In U.S., Sarkozy Reaffirms French-American Ties

Speaking at Columbia University, the French finance minister insists, “France likes the United States.”

French Finance Minister Nicolas Sarkozy spoke to Columbia University students on October 4.

Sarkozy stressed the continued strength of the transatlantic relationship, "If I am here, it is because France likes the United States," he explained. "The dream of French families is to have their children go to American universities. When we go to the movies, it’s in order to see American movies, when we turn on our radios, it’s to hear American music. And when our children learn languages, the first language they learn is English. We like the United States." Sarkozy explained that, for his part, "the reason I like America so much is because I’m a believer expressed his hope that a similar "can-do" attitude will take hold in France.

Sarkozy spoke optimistically about the state of French-American relations, emphasizing that any tensions over the war in Iraq are a thing of the past, "We had a disagreement over the war in Iraq," Sarkozy explained, "but I am very glad the United States. The world admires you, the world respects you."

Sarkozy came to the U.S. to attend the annual World Bank, IMF and G7 meetings. He also took advantage of the trip to hold meetings with key political figures, including U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell and U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan and to attend programs to strengthen transatlantic business ties.

Sarkozy was invited to speak at Columbia University by the Alliance Program, a unique partnership between Columbia University and three French universities—the Ecole Polytechnique, Sciences Po and the Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne—whoes goal is to promote a lasting cooperation across academic disciplines. For more information on the Alliance program, please visit www.alliance-program.org.

E.U. Commission Favors Turkey Accession Talks

The European Commission officially recommended on October 6 that the European Union open accession talks with Turkey, provided it continues to address the Union’s concerns with its human rights record. For the accession talks to begin, the motion must now be formally approved by the 25 current members of the Union when they hold a summit meeting on December 17. Should it be definitively approved, the entire process of accession will likely take “10 to 15 years” according to French President Jacques Chirac, who supports Turkey’s candidacy. Such an extended interval between the start and completion of accession talks is not unusual, as candidate countries must meet several requirements before they can join the Union.

Commission officials were quick to hail the progress Turkey has already made in meeting the Union’s entry requirements in the area of human rights. The Commission also praised Turkey’s economic progress: it has brought its economy more in line with international standards, liberalizing its markets and slashing its level of inflation. Nevertheless, in the eyes of the Commission, there are still many areas of improvement remaining. In particular, there is much criticism of the current state of women’s rights in Turkey, with discrimination and violence against women being persistent problems. Turkey has also failed to meet the Union’s stringent standard of zero-tolerance toward torture. The Turkish government has denounced torture, but the implementation of its policy on the ground has proved difficult.

The European Commission is adamant on making sure that Turkey meets all of the standard requirements for membership, political and economic, before full membership can be considered. The Turkish government has welcomed the Commission’s decision, and has promised to comply with the European Union’s requirements.
Government Unveils Budget Priorities

Defense, research, job creation and deficit reduction are on top of the agenda

FRENCH FINANCE MINISTER Nicolas Sarkozy unveiled his budget proposal for the coming fiscal year on September 22. President Jacques Chirac called Sarkozy’s plan a good step forward “for employment, for growth, and for the future.” Indeed, one of the government’s priorities is job creation. Several new tax incentives will help safeguard existing jobs and foster the creation of new ones.

But with Sarkozy calling the need to lower France’s public deficit below the 3 percent ceiling an “absolute priority,” the new budget focuses primarily on meeting the deficit requirements stipulated by the euro zone’s stability and growth pact. The proposed budget should lower the deficit to somewhere around 2.9 percent (down from 3.6 percent). The belt-tightening will be relatively painless: government revenues are up because of France’s strong economic performance in 2004, and growth is expected to continue in 2005. In fact, the government will be able to increase its spending on certain high priority ministries while still keeping its deficit in check.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for instance, will receive a total of 4.41 billion euros, equivalent to a 4.5 percent increase over the previous year. The budget increase will be used to support international aid programs, such as the global fight against diseases like AIDS and malaria. The rise in Official Development Assistance (ODA) will help meet France’s pledge to bring its total effort to 0.5 percent of its GDP by 2007. International aid already represents almost 50 percent of the French Foreign Ministry’s budget.

