

Frédérique Veysset
Valérie de Saint-Pierre



Ze French



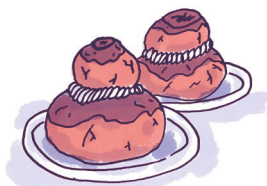
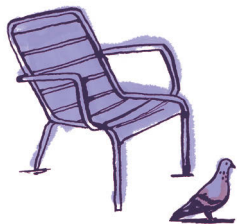
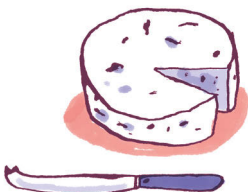
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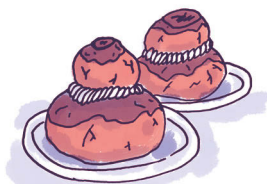
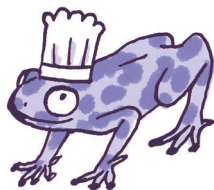
A Lifestyle
Guide

Better



Flammarion





*Ze
French
Do
It Better*

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Le French Do It Better

A Lifestyle Guide

**Frédérique Veysset
Valérie de Saint-Pierre**

Flammarion

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BIENVENUE

An Introduction



“Ze French do it better...” What a declaration! Are they just showing off, or are they on to something?

Sure, they may think they’re the crème de la crème, but the millions of tourists swarming through the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles and scrambling up the Eiffel Tower seem to agree.

Nature has been wildly generous when it comes to France: bordered by four different seas and sheltered by the massive Alps and Pyrenees mountains, the country boasts a bounty of local produce for foodies to savor, numerous regions to explore on foot, diverse

scenery for romantics to admire, and a wealth of museums and châteaux where the curious can give their eyes, smartphones, and sneakers a workout. As for the locals, they're always surprised that others think the French are arrogant and self-important. Honestly, they don't do it on purpose! Is it their fault that the wine is so good? Or that the Tour de France is so legendary? Can they be blamed for being so effortlessly slim, even though their baguettes are so crunchy? Should we hold it against them that their life is so good? Or that Mbappé is so fast? Or their vests so yellow?

So, what's their secret? How do they so easily enjoy one of the most divine lifestyles on the planet?

Well, there are as many answers as there are “tribes” in France, each one contributing its special touch to the fabric of French society. Whether they're urban or rural, suburban or country-dwelling, thrifty or high rollers, Frenchies are bound—sometimes unconsciously—by invisible ties rooted in a shared culture that includes, in no particular order, Brigitte Bardot, Notre Dame, Voltaire, Zidane, Chanel No. 5, Louis XIV, Louis Vuitton, the Champs-Élysées, Balzac, General Charles de Gaulle, Jean-Paul Gaultier, Christian Louboutin, champagne, Dior, Sartre, Françoise Hardy, Béatrice Dalle, Edith Piaf and Georges Brassens, Astérix and Obélix, Paul Pogba, Yasmina Reza, and Joey Starr.

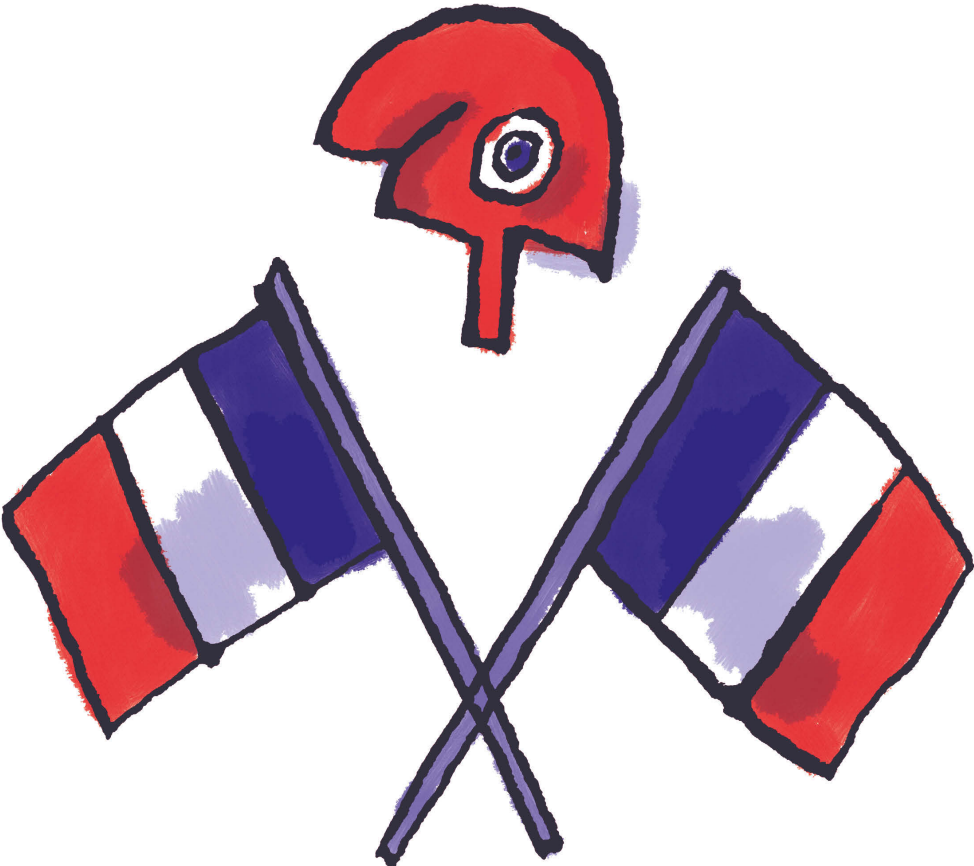
Follow the French inside their world to discover their secrets for enjoying their unrivaled, but ultimately very accessible, way of life. This is France!





