

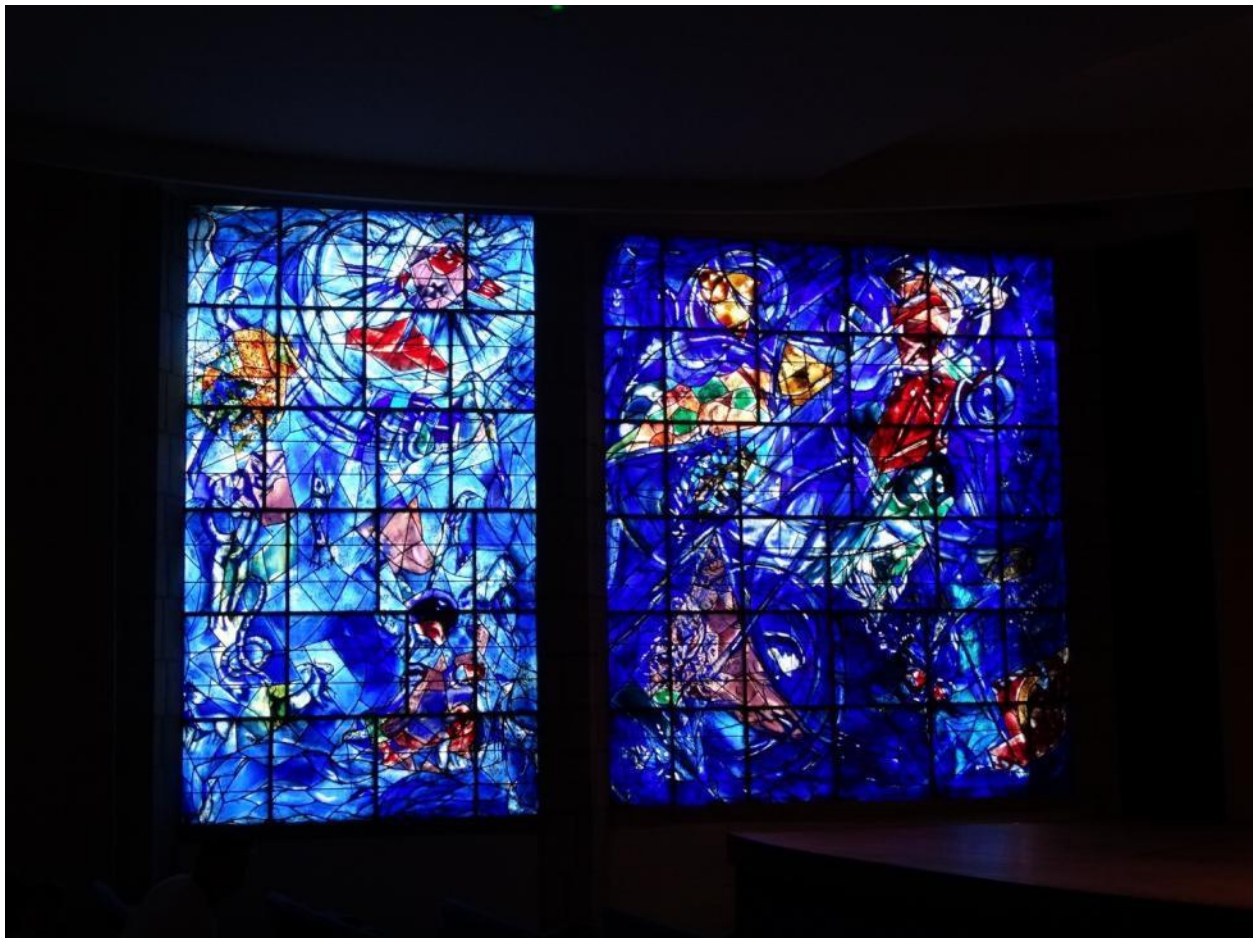
SUMMER FUN IN – AND AROUND – PARIS 2014

Dear Friends and Family,

A few “local” visits to report on. My first ever visit to Nice, a lovely city with a rocky beach on



the Med. Plenty of good eating, with a decided Mediterranean emphasis, walking in Old Town plus the Chagall



and Matisse museums. I love art Naif and that international museum was actually my favorite.



Other Nice highlights include the Russian Orthodox church and La Rotonde at the Negresco



Hotel.

But one of Nice's best features is its proximity for inexpensive visits on public transport to other Cote d'Azur towns, such as the walled/medieval Eze



and St. Paul de Vence

which with a history of bronze artisans has fun contemporary sculpture



and panoramic alps views.



I also made an

easy foray into St Remo, Italy for an excellent lunch



and a stop in Monaco (my eightieth country visited) on the way back.





