'s Step It Up initiative, which works to end discrimination against women by 2030.

For our part at the Embassy, our French Series on "Women's Impact on Political Life and Economic Development" on March 8 featured two panel discussions. In addition to celebrating, with our guests, we put our heads together to make progress toward reducing gender disparities.

Later in the month, we join the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a worldwide celebration of a favorite element of French culture: our cuisine. The third annual Goût de/Good France takes place March 21. This international event was started after UNESCO added the French gastronomic meal to its list of immaterial cultural heritage.

Restaurants all over the United States and the world will offer special menus celebrating French cuisine and the values it represents: the art of cooking, sharing and training, and the pleasure of good company. This year's focus on sustainable, vegetable-based dishes marks a renewed commitment to health and the environment.

Each participating restaurant will donate five percent of its profits to a charity of its choice. We hope you will join us to mark this occasion. By breaking bread together in the spirit of community and generosity, let us continue to strengthen the bonds between our two countries.
ON JANUARY 26, THE EMBASSY HOSTED its second French Series event on climate change. The evening included an hour-long panel discussion and a film screening of the documentary Tomorrow, with a focus on what each of us can do to combat climate change.

The panel began with an open conversation on the challenges of addressing climate change under the new US administration. The primary question panelists addressed was, “How can we all contribute to reducing our environmental footprint, protecting our shared environment, encouraging responsive government, supporting scientific research, and improving civic life?”

Much of the conversation focused on the progress being made in the private sector. Regardless of resistance from different levels of government, “the clean energy revolution is just unstoppable,” panelist Joseph Romm explained. “There is a business case for climate action,” Kathy Baughman McLeod added, predicting that businesses will continue to drive climate change action over the coming years.

Still, progress cannot be achieved without individual action. Speakers urged the audience to increase their environmental literacy, and to prioritize climate action when contacting congressional representatives.

After the discussion, the film Tomorrow was screened. Produced by Cyril Dion and Mélanie Laurent, the film, which has enjoyed critical acclaim, investigated the impact of climate change on the present and future. The producers decided to make Tomorrow after a study in 2010 announced the possible loss of part of humanity before 2100 due to climate-related catastrophes.

Dion, Laurent, and a team of four others investigated what could provoke such a catastrophe and how to avoid it with on-the-ground research in 10 different countries. During this project, they met many people who are trying to reinvent the economy, environment, agricultural and energy sectors, and even democracy; the film then presents some of these initiatives to help us imagine better solutions for the world of tomorrow.

From left to right: Moderator Lisa Friedman, Editor at ClimateWire, panelists Joseph Romm: Senior Fellow at American Progress, Kathy Baughman McLeod: Managing Director at the Nature Conservancy, and Diane Wood: President of the National Environmental Education Foundation.

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French Alumni USA launches in the nation’s capital

ON JANUARY 18, THE EMBASSY OF FRANCE in Washington, D.C. held a reception to launch France Alumni USA, a social network for those who have studied at French universities through Campus France or taught with the Teaching Assistant Program in France.

Consul General of France Michel Charbonnier gave introductory remarks, followed by Thomas Michelon, the Deputy Cultural Counselor, and three speakers who shared personal stories of their connections to both French and American culture.

The France Alumni network is part of Campus France, the organization that arranges study abroad for over 300,000 international students that study in France each year. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development established the network to help alumni maintain close ties with France. It has over 30,000 members to date with new ones joining daily.

France Alumni USA seeks to help create connections between Campus France alumni in the U.S. and to provide a platform for alumni to discover employment opportunities based on their French experience.

The website offers discussion spaces and theme groups to connect like-minded members and features sections dedicated to major French employers and job offers. The site also hosts a magazine section to keep members up to date with cultural happenings in France and interesting events for alumni to attend.

The network is free to join for those who have studied abroad in France or for higher education institutions and companies hosting French students. Visit usa.campusfrance.org to join.

Left: The France Alumni USA site offers a variety of resources for alumni of French programs; below: attendees enjoy the launch reception.
Amadou Koné is a French professor at Georgetown University whose research has centered on African literature and culture. Born and raised in Côte d'Ivoire, he graduated from the National University of Côte d'Ivoire then moved to France for graduate studies at the University François Rabelais of Tours and the University of Limoges.

Dr. Koné is also a novelist and author of one of the most well-known contemporary young adult novels in Francophone Africa, “Les frasques d’Ebinto,” which he wrote at just seventeen. The novel is now being adapted to film.