*THE
CLASSIC
FRENCHY*

VIVE LA FRANCE



“Ah, Monsieur is French? How extraordinary! What makes someone French?”

—Robert Kopp, after Montesquieu

Anyone can recognize a Frenchman. It’s easy: he has—obviously—a baguette under his arm, a beret on his head, and, for reasons unknown, a glass of champagne in his hand. He comments on the stages of the Tour de France with a knowing air before joining a graceful French woman, who—messily coiffed but elegant, and incredibly thin despite the pyramids of macarons she inhales daily—leaves a trail of Chanel No. 5 in her wake. A friendly game of boules on the Champ-de-Mars, in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower, is planned, before wrapping up the evening in a lovely little Parisian bistro surrounded by eloquent intellectuals. Oh, and of course this beau monde finishes dinner with camembert!

The French fully accept this charming reputation, famous throughout the world. In fact, they love to play it up. Even the lyrics to the French national anthem “La Marseillaise” call citizens to “take up arms!” if necessary to defend and protect France and French values, including these ten distinctly French icons:

1



BAGUETTE

CARRY A BIG STICK
AT FOURNIL DES CHAMPS

Roland Feuillas's famed bakery stocks only 100 percent natural bread. An expert baker, Feuillas masters the entire bread-making process, turning marvelous freshly stone-ground heritage wheats into bread using a natural starter and a long fermentation time.

68, rue Pierre Charron,
Paris VIII^e

According to one legend, in the late nineteenth century, during the construction of the Parisian Métro system, Fulgence Bienvenüe asked a baker to make him a long loaf of bread that could be divided without a knife, in order to avoid the deadly fights that often broke out between laborers and slowed down work. And lo, the French baguette was born! The very same baguette that makes both the world's best sandwiches and the preferred snack of generations of French schoolchildren: a square of dark chocolate wedged in a hunk of day-old bread, to be chewed vigorously, cheeks bulging with the effort.

During World War II, yeast and starter dough were impossible to find, and fermentation, an essential step in the bread-making process, was boosted with additives. This bad habit stuck around after the war, practiced by bakers looking to save time and money; it eventually soured the baguette's reputation. The situation grew so serious that the government had to intervene, issuing a decree in 1993 that set strict criteria for the popular *tradition* baguette and limited the recipe to just four ingredients: flour, salt, water, and yeast. Cheap knock-offs were out; long fermentation was back in style. The baguette has since gained cult status, and can be fairly pricey if the baker thinks highly of himself. The French are back to standing in line for their baguette on Sunday morning and around 7 p.m. on a weekday, all of them happily sighing, "Oh, it's still warm!" And you can be sure that not a single one can resist sneaking a crumb or two on the walk home.