Sarkozy also proposed to increase funding for the Ministry of Defense by 2.1 percent, for a total of 32.9 billion euros. Most of the new money will be allocated to the purchase of new equipment (such as 59 Rafale jet fighters, a Horizon-type frigate, Leclerc tanks and Tiger helicopters) and to the development of sophisticated military hardware (particularly a new military transport plane based on the Airbus). Overall, France’s research and development budget will get a big boost of 4.7 percent, to 9.27 billion euros.

Education remains, as always, a key priority, and its funding will increase by 2.5 percent. New social programs have been announced (see our lead article on page 6), in particular the launch of a one-billion-euro social cohesion plan, the construction of 90,000 low-cost housing units and the raising of the minimum wage. The Ministry of Culture was awarded the largest increase, with its share going up 5.9 percent to 2.79 billion euros. Its additional funds will mostly be devoted to the preservation and development of France’s cultural heritage (see our in-depth section on page 4).

Chirac Tours Southeast Asia

FRENCH PRESIDENT Jacques Chirac returned to Paris on October 13 from a week-long visit to three Asian countries. Chirac began his trip with a brief stop in Singapore followed by state visits to Vietnam and China. The tour’s salient objective was to promote stronger economic ties between Southeast Asia and France.

In Vietnam, Chirac emphasized that France is committed to providing further economic, educational and developmental assistance to its former colony. About 20 French business representatives, who are involved in projects ranging from a French-language University to the construction of a metro route in Hanoi, accompanied the president. Chirac, after meeting with his Vietnamese counterpart, Tran Duc Luong, attended the fifth Asia-Europe Meeting in Hanoi which convened the leaders of 15 E.U. states and 10 Asian countries.

The tour concluded in China to kick off its “Year of France.” Chinese President Hu Jintao warmly welcomed Chirac, whose entourage included fifty-some CEOs of major French companies. Chirac Spokesman Jérôme Bonnafont explained that “growth in China is an opportunity for growth and employment in France.” Bonnafont also echoed the president’s aspiration to help double the number of French companies in China by 2007. As he has in the past, Chirac used his visit to voice France’s concerns over the human rights’ situation in China.
Americans Enlist to Support Louvre

The new American Friends of the Louvre will help the Louvre museum’s outreach in the U.S.

The American Friends of the Louvre hope to facilitate more such visits.

With François Delattre, France’s Consul General in New York, hosting the reception in his splendid 5th Avenue residence, the director of the Louvre, Henry Loyrette, and the chairman of the American Friends of the Louvre, Christopher Forbes, outlined their plans to create a branch of the venerable museum on American soil. Americans form the Louvre’s largest contingent of visitors (20 percent of the total), and the Louvre in fact draws more Americans than any museum in the United States, except for New York’s Metropolitan Museum.

Other initiatives were announced, including educational programs with American institutions such as the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, the Terra Foundation in Chicago, the Milwaukee Art Museum and the Davis Museum at Wellesley College. The American Friends of the Louvre, along with the American Express Foundation, have also been providing financial and logistical support to translate the explanatory texts that accompany the Louvre’s works of art. And the two organizations are contributing to the completion of the English and Spanish versions of the Louvre’s Web site, www.louvre.fr.

The American Friends of the Louvre will host their first fundraising event, featuring a presentation of haute couture designs by Ralph Rucci, in Houston on November 8.

“The Da Vinci Code” Enthralls France

Dan Brown’s popular novel, The Da Vinci Code, has remained strong at number 1 on French best-seller lists since its release in France last March. The novel, which is largely set in Paris and suggests that the first Kings of France were descended from Jesus and Mary Magdalene, has inspired a flurry of commercial activity as tour operators and historians seek to capitalize on its success. Californian real-estate agent Olivia Hsu Decker, for instance, is offering a one-week Da Vinci Code Tour of her property, the Chateau de Villette (which plays a prominent role in the book) at the very reasonable price of $5,500! Even the venerable Louvre Museum has succumbed to the book’s appeal and used it as a marketing tool with potential American donors (see facing article). In its review, the women’s magazine Marie-Claire gushes, “you will drink till the dregs from this irresistible chalice.” Clearly, the French appreciate a well-told tale, even if it takes place in France!