Tell us about your background and how you started writing in French.

I am originally from Côte d’Ivoire, West Africa. I am from the Senufo ethnic group and I speak Senufo, Bambara, Agni. For historical reasons our educational system is in French and French is one of our national languages, so we mostly write in French.

How did you develop an interest in literature and become a writer?

I belong to an era where storytelling was still alive in Africa because radio was not yet popular and TV was at the time nonexistent. I used to listen to traditional stories in my family.

These stories were fairy and animal tales, legends, initiation tales, epics, hunter’s songs, etc. This oral tradition helped me learn how to narrate a story, how to build a character, how to construct dialogue to produce a desired effect.

Having studied and taught literature in Côte d’Ivoire, France, and the United States, what are some of the benefits and the differences between the educational approaches?

There used to be no difference between the French educational system and the Ivorian system, and even now there are only slight differences.

Now, between the French and the American system, it seems to me that the French system prioritizes the specialization of the student much earlier. In high school, the student is placed on a track and begins to specialize.

The benefit is that he or she ends up being very good in his or her area of study. The American system is much more flexible, especially at the college level. For instance, here at Georgetown University, I have had pre-med students in my African literature classes in French.

Our French majors may take classes in other disciplines that have nothing to do with language; for example, it is possible to major both in French and Government. This flexibility seems to be a big advantage to me. These remarks are very simple, of course. A sophisticated analysis would require more space and more time.

Can you talk about the process of adapting “Les frasques d’Ebinto” to film? Are there discrepancies between the way you imagined the story when writing it and the film adaptation of it?

I have been writing novels and plays since I was in high school, but movie-making is new to me. I wrote “Les frasques d’Ebinto” when I was very young, but I had never worked on a film until recently, when an Ivorian director who was working on the project of adapting “Les frasques d’Ebinto” to cinema asked me to help with the screenplay.

This kind of work is very different from the kind of writing I am used to, even from working on a play. As for the story, the movie will be different from the novel. Some characters from the book do not appear in the movie; some new characters are introduced in the film. The end of the movie is different from the end of the book. The main thing is that the movie is an adaptation not a mere reproduction of the novel. I hope that with the film, we will be able to successfully reproduce the emotion that the readers felt when reading the book.

Are you still writing fiction, and what other future projects are you planning?

Although I devote most of my time to my teaching and to academic work, I still have very important creative projects. I am working on the sequel to “Les frasques d’Ebinto.” I am hoping I can finish the new novel before the movie is released but this is an ambitious project I don’t want to rush just because I want to have a new book coming out at the same time as the movie release. I would rather take my time in order to do a good job. I am also working on a book about one of my favorite Ivorian authors Ahmadou Kourouma who has, in my view, succeeded in reinventing the language of the novel in Francophone Africa.

I have a lot of ideas for novels, plays and screenplays. For too long I have been neglecting my creative writing activity and I am looking forward to embarking upon a new period of creativity. I know that I have plenty of materials for new books. The only problem is finding the time.
A guide to French wine

NO PROPER FRENCH MEAL would be complete without it: Wine is one of the defining elements of the French patrimoine. However, the amount of history, technical skill, and cultural value behind each bottle can be overwhelming, even to the connoisseur. With that in mind, we give you a guide to the world of French wine.

History of French wine
France's wine reputation goes all the way back to the Gauls. These early inhabitants of France began cultivating grapes over 12,000 years ago, long before the Roman invasion. Once France became part of the Roman Empire, the Gauls were able to export their wines and their knowledge, and they quickly became famous for both the quality of their spirits and their expert pruning techniques.

Through the Middle Ages, vineyards were the purview of monasteries: what the monks did not use to celebrate mass they could sell for a profit. Soon, the art of winemaking became a veritable field of study, with early French universities devoting time and resources to investigating the science behind wine and new techniques to make it.

The combination of governmental quality control and the innovation of French vintners made the Age of Enlightenment in the 18th century a wine boom. However, disaster in the form of two blights struck in the mid-1800s. First mildew and then phylloxera attacked French crops, slowing production and profits.

French scientists leapt into action. Henri Marès discovered a way to combat mildew, Louis Pasteur pioneered a better method of fermenting and storing wine, and by mastering the technique of grafting French vines onto disease-resistant stock, French vintners brought the industry back from the blights.