It's incredible, but true: no one liked the “Iron Lady” at first, not even Gustave Eiffel, who showed no interest when his design office initially presented him with the blueprints. In the end, the project for “the tallest tower in the world” captured the attention of the renowned engineer when he realized that it was the perfect opportunity to demonstrate his expertise. He won the competition to design a centerpiece for the 1889 World's Fair in Paris, beating out seven competitors, and engineers and acrobatic laborers set to work. A number of artists lambasted what poet Paul Verlaine referred to as the “belfry skeleton” that would “disfigure Paris,” but letters of protest, petitions, and outright sarcasm couldn't stop the crowds from thronging to visit when it was finally completed. As the years passed, curiosity waned, and there was even talk of destroying the structure. By then, however, Eiffel went out of his way to protect the tower and installed a small meteorological observation station at the top. Later, the French army used it as a radio tower, and it played a decisive role in halting the German advance on the Marne River

in 1914. The Eiffel Tower became indispensable as an antenna for the wireless telegraph and a relay mast for the newly invented telephone, and was used as a radio and television transmitter. In 1944, Hitler, spiraling toward defeat, ordered the tower destroyed, along with the entire city of Paris. Luckily, General Von Choltitz disobeyed his order. After the Liberation of Paris, the American army installed a radar antenna on the tower. In the 1960s the tower began to draw record-breaking numbers of tourists, which continue to this day. Most Parisians are allergic to the crowds and wait until the February lull to take their children on their first visit. They never grow tired of seeing it sparkle for five minutes each night; their #ilove-paris Instagram posts are proof. On July 14, the French national holiday—which no one in France actually calls “Bastille Day”—it is the ultimate in chic to be invited to an apartment “with a view” to admire the traditional firework show in private. However, wedding photos in a poufy white dress with the Eiffel Tower in the background are far too clichéd for genuine Parisians.

② EIFFEL TOWER



INDULGE YOURSELF AT COMPTOIR CANAILLES

This bistro artfully revisits must-try classics of traditional French cuisine. During game season, it serves a striking *lièvre à la royale*, a complex and flavorful dish starring wild hare, foie gras, and copious amounts of garlic, truffles, and shallots.

47, rue Rodier,
Paris IX^e

comptoircanailles.com

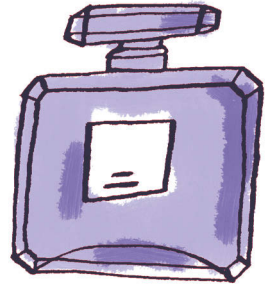
Look around you. If you see checkered tablecloths, zinc countertops, mosaics, gently worn leather booths, wooden chairs, and home cooking on the table, then there's no doubt about it: you are in an authentic bistro (or someplace engineered to look like one—sometimes that's the problem). Bourgeois family-style cooking had fallen out of favor in recent years, but it's regaining popularity again, which comes as no surprise: it's convivial, generous, and economical. A bistro worthy of the name stirs up memories of dishes simmered slowly with the expert touch of a mother or grandmother. Those who mocked their down-home flavors a few years ago are now smitten. Simple and filling, this domestic culinary style has enchanted young chefs who adore reinventing classics like *oeuf mayonnaise* (deviled eggs) and *céleri rémoulade* (celery root remoulade). With a menu boasting dishes like calf's liver with parsley, andouillette sausage with fries, leg of lamb with flageolet beans, beef bourguignon and elbow pasta, vegetarians from around the world can keep on walking. Here, meat steals the show and is always served with a "nice little wine" reserved for the occasion.



3

BISTROS

④ CHANEL NO. 5



The legendary Chanel No. 5 has remained among the world's ten bestselling perfumes ever since its creation in 1921, no doubt at the suggestion of Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich of Russia, Coco Chanel's lover. He introduced the fashion icon to Ernest Beaux, perfumer to the Russian court and a pioneer convinced that the "future of perfume lies in the hands of chemists." At the time, popular perfumes were made with natural essences that faded quickly and were too easy to identify. Ernest Beaux wanted to create an enduring and inimitable potion. He was the first to use synthetic chemicals derived from hydrocarbons discovered at the turn of the twentieth century, which he mixed with rare essences like Damascus rose, ylang-ylang from the Comoros, and Mysore sandalwood. When he presented his different samples in numbered vials, Gabrielle Chanel chose vial number five as her

favorite. Out of superstition, she kept this number for the name of her first perfume—which she launched on May 5. Her lover designed a refined bottle inspired by the vodka flasks carried by the Russian Imperial Guard. Though the relationship between the handsome Dmitri and Coco Chanel eventually evaporated, the phenomenal success of No. 5 has never waned. Marilyn Monroe famously slept in nothing but Chanel No. 5, but for French people of a certain generation the perfume evokes memories of a mother or grandmother dabbing her neck with the vial's stopper before going out. Or the unforgettable scent of an elevator heavy with perfume from the beautiful upstairs neighbor, just like Proust's *madeleine*?