France & America

Alliance Française to Hold General Assembly in D.C.

The General Assembly of the Federation of Alliances Françaises will convene on October 21 though 23 in Washington, D.C., for its annual meeting. Nearly 150 delegates and members of affiliated chapters are expected to attend the meeting, which will feature numerous workshops, exhibits, and other activities.

Ambassador and Madame Levitte will be in attendance throughout the weekend, after hosting an inaugural reception at their residence on Thursday evening. The Ambassador will address the event’s participants during a luncheon on Friday, October 22, and will present at the Charbonnier Award Tribute Dinner, which will pay homage to Pierre Cardin, head of the venerable Cardin fashion empire. The dinner, “Puttin’ on the Ritz for France!”, will feature chefs from the Cordon Bleu. A round table on French-American relations, moderated by Jean-Louis Turlin of the Figaro’s special weekly France-Amérique, is also scheduled for the weekend and participants will include Dr. Christopher Pinet, editor in Chief of the French Review, and Dr. Tom Bishop, former chair of the New York University French Department.

The Alliance Française network, boasting a membership of 30,000 and 110 chapters throughout the United States, plays a key role in the promotion of French culture in North America. For more information, please call 1-800-6FRANCE or visit the Federation’s Web site, www.afusa.org.

French Chefs Cook Up a Storm in America

When Alain Ducasse braved the Atlantic in the summer of 2000 to establish his first restaurant in the United States, the American press was unconvinced that such a highly priced oddity of the culinary landscape would have any success with the American public. Now, four years later, with menus starting at $165 or $250 per person before the wine, the Alain Ducasse restaurant at the Essex House in Manhattan has become increasingly popular with the corporate lunch clientele as well as the upscale dinner crowd, keeping its leather-bound reservation books filled months in advance.

Monsieur Ducasse is not alone. Many of France’s most celebrated chefs have established themselves in New York City; Los Angeles and, more recently, Las Vegas. Indeed, in an effort to create a more upscale image, Las Vegas has enticed French chefs such as Joel Robuchon, Guy Savoy and Daniel Boulud, as well as Alain Ducasse, with a high-end Braserie opening this November. All four were called in to cater to high rollers and to the increasingly cosmopolitan clientele Las Vegas is attracting. This migration of chefs promises to establish Las Vegas not only as a gambling Mecca but also as an island of avant-garde gastronomy in the middle of the Nevada desert.

James Conlon Honored

Conductor James Conlon, 54, who left as permanent chief and musical adviser of the Paris National Opera this summer after an eight-year stint, was awarded the rank of Commander in the Order of Arts et Lettres on September 21 by French Minister for Culture Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres. Born in New York City, James Conlon is one of the preeminent conductors of his generation.

National Libraries Launch French Heritage Web Site

The National Library of France (Bibliothèque Nationale) and the U.S. Library of Congress will join forces to create a bilingual Web site dedicated to France’s influence in North America. On September 23, James H. Billington, the Librarian of Congress, and Jean Noël Jeanneney, director of the Bibliothèque Nationale, agreed to digitize and place online archival documents—such as manuscripts, maps, photographs and audio samples—that bear witness to the French heritage in North America. A pilot version of the Web site is expected to be unveiled in early 2005.

Two American Nights in Paris

In light of the upcoming U.S. presidential election, the town hall of the 3rd arrondissement of Paris will organize two nights of cultural programming to explore the United States. The event will be launched on October 15, and includes several indoor and outdoor activities, including screenings of American classics (“American Beauty,” “Citizen Kane...”), a demonstration of American football, and Hip-Hop and Gospel performances. Conferences about the presidential election, the U.S. legal system and the role of the media in America are also on the program. For more information, please visit www.mairie3.paris.fr.

