

A BROTHER REMEMBERS . . . TRAVELING AND COFFEE

by Robert Ferré

Over the years, David and I took several brothers' trips together, leaving our wives at home. Did we stay out of trouble? I'll never tell. In 2015, we went to Warsaw to hear the world premier of André Tchaikowsky's Sonata for Viola and Piano, 60 years after the piece was written. We stayed at the Mercure Grand Hotel, in which my room had a wonderful feature I had never seen before. Between the bedroom and the bathroom was a glass-walled shower. That allowed light from the window to reach into the bathroom. For privacy there was a curtain you could pull, but I enjoyed taking a shower while looking out over the neighborhood. Or, you could enjoy someone else taking a shower. The possibilities are endless.



There's a woman in Warsaw whose job is to make sure that VIPs visiting Poland have everything they need. David was on her list. We were given concert tickets, passes to the Green Room at intermission, and a special invitation to visit Chopin's birthplace.

At the assigned time and place a van and driver took us to Żelazowa Wola, 53 kilometers away. Chopin's family originally occupied one room of a two-room house. He lived there for six months and moved away never to return. But it was his birthplace. Today there is a museum and a restaurant and a souvenir shop.

A room was added on one end of the house to hold a grand piano. Every day at noon, a guest artist plays Chopin's music. The audience sits outside of the house, in the sun, on benches. The windows and door to the concert room are opened, offering a glimpse of the performer. A microphone projects the music through speakers.

When we arrived at Żelazowa Wola, a tour guide was waiting for us. He showed us the house, which didn't take very long. The time was approaching noon. David and I kept looking at our watches. Finally, I told the guide we must go in order to find seats outside for the concert. "Oh no," he said. "That won't be necessary." He led us to the room in which the grand piano was at one end and at the other end, two folding chairs. Yes, they were for us. Pianist Grzegorz Niemczuk was, in David's words, "simply astounding." In the lefthand photo taken during the concert, those are David's knees in the foreground.



We always associated trips and cities with opportunities to visit coffeehouses. In Warsaw our go-to place just down from our hotel was Cafe Nero. Two years ago (2018), in downtown Boston, my wife Linda and I discovered that Cafe Nero has come to the United States. I hope they give Starbucks a run for their money.



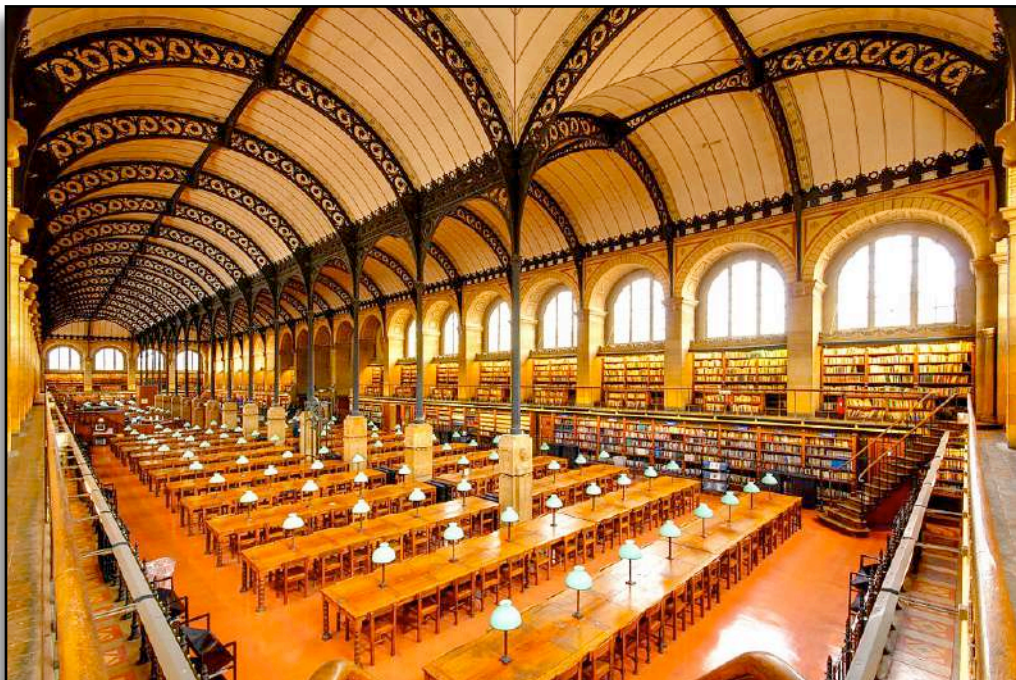
Cytat Café in the Jewish ghetto offered answers to the question “are you Batman?” (See photo.)