Next up was Budapest, highly recommended by many friends. If you like architecture and museums, especially combined with a river setting, this is the city for you! In addition to lots of Art Deco buildings, Budapest boasts “the most expensive Parliament building in the world” with 40 tons of gold, 365 towers, and 691 rooms.



Because Hungary’s Parliament is now unicameral, the former Upper House chamber is now used for international conferences, one of which was occurring on the day of my visit. Little galleries are found all along the corridors for “buttonhole” conversations and cigar-smoking breaks – see the cigar holders below the stained glass windows!



I understand Budapest has always been clean, but apparently three years ago the Mayor decreed CLEAN – and literally you could eat off the streets and sidewalks – like in Singapore. The line 1 Metro is the oldest in Continental Europe, still functioning and very quaint.



The huge Royal Palace in the Castle Hill district,



rebuilt many times including after WWII, now serves many functions including the excellent Hungarian National Gallery.





The patterned tile roofs of Matyas Church and the National Archives are reminiscent of those in Dijon/Bourgogne, France and Zagreb, Croatia. In fact, the various architecture styles pre-dating the Art Deco,



including Secession

Style, were very reminiscent of the visit to the Balkans last year where some areas had at various times been ruled by the Austro-Hungarian, Venetian and/or Ottoman empires. A surprising building was the Museum of Decorative Arts, considered to be Hungarian Secessionist with its Oriental-influenced interiors



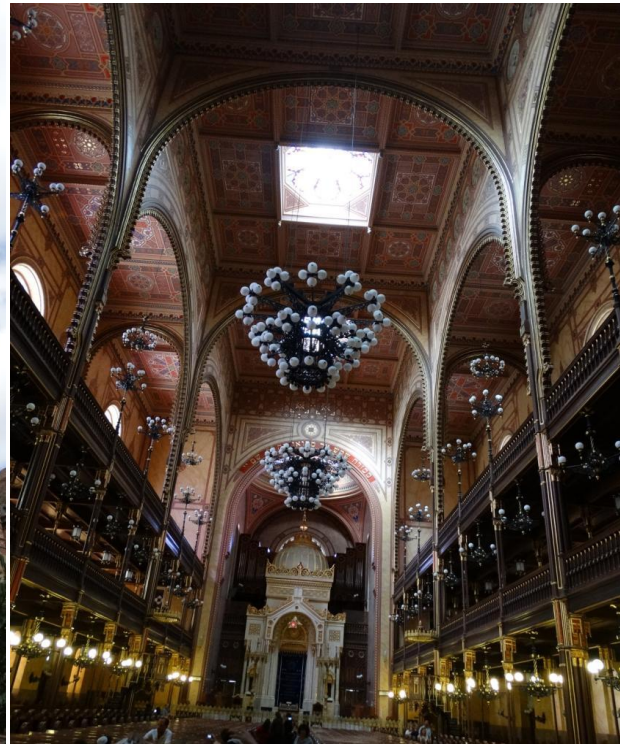
and tiled exterior.



Also in the Pest side of town is the Great Synagogue, the largest in Europe, built in a Byzantine-Moorish style between 1851 and 1859. On the site is a Holocaust Memorial of a weeping willow sculpture erected in 1991 in memory of the 600,000 Hungarian Jews killed by the Nazis



during WWII.



I also learned at the Hungarian National Museum that 18,000 Hungarian Jews emigrated to Shanghai, China, forming a vibrant community there, in advance of WWII.



Dining was also excellent with plenty of food choices for those who preferred dishes beyond paprika beef. But, perhaps the most amazing thing was the ease of getting around, with



Metro, (this photo is at rush hour!) trams and buses, plus a funicular up to Castle Hill, all easily figured out, clean, safe and affordable.

Whenever I visit a city on a river I like to take a dinner cruise to enjoy the city, especially lighted at night, from the water side. Budapest is perfect for this with its seven bridges connecting the two halves of the city center. This dinner was particularly memorable, on the Legenda, with only 80 passengers, a sit-down gourmet meal instead of a buffet, and a 2 ½ hour cruise, twice



as long as the others on offer.

I also had time in the short visit to do one day trip along the Danube



outside of town. A quick drive by site of the former Roman town Aquincum (dating from ~100



AD) to Szentendre, the spiritual and cultural capital of Orthodox Serbs in Hungary, who mostly arrived in the 18thC, fleeing the Turks. Seven churches – a Greek Orthodox, four Serbian Orthodox, and two Roman Catholic - dominate the town's skyline.