Today, France is the second-largest wine producer in the world, falling just behind Italy at 41.9 million hectoliters of wine in 2016. By comparison, the United States only produced 22.5 million hectoliters of wine.

Step 1: winemaking
French or American, all wines have the same source: grapes. When grapes are crushed, their naturally occurring yeast reacts with the sugar in their juice, producing alcohol in a process called fermentation. White wines are made without the grape skins, while including the skins gives red wine its distinctive color. Rosés are made by allowing the skins to remain in contact with the pulp for a short time.

Fermentation also creates carbon dioxide. To make sparkling wine like champagne, the carbon dioxide is trapped in the liquid instead of being allowed to escape.

Fermentation can take anywhere from three days to three months, and even the slightest variation in temperature or the material of the container can affect the quality of the wine produced. After fermentation, wine is left to mature. While some wines don’t require a very long maturation period, most are left alone for at least a year before consumption.

However, the biggest influence on the quality of the wine is the quality of the grapes. For the French, this not only depends on the specific variety of the grape but also on the concept of terroir. Stemming from the French word terre, or land, terroir encompasses all the individual characteristics of a vineyard, from the soil composition to the amount of sunlight.

Step 2: labelling
You don’t have to be an oenophile to find good French wine. The French government and the Institut National des Appellations d’Origine (INAO) regulate the industry and require very specific labels to identify the type of wine and its quality. In keeping with the concept of terroir, French wines are labelled by region, rather than by grape variety, except for bottles from Alsace and Champagne.

Vin de France is the most basic classification of wine, referring to any wine produced in France. Also called vin de table, or table wine, it is considered to be the lowest-quality drink. Wine labelled Indication Geographique Protégée (IGP) can only come from designated wine areas and is a step up from vin de France. The best wine will have an Appellation d’Origine Protégée (AOP). To earn this label, a wine must comply with its region’s guidelines of minimum quality, allowed grapes, and growing conditions. Sub-regions have even more stringent standards, so the more specific the AOP, the better the wine.

Du vin, du fromage et du pain, font un bon festin. Wine, cheese and bread make a good feast.
— French proverb
Step 3: dégustation

In France, just as much care goes into tasting wine as producing it. Dégustation has become an art form, where wine is appreciated with the eyes, nose, and mouth.

The color of a wine reveals a great deal. Younger red wines will have more tinges of purple or blue, while the longer the wine matures the more its tint will deepen into dark red or brown. Good wine is clear, although it may still have some precipitate on the bottom. Finally, the appearance of wine gives a clue as to its alcohol content; strong wine will leave an oily film on the side of the glass.

After sight comes smell. The technique of the trois nez, or three noses, maximizes olfactory perception. The first nose is taken with the wine glass completely still, which allows for the perception of the wine’s dominant aromas. Gently swirling the glass releases new aromas, making the second nose more nuanced than the first. Strong agitation of the wine, which can be done by suddenly reversing the direction of the glass, creates the fullest scent profile of all. By this third nose, you should be able to explore all the subtleties of the wine.

Taste is the last step in dégustation. Going beyond just sweet or dry, tasting the wine allows you to evaluate its complexity and balance. Complexity refers to richness of the flavors themselves, while balance measures the relationship between the flavors. The interplay between astringency, unctuousness, and acidity makes each French wine unique. Bonne dégustation!
THREE FRENCH CHEMISTS RECENTLY WON a “Challenge of essential molecules” award from Air Liquide (a French multinational company) for their method of converting carbon dioxide to carbon monoxide.

Carbon dioxide makes up a significant part of greenhouse gas emissions, and therefore is a major cause of climate change. While reducing emissions overall is necessary, stopping them completely is unrealistic.

To approach the problem from a different angle, scientists have begun to explore using carbon dioxide as a raw material for different sources of energy. One way to do so is by converting it to carbon monoxide which can be used, for example, as a less risky form of car fuel.

After extensive testing and experimentation, the French chemists, Marc Robert, Cyrille Costentin, and Jean-Michel Savéant, from the Paris Diderot University and the French National Center for Scientific Research, have identified a unique catalyst (a substance that causes or speeds up a chemical reaction) using iron to cause the desired CO\textsubscript{2} to CO conversion.

Most conversion methods have relied on precious metals, such as gold, silver, and platinum, which are scarce and costly, while iron is the most abundant metal in the earth’s crust. The French team has demonstrated that the iron catalyst method is also the most stable method presently known.

