

Daniel's iPhone Photo Blog

An almost daily dose of lasting inconsequence...





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This book is for Eric whose idea it was.

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Daniel's iPhone Photo Blog

An almost daily dose of lasting inconsequence...

In January of 2009, I started something I had vowed I'd never do: I began publishing a blog. My Belgian email-buddy Pierre had launched a daily photographic newsletter called "PicOvZeDay" on November 3, 2008. His intention was to publish one or more daily photos on various topics. I was impressed with Pierre's decision: committing to publish daily is not easy!

Around the same time I was discussing photography with several people, most of whom were of the opinion that it was no wonder that some of my photographs were not bad since I had excellent equipment. This argument has always annoyed me; after all, some of the most famous and admired photographers worked with equipment that was far less sophisticated than many of today's so-called point and shoot cameras.

Pierre's newsletter and my desire to prove that a simple camera could be used to produce something worthwhile both led to my decision to embark on a blogging experiment. The original idea was to publish 365 entries, a year's worth, at a rhythm of approximately four or five a week. Every post had to feature just one photo, invariably taken with the simplest camera I own, the one found in the first and second-generation iPhone. To put the accent on my intended publishing frequency, and to avoid any unreasonable expectations as to the profundity of the contributions, I subtitled the blog *"An almost daily dose of lasting inconsequence..."*

I began on January 25, 2009 and "preloaded" the blog with three older photos so the page would not look so miserably empty. By early February, the idea of posting daily began to sound not only feasible but downright appealing. On February 11, I decided to try not to skip any more days, and amazingly, I was able to stick to that. I closed down the blog on February 10, 2010; that day, I published entry number 380, and the 365th without skipping a single day.

It's interesting to what extent such a purely self-imposed constraint can become a veritable obsession. On certain days, as the hours passed and I had neither photo nor idea, my stress level increased, and coming up with the day's blog entry became the most important task at hand. The relief I felt when I could finally push that "publish" button has to be experienced to be believed!

At some point, my son Eric suggested that I make a printed version of the blog, and this book is the result. Even though it is closed, the original blog it is still on-line and features many things the printed version simply cannot provide: links to additional photos and web resources, sound clips, cross-references, and so on. In some cases, I had to slightly modify the text in the book to avoid references to links that cannot exist on paper, but I have done my best to preserve the tone and spirit of the original entry.

I hope you enjoy this printed version of my iPhone Photo blog.

Daniel

Cannes, July 31, 2013

Il n'y a que l'éphémère qui est éternel.
Karl Lagerfeld

Sunday, November 23, 2008



Something's Fishy...

These scaly creatures caught my eye during a Sunday shopping excursion to a supermarket in Mougins, not at all a common occurrence around here as stores tend to be closed on Sundays. At times, though, exceptions are made, especially once one gets close to major holidays. Be that as it may, what's fishy is that I'm starting things off by cheating: even though I'm beginning this blog on Sunday, January 25, 2009, the first few images precede that date. This is because I wanted to kick things off with a few entries instead of a blank slate. In a few pages we will be in sync, and it will not be necessary for me to use pictures from the past.

Saturday, December 6, 2008



A Day in Switzerland

So we took our car to Nice airport, a plane to Geneva, and a train to Neuchâtel, and why? Oh, to eat lake fish at the “Restaurant des Halles” and have coffee at “Wodey Suchard”, the very same shop where Philippe Suchard first came up with the idea to mix milk and chocolate, thus inventing milk chocolate, but that was in 1825. It is to commemorate something slightly more recent, namely, Vicki’s birthday, that we made the pilgrimage to the home of Swiss chocolate, fabulous freshwater fish, and, incidentally, the place where we had met some 34 years earlier. The weather wasn’t that great, and it was raining as we were waiting for our train back to Geneva. Did we mind? No!

Sunday, January 4, 2009



A New Ship in Town

People familiar with Antibes' Billionaire's Wharf (*le quai des milliardaires*) know that it's the place in the harbor of Antibes where one doesn't keep boats: here, we're talking ships, and big ones at that. Even knowing that, we were stunned to discover the Dilbar, a gorgeous and brand new (built in 2008) yacht. At 110 meters (just over 260 feet), the Dilbar is, at the time of writing, the 26th largest yacht in the world. Apparently, it belongs to a Russian entrepreneur who thought his previous yacht was getting a little cramped. True, it was only 60 meters (197 feet) long... We'd love to visit some of these ships, but sadly, we don't move in the same circles as the owners...

Sunday, January 25, 2009



Theoretically...

Around the Mediterranean, people tend to be a great deal less concerned with times and dates than the folks in northern Europe. When having any kind of work done, one is inevitably told that *normalement* everything will be finished on such-and-such a day. Naturally, nothing ever happens normally, and so delays are inevitable. By the same token, when a shop announces that it will open at 9:30 in the morning, expect an unlocking of the doors between 9:30 and 9:45; one is not a slave to the clock in these parts. All the more refreshing, then, that we saw this sign in the *Atelier Carpe Diem* in Valbonne today: The Atelier is theoretically open from 10:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. and from 2:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. If not, I suppose one can call or talk to the cat...

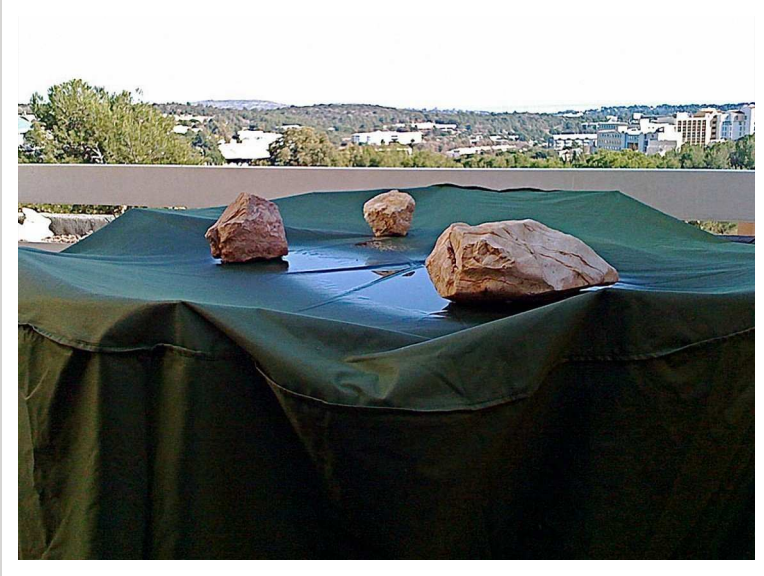
Tuesday, January 27, 2009



Ebony and Ivory

I'm off for two days because of a gastroenteritis; that's the thing we used to call an upset stomach and that our mothers would cure with spoonfuls of chicken soup. Now, of course, it's gotten a bit more complicated. If one is going to be out of work for a couple of days (more for the sake of the coworkers) one needs a doctor's certificate, and so this morning I found myself sitting in an empty waiting room when these two chairs caught my eye. Mentally humming "Ebony and Ivory", I took out my iPhone and captured the scene. A few minutes later, the waiting room was almost full. Looks like I timed it just right this time, no small feat for the guy who unerringly picks the wrong line in supermarkets, banks, post offices... A small triumph, true, but it made me feel better already.

Wednesday, January 28, 2009



Seasonal Changes

In these final days of January, it seems that spring is almost ready to, well, spring. The puddle on the tarpaulin that covers the round table on our terrace during the winter months is shrinking rapidly, and with each passing day, there is less reason to keep the rocks that weigh it down in place. True, the last couple of months have been awful: unreasonable (and atypical) amounts of rain, very high winds, and only occasional sunny days, but things seem to be improving now. Pretty soon, we should be able to roll up the tarpaulin and banish it to the cellar until the end of the fall; for several months, the terrace will become our favorite dining room again. We are ready!

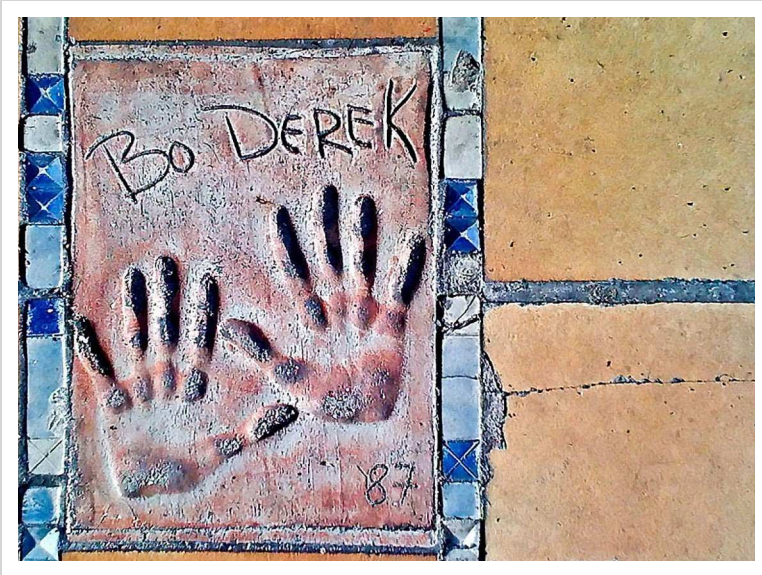
Thursday, January 29, 2009



Perspective

It is Black Thursday, and France is on strike. In this area, there are no buses, no trams, very few trains, only a few teachers in class... in short, things are a mess. The unions are protesting the dwindling purchasing power, the growing poverty rate, the shrinking job market, the fact that some of the remaining jobs are moving overseas... all legitimate complaints, to be sure. Unfortunately, the unions are very long on blaming the government for not solving the problems and very short on suggesting solutions. They want more pay and benefits for the workers and don't realize that making French labor less competitive will hardly keep the jobs from going to Asia. Between the Left and Right, it's a dialogue of the deaf; a strike will not provide the new perspective we need.

Saturday, January 31, 2009



Ten

We went to Cannes today, my wife to get her hair done and I to buy iLife '09, the latest version of Apple's photo, movie, sound, DVD, and Web suite. While my better half arose in the middle of the night and took a bus, I slept late and drove. After I had purchased what I needed, an SMS informed me that the hair job would take longer than expected, so I walked around the film festival building and looked at the hand prints of the various actresses, actors, and directors. I spotted Bo's plaque and recalled that she had, at least for the duration of a movie, been a perfect "10". Since the iPhoto part of iLife '09 sports face detection, I wondered if it would recognize my wife who had left the house a "9" at best and was sure to emerge improved after all this time...

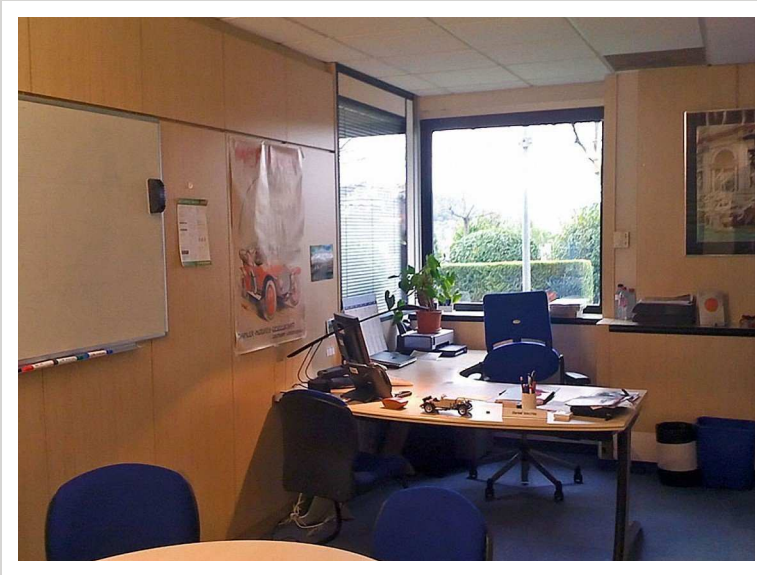
Monday, February 2, 2009



Cereal Recession

When it comes to food shopping, we basically have two choices: Carrefour, the gigantic hypermarket where one routinely loses much time to save little money, or Champion, the local super-market where shopping is faster, a little bit more expensive, and where one has a more limited selection because the store is smaller. Ironically, the Champion supermarket belongs to Carrefour. Why is that ironic? Because more and more, products we like to buy at Champion are replaced with less expensive Carrefour branded ones (such as all the cereals in the photo except “Fitness” at the lower right) that are evidently more popular with the clientele. So to buy non-Carrefour brands, we have to go to Carrefour where there is enough shelf space to accommodate several brands. This economic crisis really is beginning to affect everyone!

Tuesday, February 3, 2009



Shelter From the Storm

Contrary to what I reported a few days ago, winter and rain are back, and the weather has been absolutely horrid. The only consolation is that it is worse almost everywhere else. Ten days ago, Atlantic storm Klaus killed at least 15 people in southwestern France and northern Spain. In France alone, the damages are estimated at roughly 1.4 billion euros, and tens of thousands of homes were without power (and therefore heat) for several days. If the weather forecast can be trusted, the cold and wet will continue for the better part of the week in this area, and if all goes well, things should clear up just in time for the weekend. In the meantime, it's not so bad in the office: the furniture is comfortable, the work interesting, the colleagues friendly, and there's a thermostat.

Thursday, February 5, 2009



By the Dawn's Early Light

At 7:32 this morning, as I walked down the steps on the way to the garage where I keep my car, I was greeted by this lovely early morning sky. It seems like such a short time ago that at this hour, there would not have been nearly enough light for the built-in camera in my iPhone to produce a usable image. I love it when the days are getting longer! By the way, the illusion of a brighter and perhaps even sunny day was short-lived: the clouds rolled in quickly, and it rained most of the day again. Surely we must be breaking all kinds of precipitation records this season...

Friday, February 6, 2009



Endermology

I did something to my neck, so I need a few session with a good physical therapist to get whatever kinks exist kneaded out of my system. While I was sitting in the waiting area, this advertisement for a lipomassage caught my eye, and I thought how unlikely this poster would be in an American waiting room. It seems that in these parts, people are far more comfortable with nudity and sexuality. For example, during AIDS awareness campaigns, McDonald's serve a *café branché* (a coffee with a condom), and there is a government program to install condom dispensers in all high schools. The US strategy consists of preaching abstinence. Can you guess which country has the higher percentage of teen pregnancies? Time for a change in America!

Saturday, February 7, 2009



Haven

We went to Nice today, and while my better half shopped for things that I found somewhat less than totally enthralling (a quilted bedspread and a birthday present for a colleague), I spent a little over an hour walking around town. For the first time in several days, it wasn't raining; at times, one could even observe a timid sun peeking out from behind the clouds. Consequently, the streets and stores were pretty crowded. If one takes the time to explore the quiet streets (here the *Rue de Longchamp*) one can find amazingly beautiful havens of peace and quiet amid the hustle and bustle of the shopping areas. For aficionados of Google Earth, the coordinates of this place (for entering into the program's "Fly To" box) are 43°41'56.25"N, 7°16'2.63"E—enjoy the trip!

Sunday, February 8, 2009



Saint Blaise Festival

From February 6 through 8, Valbonne celebrated the St. Blaise festival, a weekend dedicated to products of the land, such as wines, cheeses, olive oils, honey, and other tasty stuff. Only few of the items for sale, such as the baskets in this photo, were not edible. Many people dressed up in regional costumes, and groups of street musicians alternated with flower floats in making their way through those narrow village streets that had not been converted into an open-air market. The Valbonne heritage museum was offering free tours, children activities were planned, the local boy scouts showed off some of their skills, and even a few rides were set up on the edge of the village. From the looks of it, a good time was had by all.

Monday, February 9, 2009



Tasty Stuff

Every once in a while I allow myself an exception and publish a photo that was not taken on the day of the blog entry, in this case, an image from yesterday's Saint Blaise Festival in Valbonne. At every corner, there was food for sale. Vicki (in the brown coat) chose olive and onion fritters while I preferred a table a few meters up the road where they had anise cookies and other stuff for people with a sweet tooth. It's not obvious from this picture, but Valbonne is arranged in a grid with the streets intersecting at right angles. The village was built in 1529, though its church dates back to 1199. That, however, is a story for another day. In the meantime, you can launch Google Earth and fly to this table at 43°38'29.58"N, 7°0'29.16"E.

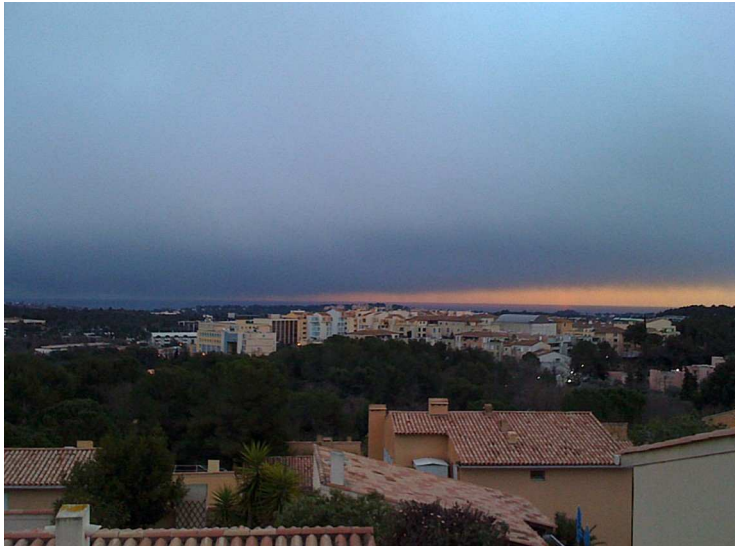
Wednesday, February 11, 2009



The Hunters

A few of us gathered by the coffee machine this morning to celebrate Benno's birthday by eating croissants in his honor (the least we could do since he bought them) and play with our respective gadgets. In the case of Magnus, Benno, and I, the gadget is an iPhone. I snapped the picture above when the two hunters were checking whether they had managed to capture at least a portion of poor Natalie (without an "h") who had fled under one of the coffee tables to prevent the boys from photographically having their way with her. I still don't know for sure whether Natalie's dive was successful or not, but judging from the smiles, it seems a fair bet that the young lady from Berlin was caught. Now I need a shot of Natalie as well... And yes, that's where we work.

Thursday, February 12, 2009



Dusk

Tonight, looking over Garbejaïre to the Mediterranean from our terrace at a quarter to six, one could see dark, threatening clouds accumulating, leaving just a thin, orange-colored sliver of sky. Another 30 minutes or so, and this view could easily become the illustration of a story that begins with, "It was a dark and stormy night." Garbejaïre is not an independent village; it is one of the residential sections of the park of Sophia Antipolis, just like Haut Sartoux where we live. The actual village of Valbonne is a few minutes away by car. The park may not be the greatest location, but it does have advantages: proximity to work and a view that is usually a great deal better than this are but two of the benefits.

Friday, February 13, 2009



Stately

This is the entrance of the main building on the Amadeus campus. There are countless olive trees on this property, and none older and more stately than this beauty that contrasts so nicely with the modern architecture. Normally, olive trees don't require much care at all; I once asked the person who trims mine once a year (when I tried it myself many moons ago, I instantly became the butt of all the neighborhood jokes) whether I should water the tree in the summer. "Only if it makes you feel better," he replied, "the tree doesn't care." Here at work we need to pamper the olive trees a bit more because the lawn areas require fertilizer which is very bad for the olive trees. Apparently, it's a real challenge to have both a lush lawn and healthy olive trees.

Saturday, February 14, 2009



Forville

This morning, we took the bus from Valbonne to Cannes; at 1 euro per person one way, you can't beat it: even for two people, the cost of a roundtrip is less than one would have to pay for parking alone. The communities around here really have done a good job improving public transportation, and often it is not only more convenient but also less expensive to keep the car in the garage. Around 10 AM, the covered Forville market was pretty busy already, with people buying fruit, vegetables, cheeses, and other locally made products. Flowers did pretty well also, it being Valentine's Day. We took a walk by the harbor and had a lovely lunch at *Chez Louis* before heading back to the bus terminal by the station for our ride home.

Sunday, February 15, 2009



Doubt

We were back in Cannes this afternoon to go to the small Arcades cinema where the movie *Doubt* (starring Meryl Streep, Philip Seymour-Hoffman, and Amy Adams) was playing in VO (*Version Originale*). Because it was the last day of one of the many trade shows that take place in Cannes every year, traffic was horrendous, and we barely made it on time. The house lights had just been turned down when we entered the theater, and it took a while for us to get used to the darkness and sit down with sufficient confidence not to end up in the lap of a perfect stranger. The movie was enjoyable and thought-provoking, even though the cliché ending was disappointing. Still, we recommend the film. In case of doubt, so to speak, go see it!

Monday, February 16, 2009



Médiathèque

Our local *Médiathèque* opened to the public on May 21, 2007. It serves the function of public library with books, periodicals, newspapers, and a decent movie and audio section. In addition, it has an 80 seat auditorium and areas where workshops for kids and adults alike can be conducted. To Americans, this may not be a big deal because public libraries are so widespread in the US. Here, however, the *Médiathèque* was a most welcome addition to the neighborhood. Those who read French can take a look online at what this center has to offer. By the way, the text on the building, somewhat liberally translated, reads, "Reading is the only way to live several lives." Now this is the kind of thing I don't mind spending my tax money on!

Tuesday, February 17, 2009



Carrefour de la Jarre

The “Carrefour de la Jarre” (intersection of the jar) is one of the many traffic circles in Sophia Antipolis. In fact, in the entire park, there is only one traffic light; intersections are handled by what the British call “roundabouts”. This is great in low to medium traffic, but during rush hour it tends to get difficult. This particular traffic circle features an enormous (and fake, of course) earthenware jar. For years, the thing was broken and a sorry sight. There was a rumor that the border between the townships of Valbonne and Biot ran exactly through the jar, and that consequently lengthy talks and negotiations were required to determine which town had to pay for how much of the repair. As the say in Italy, *Se non è vero, è ben trovato* (if it’s not true, it’s well invented).

Wednesday, February 18, 2009



The Bank

So we had to make an appointment with the bank to settle a few questions, such as why we have to pay more and more money for fewer and fewer services (would you believe it costs extra to get a statement that lists transactions by date instead of by amount in decreasing order?) I was bracing myself for the worst, especially when we were told that our usual account manager was absent in spite of having set up the meeting. Appointments are necessary because the bank's opening hours can be summed up with the words, "when I'm at work." As it turns out we were taken care of by a very nice and enthusiastic young man, and from what it looks like right now, all our issues have been resolved. Let's hope that it really is the case; a week or so will tell.

Thursday, February 19, 2009



Yellow

The Mimosa season is upon us again, reason for some to rejoice as this signals the end of winter, but for those with allergies it's bad news. Years ago, a lady who worked in my department had a secret admirer who, early one morning, deposited an enormous Mimosa bouquet on her desk. Little did he know that the object of his desire was extremely allergic to Mimosa; no sooner had Annie stepped into her office that she was a sneezing, wheezing, and coughing heap of misery who, half blind with swollen and watering eyes, had to be escorted outside. We never did find out who the secret admirer was as he understandably kept a low profile after that. In the meantime, things are turning yellow around here and it's pretty, even if one has to enjoy the flowers from a distance.

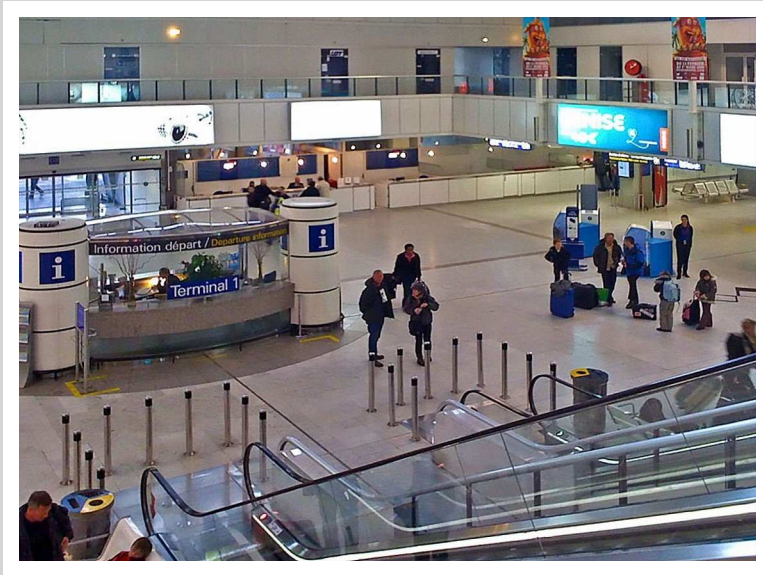
Friday, February 20, 2009



Work Lunch

In the back of our company restaurant, there are a few private dining rooms that are usually reserved for use by the Executive Briefing Center. However, when they are not booked, one can sometimes reserve one if one asks nicely. Today, we had visitors from a consulting firm we are working with; we picked up our food in the main part of the cafeteria, then took our trays to the back to eat and discuss our project in a more peaceful and quiet setting. Two other participants of this business lunch (not including myself) are off camera, but I did manage to catch Jean-Yves and Emmanuel in what can only be described as a relaxed and happy pose. I only hope they enjoyed lunch (and the discussion) as much as they seem to in this picture!

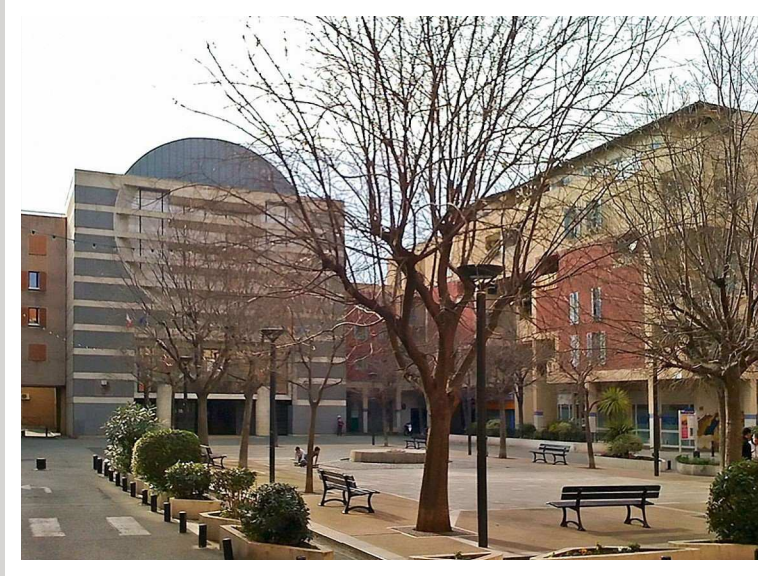
Saturday, February 21, 2009



Airport

At 8:12 this morning, terminal 1 of Nice airport was still surprisingly empty considering it was the first day of school vacation in this region. For winter and spring school vacations, France is split into three zones. This year, zone A begins its vacation on February 7 and school resumes on February 23; zone B (that's us) starts on February 21 and classes begin again on March 9; finally, zone C's first vacation day is on February 14, with classes resuming on March 2. Clearly, this weekend is the tough one: zone B leaves for vacation just as zone A heads home. This results in the dreaded *chassé-croisé* (heavy two-way traffic). In the winter it affects mostly rail and road, so my wife had no trouble making her flight to London and onward to Raleigh.

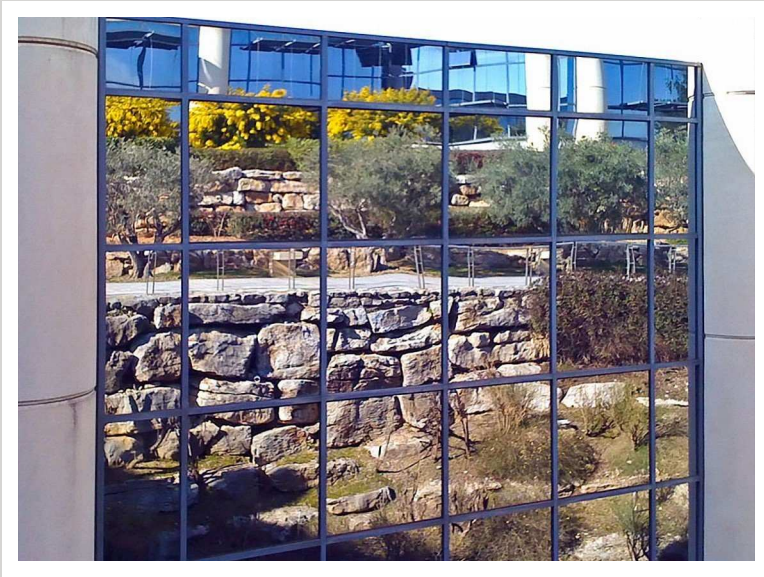
Sunday, February 22, 2009



Place Méjane

In the middle of the afternoon today, the *Place Méjane*, the central square of Garbejaire, was practically empty. This is not really exceptional: weekends are usually quiet around here. After all, Sophia Antipolis is an industrial park that thrives during business hours. When offices, stores, and the many restaurants that cater to the professional community are closed, there's not much life. This is good enough reason for many not to live in the park; on the other hand, living in the park makes commuting to work very convenient. Incidentally, the boxy gray building in the background, nicknamed "the washing machine" for obvious reasons, is a branch of Valbonne's town hall where one can take care of all kinds of administrative matters — of which there is never a shortage in France!

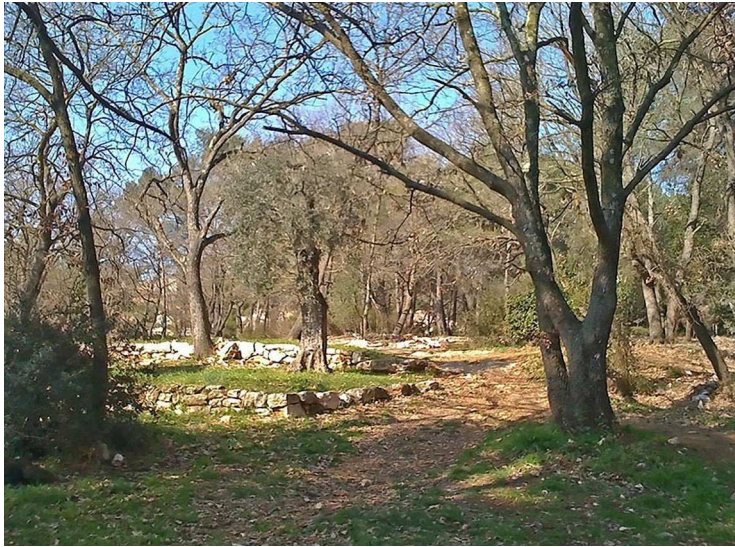
Monday, February 23, 2009



Building B

Essentially, the main and oldest part of the Amadeus campus in Sophia Antipolis consists of two U-shaped building with the two open ends of the Us facing each other, connected by glass-enclosed walkways. Outside, an olive tree bordered alley connects the two buildings; it is from there that this photo was taken. We are looking at building B; at this point, it has four floors, numbered 1 through 4. Reflected in the glass is the other side of building B, with floors 3 through 5, a result of the fact that the site is on a hill. The main entrance and lobby are on the third floor; this is a source of considerable confusion to visitors who inevitably get lost in the many corridors that mostly look alike. Use Google Earth to fly to N 43° 37.38', E 7° 3.51' to get a better idea of the layout.

Tuesday, February 24, 2009



Woods

In spite of the many businesses, Sophia Antipolis is still a park. There are large meadows, jogging trails, a little river, biking paths, tennis courts, playgrounds, and many wooded areas like this one. Using this lovely path, it takes less than ten minutes to get from Haut Sartoux, where we live, to Garbejaire, where the post office and other conveniences are located. The elementary school is just outside Garbejaire as well, and both our sons used to run to class every morning in five minutes flat. In the afternoon, it would take them about 45 minutes to walk back home; not surprisingly, the woods were far more alluring than the prospect of doing homework... This was a great area for the kids to grow up in; let's hope it stays that way for a while.

Wednesday, February 25, 2009



La Ferme Bermond

Just a few steps from the wooded path shown yesterday is *La ferme Bermond*, an old farmhouse that has been converted into a community center. All kinds of indoor and outdoor activities go on here, mostly for young people: dance lessons, sports events and tournaments, parties, concerts, flea markets, art exhibits, lectures, photography courses (my older son learned to develop his own prints in a wet lab here), and so on. It is also a place for kids to hang out in a safe environment. Most of these activities are free or are offered at rock-bottom prices because *La ferme Bermond* is heavily subsidized by the town of Valbonne. Yet another intelligent way to spend my tax money...

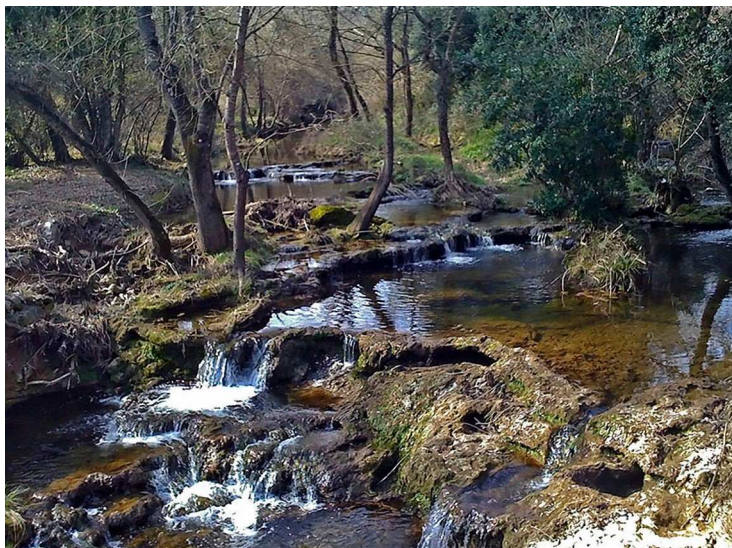
Thursday, February 26, 2009



Gendarmerie

In addition to the municipal police who mostly look the other way whenever the opportunity arises to give out parking tickets, thus encouraging people to park willy-nilly in the most inconvenient locations, the closest thing we have to a police station is the local branch of the *Gendarmerie Nationale*. The *gendarmes* (originally “*gens d’armes*”, or “armed people”) are a branch of the army that does the work of the *Police Nationale* in more rural areas, such as here. This assumes, of course, that whatever heinous crime they have to rush to is not discovered at an inconvenient time, for the *gendarmerie* keeps strict office hours: it closes over lunch and during the night. It says something for this area that this is not a problem.

Friday, February 27, 2009



La Bouillide

On the five or six minute walk from my office to the restaurant of the hotel *Petit Mercure* where I met my friend Didier (of Sainte Victoire fame) for lunch, I crossed *La Bouillide*, a small river that flows through the park of Sophia Antipolis before merging with the *Brague* between Valbonne and Biot. With all the rain we've had recently, *la Bouillide* is fairly vocal; in the summer, on the other hand, it all but dries up completely. Footpaths follow the river through the park, and it's pleasant to be able to escape into this kind of environment at a moment's notice. Having scenery like this a mere few minutes outside one's office is one of the great things about working in this area. And before I forget: Thanks for lunch, Didier. I look forward to *La Camargue*!

Saturday, February 28, 2009



The Billionaire

A couple of years ago, my doctor moved from another community in this area to Valbonne. "Did you ever," he asked at the time in an almost reverent whisper, "buy fruit from the billionaire?" Curiously enough, I knew exactly whom he meant: greengrocer Dumanois, next to the parking lot outside the old village (43°38'29.17"N, 7°0'24.65"E). And yes, I buy fruit there frequently. Stuff that is available elsewhere is sometimes up to twice as expensive than at the supermarket, but also at least twice as good. I try to stay away from fruit that nobody else carries in a given season: I've seen beautiful cherries in the middle of winter... for over 20 euros a pound! The gorgeous apples and pears I bought earlier today were far more reasonably priced.

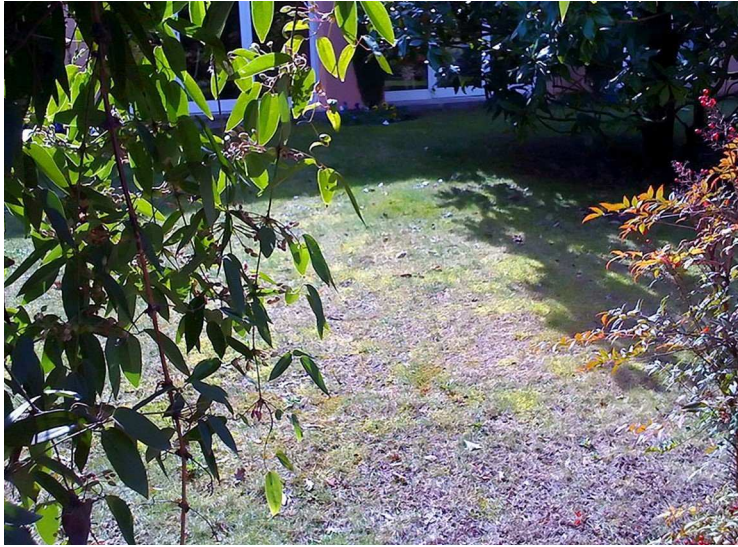
Sunday, March 1, 2009



Rain

Today, it was raining again for a change. I drove to the Rialto in Nice to see *Gran Torino*, the new Clint Eastwood movie. On my way there, it was drizzling, and as things had not improved a great deal by the time I walked out of the theater, I decided to abandon my originally planned stroll through Nice and head home. On the *Promenade des Anglais*, immediately before passing the airport, I was stopped by a traffic light just as the rain intensified and the drizzle turned into a downpour. I switched off my windshield wipers, grabbed the iPhone, and waited until the rain had distorted the view before taking the picture (special message to Susan in New York: Look, Susan, no blue sky!) And the movie? Highly recommended, but only if you like Clint Eastwood. I do.

Monday, March 2, 2009



Sunlight

After not having eaten at the *Petit Mercure* for many weeks, I found myself having lunch there for the second time in as many business days. The weather was balmy, so I walked the short distance from my office and arrived on the scene a few minutes early. I thus had ample time to walk around the premises in search of today's iPhone photo. Near the entrance, I noticed how the streaming sunlight illuminated these lush green leaves from behind. What better image to mark this early Mediterranean March Monday, I thought, especially after yesterday's dismal skies that my lunch companion who hails from Brittany claimed reminded her of her home. "Or Belgium," I added, and with this in mind I name this image "*Été Liègeois*" and dedicate it to Pierre.

Tuesday, March 3, 2009



Eganaude

Early in the morning, this scene is normally supplemented by hordes of screaming kids running hither and thither and automobiles clogging up roadways and parking areas as parents drop off their progeny, but on this Tuesday of a second winter vacation week, the *collège de l'Éganaude* looks more like a deserted medium-security detention center than a school for 11 to 15 year old pupils. In general, driving around Sophia Antipolis is a pleasure during school vacations; it seems that the schools are responsible for most of the area's traffic, not to mention a large portion of the park's noise level. This particular school is right across the street from where I work, and so I really cherish school vacations, a sentiment no doubt shared by most of the "inmates"...

Wednesday, March 4, 2009



Trout

That dead fish in my plate turned out to be pretty tasty, but the vegetables didn't look that hot: I am not a huge fan of ratatouille, and the only green stuff they had was drenched in a cheese sauce and was thus off limits. In a pinch, I had to make do with mashed potatoes and a hardboiled egg, not the vitamin-laden veggies I would have preferred, but beggars can't be choosers. In a cafeteria environment, trout is a mixed blessing: if it's even slightly overcooked, the bones will stick to the meat which makes it difficult to get them all out. Here, I'm happy to say, they appear to know this sort of thing: once the head and tail had been cut off, one slice of the knife was enough to expose the center of the fish, and all the bones came off in one piece. We are, after all, in France!

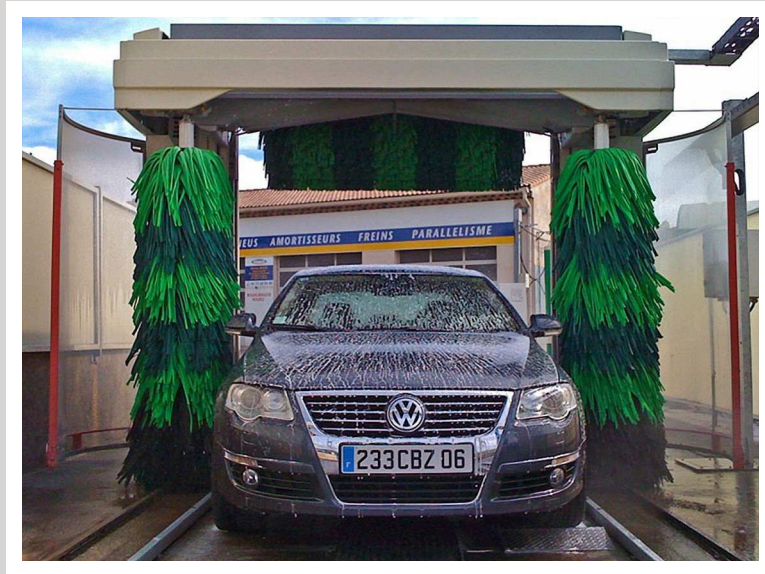
Thursday, March 5, 2009



Lemons

Lemons are a pretty big thing in this area. In Menton, there is a lemon festival (*la fête du citron*) that takes place every year around carnival time. In fact, it is probably fair to say that Menton celebrates its carnival around a lemon-based theme every year. Other citrus fruit are featured as well: on many of the floats, huge figures made of hundreds, and sometimes even thousands, of lemons, oranges, tangerines, and other citrus fruit are on display. This year's edition of the festival began on February 13 and just ended yesterday. Today's image doesn't show fancy exhibition grade lemons but the incredibly flavorful type one can find in many local markets. Plus, of course, it's very easy to grow your own, so many people do.

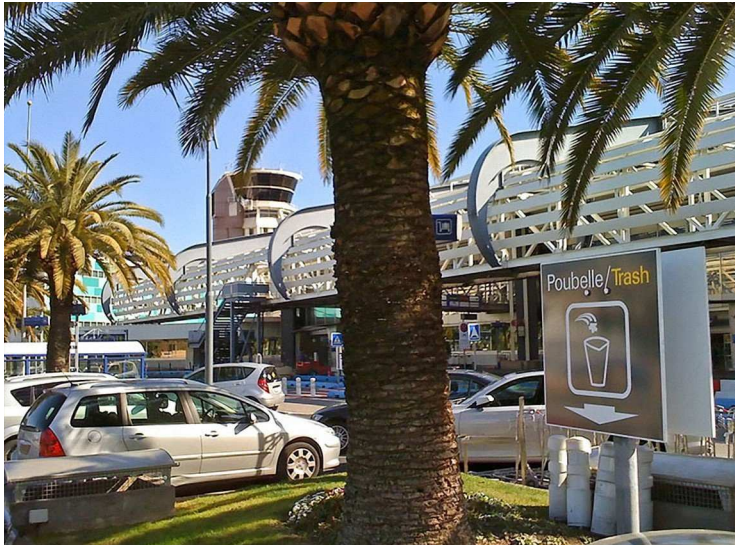
Friday, March 6, 2009



Optimism

Tomorrow, my wife returns from a trip to North Carolina, and it wouldn't do to pick her up at the airport in a filthy car. *Météo France* predicted clear skies for Saturday, but a very unstable situation with a non-negligible chance of rain for today. During my lunch hour, I thought things were just fine, so I let the machine at the BP station remove the dirt and mud from several days of hideous weather from my Passat. I was on my way back to the office when clouds rolled in out of nowhere; I modified my itinerary, parked the car in its garage... and went back to work in my wife's Polo (hey, it hadn't just been washed, after all). Naturally, the sun is now out in all its glory, and there's not a single cloud in sight. Murphy's law strikes again...

Saturday, March 7, 2009



NCE

Promptly at 2 p.m. today, I parked my car at NCE (Nice airport), terminal 1. Regular readers, or at least those familiar with yesterday's entry, know that I was there for a pick-up (always a great deal more enjoyable than a drop-off) and that my car was squeaky clean. Nice, the airport serving Monaco and the *Côte d'Azur*, is the busiest in France after Charles-de-Gaulle and Orly in Paris. In 2008, there were 183,612 airplane movements, an average of just over 500 takeoffs and landings per day. Not too bad for a two-runway airport! The 2008 passenger count was 10,382,566, or over 28,300 per day. The layout can be viewed in Google Earth (N 43° 39.95', E 7° 12.78'); the GPS receiver in the iPhone nailed the exact spot from where this photo was taken.

Sunday, March 8, 2009



Cancerilles

The *Château de Cancerilles* (N 43° 16.42', E 5° 55.43') is located in the Var, roughly 10 miles north of Toulon as the crow flies. It is where our favorite rosé wine is made, and since our supply was dwindling alarmingly, we decided to take a drive and restock. When we got there, we were greeted by these two not so fearsome (but rather loud) “watchdogs”. We originally found this place because our favorite restaurant recommended one of their wines, and we liked it so much that we decided to purchase some of our own. Today, we had left our checkbook at home, and the machine that validates credit cards was out of order. As a result, we drove off with a trunkful of wine without paying. “Just send me a check,” the owner said. How very civilized!

Monday, March 9, 2009



Vineyard

Another photograph taken yesterday at the *Château de Cancerilles* winery. The domain is very old; the original wine cellars were built by monks more than 900 years ago. The main building was added to over time but began to fall into disrepair in the 19th century. The current owners bought the property including some 100 hectares (about 247 acres) of land in 1989; they did a great job restoring the château and began producing an excellent wine. Their *Fleur de vigne* rosé is spectacular, and the late harvest *L'enfant du château* is a naturally sweet dessert rosé that also goes exceptionally well with foie gras. The domain has a web site that is, for now, available in French only, though an English translation is in the works.

Tuesday, March 10, 2009



Leaves

Most of the vegetation in this area consists of evergreens, but there are quite a few deciduous trees and shrubs around. In contrast to what happens in other areas, most tend not to lose their leaves in autumn (“fall” seems oddly inappropriate under the circumstances); instead, the leaves just turn brown and stay on the tree. When the new leaves come out in the spring, they push the old ones off the branches. Some people claim that the leaves remain on the branches because there is no frost; I have since learned that it may not be as easy as that and that there are more accurate (and definitely more complicated) explanations. Whatever the reason, some trees still look like it’s autumn around here; it’s time for the new leaves to come in!

Wednesday, March 11, 2009



Empty

Normally, I avoid the Carrefour Hypermarket like the plague: it tends to be overcrowded, the shopping carts are too big for the width of the aisles, and even driving there is a hassle. However, today I moved offices, and because the outlets are placed differently from those in my previous digs, I had to buy an extension cord to plug in my Nespresso machine. There would be plenty of other places to purchase such an item, but between 5 and 6 p.m., Carrefour is, traffic-wise, the least inconvenient. Imagine my surprise when I saw the parking lot practically empty (plenty of spaces all the way in the back, sorry Ed) and the lines at the cash registers reasonably short! Maybe no one goes there any longer because it's always too crowded...

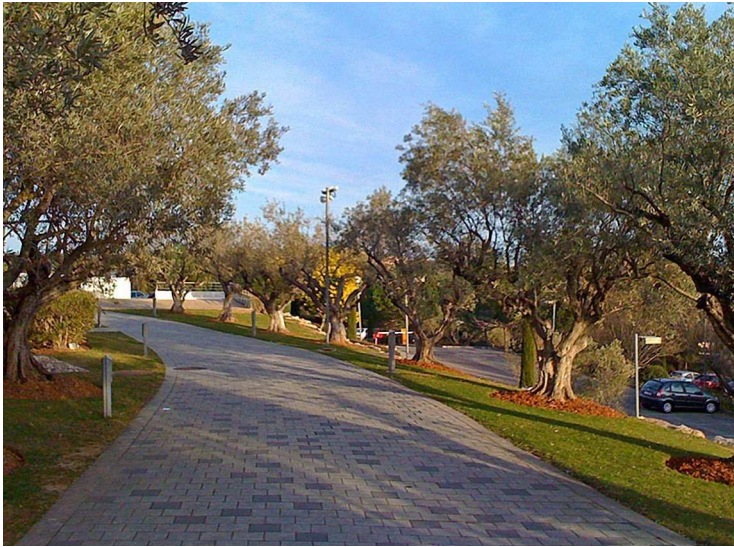
Thursday, March 12, 2009



Hose

Every day, climbing the steps from the garage to the house, I pass this rolled up yellow hose. I'm quite sure it has not been used yet this year, what with all the rain we've been having, but the way things are going, it can't be too long until it is uncoiled and put to work. I suppose I am so accustomed to having to move such items indoors during the winter months that seeing a hose in the same spot for 12 months strikes me as peculiar even after 18 years of living in the south of France. Incidentally, this hose is connected to a community faucet; it should only be used to water the common areas. No one has to have their private water bill impacted for taking care of what everyone is enjoying. I'm happy to report that the system is not being abused.