It is now a major artist colony and tourist attraction. I also tasted a somewhat bizarre regional food

specialty there called a Langos - a deep fat fried pancake topped with grated Swiss cheese and custard, which filled the stomach for quite some time.

A trip to a friend in Central Brittany offered the chance to visit La Vallee des Saints.



Currently there are 51 statues of Breton saints on a historically significant hilltop. This project supports 5 – 10 sculptors per year to come and spend 1-2 months to create their sculptures. It has expanded quite a bit since my last visit two years ago. By the way, my friend's house is for sale in case anyone is interested in owning a mini-chateau in a small Breton town.



<http://www.maisonsuperbe.com>

En route to Callac from Paris we visited Vitre. From the 13thC it was on the frontier between Brittany and France, protected by a powerful, still dominant, fortress. Thanks to the international “canvas” trade it became very prosperous in the 16thC and the wealthy merchants built half-timbered houses and richly carved stone townhouses. Even on a Sunday we were able to find some very excellent restaurants open.



Brittany is, of course, all about coastline so we visited Camaret-Sur-Mer, known for its artist



colony and lovely beach on a protected bay (reminiscent of Agadir). The 17th C Notre Dame de

Rocamadour church's vault is constructed like the hull of a wooden ship, and the old tower has



A dry moat. The Terencz bridge was on the route, the only curved one of these beautiful bridge



types I have seen.

At home in Paris there is always far more going on than I can even know about, much less partake of. I love international cinema, so the weekly movie listing that comes out on Wednesday morning guides how I organize my week. Early in July there was a horse jumping

competition on the Champs de Mars, featuring the forty top-ranked equestrian jumpers in the



World. Now we have a month of Paris Plage with tons of sand hauled in by barge and spread along the Seine (on what is normally a fast-flowing through street to by-pass the surface streets) with palm trees, concessions, cafes, and every imaginable type of beach chair. There are activities such as petanque, Tai Chi, and other classes on offer free to all participants. This year there is a miniature Eiffel Tower constructed of bistro chairs!



There are also free outdoor movies in many of the parks (reminiscent of drive-in movie theaters of my youth) where you can picnic in conjunction with your film.

One of the highlights of this summer for me is the Orient Express exhibition at the Institut du Monde Arabe. I, of course, love trains. This exhibition has an engine plus four of the few



remaining fully restored cars of the Orient Express that ran from Paris to Istanbul by way of Zurich, Vienna and Budapest, beginning in 1883. There is still a privately run Orient Express that can be taken on various routes including London and Paris to Venice. The cars that we visited were displayed with examples of famous travelers such as Josephine Baker and Graham Greene.



The bar has beautiful inlaid decorations by Rene Lalique.

One of the pleasures of a Paris base is the wide variety of activities, not only in town, but nearby, on offer. France has an amazing network of dedicated/mapped/defined walking trails – easements across private land or in national forests. I try to walk once a week with one of the volunteer-led walking groups. Usually it is a 15-20 km day hike, each of us carrying our water and a picnic lunch. Samples from these hikes include the 13th C Chateau de la Reine Blanche on the Commelles ponds – originally dug by in the 12th C by monks of the Abby de Challis to do fish farming. There have apparently been at least three Queen Blanche’s in France’s history and

this Chateau was never lived in by any one of them. But it did serve as a hunting lodge during the Duke of Bourbon's period of ownership. The interior is not open to the public. These are



all in the Chantilly forest which surrounds Chateau Chantilly with its palatial horse stables.



Other nearby walks include the river Yerre where the Impressionist painter Gustave Caillebotte lived for twelve years. I am most familiar with him from his huge “Paris Street Rainy Day” (actually rue de Moscou in the 8th arrondissement) which hangs in the Art Institute of Chicago and a 1998 exhibition of his works there entitled “Gustave Caillebotte – Urban Impressionist”. But during his years at the family summer home in Yerre he painted river scenes, boaters and local fishermen. There was a temporary exhibition of 43 of his works this spring at the



Caillebotte park along the Yerre.

Another such walk took me to Moret-sur-Loing where the painter Alfred Sisley (who tried twice, but never received French citizenship) lived and worked. He did 14 paintings of the church, exploring the



effects of different light conditions, much as Monet did with the cathedral at Rouen. He was also famous for his ability to capture clouds.

Moret-sur-Loing is a delightful medieval day trip with its 12th C Porte de la Bourgogne at the edge of the river.



Often the walks take us along a canal, or even a canal parallel to the natural river of the same name. This was an unusual situation where the canal Ourcq actually crosses over a river. On this same walk we passed the Commanderie de Moisy which was a church, lodging and farm of the Templars which was a military/religious order in France from 1129 to 1312.

And sometimes we get a pebble in our boot.