Modern French Poetry Translated to English

With the release of the bilingual Yale Anthology of Twentieth-Century French Poetry, a vast selection of modern French poetry has become accessible to the English-speaking public. From Guillaume Apollinaire to contemporary author Michel Houellebecq, the entire pantheon of celebrated 20th-century French poets makes an appearance in this volume. Indeed, editor Mary Ann Caws has chosen works by more than 100 poets, including many women. For more information, please visit www.yalebooks.com.
Le Patrimoine

What Is "Le Patrimoine?"

THE PATRIMOINE is a multifaceted French term that embodies a certain vision of what it means to be French. Often translated as "heritage," it has a strong collective and cultural connotation that emphasizes the importance of the objects it designates. In effect, the patrimoine is the collective cultural and historical heritage of the French nation, and as such, it must be protected and preserved for future generations and for the world at large. Examples of patrimoine include everything from châteaux to cathedrals, from the Arc of Triumph to prehistoric caves, from military forts and citadels to gardens and parks.

The French nation's fascination with its patrimoine has led to major state actions aimed at preserving, but also developing, the buildings and sites it encompasses. The French government strives not only to protect constructions and properties that it deems significant (because of their cultural or historic value), but also everything from urban centers to areas of the countryside. The notion of patrimoine even extends as far as the art, tapestries, vases or furniture that are located inside the protected buildings, or the environments that surround them.

Several government agencies are involved in the conservation of France’s patrimoine, including the Center for National Monuments (under the Ministry of Culture) and the Department of Architecture and Heritage. Organizations even exist to train individuals on the nuances of patrimoine, such as the École Nationale du Patrimoine. Today around 40,000 areas are classified as historic monuments and are therefore protected by the French government.

A Long, Cherished Tradition of Protection

THE FRENCH STATE’S direct involvement in the protection of the nation’s patrimoine stemmed from the French Revolution, when the revolutionaries decided that the holdings of the aristocracy, the royal family, and the church would become property of the state and thus accessible to all. They did this to save these precious holdings from destruction, and also to reinforce the ideas of community and common heritage among the citizens of France. The idea of patrimoine was present during Napoleon’s reign and was first politicized during the July Monarchy (1830-1848), when Minister François Guizot appointed the first curator of historical monuments, laying the foundation for one of the world’s first Historical Monument Departments.

However, it was not until the beginning of the 20th century that France began to pass an array of legislation protecting historical monuments and natural sites, a process that still continues today. These laws included protecting sites with artistic, historical, or scientific significance, as well as sites renowned for their picturesque landscapes or for their connection to traditional legends (1930), and national treasures, such as paintings (2000). In 1964, André Malraux, famous author and also the first minister of cultural affairs, launched a general inventory of French monuments and artistic treasures, a vast operation that is still in progress. Throughout the 20th century, the idea of patrimoine has progressively taken on a more expansive outlook. For example, patrimoine now includes both material and immaterial objects, such as customs and knowledge.

RECORD ATTENDANCE FOR "JOURNEES DU PATRIMOINE"

The French came out in droves to visit the thousands of historical and cultural sites opened to the public for the 21st annual "Journées du Patrimoine" ("Heritage Days"). With nearly 12 million participants—half a million more than in 2003—the program, held on September 18 and 19, was undoubtedly a great success. As part of this year’s science theme, numerous research institutions and restoration projects were among the weekend’s highlights. Another main attraction was the infrequently displayed Edict of Nantes at the Ministry of Religion. Signed in 1598 by Henry IV to end the Wars of Religion, this document is a lasting testimony to French religious tolerance. Popular sites around the country included the Abbey of Mont Saint-Michel (13,058 visitors), the Chateau du Haut-Koenigsberg (7,987 visitors), and the Abbey of Cluny (5,400 visitors). For more information, www.journeesdupatrimoine.culture.fr.
MINISTER OF EDUCATION François Fillon unveiled on September 28 a new government program that has as its ambitious goal nothing less than putting a notebook computer in the hands of every French university student. During a highly anticipated press conference, Fillon explained that providing students with their own computers and high-speed Internet access is indispensable if they are to thrive in the future global economy. Though 85 percent of French students regularly use the Internet, only 8 percent own a notebook computer.