Friday, March 13, 2009



Alley

Now that I have moved to another building, I leave my car in Amadeus' main parking lot so I get to pass these lovely olive trees twice a day. Honesty compels me to admit that his photo was not taken on this second Friday the thirteenth of the year, but two days ago, on March 11, the day of my move. I mentioned this Friday the thirteenth business because the French are a superstitious lot, but in this case it works both ways: some think that it's an unlucky day while others purchase lottery tickets they would never consider buying on normal days. But anyway, today was more gray with less sunshine, so this photo is a better omen for the coming weekend. Not that I'm superstitious...

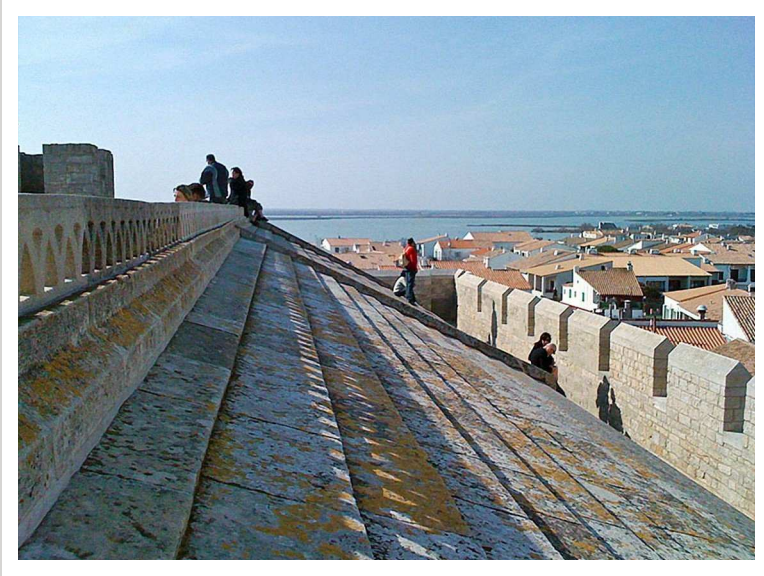
Saturday, March 14, 2009



Flamingos

In the past (on February 27, to be exact) I had alluded to a photo trip to the Camargue with my friend Didier. Well, today was the day. The Camargue is home to a very varied fauna: coypus, Camargue horses, Camargue bulls, mosquitoes... and over 400 species of birds! At this moment, we happen to be in the middle of the flamingo mating season, so there were huge numbers of these elegant birds around. They are very vocal and go through a variety of mating rituals, but I don't think they're actually doing anything yet; they still seem to be at the dating stage. Nevertheless, the beautiful pink and white of the birds and the blue sky reflected in the water made for a perfect photograph for today's blog entry.

Sunday, March 15, 2009



Rooftop

After yesterday's wonderful photo excursion to the Camargue yielded so many images, including a few taken with my iPhone, I intend to get at least two or three blog pictures out of it (a page for our main web site is in the works, so stay tuned). Yesterday, Didier and I had lunch in Saintes Maries de la Mer ("Saint Marys of the Sea", named after Mary Magalene, Mary Salome, and Mary Jacobe, the three women believed to have been the first to witness the resurrection of Christ). After the meal, we climbed to the roof of the church from where one has a lovely view over the town and the Mediterranean. Do you want to go to this rooftop, too? You can; the Google Earth coordinates are N 43° 27.10', E 4° 25.66'. Enjoy the trip!

Monday, March 16, 2009



Scamandre

And yet another one of the Camargue, in other words a photo that dates from this past Saturday. This is the entrance to the nature reserve of *Scamandre* ("Scamander" in English; I had to look it up, so you can, too), a beautiful area of some 215 hectares (531 acres) where one follows the very well marked *sentier de la fromagère*, the [female] cheese maker's footpath. Apparently, it is so named because there used to be sheep around here. If true, they must have been the aquatic kind is all I have to say. On the way, one can see all kinds of wildlife (real and not so real—don't ask) as well as absolutely gorgeous landscapes. Several photos of this reserve will soon be posted on my main web site; it's just a matter of a few more days now. Patience...

Tuesday, March 17, 2009



Green

Today was going to feature the last iPhoto shot of the Camargue series until I realized that the picture I had chosen was not predominantly green. Unacceptable on Saint Patrick's Day, surely. Luckily, I had taken this photo of a weeping willow on Saturday morning; not, to be sure, a typical Irish emerald green, but the tender yellowish-green of the first leaves to emerge in the spring. Happy Saint Patrick's Day to all of my green-blooded friends (are you there, JTF, Eileen, Peadar, ... ?) and everyone else, for that matter. I promise that this is absolutely and definitely the penultimate Camargue shot for a while; tomorrow, to close the series, you'll read about reeds, and "thatch" a promise, 'pun my word!

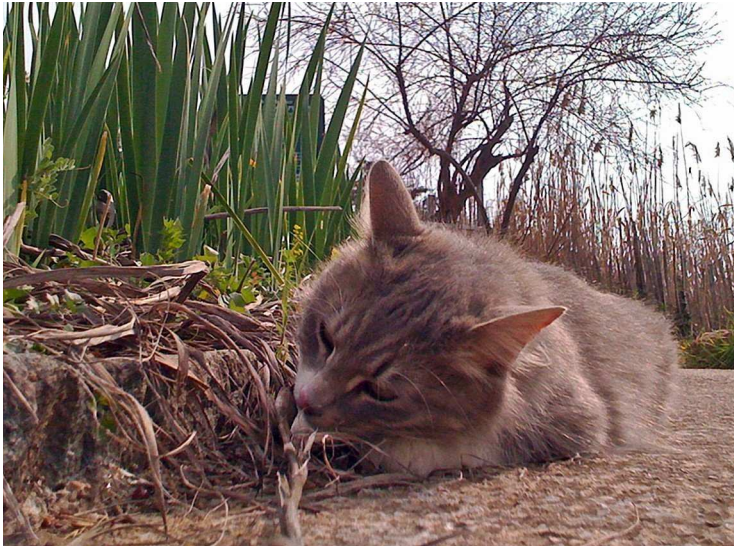
Wednesday, March 18, 2009



Thatch

As promised yesterday, to (finally) close out this series of iPhone shots taken in the Camargue this past Saturday, here is a photo of reeds. Like most wetlands, the Camargue has an abundance of water reeds; the plants are gathered and tied into sheaves as shown; they are then used to thatch the roofs of houses. The material is amazingly resistant and provides excellent sound and thermal insulation. Since the technique of thatching and the tools developed for it have evolved greatly, thatched roofs have lost their one main disadvantage: they are no longer considered to be the fire hazard they once were. Because the material is natural, non-polluting, and inexpensive, thatched roofs are making a comeback in certain rural areas.

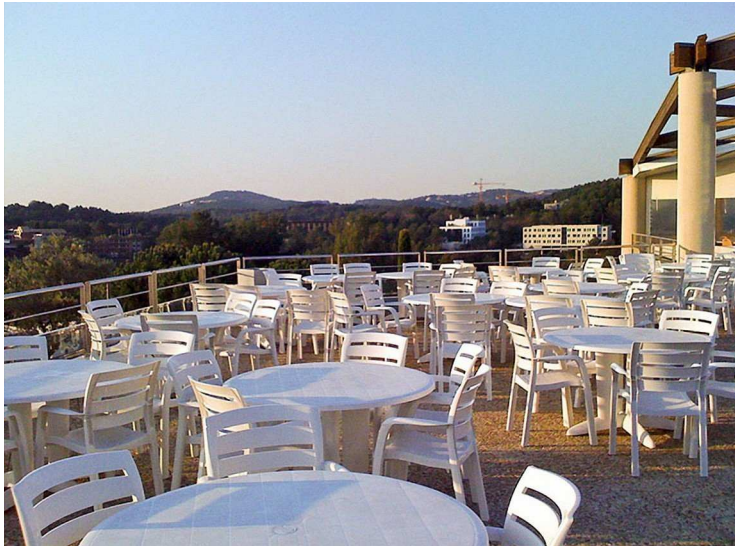
Thursday, March 19, 2009



Playful

This photo was a special request, and taking photos of cats with an iPhone is not an easy matter. The camera has a wide angle lens, so one has to get pretty close, and when one does, the animal inevitably gets curious and comes too close. In this case, I moved the branch by the cat's nose around with my left hand; that kept the feline's attention. In my right hand, I held the iPhone close to the ground and (barely) managed to press the shutter release by wrapping one finger around the edge of the device. Phew! Of course, what was requested was a photograph of a particular cat, "Jambon", but I haven't seen that one around, so this substitute will have to do. Actually, she's a bit of a ham herself and so without further ado, and in honor of the requester, I hereby name this lovely cat "Hamelia" (you may now groan).

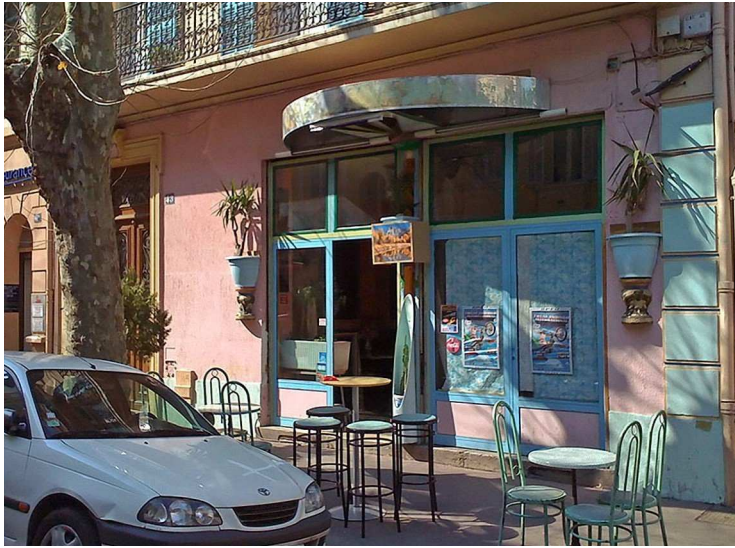
Friday, March 20, 2009



Terrace

At 7:26 this morning, the sun was already illuminating the terrace of our company restaurant. I had never seen it this empty, but then I had never bothered taking a look that early. By lunchtime, I was sure, there would not be a single empty outdoor seat. As it turns out, I was wrong: by mid-morning, heavy clouds had rolled in, and around noon there was quite a bit of wind and it was raining, so even the most diehard worshippers of the great outdoors decided to eat inside. Around 2 p.m. the clouds started to disappear, and half an hour later, we were once again treated to clear blue skies and sunshine. So much the better: the weekend is coming up, and it promises to be a decent one if the weather forecast can be trusted. Let's hope so!

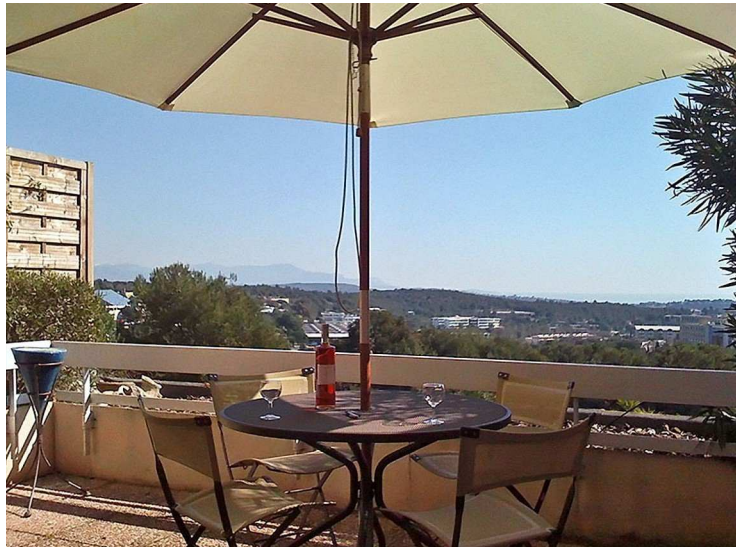
Saturday, March 21, 2009



Café

North of the railroad tracks, only three or four blocks away from the fancy *Rue d'Antibes* and *La Croisette*, one encounters a totally different Cannes: a town of ethnic communities, small specialty stores, neighborhood hang-outs... in short, a place where real people live, work, and play. What one won't see here are rich ladies promenading their immaculately groomed French poodles with jewelry-studded collars, or older men, their Yves Saint-Laurent shirts open to the navel, one hand on the wheel of an open sports car, prowling for young chicks. This area is for real people, like the patrons of this temporarily abandoned café who are playing *pétanque* in the square some fifty yards away. They will be back, and then things will get lively.

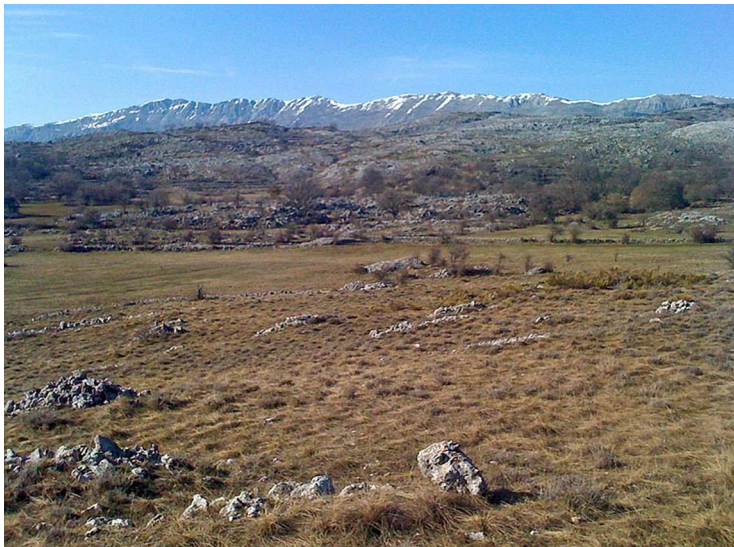
Sunday, March 22, 2009



Spring

On this second day of spring, we finally folded and put away the tarpaulin that had covered our terrace table throughout the winter, set up the parasol, and brought out the outdoor candle (which would be doing a fine job of keeping the mosquitos at bay if we had any around here). The bottle is a 2006 Cancerilles *L'enfant du château* from a vineyard not too far from here. It appears here for show only as mid-morning is a bit early to polish off a bottle of wine; it is, however, perfectly within the realm of the possible that we will uncork a bottle later in the day. Sitting out here at nightfall and watching the Mediterranean (barely visible through the haze in the photo) while sipping a glass of wine (or two...) is a delight.

Monday, March 23, 2009



Plateau Saint Barnabé

Yesterday, we drove into the mountains to the Col de Vence and from there into the tiny hamlet of Saint Barnabé. We walked across the vast plateau to the Saint Jean-Baptiste oratory and back, a modest hike of just over one hour. The plateau is a barren and desolate environment that I find rather beautiful in an eerie sort of way. Supposedly, this is a place of frequent UFO sightings that some people with way too much time on their hands have spent years researching; I just think it makes for an interesting landscape. Give it a try if you're in the area, and if you're reading this from a few light-years away and are looking for a suitable landing site for your flying saucer, I can recommend this place. The coordinates are N 43° 45.38', E 7° 1.52'.

Tuesday, March 24, 2009



Cafeteria

This is the entrance to the Amadeus company restaurant, as management prefers to call it, and rightfully so, since the term “cafeteria” evokes eateries with slightly less appealing foods than what we enjoy here (those who have lived in the United States will know what I mean). When one considers how inexpensive this place is, and keeping in mind that several hundred lunches are served every single business day, one just has to be impressed with the quality of the foods offered, both in terms of variety, presentation, and taste. Why, then, is this wonderful restaurant devoid of even a hint of a customer? Well, because it doesn’t open until 11:45 AM, and this photo was taken nine minutes before that...

Wednesday, March 25, 2009



Sunbath

Now that I have moved to another office with northeastern exposure, I have the sun streaming through the window at an angle for about one hour every morning, making my screen all but illegible. After that, I have no direct sunlight for the rest of the day. This is a huge improvement over my previous office which looked roughly to the southwest, and where I had to keep the sunshades drawn during practically the entire afternoon. My office plant, which has been with me for more than 5 years now (an absolute record as I have what some people call a “brown thumb”) and which I pamper because it was a gift from a few colleagues, appears to enjoy the morning sun: new blossoms are on the way!

Thursday, March 26, 2009



Outside

Yesterday's blog picture showed one of my (admittedly filthy) office windows from the inside; in today's photo, I tried to provide a glimpse of where my office is located from the outside. The window that is slightly open and the one to its left make up the width of my office; the plant shown yesterday was behind the window to the left of the one that's ajar. As you can see, there's plenty of greenery to look at; there are two pine trees right outside my window, and the usually rather plain hedge is showing off in gorgeous reds. There are also some young cypress trees that are barely visible through all the plants. Oh, and before I forget: Happy Birthday, Evelyne!

Friday, March 27, 2009



Vauban

The Vauban in Antibes has been our favorite restaurant in the area for some time now; it features absolutely outstanding value for the money. The dishes are not just tasty; they are also a delight to look at. Since we were celebrating a birthday today, a visit to the Vauban was in order. My menu consisted of *Foie gras de canard cuit au torchon*, *chutney d'ananas au poivre de Séchuan*, followed by *Saint Jacques rôties*, *sucrine et mousseline de betterave*, and for dessert, *La fraise, en émulsion, en marinade et en sorbet*. There were also a pre-appetizer, a pre-dessert, and little pastries with the coffee. If you are in Antibes, you owe it to yourself to check out the Vauban. Tell them the Kiechles sent you!

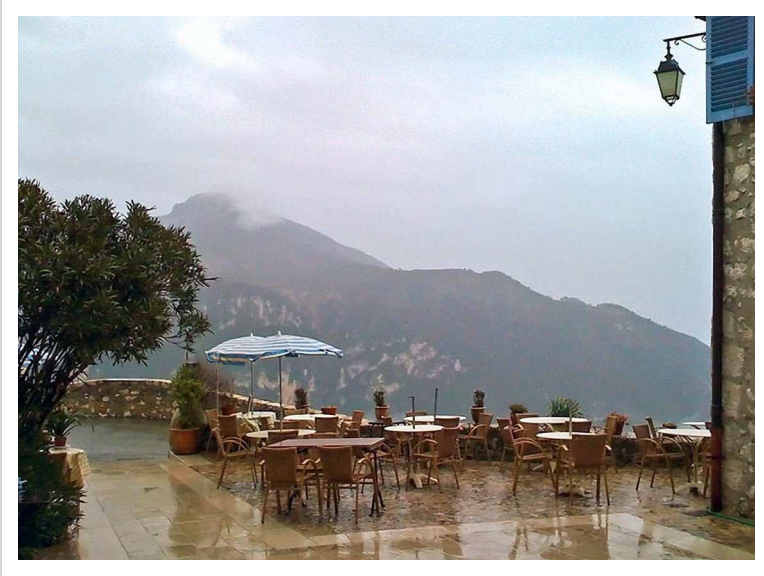
Saturday, March 28, 2009



Bikinis

As of yesterday, there are major problems with iWeb and MobileMe; in short, the smallest change made to the web site causes the entire site, instead of just the change, to be uploaded. This is obviously a pain because it does not only affect the blog but all other pages; since most, if not all, iWeb users appear to have this problem, the servers are incredibly busy, and adding just today's entry will, in all likelihood, take over two hours, clearly not an exercise I want to go through every day. I am therefore suspending publication of this blog until the situation has returned to normal, hopefully within the next two or three days. In the meantime, I leave you with these "Bikinis for Dummies" photographed yesterday in Antibes...

Sunday, March 29, 2009



Gourdon

Rumor has it that the problems I mentioned this past Saturday have been fixed, so I'll attempt to upload an update I had prepared last Sunday when a solution had already been erroneously reported. Speaking of problems, this past weekend was a doozy weather-wise: gray skies, rain... and just when we had a friend from North Carolina staying with us for a long week-end! Since we couldn't very well sit around and mope all day, we drove up to Gourdon anyway and explained the view to Barbara (that is, the view we would have had if it hadn't been for all the clouds and rain). Even the *Pic de Courmettes* had its peak shrouded in a cloud. After a few minutes, we drove down the Gorges du Loup and visited Tourrettes-sur-Loup before heading back home soaked.

Monday, March 30, 2009



Couleurs du Sud

Apparently, the folks at Apple in Cupertino have fixed the problems since I was able to successfully update my blog with this past Sunday's entry a couple of minutes ago—and only the changes as opposed to the entire site were sent to the servers. Normal operation can thus resume, and I'll bridge the gap of the two missing days with two more images from last weekend. The *Couleurs du Sud* in Gourdon probably did not move a great deal of merchandise on Sunday; when we were there, the two people walking in the rain under a shared umbrella were the only potential customers, ourselves not included. The gray skies and the pavement blackened by the rain lent an ironic character to the name of the store.

Tuesday, March 31, 2009



Cyclamen

My iPhone captured these beautiful cyclamen in Tourrettes-sur-Loup, the last stop we made on this past Sunday's rain tour before heading home. Cyclamen are European members of the primrose family, and their color really comes alive in the rain. Strangely, I cannot see these flowers without thinking of a two-liner by German humorist, comedian, actor, and poet Heinz Erhardt that I read years ago. I know that some German-speaking people occasionally look at this blog, so I'll add the two lines as Erhardt wrote them, and without a translation (don't even ask!):

*Es stinkt nicht auf dem Damenklo,
Es sind ja auch Zyklamen do!*

Wednesday, April 1, 2009



Poissons d'Avril

April Fool's Day... The origins of this "holiday" are not certain, but there are many theories. One of these claims that when Charles IX of France moved the beginning of the year from April 1 to January 1 by decree in 1564, those who refused to adapt were called "April Fools" and were the target of derision and practical jokes. Traditionally, in France, children try to pin paper fish to the backs of unsuspecting victims; once the recipients notice, they are greeted with gleeful cries of "Poisson d'Avril" (April fish). The same expression accompanies any other prank at the moment the hoax is revealed. Why fish? Nobody knows for sure, but in France, they are the symbol of the day, as shown by this colorful duo caught in the company restaurant earlier today.

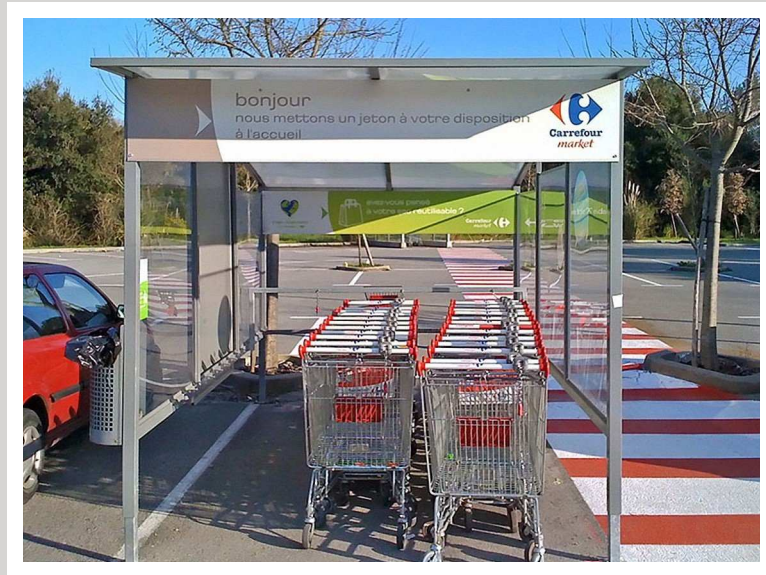
Thursday, April 2, 2009



Espaces

The Amadeus campus has grown substantially these past few years; in fact, there are now more people working on the northeast side of the *Route du Pin Montard* than on the main site. Today's photo, which clearly shows that the poor weather persists (while the folks in northern France enjoy sunshine galore...) was actually taken yesterday morning. We're looking at *Les Espaces* from a terrace at *Les Triades* on our way to *Les Oréades*. At 9:55 in the morning, it was merely gray; minutes later, it was raining cats and dogs. Today was not much better, and we can look forward to more of the same tomorrow. Things are supposed to improve in time for the weekend. It would be about time...

Friday, April 3, 2009



Champion

A while back, I wrote about Champion, our local supermarket that belongs to retail giant Carrefour (second only to Walmart). Apparently, ownership was not good enough for mighty Carrefour: throughout the year, the over 1,000 Champion stores are being changed into smaller versions of Carrefour hypermarkets called *Carrefour market*, and last month, it was the turn of "our" store. Needless to say, the whole thing is accompanied by a rearrangement of goods to different aisles for absolutely no apparent reason other than to make it even harder for people to find the items they wish to purchase. I was struck by how quickly every reference to Champion was replaced with *Carrefour market*. Evidently, even today, companies still have money to spend on such fluff.

Saturday, April 4, 2009



Apples and Oranges

On the left, a few Golden Delicious apples from France, an admittedly anemic yellow in color, some with a little blush spot. On the right, a similar number of Israeli Jaffa oranges, rich in warm, intense color. The apples are hard to the touch; it seems impossible to get a significant amount of juice out of apples. Instead, one wants to sink one's teeth into the fruit and taste the sweet flavor. The oranges are softer to the touch, taste a bit more tart, and have rind instead of skin. They are gorged with juice; one can feel it by applying a little pressure on the outside. It's easy to peel an orange with one's fingers, certainly not something one can do with an apple. Now all this begs the question: who says you can't compare apples and oranges?

Sunday, April 5, 2009



Saint-Honorat

This morning, we took a boat from Cannes to Saint-Honorat, the smaller of the two *Iles de Lérins*. Saint-Honorat has been home to a monastery ever since Saint Honoratus founded one in 410 A.D., so monks have been living, working, and praying there for 16 centuries. This was our first visit to Saint-Honorat in many years; usually, we tend to favor the larger island Sainte Marguerite, though today's trip will probably make us reconsider this preference. Over the next few days, there will be several more Saint-Honorat photos published in this space. Our own village, Valbonne, was founded by the monks of Lérins in 1519.

Monday, April 6, 2009



Monastery

This photo was taken yesterday in the monastery on the island of Saint-Honorat, about a mile off the city of Cannes. Since it was established in the year 410 A.D. the building has been partially or fully destroyed several times; the structure in place today is relatively recent: it dates from 1869. Visitors are free to move about certain areas (and admire, among other things, the wisterias that were in full bloom), though a newer part of the monastery that serves as a retreat is off limits. In addition to the abbey, there is also the fortified monastery that was built in 1073 as protection against Saracen pirates. It is open to the public, and from the top, one has a spectacular view over both the abbey and the Mediterranean.

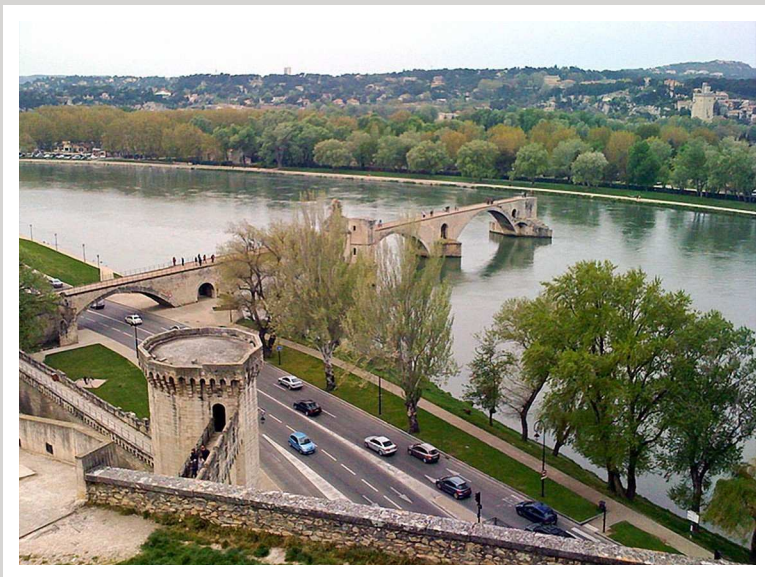
Tuesday, April 7, 2009



Seaview

To close this mini-series of Saint-Honorat images, here is one taken from the top of the fortified monastery, an imposing structure that, at least from a distance, looks a little like something out of “Lord of the Rings”—without the creepy creatures, thank goodness. Unfortunately, I do not have an iPhone picture of the fortified monastery, but a link to a D300 photo, taken this past Sunday, is on the on-line version of this blog. The part with the stairs leading to an entrance is a recent add-on: access to the original, erected in 1070, was by means of a ladder through an opening fairly high up; the ladder could then be pulled up which made the job of a would-be conqueror more difficult. Sneaky, these monks!

Wednesday, April 8, 2009



Pont d'Avignon

To the hundreds of readers who wrote to say how sorry they were that the Saint-Honorat series had come to an end so soon (alright, so “hundreds” is a slight exaggeration; the truth is that one person—myself—expressed this regret) I’m delighted to announce that there are 34 Saint-Honorat pictures published on my web site. But on to today. We spent the day in the old papal city of Avignon where we not only saw an old friend from Long Island and his lovely daughter, but also the famous *Pont d'Avignon*. It was built from 1171 through 1185; through the years, the bridge had to be partially rebuilt so many times that it was permanently put out of service in 1668. Only 4 of the original 22 arches remain; so much for craftsmanship.

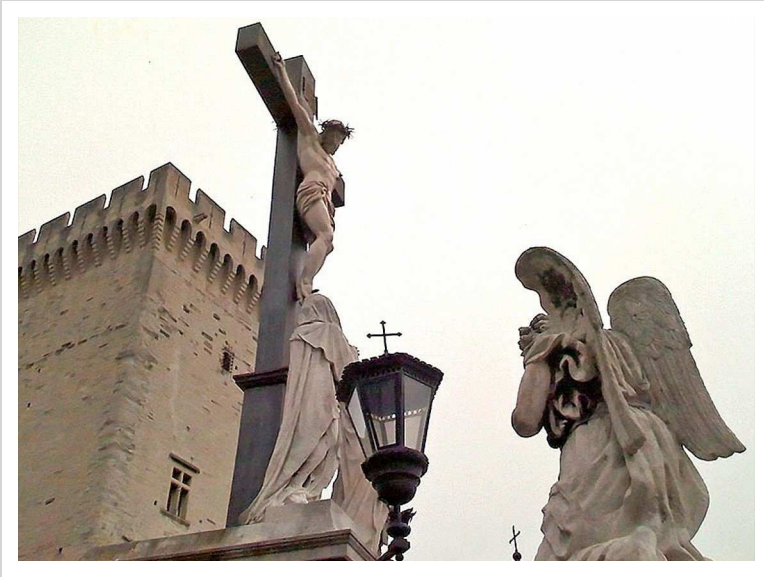
Thursday, April 9, 2009



Palais des Papes

Another photo from yesterday's trip to Avignon. This one is of the "Palais des Papes", the palace of the popes. Indeed, from 1309 to 1377, seven different popes (not so coincidentally all French-speaking) resided in Avignon in this very palace. This came about because French kings were less and less willing to have the popes impose their will in anything other than clerical matters. This turned into cooperation when the newly elected Pope Clement V, a Frenchman, refused to move to Rome and set up his court in Avignon where the papacy remained until 1376 when Gregory XI moved back to Rome. Actually, it's a bit more complicated than that but too long for a blog entry. Instead, interested readers may consult Wikipedia.

Friday, April 10, 2009



Good Friday

Today is Good Friday, and what better way to close out the mini-series of Avignon pictures than with this sculpture of Christ on the cross located in front the palace of the popes (see yesterday's entry). I haven't spent a great deal of time on it, but I have not been able to find the name of the artist (if you know, dear reader, please contact me). The author of a French web page I came across wrote that he missed the original wooden Christ figure which was replaced a few years ago by what he described as "cold resin". While Good Friday is not a national holiday in France, Easter Monday is, so we are looking forward to a three-day weekend. Sadly, we will need to devote a good part of it to our French tax return. Talk about being crucified...

Saturday, April 11, 2009



Rue d'Antibes

At 3:47 this afternoon, people had finished their lunch and as it was not nearly nice enough to go to the beach, most folks indulged in an afternoon of “lèche-vitrines”, literally “window-licking”, but of course more correctly translated as “window shopping”. In Cannes, the street for that is the *Rue d'Antibes*, and whereas its sidewalks are not nearly as full as they will be in another month or two, they are already far busier than a few weeks ago. What were we doing in Cannes? I needed to get my hair cut, but as it turns out, the lady who usually takes care of that, gives superb head massages, and entertains me with funny stories of her children and husband was out sick, so we had lunch and joined the crowds on the *Rue d'Antibes*. There's always next Saturday!

Sunday, April 12, 2009



Bonsai

At 4:16 on this gray and dismal (but dry) Easter Sunday afternoon, I took this picture of my not quite eight-year old Chinese elm bonsai. The tree spent the afternoon outdoors in preparation of tomorrow's obligatory trim. A few weeks ago, more than half the leaves were yellow or brown; those have since fallen off and have been replaced by new ones that feature that delicate and very bright shade of green so typical of spring. In another month, the bonsai will have to be repotted, a task I will leave to the folks at the nearby Bonsai museum (who also look after the tree when we're on vacation) as I cannot take any chances at all: this bonsai was a gift from colleagues, and once a year I'm expected to furnish pictorial proof of its well-being.

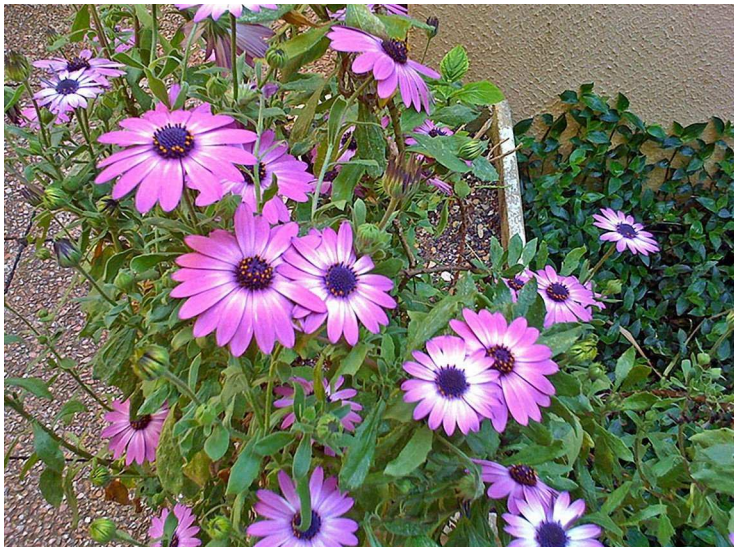
Monday, April 13, 2009



Dandelion

Standing in the large divider between the northbound and southbound lanes of the *Route du Parc* at 2:18 this afternoon, I took this photo of the lush meadow with its many points of yellow light: the dandelions are out! I love it when the gardeners of the town of Valbonne don't rush their mowers to the green areas as soon as the grass reaches a certain height; I find this much more appealing than the sterile golf-course like lawns. When looking at this peaceful setting, it's hard to imagine that we're about three minutes from the *Parc de Sophia Antipolis*, one of Europe's busiest research and development centers. The town of Antibes is fifteen to twenty minutes behind me, whereas the village of Valbonne is less than ten minutes up the road. Not a bad area!

Tuesday, April 14, 2009



Purple Daisies

At least a couple of times a day, I pass these purple (or are they mauve?) flowers that our neighbor has planted close to his (and therefore our) front door. But what are they? My knowledge of botany extends far enough for me to assert with confidence that they are neither carnations nor roses, yet stops considerably short of allowing me to know what they are called. I am reminded of school trips decades ago where, field guide in hand, we had to identify plants by answering scores of questions from the book. I hardly remember anything I learned during those classes, and the book and I went our separate ways eons ago, so I am reduced to calling these flowers “purple daisies”, even though the word “daisies” conjures up white-petaled flowers with a yellow center.

Wednesday, April 15, 2009



Wisteria

Yesterday, I commented on my rather shaky (to put it mildly) knowledge of botany; actually, it is even worse than I thought! Back on April 6, I mentioned “blooming lilacs” in reference to a plant like the one shown here. For whatever reason, I was always convinced that these were lilacs. As alert reader Sabine from Basel was good enough to point out, these are, in fact, Wisterias. Of course, this begs the question what lilacs really look like. Once again, the same alert reader came through with a photograph of lilacs from her own garden. Maybe I should have held on to the book that allowed one to identify plants, but honesty compels me to admit that I was always abysmally bad at that. Better to learn from those who know...

Thursday, April 16, 2009



Butts

Every time we think that the bad weather is behind us, rain and clouds return to tell us otherwise. This morning was pretty awful again, with at times very heavy rain. At 7:38 AM, I passed these cigarette butts; they were about the only thing around that looked reasonably dry. Now that smoking is definitely prohibited anywhere inside the buildings (and a good thing it is, too), the few people who still light up have to go outside where there are ashtrays. Interestingly enough, no shelter at all is provided for the smokers, but the butts, once discarded, are reasonably safe from the elements. I suppose this is out of consideration for the cleaning staff... Maybe this rainy weather causes people to smoke less; that would definitely be one good thing about it.

Friday, April 17, 2009



Fox

Vulpes Vulpes, the red fox. This one moved from a wall at Owen's 501 diner in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, to a wall in my office here in the south of France. It crossed the Atlantic in an enormous cardboard box, designed both to protect the thin and therefore fragile limbs, as well as to intrigue the recipient, yours truly. On both counts, the box fulfilled its missions admirably well. And no, of course the fox (I still have to find a name for it and am open to suggestions) was not stolen off a diner wall! He was part of an exhibit of many colorful animals, and he was the one chosen and purchased just for me. Now, I know that this won't make sense to anyone except David and Eric. Thanks, guys! And as for the rest of you: you may not get it, but damn, isn't he cute?

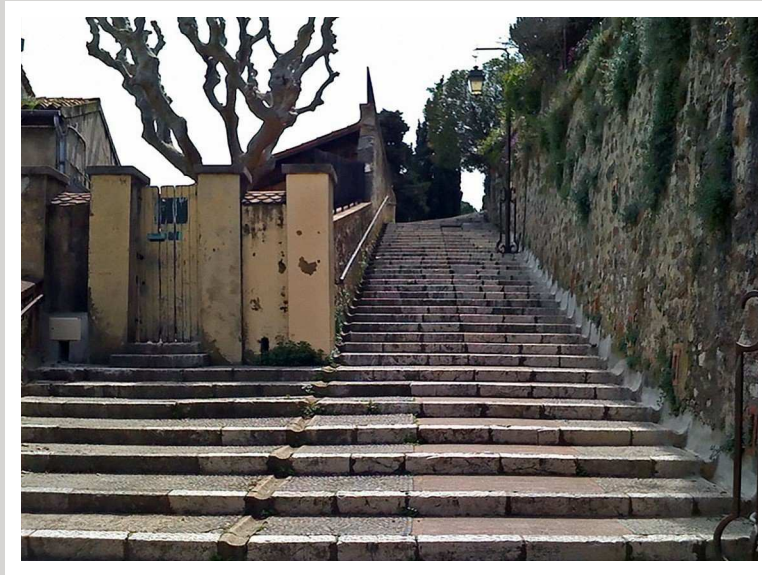
Saturday, April 18, 2009



La Piazza

This morning, we took the 8 AM bus from Sophia to Cannes so I could finally get my hair cut. With that mission accomplished, we enjoyed a cappuccino and a cramique at *Paul* by the Forville market and walked around town a bit. At 12:14 we ended up at *La Piazza* where I had my obligatory *Escalope Milanaise*—the best in the area, I think. The weather was just right to have lunch on the terrace. This is a double pleasure: first, to be outside after all the rain that has fallen in the last few weeks was a delight; second, our position allowed us to people-watch. I never get tired of observing people dragging around and struggling with the tiny creatures that pass for dogs these days. To me, anything small enough to risk death by being stepped on is not a dog. *De gustibus...*

Sunday, April 19, 2009



Suquet

At 1:25 yesterday afternoon, we tried to retroactively earn our lunch by ascending the *Rocher du Suquet*, the hill overlooking the old part of Cannes. There are several ways to do this, either through public gardens, winding narrow and cobbled streets, or long series of steps as shown in today's iPhone photo. The hill overlooks the old harbor; on top, one can see the *Tour de Mont Chevalier* (12th century), a few ramparts, and *Notre-Dame-de-l'Espérance*. The earliest portions of this church also date back to the 12th century, but the edifice was added to and modified several times through the years; it has existed in its present form since the 16th century. But the main reason to climb to the top of the *Rocher du Suquet* is the view. Stay tuned!

Monday, April 20, 2009



Old Cannes

Saturday afternoon, having climbed the *Rocher du Suquet*, we admired the view of Cannes from the castle square. Some blue sky was still visible, but menacing clouds were moving in. It proved to be a false alarm as it didn't rain that day. Normally, people who climb up here take pictures of the Bay of Cannes; if rooftops and cityscapes are not your cup of tea, it won't be hard to find a more conventional photo taken from the same place. Thinking we had plenty of time, we took a leisurely stroll to the station to board the 2:20 p.m. bus which, as it turns out, was scheduled to leave at 2 p.m. and was just pulling out as we got there. The driver took pity at our frantic waving, stopped, and let us board. Thus, we avoided the wait for the next bus... two and a half hours later.

Tuesday, April 21, 2009



No School

Since yesterday and for the rest of the month, the local schoolchildren and their teachers are on a well-deserved (at least in the case of some teachers) vacation. This has a tremendous impact on traffic conditions in and around Sophia Antipolis: the streets are empty, there are zero traffic jams, and getting home from work takes me only about six or seven minutes by car (as opposed to fifteen). Usually, the problem is that parents who drop off and pick up their children have to use the same roads as the many people who drive to and from Sophia for work every day, so there are quite a few bottlenecks. The obvious solution would be to make a new access road for the main school, the CIV, but that would be too sensible. For now, I enjoy the quiet... until May 4.

Wednesday, April 22, 2009



2CV

Few things are as quintessentially French as the Citroën 2CV, with the possible exception of *berets*, *baguettes*, and *grèves* (strikes). The 2CV, or "*Deux Chevaux*" never had as little as the two horse power output its name implies; indeed, this was always its fiscal rating and only relevant for tax purposes. Still, with engine sizes ranging from 375 to a whopping 600 cc, the 2CV is hardly a speed demon. It was built continuously from 1948 through 1990 with only minor design changes in between. These days, it is becoming rare to see a 2CV, so I was happy to take a photo of this one in the Amadeus parking lot at 7:35 this morning. It belongs to my (English!) colleague Peter and it's about 20 years old. For more on this French classic, look for it on the web. Ugly? Try endearing...

Thursday, April 23, 2009



The Main

I'm not talking about Trevelyan's novel "The Main" here; the quotes should only surround the second word, as in The "Main". If you now pronounce "main" the French way and know that it means "hand", then everything should fall into place. Anyway, in the center of the *Place Bermond*, there's this sculpture of a hand. It's a great meeting point as one can even sit in the palm of the hand while waiting. "See you after class at the 'main'," I've heard kids yell on more than one occasion. For some reason, everyone knows where that is as long as "main" is pronounced like the French word. Somehow, "Let's meet at the hand" would not be understood as easily. Still, I would like to know where this hand came from and what its story is. No one seems to know.

Friday, April 24, 2009



Covers

Tired of the drab old plastic covers to the gas meter and television connection boxes in our neighborhood, some artsy person(s) took it upon themselves to paint them all in a variety of styles and colors. Whether one likes the result or not, it is refreshing to see that some people are willing to invest their time into making the neighborhood more beautiful; this is in stark contrast to most taggers who are merely out to destroy that which others appreciate. Speaking of art, indefatigable reader Djukel has found out that the statue of a hand from yesterday's entry was created by one Henri Marquet, and he did this from Belgium armed with nothing but superb on-line research skills. I am humbled by this effort and salute it.

Saturday, April 25, 2009



Saleya

At 10:57 this morning, the *Cours Saleya* in Nice was already pretty packed. The weather was nice, and many people came to what is undoubtedly one of the busiest places in town. There is a daily flower market, but vendors with wonderful Mediterranean accents also sell fruit, vegetables, spices, honey, olive oil, and other local products. From the row of buildings on the south side of the Cours Saleya, there is a flight of steps to access the roofs; whereas the gate on top is invariably closed, one nevertheless has a good view over the entire square and the *Palais des rois Sard* (Palace of the Sardinian Kings) where the Russia–EU summit took place on November 14 of last year. From here, we went to the *Château*, but that's the topic of tomorrow's entry.

Sunday, April 26, 2009



Château

After our visit of the *Cours Saleya* yesterday, we walked along the *Quai des Etats-Unis* to the steps that lead to what is still called the *Château*, even though the fortification that gave it that name was destroyed in 1706. Still, this 300 foot hill is a very popular place, mostly because one has a truly spectacular view of the old town of Nice to the west; the other side overlooks the harbor of Nice. The Greeks established a settlement on top of the hill in the 5th century BC and named it Nikaïa in honor of their goddess of victory, Nike. Over time, Nikaïa became Nice. Ruins of the old settlement are visible to this day. We sat down to enjoy a cappuccino in one of the two outdoor cafés on the Château before making our way back down.

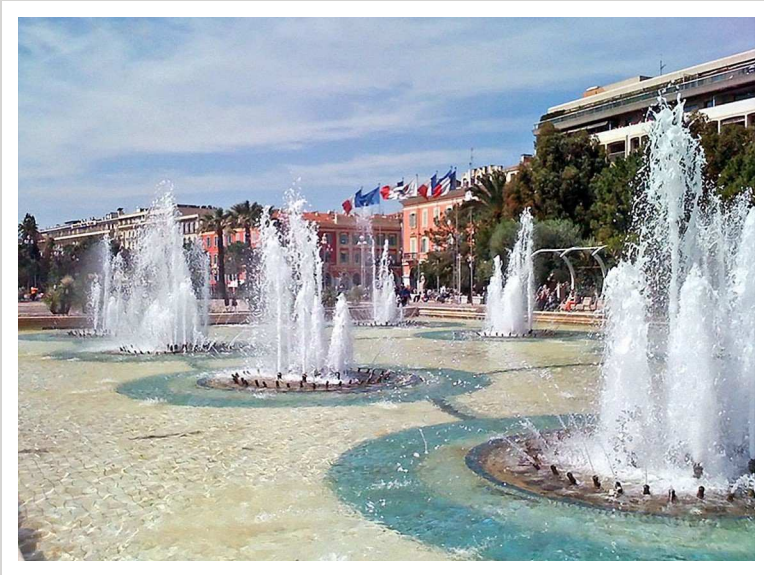
Monday, April 27, 2009



Vieille Ville

Instead of leaving the way we had come, i.e., by taking the steep steps leading to the *Château* on the Mediterranean side, we chose to take the back way through a variety of narrow streets and into the heart of *la vieille ville*, the old town of Nice. Along the way, there are many beautiful sights, such as nicely restored façades and balconies decorated with flowers. Down in the *Place Rossetti* (43°41'50.00"N, 7°16'34.00"E), people were sitting down to enjoy an apéritif or a meal. We wandered around a bit more, and since we had some minor shopping to do, we left the maze of crooked streets that is the old town and left in the direction of the *Rue Jean Médecin*, the main shopping drag.

Monday, April 27, 2009



Esplanade

After leaving the old town this past Saturday, we walked through the little park next to the bus terminal and into the *Esplanade du Paillon*. The fountains were not running full strength, probably because there was quite a bit of wind as can be seen by looking at the flags in the background. We continued to the *Place Masséna* (which Google Earth still shows under construction from when the city installed the tracks for the tram). We grabbed a panini for lunch and picked up a few things before heading back home. This concludes this series of Nice images, but don't fret: I took so many photos last Saturday that I decided to make a whole web page which you can look at on my main web site. And now I have to figure out what to do for tomorrow's picture...

Wednesday, April 29, 2009



Parrot

Today, I took the afternoon off since we had to take care of a few things in Cannes. At 4:18 p.m., near the Forville market, we spotted this beautiful parrot in a Real Estate agency; it flies back and forth between this rope inside the office and a perch that has been set up for its benefit outside the agency. The bird is not limited in its movements in any way; it could easily fly off if it wanted to, but apparently, it doesn't have any intention of doing so. And why should it? It's well cared for, fed, loved... what more could a bird want? The one thing this particular parrot does not do is speak; at least, we didn't hear it make any sound at all. If it did have the gift of speech, however, we know what it would have said today: Happy Birthday, David! We are only too happy to parrot this.

Thursday, April 30, 2009



Overgrown

This footpath is located some twenty yards from our front door; it leads through a small wooded area into the lower parking lot and is often used by those who want to avoid the long flight of steps that leads to the same place and which I take every day to get to and from the garage where I keep my car. This evening at 5:40, I was struck by how incredibly overgrown the path has become in a very short time, undoubtedly a result of all the rain we've been having this year. Even the steps are getting narrow with plants infringing on the space from both sides. Now that the weather has taken a turn for the better (let it be the last time I make this claim this year), I hope the people whose job it is to keep the passageways reasonably open begin doing just that.