From Warsaw we went to Krakow, where I had a perfect garret room overlooking the famous main square. David’s room was in the back of the hotel, looking out at the fire escape.

And then there were the meals. We had a spectacular dinner in a dramatic cellar restaurant called Cyrano de Bergerac. My description of our meal has been one of the most popular reviews of the 900 I have written for Trip Advisor.

Besides going to Poland, David and I took several trips to France, once to the Pyrenees Mountains to see two stages of the Tour de France bicycle race, and more recently (2017) to Paris and Bordeaux.

In Paris, I arranged for a private tour of the Sainte-Geneviève Library, a relatively unknown historic treasure in the Sorbonne area featuring one of the first uses of decorative wrought iron in the 19th century. We had the place to ourselves for an hour before the students arrived at 10:00 a.m..



We sat at tables and continued our on-going competition in speed sudoku. May I modestly claim to being interplanetary champion.

Of course every day started with *café au lait* and croissants. We stayed at separate Airbnbs in the Buttes-aux-Cailles neighborhood in the 13th arrondissement. How many Airbnbs are there in Paris you ask? Around 60,000! Most of them are illegal. Every year the city prosecutes a few hundred cases (not

enough of a threat to thwart anyone from doing it). I had a quiet little studio looking out to a shaded interior courtyard whereas David stayed on the busy Blvd. Auguste Blanqui looking out at the above-ground subway station. There seems to be a pattern here with accommodations. *C'est la vie.*



I had arrived a couple of days earlier, while David was in England. When he arrived, we had a snack at a popular cafe on Place d'Italie.

In Paris, eating well has always been a favorite pastime. We had a classic cassoulet in the Canal Saint Martin district at Auberge Pyrenees Cevennes where we met musicologist Frédéric Gaussin (right).



From Paris, we took a comfortable TGV train to Bordeaux in just a few hours. Bordeaux has become the place to go in France. The streets have been pedestrianized in most of the central city and the tram is quite amazing (ground level, no dangerous tracks or hot rail, easy on and off with senior passes).

We stayed in a two-bedroom luxury apartment above a bakery coffeehouse (of course). This being the south of France, coffeehouses didn't open until 8:00 a.m.. Being early risers, we found this to be inconvenient. While getting our rental car, we discovered Costa Coffee (an Italian-influenced chain) at the train station where there was an upright piano available for the public to play. Sometimes there was a line of people waiting to play. As one would expect, there was great variety in both selections played and ability. I especially liked the children playing their halting *Für Elise*.



Tram, coffee.

Bordeaux is all about wine, so we made that our main focus. We rented a car for a couple of days and toured wine chateaux in the area. Being October, the wine harvest was finished and most wineries closed until spring.

As we drove one Sunday in the Medoc region, I needed to find a restroom. We pulled into Chateaux Cordeillan-Bages because we saw cars. It turned out they were serving Sunday lunch. Although we had no reservations and were not dressed formally, they found a table for us. The young soon-to-be-Michelin-starred chef pulled out all the stops, not to mention the 1,800 wines on offer. Normally, the *a la carte* menu was very costly. To our good fortune, they had a special all-inclusive lunch menu on Sundays for the equivalent of \$75 U.S., including paired fine wines (two glasses). It took a couple of hours for the meal, which was fine with us. The artistic presentation of the courses and the impeccable service were a joy. As veteran travelers, we enjoyed finding such excellent value. I recently visited their website and found a different, much less expensive menu.