In what has become a model of public-private partnership, the government has enlisted the support of nine major computer makers, ten software publishers, six banks and 80 percent of France’s universities to provide students with inexpensive, all-inclusive notebook packages. The participating companies (including Apple, Dell, HP, IBM, Intel, and Microsoft from the U.S.) will offer discounts and special services. The universities will provide technical support and free Internet access through wireless WiFi networks, and the banks will arrange financing adapted to the needs of impecunious students.

Thirty notebook models, specifically designed for students and all equipped with essential software as well as WiFi Internet capabilities, will be available for as little as 1 euro a day over a 36-month period. The government itself will spend about 4.5 million euros, primarily on a publicity campaign.

For more information (in French), please visit the government’s Web site www.delegation.internet.gouv.fr.

Riding on Air—Or Not... Michelin Unveils Prototype Wheels

MICHELIN, the world’s leading tire manufacturer, recently announced that it is developing two new wheels that are non-pneumatic, meaning they don’t require air. Designed with certain types of roads and driving conditions in mind, such as pothole-filled streets and rough terrain, they will be especially suitable for the emerging needs of countries with a growing driving population but with less developed transport infrastructures, such as China and India.

The two models, the "Airless" and the "Tweed," incorporate innovative technologies that will make them more resistant to tough driving conditions while using fewer raw materials. The "Airless" uses hoops in the cross section of the tires that absorb shocks (making it almost maintenance-free), and the "Tweed" is an easy to mount wheel with flexible spokes and a puncture-proof, retradable surface (it can be scaled down to fit wheelchairs).

The prototypes were showcased at the Paris Auto Show, from September 15 to October 10 (see NFF issue 04.10). Another Michelin innovation presented at the show was the "Active Wheel" concept, which actually houses its own electric engine, making it extremely responsive to road conditions. Equipped with an active suspension system, it is designed specifically for electric fuel-cell vehicles (clean-running fuel cells will likely replace gasoline-powered engines in the future). The French company hopes these tires will become widely available within the next 15 years.

Neolithic Family Burial Site Found

AFRICO-BRITISH archeological team recently discovered a family of six, along with ceramic objects, in a 6,000-year-old funerary chamber. For the past ten years, the team, funded by the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, has been meticulously excavating a large prehistoric burial barrow located at Prissé-la-Charmerie (in western France, near La Rochelle). The archeologists have already uncovered three funerary chambers and expect to continue working for another five years on the site, which seems to have been built in three different stages over a period of 400 years.

The newly uncovered funerary chamber contains the near-perfectly preserved bodies of two men, a woman, and three children. Next to them were placed two ceramic objects as well as a pearl and an abalone shell carved into a jewelry piece. The team hopes that these new finds will offer clues to the lives of the Paleolithic men who lived in what is now France. Much is known of their diets, as well as their domestication of animals and their agricultural skills, but much less is known of their society and religious beliefs. The chamber, which has remained untouched for thousands of years, may provide some insight into their views on death and the afterlife, as well as on their funerary customs.

Tree Genome Decoded for First Time

The French National Institute for Agricultural Research (INRA) announced late September that the 40,000 genes of the poplar tree have been identified and inventoried. Two hundred scientists working in teams from around the world, including four teams from France and Belgium, presented their findings at the INRA in Orléans. The scientists hope to learn more about wood formation, nutrition, and resistance to drought and pathogens.

RENAULT DRINKS FROM FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

French carmaker Renault has announced that it will hire 10,000 new employees in 2005, half of whom will be from countries other than France. The new recruits will work in all areas of the company, and the majority will be young, with less than three years’ experience. The new employees are part of an effort to both internationalize and rejuvenate the company. Countries such as Russia, Slovenia, and Turkey, where Renault owns factories, will especially benefit from this rush of new jobs.