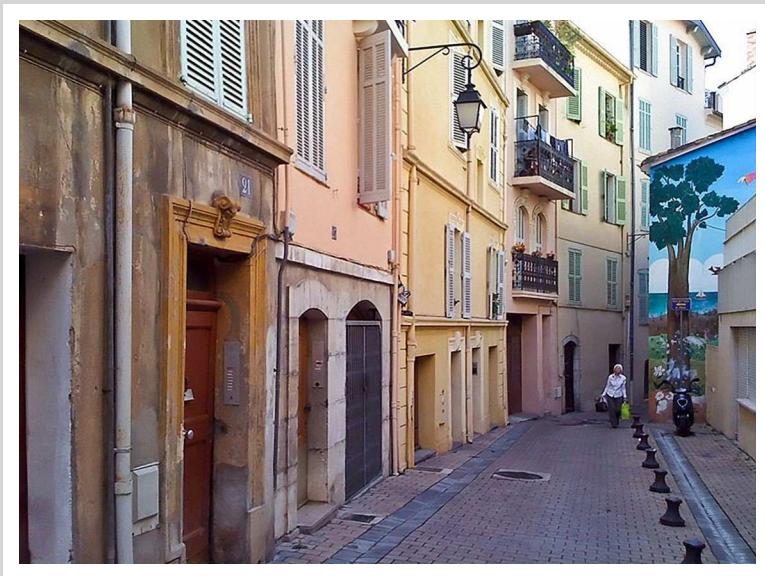
Friday, May 1, 2009



Breakfast

May 1, International Worker's Day, or Labor Day for most of the world's population. This is quite a big deal in France because the labor movement is fairly well organized in spite of representing less than ten percent of the population. Labor Day is a day of rest, parades, union assemblies and marches, family gatherings, in short a day on which one attempts to do just about anything except perform any kind of labor. From this perspective, it is not so different from the US Labor Day which is celebrated on the first Monday in September. This morning, after sleeping late, I labored to prepare breakfast which I served on the terrace under our umbrella. Juice, cereal (his and hers), bread, honey, large coffees with steamed milk... I could go for this labor thing more often!

Saturday, May 2, 2009



Rue Jean Méro

Many people were taking advantage of the three-day weekend and the superb weather, and Cannes was quite busy this morning. If the town and hotel beaches were not yet crowded, the main shopping street of the new Cannes, the *Rue d'Antibes*, and its equivalent in the old town, the *Rue Meynadier*, were both teeming with people, mostly tourists sporting designer sunglasses, cameras, sandals (some with socks!), and bare mid-ribs (though for some reason, it's always the ones that can least afford it who show the most skin). Yet a mere block away, in the *Rue Jean Méro*, we are in the middle of a quiet residential area with barely a soul in sight. Incidentally, if you think that we are spending a great deal of time in Cannes lately, you're absolutely right.

Sunday, May 3, 2009



Dryer

The people of Valbonne may not wash their dirty linen in public, but they sure don't seem to mind drying it in everyone's sight as this photo, taken during our stroll through the village at 7:10 this evening, shows. Actually, this has nothing to do with Valbonne; what you are looking at is a classic example of the typical Mediterranean clothes dryer: a few lengths of rope outside one's window, a handful of clothespins, and some laundry fresh out of the washing machine's spinning cycle: still very moist but not sopping wet. Most village apartments are simply too small to accommodate both a washing machine and a dryer, and so people have to make do. This system is undeniably energy-efficient and lends a certain stereotypical old-world charm to the village streets.

Monday, May 4, 2009



Playground

Just about every village or even hamlet has a playground, and our small community, part of the village of Valbonne but a few kilometers away from it, is no exception. The playgrounds are funded by the local communities, and they are costly to maintain because kids are incredibly rough on things. Sadly, every once in a while, there is also an incident of vandalism, and the town just fixes whatever damage there is. This particular playground is located on top of a small wooded hill behind our house, less than two minutes from our front door. There are paved tracks (in the sun as well as in the shade) where kids can learn to ride a bike, and there is a small ball field for those too old for the playground. There are no cars! In short: a great place to raise children...

Tuesday, May 5, 2009



Labels

Everything these days must have a label, from bags of peanuts (“Warning, contains nuts”) to hair dryers (“Caution, do not use while submerged”). McDonald’s coffee cups have to tell you that their contents may be hot, and chain saws have to include a warning along the lines of “Caution! Do not attempt to stop the chain with your hands.” This annoying trend comes to us from the United States where everyone, it seems, can file a law suit for the silliest of reasons. Imagine my surprise, then, when I saw this sign painted on a house in the village of Valbonne last Sunday. “A house in Valbonne”, it reads. What the... I wondered, and then it hit me: the tourist season is upon us, and with that the arrival of visitors from Belgium... who need all the help they can get!

Wednesday, May 6, 2009



Stella

We had an appointment to sign some papers in Cannes at 5 p.m. today, and since we got there a few minutes early, we decided to stop in a bar on the *Rue Jean Jaurès* and get something to drink. In yesterday's entry, I made fun of the Belgians who in France enjoy the same reputation the Poles have in the United States. OK, time to make up for those remarks by saying something nice about the Belgians: they make a mighty fine beer! Stella you can get just about anywhere and it's very good, but my absolute favorite is having a *bolleke* in an Antwerp pub. Then, of course, there are the *chansons* of Jacques Brel, the *bandes dessinées* of Hergé, the waffles in Liège... and the humor, for whom do you think the Belgians make fun of? Why, the French, of course. Perfect!

Thursday, May 7, 2009



Bermond

Today at 4:52 in the afternoon, the *Place Joseph Bermond* was empty. The square is named after a politician who was born in Valbonne in 1853 and died in the same place in 1957, aged 104. From 1900 through 1936, Joseph Bermond was mayor of Valbonne, and I am certain he would not be thrilled to know that the square bearing his name is famous for having the only traffic light in the park of Sophia Antipolis. Indeed, most of the traffic around here is regulated by traffic circles, and it is possible to drive from this square to the airport, some 24 kilometers (15 miles) away, without encountering a single traffic light. There are many things about New York I do miss, but traffic lights are definitely something I can live without.

Friday, May 8, 2009



Braguette

Sixty-four years ago today, World War II ended in Europe, and in remembrance of this, May 8 is celebrated in many European countries every year. In France, it is a national holiday, and this means that I was off work for the second consecutive Friday. Late afternoon, we decided to walk to Valbonne and have a salad at the *Auberge Provençale*. This is an easy walk; it involves making one's way down to the small river called *La Braguette*, climbing up a hill, and go down the other side where the village of Valbonne lies. The photo above shows *La Braguette*, which literally means "the fly" (as in pants, not insects), but which also the diminutive form of *Brague*, the name of Valbonne's river. We got our salad and returned home by bus.

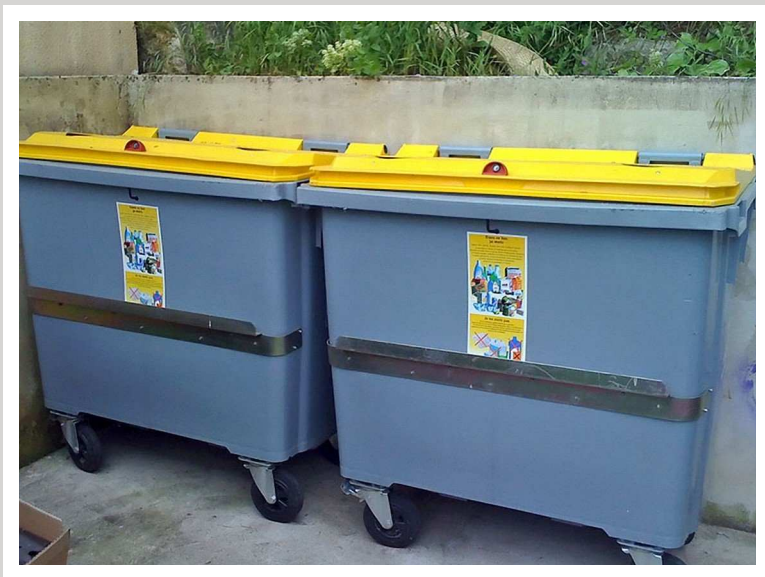
Saturday, May 9, 2009



Flowers

Our walk to the village of Valbonne yesterday took us through parts of the *Parc Départemental de la Bague*, a large park of some 480 hectares (roughly 1,200 acres) with a typical Mediterranean vegetation (or so they say). The park gets as close as 6 kilometers (3.7 miles) to the sea, and it is located at an altitude of between 40 and 245 meters (130 to 800 feet). Since we can comfortably walk there from home, we are relatively frequent visitors (a dozen photographs of *La Bague* are posted on one of our web sites). Yesterday, we came across a beautiful tree; we suspect that it is a type of oak, but no doubt this can be confirmed or corrected by one of our regular readers and resident botany experts from Basel or Liège. The picture is in the on-line version of the blog. Well?

Sunday, May 10, 2009



Recycling

At 4:08 this afternoon I took our large recyclable garbage container to one of the collection points in the neighborhood. These bins are identified by their bright yellow lids which are locked; there are openings in the top through which recyclable garbage has to be shoved one item at a time. Anything too large to fit has to be taken apart, which is not always easy. This system implies that one has to manipulate one's garbage by hand, hardly a delightful experience. Glass bottles go into a different set of collecting bins some 50 or 60 yards away. Now I don't mind doing my share to save the planet, but really, can't they come up with a slightly more convenient method? For instance by forcing manufacturers to package their goods more intelligently? Just a thought...

Monday, May 11, 2009



Bananas

On the way from the garage to my home, I pass a house that features the neighborhood's only banana tree (which, by the way, just goes to show that there are plants even I can identify without help). Every winter, the leaves turn a cruddy brown and become shaggy looking; they just seem to shrivel up and die but they don't actually fall off. By early May, the tree normally has a full set of beautiful and enormous green leaves. As can easily be seen in the photo I took tonight, the banana tree is a few weeks behind schedule this year, as indeed is most of the vegetation in these parts. Did you know there is an International Banana Society? Some people have WAY too much time on their hands. Then again, look who's talking...

Tuesday, May 12, 2009



Poppies

Yesterday I mentioned that all plants and flowers are a little late this year, and poppies are no exception. By the middle of May, my favorite flower is usually ubiquitous: in some areas, there are entire fields of corn poppies, and the green grass in the traffic circles is sprinkled with them. The little red splashes of color normally brighten up the entire landscape, yet this year, it is difficult to even come across a few one can photograph. I found the ones in this photo next to one of the buildings on the Amadeus campus at 9:40 this morning while on my way to a meeting. I recently found out that there are poppies of different color, such as white, yellow, and blue. In this case, nature clearly goofed. There is but one color for Ferraris and poppies: You're looking at it.

Wednesday, May 13, 2009



Iris

With various botany experts reading this blog, it is somewhat risky to stay on the topic of plants for such a long time, but in this case I'm certain that the blossom in today's photo is an Iris. Mind you, I'm not going to go out on a limb and be more specific, even though a quick peek at a Wikipedia page makes me think that we might be dealing with an *Iris reichenbachii*, or Reichenbach's Iris (who said Latin was difficult?), but again, let's just leave well enough alone and simply call it an Iris. I admit that as a Conan Doyle (but certainly not Gilbert Adair) fan, I find the Reichenbach connection rather pleasing, even though the more photos I look at, the less sure I am about it. After all, there are between 200 and 300 species of Iris...

Thursday, May 14, 2009



Schwertlilien

The title of today's entry, literally "Sword Lilies", is the German name for the flowers we call Iris. Today's photo, like the previous one, was taken at the Nice botanical garden yesterday afternoon and shows a bunch of blue lilies (note that I'm not going too far out on a limb in making this claim). The garden occupies an area of 3.5 hectares (8.6 acres) and is located on the aptly named *Corniche Fleurie* in the western part of town. It is open to the public free of charge every day and is home to an impressive 3,500 species of mostly Mediterranean plants. But, I hear you say, surely the plants in a botanical garden are all labeled! Ah, that may be, but I never looked at the labels. Some people like to live dangerously...

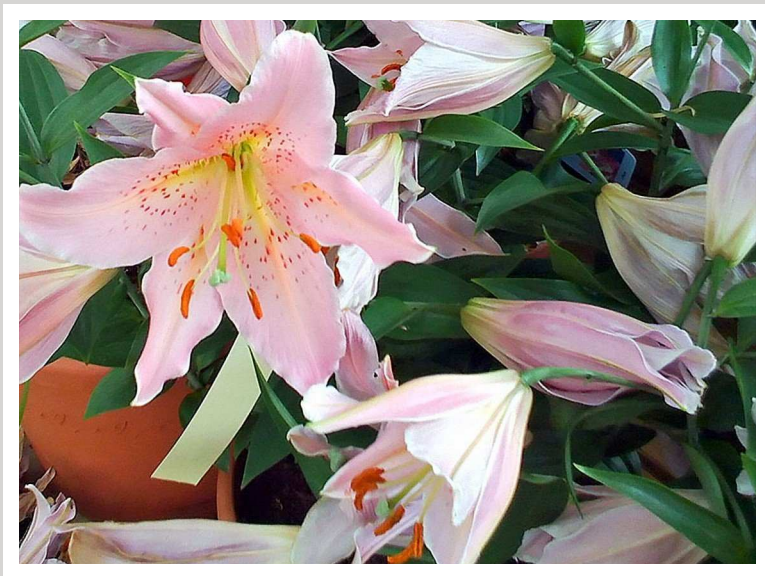
Friday, May 15, 2009



Koi

To close this botanical garden series, here is a photo one could dub the “Loch Nice Monster” (you may now groan). I was actually trying to capture the water lilies and goldfish when this whopper of a Japanese carp appeared out of nowhere. It’s hard to get an idea of the size of this fish, but the two goldfish were not exactly tiny, nor were the water lilies. Apparently, these large fish are a symbol of love and friendship in Japan, but it seems this is based on the word “Koi”: it means carp but sounds identical to a word that means affection. Somehow, I suspected it was not a visual thing! These carps can get very old; the oldest Koi on record was named “Hanako” and died in 1977 at the ripe old age of 226 years. You just can’t make up stuff like that...

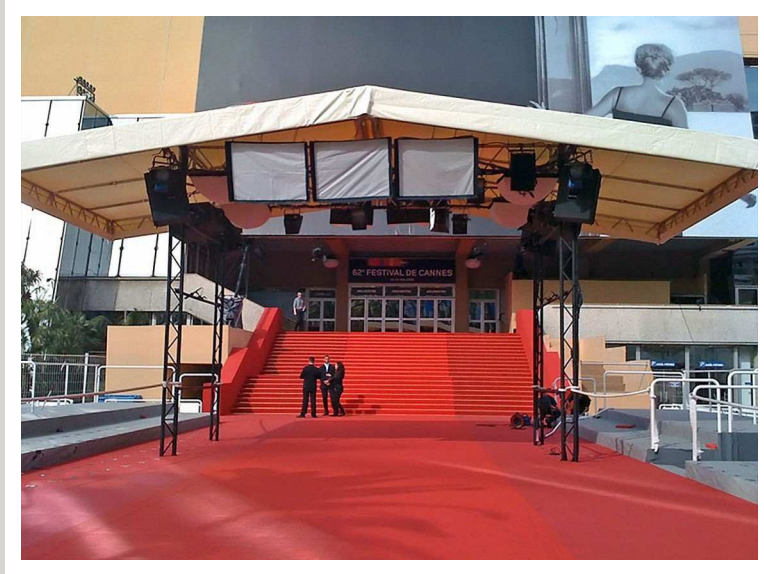
Saturday, May 16, 2009



Botanic

Try as I may, I cannot seem to get out of this flower series. This afternoon, we had to go to Botanic to buy a couple of basic things: a watering can, fertilizer for orchids, you know, that sort of exciting stuff. While I strolled through this temple of pollen, I came across these beautiful Asian lilies that were literally begging to appear on my blog. How could I resist? While I was there, I took another picture that I might be tempted to use for tomorrow's entry; to nip that idea in the bud, so to speak, I officially announce that I won't. And voilà, now I have to think of something completely different for tomorrow's entry. I promise to do my best to stay away from plants—even though the iPhone produces credible flower shots, as I hope you'll agree.

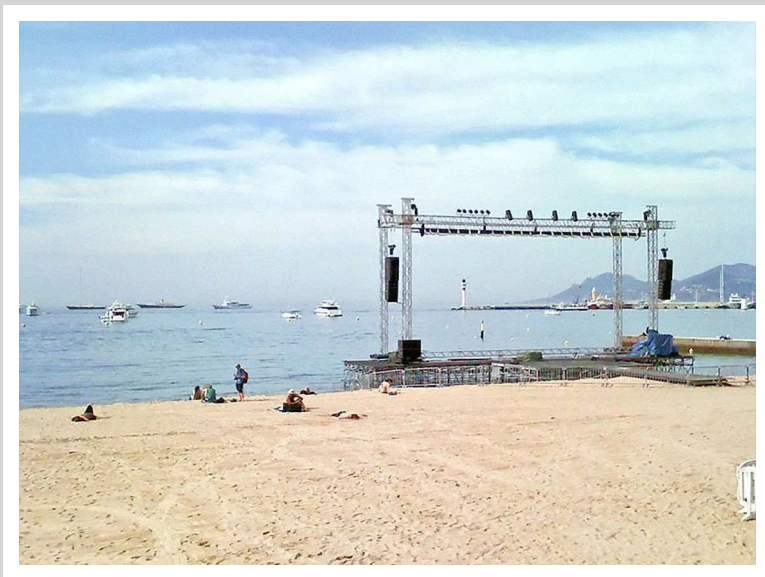
Sunday, May 17, 2009



Palace

This morning at 9:21 we were standing by the famous red-carpeted steps leading to the *Palais des Festivals* in Cannes. As everyone knows, at least around here, the 62nd Cannes Film Festival began this past Wednesday, and the hubbub continues through this coming Sunday, May 24. Normally, I try to avoid Cannes like the plague during the festival, mostly because traffic is a mess, parking near impossible, and the streets are overflowing with people wearing sunglasses and pretending that someone might recognize them if they took them off. However, the early morning (say, until 2 p.m.) is usually safe as the festival attendees sleep off last night's party. A good time, then, for me to take some photos that I will present here over the next few days. Stay tuned!

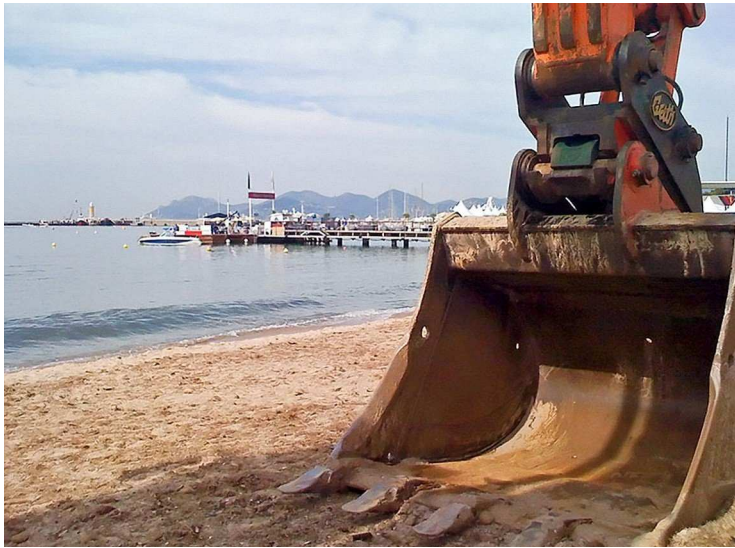
Monday, May 18, 2009



Stage

At 9:40 on Sunday morning, the stage on the beach was predictably empty. Viewers of one or more of the countless television specials broadcast from the Cannes Film Festival will, no doubt, recognize this stage, even though they usually see it later in the day, bathed in floodlights, and occupied by television personalities of various degrees of vacuousness, interviewing an endless series of stars and starlets who desperately try to come across as amazingly nonchalant. The rule seems to be that those who are the most famous tend to be the least blasé, presumably because they don't have anything to prove any longer. Be that as it may, I think I like the stage better this way: affording a view of the bay of Cannes with the Esterel mountains in the background.

Tuesday, May 19, 2009



Shovel

Cannes has a strip of sandy beach all along its waterfront; the town takes excellent care of it, and not only during the film festival. The sand is turned over every night using construction machines like the one this huge shovel belongs to. Other machines then “comb” the beach and collect garbage that may have been deposited there by the sea or forgotten by careless visitors. Even though it is technically forbidden, some people sleep on the beach, particularly during the months of July and August. The crews working the beach always have to make sure that no one is in the way as the type of shovel shown above could definitely inflict serious injury. But enough of such gloomy thoughts: tomorrow, we shall talk about... Christmas!

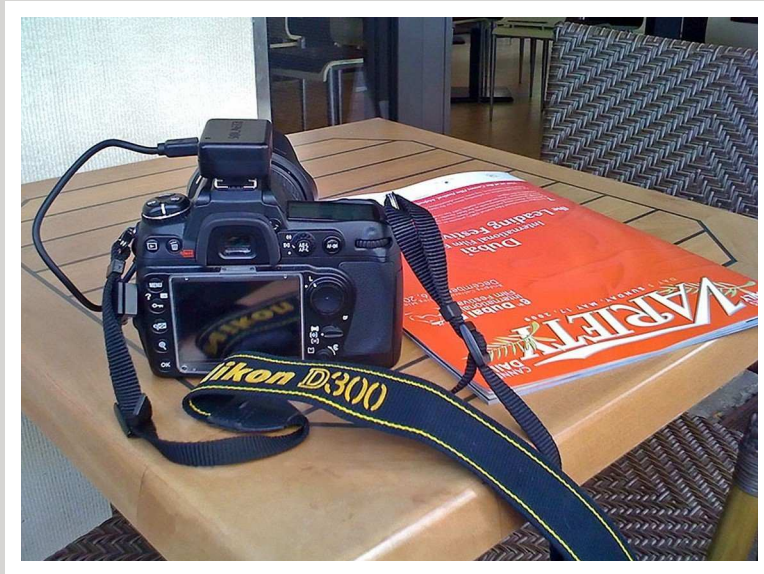
Wednesday, May 20, 2009



Noël

Yesterday, I wrote that we were going to talk about Christmas, and that's exactly what's on the agenda. This past Sunday morning at 9:53, we ambled past the Carlton hotel on Cannes' seaside promenade and were treated to the above (incongruous, to say the least) sight: A snow-covered Christmas tree on the Côte d'Azur in the middle of May! Needless to say, I had to cross the road and take a closer look, not to mention a few pictures. The whole thing turned out to be publicity for the Jim Carrey film *A Christmas Carol* (to be released in November). The fake snow looked great but felt weird, a little bit like tiny pieces of fabric. Apparently, it's what they use on movie sets. As the Irish Times put it, "There's no business like snow business." Further proof that you can't believe everything you see!

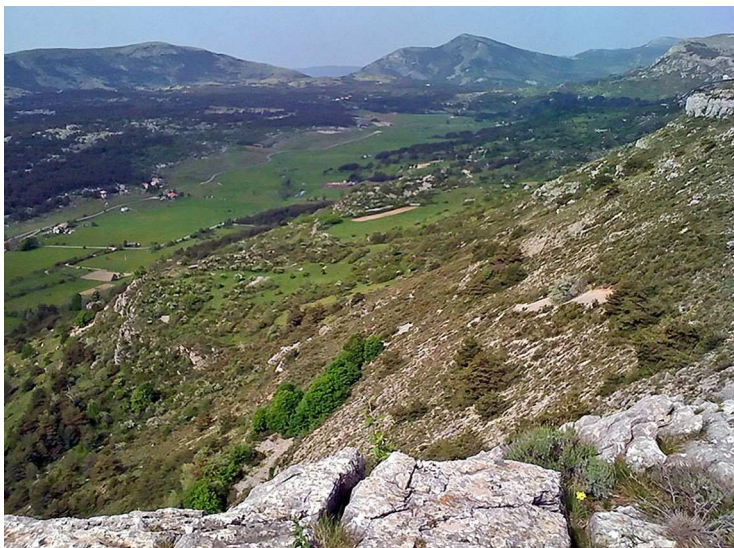
Thursday, May 21, 2009



Rest

At 10:19 a.m. this past Sunday we thought it was about time to take the weight off our feet and give ourselves and the cameras a rest. For us, this involved consuming a delicious cappuccino and a croissant; the Nikon had to be satisfied with being switched off, and the iPhone had to take one more photo (this one) before being allowed to return to its case. As for us, it's time to take a break from Cannes. I know you probably hoped to see a few festival celebrities, but Brad, Penelope, Clint, Meryl, and all our other friends begged us not to publish their photos, a request we are obviously happy to honor. Finishing our coffee left us a little over half an hour to walk around before taking the 11:30 bus back to Sophia.

Friday, May 22, 2009



Aven

This morning, Eric and I drove to the *Plaine de Caussols* above Gourdon, parked the car, and climbed the Aven from where one has a spectacular view of the plain below. This is by no means a demanding hike: the plain below is at an altitude of some 1100 meters (3600 feet) while this photo was taken at 1340 meters (4400 feet), the highest point we reached on this particular hike. We continued our journey following the mountain westwards to the *Observatoire de la Côte d'Azur* of which one can barely see the white dome in the upper right corner of the photo. From there, we started climbing down again towards the plain. All in all, it was a walk of just over three hours during which we were involved in a rescue mission, but more about that tomorrow.

Saturday, May 23, 2009



Lamb

As we were making our way up the Aven yesterday morning, we heard this plaintive bleating and eventually found this lost lamb. I naively thought that someone would be looking for it, but a lady hiker who showed up minutes later told us that this was clearly not the case, that shepherds often did not go out of their way for one animal. She offered to carry the lamb back to the valley and the herd. We later got an email from her saying that she had talked to the shepherd, had learned that this lamb was 5 days old, 3 of which it had spent alone in the hills. He thought it would not survive long in the herd and would soon make good meat for his dogs! Our new friend thus took the lamb home where the little one is now being raised with a bottle.

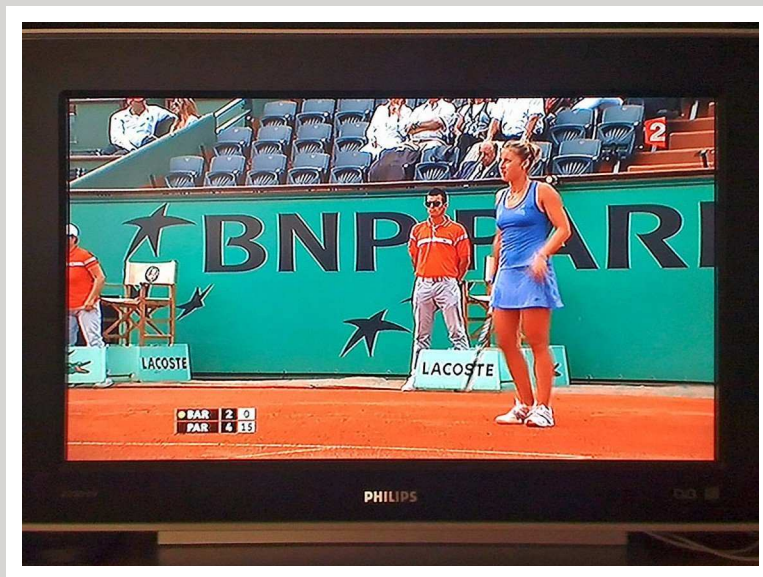
Sunday, May 24, 2009



Cavillore

At 9:47 a.m. this past Friday, following our climb of the Aven and the episode with the lost lamb (see yesterday's entry for details), Eric and I were nearing the plateau of Cavillore, not quite 200 meters (650 feet) above the plain of Caussole which one can see on the left. At the time we didn't yet know what had happened to the lamb; since then, we have had news twice, first about the shepherd who wanted to turn the poor thing into meat for his dogs, and then again this afternoon from the lady who had taken the poor creature home. Turns out the little one is doing well; her new family have converted a toolshed into a temporary stable. Looks to me like the little lamb lucked out...

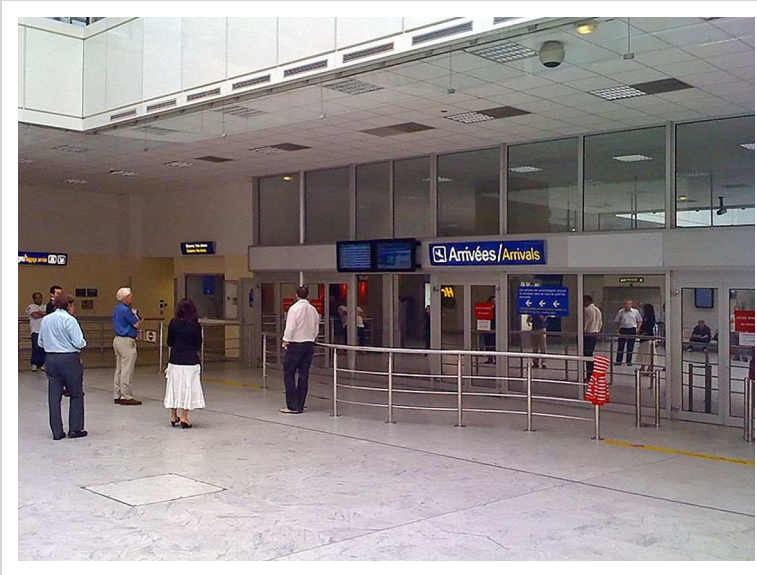
Monday, May 25, 2009



Roland Garros

Now that two of the area's main yearly events are behind us (the Cannes Film Festival ended yesterday, the day of the Monaco Grand Prix), it's time for the next round of excitement: Roland Garros, the French Open tennis tournament, one of four Grand Slam events held every year. Until June 7, the question on everyone's mind is whether Roger Federer will at long last manage to overcome his nemesis Rafael Nadal, or whether two different players will slug it out in the final. When I came home and turned on the TV at 5:49 this afternoon, Pauline Parmentier was winning her first set against Marion Bartoli; she eventually lost 6:3 1:6 3:6. Oh, how I miss Justine Henin! By the way, Roland Garros was not one of the musketeers; he was a French World War I aviator.

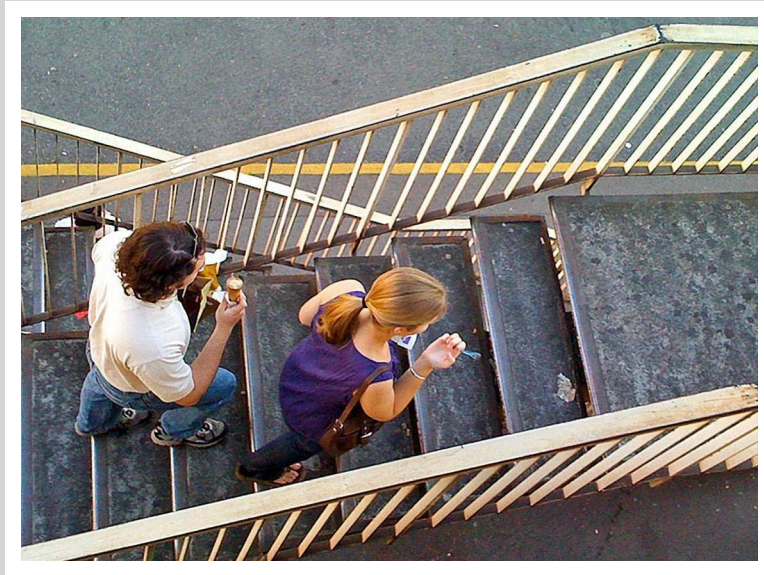
Tuesday, May 26, 2009



Crisis

Yesterday, I mentioned that two of the area's main avenues of yearly excitement, namely, the Cannes Film Festival and the Monaco Formula One Grand Prix, were over and done with for 2009. Nowhere was this more apparent than when I showed up at Nice airport's terminal 1 for a pickup at 2:49 this afternoon: where a week ago, hordes of people were scurrying hither and yon, the place was eerily quiet today, and just a handful of people were waiting for the London passengers who had just arrived on BA 344. Even for the week following the end of the festival and the Grand Prix, this lack of activity is highly unusual. It is true that the global economic crisis is having a huge impact on air travel, something Amadeus, the company I work for, knows a thing or two about.

Wednesday, May 27, 2009



Ice Cream

This evening at 7:51 I caught this couple climbing up the stairs from the bus terminal to the *Voie Rapide* near the station in Cannes. Both are enjoying an ice cream, a surefire way to know that summer is upon us or at least on its way. In the course of trying to find out some information about ice cream, I ran across a Wikipedia article which, among other things, mentioned that, "In 62 AD, the Roman emperor Nero sent slaves to the Apennine mountains to collect snow to be flavored with honey and nuts." Well, 1947 years later, we can luckily dispense with this routine; I would sure hate to have to send my slaves on a long journey just to get dessert! It's much, much easier to just buy the stuff at one of the many ice cream parlors in town. *Bon appétit!*

Thursday, May 28, 2009



Bombardier

Last night, I came across this strange vehicle. Weird scooters with two small front wheels are cropping up all over the place, but this was a horse of a different color! The only brand identification I could see was a tiny “BRP” logo in the front. A quick investigation on-line revealed that this stands for “Bombardier Recreational Products”. Now Bombardier is a Canadian company that is known for producing things that fly (in fact, it is the third-largest civilian aircraft maker), and things that run on rails, but it was news to me that they were into vehicles like this. After air and tracks, the road is the company’s new frontier. It appears that the vehicle is a Spyder Roadster, and it looks like a lot of fun, but at over \$16K it is not exactly cheap. Oh well...

Friday, May 29, 2009



Belltower

I snapped this photo of the old Valbonne church's bell-tower at 10:39 this morning during a stroll through the village to mark the beginning of yet another four-day weekend. The old church is part of an abbey that was founded in 1199 and thus precedes the village by some 320 years. In the process of trying to find out some information about this really beautifully restored church, I was delighted to come across the web site of *The Friends of the Abbey and of Valbonne's Heritage*, a non-profit organization that concerns itself with "the 12th century Chalaisian Abbey, and the old village of Valbonne founded at the 16th century." If you have a few minutes to spare, I recommend you take a look at the history of our town.

Saturday, May 30, 2009



Sanremo

This morning, we decided to drive to Sanremo, a place we hadn't visited in about a year. The drive on the French A8 and Italian A10 highways was easy enough, and one hour and five minutes after having left home, we arrived in this Italian seaside resort. It then took 35 minutes to find a place to park. With what appears to be 90% of the world's scooter population flitting in and out of lanes and skirting cars that are driven in a fashion that makes French drivers look sedate, driving in Samremo is a bit of a challenge. Even a walk on the crowded *Via Palazzo*, one of the main shopping drags, was relaxing by comparison. By the way, most people call this Italian Riviera town "San Remo". Check the city's web site to see why they are wrong.

Sunday, May 31, 2009



Saint Cassien

On day three of what unfortunately promises to be the last four-day weekend for a while, we had a picnic on the shores of the *Lac de Saint Cassien*, an artificial lake some 45 minutes from our home. The lake is about 7 kilometers (4.3 miles) long and 3 kilometers (1.9 miles) wide. In the summer, it is often used by Canadair fire-fighting aircraft; they scoop up water from the lake and dump it on forest fires. Today, however, there was no need for Canadair interventions: our only worry was whether we were going to have a thunderstorm or not. In the end, we were spared rain, thunder, and lightning, so Amelia, David, and Eric were able to go paddle-boating. Several souvenir photos of the day may be found on our alternate web site.

Monday, June 1, 2009



Ugly

What's ugly? The weather's ugly, that's what. But I guess we can't really complain: it's thunder and rain, and this is very much expected from time to time, especially considering that the previous few days have been beautiful. While the others went shopping today, I stayed at home and watched Roger Federer keep his chances for a first tournament victory at the French Open alive. At first, it looked that after Djokovic and Nadal, Federer was on his way out: he was two sets down and had to battle to finally beat Tommy Haas. With nail-biting excitement like this, I'm almost (but only just almost) glad to head back to the office and a more quiet life tomorrow. Yes, it will be a short week, followed by an even shorter (2 day) weekend. By all means, bring on the rain!

Tuesday, June 2, 2009



Arcades

At 7:14 this evening, the *Café des Arcades* in the main square of Valbonne was still pretty quiet because most people tend to eat a little bit later. The advantage of showing up early, however, is that one can easily pick a good table. In most restaurants, one doesn't need to make reservations, and the practice, so commonplace in the United States, of having to line up for a long time, putting one's name on a list, and possibly being obliged to carry a silly buzzer to be told when one's table is ready, is virtually unknown in these parts. The exceptions might be the some of the most crowded tourist restaurants at the height of the season, but even then things are not that bad. And a good thing it is, too: sitting down for a good meal should not require extensive planning.

Wednesday, June 3, 2009



Gates

Every workday, I pass through these gates several times. Arriving in the morning and leaving in the evening, of course, but also going for lunch or attending a meeting in a different building. The gates are fairly recent; before, there was a model with a slot into which one had to insert one's badge, and often, I used to get a shock of static electricity. With this model the badge doesn't have to touch the gate: just holding it close to the little red light causes the doors to slide open. But it's still treacherous: in an effort to prevent two people from entering together, the doors slam shut as soon as the photoelectric cell detects that something has entered the site, so not holding one's umbrella vertically, for instance, can be quite painful. A good thing it doesn't rain too often...

Thursday, June 4, 2009



Pollution

A few years ago, one could barely walk through a French city without stepping into something distinctly unsavory, the result of the French love for dogs and their penchant for *laissez-faire* in almost all things that might otherwise require an even modest effort. Though not perfect yet, city streets have become much cleaner in recent years, partially because of explicit signs like this one I photographed in Cannes last April. However, municipalities do recognize that dogs will be dogs, so many cities provide dispensers of baggies and disposal receptacles to help dog owners clean up after their pets. In Paris, they even have a uniformed poop patrol that issues fines up to 180 euros (now roughly US\$ 250) for non-compliance. Hey, whatever works!

Friday, June 5, 2009



Pain

No, no one is suffering; “pain” is simply the French word for “bread”, and the sign in the photo probably doesn’t say “boulangerie” (“bakery”) because that would not have fit. I took this picture at 11:03 this morning on my way to see my ophthalmologist; we are on the *Avenue Georges Clémenceau* in Vallauris. This town is mostly known for its pottery and for the fact that Picasso lived there from 1948 through 1955. The old town is quite picturesque, and the township includes the seaside resort Golfe Juan, located between Antibes and Cannes. What put Golfe Juan on the map (other than tourists) is the fact that Napoleon landed there in 1815 after having escaped from his exile on the island of Elba, an event which was to cause quite a bit of, well, pain...

Saturday, June 6, 2009



Horse

This afternoon, we ran across this horse that, for no apparent reason, seems to grow out of a wall in the old town of Antibes. In remembrance of D-Day, I had wanted to show the war memorial with the French, American, and British flags, but it's near Cannes, and that's not where we were today. Still, it is worth mentioning that the French, especially our generation and the one before, are still tremendously grateful to those who liberated France. TV crews interviewed American veterans participating in the D-Day commemorative festivities in Normandy; they said they were stunned that French men and women would spontaneously walk up to them, shake their hands, and say thank you. The French did have a problem with the Bush administration, but then again, so did I.

Sunday, June 7, 2009



Mother's Day

The French celebrate Mother's Day on the last Sunday in May, unless Whit Sunday falls on the same day. In that case, Mother's Day is celebrated on the first Sunday in June, in other words today. For the occasion, four couples (us included) showed up at our friend Michèle's wonderful place in Biot for what turned out to be a veritable outdoor feast. The two younger couples each brought their child: a 14 months old boy and a 6 year old girl, respectively. By 4:30 this afternoon, we were ready to attack dessert (not shown: the various types of cookies, chocolates, and ice creams). As always at Michèle's, a great time was had by all. And to cap this most perfect of days: Roger Federer finally did win his first French Open tennis title. Life is good...

Monday, June 8, 2009



BD

This past Saturday at 3:19 p.m., as we were strolling through Antibes, we came across this man sitting in the unusually quiet *Rue des Revennes*, reading a BD, a *bande dessinée*. To call a BD a comic strip simply does not do it justice. For one thing, a BD is not limited to a particular genre; its topic can be humorous, but also political, historical, biographical, artistic... even pornographic. Many BD feature topics or stories that may be read on different levels; thus, adults and children might both laugh at a humorous BD, though not necessarily in the same spots. While some famous series have been published in different languages, BD are a truly francophone phenomenon and do not usually translate well. Check the web for more information.

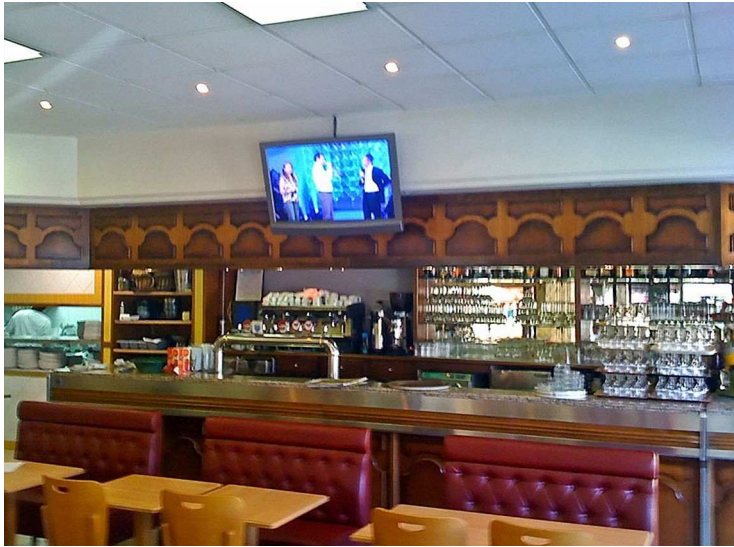
Tuesday, June 9, 2009



Hours

Another photo from our stroll through Antibes this past Saturday. At 3:25 in the afternoon, we came across this rather original way of posting opening hours: “No precise schedule,” the sign reads, “but I’m never too far off. Call me.” This in itself is pretty amusing, even knowing the French aversion to schedules, but what make the sign even better is that there is no obvious way to find out what in the world this shop is all about. Are goods being sold? Items repaired? Services offered? There were no clues to be found, though I suppose those who are curious could always call the cell phone number. This beats an earlier example (see January 25) and is just like Italy—except that in Italy, the phone number would no longer be in service...

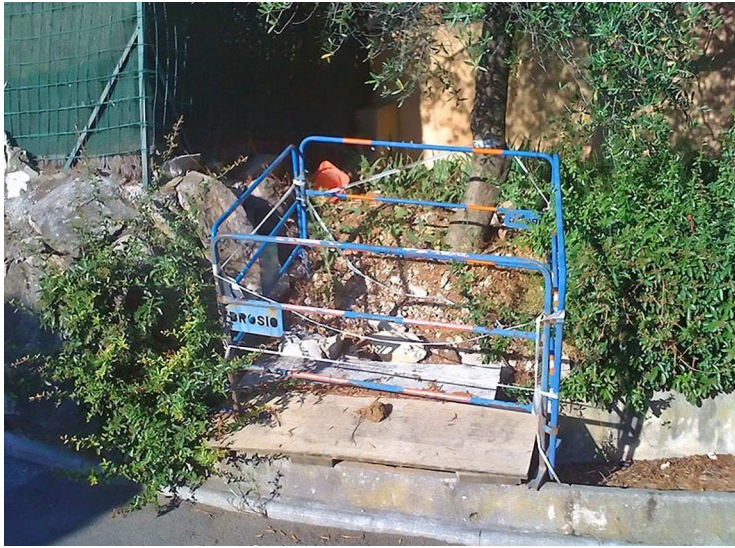
Wednesday, June 10, 2009



Montparnasse

When we walked into *Le Montparnasse*, our friendly neighborhood restaurant, at 7:12 p.m., the place looked completely deserted. Several people were sitting on the terrace enjoying a beer, but the inside, where we prefer to be because there is no smoking, was empty. In the middle of the week, the evenings in the restaurant tend to be quiet; the place does most of its business by serving lunch to employees of the many companies that are located in its vicinity. It's not exactly a gourmet haven, but sometimes one just doesn't feel like cooking after a full work day, or one has something to celebrate, yet doesn't feel like driving anywhere... That's where *Le Montparnasse* comes in. It's literally three minutes by foot from us—very convenient.

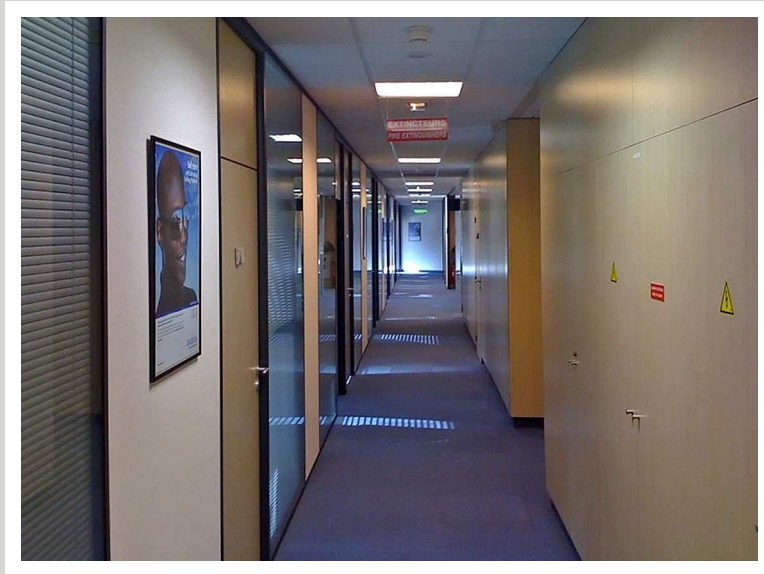
Thursday, June 11, 2009



Construction

Our house is located on top of a hill, and as we usually park the car in its garage near the bottom, we don't normally drive on the narrow road that winds its way to the top parking lot. It does happen, though, such as when we have many items to bring to the house. Several weeks ago, in the middle of the big curve, the road was half blocked, constructions machines were making it all but impossible to get through, and no one had a clue what the whole thing was about. On our way to the *Restaurant Montparnasse* last night I was surprised to see that traces of this activity remain to this day: a small area fenced in by some construction barriers. Mind you, there's nothing in there, so the mystery persists. But one thing is certain: someone is being billed for something!

Friday, June 12, 2009



Hallway

When I arrive at work in the morning, typically between 7:30 and 7:45, I'm usually the first on the fifth and last floor of building B where my new office (the second door on the left, the one that's open) is located. I don't normally encounter anyone when I walk down the hallway to fill the water container of my Nespresso machine, check my snail-mail box, and wake up the network printers. Lest you think that I am going for brownie points by gently steering my boss to this blog, I hasten to add that I am a firm believer in the FIFO (First In, First Out) principle, at least as far as work hours are concerned: between 5:15 and 5:30 in the afternoon, I am out the door unless we have a dire emergency on our hands or a meeting runs exceptionally late.

Saturday, June 13, 2009



Mushrooms

While shopping for fruit at the Forville market in Cannes at 10:27 this morning, I came across this beautiful display of *1er choix* (first choice) mushrooms, more precisely *boletus edulis* or *cèpes*, as the French call them. This particular bunch was imported from Montenegro and thus had to travel further than the mostly local foods that are sold here. The Forville market with its wonderful displays of different foods is simply a delight, and we find ourselves wandering through its aisles more and more frequently. The market is not that old; it was designed by architect Henri Bret and completed in 1929. It is open mornings from Tuesday through Sunday; on Mondays, Forville is home to a large flea market and antiques fair.

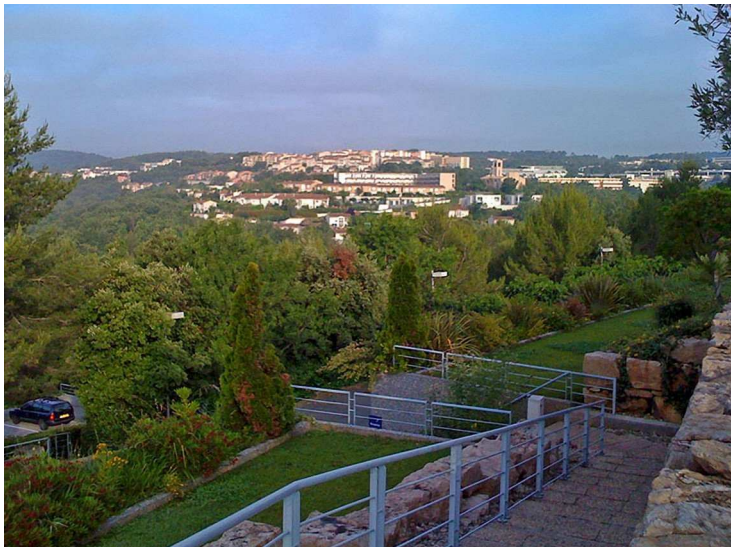
Sunday, June 14, 2009



Meynadier

Yesterday at 2:16 in the afternoon, the *Rue Meynadier*, the longest pedestrian street in Cannes, was starting to get busy. When this street was first built in 1752, it was the only way to get from the old town of Cannes to Antibes. The street was widened in 1883; at the same time, the first shops were opened by cobblers, butchers, and grocers. In the 1880s, the street was also home to a small theater, and at number 16 was the seat of the Cannes branch of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul that had been founded some 50 years earlier in Paris. Before 1883, the street was known as *Grand-Rue*; following the works of 1883, it was renamed *Rue Grande*, the name many of Cannes' older inhabitants still use. It became the *Rue Meynadier* in 1945.