The next day, we went to the Chateau la Dominique to have lunch at Le Terrasse Rouge (right and next page). Two costly meals in a row? Our wives would never approve.





This being the off season didn't seem to affect business. The restaurant was full. We went early to avoid the crowd.

Our most impressive wine experience was at Cité du Vin (City of Wine). The architecture is very modern, as you can see. Rather pricey tours end with a wine tasting on the top floor where the walls are all glass and the ceiling is composed of 5,000 clear glass empty wine bottles in undulating rows.





We ate at the ground floor restaurant, which had surprisingly reasonable prices, even for a glass of very good wine. David had the generous charcuterie plate (cold cuts) and I had a salad.

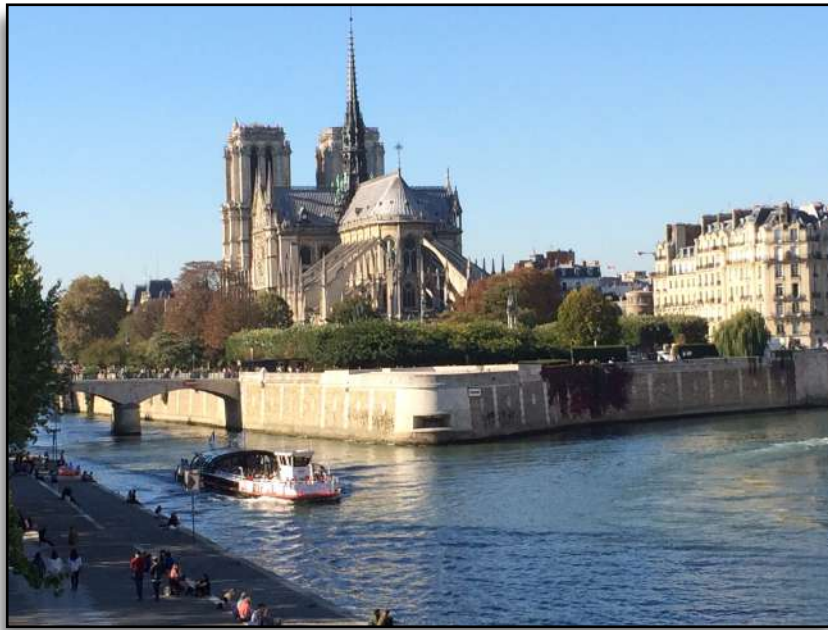
Cité du Vin has the most amazing wine store I have ever seen, a huge circular room with six levels of shelves around the periphery plus more on both sides of a lower inner circular counter. They have more than 800 wines from the region as well as examples from all around the world.



We returned to Paris for a couple of nights back in the Buttes-aux-Cailles (Quail Hill) area at the very affordable Hotel St. Charles. The lobby is simple, the rooms smallish, but quiet and good value. Most of all, a hallway leads to a glass-enclosed room in the back courtyard for a wonderful breakfast buffet. We enjoyed the machine in which, with the push of a button, fresh oranges fell down, were cut in half and squeezed as we watched, the fresh juice going directly into our glasses.

There is so much more I would like to include about our travels together. Little did we know this was to be our last brothers' trip. Even had we known, I can't imagine doing anything differently. It was magical.

Neither would I have predicted my photo of Notre Dame (next page) would also bring poignant memories, due to the subsequent devastating fire.



David documented most of his trips for the past ten years by posting a daily summary on his website. To enjoy traveling with David and Kathy and others, see: www.davidandkathy.com/blogs/index.htm



Left: A bonus photo from Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, of us discovering a business with our family name.

IMPORTANT LINKS

Details about the memorial concert being planned for David in Karlskrona, Sweden, in October of 2022:
www.andretchaikowsky.com/concertpdf.pdf.

Details about the historic city of Karlskrona and the GoFundMe campaign to pay for the memorial concert:
www.andretchaikowsky.com/GoFundMepdf.pdf.