ALSTOM TO BUILD NEW CRUISE LINERS

French shipbuilder Alstom has won an 800-million-euro contract to build two cruise ships for the Italian company MSC Cruises. The contract for the 1,275-cabin ships, to be delivered in 2006 and 2007, is the first of its kind for the company in over three years. Both ships will carry up to 3,000 passengers and 1,000 crew and are intended for cruises in the Mediterranean and the Caribbean.

OMNIPRESENT TOUCH-SCREENS

Imagine changing the channel on your coffee table or turning on the lights by touching the wall! A startup firm out of the University of Paris is on the brink of commercializing technology that can turn any object into a touchscreen device. Sensitive Object has developed piezo-electric sensors—which can be integrated into most materials—that can analyze the acoustic messages sent by tapping fingers. For more information: www.sensitive-object.com.

CLIPPERTON ADVENTURE

French explorer Jean-Louis Etienne and his team announced that they will set off to Clipperon, a French atoll in the northern Pacific, on an “inventory adventure” in December. They will be studying the flora and fauna both on land and in the ocean in hopes of learning more about the unique biodiversity of this uninhabited atoll. Etienne will be keeping a daily journal of his observations on his Web site, www.jeanlouisetienne.fr.

Laptops for the Price of Daily Coffee

New government program will help put notebook computers in the hands of university students
Vast Urban Renewal Plan Proposed

French Labor Minister Jean-Louis Borloo unveiled a $22 billion proposal in September aimed at combating the growing problems associated with France’s less affluent regions. Issues such as unemployment, religious extremism and alienation have become increasingly prevalent in France’s poorer areas, and the purpose of Borloo’s plan is to cure these social afflictions by fully reintegrating the inhabitants of these neighborhoods into society. Borloo declared that the purpose of the program is “to prepare for the future while nursing immediate wounds.”

Often compared to the Marshall Plan (the U.S. program of comprehensive economic aid given to Europe during its post-WWII reconstruction) but perhaps more akin to President Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, Borloo’s proposal is centered around improving employment and housing, and will seek to create one million new jobs and half a million new homes. It will involve regional governments but also nonprofit organizations, charities and private companies.

The plan is particularly targeted at the large number of disaffected youths who often have little prospect of employment. Through public service projects, the Borloo Plan hopes to prevent further alienation among the youths as well as tackle the high levels of unemployment that they have endured for the past few years.

President Jacques Chirac has already given his support for the plan, stating that it would improve the job market for France’s most impoverished. Borloo’s proposal is set to be debated in the Parliament in October and is likely to be approved, given the ruling party’s large majority in Parliament.

Athletes Overcome Disabilities in 2004 Paralympic Games

Forty-four years after the first Paralympic Games were held in Rome, Athens welcomed their 12th edition from September 17 to 28, following its hosting of the Olympic Games this summer. With 3,969 paralympic athletes from 136 countries participating, these were the most successful paralympic games ever.

After two weeks of competition in 18 different sports between the best disabled athletes in the world, France finished sixth, with a total medal haul of 74 (China came first, with 141 medals, the United States fourth, with 88, and Canada seventh, with 72). With 18 gold, 26 silver and 30 bronze medals, “the assessment is satisfying,” estimated the president of the French Handisport Federation (FFH), André Auburger.

French women brought back 10 of France’s 18 gold medals. With her four gold medals (in the 100-meter, 200-meter, 400-meter and 800-meter races), the visually challenged Parisian sprinter, Assia El Hannouni, was particularly impressive. As for the Albanian paraplegic swimmer Béatrice Hess, 42, she brought home two gold and three silver medals (giving her a grand total of 13 Olympic gold medals over three Games!). Other noteworthy performances included French flag bearer Joël Jeannot’s gold in the 10,000-meter armchair race, and amputee Clavel Kayat’s silver medals in the 100- and 200-meter races.