Robert points out that “it will take another ten or twenty years for these processes to be applicable to [the] industry.” He and his colleagues will use the grant they received from Air Liquide to recruit new post-doctoral students to join their team and continue their research.
More French stores to open on Sundays

RECENT ECONOMIC REFORMS made by the French government and aimed at creating more jobs and encourage tourism include having more businesses open on Sundays.

In 2015, then-Minister of the Economy Emmanuel Macron proposed the Macron law, which allowed French stores in 21 designated international tourist zones to open on Sundays, and until midnight on weekdays. His law was the extension of a 2009 reform that labelled 500 towns, including Paris, Marseille, and Lille, as tourist interest areas with permission to have Sunday hours.

The evolution is visible in Paris, one of the world’s most visited cities. Shops on the Champs Elysées were quick to extend their hours and large department stores are beginning to leave their doors open all weekend. The Galeries Lafayette led the way and predicted this January that its sales would rise 5 to 10 percent thanks to this decision. Other stores, like Printemps and Le Bon Marché, have followed suit.

While the Macron law only applies to popular tourist areas, travelers aren’t the only ones excited about the opportunity to shop any day of the week. In a 2015 survey by Odoxa, 68 percent of French citizens were found in favor of stores being open on Sundays, showing a shift in a culture in which Sunday was traditionally seen as a day for rest and family.

Tilt Kids Festival in New York City

THE SECOND ANNUAL TILT KIDS FESTIVAL takes place March 4 through April 16 at venues throughout New York City, hosted by The Cultural Services of the French Embassy and the French Institute Alliance Française (FIAF). With five world premieres and four U.S. debuts, the multidisciplinary festival presents adventurous and playful new work for families from artists spanning the globe.

The 2017 Tilt Kids Festival features programming ranging from high-flying acrobatics and open philosophical discussions for kids with Simon Critchley’s team of philosophers, to a new adaptation of a classic fairytale with La Cordonnerie, told through a combination of film and live performance. “In this time of heightened global uncertainty, we remain committed to offering positive, mind-opening artistic experiences that encourage a deeper understanding of the world. No matter how old you are, let curiosity be your guide!” said Rima Abdul-Malak, Lili Chopra, and Violaine Huisman, co-curators of Tilt Kids Festival.

Five of the festival’s world premieres are newly commissioned works. The first is an immersive installation by artist and author of over 75 children’s books Hervé Tullet. In another, Congolese theater director Toto Kisaku invites kids and their parents to create costumes, sound effects, and creative recitation in a performance of his favorite African folktale.

The Teens Library, created by French artist Fanny de Chaillé, will highlight the lives of recent immigrant teenagers in New York City, who will become living books and share their personal stories with the audience. In the festival’s first collaboration with the Met Museum, the Juilliard Orchestra will perform Oscar- and Grammy-winning composer and conductor Tan Dun’s Terracotta Symphony and Hero Concerto. And renowned actor Nicolas Bouchaud and cellist Sonia Wieder-Atherton will offer a compelling, musical retelling of the Hans Christian Andersen classic The Emperor and the Nightingale.

Festival Tickets are on sale at www.tiltkidsfestival.org.
VERSAILLES PALACE is one of the most visited tourist attractions in the world, yet few visitors stop to take in the surrounding town, also called Versailles. The quaint city makes a worthwhile destination on its own, with many hotels, restaurants, a popular weekly market, and, of course, convenient access to the palace.

The palace, which was commissioned by The Sun King Louis XIV during the peak of the Bourbon dynasty, housed the royal family and their entire court until the French Revolution, making it one of the most spectacular buildings in the world.

Besides the palace, there are plenty of historical sites to see in Versailles, such as the Royal Opera (considered by some the most beautiful in all of Europe), the Jeu de Paume (site of the famous Tennis Court Oath), the Courtyard of Fragrances (a museum detailing the transformation of French perfume into an art form), and the Potager du Roi (a garden that still uses 17th century agricultural techniques).

The town is also home to the Versailles Academy of Equestrian Arts, open to the public every weekend, which teaches equestrian choreography and dressage.

But perhaps the most impressive site is the town’s gourmet market. Food markets are a staple of any French town, but Versailles has one of the grandest in its region. Open daily, the market sells fresh and local items such as wine, charcuterie, cheese, fish, pâté, fruits, vegetables and much more.

The enormous gardens of the Versailles Palace are also free and open to the public daily, so visitors to the village can enjoy walking, running, and exploring miles of beautiful scenery.