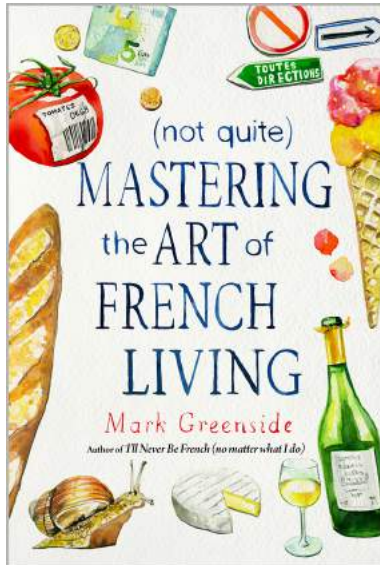




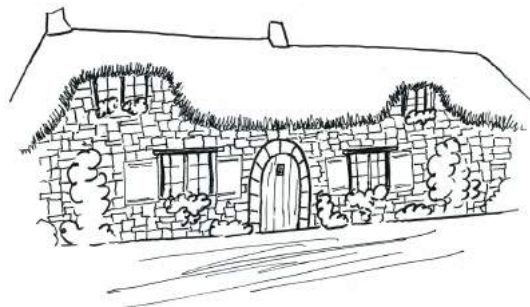
Volume 2, Number 4, December 2018



Dear Friend,

Happy Holidays to you and your family and friends. Donna and I wish you all the best amidst all the turbulence, especially the turbulence in France, but also here, and many other places as well. I read about it in newspapers and magazines and watch BBC News and News Hour and shudder. I act locally, write letters, organize, contribute, kvetch, and moan. We are not living in a good historical moment—at least I'm not. It feels apocalyptic, earth-quakable, which in the San Francisco Bay Area has double meaning and is double scary.

To offset feelings of doom, I write. I've begun writing another French book, French book # 3, probably the last. Here's an excerpt from what is now chapter 1.



In the U.S., hardly anyone knocks on my door, not even Jehovah's Witnesses. In France, everyone does.

The water meter guy knocks, probably a lot, because he comes in winter when nobody's there. When I arrive in spring, there's a card waiting for me with directions on how to read the meter and fill out the card. It's all very clear and simple—and

impossible. First, it's on the floor, under the sink, which means I have to crawl into the cabinet with all the cleaning supplies and solvents to find it. Second, it's dark, so I need a flashlight. Third, the floor is cold and often damp, and I have to lie on it to read the meter, which no matter what I do, I can't, because it is upside down. I don't know why, but it is. And even when I've had it replaced, it remains upside down. But that's not the real problem. I can read the upside numbers with a mirror: mirror in one hand, pen in the other, flashlight in my mouth, pad on the floor, I'm ready to write the numbers—except for the water. The face of the meter is blurred by water. Not on the outside, but inside, making the meter impossible to read, which means every spring I have to go to the water company and make an appointment to have the meter read.

First, I have to find the water company, as the office changes locations every few years. Second, I have to find it open, as the hours are odd, and they too have changed over the years: say, closed Monday, open Tuesday, 10:00 – 12:00, closed Wednesday, open Thursday 1:30-4:30, Fridays maybe, Saturdays, theoretically. This requires multiple visits, as the office is often closed the hours it's supposed to be open and open when it's supposed to be closed. Still, eventually, mostly by luck, I do find it and find it open and manage to explain that I'd like to fill out their card and save them a trip, but I can't read the meter. It goes like this:

“Bonjour, Madame...” The person I'm speaking with looks eighteen, but there's no way I'm calling her mademoiselle... and I hand her the blank water meter reader card. “Cette card est tres bien, mais c'est ne pas possible leer le metre parce que beaucoup d'eau dans le interior le metre.” This card is very good, but it is not possible I read the yardstick because lots of water in the interior the yardstick.” Metre it turns out means meter, as in one meter long. Water meter is compteur d'eau.