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

French "Spiderman" Mounts Montparnasse

Solo urban climber Alain Robert scaled the 59-story Montparnasse Tower in Paris on September 22 using only his bare hands. The 42-year-old, billing himself as the French Spiderman, accomplished the awe-inspiring feat without any safety apparatus. The 700-foot-tall office building, France’s tallest skyscraper, is one of more than 30 edifices on Robert’s impressive résumé, which includes the Eiffel Tower and the Empire State Building. Spiderman ascends these structures while overcoming a case of vertigo and other aftereffects of his two serious training accidents. For more information, please visit: www.alainrobert.com.
"Marie Claire" Celebrates 50th Anniversary

Leading ladies’ magazine helped pave the way for the rights of women

LAUNCHED IN its modern incarnation in October 1954, the French monthly Marie Claire has proved so successful that it is now published in 14 languages in 25 different editions worldwide. The magazine actually first appeared in 1937 as a weekly review, and it clearly met pent-up demand: readers were so enthusiastic on the day of its first release that police officers had to intervene to control the large crowds forming at newsstands!

Unlike most women’s magazines at the time, Marie Claire started to discuss subjects that interested women not as mothers or housewives, but rather as enlightened, independent individuals. The magazine covers traditional topics such as fashion and beauty without ignoring more controversial ones like abortion, homosexuality or prostitution. For 50 years, the magazine has considered itself to be a mirror of French society, reflecting the evolution of the status of women and their fight toward emancipation.

Marie Claire is now an international group running several other periodicals, in particular Cosmopolitan. In France, Marie Claire is one of the leading magazines among women’s publications, with more than three million readers a month. The U.S. issue of Marie Claire is also very successful; it is America’s best-selling fashion magazine.

Back to Basics: TV Reality Show Recreates 1950’s School

FRENCH AUDIENCES are tuning in to a new reality television show that takes 24 students aged 14 to 16, and sends them to a 1950’s style disciplinarian boarding school in the town of Chavagnes-en-Paillers, near Nantes. Taught by certified educators, and immersed into the harsh French public school system of the fifties, the students toil through exams and disciplinarian exercises (but are spared corporal punishment) to complete a fictitious “certificate of studies”—the real certificate having been restored into the public school system, according to some critics, an attitude of disciplinarian functions, leading to what they believe is an increasingly lax atmosphere for learning. Many parents in France now wish that some form of stricter discipline be restored into the public school system, whether by imposing uniforms or using more disciplinarian teaching techniques.

Meanwhile, most commentators have welcomed the new show’s contribution to the debate by illustrating the best and worst of the old system for a vast audience, it sheds light on what the future could hold for public education in France.

Sounds and Lights in the Centre Pompidou

MODERN ART is not always simply a feast for the eyes but can be a banquet for the ears as well. Such is the idea behind the exposition “Sound and Light” which opened in Paris’s Centre Pompidou on September 22 and will run till January 3. The exhibit includes more than 400 pieces from artists the world over that can actually provoke dizziness. After such a jolt, one may calm down with Pierre Huyghe’s “Box of Light,” a cube filled with colored smoke, accompanied by the soothing notes of Satie’s “Gymnopédie.”

For more information, please visit www.cnac-op.fr.

CULTURE PASS FOR STUDENTS

The city of Paris is making culture and leisure more accessible for its students. The new “Etudiant de Paris” card will be provided this year to some 180,000 students who attend six of Paris’s universities, before being extended to all of the city’s universities and their 300,000-strong student body. The card provides free access to 15 museums, as well as discounts in theaters and sports facilities. It will soon also give students the right to borrow books from university libraries throughout the city.

AU REVOIR, TRISTESSE

François Sagan, whose novel Bonjour Tristesse (1954) made her an instant celebrity, died on September 24 in a Normandy hospital at the age of 69. After publishing Bonjour Tristesse when she was only 18, Sagan was hailed as the spokesman of her generation. The work created a national furor and eventually sold two million copies worldwide. She went on to publish 30 novels and nine plays. Numerous newspaper tributes honored Sagan, recognizing her as “more than a writing phenomenon: a writer, a woman, an era” and the “Bardot of literature.”