Monday, June 15, 2009



Garbejaïre

This morning at 7:25, as I walked from the parking lot to the building where I work, I noticed that the little village of Garbejaïre was bathed in the pretty light of the morning sun. Actually, Garbejaïre is not a village at all; it is one of the two original residential areas located inside the park of Sophia Antipolis (the other being Haut Sartoux where we live). Both are part of the township of Valbonne and share its zip code. More recent residential areas have been built on the east side of the park, but they belong to the township of Biot. Regular readers of this blog have already visited the central square of Garbejaïre, the *Place Méjane*. All in all, some 30,000 people work in Sophia Antipolis, and only a tiny minority live here; the rest commute.

Tuesday, June 16, 2009



Cannes Beach

I had a meeting in Cannes today; since I don't drive there often on weekday mornings, I didn't know what to expect in terms of rush hour traffic, so I left myself plenty of time. I set off at five minutes to eight and decided to take the scenic route via Vallauris, driving across the hill between the two towns on the D803 (called *Avenue de Cannes* in Vallauris and *Avenue de Vallauris* in Cannes... go figure). There was no traffic at all, and 25 minutes after leaving home, I pulled into the parking garage at the Cannes station. Minutes later, at 8:31, I was walking on the *Croisette* enjoying the view. Incidentally, certain Northerners claim that there is something called the *Croisette* in Belgium. It's interesting to see the effect wishful thinking can have on people...

Wednesday, June 17, 2009



Meynadier Revisited

Last Sunday, I wrote about the *Rue Meynadier* in Cannes; surprised that I couldn't find much on the Internet about who the street was named after, I sent an email to David Lisnard, a public official of the city of Cannes who was kind enough to furnish me with the following information: The street was renamed *Rue Meynadier* on March 22, 1945 to honor an old Cannes family. Théodore Meynadier died fighting for France during World War I in 1915; his son Roger, born in 1914, played a key role in the French *Résistance*. After the liberation of Paris, he became part of General Koenig's staff headquarters. Sadly, his health had suffered so much during the war years that he died on October 13, 1944, just 30 years of age. Our generation takes so much for granted...

Thursday, June 18, 2009



Nespresso

At 9:15 this morning, my second morning cup had just been brewed. If you believe the Nespresso ads with George Clooney, my office should be overflowing with gorgeous women rubbing up against me in the most suggestive ways, trying to make me forget the Nespresso capsule in my hand. Strangely enough, it's not happening. Part of the reason might be that I've only recently moved to this office, so the hot babes might not have found me yet. Oh, but I'm ready for them, for I have rehearsed the scene in my mind many times: this lovely model will lean towards me with a killer smile and say, "You are George Clooney, aren't you?" to which I will truthfully reply, "No, you must be mistaken." Then I'll turn around to drop a capsule into the machine. Fat chance!

Friday, June 19, 2009



Fête de la Musique

On June 21, the day of the summer solstice in the northern hemisphere, France celebrates the *Fête de la Musique*, a nationwide music festival. It brings people of different backgrounds and cultures together, and almost every community organizes festivities of some sort. This year, the bulk of the celebrations will no doubt take place Saturday night and last well into Sunday, but my employer chose to mark the occasion today. A small stage was set up outside the company restaurant, and several groups showed off their talents. Today's picture shows the Amadeus choir, directed by Yann Nolle, performing one of several Bossa Nova numbers. I had made an iPhone recording of it, unfortunately not audible in this book. Sorry about that...

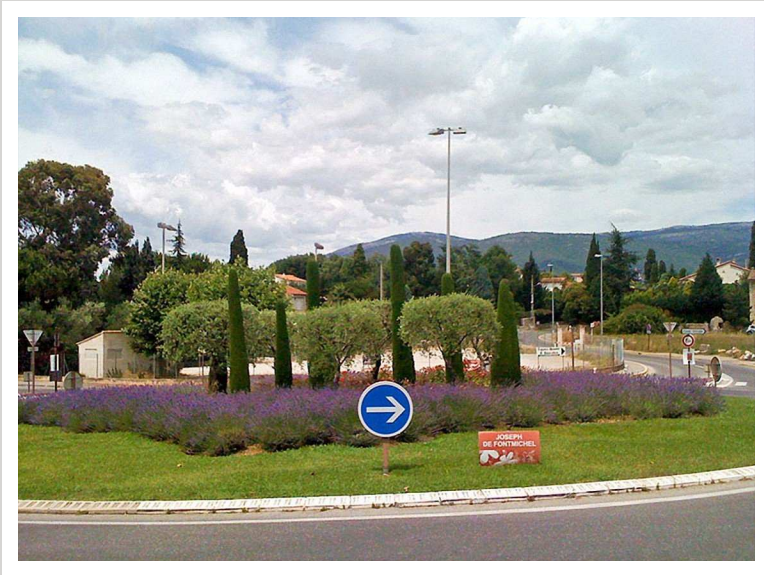
Saturday, June 20, 2009



Casino

On a couple of occasions I have written about food shopping in this area; the first time I mentioned the shrinking offer given that the smaller store belongs to the giant one, and the second time I complained about the fact that we now had the choice between Carrefour and... Carrefour. Well, here is some good news: since last Wednesday, there is a new supermarket, about the same distance from our home, albeit in the opposite direction: Casino, located in the Greenside section of the park. We did our shopping there this morning, and it was lovely. They had all the stuff we like and the other supermarket stopped carrying, the store is clean, well lit, and there is enough space between the aisles to move with a caddie. Hello Casino, goodbye Carrefour!

Sunday, June 21, 2009



BP Plascassier

Even with a car that doesn't consume gobs of fuel and has a large gas tank, it is necessary to stop at a gas station periodically; as I don't like it when the gauge dips too low, I try to fill up the Passat when the odometer tells me I've driven roughly 800 kms (500 miles). I regularly drive to the BP station in Plascassier for fuel, even though they charge a couple of cents more per liter than at the self-service station that's closer to home. Why? Because at BP, I can get my car washed, and they have air for the tires free of charge, a rarity these days. Stuff like this needs to be encouraged. Also, the drive to Plascassier is short and pretty enough. Today's photo shows the lavender-laden traffic circle in front of the BP station.

Monday, June 22, 2009



Pool

Coming up from the covered area where I had parked my car (since I washed it yesterday and the weather forecast called for scattered showers), I took this photo of parts of the company restaurant. But, you ask, what does this have to do with a pool? Well, the platform on the left actually covers a fairly large pool containing thousands of gallons of water that is kept on hand in the event of a fire. When it was first built years ago, it was open, thus triggering wild rumors among the employees that we were getting a pool to cool down on hot summer days. No such luck! Eventually, the pool was covered because algae were a constant problem. And speaking of water: it did eventually rain today, but not until I was on the road on my way home. Figures...

Tuesday, June 23, 2009



Coffee

I tend to eat lunch early, so by the time noon rolls around, I'm usually already at the coffee bar or at least on my way there. Until a few days ago, the ladies behind the counter had to hold a little receptacle under the coffee grinder, twist a lever to fill it with coffee, clamp it under a machine, push a button, then empty the receptacle once the coffee was done. Not any more: new machines of UNIC's Tango line have recently been installed, and the entire process is now completely automatic: at the push of a button, the coffee is being ground, brewed, and poured into a cup (which one must still manually place underneath the spout, though). This leaves a few more seconds to chat with the friendly staff, and if anything, the coffee tastes even better than before.

Wednesday, June 24, 2009



Olive Tree Alley

At 7:39 this morning, olive tree alley, which connects buildings A and B on the Amadeus campus, was empty save for a lone smoker who is evidently observing the rule that smoking is not permitted anywhere inside the buildings, nor too close to windows and doors. When I started working here in 1990, building A, the one shown, was the only one that existed; now the Amadeus campus consists of a dozen buildings as well as quite a few others in the park that are not directly connected to the main site. Incidentally, the squarish platform on which the smoker stands is meant to accommodate fire trucks in the event of an emergency; they would arrive through the back via the driveway of which one can just get a glimpse at the bottom of the image.

Thursday, June 25, 2009



Signs

This is the entrance to Haut-Sartoux, the area of the park where we live. As you can see, it's a cul-de-sac; this is because the exit to the *Route des Dolines* on the other end is closed off by a barrier in order to prevent through traffic. Note that there is not supposed to be any honking; there is. Note that people are not supposed to go faster than 30 kilometers per hour (18.6 mph); they do. Note that cars are not supposed to even stop along the road; they don't: people actually *park* along the road. But, you say, the sign claims they will be towed if they do! Well, they aren't. Note that there are supposed to be speed bumps; there are, so that sign is perfectly correct. In other words, two signs out of six are reflecting reality. Not bad for France...

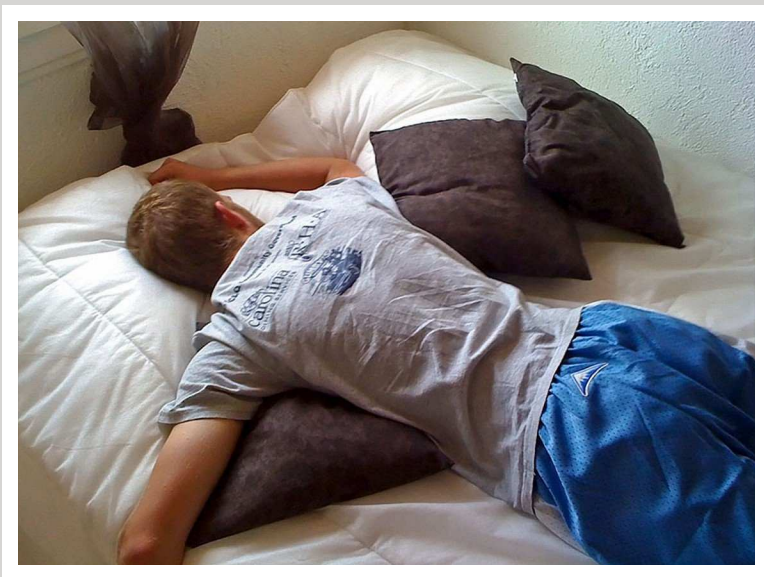
Friday, June 26, 2009



Oasis

After running around all afternoon in Cannes, going through a myriad of different administrative matters, and signing scores of more or less official looking documents, we were both famished and exhausted, and since 3:42 p.m. was a bit late for lunch and definitely too early for dinner, we entered a coffee shop where we had a delicious cappuccino and a no less delicious pastry. We were the only patrons in the tiny room on the first floor, and through the glass doors we saw this lovely garden (which, as the owner explained to us, cannot be used to seat customers because there is no fire escape). Now, this place is less than half a block from the busiest street in Cannes. How delightful to be able to find an oasis when one needs one so badly!

Saturday, June 27, 2009



Nap

18 hours after having returned from Kenya via Paris and London (don't ask...), and following a good night's sleep and a trip to the supermarket on Saturday morning, Eric crashed out in Cannes. It was just a short nap, and moments later we were all back to shopping as well as dinner at *La Piazza*, a place I have already written about earlier. The nap was almost an act of desperation: the original intent had been to watch some Wimbledon tennis, but in spite of the fact that several French players have entered the tournament (and one of them, Gilles Simon, is still in it), none of the public French networks were showing any tennis action. Canal+ appears to have the exclusive rights, and since we choose not to pay for that overpriced channel, we were out of luck. Thus... nap time!

Sunday, June 28, 2009



Saint Raphaël

It was almost 5 o'clock this afternoon when we decided to drive to Saint-Raphaël. This lovely seaside resort is located in the department of the Var; using the highway, it's about 45 minutes from our home (though coming back following the Mediterranean along the *Corniche d'Or* takes over an hour, and sometimes quite a bit longer depending on how many frightened tourists are crawling along the narrow and winding road that is squeezed between the sea and the Esterel). Today's photo was taken at 6:48 p.m. from location N 43° 25.45', E 6° 45.90' and looking in a southeasterly direction (you can "fly" there by firing up Google Earth; the level of detail available for this area is remarkable). More about Saint Raphaël tomorrow.

Monday, June 29, 2009



Jean Bart

We continue our pictorial visit of Saint Raphaël by strolling along the *Cours Jean Bart*, named after the great French naval commander (or pirate, as most other countries would call him). You can read up on this colorful character on-line; a highlight of his life would have to be the fact that he married 16-year old Nicole Gontier in 1676; she died a mere six years later after having given birth to four children! Indefatigable Jean then married Jacoba Tugghe seven years later, and she bore him ten children in the thirteen years they were married until his death in 1702. One is starting to get a feel for what poor Nicole must have died of... Anyway, we had dinner at a typical tourist joint along this promenade and delicious ice cream cones for dessert.

Tuesday, June 30, 2009



Town Beach

Another photo of this past Sunday's trip to Saint Raphaël, this time of the town beach. There are not too many people in the water; this will change in July and August. And now for something completely different: regular readers of this blog will remember the story of the little lamb Eric and I had found in late May. At the time, I promised to relay whatever news I might receive about the animal. Well, I just got an email from the lady who had taken the lamb home. It seems she has given it to friends who have more space and are raising it. The lamb's name is "Tartine", she's doing very well, is starting to graze in addition to still being given the bottle, so as a result she's grown quite a bit. So much for that; tomorrow, we'll leave Saint Raphaël.

Wednesday, July 1, 2009



Harbor Sunset

Taking sunset photos with a phone camera is a tricky business. Why? Because phones usually lack the controls needed for such captures, mainly exposure compensation. Faced with a bright light source, the camera will dramatically underexpose the rest of the picture. Some cameras (such as the one in the new iPhone 3GS) allow the user to specify the part of the image that should be used to calculate the exposure; in that case, the result is often a grossly overexposed sun. Today's photo was taken this past Sunday at 8:46 in the evening; it shows that by carefully placing the brightest part of the image behind something, in this case a ship's mast, one can obtain a pleasing picture that retains the mood of the scene. And with this sunset, we leave Saint Raphaël.

Thursday, July 2, 2009



Plaque

This plaque is mounted on the outside wall of our house; it was made by the *Poterie Tournesol*, a small shop in Tourrettes-sur-Loup that is famous for this kind of item. When we shopped for it years ago, we went through some catalog of plaques that had been made in the shop, and imagine our surprise when we came across one with our name! Some distant relative visiting the area, perhaps? Possibly an incredibly rich and hitherto unknown uncle looking for heirs? We asked the shopkeeper to check, but as it had been a cash purchase, no further information was available. As it turned out, our neighbors had ordered the plaque as a present for us. It has everything we like: olive trees, the Mediterranean, rolling hills, an old village... even a Siamese cat.

Friday, July 3, 2009



Timeliness

This morning, I showed up in the Mistral auditorium for an event that was supposed to start at nine o'clock and finish at noon. This photo was taken at 9:02, and as you can see, there is no soul in sight yet. To be fair, there were two other people present, but they were off to my right and therefore out of the field of vision of my iPhone. But where was everybody? Simple: the organizers had kindly made available coffee and croissants in the lobby; these things were evidently intended for those who were early (as if anyone around here would turn up early for a 9 a.m. event!) Be that as it may, by 9:15 there was no empty seat to be had and things finally got underway. I suspect that 9:15 a.m. was the start time intended by the organizers all along...

Saturday, July 4, 2009



Cap 3000

Apologies to those who expected a typical Independence Day entry on this July 4; it won't happen as it is not something we celebrate over here. Naturally, we think about it, but it doesn't affect our life in France. This evening, we went to Cap 3000, the closest thing to a mall we have around here. Except for a *Galeries Lafayette* department store and a pretty decent food market, there's nothing to see at Cap 3000 other than shoe and clothing stores. The reason for our trip was to buy stuff we will take to the States with us; essentially, you might say that this was a Ragusa expedition (and Cap 3000 is the only place in the area where we can buy that particular goodie). All this aside, it is July 4, so if you are a fellow American, Happy Independence Day!

Sunday, July 5, 2009



Wimbledon

What in the world does the admittedly exceedingly unattractive railway station in Cannes have to do with Wimbledon? Ah, quite a lot, as it turns out. This morning, we took a 9:30 a.m. bus to Cannes where we spent the day. After a late lunch, we decided to stay in town to watch the Wimbledon men's final that began at 3 p.m. our time. Since the last bus leaves at 7:50 in the evening, we were certain we'd have plenty of time to take a photo for today's blog entry after the match. Wrong! Andy Roddick and Roger Federer really went at it, and by the time Federer won 16:14 in the fifth and final set, we barely had time to run to the bus terminal near the railway station to catch the last bus. This image is thus all I can do for today. But what a match!

Monday, July 6, 2009



Fruit

The weather around here has been awful: extremely hot with humidity levels above 90%, in short, a mugginess resembling our worst New York memories. No wonder, then, that one doesn't feel like eating hot meals! The other day, when we were at Cap 3000, I had a wonderful treat from the self-service restaurant's fruit bar: grapes, pineapples, strawberries, peaches, kiwi, melon... truly refreshing. This is also a good time for salads, gazpacho, cold cuts, sorbet... anything to avoid heating up the kitchen or consuming warm food. An end is not in sight just yet; the occasional short downpours in the evening are not enough cool things down and only serve to increase the already sky-high humidity. A (short) blizzard would be nice...

Tuesday, July 7, 2009



Bed

It's hot and humid around here at the moment, and so sleep doesn't come easily. Last night, I stayed up rather late doing some tedious but necessary accounting, and then I watched a couple of episodes of Blackadder with Eric. It was already pretty late when I finally went to bed. I fell asleep with CNN on the TV and the fan aimed in my direction, so I was getting hot air from everywhere. No wonder I woke up a couple of times during the night... From the way I felt this morning, I must have finally slipped into a deep sleep seconds before that blasted alarm clock went off. About an hour later, at 7:21, what did I see by the garbage dumpsters next to the garage where I keep my car? A bed! It may all be in my head, but I haven't fully woken up yet today...

Wednesday, July 8, 2009



Strelitzia

What I always thought was a “Bird of Paradise” is actually called “Strelitzia” after the duchy of Mecklenburg-Strelitz in Germany, birth place of Queen Charlotte, wife of King George III of the United Kingdom. I have seen a portrait of this Charlotte, and all I can say is that she doesn’t at all resemble the blossom, whereas it is not too difficult to use one’s imagination and see the flower’s resemblance with an exotic bird. Incidentally, the American city of Charlotte, North Carolina, is named after the same person and is located in Mecklenburg county! There are five species of Strelitziaceae; this one is clearly a *Strelitzia reginae*, also known as (aha!) Bird of Paradise. In South Africa, where these beauties come from, the flower is also referred to as a crane lily.

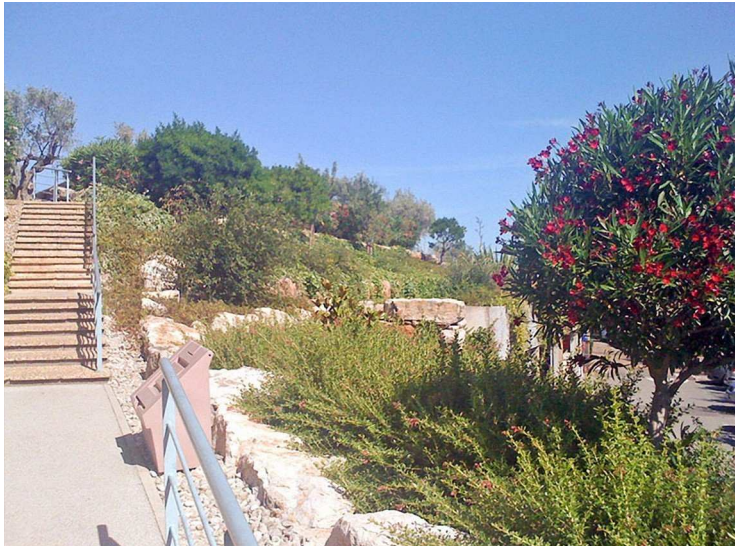
Thursday, July 9, 2009



Reflection

At 11:39 this morning, I was getting ready for an early lunch when I saw the grounds around the company restaurant beautifully reflected in the windows of one of the private dining rooms. There are roughly half a dozen such private rooms on this side of the restaurant; for the most part, they are used to host meals for visitors to our Executive Briefing Center. In the early evening, the rooms can also be booked by employees who wish to celebrate a change in department, a promotion, or even an upcoming retirement with a few colleagues. In such cases, beverages (soft drinks, punch, champagne, wine, beer, and so on) as well as hors-d'œuvres (sweet, salty, or both) can be arranged by the restaurant staff at extremely attractive prices. Convenient...

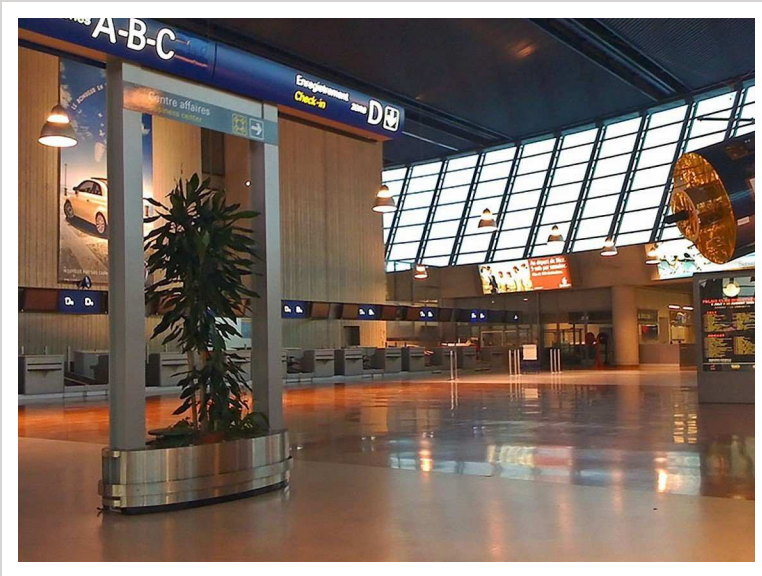
Friday, July 10, 2009



Steps

Rather than having Eric climb these steps to meet me after work yesterday, I walked down because we were headed for one of the lower parking lots anyway. Since I was a couple of minutes early, I stopped to admire the beautiful oleander in full bloom. On my left, building B rises up; its facade is not actually blue but glass, and it's the reflection of the sky that gives it that rich color. The little box in the area between the banisters contains salt. Though it may be hard to believe in this season, winter temperatures do occasionally dip below the freezing point, making these steps a very treacherous affair indeed, hence the salt bin. The grounds of the Amadeus campus are always meticulously well maintained, something most employees really appreciate.

Saturday, July 11, 2009



Waiting

Because of a situation that would be too complicated to explain in these few lines, this morning at 6:13 I found myself sitting in the departure area of Nice airport's Terminal 2 waiting for the counters visible in the background to open so that I could check in for my flight to New York. At the same time, Eric was in Terminal 1 of the same airport, checking in for a flight to London with connecting service to New York's JFK airport where, provided our respective flights are on time, we should arrive within an hour of each other. This wait for my 10:30 a.m. flight is not much fun for someone who is notoriously impatient... At 8 o'clock, I was checked in and through security. It is now 9 a.m. as I write this; it will be uploaded later from New York.

Sunday, July 12, 2009



Smith Haven Mall

Today, we were supposed to go out on the Long Island Sound with friends who have a boat, but a few days ago, I did something to my back, and yesterday's nearly nine hours in a cramped airline seat did not exactly improve the situation. With regret, we informed our friends that we would not be going. I spent the morning sitting at the kitchen table in Kings Park with a heating pad in my back. In the afternoon, we did venture outside to go to Smith Haven Mall where they have something I wish they had near us: an Apple store! We had a couple of Nathan's hot dogs, spent some time at Barnes & Noble, and before leaving, I took this photo of one of the rear mall entrances. Right now I'm back on the heating pad...

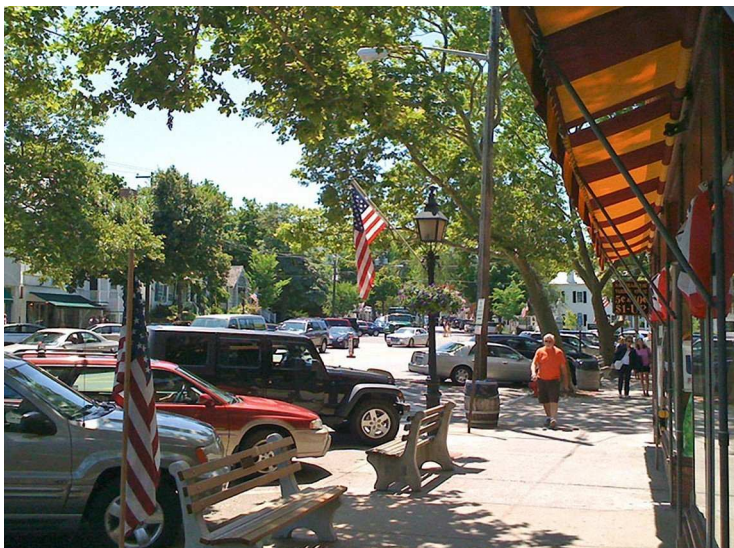
Monday, July 13, 2009



Kings Park

At 8:55 this morning, we were standing on the platform of the Kings Park railroad station (isn't it an amazing architectural accomplishment? And to think some people complain about Calatrava's magnificently designed train station in Liège...) Anyway, the Long Island Railroad actually took us to Manhattan on time, and we walked around mid-town for a while, taking it easy: my back is getting better every day, but it's a good idea not to do too much too quickly. We spent some time in Bryant Park, walked around Times Square, and on the way home we met Gail in Huntington where we went to the Book Review. It was odd to be back in the town we had lived in until our departure for France in the fall of 1990...

Tuesday, July 14, 2009



Sag Harbor

Sag Harbor is a small community on the northern edge of Long Island's South Fork (if this sounds confusing, fire up Google Earth, fly to $41^{\circ} 0' 7.00''$ N, $72^{\circ} 17' 40.57''$ W and if you zoom out, you will see what I mean). From here, one can take a ferry to Shelter Island, and from there another ferry to the North Fork of Long Island, saving a massive detour via Riverhead. We were happy to stay in town, however, wandering up and down Main Street (shown in today's photo), looking at the old windmill, and admiring the boats in the bay. The flags in the photo are not just remnants of the July 4 celebration of ten days ago; they are out all year. Which reminds me: Happy Bastille Day to our French friends in France and abroad!

Wednesday, July 15, 2009



Copperline

Late this morning, we took a flight from New York to Raleigh where we arrived around one o'clock in the afternoon. David was on hand to pick us up at the airport with our car, and we demonstrated our keen sense of priorities by immediately stopping at an eatery to have lunch. Because it takes 45 minutes to drive from Raleigh, where we were and where David lives, to Chapel Hill, our home in North Carolina, we decided to spend the afternoon in the Raleigh area with David rather than drive back and forth twice. By the time we finally arrived on Copperline Drive in Chapel Hill where I took today's iPhoto picture, it was 6:35 p.m. already. By now, I'm all unpacked, the Internet is up, and coffee is brewing. Life is good...

Thursday, July 16, 2009



Scooter

Because insurance rates for young drivers are what they are, Eric calculated that at the earliest, he would be able to afford driving a car starting in March of 2010, and as he needs an independent means of transportation right now, he decided to purchase a scooter. This process began back in France; endless lists were consulted to find a used one in good condition that didn't exceed 50 cc (no insurance, no registration, no license...). The ideal candidate was located a few days ago in Pittsboro, some 18 miles from Chapel Hill. At 5:20 tonight, Eric sat on it for the first time, but I was the lucky guy who got to drive it home. What fun! Right now, Eric is out driving (official excuse: the scooter needs gas) and having fun. We have a happy camper on our hands...

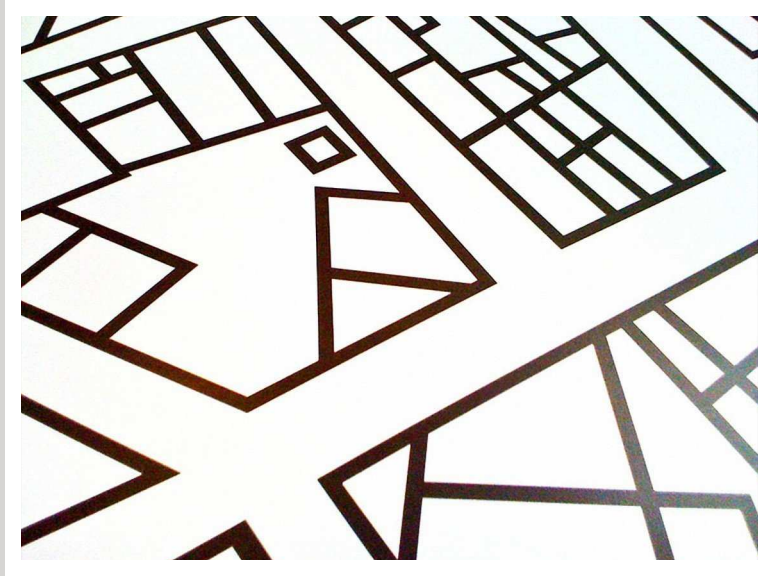
Friday, July 17, 2009



Downpour

This afternoon, we went shopping with David while Eric was enjoying the freedom brought about by his recent scooter acquisition. The prices in this country never cease to amaze me. It is not at all unusual to be charged an exorbitant four dollars for a medium-sized coffee with steamed milk, yet one can also purchase 50 blank DVDs on a spindle for the ridiculously low price of \$9.99, or 7 euros by the current exchange rate. A country of extremes... And speaking of extremes: while we were standing in front of a Border's book store at 5:40 p.m., the skies opened and unleashed a veritable deluge. Minutes later, the sun peaked through the downpour. Today's photo doesn't do justice to the type of rainfall we're talking about; let's just say it was coming down in buckets.

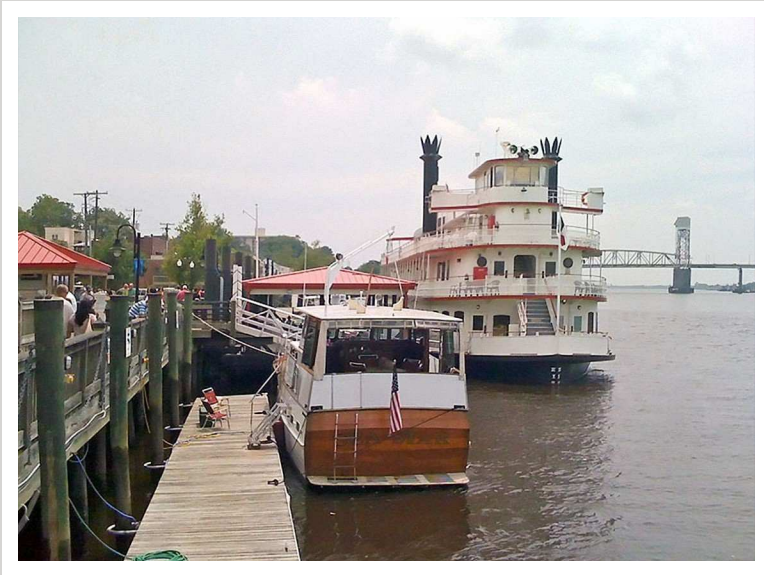
Saturday, July 18, 2009



Pattern

Did we visit the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh and admire some abstract black and white paintings by Paul Klee, or perhaps Piet Mondrian, or some other modern master? Were we looking at a downtown map of Chapel Hill with all the street names removed? Or perhaps we stumbled upon a sewing pattern? No, we are simply looking at one of the tabletops at the food court of South Point Mall in Durham. As it turns out, they all show this very abstract pattern. I took this picture just after 11 o'clock in the morning and the food court was empty: it was too late for the breakfast crowd and too early for those looking to have lunch.

Sunday, July 19, 2009



Wilmington

Today, we drove the nearly two and a half hours to the North Carolina coast and visited the town of Wilmington. The photo was taken at 1:51 in the afternoon; the Riverwalk, a promenade which runs along the Northeast Cape Fear River, is at left, and in the background, the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge is clearly visible. We had a delicious brunch at the *Caffe Phoenix* followed by a leisurely stroll through town. The place is rather touristy; it features a variety of colorful shops as well as other typical attractions designed to make tourists part with their money. After an obligatory coffee-shop stop, we left Wilmington for Wrightsville Beach; after all, we had not come all this way to leave without seeing the ocean, but more about that tomorrow.

Monday, July 20, 2009



Wrightsville Beach

After our visit to Wilmington yesterday, we drove to Wrightsville Beach to get a glimpse of the Atlantic ocean. The town consists of a four-mile-long beach island, an interior island called Harbor Island, and pockets of commercial property on the mainland. Even though it was Sunday, the beaches were not crowded at all. Some people were sitting under beach umbrellas, while others were in the water. Karen, Vicki, and I went for a walk on the beach while Eric spent an hour in the water which, according to him, was delightful. As I had driven from Chapel Hill to Wilmington, Vicki was our driver for the return trip. This gave my iPhone the opportunity to grab a few more shots between the coast and Raleigh.

Tuesday, July 21, 2009



Fearrington

Today's photo was taken at 5 p.m. at Fearrington village, a community built on farmland in the township of Pittsboro in Chatham County, North Carolina. By car, it is no more than ten minutes away from our Chapel Hill home; scenery-wise, it is truly beautiful and very typical for rural North Carolina. The community got started in 1974 when a couple bought a 200 year-old dairy farm from Jesse Fearrington. The 640 acres comprising the farm had been staked out by Jesse's great-great grandfather in 1786. Over the last 30 years, the community has grown to include over 1800 residents, a country inn and restaurant, an independent bookstore, a special breed of cows, and more. You can read all about the community on the Fearrington web site.

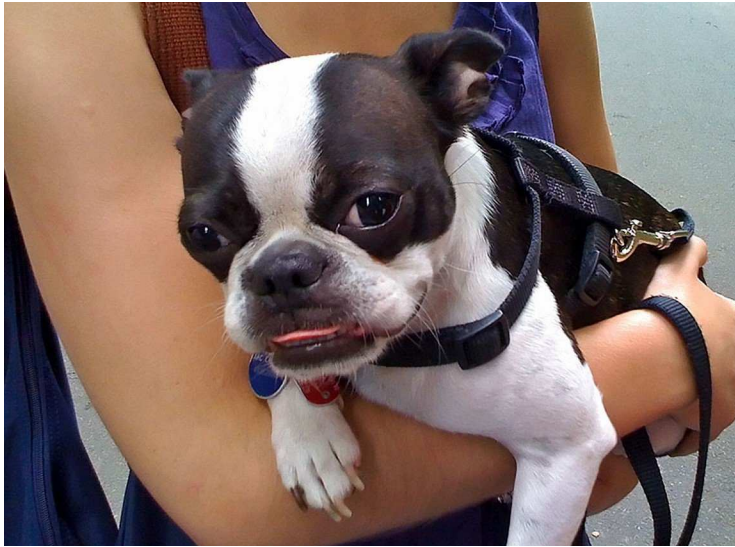
Wednesday, July 22, 2009



Service

Our 1996 Camry needed an oil change, so at 11 a.m., we drove into the service lane of the local Toyota dealership. What an amazing experience! We were greeted by an attendant to whom we explained the purpose of our visit; the dealership staff took it from there. People with laptops or other Internet-enabled devices may sit in the business lounge and access the free WiFi network; parents may bring their kids to the playroom; people in urgent need of a caffeine fix or simply longing for a cool drink can get a complimentary beverage at the bar; and those who just want to relax can do so in the main reception area. Everyone is friendly, helpful, nice... and the oil change was very inexpensive. France is great, but no one does service like the South of the United States.

Thursday, July 23, 2009



Amaryllis

This morning at 7:53, we picked up David at his Wolf Village apartment on the NC State campus (at the moment, he lives in a huge building where he is the only resident!), and a little later, we picked up Amelia (a.k.a. the human GPS) at her house. Purpose of today's outing: to try to find a car for David who desperately needs wheels. Buy a used car or lease a new one? What are the monthly payments? What is the buyback? Why is it so expensive? Decisions, decisions... Suffice it to say that we acquired insight but did not reach a conclusion yet. When we dropped off Amelia at her house after lunch, we met her dad and Amaryllis, the family Boston terrier, whom I caught with my iPhone at 2:03 p.m. She seems very comfortable in Amelia's arms...

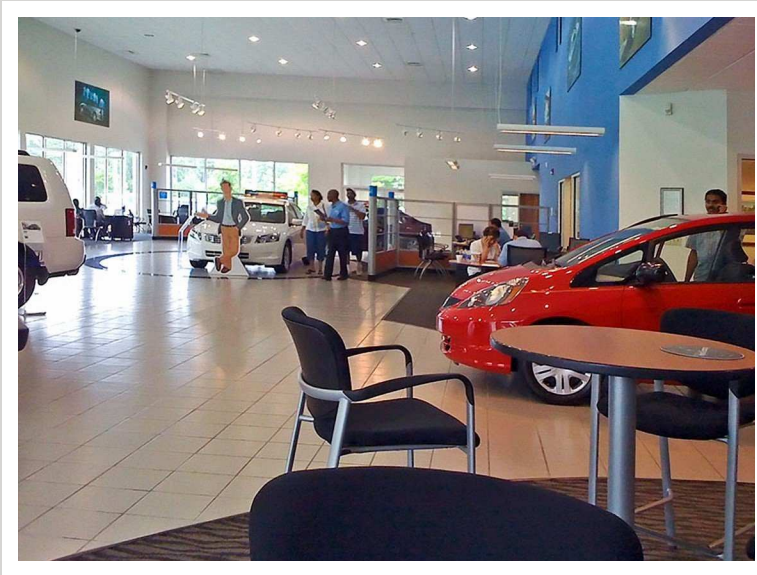
Friday, July 24, 2009



Books

After having brunch with Karen and Jen (new and important discovery: sweetening plain yoghurt with maple syrup is both delicious as well as a brilliant idea), we wanted to take a walk, but it was way too hot to venture outside. What to do? Easy: drive to the next mall and walk in a comfortable air-conditioned environment. At the same time, one can do some window-shopping. While the ladies went their own way, I retired to a Barnes & Noble bookstore, grabbed a couple of books, and sat down in their coffee shop with a medium latte, plenty of reading material, and free WiFi for my iPhone. These bookstores are great, but when I see that in all of them, the section on religion is several times larger than the one on science, I get an uneasy feeling...

Saturday, July 25, 2009



Dealership

It seems we're spending an awful lot of time at car dealerships these days; the reason, of course, is the hunt for David's automobile. Used (sorry: pre-owned) smaller cars with relatively low mileage are so expensive that one is almost forced to buy new. Example: a 2008 Toyota Corolla LE with 23,000 miles on the counter sells for just a little over one thousand dollars less than a new 2009 identically equipped model. What kind of sense does that make? With all this, leasing a new car becomes a very tempting proposition. At 3:20 this afternoon I snapped this photo at Crown Honda Southpoint while David and Amelia were test driving a Honda Civic LX. A little later, they also drove the Corolla LE. So far, it looks like Honda is winning. What a cliffhanger...

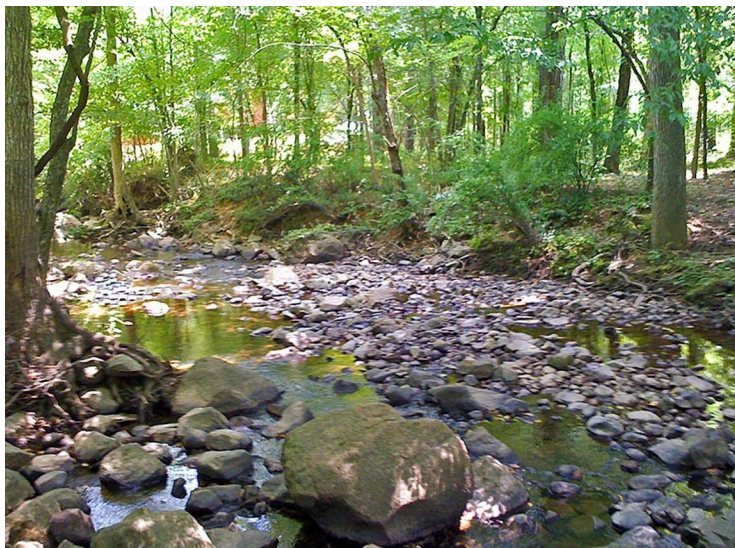
Sunday, July 26, 2009



Fireplug

This morning at 11:08, we parked the car in this Carrboro neighborhood and proceeded on foot in search of an address where an entry on Craigslist had promised a furniture giveaway (Eric needed a desk...) when this sunlit fireplug, or hydrant, if you prefer, caught my eye. Years ago, when I was designing user interfaces, I learned not to use mailboxes as icons because they vary extensively from country to country. I suppose much the same could be said for fireplugs: this one is definitely American and looks completely different from the ones in France. Later on, we stopped by the house Eric is renting with two buddies for the coming year to drop off the desk (yeah, he got it). In the afternoon, we took a walk along Bolin Creek, but that's a topic for tomorrow.

Monday, July 27, 2009



Bolin Creek

Yesterday afternoon, we parked the car at Foster's on Airport Road in Chapel Hill where we were practically forced to indulge in a tasty brunch: after all, parking is only for customers! We then followed the Bolin Creek Trail, a lovely walk with plenty of welcome shade. Looking at the picture, it is not at all obvious that one is in town! Near the end of the trail, we climbed the steps to the *Caffé Driade* to replenish the liquid we had lost *en route*. On our walk, I came across a traffic sign I had never seen before; I suppose it means that the path gets slippery for bicycles, the only vehicles allowed on the trail. Eric's suggestion that it warns riders of snakes attacking their bikes doesn't seem plausible to me... But if you look at the on-line version of the blog, you can judge for yourself.

Tuesday, July 28, 2009



Cracker Barrel

This morning, we had a typical Southern Breakfast at a Cracker Barrel Old Country Store. This is a nationwide chain that combines food with a store where they sell the kind of thing for which there is a fabulous word in Swiss German: “Ginggernillis”, meaning junk, trash, kitsch, whatchamacallits, in other words stuff that is ideal for people with, let’s say, uh, unusual taste. Cracker Barrel stores also have a thing about rocking chairs: you can purchase the one you’ve been sitting in (or any other one, for that matter). The breakfast was actually delicious: what makes it southern is the fact that the traditional rolls or muffins are replaced by biscuits, and that there is grits on the menu. I’m not a great fan of grits, but biscuits are tasty if you stay away from the gravy.

Wednesday, July 29, 2009



Jordan Lake

On our way for a last lunch with David prior to my departure for France tomorrow morning, we took the scenic route along Farrington Road and Jordan Lake. Strictly speaking, this is not a lake at all but a reservoir, and it is named in honor of former North Carolina Senator B. Everett Jordan, so contrary to what many people believe, “Jordan” is not a biblical reference. The lake (since this is what everyone insists on calling it) covers an area of 13,940 acres (56 km²). It was created between 1973 and 1983 when the US Army Corps of Engineers dammed the Haw and New Hope rivers. It is very close to our Chapel Hill home (15 minutes by car) and thus highly accessible. Much more information is available on the lake’s own web site.

Thursday, July 30, 2009



Organic

These days, everything that is consumed in the United States has to be organic. To those who, like myself, tend to hang on to the antiquated notion that words actually have a precise meaning and don't require Madison Avenue marketing gurus to come up with new definitions for the sole purpose of increasing someone's profit margins, the very idea of adding the adjective "organic" to nouns such as meat, eggs, milk, apples, or coffee (as shown in today's photo) seems to be redundant and, dare I say it, ridiculous. What "organic" actually means nowadays, I'm told, is that the foods were produced in an environment-friendly way and that third-world farmers were paid an honest price for their products. Call me cynical, but all I see is an increase in price...

Friday, July 31, 2009



JFK

Since this vacation series began on July 11 with an airport photo, it seems only fitting to end it with one. This shot was taken yesterday at New York's John F. Kennedy airport, Terminal 3 (the old Pan Am World Port), Gate 8. The jetway has just been removed from Delta's flight 132 to Athens; two or three minutes later, the aircraft was pushed back and was on its way. The gate did not remain empty long: another Boeing 767 soon occupied the space: my own flight 82 to Nice. We took off at 7 p.m. and landed at 8:10 this morning, ten minutes ahead of schedule. The minutes gained were more than offset by a very late luggage delivery, but the main thing is that my bag arrived at all. We have not always been this lucky, but then I didn't fly via London this time...

Saturday, August 1, 2009



Swiss Alligator

There is no place on the *Côte d'Azur* we like better than Cannes, and so it's no wonder that I am here a mere day after my arrival back in France. After a leisurely early dinner at *La Piazza*, I walked around in search of something to honor August 1, Swiss Independence Day (independence from Hapsburg, if you must know). Not only did I find a boat with a Swiss flag (unfortunately not flowing in the wind because there wasn't any), but the Alligator is registered in Basel, too! What could be more fitting, then, than to make this today's blog picture? As it turns out, I brought my laptop but not the cable that connects my iPhone to it, so I had to email myself the photo. I'm probably still suffering from jet lag...

Sunday, August 2, 2009



Mirabelle

This morning at 9:30 I was wandering around the streets of *Le Suquet*, the old part of Cannes. The steps leading down to *La Mirabelle* have always been a favorite spot of mine, provided there are no people around. Even though I was a bit late, I managed a shot without tourists. Every time I pass here, I forget to note the name of the street, and it's too small to show on any of the on-line street maps. Anyway, the main reason one ascends these steps is to eventually end up at the *Place de la Castre* from where one has a terrific view of Cannes. This morning, an organist was practicing in the (still) empty church on top of the hill; judging from the sound, they were not quite ready for prime time yet but seemed to enjoy themselves. On the web version of this blog you can listen in...

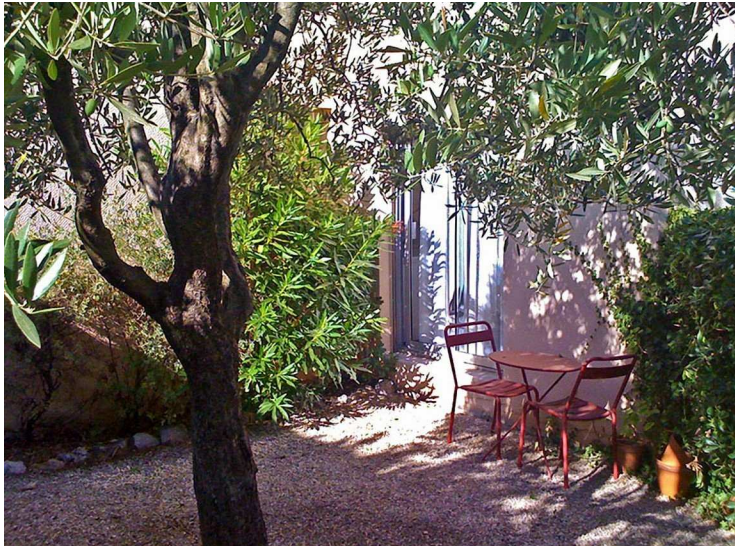
Monday, August 3, 2009



Gardening

I hate gardening; I loathe it with a passion that borders on the irrational. I mean, the futility of it all! One cuts plants down only to watch them grow back bigger and stronger than they were. My own tiny front lawn is covered with pebbles, and the planters on my terrace are filled with wood chips that have the merit not to grow. Here is a portion of the walkway I am supposed to maintain as far as greenery is concerned. Since I have been away, the bushes have grown well into the path and it is necessary to duck to get through; if I ever catch the raving lunatic who saw fit to plant shrubs with a negative leaf to thorn ratio along a walkway, he'll be sorry. Anyway, time to call the man who takes care of this sort of thing for me. Thank goodness for gardeners...