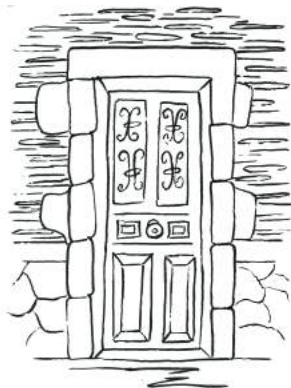
She takes the blank card, starts to say something, and stops. It's clear she doesn't know if she should believe what she just heard—or even if she just heard what she thinks she heard. I stand there and wait, and eventually she does what I need. She opens the giant ledger on her desk, checks her computer, and we make an appointment—usually weeks in the future—for the water meter person to visit the house. It takes so long, apparently, because water meter reading seems to be a winter activity, and it's summer now, and the meter reader person works stranger hours than when the office is open.

We do get there, though, and on the appointed day, promptly, at the appointed hour, there's a knock on the door. I know who it is, and I'm ready. "Bonjour," I say, shake the guy's hand, and lead him into the kitchen, where the under the sink cabinet doors are open, and the cleaning supplies and solvents are all pushed to one corner. He looks at me like, "Merde".

He's big and the space is small. It's also, he knows, cold and probably wet. He's wearing nice pants, nice shirt, good shoes. This wasn't what he expected. He crawls into the cabinet, flashlight and pad in hands, ready to finish and get out of there as fast as he can, and he can't: the numbers are upside down and there's water in the meter. He looks at me like, "Double merde".

I hand him a mirror, and he says, "Merci." After a few minutes of fumbling around and muttering, I hand him a plumber's wrench, and he says, "Merci." He then turns the water off, removes the meter, shakes out the water, and reads it. Years ago, probably in hope of never having to do this again—or helping the next guy, as the same person never appears twice—the guy went to his van and returned with a new meter. I thanked him profusely, but when I went to read it the following year the numbers were upside down and impossible to read because water blurred the face. I've asked about placing the meter outside, where it would be more accessible to read, but Madame/Mademoiselle said it would cost too much, and they didn't really want to do it. Apparently, they'd rather send someone in winter, when no one is at the house, and set up a special appointment to send someone to the house to read the meter in spring. All I can figure is this is another way of providing employment. A few days after the meter reader's visit, I receive a bill and a notice from the water company, telling me what I owe them or they owe me (which has never happened) for the previous twelve months, and what they'll automatically deduct from my bank account for the next twelve months.

The post person knocks....



News about (not quite) Mastering the Art of French Living:

1. It is in its second printing; thank you for your reviews and support;
2. Either the ebook or the hardcover is almost always in the top 50 selling Amazon books about France;
3. There are 44 Amazon reviews averaging 5.0, the highest;
4. There are 45 Goodreads reviews and 105 ratings, averaging 4.1/5;
5. The book is in library systems (meaning multiple branches) from San Francisco to Malaysia;
6. The reading and book signing at the Philadelphia Alliance Française was a huge success and a lot of fun for me, and I think/hope for them. It was intimidating at first, as they speak French-French and I speak Mark-French, but they were very kind, generous, considerate, interested, and interesting—and they bought lots of books;
7. I visited a book club in Berkeley and another in Oakland and enjoyed both tremendously: speaking with people, answering questions, feeling their enthusiasm, adding to mine.

Books make great holiday, birthday, anniversary, Valentine, and any time surprise gifts—especially my books, because they make people laugh. Here are a few others I've recently read and thoroughly enjoyed:

One Sip at a Time and ***Are We There Yet*** by Keith Van Sickle, memoir

The Lost Vintage by Ann Mah, fiction

Finding Fontainebleau by Thad Carhart, memoir

The Little French Bistro by Nina George, fiction

The Bonjour Effect by Julie Barlow and Jean-Benoît Nadeau

The Appart by David Lebowitz, memoir

And remember, people who wrote Amazon reviews for (not quite) Mastering the Art of French Living are eligible for a 40% discount off the rent of my house in France.

Please, share this newsletter with anyone you think would be interested.
Happy Holidays and All the Best.

Wishing you a very good New Year,

Mark

- Email: mark@markgreenside.com
- Web site: www.markgreenside.com
- Facebook author page : facebook.com/markgreensideauthor
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