NAPOLEON’S JEWELS OF LOVE

Napoleon was no miser when it came to showing his affection, as demonstrated by an astounding display of jewelry at the Chaumet Jewelers’ private museum. The exhibition, “Napoléon Amoureux, Bijoux de l’Empire, des Aigles et du Cœur,” includes pieces that Napoleon commissioned (often from Chaumet) for his famous love, Joséphine de Beauharnais, as well as the emperor’s own personal adornments and gifts that he handed to his friends and loyal generals. Readings of the love letters Napoleon wrote to Joséphine are piped through exhibition rooms that faithfully replicate the Emperor’s salons (Chaumet Jewelers, 12 place Vendôme, Paris, till the end of December).

IONESCO REMEMBERED

Ten years have passed since the death of celebrated French-Romanian playwright Eugène Ionesco. The Parisian drama world marked his passing with the 15,000th performance of “La Cantatrice Chauve,” perhaps his most famous work, in July. Various theaters throughout Paris will be producing Ionesco’s plays, including the Hébertot theater and the Théâtre de la Ville which is launching its 2004-2005 season with the Ionesco classic, “Rhinelors.” “The Huchette theater, a veritable temple to Ionesco, is holding continuous runs of “La Leçon” and “La Cantatrice Chauve.”
MOVING WATERCOLOR STILL LIFES BY CÉZANNE

Art lovers in Los Angeles will be able to explore a lesser-known side of Paul Cézanne’s body of work at the J. Paul Getty Museum’s new exhibition, “Cézanne in the Studio: Still Life in Watercolors.” More than 20 watercolor still lifes, as well as sketches and exploratory studies, will be on display until January 2, 2005. Drawn from institutions around the world, many of the paintings have never before been loaned because of their medium’s fragile nature. Cézanne’s watercolors reveal a more human side of the artist, who was just as concerned with the interior world of his studio as he was with the landscapes for which he is better known. These works vividly depict humble items, including pots, bottles and tapestries, from the rustic world of Provence that Cézanne called home. By bringing attention to this more personal side of Cézanne, the Getty hopes to offer a better understanding of the artist and his creative process. For more information, please visit www.getty.edu.

That’s a Wrap
An exhibit at the Portland Art Museum examines the wrapping of Paris’s Pont Neuf

FOR HALF A CENTURY, artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude have been creating provocative works of temporary art with post-industrial materials. Using fabric, they have surrounded islands off the coast of Florida, constructed the 25-mile “Running Fence” in California and wrapped famous buildings such as the Reichstag in Berlin. For the first time, Americans have the opportunity to trace the course of one of their projects in the exhibit "The Pont Neuf Wrapped, Paris 1975-85," at Oregon’s Portland Art Museum. Until January 2, 2005, visitors will be able to examine the drawings, collages, photographs and correspondence that tell the complex story of how this project was realized, from its first conception to the final transformation of the structure.

Over a period of ten years, Christo and Jeanne-Claude worked to transform one of Paris’s most famous landmarks into one of the largest temporary artworks of all time. For 14 days in 1985, the Pont Neuf was wrapped in 454,178 square feet of gold-polyamide fabric to become the center of the avant-garde art world. The fabric, which was held down to the bridge’s surface by 42,900 feet of rope and steel chains encircling the base of each tower, clung closely to the shape of the Pont Neuf. Even as it was transformed into a sculpture, the Pont Neuf remained a functioning piece of architecture. Boats continued to travel under it and pedestrians walked on the fabric covering the sidewalks. In this way, the bridge was once again made the social heart of Paris—just as it had been 400 years ago.

This exhibit will also prepare American audiences for Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s next highly anticipated project, "The Gates, Central Park, New York 1979-2005," scheduled for February 2005. For 16 days, fabric will be hung from structures along Central Park’s footpaths, creating a “golden river appearing and disappearing beneath the bare branches of the trees.” Those who have witnessed the transformation of the Pont Neuf will not want to miss this one-of-a-kind event. For more information, please visit: www.portlandartmuseum.org and www.christojeanneclaude.net.