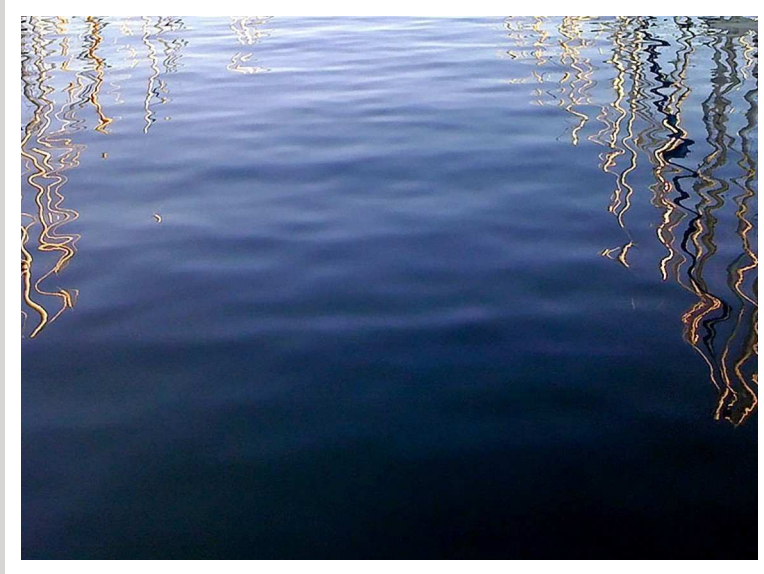
Tuesday, August 4, 2009



Pebbles

Yesterday, I mentioned that in an effort to reduce gardening chores to the barest minimum, I had covered my tiny front yard with pebbles; lest you thought I was kidding, here is proof. Underneath the pebbles, a tarpaulin covers the entire yard to prevent weeds from making it to the surface. Other than the olive tree, which I love, the only plants tolerated are along the edges. The window in the background leads to the kitchen; the only other access to this small garden is through a second door, just out of sight to the left, which leads to the master bedroom. The other two sides of the squarish garden are surrounded by hedges for privacy. And the mess I showed yesterday? As I got home from work today, I saw that it had been taken care of.

Wednesday, August 5, 2009



Masts

At 7:46 this evening, the very gentle movement of the water in Cannes' yacht harbor was enough to turn the reflected masts of the sailboats into a slowly moving pattern. The richest of the rich must berth their floating palaces in the harbor of Antibes, the only place around here that can handle truly enormous ships. While the harbor of Cannes can only accommodate ships of a smaller size, some of these yachts are nothing to sneeze at! To us, the Cannes harbor has two advantages that make it special: first, it is in Cannes, our favorite place around here, and second, the piers are open to the public, and one can walk around and take a look from really close up. Besides, aren't these boats a little less obscene than the truly huge ones?

Thursday, August 6, 2009



Madison

This afternoon at 5:42 p.m., I learned that we have *The Bridges of Madison County* right here in Sophia! Indeed, the owners of a local eatery decided to call their establishment “*Sur la route de Madison*” (in an Indiana Jones font, no less), the film’s French title. This is odd: first, the French title implies that the action unfolds on a road in Iowa leading to a place called Madison, but there is, in fact, no such place in that state (there is a Fort Madison, but it’s in a different county). Second, there is not a single covered bridge in Sophia that I’m aware of, so the reference to this movie seems even stranger. Finally, neither Meryl nor Clint were around. I hope the food is less disappointing than that. But the movie? Call me sentimental, but I like it very much.

Friday, August 7, 2009



Privacy

At 7:05 this evening, my bus had just entered the *Boulevard Carnot*, one of the major roadways leading into Cannes. It was still rush hour, so traffic in both lanes leading downtown was bumper to bumper. Once again, I noticed how absolutely oblivious people are of others when they are sitting in their cars. They scratch themselves in all kinds of places (and not just the men!), remove and examine disgusting objects from their noses (okay, mostly the men), to say nothing of what couples can be observed doing when they are in a car together. So the next time you're sitting in your automobile, dear reader, think that you may be seen or even photographed. Not every blogger will show as much restraint as I and publish such an innocuous picture!

Saturday, August 8, 2009



Anouk

At 10:52 this morning, I was impatiently waiting for Anouk to have her way with me. Anouk has been cutting my hair for a while now, and my wife's even longer. She's from Cannes, very cute, a bit feisty (she does have some Corsican blood) and married to an Italian with whom she has two children. Anouk and her husband are both soccer fans, but supporters of different teams. This leads to all kinds of rather humorous conflicts, the most serious of which goes back to July 9, 2006 when Italy and France squared off in the final of the soccer world championship in Germany (Italy won). While shampooing, Anouk gives the best head massages, and if one can make her talk about her family, she gets carried away and the massage lasts much longer. Simple pleasures...

Sunday, August 9, 2009



Paul

This morning at 8:52 I was already comfortably seated at a table in Paul's, sipping a delicious cappuccino and eating a rhubarb tart. For the second Sunday in a row, I didn't get my Kramick; they only had the family size and not the one that is fit for consumption by an individual. For the uninitiated, a Kramick is a Belgian (see, it's not just about beer any more...) bakery specialty, a special bread sweetened with raisins. It's absolutely delicious. I am very interested in the etymology of the word (which I have also seen spelled "Cramique"). Perhaps Pierre can take some time off carting dirt-filled wheelbarrows around and attempt a little local Belgian research? Oh, and as for last week's (August 2) mystery: the street name is "*Rue Panisse*".

Monday, August 10, 2009



Self-Portrait

Two (2) people wanted to know how my visit to Anouk had changed me, and there is simply no way I can ignore such a large percentage of my readership. I therefore took this self-portrait yesterday morning at 9:28 on top of *Le Suquet* in Cannes. Many people make it needlessly difficult to take iPhone pictures of themselves; they hold the device awkwardly and blindly tap the side they can't see in search of the shutter button. There's a much easier way. The iPhone takes the picture when one *releases* the button, not when one taps it. Therefore, one can place a finger on top of the button, aim the camera, take the finger off, and voilà—the shutter is released. This comes in handy in a variety of other shooting situations.

Tuesday, August 11, 2009



Picnic

For lunch, I met with a delightful group of people I used to work with for what I would call a “comfortable picnic,” i.e., one where one can sit down without having to share one’s food with ants. This took place at Laure’s house, or more precisely on her beautiful 70m² (750 ft²) terrace. Present were (from left to right) Gilbert (of whom just a tiny bit is visible), Nathalie, Carine, Sophie, and of course Laure (not in the picture because she was running around doing the kind of things hostesses do). The food was excellent, the coffee superb (one word: Nespresso), and the company outstanding. What more could one want, and on a work day to boot? Thanks, Laure!

Wednesday, August 12, 2009



Joueuse

On August 5, a mere week ago, an intriguing movie opened in France: “Joueuse” (which translates into [female] “Player”). It takes place in Corsica and is about a cleaning woman who learns to play chess to escape her day-to-day existence. Sandrine Bonnaire plays the female lead. Corsica, chess, and Sandrine (not necessarily in that order)... how could I resist? Imagine my surprise, then, when I looked up the schedule and found out that the movie wasn’t playing in Cannes any more! The only place it was still showing around here was the “Variétés” in Nice, so naturally I went. Is it a great movie? Not really, but it’s good, and it even features Kevin Kline speaking passable French, so I enjoyed myself. Still, why can’t anyone make a movie that shows chess realistically? Oh well...

Thursday, August 13, 2009



Patrick Henry

Patrick Henry was one of the founding fathers of the United States. He is best known for a speech he made in 1775 and which he ended with the defiant words, "Give me liberty, or give me death!" All well and good, but when I spotted this tea room in Nice yesterday, it dawned on me that Henry's reputation for bravado may be entirely based on a tremendous misunderstanding. Indeed, thirsty from a lengthy speech, Patrick Henry may simply have been trying to order a beverage in a humorous way: "Waiter, give me Liber'tea or give me death!" If one remembers that the Boston Tea Party had taken place a mere two years earlier, such political humor becomes credible, indeed. American history may have to be rewritten; remember, you read it here first!

Friday, August 14, 2009



Rue Masséna

At 7:17 p.m. this past Wednesday, the streets in Nice were still busy with tourists looking for a place to eat. The *Mirador* in the foreground appears to have one free table (it was taken seconds after I took this photo). On the left is the *Orange* store where we waited in line to get our first iPhones. We are in the *Rue Masséna*, named after one the most famous people born here, French military commander Jean-André Masséna (1758–1817) whose biography reads like an adventure novel. Many things in Nice are named after Masséna, from the largest high-school to the largest square in the center of town. While writing this entry, I came across the curious fact that there is a village in New York State named after Masséna! Who said blogging wasn't educational?

Saturday, August 15, 2009



Croissants

I don't know if it's the water, the butter, or both, but there is something about the way the French make *croissants* that makes them better than any other (the *croissants*, not the French). Combined with a cappuccino, a *pain au chocolat*, and perhaps a glass of juice, it is a perfect breakfast, even without preserves, marmalade, honey, and butter. Anyway, that's how my day started at 9:53 this morning in Cannes. Note that cappuccino is not very typical around here for breakfast; the French much prefer a *bol de café au lait* (yes, that's a *bowl* of milk coffee) or just a normal black coffee. Why a bowl and not a mug? Simply because it makes it easier to dunk the *croissants*. I like neither crumbs in my coffee nor soggy croissants; I don't dunk, so I'm fine with a cup.

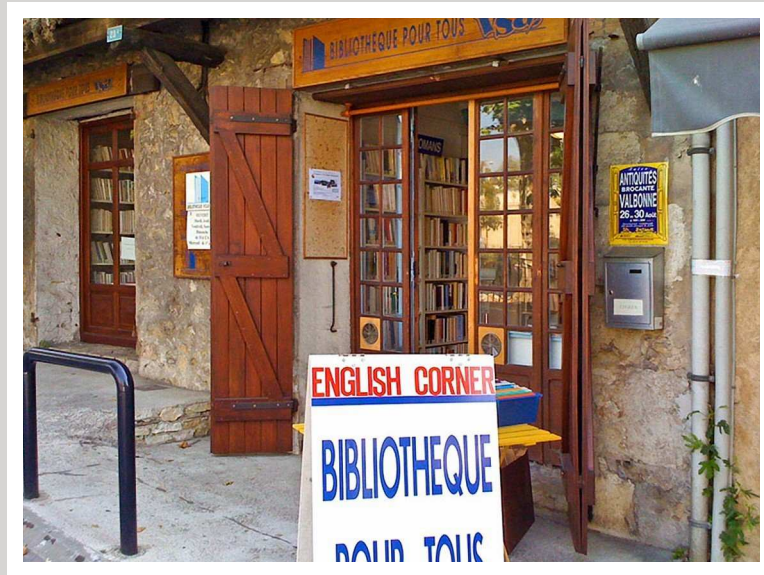
Sunday, August 16, 2009



Circus

The circus is in town! I had seen the tents, trailers, and animal cages on the very large square next to the village of Valbonne, but that was from the bus yesterday, and so I went to take a look this morning. To be sure, the *Arlette Gruss* circus is small, but they do show up in this area regularly and they have some serious circus animals, such as tigers and elephants. The last time we went to the circus was in Monaco, about 15 years ago. From all the sawdust and the many animals, Eric got a doozy of an asthma attack, and we had to leave, sneezing, wheezing, and sniveling kid in tow. On our way out, we saw Prince Rainier running after one of his grand-children. Aristocracy or not, everyone has the same problems. Good thing, too...

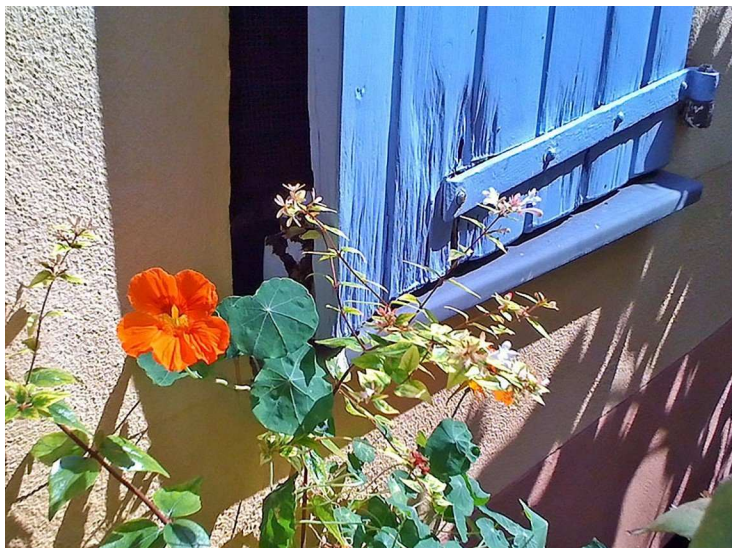
Monday, August 17, 2009



Bibliothèque

While strolling through Valbonne yesterday morning, I came across what I believe is a new library (though I've been known to walk past this sort of thing for months without noticing). It is a lending library *pour tous* (for everyone), i.e., it's part of a nationwide (private) initiative to encourage reading (the government is testing other ideas, such as giving college students a free subscription to a newspaper of their choice). The library has an English corner, presumably to encourage a portion of the non-French population to read more, too. There is also an English bookstore in Valbonne; clearly, it wouldn't be right if the French could borrow books while anglophone readers were forced to buy them. It never ceases to amaze me how many things the French get right.

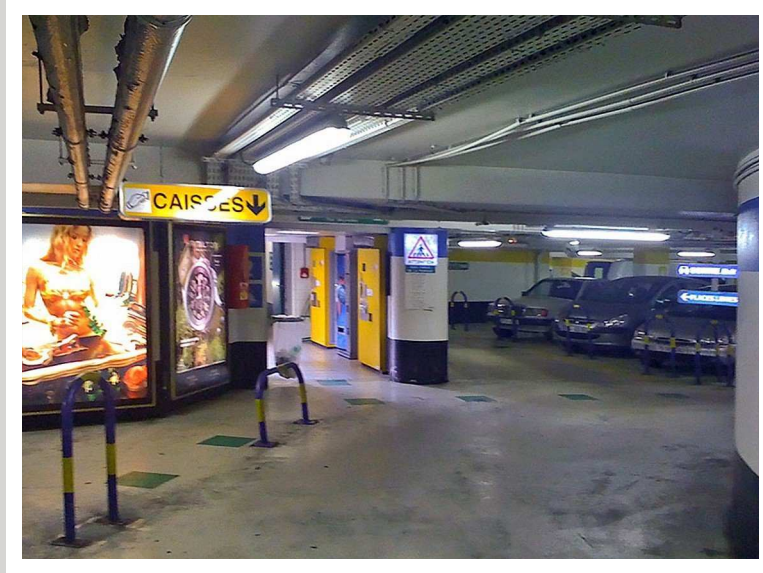
Tuesday, August 18, 2009



Observant

As an alert and long-time reader of this blog (and even longer-time wife of the blogger) has pointed out, the library I presented as new yesterday has been in Valbonne for at least as long as we have, in other words, uh, let's see, nearly 19 years! How could I have missed it? Probably because of the opening hours: Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays from 10 a.m. to noon, and Wednesdays from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. And when it's closed, it's all but invisible... Then again, perhaps I only do notice things that are truly recent, like this lovely orange flower in today's photo. I can pretty much guarantee that it wasn't there a month ago, so while I may not be the most observant person in the world, I do notice certain things...

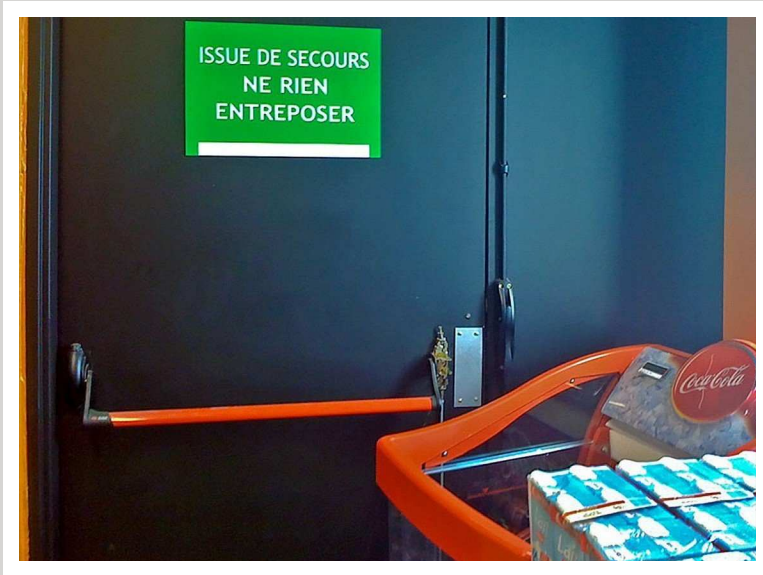
Wednesday, August 19, 2009



Parking

I have written about things the French get right on so many occasions that I feel it is about time I mentioned one thing they don't get at all: the French cannot build a decent parking garage to save their lives. The curves are too tight, the lanes not wide enough, the spots way too narrow and often too short, and there are supporting columns after every two spots. In other words: every single spot is made even narrower than it already is by the presence of pillars that are both too long and too wide. Here's an idea: Let *le président Sarkozy* export the French healthcare system to the United States; in exchange, president Obama can send architects and engineers to France to teach their local colleagues how to build parking garages. Both countries would come out ahead.

Thursday, August 20, 2009



Do As I Say...

...not as I do! While we are on the subject of what the French are not particularly good at, it is necessary to mention a certain propensity for bucking authority and disregarding instructions, even their own. While I was shopping for groceries this evening, I came across this door. The sign reads, loosely translated, "Emergency Exit, keep unobstructed." As you can see, the store cheerfully disregarded its own directive by obstructing the exit with a Coca Cola display case, a stack of milk cartons, and two empty pallets (out of sight on the floor). In short: there had better not be an emergency any time soon. The same lack of discipline is evident in the way the French drive, or worse, park their cars. Does one get used to it? Well, some of us do, more or less...

Friday, August 21, 2009



Roadwork

This is what we used to call “the traffic circle with the ugly statue”—and everyone knew what we were talking about. In June of this year, we were informed that for one kilometer (0.6 miles) from here up the road visible in the background, “important road works” would be conducted. All we know is that two additional traffic circles will be built (we can’t imagine why). It also looks like the road, currently only one lane in either direction, will be widened—though in some spots we cannot see how it is possible. As soon as school vacation ends (in one week), this portion of the road will be the source of massive traffic jams. And the work is supposed to go on until February 2010... On the positive side: no more ugly statue to scare little kids, at least not for the moment.

Saturday, August 22, 2009



Arrivals

This morning at 10:05 I had just parked my car and was looking down on the Arrivals level at Nice airport where I was picking up my wife who was coming in from Raleigh via New York. According to the schedule, Delta flight 82 arrives at 8:20, but a mechanical problem in New York (later naturally blamed on the weather) delayed the plane by almost two hours. Isn't it amazing that delays are never the airline's fault? They even make it sound as though the constantly blamed "late incoming aircraft" were an act of God completely out of human control. But let's be grateful that the mechanical problem was apparently fixed since the plane arrived safely, and that the luggage showed up at the same time as the passenger, a phenomenon less common than one would expect.

Sunday, August 23, 2009



Night

The situations one should avoid most of all with camera phones are low light scenes, and clearly, night photography is one of the most difficult of these. As we were wandering through Cannes around ten past eleven last night, I saw the lovely way *Le Suquet* was lit, and so I just had to try. What this sort of thing typically produces is a sea of noise. This is what we used to call “grain” when we were using film, and while it may have been desirable back then, in digital photography it is definitely frowned upon: grain is acceptable, noise is bad. Ten minutes worth of post-processing fixed most, if not all issues, and while my Nikon would definitely have been preferable for this sort of exercise, I was pleased to see that the iPhone did well enough for a blog entry.

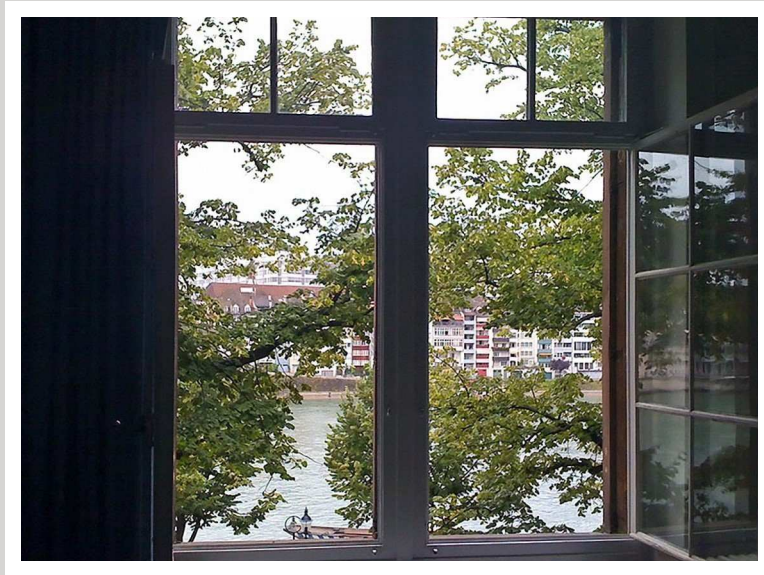
Monday, August 24, 2009



Carts

Tonight, we are headed to the airport for a flight to Mulhouse to surprise my aunt Marie who is turning 97 tomorrow, so this airport photo, taken last Saturday, is a good choice for today's blog entry. At Nice airport, carts used to be freely available in the baggage claim area. The result was that people left them all over the place, so they ended up being a problem in the parking lots. Now one needs a one euro coin which one gets back upon returning the cart. This is fine for people who come from countries that use the euro, but others are unlikely to be able to get a cart with this system. Ideally, there should be coin-less carts that people would voluntarily return to a designated collection area, but human nature being what it is, this is not about to happen. Pity...

Tuesday, August 25, 2009



Basel

After our birthday visit to my very surprised but happy now 97-year old aunt Marie in Mulhouse this morning, we drove the 32 kilometers (20 miles) to Basel, a city I know like the back of my hand. After feasting on *Saint-Honoré*, we met my cousin Evelyne who is a teacher; one of her classrooms is in the *Kaserne*, the old military barracks of Basel that now serve as a school and cultural center. Looking out the window, one has a beautiful view of the Rhine through gorgeous old trees. Right outside is the landing of one of four ferries that hang from a cable spanning the Rhine and are completely driven by the current of the river. Therefore, they do not require any outside energy source, something that must surely please the rather frugal Swiss...

Wednesday, August 26, 2009



Mulhouse

At 9:21 this morning, we were admiring the cobble-stoned *Place de la Réunion*, the center of the old town of Mulhouse. In addition to the beautifully restored (mostly 15th century) houses, there are many gorgeous shops, like the *crémérie* in the third house from the left. The name of this house is *Butterblume* (buttercup), so the dairy store is appropriately named *Au Bouton d'Or*. Also on this square are the Protestant *Temple Saint-Etienne* and the old Town Hall that was built in 1553 and now houses the city's Historical Museum. Even though we had enjoyed breakfast at the hotel, we couldn't ignore the *chocothèque* and indulged in a couple of treats and a cappuccino under the umbrellas before our second visit to my aunt Marie and an early afternoon flight home to Nice.

Thursday, August 27, 2009



Condomeria

In Basel, we passed this store on Tuesday evening. As the name implies, the Condomeria sells almost exclusively condoms of a bewildering variety, though they carry some other contraceptive devices, such as diaphragms. They also provide advice on contraception in general and on condoms in particular. The store's web site offers interesting information, but unfortunately only in German. The company's motto is a statement made by Elise Ottesen-Jensen: "I dream of the day when all children who are born are also wanted, when men and woman are equals, and when sex is an expression of pleasure, intimacy, and tenderness." Today, she might have added a word about protection from disease. I would love to see stores like this in the United States...

Friday, August 28, 2009



Mittleri Brugg

While we are in Basel, we may as well stroll over the “Mittleri Brugg”, the Middle (or Central) Bridge. Even though today’s structure was built in 1905, the original bridge goes back to the year 1225, which makes it the first (and for a while only) Rhine crossing. The structure with the colored roof tiles ahead, behind the Swiss flag, is the “Käppelijoch”; originally, this was where one had to pay the bridge toll. Later, it also served as a place of public punishment. For example, women convicted of adultery were shackled and thrown into the Rhine from there, as were men convicted of bigamy or mistreatment of their parents. Looking down into the river these days, one is more likely to see a “Waidlig”, a craft surprisingly tricky to handle in the current with just one oar.

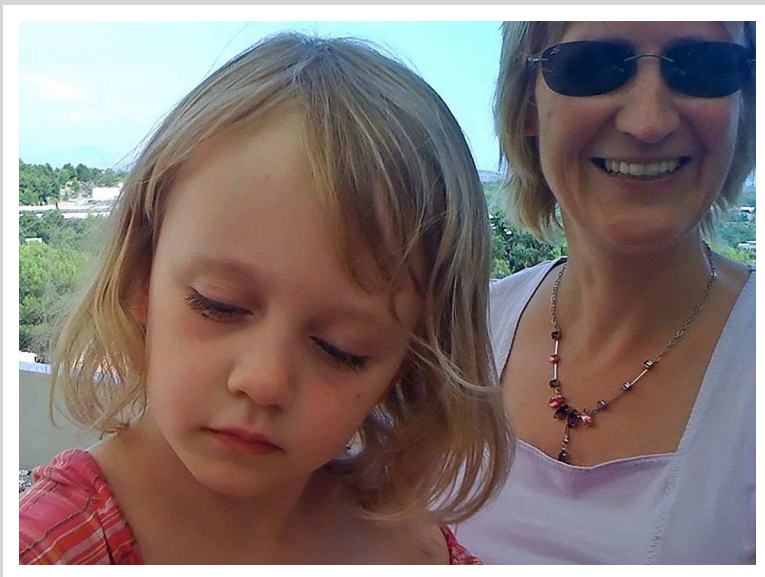
Saturday, August 29, 2009



Snow Leopard

Yesterday, Apple released Mac OS X 10.6, a.k.a. Snow Leopard. As we were sitting in the bus to Cannes in the evening, I was on pins and needles: would we get there in time for me to grab a copy at MCS? As it turned out, we did, but barely: I was the last customer they let into the store. After a scrumptious seafood dinner at the *Caveau 30*, I installed the new OS on my MacBook Pro, and I'm happy to report that everything is working beautifully, except two third-party apps for which upgrades have already been announced. This, then, is the first blog entry brought to you running Snow Leopard. This morning, we had my kind of breakfast: Nespresso Latte, a bowl of fresh strawberries (cream was added), a Cramique... and Snow Leopard. *Bon appétit!*

Sunday, August 30, 2009



Natasha

To ring in the new school year that starts tomorrow, we had our friends Michèle, Ron and Gudrun, and their daughter Natasha over for a French-American brunch (meaning: there were bagels with salmon and cream cheese, but also Champagne and wine). The weather cooperated nicely: the temperature didn't exceed a pleasant 28°C (or 82°F), the humidity, though still on the high side, was bearable, and there was a breeze coming from the Mediterranean. Natasha and I have a great deal in common: we are both very well behaved, we like chocolate (though she favors dark whereas I prefer light), and, contrary to the other people present, neither one of us is a teacher. Reasons enough to make the young lady, shown here with her mom, the subject of today's entry.

Monday, August 31, 2009



Sunrise

At 7:14 this morning, the view from our terrace was spectacular: the rising sun was hidden behind a bank of clouds, its reddish light reflected by the Mediterranean. I ran back inside to grab my iPhone; the early morning light changes very rapidly, and usually one has but a few seconds to capture a particular look. Indeed, when I got back less than half a minute later, the light was no longer the same: the sun was obviously a little bit higher, the clouds had shifted by the smallest of margins, and the reflection on the water appeared less focused than before. Sunrise was at 6:53 this morning; isn't it amazing that 30 seconds should make such a difference 21 minutes later? I believe it is, but even so, I thought this was pretty enough to begin the week and end the month.

Tuesday, September 1, 2009



William Tell

Last weekend, I got distracted with the release of Snow Leopard and our Sunday brunch, while yesterday, I simply had to use the sunrise photo. Time now to return to the mini-series of images from last week's quick trip to the Basel-Mulhouse area. Last Wednesday morning, I took this photo of the *Café Guillaume Tell* in Mulhouse. Wait a minute, isn't this Tell dude, famous for having shot an Apple off his son's head, a Swiss folk hero? And isn't Mulhouse an Alsatian city, and therefore French? Yes and yes, but one must remember that Mulhouse became an associate city of the Swiss Confederation in 1515 and did not become part of France until 1798, so there is quite a bit of Switzerland in this town. Just think: all this explanation for a guy who probably never existed...

Wednesday, September 2, 2009



Doggie Bags

I have mentioned before that French cities have become a great deal cleaner, at least when it comes to the stuff one might accidentally step into given the affinity the locals have for dogs of all sizes and gastric capacity. The problem used to be significant enough to be regularly written about, particularly in British and American travel guides. As I reported on June 4, things have improved. One reason is that municipalities are giving dog owners the means of cleaning up after their pets, as shown in this Mulhouse dispenser of a different kind of doggie bags. They are free, but not using them, one risks a rather steep fine. Of course, dogs were never the problem in the first place; it's certain owners that needed training. It looks like even tough cases are learning...

Thursday, September 3, 2009



Tour de l'Europe

This mostly residential tower is the tallest building in Mulhouse and indeed, in all of Alsace. Its triangular shape symbolizes the three countries that come together in this region: France, Germany, and Switzerland. Including basements and mezzanines, there are 37 levels; the rotating restaurant on the top is located on the 31st floor and completes one full turn every 75 minutes. Diners are seated 97 meters (318 ft) above ground; from up there, one has a great view that, depending on the weather, can extend all the way to the Alps. The tower was completed in 1972 and houses 180 apartments and studios as well as several office floors. It has become the symbol of the city of Mulhouse and contrasts nicely with the far older structures of the old town.

Friday, September 4, 2009



Saint Martin's

Saint Martin's church is the oldest in Basel and second only to the Münster, or cathedral. Saint Martin's was first mentioned around the year 1100, and the lower part of the steeple and portions of the façade go back to the year 1287. Following the big earthquake of 1356, the church had to be almost entirely rebuilt. It became Protestant in 1529, and today, it is used mainly for concerts (in fact, yours truly sang at Saint Martin's in the mid-sixties). Traditionally, the bell of Saint Martin's rings in the annual autumn fair with its countless attractions, and on each, the first ride following the bell is free. Needless to say, at noon of the day the fair starts, there's a hush as kids of all ages wait for the bell. And with this, we wrap up our mini-series on the Basel-Mulhouse area.

Saturday, September 5, 2009



Chocolate

France is not considered a great chocolate country in the same way Switzerland and Belgium are, but there are still some good *chocolatiers* around. At 6:13 this evening, we passed the window of one of them on the *Rue Hoche* in Cannes. Here one can buy a Hello Kitty, the catch of the day, seashells, starfish, a whole lobster Thermidor, even a bottle of sun screen (with UV protection, of course)... all made of chocolate. Whether one likes dark chocolate, milk chocolate, white chocolate, or any kind of flavored variety, one is sure to find something to one's liking here. However, there is not much in terms of French chocolate to be found in supermarkets; one is better off buying imported goods, particularly from the countries mentioned above.

Sunday, September 6, 2009



Home Delivery

Occasionally, I come across signs that strike me as amusing, either because they are typical for the Mediterranean mentality or because they express something that is not the intended message. This sign falls in the second category; the left side reads, “Feet, Legs, Back—Delivered to your home”. Since this is an orthopedic supply store, they of course mean that items for the medical treatment of feet, legs, and back may be delivered to people’s homes. While I’m on the subject of signs, I recently saw an example of an obviously home-made sign in an art gallery window; it said that the cat was not locked in. I guess a cat lives in this gallery and that concerned passers-by used to call the owners saying that they had forgotten to let the animal out...

Monday, September 7, 2009



Tune-Up

At 5:39 this evening, my Passat was parked in the lot of the Volkswagen dealership in Grasse, waiting patiently for its first scheduled maintenance, the 1 year or 15,000 kilometer (whatever comes first) tune-up. There are a couple of dealerships that would be a little bit closer, but the one in Grasse is where we bought the car, and I always feel I get better service there. VW in Antibes once went as far as telling me that I shouldn't expect great service if I insisted on buying my cars elsewhere! Needless to say, I haven't gone back there. Tomorrow, we'll leave Vicki's Polo in Grasse for its tune-up when we pick up my car. They won't believe their eyes: it's a 2002 model and only has 17,500 kilometers (less than 11,000 miles) on the counter...

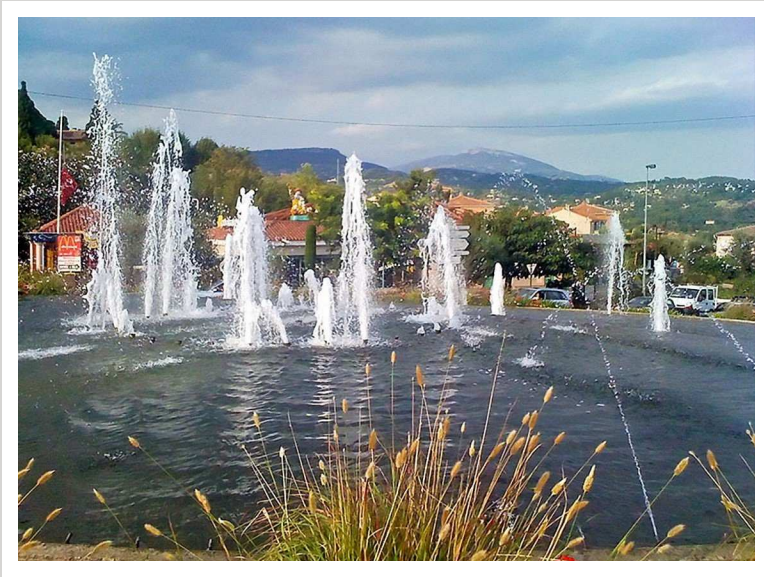
Tuesday, September 8, 2009



Americane Frite

The *Gambetta Americane Frite* in Cannes is, believe it or not, a favorite of ours. Never mind the bizarre name (we can't decide if it should have been "American Fries" or "Frites Américaines"), but the owners of this take-out stand make the absolute best jambon-beurre (and if you think that "ham sandwich" is a good enough translation, think again). They also make the best Greek salad, or so I'm told: since I don't eat cheese, Greek salads are not something I indulge in, but if it is anywhere as good as the *salade niçoise* they make (without the anchovies, please), then I can vouch for it. Above all, you get excellent value for your euro: more than generous servings and top quality ingredients. It just goes to show that one should not judge a book by its cover...

Wednesday, September 9, 2009



Quatre Chemins

As I mentioned a couple of days ago, we had our cars serviced this week and thus had to drive to the dealership in Grasse for the third time in as many days today. At 5:36 this evening, I took this photo of the rather large fountain in the center of a traffic circle called *Quatre Chemins* (meaning: four roads, or lanes), named, no doubt, for the six roads that come together here (I swear I'm not making this up). While their naming conventions can, on occasion, defy logic, one has to give the French credit for making an attractive spot out of a dreary intersection. Alert readers will of course notice the statue of the clown sitting on a roof in the background and the familiar golden arches on the left side. Relax, Pierre: I won't add to your list of recommended local eateries today...

Thursday, September 10, 2009



Well-being

I'm lucky enough to work for a company that cares a great deal about its employees, certainly more than what is required by law (which, in France, is already considerable). To assess the well-being of employees and study factors contributing to stress and see what can be done about them, Amadeus launched a project. It includes two workgroups, one for staff and one for management; these groups will get together separately every few weeks for the next several months in order to brainstorm, discuss problems, suggest improvements, survey the employees, and present an action plan to Senior Management. I was asked to join the management group, and we had our first full day off-site meeting today. As you can see, waiting for dessert was not too stressful...

Friday, September 11, 2009



Miséricorde

It would be quite impossible to look at a calendar and not realize what today's date stands for, even if one were not bombarded with reminders by television, radio, and the printed press. This is clearly a watershed date, one about which people speak in terms of before and after. Such dates tend to spell trouble; in the US, December 7, 1941 and November 22, 1963 come to mind. Let us spare a thought for all the victims of terrorism who died on this day eight years ago, but also for the many more who have been killed or maimed in different parts of the world as a consequence of what happened in the United States on September 11, 2001. Today's photo shows the *rue de la Miséricorde*, or street of (divine) mercy, compassion, and forgiveness, in Cannes.

Saturday, September 12, 2009



Croisette

Shortly after 1 p.m. today, we bought some food and ate a picnic lunch under one of the pine trees growing along the *Croisette*, the promenade that goes around the bay of Cannes. Even though the weather forecast had predicted cloudy skies and even rain, it did not turn out that way. There were few people on the *Croisette*: first, the season is practically over; second, it was lunchtime; and third, those people who were not eating lunch were probably at the yacht show by the harbor. Even the artists exhibiting their work were bored and tried to make up for the lack of customers by entertaining themselves differently, for instance by feeding pigeons. I love the time of year when those who live in this area gradually take it over again...

Sunday, September 13, 2009



Pads

Looking at some of the yachts in the harbor of Cannes, I was struck by these pads that protect the wood from the ropes the bumpers are attached to, and the bumpers, in turn, protect the ship's side from getting scraped on the dock. These particular pads are made of beautiful saddle leather, evidently hand-stitched, and there were about 20 of them. I guess if one can afford a yacht like this, bumper-rope pads are a mere trifle. When I imagine having to buy twenty of these, I shudder and I say to myself that economically, the owners of this yacht and I are worlds apart. Then I realize that the difference between me and those who don't have enough to survive is even greater. It's a sobering, unpleasant thought, but we don't bruise: our minds are padded.

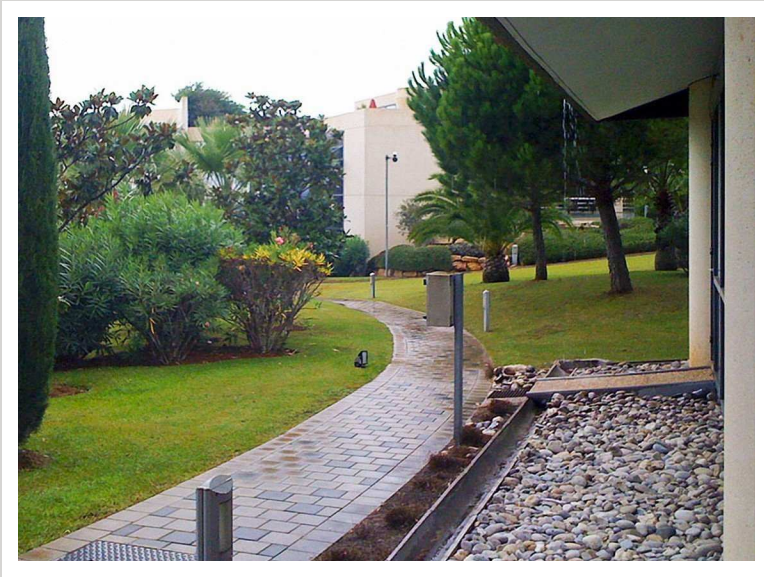
Monday, September 14, 2009



Tunnel

When we drive to Switzerland, we usually take the St. Gotthard tunnel, at 16.4 kilometers (10.5 miles) the third-longest road tunnel in the world. That can get a little uncomfortable, particularly when traffic comes to a stop in the middle. Today, on my way to a meeting, I walked through a slightly smaller tunnel, one that goes under a rather busy road and joins the two sides of the Amadeus central campus. When we expanded to the east side of the *Route du Pin Montard* a few years ago, the company had the tunnel built so that employees could safely cross from one side to the other. Since we obtained a below ground building permit, we were able to run our own fiber-optics network to the other side, saving a bundle. I guess it pays to keep one's employees safe!

Tuesday, September 15, 2009



Finally

After countless promises by the weather forecasters and days in which clouds built up menacingly only to disappear again without having shed a drop of rain, it is finally, finally raining! Best of all, it began with a rain that is rather uncharacteristic for this area: a very fine drizzle, a type of precipitation far more familiar to those living north of the Alps. It got the ground wet and ready to absorb the more violent downpours predicted for later on tonight and tomorrow morning. Usually, we get the deluge first, and because the ground is too dry to absorb anything, the rain just washes away the topsoil. This obviously causes almost immediate flooding and, in some areas, mud slides. Let's just hope that things proceed as forecast for a change; we need water very badly.

Wednesday, September 16, 2009



Ominous

Before leaving the house at 7:14 this morning, I stepped out onto the terrace to look at the clouds moving in from the Mediterranean, a small sliver of which is visible on the right side of today's photo. Though the rain did increase in strength last night, the expected deluge did not materialize; the news this morning mentioned some flooding in Cannes, but here in Sophia, I didn't even see a puddle on the road on my way to work. The clouds did bring some heavier rain during the day, but again, not as much as we had been expecting. This rainy weather is supposed to be with us until this weekend, and no one really minds. As I mentioned yesterday, we do need the water, and it's also nice to have temperatures down in the mid 20s (mid 70s F) for a change.

Thursday, September 17, 2009



Bikes

The young owners of these bikes didn't take any chances: the smaller bike is tied to the larger one while that one is attached to a ring in the wall. These cycles are in front of a house in Valbonne that we noticed in the mid-nineties because of the painted cat and flowerpot on the door. The oldest photo we have of this door goes back to July 5, 1998; we had just bought our first digital camera, a Fujifilm MX-700, the day before. While we are on older photos: faithful readers of this blog will no doubt remember the little lamb Eric and I had found back in May. It had been adopted by people in the area. I'm happy to report that the animal is doing well and looks more and more like a sheep. In real life, I love Hollywood endings!

Friday, September 18, 2009



Envibus

There are two bus companies that operate in and around Sophia Antipolis: TAM, funded by the General Counsel of the *Alpes-Maritimes*, and Envibus, a company that operates on more local routes and is easily identified by its pink buses. In all cases, one way fares are one euro, though the Envibus number 100, operating between Antibes and Sophia Antipolis, is always free. For those who think that one euro is too much, there are monthly passes that allow saving quite a bit of money. Clearly, the local authorities want to encourage the use of public transportation. How about this: no bus at the time you need one? Call Envibus a couple of hours before you need a bus, and a minivan will pick you up and drive you to your destination. Cost? One euro...

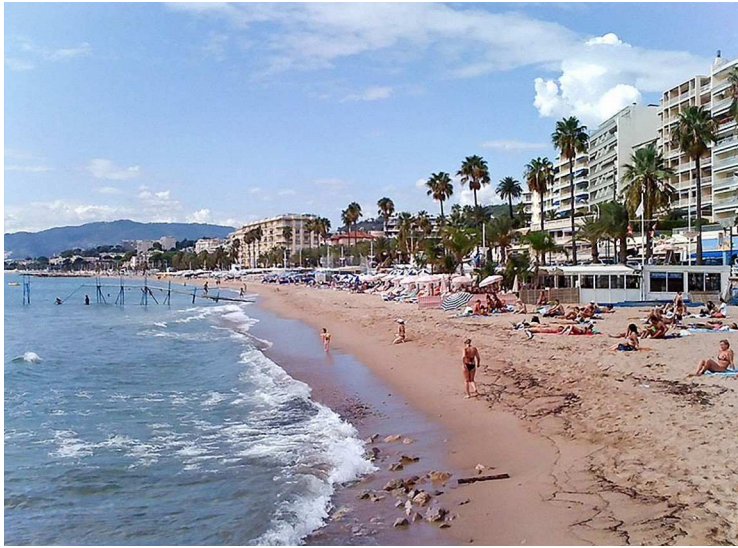
Saturday, September 19, 2009



Nostalgia

At 4:16 this afternoon, I saw this old typewriter in a store window in Cannes. Less than one hour later, I am typing these lines on my MacBook Pro running OS X Snow Leopard, the most advanced operating system in the world (sorry, Djukel). I still own a considerably more modern, but still fully manual Olympia Monica typewriter. It is on the Monica that I typed my high school essays, the editorials for the school paper, as well as pretty much all my correspondence. These days, aligning things and correcting errors is much easier; on the other hand, back then I never wondered about how much battery power was left, and backing up meant putting the car in reverse. Still, I wouldn't go back. Sorry, Monica, not even close, and clearly no cigar (apologies to Bill Clinton).

Sunday, September 20, 2009



Beach

Yesterday, we woke up to sunshine and rain (yes, simultaneously); today, we got only one of the two, and it wasn't the rain. Some people took advantage of the delightful temperatures by heading for the beach, for example the sandy strip just west of the harbor of Cannes shown in today's photo. One can get a sense that the season is practically over: compared to a month ago, the beach is nearly empty. Most noticeable is the absence of school-aged children, except for a few local kids. School having resumed pretty much all over Europe, only very young children and child-less couples are still on vacation. The difference in sound level is extraordinary. It is even possible to hear the waves washing across the sand...

Monday, September 21, 2009



Analia

In the harbor of Cannes, the gorgeous 22.25 meter (73 ft) Analia is being prepped for the *Régates Royales-Trophée Panerai*, the 31st edition of which begins tomorrow. Contrary to what one might expect based on her spotless appearance, the Analia is an old lady: indeed, her maiden voyage took place in 1925. Analia is truly international: she was drawn by Scottish yacht designer Alfred Mylne, is owned by Frenchman Pierre Boissier, and sails under the Spanish flag. She is entered in the Classic Yachts 16 to 24.99 meters (52.4 to 82 ft) category. The bay of Cannes is shaped in such a way that watching the regattas would be easy; unfortunately, the same cannot be said for my work schedule, so Analia will have to compete without my encouragements. Pity...

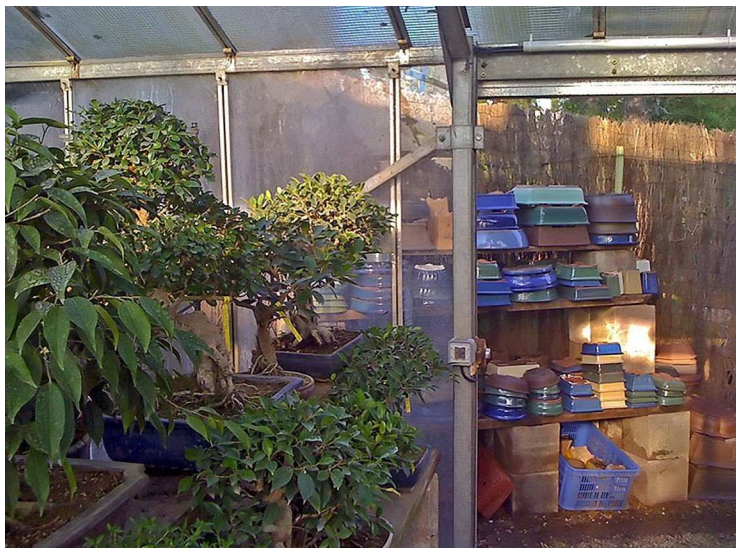
Tuesday, September 22, 2009



Evacuation

At 11:30 this morning, the emergency sirens at work began to blare. Pre-recorded announcements ordered everybody to evacuate the building without delay. I glanced at the calendar: sure enough, Tuesday. You see, every few months, the company conducts evacuation exercises, and for whatever reason, these always taken place on a Tuesday. The oft-practiced drill (every time, we are told that we have been excellent but that there is still room for improvement) went well, and employees gathered in the designated meeting places. Soon, we were advised that we could go back to work. Many of us did not follow these instructions, however, choosing to go for an early lunch in the company restaurant instead. Nothing whets the appetite like an evacuation drill!

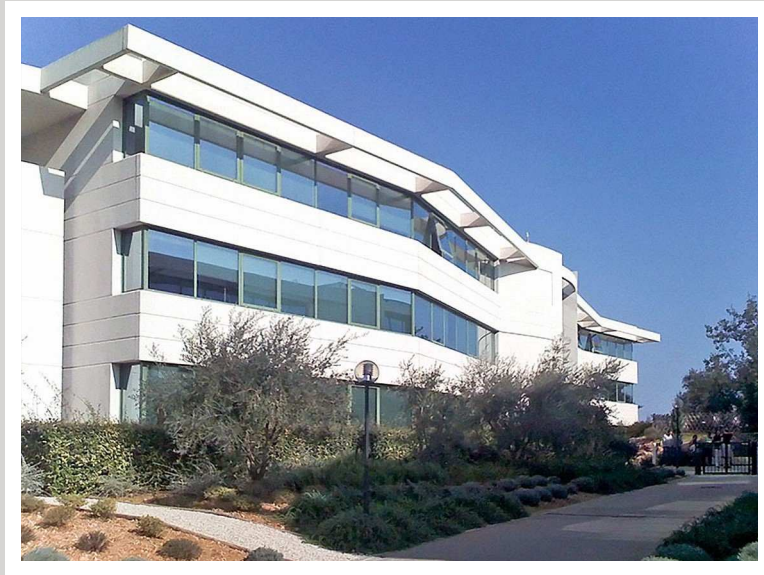
Wednesday, September 23, 2009



Nursery

Before going on vacation in early July, I brought my Chinese elm Bonsai to the Bonsai museum in Biot; they have a nursery that will take in plants whose owners are, for some reason or another, unable to take care of them for a while. The fee for this is a ridiculously low 5 euros per month, so it's not exactly unaffordable. In the case of my Bonsai, it is literally a life-saver because the tree would never survive several weeks without being watered. Tonight, we drove to Biot to get the Bonsai back, and I took this photo inside the small greenhouse by the entrance while the attendant went to get my plant. We also looked over some of the older Bonsais they had, like a truly magnificent fig tree. It will be a while until my Chinese elm looks this old...

Thursday, September 24, 2009



Clara

Clara is the name of two buildings, the one shown here, and an identical, albeit mirror-imaged one off to the right. Clara is one of the more recent Amadeus sites in Sophia Antipolis; before that, it was the home of ISSA, the International School of Sophia Antipolis, basically a spin-off of the IB (International Baccalaureate) section of ASEICA, the association which used to have both an IB and a BOI (*Bac Option Internationale*) program. The whole project was ill-conceived and poorly and fraudulently executed. In the end, the school went bankrupt, and huge sums of ASEICA money were lost by the man responsible for the fiasco: Robert Chenhalls-Walker who fled France like the thief in the night he is. Robert, you crook, if you read this, please sue me; I'd love to see you in court!

Friday, September 25, 2009



Oldie Ads

Every year, the local tourist traps have to come up with new ideas on how to extract money from foreign visitors. Recently, the fashion has been to sell old stuff, or at least brand new stuff that's made to look like old stuff. Particularly old advertisements are very much *en vogue*, be it in the form of posters, or like here, miniature metal replicas of originally much larger thermometers or wall plates that used to be prevalent in public places. I actually remember seeing two of the thermometers shown here in bars and restaurants when I was a kid, which shows you not only that the pieces look rather authentic but also tells you a thing or two about my age. Anyway, I thought this colorful display of overpriced nostalgia made a pretty picture for today's blog entry.

Saturday, September 26, 2009



Solex

One sees it less and less frequently, the venerable VeloSoleX, or Solex, for short. It is a motor-assisted bicycle that was produced in France starting in the late 1940s. The motor sits directly above the front wheel; a small roller with a very rough surface transmits the power to the front tire by friction. I used to drive my cousin Evelyne's Solex some forty years ago, and I can attest to the fact that it's a pretty dangerous vehicle. Downhill, it does very well. On a level road, it does (kind of) OK. Forget uphill, and forget driving in the rain when the friction wheel slips. Top speed was about 32 kph (20 mph), but the amazing thing was the mileage: 1,2 liters/100 kms (196 mpg). In the photo above, the round pan-like thing is the muffler, and the gas tank cap is missing.

Sunday, September 27, 2009



For Monks Only

Having taken the delightfully empty early boat from Cannes to Saint-Honorat (an 8 a.m. departure), we strolled around the island, enjoying the almost total absence of fellow tourists and admiring the beautiful scenery around us. By a quarter past nine, we were ambling through the abbey gardens when this “Access reserved to monks” sign caught Vicki’s eye. This, then, is a radical departure from the usual blog fare: not only did my wife pick the subject, but she also took the photo (with my iPhone, while I was holding the branches at bay). When I was in high school writing French essays, I used to make accents by drawing a horizontal line when I wasn’t sure whether to use an acute or a grave. The teacher never caught on; I was amused to see that the monks use the same trick...

Monday, September 28, 2009



Beetle

Two days ago, the blog photo showed a Solex, clearly a sight that is getting less and less common. Back in April, I featured the venerable *Deux Chevaux*, another endangered species. Here is one more vehicle that used to be ubiquitous and has virtually disappeared: the Volkswagen Beetle. I came across this beautifully preserved specimen in the harbor of Cannes, next to a rather expensive-looking yacht (as if there were cheap ones). Next to yachts, one usually sees Porsches, or Lotus Esprits, or Jaguars, even the occasional Bentley... but certainly not anything as lowly as a VW Beetle. I suppose what make it valuable is that it is rare: one cannot just go and buy one. Apparently, this makes it a prime choice for someone who owns a multimillion dollar yacht.

Tuesday, September 29, 2009



Puki

Let's be honest for a moment and admit it: we Americans tend to take political correctness way too seriously. I mean, you can't call a spade a spade any longer; everything has to be described by the euphemism *du jour*. We are no longer dead: we are actuarially mature; cannibalism has become intra-species dining; normal dairy farmers have turned into bovine lactation facilitators, etc. I tend to mock this catering to oversensitive souls, but I must admit I did a double-take when I came across this restaurant in Cannes the other day. I know it's not Chinese, but the term used can clearly be seen as offensive to Asians in general. Not to mention that "Puki", the name of the chef, is singularly unappealing. I think the only thing that beats this one is the famous "Phat Phuc Noodle Bar" in London. Ouch...

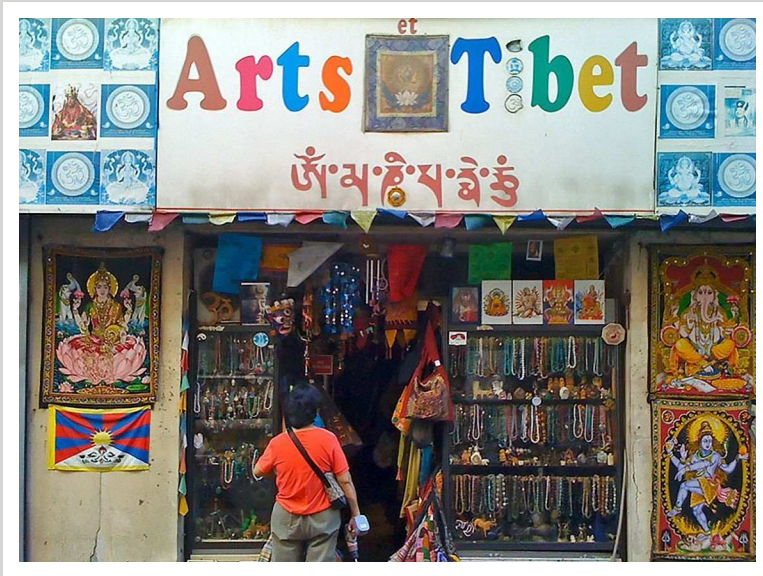
Wednesday, September 30, 2009



Four Aces

Recently, there was a news item about the growing popularity of poker, both worldwide and in France. In addition to the illegal smoky back rooms known from movies, there are now more and more places where one can play poker in all legality, or so I'm told, presumably without the smoke. Usually, it must be said, the French government very much frowns upon gambling, unless, of course, said gambling is organized by and benefits the French government. France is currently at odds with the European Union as a result of laws which are considered too restrictive, and several European on-line gambling sites have filed suits. The laws clearly weren't too restrictive for the owner of *Quattroassi* ("Four Aces"); surely the name cannot be a coincidence...

Thursday, October 1, 2009



Tibet

When the Dalai Lama visited this country last June, Nicolas Sarkozy's decision not to meet him was much criticized by the population. I admit I know very little about the history of Tibet; some claim that the people there are better off under Chinese administration, some claim the opposite. What is certain is that I do not at all care for theocracies, and clearly, the Tibetan government in exile is one of those. However, the Chinese successfully blackmailed Sarkozy into not meeting the Dalai Lama, just as they are trying to economically blackmail nations into prohibiting peaceful Tibetan demonstrations. I guess that settles it for me. Today, the People's Republic of China celebrates its 60th birthday; as a present, I offer this photo of a Tibetan arts and crafts store in Cannes.

Friday, October 2, 2009



Lamp

During our digestive walk at 8:53 this evening, we came across this unusual lamp in a store window. Now contrary to what many people might think, this type of object is not really typical for France. What is true is that women here tend to dress more provocatively than in many other countries, and when it comes to nudity and sexuality, the French are less inhibited than Americans who are extremely Victorian in comparison. For instance, prostitution is legal in France, it is perfectly OK for women to go topless on public beaches (sadly, a right that is mostly exercised by those who shouldn't), and so on. The more secular the country, the less uptight its citizens. I can't help but think that we Americans would do well to shed some of our hangups...

Saturday, October 3, 2009



Tourism

This afternoon, we decided to take a touristy view of Cannes. Not, mind you, that we went as far as taking one of those obnoxious little trains that clog up the streets of practically every resort town these days; no, that would have been too extreme. Instead, we boarded the doubled-decker open-topped bus number 8. This line is part of the Cannes public transportation system and runs from the old port to the Palm Beach Casino all the way at the other end of the *Croisette* and back. Luckily, there were very few riders, so it was an easy matter to move about to take pictures. On a couple of occasions, the bus got so close to the edge of the road that I got whipped by palm leaves and almost dropped my iPhone. Photography is a dangerous business...

Sunday, October 4, 2009



Quiet Time

Yesterday, I mentioned our ride on the double-decker bus with the open top. Sitting on the upper level definitely changes one's picture-taking opportunities. First, one can discreetly photograph subjects one might normally be reluctant to approach with a ready-to-shoot iPhone; second, things one is used to seeing at street level look different from higher up. Today's photo illustrates both points. I saw these two elderly ladies having a quiet time on the *Croisette* while enjoying the rays of the early evening sun from pretty far away, so I had ample time to get ready to take their picture without them noticing just as the bus passed them by. I also feel that the angle from above makes this snapshot more interesting, but that's subjective, so feel free to disagree.

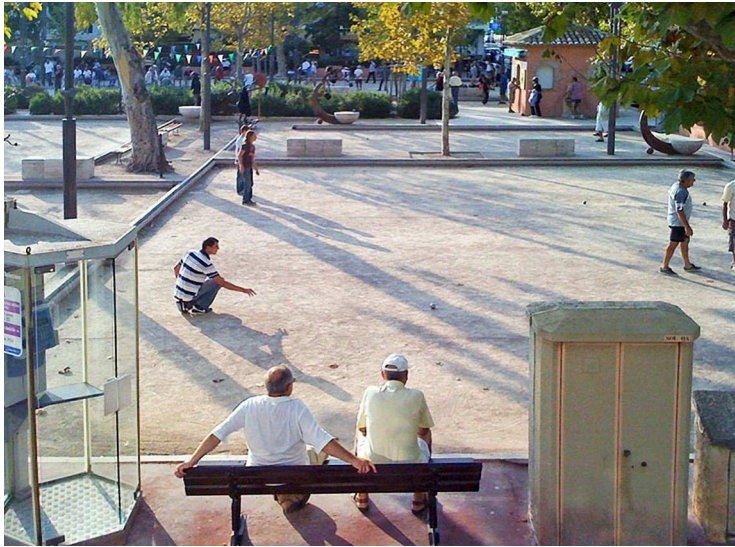
Monday, October 5, 2009



Fixer-Upper

One can only guess what might have happened to this poor house on the *Avenue de Lérins* at the southeastern corner of Cannes, a stone's throw from the Palm Beach casino. Actually, it looks like it was hit by a bomb, though I'm reasonably sure that that's not the case. Interestingly enough, on Google Earth ($43^{\circ} 32.254'N$, $7^{\circ} 2.281'E$) the house is intact, but in Street View it looks as shown here. Whatever turned this place into a heap of rubble not even suitable for *This Old House*, one thing is certain: this ruin won't stay like this for long because this is prime real estate. Indeed, from the top of the small hill to the right of what used to be a house, one has an unobstructed sea view, and it surely won't be long until someone seizes this commercial opportunity.

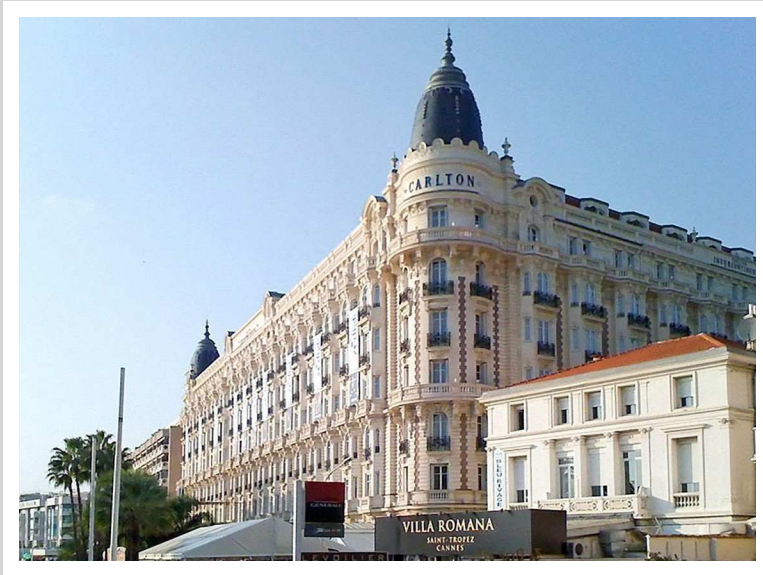
Tuesday, October 6, 2009



Pétanque

Pétanque is no laughing matter in the south of France; it's part of the three Ps (Pétanque, Pastis, Provence—not necessarily in that order) and therefore practically a matter of life and death. The game in its current form originated in La Ciotat in 1907, and believe it or not, world championships are organized. The last one took place in 2008 in Senegal, and the French won (they mostly, but not always, do). The weirdest variation is “boules carrées”, or square balls (cubes, in other words), the thirtieth World Championship of which just took place in Cagnes-sur-Mer last August. The idea is that rank beginners and top experts start with equal chances... Lest you think Americans are above such things, there is a “US Federation of Petanque”, though they do drop the accent. Barbarians!

Wednesday, October 7, 2009



Carlton

The western and central portion of the *Croisette*, in other words the part closest to the *Palais des festivals*, features many famous five-star hotels: The Martinez, the Palais Stephanie (formerly known as the Noga Hilton), the Majestic... but none more famous, more luxurious, and more imbued with snob-appeal than the Carlton. It was built in 1909 and should therefore soon be celebrating the 100th birthday of its opening. A popular legend around here is that the Carlton's two non-identical domes were modeled after the breasts of Carolina Otero, which, true or not, makes for a good story. In Cannes, the best way to see any kind of luxury car imaginable is to have a drink on the Carlton's terrace bar. If the car costs a fortune, it will drive up sooner or later...

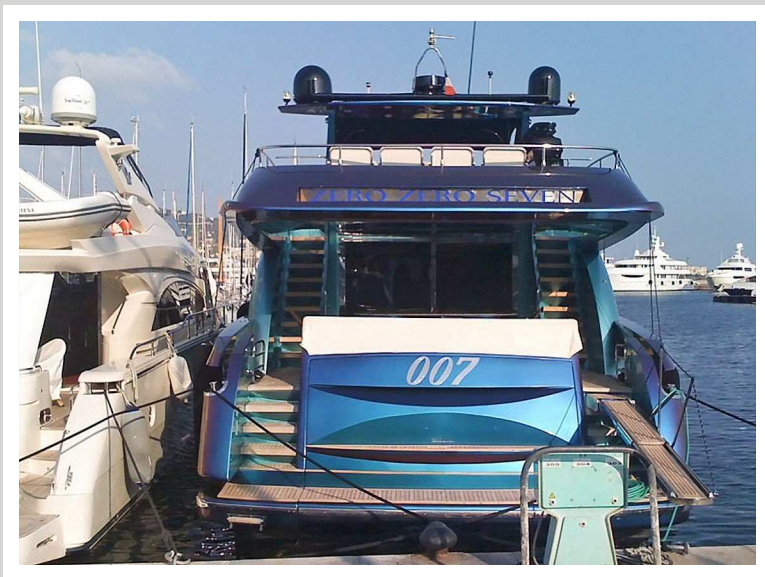
Thursday, October 8, 2009



Uncomfortable

God only knows what the owners of this restaurant were thinking when they named their establishment *Au Mal Assis*, which one could roughly translate as “Where one is uncomfortably seated”. Perhaps the idea is that the food is so outstanding that patrons are willing to put up with horrible chairs, or maybe the name is meant to appeal to individualists. While in the US, people want to be like everyone else (“more people prefer brand X so that’s what you should buy”), in Europe, appealing to people’s individualism often works better (“Only the most discerning people like brand X; what about you?”). One of these days, we have to try the place; it’s next to the harbor of Cannes and has a reputation for outstanding seafood... and extremely comfortable chairs.

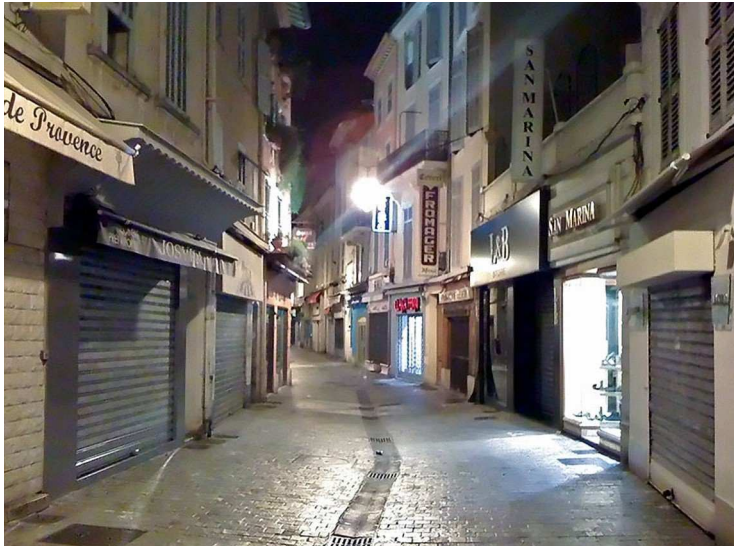
Friday, October 9, 2009



007

Isn't it remarkable that someone who has the means of acquiring, and thus probably naming, a yacht like this doesn't know that Ian Fleming's famous agent James Bond is never, ever called "zero zero seven" but always "double-oh seven"? True, "Zero Zero Seven" was used to advertise the Coca-Cola company's latest "can of nothing", Coke Zero, but surely, this boat cannot possibly be named after a soft drink ad! On a completely different note, few people know that in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, Ian Fleming created parents for his hero: Scotsman Andrew Bond, and Swiss Monique Delacroix (of the canton of Vaud), Fleming's Swiss fiancée in real life. This blog gets more educational every day...

Saturday, October 10, 2009



Meynadier-by-Night

If further proof that the season is winding down were needed, this photo of the usually hustling and bustling *Rue Meynadier* would do it. You would think that the time is not too far from two o'clock in the morning: Just about all the stores are shuttered, and there is literally not a soul in sight. Yet it was only 9:05 p.m. when I took this picture last weekend. In July, August, and early September, this main artery of the old Cannes would still be teeming with hungry tourists on the lookout for a last bargain or late dinner. One block south of here, the restaurants are still busy, but one can now go eat around 8 p.m. without having made a reservation. As fun as the hubbub can be, it's also nice to see things gradually quiet down as we head towards even shorter days.

Sunday, October 11, 2009



Negotiation

Yesterday afternoon, I watched the little boy at the lower right negotiate with his mother from all the way across the square. They would walk a few steps, then stop and quietly speak to each other. From the boy's calm pointing, it was clear that the goal of the negotiation was a ride on the merry-go-round located on the large square between the *Rue Felix Faure* and *La Pantiero* in Cannes. While he was very serious (it was, after all, his ride that was at stake), his mother was smiling, visibly enjoying her son's gentle insistence. I was therefore not surprised that she finally handed him the necessary coins; I managed to take the picture as he stared at her, still incredulous that he had won. Moments later, he was running towards the carousel with a gleeful smile.

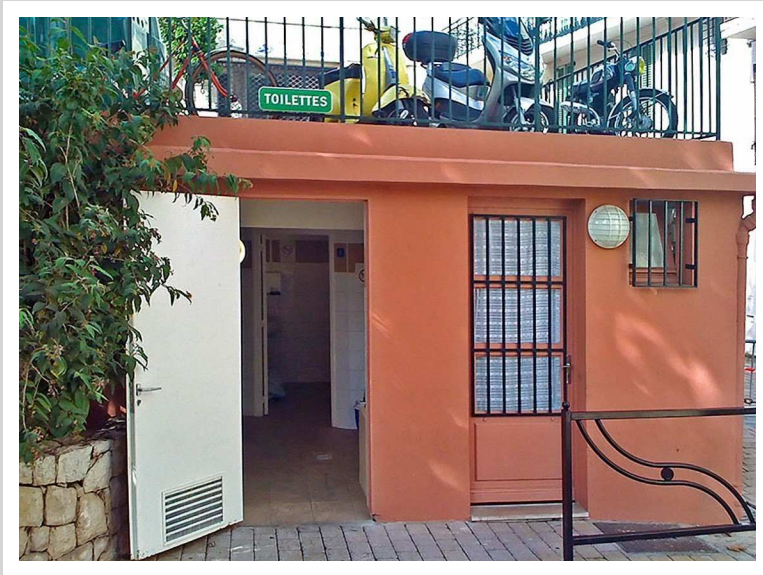
Monday, October 12, 2009



Exhibit

On the west side of the merry-go-round we saw yesterday, there appears to be a weekly exhibit of artists and craftsmen of varying levels of proficiency; the work they show ranges from the very nice to the highly unusual. This latter category concerns, for example, the output of a man who exhibits nothing but sculptures made out of rusty screws, nuts, bolts, washers, nails, and other pieces of ancient looking metal unfit for any practical purpose. A Jean Tinguely he isn't... On the other hand, some of the canvases are actually quite good; what's fun is to watch the artists paint, but as most of them don't like their work being photographed, it's tricky to take their picture. There is also a flea market where for a small fortune, you can buy all the junk your grand-mother threw out...

Tuesday, October 13, 2009



Toilets

How often have I had to enter a store in search of a restroom in the United States! It's something that's always puzzled me: there are eateries galore, but unless you are in one of them when nature calls, you'd better hope you are not too far from Macy's. Around here, there are plenty of public toilets, and they essentially fall into two categories. First, there are facilities like the one shown in today's photo. They features a (usually female) attendant (referred to as *Madame Pipi*), and one pays for the relative cleanliness of the place by dropping a few coins into a plate. More and more, there are also automatic toilets that are self-cleaning and come in various styles: one drops in a coin, the door opens, and the restroom is cleaned automatically after each use.

Wednesday, October 14, 2009



Break

Running around Cannes looking for things to photograph, one can become tired, not to mention thirsty. Fortunately, places to take a well-deserved (well, I think so) break are not exactly a rarity. This time, I chose a small coffee and beer bar at the end of the *Rue des Halles*, just a few steps from the Forville market. They have mostly Belgian favorites of mine: Leffe, Stella, and what is probably the best of them all, Duvel. On this occasion, it was a tough choice between Stella and Duvel; what clinched it is that they have Stella on tap, and that's what I happened to be in the mood for. While I was stretching my legs, I played around with my iPhone and more by accident than design came up with this neat and unusual (if I say so myself) angle. Cheers!

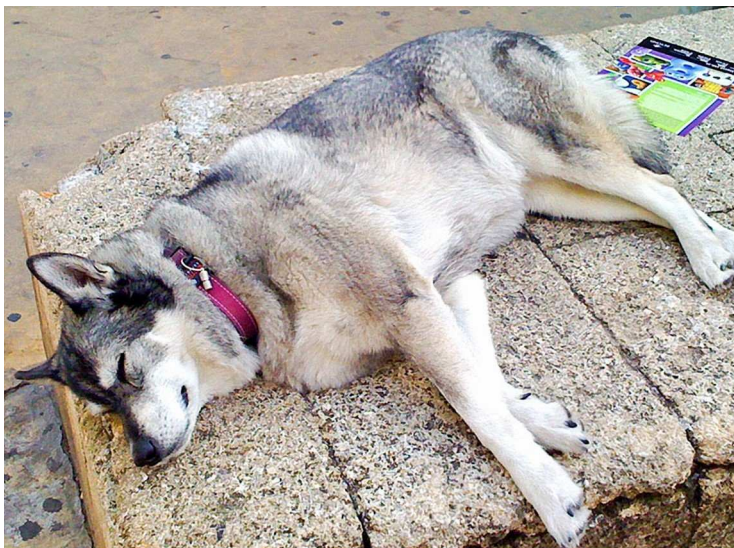
Thursday, October 15, 2009



Jean Gabin

Because of its film festival, the city of Cannes is inexorably linked to the motion picture industry. This shows itself in many different ways, but perhaps none as obvious as the gigantic poster-like murals one sees in various parts of town. This particular one is located on the side of the parking garage by the train station and depicts French actor Jean Gabin as the engine driver Jacques Lantier in *La Bête Humaine* (The Human Beast), the 1938 film version of Emile Zola's 1890 novel of the same name. These enormous pictures are painted; some are photo-realistic while others are more basic. Both famous people and generic movie-industry professionals, such as cameramen, projectionists, and so on, are depicted.

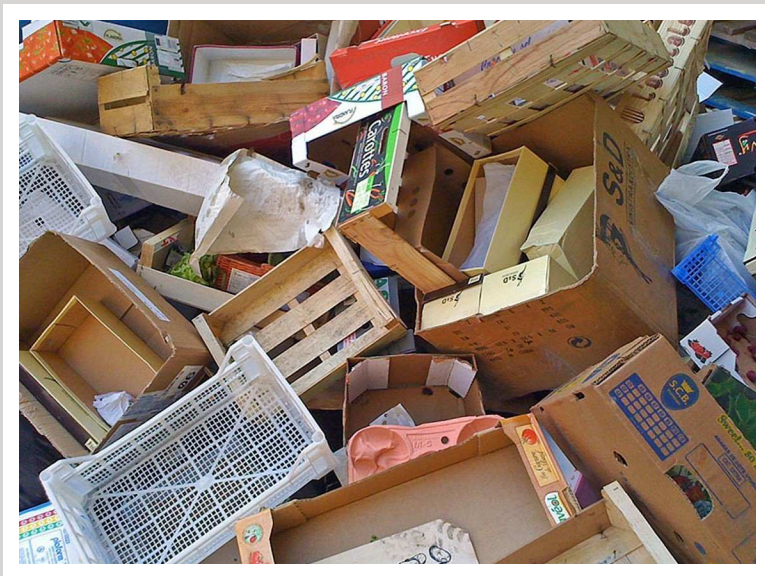
Friday, October 16, 2009



Sleep

A couple of days ago I wrote about taking a breather and relaxing with a glass of cold beer. Well, here's someone who can relax without the benefit of a Belgian brew. This photo was taken last Saturday as I explored the exhibit of paintings I wrote about at the time. One area where there were at least a dozen pictures on display was deserted; I guess the owner had taken a break, leaving his guard dog behind to protect his property. When I passed the spot again roughly half an hour later, the dog had not budged at all, and I had to look closely to see its flanks move up and down very slowly and thus convince myself that the animal was OK. The owner was still nowhere to be seen, and from the looks of it, no painting was missing. Guard dogs are very effective...

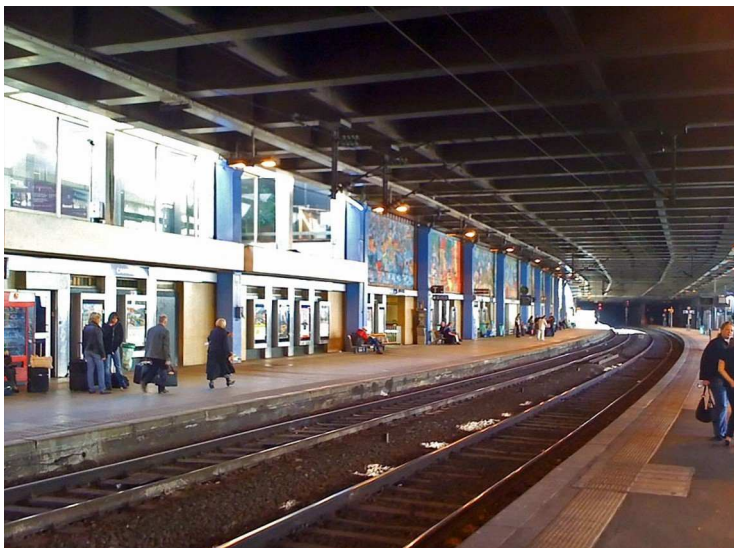
Saturday, October 17, 2009



Crates

At around 2 p.m. this afternoons, this last heap of crates was all that remained of the bustling street market activity at the *Place Gambetta*. We always marvel at the effort made by the many vendors, most of whom sell products they grow themselves, to set up their stands in the early morning of every single day, rain or shine, only to dismantle the whole setup around noon. In the afternoon and evening, the square turns into a parking lot that is a great deal less attractive than the fruit, vegetables, and other goodies sold at the *Marché Provençal*. Garbage trucks come by starting around noon and they gradually cart off the refuse while sanitation workers begin hosing down the area. Lots of work? Yes, certainly, but quality of the products is far above supermarket grade.

Sunday, October 18, 2009



TER

“TER” stands for *Train Express Régional* and denotes the intra-area train network of the SNCF, the French railways. This morning, we were waiting at the truly hideous Cannes train station for the TER to Antibes, three stops or ten minutes away. Above us, we could hear the traffic rumble on the *Voie Rapide*, the wide and busy roadway that cuts through town (special note to Djukel: this station was not designed by Calatrava, and it shows). On the other hand, the train itself was a pleasant surprise: clean, comfortable, and empty, at least on the upper deck. We arrived at Antibes train station on time; this one is an improvement over its Cannes counterpart, especially since they changed its color from bird-dropping yellow to a shade of red a few years ago. Stay tuned...

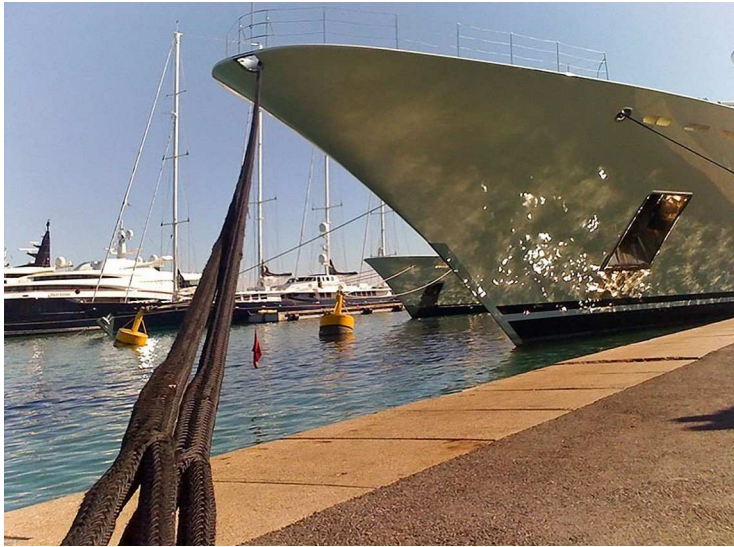
Monday, October 19, 2009



Do Not Disturb

Another episode in the series of strange signs and customs, along with police stations that close for lunch, stores with theoretical opening hours, and so on. Yesterday morning, we had just gotten off the train from Cannes in Antibes when I spotted these signs. The top one reads, “Stop, no entry”; fair enough, but it’s the one immediately below that is strange: “Security station—Do not disturb”. Personally, I am at a loss to understand this. Assuming there were some sort of security problem, would it not be an excellent idea to disturb the security staff? Or does the sign mean one shouldn’t disturb them unless there were some emergency, preferably one not too close to lunch hour? The ways of the Lord may be impenetrable, but the French truly are in a category of their own...

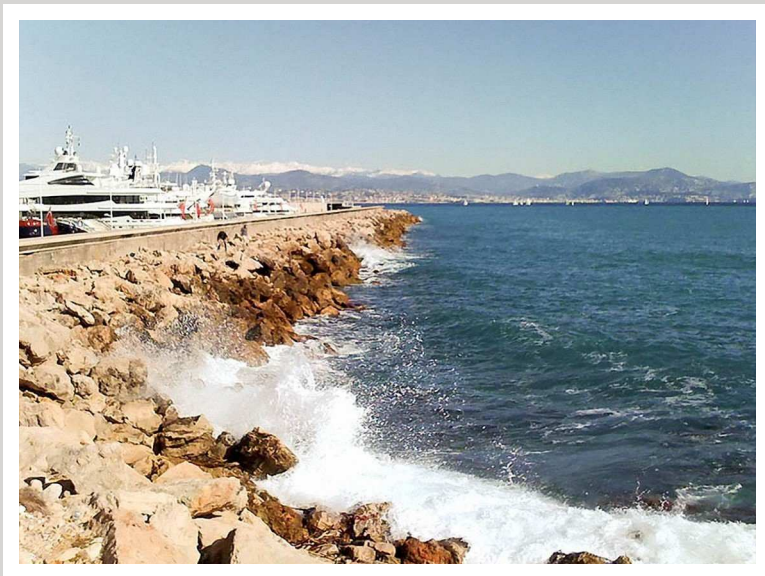
Tuesday, October 20, 2009



Pelorus

Last January, we reported on the huge Dilbar, with a length of 110 meters (361 feet) the largest yacht berthed in Antibes' Billionaire's Wharf. In the "can you top this" game played by the world's richest and most famous, it was only a matter of time until someone could show off an even larger ship. This past Sunday, we spotted the Pelorus, length 115 meters (377 feet). It's current owner, the Russian Roman Abramovich, had her refitted (apparently, one helipad is not enough: one needs at least two) to suit his personal needs and taste. The price tag of this toy is roughly \$300 million, but I don't know whether this is before or after the refitting. My guess is that Mr. Abramovich doesn't care one way or the other. And as of today, there are 13 larger yachts out there...

Wednesday, October 21, 2009



Waves

This past Sunday, the weather was absolutely magnificent, and so we were able to enjoy our mini-excursion to Antibes to the fullest. Standing on the harbor wall that protects Billionaire's Wharf, we looked across the *Baie des Anges* (Bay of Angels) towards the city of Nice and the already snow-capped mountains in the background (this is one of the few areas in the world where one can ski downhill in the morning and waterski in the afternoon. We do neither, but it's a pleasant enough thought). Interestingly, there were quite a few waves in spite of the fact that there was little wind. The only thing that wasn't perfect is that we hadn't made lunch reservations at the Vauban, and so we had to eat under a parasol at the Chinese place down the road instead. It was delicious!

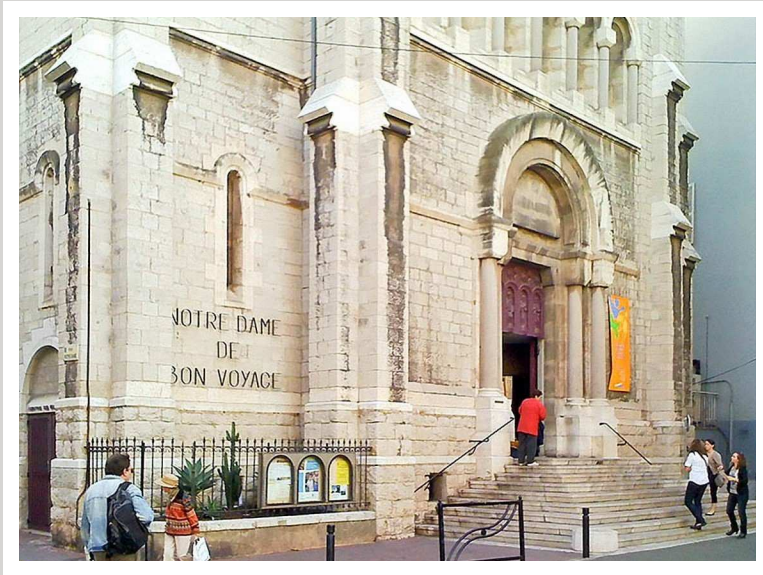
Thursday, October 22, 2009



Ramparts

The town of Antibes was founded in the 5th century B.C. and was originally a colony of Marseilles, which was itself founded by Greek sailors from Asia Minor. Antibes' original name of Antipolis ("the opposite city") is almost certainly meant with respect to Marseilles and not, as many people believe, with Nikaïa (Nice), which was founded a couple of hundred years after Antibes. The ramparts that protect the city against potential invaders from the sea were initially built during the Middle Ages but redone by the incredibly prolific Vauban in the 17th century (go ahead, look him up). Immediately in front of the wall is the town beach of Antibes. In October, it is naturally not as crowded as in the summer...

Friday, October 23, 2009



Recital

Following our stroll and lunch in Antibes this past Sunday, we took the train back to Cannes in plenty of time to attend a recital by a young American organist, Jonathan Gregoire, at the *Notre Dame de Bon Voyage* church. This was sponsored by a local association of friends of organ music that organizes events in various churches in this area. The recital began promptly at 5 p.m. and lasted almost exactly an hour. Alas, we were not overly impressed with the acoustics of the place, and the works chosen by the performer were perhaps a bit ambitious. Nevertheless, I recorded the entire recital with my iPhone. You can't listen to it with this book, but on the on-line version of this blog, you can hear Jonathan Gregoire performing *Tema e Variazioni* composed by Italian organ virtuoso Marco Enrico Bossi.

Saturday, October 24, 2009



Marzipan

Marzipan and chocolate pumpkins, witches, spider webs, ghosts... no doubt about it, Halloween is almost upon us. Americans tend to consider the holiday their very own; the truth is that this anglo-saxon festival is probably of celtic origin and almost certainly originated in Ireland from where it was exported to Canada, the United States, Australia, and other English-speaking countries. When we arrived in France in 1990, Halloween was practically unknown; people who had heard of it spoke of a strange custom of *les Américains*. The tradition was briefly popularized here around 2000, mostly by McDonald's and Disneyland Paris; today, French trick or treaters are practically extinct, and all that remains are store window displays such as the one shown in today's photo.

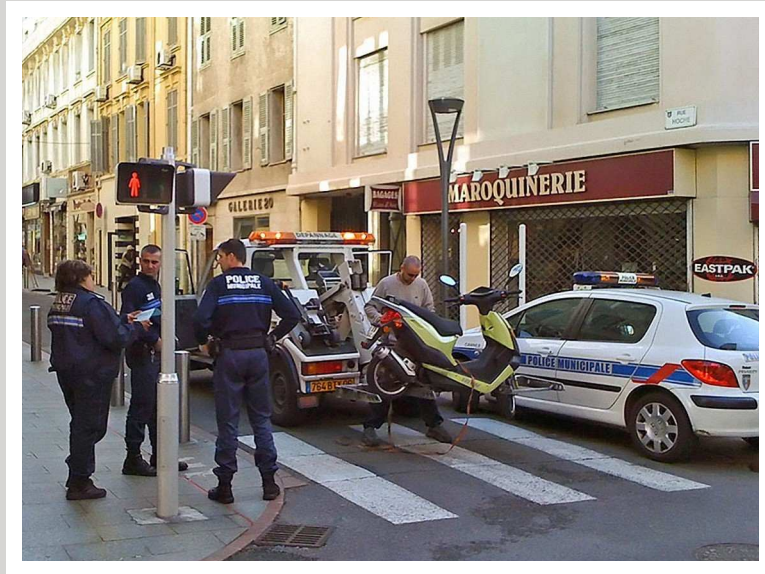
Sunday, October 25, 2009



Low Profile

You really have to wonder what some owners are thinking when they name their yachts. I mean, if this sleek, racy boat is what its owner calls "low profile", I'd hate to see what his high profile toys look like. Note that the reverse exists as well, as shown in a picture I took some time ago of a decrepit old barge named "Nice". Obviously, what was meant is the city of Nice and not the adjective "nice", but visually, it's still an oxymoron. Speaking of morons, we're having a 25-hour day today as Europe changed the clocks back to two a.m. at three a.m. As I write this, it's just after six in the evening and it is already pitch black. To make matters worse, the US and Europe are no longer changing clocks on the same day. Can't we at least agree to be stupid at the same time? I guess not, for that would be smart...

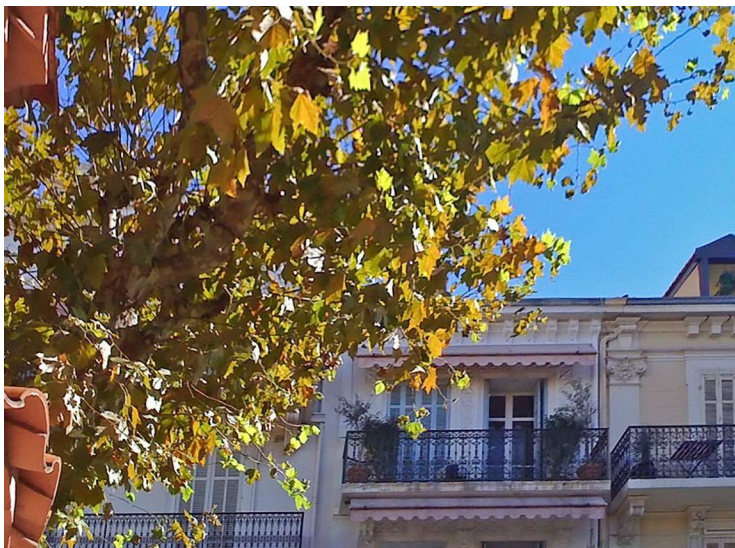
Monday, October 26, 2009



Police

I witnessed this scene today at 11:09 a.m. in the *Rue Hoche* in Cannes: Three members of the municipal police were discussing whatever evil deed the owner of the scooter had committed that warranted having his vehicle impounded while an employee of the towing company was securing the bike to the truck. This is the flip side of the Sarkozy government: a huge increase in radar speed traps, unprecedented numbers of revoked driver's licenses, and more summonses issued than ever before. Officially, this is for our benefit; in reality, it's hard not to see it as an easy way to make money. Meanwhile, there is a slight smell of police state in the air... And speaking of policing: what was I doing at 11 o'clock in the morning in Cannes? Simple: I am on vacation this week.

Tuesday, October 27, 2009



Indian Summer

10:35 a.m. along the *Rue Louis Blanc*: Indian Summer is upon us. While it was still raining quite a bit a few days ago, this week is shaping up to be the kind apt to convince many people that October is the very best time to visit the French Riviera (are you listening, Patrick and Joni?). I know it's only Tuesday, but the forecast for the rest of the week looks very good, indeed. Of course, strictly speaking, there is no *été indien* here, due mostly, I suspect, to the glaring absence of Indians from these shores, but ever since Joe Dassin popularized *L'été indien* in his 1975 song of the same name, the term has replaced the older *été de la Saint-Martin*, or St. Martin's summer. That's officially in November, and indeed, as you can see, the leaves are not quite ready yet.

Wednesday, October 28, 2009



Spot

About a minute from where yesterday's photo was taken, we have *Le Spot*, and with a name like this, I obviously had to take the picture. Some of my readers will understand this completely, some won't have a clue. It doesn't matter; let's just call it a family inside joke, and no, I won't elaborate. You may, however, want to visit this particular spot yourself; you can easily do that by using Google Earth to fly to 43°33.087'N, 7°0.844'E. The big round thing visible on Google Earth near the spot (so to speak) is a bandstand; only on very few occasions have we seen it used for its intended purpose. This is too bad because we rather like the type of music played by big bands in fancy uniforms on festive occasions, but such concerts are a less and less frequent pleasure.

Thursday, October 29, 2009



Squirrel Lake

This morning at 8:56, I was horrified to see that this miserable puddle and a sea of reddish mud was all that remained of beautiful Squirrel Lake (oh, all right, *lac de l'écureuil*) in the Esterel. I had intended to hike all the way to the *Pic de l'Ours* the way I did on a previous occasion, but all the paths beyond the lake were blocked. The explanation? The lake area is being “redone” (what on Earth that might mean I haven’t a clue). Compare this to the pictures I took in January 2007 (you’ll find them on my web site) and you’ll see what I mean. And no, it’s not a weather thing: I was merely early today and the morning fog had not yet lifted. But again, I couldn’t go further than the other side of this mud field, so I turned around and ate my picnic at home. Let’s hope they fix this soon...

Friday, October 30, 2009



Sand Sculptures

When I was a tot, I used to build sand castles by filling a bucket with wet sand, turning it upside down to form a turret, and add enough of those to form more or less rectangular shapes that, at least in the eyes of a child, could pass for castles. Since then, I have seen real sand castles and have marveled at the patience and skill of those who build them. During every season, different artists excel at shaping the sand of the Cannes beach into all kinds of sculptures. We've seen the Mona Lisa, a pretty scary looking crocodile, different types of still lifes, and so on. While strolling along the *Croisette* around noon today (I know, it's a rough life...), we saw this rather impressive sculpture and I promptly captured it for posterity. The original will be gone all too soon...

Saturday, October 31, 2009



Halloween

How could I resist this sailboat, registered in Cork, Ireland, to boot? When I spotted the Hallowe'en a few days ago in the harbor of Cannes, I just had to photograph it and save the image for today's blog entry. It is unlikely that I will find anything more typical; for instance, there's virtually no hope of seeing a Jack-o'-lantern around here, and there won't be any groups of kids trick-or-treating, either. As I mentioned in a previous entry, Halloween festivities have pretty much disappeared in France, and at least some of the "credit" goes to the Catholic Church which continues its efforts to combat this heathen rite. Does the Vatican know Christmas is originally a pagan festival? Honestly, I have nothing against gods, but the world would truly be a better place without their ground crew...

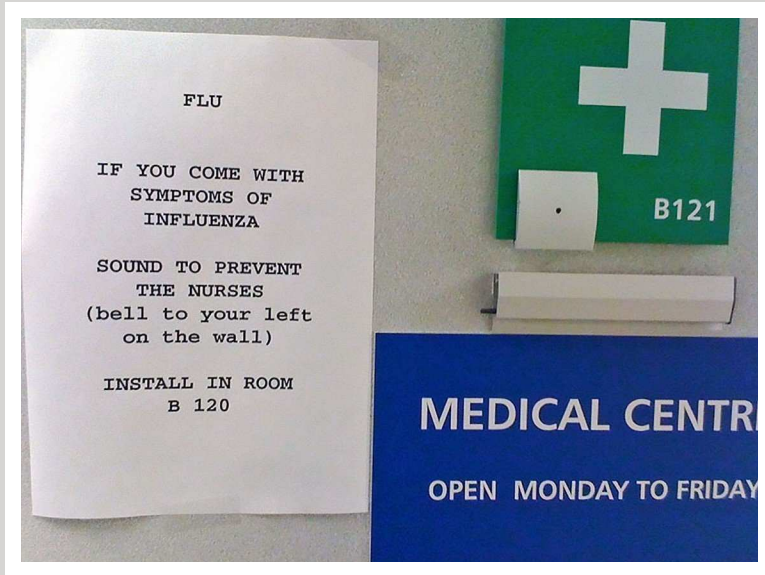
Sunday, November 1, 2009



End of Season

Now that October is behind us, the season has come to an end. The beach toys are gathered and ready for departure, the last few tourists sit or stand on the beach fully clothed, and only a few brave souls venture into the water. Indeed, after a glorious week, the temperatures have fallen from the lower seventies (around 23° C) to the upper fifties (15° C), and suddenly short sleeves don't seem quite enough and shorts give way to slacks. This weekend, the last tourists leave as school vacation ends for many French kids; until mid-December, when the next visitors arrive for the year-end holidays, the area once again belongs to those who live here. To be sure, there will be a few more balmy days, but the season is definitely over. And tomorrow, it's supposed to rain...

Monday, November 2, 2009



Nurse Prevention

Like all large companies in France, my employer has a medical center on the premises with a dedicated staff qualified to take care of whatever medical emergencies can arise in a workplace with over two thousand people. The doctor and nurses also perform the regular medical checkups of all employees. With all this talk of H1N1, they now have the added task of screening those with flu symptoms in order to determine what the problem is. In the nineteen years we've lived here, we've seen our share of funny *franglais* signs, from an "electric fools" section in a local store to a sign that asked for silence because "people are hardly working here", but this one about nurse prevention is, in my opinion, the best yet and thus merits being mentioned in this space.

Tuesday, November 3, 2009



November Skies

According to the weather forecast we saw two days ago, the bell tower of the old Valbonne church should be rising into stormy skies, be whipped by chilly rain, and tormented by howling winds of considerable strength as I write these lines. As you can see, meteorology is not an exact science... After the weather got noticeably more gray and cold this past Sunday, we did indeed wake up to what can only be described as a violent downpour on Monday morning. By midday, however, the clouds were retreating already, and today, the weather was absolutely gorgeous again, though perhaps not quite as warm as last week. And what about the howling winds? Let's just say that there is a rather delightful faint breeze. The climate around here is not half bad :-)

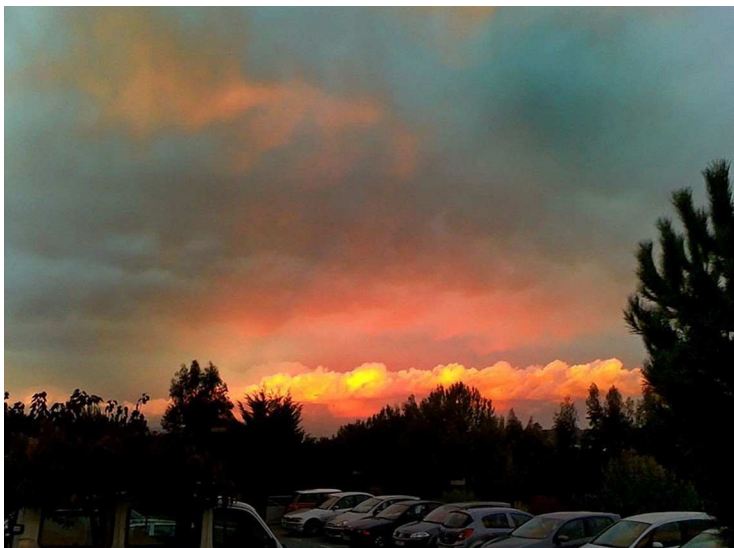
Wednesday, November 4 2009



Innovation

On my way to lunch, I saw this bizarre obelisk-like contraption rocking back and forth in the breeze on the large circular plaza between the main entrance of the Amadeus building and the company restaurant. "Do the Innovation", orders one side, and "Discover the different faces of Innovation", commands another. Frankly, I believe Amadeus has always been a truly innovative company, both in terms of products and technology. Keeping people informed, however, seems to be a different story. Indeed, there hasn't been any communication regarding this blue column, so its origin is as mysterious as that of the monolith in Kubrick's *Space Odyssey*. So far, though, my office PC hasn't told me, "I'm afraid I can't do that, Dan" when I tried to get some work done. Maybe tomorrow...

Thursday, November 5, 2009



Fire In The Sky

One consequence of the recent time change away from daylight savings time is that night is falling between five and six in the evening. Today, as I was making my way to my car at a quarter past five, I was treated to this beautiful display put on by clouds over the Mediterranean, with a little help from the setting sun. I still think changing the clocks is stupid; we should simply stay on daylight savings time all year. One argument in favor of falling back put forth by the government is that it allows children to go to school in daylight. That's terrific until one realizes that they will have to get home in darkness. A lot of sense that makes... When I was a kid, school simply started an hour earlier in the summer, and the clocks never changed. I guess that's too simple a solution...

Friday, November 6, 2009



Autumn

The fact that deciduous trees drop their leaves in order to survive harsh winter conditions explains why we don't have many such trees in this area: our winters are too mild. Yes, temperatures do drop, and perhaps we occasionally have to resort to using an umbrella or a hood to cope with rain, but even that is not common. When it does rain, though, it does so with a vengeance: we get the same yearly rainfall as Paris, but with 100 fewer days of precipitation, but I digress. The whole point is that because there is such a paucity of deciduous trees in this area, we don't get the beautiful falls of other regions, so we hold on to every bit of autumnal color we can, for instance the one provided by these lovely red leaves climbing up a wall on the Amadeus campus.

Saturday, November 7, 2009



BB

Normally, when one says “BB” in France, one refers to sex symbol turned animal activist Brigitte Bardot (the fact that her initials are pronounced “bébé”, the French word for “baby”, doesn’t hurt), but for some, the letters stand for *The Blues Brothers*, a movie that has been hugely successful in this country. For many who were teenagers when the film came out in 1980, John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd represent a kind of romantic post-sixties America, along with Harley Davidson bikes and old-fashioned glass Coca-Cola bottles. Here is a closeup of John “Jake” Belushi singing in the rain next to an old Texaco pump on the *Rue Meynadier* in Cannes, the whole thing a store display, of course. I would have preferred the Brigitte Bardot of the fifties...

Sunday, November 8, 2009



Towels

The dates during which retail sales can take place in France are regulated by the *Préfecture*, the *département* administration. Historically, sales have been limited to two periods of six weeks per year, the summer sales starting in June and the winter sales in January. Beginning in 2009, the two sales periods have been shortened to five weeks each, but stores now have the possibility of conducting sales during two additional weeks of their choice each year. Selling goods below the stores' acquisition price is only allowed during the approved sales periods. Why regulate sales? Simply to protect the small businesses that would otherwise not be able to compete fairly against larger chains. And so, for the first time ever, we were able to buy towels on sale in November!

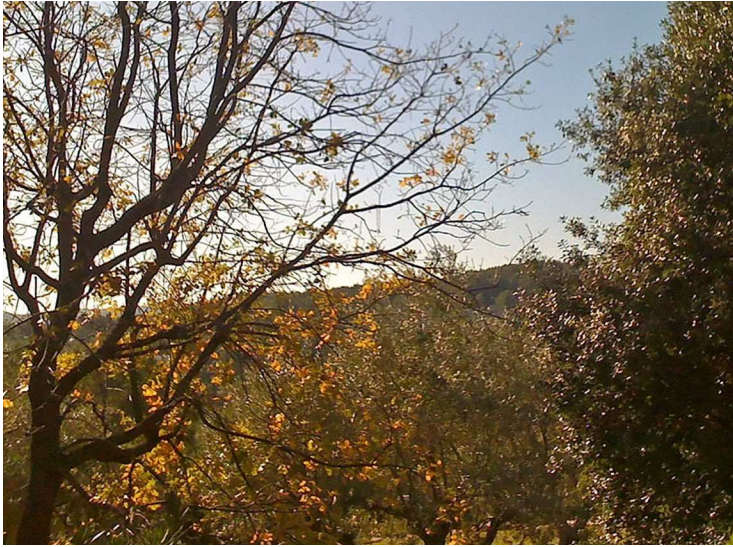
Monday, November 9, 2009



Tacky

Among other things, Switzerland is known for its top notch hotel schools and excellent restaurants, so why, oh why, must most Swiss restaurants located abroad look so abysmally tacky? Inevitably, there has to be this decrepit chalet look with overly ornate kitschy decorations. It's a miracle they don't expect patrons to wear cowbells... The look of this place in Cannes is enough to ensure that I will never dine there; aside from the fact that they appear to equate "Swiss" with "cheese" (which I can't eat), the décor would surely prevent me from enjoying the food even if it were as good as might befit a restaurant that is *mondialement connu* (known the world over) according to the claims made on its web site. Go ahead, check it out; you'll be able to admire the stunning inside, too.

Tuesday, November 10, 2009



Bare

As I mentioned before, fall is not nearly as colorful in this area as in other places we've lived; one has to look long and hard for the bright hues that usually signal the coming end of the year. What one can find is small plants and vines like the one I photographed last Friday; not as common, at least on the Amadeus campus, are actual trees that change colors and shed their leaves, such as this specimen I captured outside the company restaurant before lunch today. You will notice, by the way, that the weather has improved again, but temperatures are still rather low for the area. As I drove to work this morning, my car's outside thermometer, which is usually quite accurate, indicated 5° C (41° F). One or two more days like this and this tree will be completely bare.

Wednesday, November 11, 2009



Armistice

Ninety years ago today, World War I ended when Germany, the last of the Central Powers to capitulate, signed the armistice on November 11, 1918 in a railway car at Compiègne. The cost of this war was staggering; of the 60 million European soldiers mobilized from 1914 to 1918, 8 million were killed, 7 million were permanently disabled, and 15 million suffered serious injuries. Over 16 million people were killed, including nearly 7 million civilians. There is hardly a village in France that does not have a memorial to honor its WW I dead; on November 11, these monuments are decorated with flowers. Friends and allies are not forgotten, and it was good to see the US flag in Cannes, along with many others that are off camera. And what have we learned? Not a thing...

Thursday, November 12, 2009



Zoo

Today, I had an appointment with my ophthalmologist for my yearly eye checkup; I feared that the ravages of time made an update to my eyeglass prescription necessary (as it turned out, only a minimal one). His practice is in the *Rue Hoche* in Vallauris, and as I walked down that street, I heard the laughter of small children. I was passing by a kindergarten, and the outside wall was decorated with a mural of tiles of which today's photo is an excerpt. It is a veritable zoo: birds, butterflies, a rabbit, a snail, mice... all done by children four and a half to five and a half years of age. The sun is shining brightly, the tree is laden with apples... only the mushrooms look like they may not be the edible kind. This mural and the laughter behind it put me in a good mood.

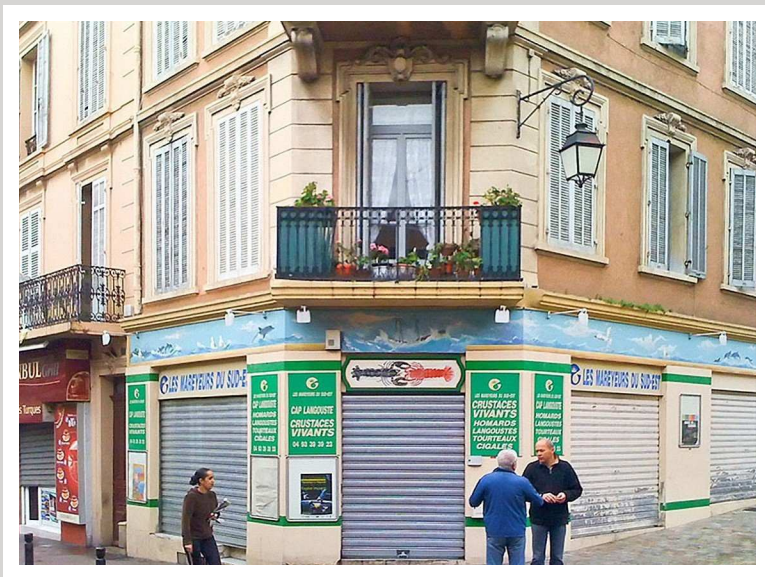
Friday, November 13, 2009



Hook

It being Friday the 13th and all, I intend to use this pirate-themed candy store (there's never a black cat around when you need one) as a starting point to say a few words about founded and unfounded superstitions. For instance, the old saw about not rubbing your eye with a hand that has been replaced by a hook is clearly good advice (see the eye patch), as is staying clear of ticking crocodiles. Contrariwise, it is perfectly all right to have a thirteenth row of seats in an airplane, or a thirteenth floor in a building, and skipping that number merely contributes to a general dumbing down of the population. Breaking a mirror is bad luck? Only for the mirror. Come on, people, it's 2009, and the Mayan calendar notwithstanding, the world will not end on December 21, 2012.

Saturday, November 14, 2009



Balcony

I took this photo early this morning on our stroll around Forville; we brought freshly baked bread at the bakery, freshly picked fruit at the market, and freshly stocked (they were out the other day) cereal at the corner grocery store. It is pleasant to be able to buy all the stuff one needs without having to take the car out of the garage. Anyway, this photo shows the quintessential Cannes house; the corner is cut off, creating an additional, narrow façade that usually features balconies with wrought iron banisters. From these balconies, one has a good view over both streets that come together at this particular corner. The store on the ground floor is a wholesale seafood place that mostly caters to restaurants; it opened a few minutes after I captured this image.

Sunday, November 15, 2009



Zen

I've written in the past how important the game of Pétanque is around here; the player in today's photo is yet another illustration of this. In a Zen-like trance he stood immobile for a very long time, studying the layout of the game. Existential questions no doubt ran through his mind: should he point (i.e., try to place the *boule* as close to the jack as possible) or shoot (attempt to knock an opponent's well-placed *boule* out of the way)? He was rooted to the spot, holding two *boules* behind his back, while the spectators on the bench in the background patiently looked on. It is because of this audience that I didn't quite dare raise my iPhone to eye level; I shot blind from the hip while walking past, and so I can't even tell you what decision the player eventually made.

Monday, November 16, 2009



Lady

In Antibes, right next to the covered market at the *Cours Masséna*, we came across this lovely lady from another time, sitting at a table and selling... what? Nothing, really. She is merely wearing a sign advertising some special or other. The store sells wine and local products; I do not know whether this includes absinthe, a beverage that is truly the devil's work, as the Van Gogh poster on the left attempts to make clear. So bad is this concoction that it was banned for almost a hundred years in the United States and for a major part of the 20th century in Europe. It is not until the 1990s that absinthe, which was invented in Neuchâtel, started to make a modest comeback. It's still not very common today, although, as they say, absinthe makes the heart grow fonder {groan}...

Tuesday, November 17, 2009



Rocks

I have always liked pictures of rocks and pebbles. There's something subtly beautiful about the slight variations in color and the mildly contrasting veins that run through the stones. I've seen many photos of pebble beaches, and Mac OS ships with a number of desktop images, one of which is simply called "rocks" (I have never been tempted to use it because it is slightly out of focus, too much not to be annoying, but not enough to be intentional). For a while now, I've been wondering where I could take a shot of rocks for this blog when it hit me: the outside of the Amadeus cafeteria is lined with a thin border of rocks to allow rain water to get to the drain pipes. They are not fancy rocks, mind you, just ordinary stones, but they were there, so I snapped them at lunchtime.

Wednesday, November 18, 2009



Defenders

I should be packing. There are few activities in this world I detest more: I inevitably bring too much stuff I don't need and not enough of those things that would come in handy. Ah, but I do have a blog entry to complete, and this is a terrific way to procrastinate and postpone the inevitable. Anyway, I am off to North Carolina tomorrow: a non-stop flight from Nice to JFK, then another non-stop segment to Raleigh, and while I am truly looking forward to being there, the travel part itself is definitely a drag. At least I don't have to worry about the safety of the neighborhood while I am gone, not with these two defenders around. By the way, I just decided to leave my Nikon at home, so now I'm sure aliens will land in the backyard in Chapel Hill for a photo-op...

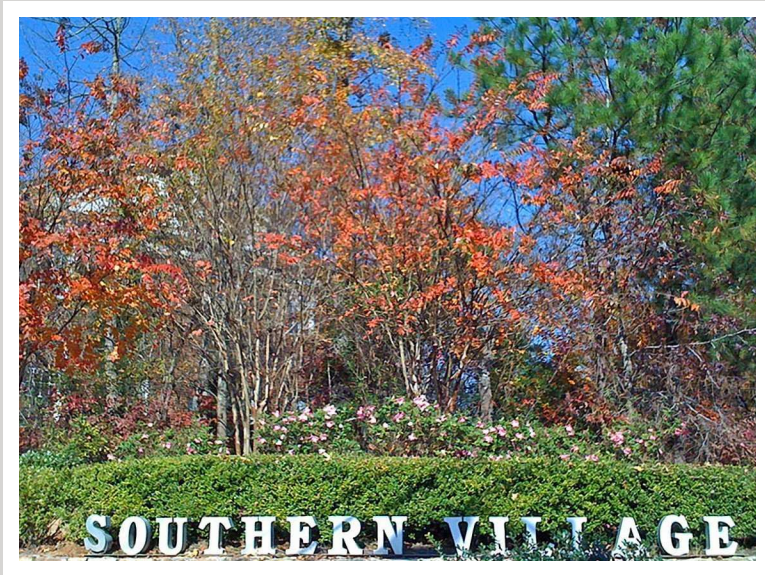
Thursday, November 19, 2009



WC

While the date shown for each blog entry represents the date it was posted (which isn't necessarily the date the photo was taken), the time shown (for example in RSS feeds) always corresponds to the time the shutter was activated. So far, this has been correct for the 296 entries which precede this one. Today's posting, however, is different. I was sitting in a Delta Airlines B767 bathroom (actually, the term "WC" is more appropriate: it's more a closet than a room, and you sure don't want to be claustrophobic when nature calls...); the plane was somewhere over the Atlantic between Nice and New York. In France, it was 4:11 p.m., but I haven't a clue in which time zone this shot was taken, and so, this photo of a reasonably clean Delta restroom sink (I wiped it myself) is truly timeless.

Friday, November 20, 2009



Southern Village

Yesterday, I landed in New York in what can only be described as a dismal muck of rain, clouds, and fog; things were a bit better in Raleigh, and made better still by the wonderful Amelia and David welcoming committee. Uncharacteristically, I had gotten no sleep on the plane, and so I was kind of wiped when we got home. Home, in this case, is Southern Village, a neighborhood of Chapel Hill. The “southern” refers to both its geographical location within Chapel Hill, as well as the very civilized southern character of the place. After a solid nine hours of sleep, I awoke to sparkling blue skies. On my way home from a basic ABC (apples, bagels, cereal) shopping, I took this picture of the neighborhood entrance at 11:42 a.m. It’s good to be here!

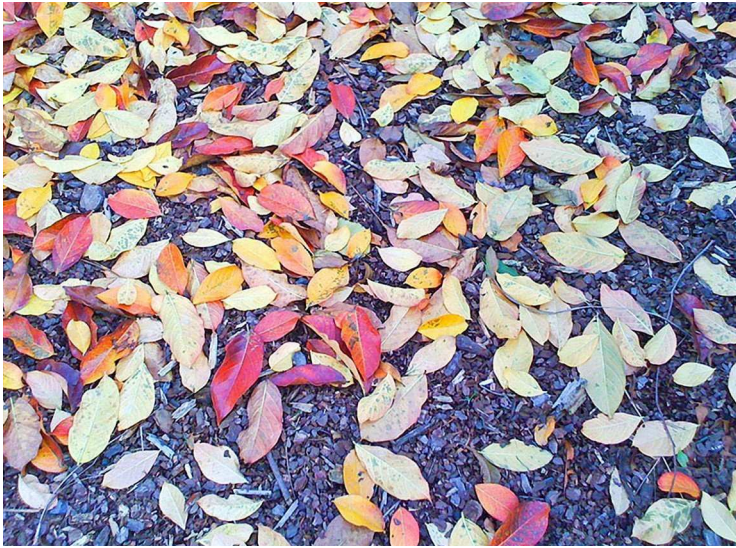
Saturday, November 21, 2009



Uncomplaining

This morning at 10:44 we were just coming out of Trader Joe's when we spotted these two dogs sitting in a car, patiently waiting for their master to return from a shopping trip. They both looked somewhat worried as though the possibility existed that their master would never, ever return to them, and this in spite of the fact that they probably find themselves in this exact same position every other day. We didn't see the owner of the vehicle come back, but we are certain that he or she was given a royal greeting, a hero's welcome, as it were. Dogs are funny that way; they have the capacity to make us feel special, and we expect it of them. Cats are altogether different: we have the capacity to make them feel special, and they expect it of us. To each his own...

Sunday, November 22, 2009



Autumn Day

Lord, it is time. The summer has been grand. Soothe the sundials with your gentle, cooling shade, and from the glades blow winds across the land. Command the fruit to ripen on the vine; grant them but two more warm and southern days, urge them towards swelling perfection and raise the last sweet taste within the heavy wine.

Whoever has no house won't build one now, and long will remain so, he who is alone. Will read, write letters, and wake on his own, and in the alleyways up and down restlessly wander as the leaves are blown.

Rainer Maria Rilke
"Herbsttag"

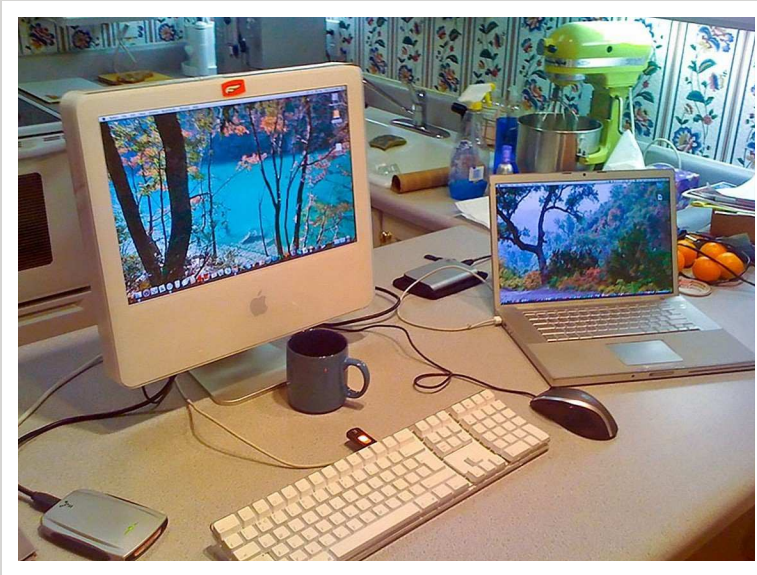
Monday, November 23, 2009



Eastgate

This morning, I had to bring in our 1996 Toyota Camry for its yearly inspection, and we usually do this at the BP station next to the Eastgate shopping center because there is stuff to do while one waits (it usually takes a little over an hour since one cannot make appointments). While a couple of mechanics worked on the old girl, I walked across the lot to Bruegger's to have some coffee and a bagel. The place was pretty full, especially since it was too wet to sit outside, but I managed to get the last table and used the free WiFi to connect to my machine at work in France and see if there was anything urgent going on (there wasn't). About an hour later, I picked up the car which had passed inspection with flying colors. When it works, technology is beautiful...

Tuesday, November 24, 2009



Quest

My mission today was to clean up Eric's 17" iMac G5 that was purchased in London in May of 2005; in the course of its long (in computer terms) life, the system software has been updated numerous times, and always by simply installing over the previous version, so the the whole system was choking on a couple of hundred thousand useless files. The objective was to get the machine to perform as similarly as possible to the way it did when it was new while preserving the user documents. Today's photo shows the patient along with my nearly three year old MacBook Pro, two Firewire drives, and a few cables cluttering up the kitchen counter. In the end, the iMac, which is not a main work machine but merely something to have fun with, ran noticeably better.

Wednesday, November 25, 2009



Weaver Street Market

The Weaver Street Market is truly a staple of Southern Village; it's been here longer than we have. This is a community-owned business with stores in Hillsborough, Carrboro, and here by us. The stores are not cheap, but the quality of the foods they sell is consistently high. Before we had our fancy Jura coffee machine, we used to stop by more often; these days, we mostly buy desserts or baked goods there, and maybe a few items forgotten during our regular shopping. The great thing about this market is that it's just a couple of minutes away from our place by foot, so we don't have to take out the car to shop. The market is located on the main village square; you can check it out by using coordinates 35°52'48.43"N, 79° 3' 57.68"W in Google Earth.

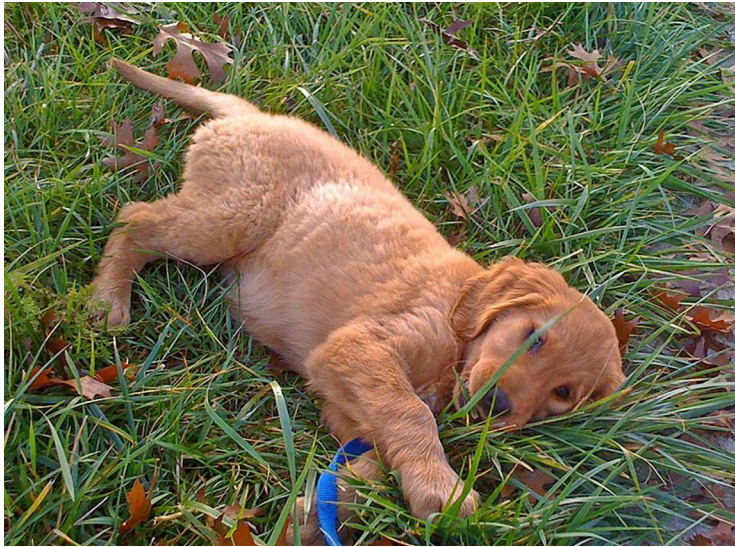
Thursday, November 26, 2009



Thanksgiving

In the United States, Thanksgiving is one of the most important holidays. It is not about presents; rather, it is a day for families to come together and for massive amounts of food to be consumed. The main course inevitably consists of turkey, and so this bird has become the symbol of the holiday itself. The National Turkey Federation estimates that almost 88% of all Americans ate turkey during the 2008 Thanksgiving celebrations, and that 46 million turkeys of an average weight of 15 pounds were consumed that year. That comes out to a respectable 690 million pounds of turkey meat. On the way to Karen's house for a sumptuous Thanksgiving meal with turkey, cranberries, stuffing, sweet potatoes, and so on, I saw this "bird" in someone's yard. Happy Thanksgiving!

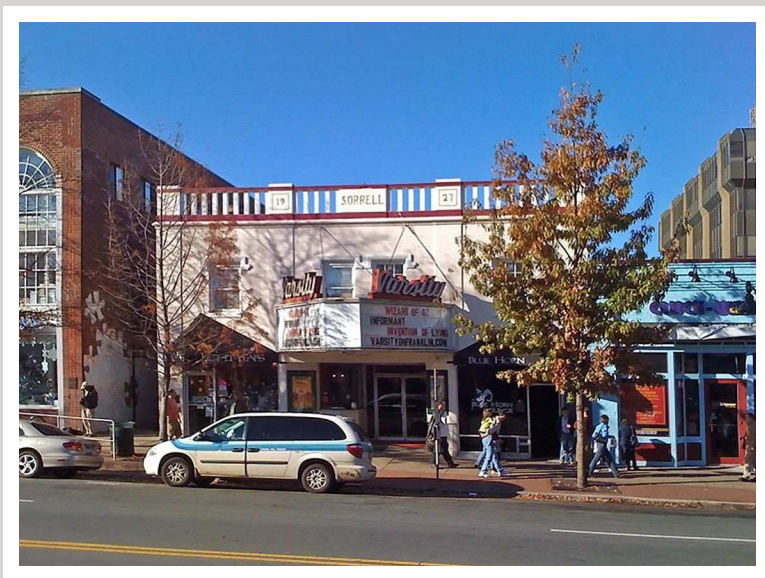
Friday, November 27, 2009



Jasmine

During yesterday's Thanksgiving meal, we needed to take a digestive break between finishing off Herman (the turkey) and tackling Karen's phenomenal brownies and the cherry pie. Besides, the dogs were ready to go outside, so we decided to take a walk around the neighborhood. With us were Karen's dog Cory and Jennifer's dogs Koda and nine-week old Golden Retriever puppy Jasmine, the subject of today's blog photo. Jasmine is incredibly cute and soft; she feels as cuddly as a stuffed animal. After we got back home, David and Amelia joined us for dessert. This was a wonderful Thanksgiving Day, and the best part was to spend it with family members whom we don't see all that often. I'm ready to sign up for an encore...

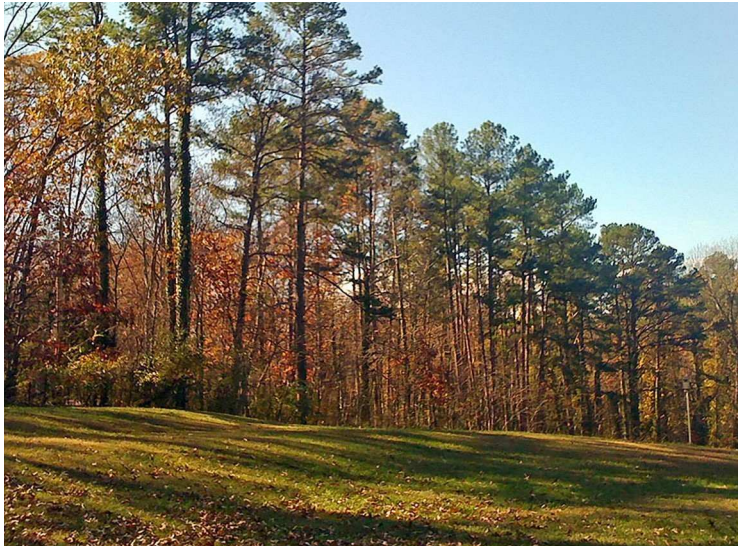
Saturday, November 28, 2009



Varsity

One of the things that seem to be particularly difficult to purchase around here are fresh flowers. This afternoon, we drove around looking for a florist; I had found one on the Internet near what I thought was University Mall, but in reality turned out to be University Square. After I realized my mistake, we drove to the correct address but the shop was closed. Eric then remembered that there was another florist on Franklin Street, and he was right: we were finally able to make a purchase right across the street from the Varsity theater. Some time ago, it was announced that the Varsity was closing; this caused quite a bit of dismay as the theater had been a fixture of Franklin Street for decades. A good thing, then, that it just reopened for business yesterday!

Sunday, November 29, 2009



Outdoor Recreation Center

Following a scrumptious brunch at Foster's Market, the kids and I went for a walk through the UNC Outdoor Recreation Center. This is a very large plot of land that features several tennis and volleyball courts as well as something I had never seen before: an 18 hole disc golf course. This is just like a golf course except that one plays with discs that resemble skinny frisbees; instead of a ball ending in a cup, the objective is to have the disc end up in a basket. The weather was glorious, and the surroundings so rural that it was hard to remember that we were on a university campus. This late in the season, most of the leaves were down, though a few still held on for dear life. We spent about an hour walking through this area before heading back to civilization.

Monday, November 30, 2009



Elmo's

One of my favorite places around here is Elmo's Diner at Carr Mill Mall in Carrboro, just a short drive from Southern Village. The setting alone makes this diner unusual, and the fact that it is inside a mall is most convenient as it is easy to do one's shopping before or after a meal. The clincher is that at Elmo's, they serve breakfast all day long, and they have all my favorite breakfast foods. The owners write, "Our job at Elmo's is to recognize that the vast majority of our business is made up of repeat customers. You are our friends and our neighbors, and we want you to feel good about eating at Elmo's." This does sound a bit corny, but once you've eaten at Elmo's, you realize that it's absolutely true.

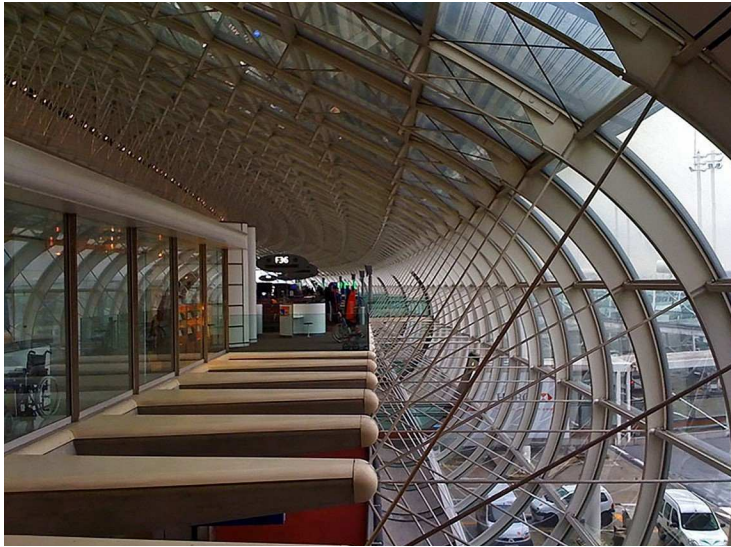
Tuesday, December 1, 2009



Gimghoul

Ominous looking Gimghoul Castle in Chapel Hill was built in the 1920s and serves as headquarters of a secret society, the Order of Gimghoul. Very little is known about this organization, which of course fuels the speculations surrounding it. Rumors of clandestine meetings at the castle, with men in white robes performing all kinds of weird rituals, are part of the town lore. On the web, one can find several mysteries related to this place. The castle is surrounded by a low wall, and there are many signs that discourage trespassing. At the edge of the property, one finds Battle Seat, a semi circular stone bench with a plaque honoring Kemp Plummer Battle, the president of the University of North Carolina from 1876 to 1891. Amazing the stuff one can find at one's doorstep...

Wednesday, December 2, 2009



Terminal F

Even though my flight from Raleigh to Newark yesterday evening took off an hour late, I had no problem making my connecting flight from Newark to Paris. As it turns out, Continental flies to terminal 1 at Charles de Gaulle airport. This is a perfectly circular ten-story building with seven satellites that are connected by underground moving sidewalks. Each satellite accommodates four gates. Terminal 1 opened in 1974, and it looked amazingly futuristic back then. Today, seeing it for the first time in many years, I couldn't help but notice how old it seemed. A bus took me to terminal 2F from where I boarded my flight home. Wide-open spaces are the design concept of all parts of terminal 2. I wonder how well this will age... At 2 p.m., I landed in Nice.

Thursday, December 3, 2009



Gugelhupf

While we are on the subject of airline terminals, and to pictorially document my return home yesterday, here is a photo of Nice airport's terminal 2, taken from the jetway. The shape very much reminds me of an upside-down Gugelhupf mold, the kind my mother and aunts used when baking this tasty cake. This relatively new terminal opened in December of 2002. Nice is a two-runway airport; the southern runway, the one furthest out to sea, is 3.2 kilometers (2 miles) long while the shorter runway measures 2.7 kilometers (1.7 miles). It was moved further south to make space for more aircraft parking in 1999, all without interrupting the considerable airport traffic: in 2008, there were 183,612 aircraft movements (takeoffs and landings), more than 500 per day.

Friday, December 4, 2009



Xmas Shopping

The first Sunday in Advent 2009 was November 29; now that it is behind us, we are in the midst of the year's busiest (or, dare I say, "worst") shopping period. From now until December 24, the activity in the stores and shops is going to increase with each passing day and reach a veritable frenzy during the last few hours. Malls and other shopping venues are open for business on Sundays (not the norm around here), and the streets are teeming with people scurrying around toting shopping bags filled with gifts and other holiday goodies. For now, the supermarkets are still safe, but in another two weeks, they, too, will be jam-packed. Among all the hustle and bustle, it's all too easy to forget what the holiday season is about. We would do well to remember...

Saturday, December 5, 2009



Wine and Cheese Shop

As those who know me are aware, I'm not exactly opposed to a good glass of wine, but I do not touch cheese, ever. I've got a food allergy that prevents me from eating fermented cheese (though I'm fine with other dairy products such as milk, yoghurts, and even sweet cheeses); I intensely dislike not only the flavor but also the smell of cheese, and to be around a bubbling pot of fondue or a raclette grill is enough to make me gag. This is not as bad as it sounds; it doesn't bear thinking about what a misery my life would have been had I been allergic to strawberries or chocolate... But even I have to admit that this display of the Ceneri Wine and Cheese Shop in the *Rue Meynadier* in Cannes is beautiful, and there is more selection than in the famous Monty Python cheese shop.

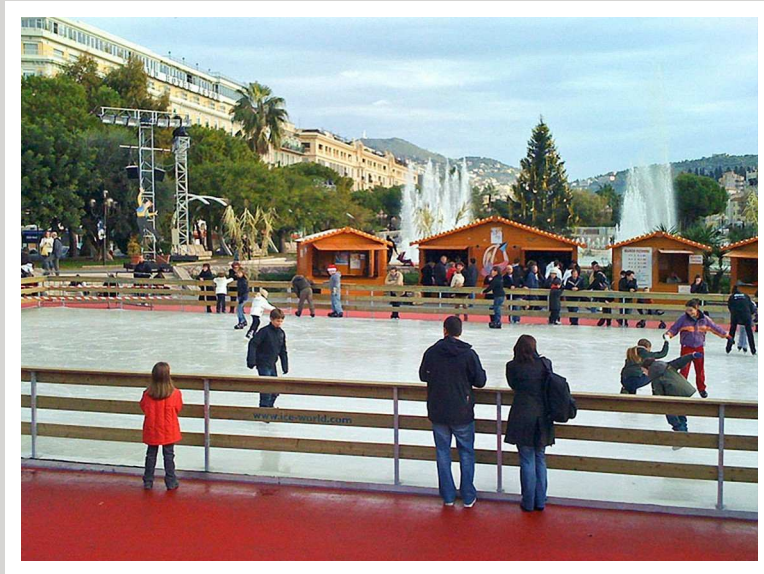
Sunday, December 6, 2009



Ferris Wheel

This morning, we took a quick trip to Nice to look at the modest Christmas Market on the *Place Masséna*. It would have been quite impossible to miss the rather larger Ferris Wheel that had been set up across the street in the *Jardin Albert 1er*. Of course, we figured that the view from the top would be exquisite and definitely a worthwhile addition to the iPhone Photo Blog. However, the owners were asking an outrageous 6 (six) euros per person; that comes to about \$18 for two people, a clear case of highway robbery. In silent protest, we walked away and decided that our blog visitors would have to do without the view from the top. To console ourselves, we spent six euros on a large bag of roasted almonds, a far better investment.

Monday, December 7, 2009



Ice Skating

Like every year in December, an ice-skating rink was set up on the *Place Masséna* in Nice, right next to the Christmas market. Seeing people ice-skate in the middle of Nice is sufficiently unusual to merit inclusion in this blog; after all, Nice is famous as a Mediterranean resort town and not as a center for winter sports of any kind. Yes, there is an indoor skating rink, but ice, palm trees, and Zambonis (off camera to the right) don't normally go together. At 11:14 yesterday morning, not too many people had ventured onto the slippery stuff, but the place had just opened and things were barely getting underway. Even so, I doubt that anyone showed up to rival the performance of a Scott Hamilton or Katarina Witt (those too young to know these names can look them up)...

Tuesday, December 8, 2009



Père Noël

Père Noël, or Father Christmas, as Santa Claus is called in France. Mind you, this makes a lot more sense: Claus is really a reference to Saint Nicholas and as such doesn't really have much to do with Christmas, at least depending on what culture one comes from. When I grew up, I was told that the presents that are exchanged at Christmas are meant to symbolize the gifts the Three Kings brought the newborn Jesus. Saint Nicholas, on the other hand, appeared on December 6 to reward the good children and punish those who had misbehaved during the year. And Saint Nicholas lived in the Black Forest, not at the North Pole, and he had neither elves nor reindeer... Apparently the only things all cultures agree on is that no object is too tacky when it comes to making a profit...

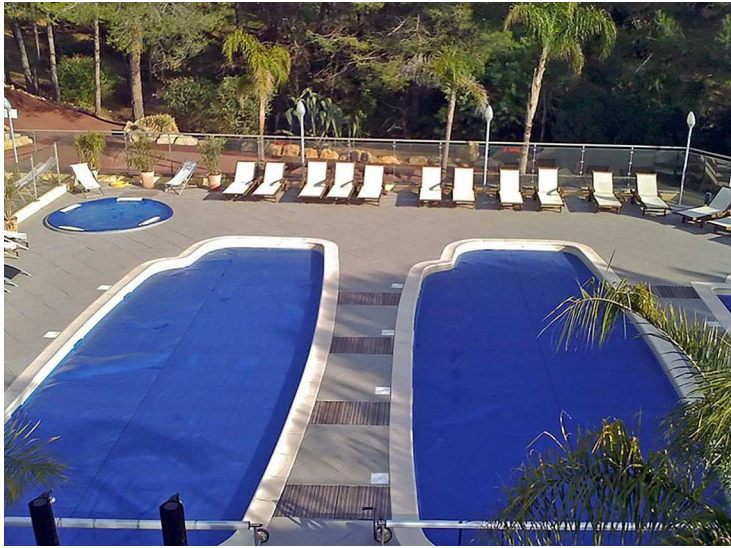
Wednesday, December 9, 2009



Kawa

Kawa: A nice French slang term for what Americans might call a “cuppa joe” when they are not forced to say bizarre things, such as, “Skinny Cinnamon Dolce Latte Venti” at Starbucks, where sprinkling non-English words into consumer choices evidently justifies raising prices to absurd levels. Today’s photo shows nothing that fancy, just my usual after-lunch fare at the Amadeus cafeteria, a double espresso strong enough to put hair on your teeth, yet not the least bit bitter and amazingly affordable. I’ve practically recuperated from the cold I brought home from my recent trip to the United States, but a small amount of fatigue still lingers, so I need this even more than I usually do. I mean, it simply wouldn’t do to fall asleep during a particularly boring afternoon meeting...

Thursday, December 10, 2009



Hibernating

This month's off-site meeting of the task force on stress management and reduction in the workplace once again took place at *Espaces Antipolis* right here in the park (and about ten minutes by foot from my house). This place combines business and resort functions, though in this season, most of the resort part is hibernating: the Jacuzzis and the pools are covered up, and all other outdoor activities are shut down until spring. This leaves the business part: we typically meet in a conference room, eat lunch on the terrace, and have another work session in the afternoon. My way home leads through the wooded area in the background. In this season, one has to be careful not to run into a group of wild boars: they roam the area looking for food and are dangerous if startled.

Friday, December 11, 2009



Fungus

One of the most beautiful features of the Amadeus campus is the olive tree alley, a walkway of some 160 yards that is, as the name implies, bordered by some magnificent olive trees, some of which are quite old. Several months ago, the trees began to look different: they lost their leaves or failed to grow new ones. In short, it became clear that something was wrong. Experts were called in to diagnose the problem; it turns out that our olive trees are sick, attacked by some vicious fungus, and some are already beyond help. Everything is being done to save the remaining trees: the roots have to be exposed and treated with various chemicals, and I've even seen injections being administered with scary looking syringe-like tools. Let's hope all this works...

Saturday, December 12, 2009



Postcards

Back in Cannes for the first time in 24 days, essentially because of my trip to North Carolina and the fact that I was still getting over a pretty bad cold last weekend. The year-end tourists have not arrived yet, and though the stores are getting crowded, the lines in front of the cash registers are still manageable: the Christmas shopping frenzy is not in full swing yet. The merchants that are not doing great around this time of year are those who cater to summer visitors, the ones who buy bathing suits and beach toys, sunscreen, sunglasses, colorful towels, and of course postcards. I do wonder how the postcard industry is doing; in these days of cell phones, cameras, and email, there seems less and less of a reason to buy postcards. We haven't written any in years...

Sunday, December 13, 2009



BS

Let's see what the dictionary has to say: "Bullshit. Noun: Stupid or untrue talk or writing; nonsense. Verb (-shit•ted, -shit•ting) [trans.] talk nonsense, typically to be misleading or deceptive." Well, all I can say is how wonderfully appropriate for this temple of cosmetics to bear the initials it does! We've all seen the commercials on TV: a more or less gorgeous person of the female persuasion, having undergone several facelifts already, turns her puffed up Botox face to the audience and claims that her appearance is entirely due to this new miracle cream, developed by top scientists in a secret lab on the shores of lake Geneva. One or two dabs a day, and the years drop like flies. Can anyone deny that the letters "BS" describe the cosmetics industry to perfection?

Monday, December 14, 2009



Quickly!

I am still trying to find out what these two signs are all about. The green one says, "Get sick today" while the red one asserts, "Tomorrow, it may already be too late." I spotted the pair on a window in the *Rue de la Pompe* in Cannes. Unfortunately, neither web site referenced on the signs appears to be up, though the names are registered in the name of a company called *Just A Kiss* (Jak for short) in Paris. From a description I found, "The ambition of the Jak Lab is to open large the vision about upcoming trends and future." Sounds impressive... but it does not explain the signs. Are they drawing attention to rising health care costs? Or do they follow the German adage that claims that "he who dies sooner is dead longer"? I've emailed Jak and will report back if I get an answer.

Tuesday, December 15, 2009



Humboldt Penguin

A very popular tourist attraction around here is Marineland in Antibes. As the name implies, this is a marine animal park similar to SeaWorld in the United States, but on a smaller scale (even though they, too, have killer whales, dolphins, a shark tunnel, sea lions, and penguins). Today, about sixty of us went there with our boss who treated us to a Christmas lunch. As a fringe benefit we got to walk around the park and see some of the shows. I hadn't been there in years, so this was a welcome opportunity to reacquaint myself with the attractions and find out about those that had been added since my last visit. Today's picture shows a *Spheniscus humboldti* in his pond which you can visit here: [43° 36.833'N, 7° 7.509'E](#). Enjoy your virtual tour of Marineland...

Wednesday, December 16, 2009



Kitsch

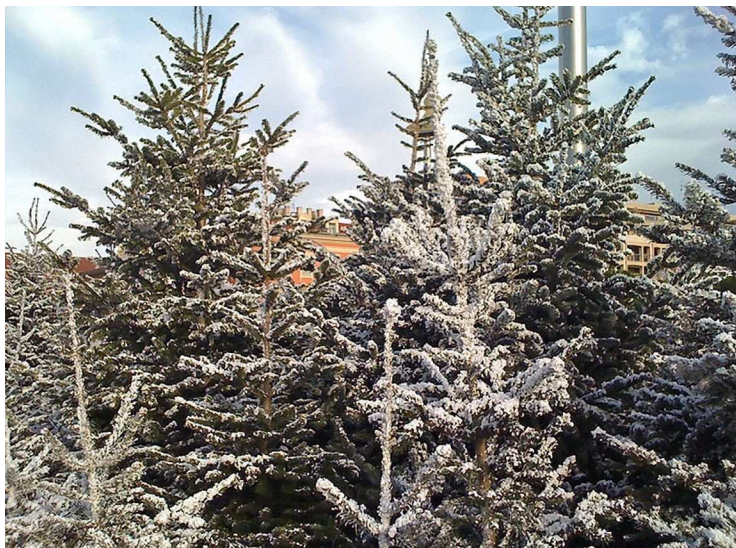
Even an educational and fun place like Marineland (see yesterday's entry) is evidently not able to resist adding some Disneyesque kitsch to its list of attractions, in this case a (predominantly) plastic pirate ship that appears to be loosely based on Captain Hook's Jolly Roger from Peter Pan. But maybe you think that this particular item is not nearly bad enough to serve as an example of kitsch. I respectfully submit that this is because I photographed it from its most flattering (make that "least unflattering") angle. To see what I mean, you have to take a look at another photo that shows the same ship from the side (available in the on-line version of this blog). Why is it necessary to introduce stuff like this into an otherwise fine theme park? There are so many good things to import from the US, so it's hardly necessary to focus on garbage.

Thursday, December 17, 2009



Queue

Our company restaurant is rather popular as it serves generally good food (we're in France, after all) at subsidized, and thus very reasonable prices. By noon, the lines are not usually out the door, but it does tend to become quite busy inside. This is the reason I usually try to eat when the place opens at 11:45. Today, however, it was already bustling when I got there because they were serving the official Christmas lunch, and everyone knows that the dishes prepared on this occasion are even fancier than usual. For instance, it took me a while to decide between two of the main dishes: a delicious looking ostrich steak or scallops with rice and a seafood sauce (the scallops won). As you can see, a few minutes past noon, the queue into the restaurant had reached a record length.



Yuletide Arithmetic

It turns out that this year, the holidays fall very nicely. Our offices are always closed during the afternoons of December 24 and 31, and since Christmas Day and New Year's Day fall on a Friday, we're looking at two consecutive long weekends. By taking off the three and a half days from Monday, December 28, through Thursday, December 31 at noon, I get a vacation of ten and a half days, from December 24 at noon through the evening of January 3. This great return on a modest investment proved irresistible: though I didn't plan to take any time off at first, I changed my mind this morning. Sadly, deals on Christmas trees are far less attractive as evidenced by these grossly overpriced specimens in the *Place Masséna* in Nice. Maybe it's the fake snow...

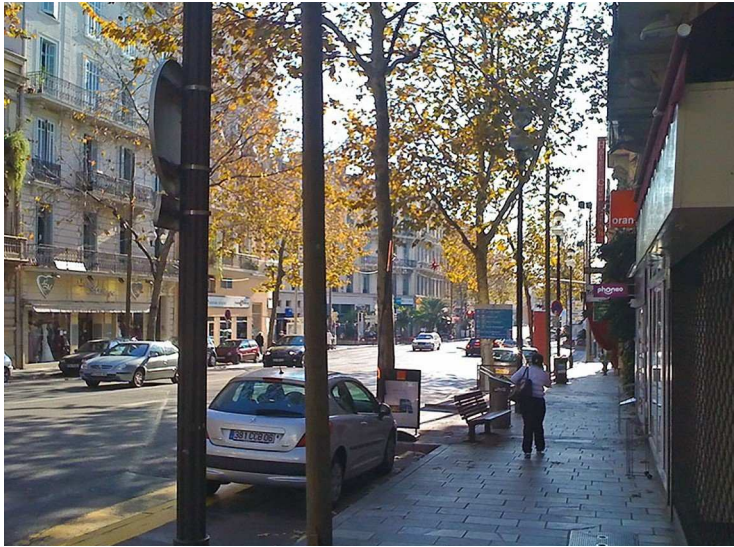
Saturday, December 19, 2009



Norma Jeane

I already mentioned the giant murals that adorn the façades of certain Cannes buildings and honor famous actors and actresses; back in October, I featured one of Jean Gabin. Today's photo shows Norma Jeane Baker, better known as Marilyn Monroe. It is located on the side of the Cannes Riviera Hotel on the *Boulevard d'Alsace*, and the fact that I rarely walk through that part of town is probably why I never saw it before. For whatever reason, the French love Marilyn Monroe, and I'm sure her tragic end has much to do with it (then again, they also love Jerry Lewis. Go figure...) For those who like trivia, let me add that "Monroe" was Marilyn's mother's maiden name, and that her birth certificate actually read "Norma Jeane Mortenson" (long story, look it up yourself).

Sunday, December 20, 2009



Lunchtime

The *Boulevard Carnot* in Cannes is named after... whom? Sadi Carnot, of course, but which one? We have the choice between Nicolas Léonard Sadi Carnot (1796–1832), the French physicist who died during a cholera epidemic, or Marie François Sadi Carnot (1837–1894), president of France from 1887 until his assassination at age 57. It doesn't help to know that the latter was the nephew of the former, or that neither of these men had anything to do with the Riviera in general or Cannes in particular. Still, this boulevard is the main thoroughfare that links the A8 highway to the center of Cannes, so it is almost perpetually congested. So what about today's picture? Easy: the year-end tourists are not here yet, and the photo was taken yesterday at 12:40. The French were eating!

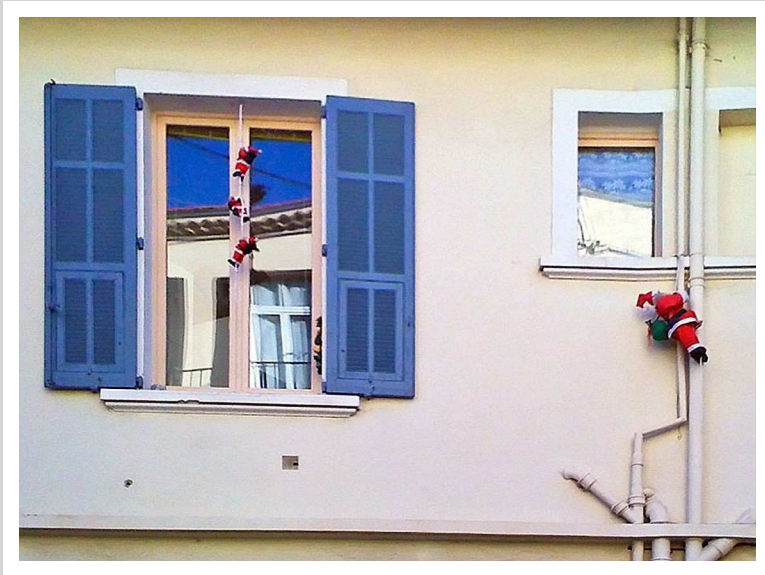
Monday, December 21, 2009



Façade

We are still on the *Boulevard Carnot*, and no, I don't know which Sadi Carnot it is named after (see yesterday's entry). With two lanes in either direction, plus parking on both sides, this is indeed considered a major roadway around here. Between Le Cannet where much highway traffic merges into it, and the *Voie Rapide*, a sort of urban highway that is built on top of the railroad tracks and that cuts the town into a northern and a more desirable southern side, the *Boulevard Carnot* features a bewildering number of traffic lights, none of which seem to be synchronized with any of the others. With the frequent stops that this imposes on motorists, there is plenty of time to admire the lovely buildings with their wrought iron or stone banisters and colorful flowers.

Tuesday, December 22, 2009



Invasion

People here don't tend to go overboard when it comes to Christmas decorations. The municipalities embellish the villages, towns, and cities with festive LED lights, but private individuals keep a low energy profile. On Long Island, I recall seeing houses decorated with literally thousands of light bulbs; some of these homes were even featured in *Newsday*, the local paper. I do hope this wasteful custom is a thing of the past, given the environmental issues we face. Another observation is that the French *Pères Noël* apparently avoid sooty chimneys (and the fires that often burn at their bottom) by choosing a mountaineering approach; this photo, taken last Saturday in the Stanislas neighborhood of Cannes, shows one small and three tiny Santas invading a residence.

Wednesday, December 23, 2009



Letters

The other day, I came across this charming old mailbox (or replica thereof) in Cannes, and it made me think of how the postal services have evolved. Much has changed since the days depicted on the mailbox: email has replaced many business and personal letters, and competition has come from companies like Federal Express, DHL, UPS, and many others. To compensate, the post offices have begun to offer new services. In France, for instance, *La Poste* is the bank of choice for roughly 20% of the population. Some services have been reduced: lines at the post office tend to get longer, not shorter, and the delivery of mail has gotten slower and occurs less frequently than it used to in spite of the price of stamps going up. Let's just hope that the holiday mail gets delivered on time!

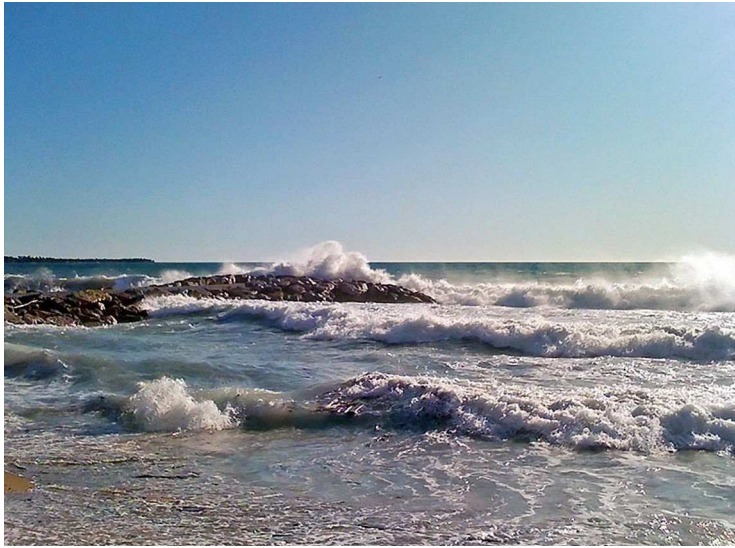
Thursday, December 24, 2009



O Holy Night

My second best Christmas memories are from decades ago. I was a tot, and in the late afternoon of December 24, Dad always took me to a movie (usually a Disney animated feature) while Mom stayed home to set up the tree and arrange the presents under it. My very best Christmas memories are a bit more recent; they are about seeing the excitement in my own children's eyes mixing with the reflection of the (always real) candles on our (just as real) Christmas tree. My parents are long gone, my kids are grown up, and we haven't had a Christmas tree in many years. What remains is the family celebration, a simple but good dinner (*foie gras* and *saumon fumé* tonight)... and Christmas carols. Happy Holidays to you all!

Friday, December 25, 2009



Windy Christmas

Yesterday, the weather was truly abysmal. It rained so hard all day that I was half expecting to see Santa in a neoprene diver's suit and reindeer with snorkels pulling an underwater sled through the neighborhood. Around 9 o'clock this morning, the situation had improved dramatically, and the last clouds disappeared fast, chased away by a very strong wind. After an outstanding pancake breakfast with superb Vermont maple syrup (thanks, guys; you know who you are), we decided to head to Cannes and walk around. The wind was blowing really hard by now, producing truly amazing waves. Along the *Boulevard Jean Hibert* there was no more beach. Fortunately, there were a few items sold at the market that reminded us what day it was. Merry Christmas!

Saturday, December 26, 2009



Kiddie Fun

Today, we we had lunch at the Vauban in Antibes. The streets were surprisingly crowded as adults and children alike took their dogs and Christmas presents for a walk. In 2002, we celebrated Christmas in London, and on December 26 (Boxing Day), everything was closed; the stores did not open until December 27. In France, shopping resumes the day after Christmas, provided that day doesn't fall on a Sunday. After all, why miss an opportunity to extract more money from parents on the flimsy excuse that yesterday was Christmas? And so, on the *Place Nationale*, some rides for small children had been set up, and many parents relented and dutifully took out their purses. After all, "Peace on Earth" is not supposed to stop the day after Christmas...

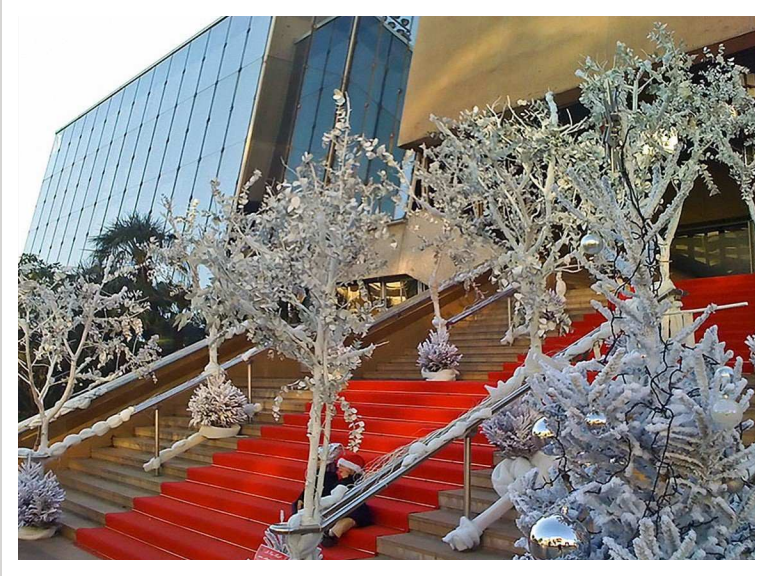
Sunday, December 27, 2009



Juan-les-Pins

Today, we decided to take a stroll through Juan-les-Pins and parts of the *Cap d'Antibes*. Juan-les-Pins, actually a neighborhood of Antibes, is famous for its yearly Jazz Festival (which, incidentally, takes place in the exact spot depicted in today's photo) as well as for being a playground of the rich and famous (I'm afraid we didn't blend). The *Cap d'Antibes* is a peninsula that separates the Bay of Cannes from the Bay of Angels (where Nice is located); it features some of the area's most opulent properties and beautiful views. The walk along the *Cap d'Antibes* was lovely, and we even saw a wrecked sailboat, apparently a victim of the very strong winds that blew on Christmas day. We ended our excursion with a cappuccino (of course) and a tasty dessert.

Monday, December 28, 2009



VIP Steps

I have shown these famous steps leading up to the *Palais des Festivals* in a previous entry, but that was during the film festival. What I wish to convey today is that these same steps have been decorated as appropriate for the season, and that a red carpet has been laid out, even though there is no event scheduled at the moment. Thus, tourists are dying to have their picture taken on the VIP steps. I observed a group of Asian visitors take individual photos of each other, exchanging cameras at every turn. Italians mostly want pictures of their children on the steps, the Germans pose as groups, Americans as couples, and so on. I tried to take a photo without people and failed. Empty steps with no one but these two partially hidden kids was the best I could do.

Tuesday, December 29, 2009



Drugstore

This afternoon, I walked across the *Place Bermond* and past our local drugstore, or pharmacy, as I should probably call it. There are tons of pharmacies in France; in town, one is rarely more than a five minute walk from one. Their role is to dispense prescription drugs, but they sell other items, such as beauty supplies, over-the-counter drugs, herbal and aromatherapy products, and so forth. Contrary to what we know from the States, this is not just a five and dime with a prescription drug counter; the accent really is on medicine. Incidentally, the sign “ouverture non-stop” only means that the place is open over lunch, not that it does business 24 hours a day. Like most stores, the pharmacy closes in the evening; for emergencies, there is a condom dispenser mounted outside.

Wednesday, December 30, 2009



You're in for a treat

During a shopping trip to the Casino supermarket this morning (yes, I am off this week as the more perceptive of my readers may have gathered), I saw this Beaujolais label. The word “dru” (in the context of a liquid) means heavy, thick, while “pisse” means exactly what you think it does, so here we have a wine label that basically reads, “Thick and heavy piss”. In retrospect, perhaps I should have called this entry “Urine for a treat”... So far, my favorite wine label had been “Fat Bastard” (and I actually saw a bottle of it at Trader Joe’s in Chapel Hill). By the way, the Beaujolais label does not refer to the wine’s effect on the consumer; rather it comes from an old French vintner’s expression that means that the grapes are particularly juicy and will make a fine wine. Cheers!

Thursday, December 31, 2009



Year-end rush

This morning at 11:28, the *Rue Meynadier* in Cannes was teeming with people out for the year's last shopping opportunity. Ernest (as well as two other *traiteurs*) had lines out into the street as desperate consumers battled for the last *hors d'œuvres*, lobsters, truffles, and chunks of *foie gras*. Hard to imagine, then, that not even half a block to the north, there was hardly anyone in the street. Our next stop was Valbonne where we intended to shop for a few things ourselves. Eric insisted on a quick trip to the local bakery to pick up what we still call a *négresse* even though the pastry has been renamed "black beauty" for reasons of political correctness. The shape and taste remain unchanged... Happy New Year!

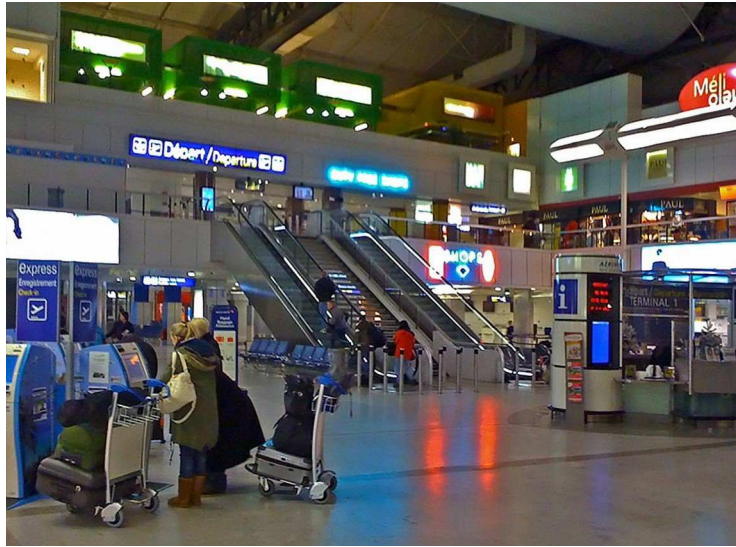
Friday, January 1, 2010



Valbonne

It's getting increasingly difficult to find blog entry titles that have not been used yet; imagine my surprise, then, when I discovered that "Valbonne" is just such an unused title! And to think that we've been living here for over 19 years... Anyway, the rather dismal-looking main square of the old village, *La Place des Arcades*, is a perfect illustration of how this year seems to have started with a whimper, not a shout, at least as far as the weather is concerned. One can only marvel at the optimism of the owner of the *Café des Arcades* who set all the outdoor tables. Incidentally, I have already shown this very square on June 2 (albeit taken from the opposite side); revisiting it is an opportunity to show what a difference a little sunshine (and a few people) can make.

Saturday, January 2, 2010



Departure

This morning at 7:31, the departure area of Nice airport's terminal 1 looked empty. The Lufthansa plane to Munich had already left, as had the Swiss flight to Zurich (though why anyone would want to go there when one can go to Basel is beyond me). Iberia's passengers to Madrid were boarding already for a 7:45 departure, so the British Airways flight to London was pretty much the only reason to be in this part of the terminal. Eric had to check in for this flight as he was traveling to New York and Raleigh via London. For once, the automatic check-in machines gave him boarding passes all the way to New York, but the line at the baggage drop was actually longer than the check-in line, and moving about as slowly. This is probably intentional: the Brits just love queues...

Sunday, January 3, 2010



Fishing Boat

When I get my hair cut, the process lasts roughly twenty minutes, and a twenty typically takes care of the business end of things. When my beloved wife gets her hair done, Anouk routinely estimates that it will take two hours, it inevitably takes three, and let's not talk about cost! I don't know what goes on during all this time, but as my wife occasionally reads this blog, self-preservation compels me to add that it is absolutely worth every minute because the result is simply spectacular. All this to say that yesterday, I was informed by SMS that our 1 p.m. lunch appointment at *La Piazza* was postponed, and so I had time to walk around the harbor where I saw this typical Provençal fishing boat with its net reel. I don't know how this works; I've never seen anyone fish with one of these.

Monday, January 4, 2010



Yum!

Now that the holiday season with all its excesses is behind us, it is time to ingest healthy foods again. While I am not a huge fan of vegetables (except for the basics: potatoes, carrots, green beans, and maybe spinach and cauliflower), I love all kinds of fruit, though in this case, too, I am very conservative. Keep your papaya, mango, persimmon, lychee, kiwi, or other newfangled stuff. On the other hand, I can eat tons of apples (except Granny Smith: way too sour), pears, bananas, and other “conventional” fruit. The one exotic fruit I absolutely love is the pineapple, provided someone cuts it up for me: I’m lazy, yet I like my fruit fresh. Fortunately, my wife spoils me in this regard. And now you must excuse me: dinner (pasta carbonara) is ready and the wine is poured.

Tuesday, January 5, 2010



Unusual

I did a double-take on my way out the main Amadeus building at 4:59 this afternoon: there, right in front of me, on the little grassy patch that borders the walkway, stood a real, honest-to-goodness... snowman! My first day with Amadeus was November 19, 1990, so I have been on their payroll for 6,988 days. In all this time, this is the first snowman I've seen on company property. The funny thing is that we haven't had a single snowflake so far this year, so Frosty's raw materials must have been brought here by an employee, most likely on a car. I grant you that this may not be much of a snowman, but the only other one I've seen around here is the one built by Eric on our terrace on February 10, 1999. It was wearing Eric's sweater, new glasses, and... oh, just go look at the on-line version of the blog and see for yourself!

Wednesday, January 6, 2010



Epiphany

Today, we celebrate the visit of the Magi who traveled all the way from Persia to Bethlehem to bring baby Jesus gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh (try that last one the next time you play Hangman with a small child). And just how is this event celebrated here? With food, of course, in this case a Three Kings Cake. There are several kinds (my favorite is the one filled with frangipane shown here), but they all have something in common: a small trinket is hidden inside. This used to be a simple bean; nowadays, it could be a plastic baby Jesus or a hand painted porcelain figurine. Whoever gets the goodie is king or queen for the day and gets to pick a consort (relax: it's a purely ceremonial role). Today's photo shows my contribution to this morning's office party.

Thursday, January 7, 2010



Glacier

According to my dictionary, the word “glacier” in English means “a slowly moving mass or river of ice formed by the accumulation and compaction of snow on mountains or near the poles.” An example is shown in the on-line version of the blog: the Aletsch glacier in Switzerland, at a length of 17 miles (though sadly shrinking) the largest of the Alpine glaciers. In French, “glacier” means the same thing, but the word also designates an ice-cream maker, or a person or shop that sells mostly ice-cream. Today’s picture was taken in Cannes, so it is clear that we are in front of an ice-cream parlor and not next to a river of ice. Amazing, however, that these (real) orchids can stand the single-digit (lower 30s for those of you who measure in Fahrenheit) temperatures we’ve been having lately...

Friday, January 8, 2010



Dead End

I have often wondered about this little cul-de-sac, or “impasse”, as the French ironically prefer to call it. It looks like a real street with sidewalks and curbs, but I cannot see how any vehicle could ever have parked, let alone driven here. The reason is that I am standing at the very beginning of this dead end (at 43°32'56.63"N, 7°0'37.49"E), and behind me is a long stairway that leads from the *Rue Clémenceau* to the *Rue Perrissol*. Looking at the surroundings, it's difficult to imagine how any car could ever have made it up here. Yet, there are sidewalks, and as the faded signs on the wall indicate, there used to be businesses here: a certain R. Chaisserieau made chairs and leg rests, and someone named Bonhert manufactured lamps. Some day, I'll have to research this...

Saturday, January 9, 2010



Apple Store

For the moment, we don't have an Apple Store in this area. There are only two in France, one in Paris and one in Montpellier. We do, however, have the next best thing: MCS, an Apple Premium Reseller with stores in Nice and Cannes. We have been MCS customers for a while; their service is excellent, and it's nice to be able to walk into a store and talk about Macs with people who actually understand what one is saying. I do buy certain items in the US, but let's face it, my Mac Pro would hardly have fit under an airline seat, so I bought it here a year and a half ago. But how come the store is closed, you ask? Why, because it's lunchtime and we are in France! We decided to have a bite, too, and a little over an hour later, I was digesting a most delicious *pavé de saumon aux petits légumes*.

Sunday, January 10, 2010



Inclement

I frequently get comments to the effects that the only reason I maintain this blog is to show off the blue skies, abundant sunshine, and generally balmy weather of the *Côte d'Azur*. Of course, people (OK, New Yorkers) who make such claims are wrong. Today's photo is proof positive: when I ventured outside this morning, the sky was an unpleasant gray, the sun was nowhere to be seen, and I had to wrap my scarf around my ears and nose to protect myself against a most unpleasant, icy wind and drizzle. So much for showing off our tropical climate... But hey, it is not as bad as the southern part of Florida where it got so cold recently that iguanas went into a sort of hibernation state and literally fell off the trees by the dozen. And that's Florida... New York, anyone?

Monday, January 11, 2010



Optician

My eyesight being what it is, I get the old peepers checked out every year, and every other time, my ophthalmologist decides that it is time for a new pair of glasses. For the last five years, I've been at the slightly depressing stage where the reading portion of my progressive lenses gets stronger and stronger while the upper part requires less and less of a correction. So how does the optician's shop work? Well, you bring in your prescription, you choose frames you like, and you go back two or three days later to pick up your new glasses. The optician bills social security directly, submits the balance to one's supplemental insurance, and the customer pays the difference (mostly, there isn't any). Now isn't that better than a system in which only the rich can see well?

Tuesday, January 12, 2010



Vespa

Often, while wandering through the maze of crooked streets and stairways that is Cannes' *Le Suquet* neighborhood, I have come across this pink Vespa, a scooter made by Piaggio. In my mind, the color of the vehicle inevitably conjured up images of the driver: a young woman, perhaps vaguely resembling French actress Sandrine Bonnaire, wearing straight-legged jeans with blue or white espadrilles, or a flowing Provençal skirt billowing in the wind like Marilyn Monroe's dress in *The Seven Year Itch*... Maybe a snug T-shirt... A while back, my wife saw this very Vespa in the middle of Cannes; the driver was a burly, hairy-knuckled, rustic looking man with a large beard and piercing eyes. He supposedly looked a little bit like Rasputin. Another illusion shattered...

Wednesday, January 13, 2010



Reunion

Conveniently, the title of this entry means “meeting” in French (albeit with an accent: *réunion*). This morning, I had the pleasure of meeting two former colleagues from Amadeus Germany, people I used to work with a few years ago, but whom I hadn’t seen in a long time. Martin and Michael (from left to right) spent a couple of days in Nice to talk about and demo a test system monitoring tool they have developed and are using successfully in Frankfurt. Juan-Jose, a Nice-based Software Engineering colleague, also attended the meeting; he and I both agreed that the tool from across the Alps looked promising and warranted further investigation. Let’s hope we can turn this into a joint project! Fringe benefit: I’d get to speak a bit more German for a change...

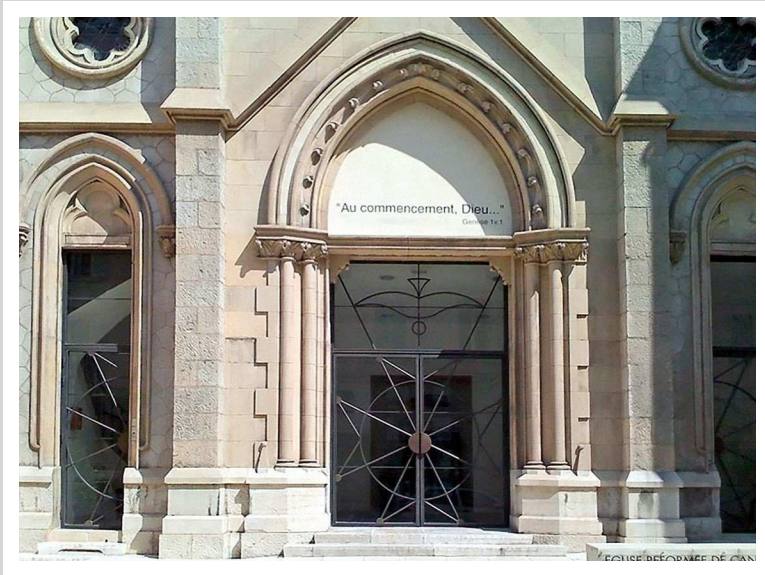
Thursday, January 14, 2010



Instant Zen

I snapped these signs at the corner of the *Rue Jean Méro* and the *Rue Meynadier* in Cannes. The road to instant zen, they seem to say, is far shorter than the one you must travel to seek relief of a more mundane nature. In reality, the sign to the right advertises *L'instant Zen* (The Zen Moment), one of those trendy well-being shops that appear to be popping up all over the place, providing useful services, such as carcinogenic ultraviolet tanning sessions, or Shiatsu, apparently a Japanese hands-on “therapy” (and here I thought it was one of those tiny Tibetan dogs). Call me an old fart, but I don’t hold with this type of new-age baloney. When the need arises, my well-being needs are served more than adequately by what is found 300 meters in the direction of the green sign.

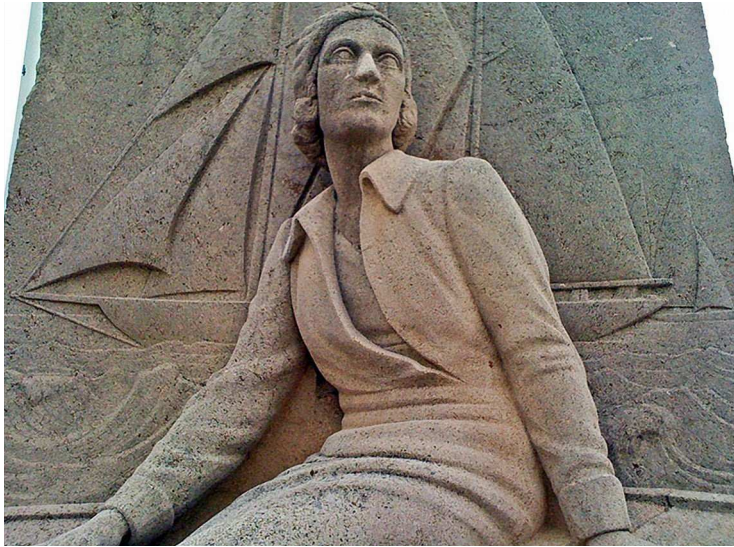
Friday, January 15, 2010



Honeymoon

In September of 1948, my parents tied the knot in a civil ceremony. My mom was Catholic by faith and my dad Protestant on paper; this made getting married in church a bit tricky. They decided to spend their honeymoon in Cannes. The day after they arrived they went to the beach, and my dad asked a complete stranger whether he knew a minister who might be willing to perform a marriage ceremony for him, a Protestant, and his Catholic wife. The man beamed and replied that he'd be delighted to perform the ceremony himself: he turned out to be the pastor of the Protestant Church in Cannes! And so, over 61 years ago, my parents exchanged vows in this church. Today, my wife and I live 30 minutes away by bus and spend tons of time in Cannes. Life writes great stories...

Saturday, January 16, 2010



Yachtswoman

Meet Virginie Hériot (1890–1932). At age 14, she accompanied her brother and a few friends on a cruise aboard the family yacht. Six years later, she married Viscount François Marie Haincque de Saint Senoch; the couple honeymooned on the yacht *Salvador*, a wedding present. From then on, she was definitively bitten by the sailing bug. In 1912, she had her first racing boat built (rich or poor, it pays to have money), and in 1928, she reached the pinnacle of her career by winning the gold medal in the 8-meter class during the Olympics in Amsterdam. During a regatta in Arcachon in 1932, she died of a massive heart attack at the very moment her yacht crossed the finish line. I was unaware of Virginie Hériot's existence until I saw this statue of her in the harbor of Cannes today.

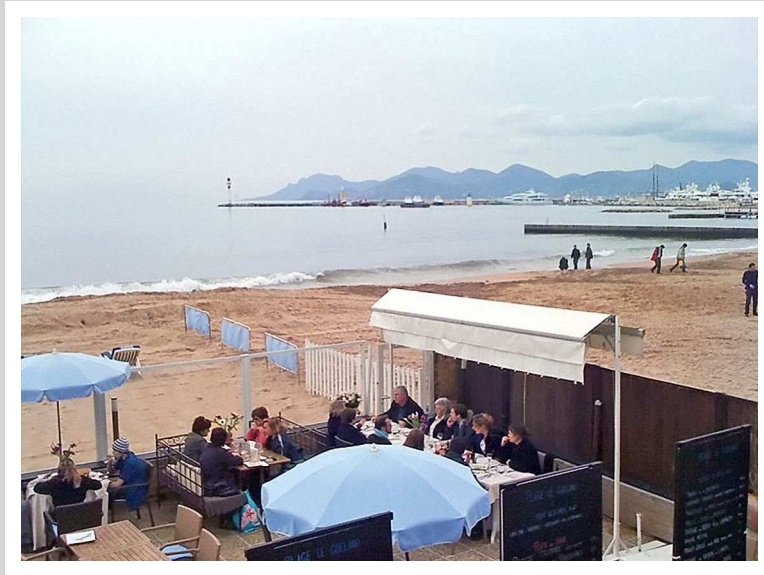
Sunday, January 17, 2010



Homebound

This morning, we took the 11:30 bus from the railway station in Cannes to return to Sophia. Just as we usually head down on the 6:10 p.m. bus on Fridays, we tend to take this early bus back on Sundays. This gives us enough time to attend to the tasks that need to be completed before the new week starts: do the laundry, publish the blog, process the pictures taken over the weekend, and, in the case of Vicki, perhaps grade a few papers or do some prep work. The bus is not normally crowded; nevertheless it is rare to get the two seats in the very first row. In fact, today was the first time we managed to do just that, and I took this opportunity to snap today's blog picture. We are between Mougins and Sophia at $43^{\circ}36.616'N, 7^{\circ}1.200'E$, roughly five minutes from home.

Monday, January 18, 2010



Goéland

With all the rain we've been having lately, everyone is sort of champing at the bit to be outside. This is particularly obvious in people's desire to eat outdoors, especially in the winter: the pleasure is made all the more intense by the knowledge that this is not something Parisians can typically do. This past Saturday, as I strolled along the *Croisette*, the skies were gray, there was a chilly breeze, and it looked like raindrops were just moments away. Evidently, the patrons of the *Goéland* beach restaurant didn't care: gray skies never hurt anyone, glass panels protect against all but the strongest winds, and rain, well, it wasn't raining, now, was it. And so, looking at the Esterel mountains in the distance and listening to the sound of the waves, people were enjoying lunch.

Tuesday, January 19, 2010



Palm

For the second straight day, we have experienced blue skies, sunshine, and temperatures well above the freezing point. This sudden change is instantly reflected in people's faces and behavior; folks around here get antsy when the sun does not show itself for two or more consecutive days, let alone for a long period of miserable weather such as the one we've recently gone through. Plants love the sunshine, too. In fact, I'm almost sure this little palm tree winked at me when I took its picture on the lawn outside the company restaurant this morning. My (admittedly modest) efforts to find out what kind of palm this is have remained unsuccessful; perhaps one of my faithful botany-savvy readers can help. But hurry: according to the forecast, we're in for some rain tomorrow...

Wednesday, January 20, 2010



Uncouth?

The name of this boat, which I spotted in the harbor of Cannes, may require an explanation. In spoken French, it is not uncommon to suppress a vowel and form a contraction, for instance by saying “p’tit chat” instead of “petit chat” (small cat), or “f’nêtre” instead of “fenêtre” (window). Strictly speaking, this is, of course, incorrect, but hey, it saves a whole syllable. While adults tend to skip vowels, small children conversing in baby talk often drop consonants, and so, “petit chat” can be successively shortened to “p’tit chat” and even “tit chat”. The subject of today’s photo is thus clearly a “tit bateau”, a little boat, or more appropriately, a “Li’l boat”. Perhaps you were thinking of something “udderly” different, dear reader? I wouldn’t put it past you to be so uncouth...

Thursday, January 21, 2010



Kandinsky?

No, it's not Kandinsky, nor Klee, nor Klimt. Though this pattern is, I think, just as pretty as many items that pass for art these days, you won't find it in any museum (I have this theory that museums of modern art conduct secret guided tours where participants gather around security monitors and laugh themselves silly over pseudo-intellectual "experts" who go gaga over the complete garbage that's on display, but I digress). What today's photo shows is a piece of sidewalk in the *Rue Hoche*. The yellow traces are all that's left of a whole series of hashed lines that denoted a loading and unloading zone; combined with the bluish slabs of the pavement and the thin red line of unknown (to me) origin, it makes for a lovely piece of "modern art". Eat your heart out, *Centre Pompidou*!

Friday, January 22, 2010



Innovation revisited

Back on November 14, I wrote about the blue innovation obelisk that suddenly materialized on the Amadeus main site. That one lasted just a day or two; a great deal more persistent are the many “Do the Innovation” posters that popped up all over campus around the same time. They mostly consist of a wavy, reflective foil that makes all of us innovators look like carnival freaks. Before that, we had the “Do the Evolution” campaign (I hadn’t realized evolution was optional; I’ll have to thank my ancestors for signing up). Both campaigns are extensively talked about, so I guess they must be successful. And speaking of evolution: 37 years ago today, on January 22, 1973, the US Supreme Court ruled on Roe v. Wade, effectively legalizing abortion. Let’s not evolve backwards!

Saturday, January 23, 2010



Rodent birds

At 10:43 this morning, I was on my way to that handyman's paradise that is *Bricorama* (no, I am not turning into Mr. Goodwrench; I just needed to buy a small halogen bulb for my desk lamp), and on the *Boulevard d'Alsace*, this sign caught my attention. It really does appear to say "rodent birds", an impression reinforced by the (unfortunately toothless) pigeon sitting right underneath it. I couldn't resist; I inched as close as I thought I could get away with and barely managed to snap today's photo before the rodent flew off. OK, what the sign actually does say is "Birds, Rodents", and, you guessed it, we are in front of a pet store. The birds for sale don't look at all like the one in the picture (think canaries and parakeets), and the rodents are wingless hamsters and rabbits.

Sunday, January 24, 2010



Goats

After yesterday's rodent birds, let's stay with unusual animals with this photo of a goat. What, I hear you ask, is so unusual about a goat? Well, on a farm nothing at all, but here we are on the *Croisette*, the waterfront promenade of Cannes. This is the walkway of the rich and famous, of movie stars, women in fur coats barely able to move under the weight of jewelry (and makeup), old geezers ogling young chicks from behind enormous sun glasses, chihuahuas, skye terriers, and other ridiculously small dogs protected by no less ridiculous coats (relax, ATH, dachshunds are a noble breed and not included in the above description), but goats? Yes, this couple was walking two goats right on the *Croisette*. From the looks they got it is clear that this is not a usual sight...

Monday, January 25, 2010



Double-Parking

What's going on here? It looks like the DHL truck on the right arrived to make a delivery, and the driver thought that the spot under the No Parking sign would be just perfect. After a while, a larger DHL truck showed up, and because the spot under the No Parking sign was already taken, the driver put on his flashers and simply double-parked. The result was a completely blocked street. Those who complain about this sort of thing are met with a total lack of understanding. Who could be in that much of a hurry? Why not simply wait or take the next cross street? And the cops? They are too busy looking for passenger cars with expired parking meters (there's an 11€ fine for that offense, making it cheaper for all-day parking than a parking garage). Welcome to France...

Tuesday, January 26, 2010



Xanaka

There are three reasons for today's photo. The first is to point out that the official sales period ("les soldes") is still in full swing. Final markdowns have been applied, in the case of this store as much as 60% off the regular price. The second is to show a most convenient feature of just about all French traffic lights: a smaller version of the red, yellow, and green lights far closer to the ground. When you sit in your car waiting for the light to change, you don't have to crane your neck: a sideways glance is enough. And the third reason? I wanted to add another entry starting with "X", so this store came in handy. It sells "sexy and glamour clothing that underlines seduction" according to Xanaka's (French) web site. A shame they do not have anything in my size...

Wednesday, January 27, 2010



Kitties

For a while now, I've wanted to photograph this cat and mouse display that graces a *Galleries Lafayette* window in Cannes. One problem or another always prevented me from doing so: either there was too much light, and consequently the reflections on the black glass became too strong; or it was too dark, and holding the iPhone steady turned out to be too difficult. A polarizing filter would have solved the first issue and a tripod the second, but neither solution is available for the iPhone. One day, the light was just perfect, but the street was so crowded that it was impossible not to have any people in the frame. This past Saturday, everything fell into place, and I was finally able to snap the picture which I am happy to dedicate to my faraway, feline friend Boublan.

Thursday, January 28, 2010



Red Hot Chili Peppers

This display of *piment rouge* at the Forville market brought back some very unpleasant memories of a meal in Manhattan a quarter of a century or so ago. With a couple of friends from work, we had gone to some Asian eatery for lunch, and in the course of the meal, I inadvertently bit down on one of these red hot peppers that clearly shouldn't have been there in the first place. Talk about pain... It's not easy to describe the incredible burning sensation, nor how nothing seemed to alleviate it. I remember sticking my tongue into my water glass that contained a zillion ice cubes: nothing doing. The initial pain lasted almost an hour, and a lingering discomfort remained for several days. These things are the devil's work... I apologize if you expected to read something about the band.

Friday, January 29, 2010



Vitamin-Man

Apparently, the folks who run our company restaurant love to play with food. I've already featured a fruit sculpture of theirs last April; since then, there have been numerous others. Today's vaguely reminded me of a certain Mr. Potato Head of my children's early years, so I decided to use it as a blog photo. Vitamin-Man, as I have spontaneously named him, has a double mission: he is an advertisement for the fruit, vegetable, and salad bar of the main restaurant, and he is supposed to draw attention to the sign next to him, a partial listing of what can be ordered in the Café on the lower level. Perhaps you think this blog mentions food too often? Let me tell you, we are in France, and in this country, there is simply no way one can talk about food too much.

Saturday, January 30, 2010



FNAC

A look at my list of blog entries reveals that I haven't featured the FNAC yet, an oversight I must correct immediately. The FNAC is a chain of over 200 stores, most of which are in France. The cool thing, however, is what the FNAC sells: books, CDs, DVDs, cameras (both consumer-level and high end), audio-visual equipment (from iPods to huge flat-panel TVs), cell phones, computer software and hardware (yes, they have a Mac section)... you get the idea. Of course, they carry a whole range of accessories for everything they sell... in short, it's the ideal hangout for me while my better half shops for even more exciting things, such as household stuff. The FNAC is an institution with an interesting history you may read about on the web. I took this photo of the Cannes store earlier today.

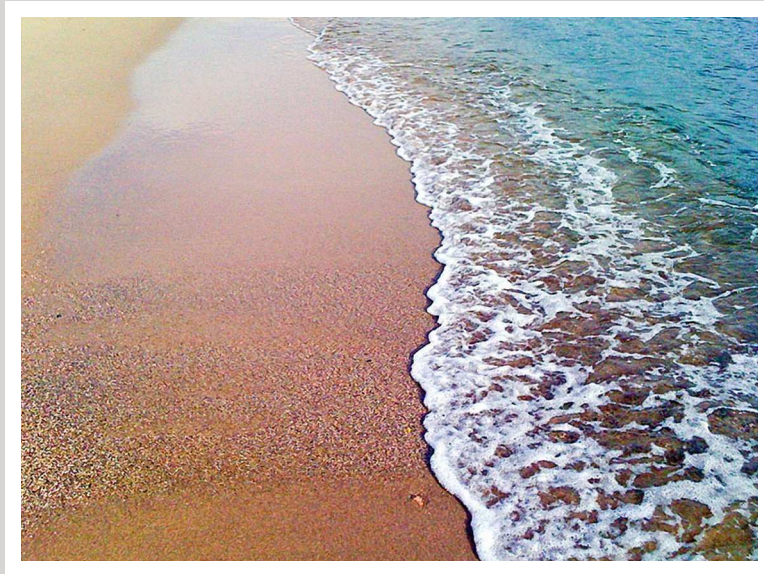
Sunday, January 31, 2010



Winter

This morning, it snowed in Cannes! This is by no means common; the last time we had snow in this town was several years ago (though we've seen flurries in Sophia). For a while, it was really coming down, so we rushed outside to record this meteorological marvel for posterity. Taking photos of falling snow is surprisingly tricky, and not something the iPhone is very good at. Thus, I had to pick views that showed traces of fallen snow. It was a tough choice between today's image and the runner-up (which you can see on the web version of this blog). I did take a few more pictures that show the snow a little better; you may look at photographs and view a short movie in our web galleries. For most of you, this is no big deal, but for us Riviera dwellers, snow is an event...

Monday, February 1, 2010



Foam

Unlike Nice, which has a pebble beach, the Cannes waterfront features sand, far more comfortable for those who wish to lie down on a beach towel or just walk along the Mediterranean shore. It is a relaxing pastime to observe the gentle waves coming in, pushing sand up on the beach, only to pull it back into the sea as they recede. Much can be gleaned by simply looking at the sand and water. For instance, in this picture, we know that it is sunny because of the color of the sand and the shadow cast by the advancing wave. We can pretty much deduce the color of the sky by looking at its reflection in the water towards the top right of the photo. A perfectly normal *Côte d'Azur* day, you might say. And to think that less than 24 hours earlier, this same beach was covered with snow...

Tuesday, February 2, 2010



Under that tree...

...no, wait, by that shrub over there... Or was it next to the bird bath? If there is one thing squirrels are famous for it's hiding their food so well that they can't find it again. Given this solid reputation for misplacing assets, doesn't it seem a tad incongruous that the *Caisse d'Épargne*, the largest savings bank in France, should have chosen a squirrel for their logo? Sure enough, in October of 2008, the squirrels buried 600 million euros that they couldn't subsequently locate. They fired the individual bushy tails responsible for the debacle, allowed the government to bail them out, and things returned to normal. Still, I feel a bit uneasy: the *Caisse d'Épargne* is supposed to merge with my bank, and the squirrels would then oversee 480 billion euros. That's way too many nuts...

Wednesday, February 3, 2010



North Africa

Take the *Boulevard de la République* and go a couple of blocks north of the *Voie Rapide*, and you find yourself in North Africa, or, more appropriately, in the Maghreb. It pretty much starts here, at the *Place Commandant Maria*, a wedge-shaped park with a pretty fountain, and extends a few blocks to the west. Here, we can find stores like a Maghrebi butcher and grocer (these stores have longer opening hours and greet customers with a smile, not a frown). There is even a shop selling antiques for people with a, uh, different sense of aesthetics. I just love ethnic neighborhoods; they lend character to cities and remind us of the many different ways we can be similar. It's one of the things I like about New York; it's great to find it here, even though it's on a much smaller scale.

Thursday, February 4, 2010



Hedonism

In other words, the ethical theory that pleasure (in the sense of the satisfaction of one's desires) is the highest good and proper aim of human life. Sign me up! Having said that, there is something rather unusual about the scene depicted in today's photo: contrary to what happens in many other countries, in France, coffee is served at the very end of a meal, i.e., following dessert. What, then, is my coffee doing next to that luscious slice of raspberry tart? Simple: the best wife of them all had opted for a *café gourmand*, a coffee served with a small chocolate pastry, a tiny *Tarte Tatin*, and a miniature Häagen Dazs Magnum (really!) ice-cream bar. Obviously, anyone who likes coffee as much as I do is not going to watch someone else enjoy one, hence I ordered mine *with* dessert.

Friday, February 5, 2010



Hot and Cold

How could I not be reminded of one of my favorite Robert Frost poems,
Fire and Ice:

Some say the world will end in fire.

Some say in ice.

From what I've tasted of desire

I hold with those who favor fire.

But if it had to perish twice

I think I know enough of hate

To say that for destruction ice

Is also great

And would suffice.

Saturday, February 6, 2010



Jennyanydots

This afternoon at 4:37, in *Le Suquet*, I ran into Jennyanydots, the old Gumbie cat, and a member of the Jellicles. During the day, Jennyanydots doesn't do very much at all. "She sits, and sits, and sits, and sits"; after all, that's what makes a Gumbie cat. But at night, she comes to life: while the family sleeps, she teaches the mice music, crocheting, and tatting, while the cockroaches get tap-dancing lessons from her. If you think I've gone crazy and you don't have a clue what I'm talking about, you haven't read T. S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, and in all likelihood, you're not familiar with Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *Cats*, either. Both are worth knowing. Oh, and here's a bit of trivia for you: all three-colored cats (like the one in today's photo) are female.

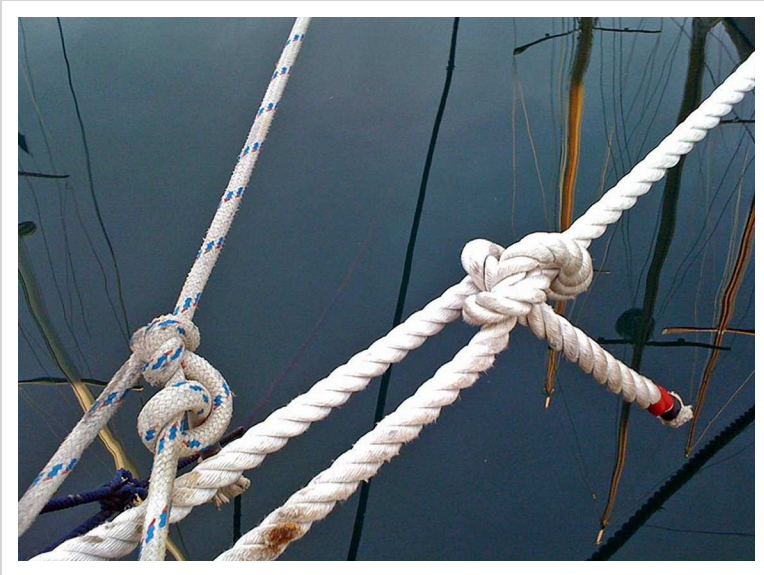
Sunday, February 7, 2010



Up and down

Many older buildings in Cannes have very steep and narrow staircases. This is a problem if people are moving in or out with large pieces of furniture, or if extensive work is required on one of the upper floors. An obvious solution is to use a contraption that permits moving things in and out of windows. This morning, I watched as two workers poured the output of a small cement mixer onto a platform. This platform was then raised, and one of the men shoveled the cement into a window on the top floor. Last night, I saw an ancient-looking bathtub on the platform that had been lowered to street level, so I guess a bathroom is being remodeled in this *Rue Jean Méro* house. And it's being done privately: you couldn't hire a company to do this kind of work on a Sunday.

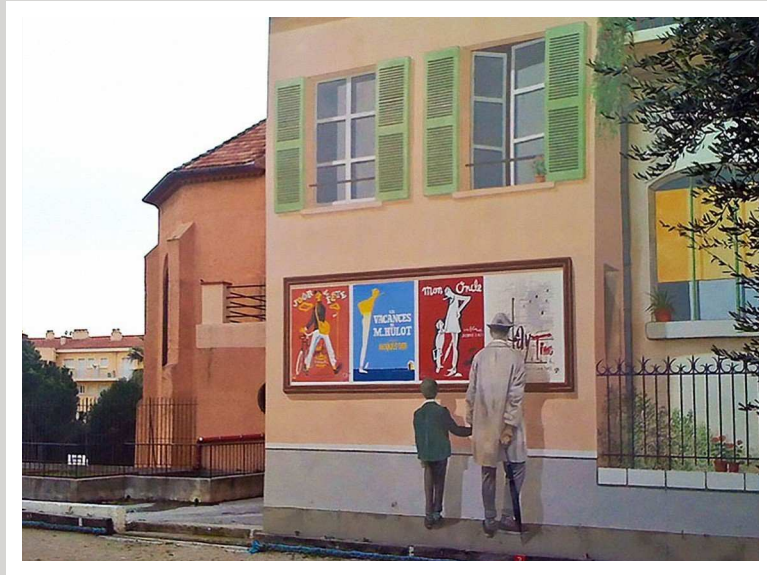
Monday, February 8, 2010



Knots

Sailors are supposed to be experts at knots, but one quickly comes to a different conclusion when one walks around the harbor of Cannes (or, for that matter, any harbor around here). It seems that boats are tied up willy-nilly with any kind of material that happens to be on hand. The rope is still an old favorite, but more and more, rusty chains are making inroads. If one is interested (which most boaters clearly don't appear to be), one can learn amazing things about knots on the web. But looking around in the harbor, one quickly comes to believe that the rule is simple: the smaller the boat, the the messier the job of tying it to the pier. To be sure, there are exceptions. For examples, take a look at the web version of this blog.

Tuesday, February 9, 2010



Trompe-l'œil

In *Le Suquet*, a father and his son (or is it an uncle and his nephew?) are looking at posters of four Jacques Tati movies: *Jour de fête*, *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot*, *Mon Oncle*, and *Playtime*. In fact, with his trademark raincoat and umbrella, isn't it Jacques Tati himself who is admiring these posters? What's going on here? Well, there is nothing at all real about this entire scene: there is no fence and no sidewalk, and there are no windows, no posters, no people. It's all painted on a perfectly flat, window-less facade, a great example of *Trompe-l'œil* (literally, "deceive the eye"). There are a few such "eye deceptions" in Cannes, and they're all about the film industry. This particular one is a bit off the beaten track; I didn't discover it until this past Saturday.

Wednesday, February 10, 2010



Stop this blog...

... I want to get off! When I started this thing in early 2009, my intention was to publish 365 entries to the tune of four or five a week. While I initially skipped a few days, I soon felt that it might be worth aiming for a full year without any gaps. Today marks the 380th entry, and the 365th without missing a day. With every post, I tried to offer something new to smile or think about, or perhaps a tidbit about life in France. I featured 380 iPhone photos and linked to 102 more. It is now time to bring the curtain down and end this blog. Thanks to all of you who loyally accompanied me on this journey and who commented in the blog itself, by email, or in person. I shall definitely miss your company, but I hope to see you on my main or alternate web site soon. Goodbye for now...

Visit the on-line version of this blog at
<http://www.kiechle.com/alternate/daniel/Blog/Blog.html>

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