chanel.com

TOUR DE FRANCE



5

ADOPT A CYCLIST FROM THE ROGER FOUNDRY

Long before video games were invented, French children played Tour de France with miniature Roger cyclists and marbles: after creating a circuit in the dirt or sand, they would race each other on it by flicking a marble and placing the figurine where it landed. Manufactured using the original 1930s molds, these figurines, crafted in ZAMAK (a lead-free alloy), are still hand-painted and continue to captivate collectors around the world.

fonderierogier.fr

This famed bicycle race showcasing the best of France's landscapes gained its legendary status a little over a century ago. Initially organized by a sports magazine to drum up support among early fans of cycling, the first Tour de France began on July 1, 1903, outside the café Le Réveil Matin in the village of Montgeron, near Paris. The six-stage route connected Paris, Lyon, Marseille, Bordeaux, Toulouse, and Nantes, before looping back to the capital. Sales of newspapers that covered the event broke historical records. The Tour de France took on a political dimension in 1911 when its stage in Alsace-Lorraine, a region annexed by the German Empire in 1871, provided an occasion for the population to demonstrate their French patriotism, which did not sit well with the Kaiser. Early fans of the Tour were avid in their support, but still relatively rare; they applauded the French values of liberty, equality, and fraternity displayed by the courageous cyclists, those "aristocrats of muscle" who struggled along on the "little queen," as the bicycle was affectionately called. Starting in the 1950s, working-class fans settled in to watch the stages on television and, in 1960, President Charles de Gaulle himself attended a stage of the Tour. In 1975, President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing launched the tradition of presenting the winner with a yellow jersey on the Champs-Élysées. Today, the Tour is famous outside France, with athletes from around the world participating—and some of them even win! Even French people who couldn't care less about cycling have a basic understanding of the Tour, gleaned from summers spent with a grandfather who followed it closely.

Once forbidden by the nobility to play this quintessentially French game, commoners finally regained the right to heft a set of boules when feudal privilege was abolished on the fateful night of August 4, 1789. Long before that, the Romans had introduced an earlier version of *pétanque* to the Gauls that became so popular the clergy tried to forbid it, fearing it would interfere with religious practice. Clearly, they failed, because *pétanque* has been the most popular leisure activity in France since the nineteenth century. Family photos were once staged on the boules strip, and whole villages play against each other (the first competitions and tournaments date back to 1894). In fact, it's not uncommon for players to come to blows. The beloved *pétanque* (from the French *pieds tanqués*, “immobile feet”), as it is known today, was created in 1907 in Provence for a player riddled with arthritis. It gave rise to a whole mythology that exudes the essence of the South of France and the aniseed aroma of a glass of Pernod. In recent years, this “sport,” traditionally the pastime of happy retirees, got a makeover: in summer, groups of young hipsters wearing “Riviera moccasins” (a chic imitation of the scrappy slip-ons favored by old-school players), love to “try for a tile” or “cap it.”

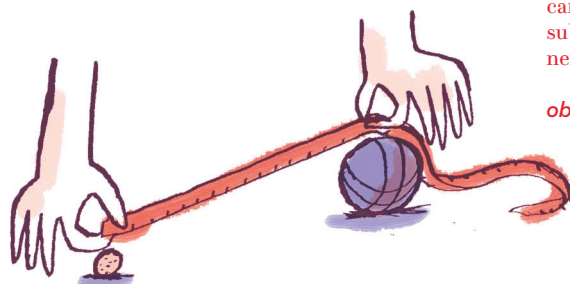


STAY ON THE BALL WITH OBUT

The official supplier to the most prestigious *pétanque* tournaments, Obut has been making steel boules in the Loire region since 1955. Smooth, ribbed, steel, carbon, impact absorbing, soft, or half-soft: the company goes to great lengths to ensure their boules “tickle the jack.” They even sell creams to pamper them and there’s a museum in Provence where you can study up on the subject before your next match.

obut.com

⑥ PÉTANQUE





7

BÉRET

HATS OFF TO MAISON LAULHÈRE

Founded in 1840, this brand has supplied the French army since World War II, as well as the armed forces of countries around the world. Still manufactured in Oloron-Sainte-Marie from merino wool and trimmed with a leather braid from the Montagne Noire region (in central southern France), the traditional beret is distinguished by a *bouffette* (a small black, yellow, or red ribbon) fastened on the side.

laulhere-france.com

For many years, this wool hat, flat as a crêpe, was the hallmark of Bernese shepherds, schoolchildren, and elderly French men, before becoming a symbol of revolutionaries and military personnel. Then, following World War I, women cast off their corsets and frills, and began wearing pants, as well as more functional men's clothing and accessories. The beret, varying in size, color, and degree of decorative embellishment, began to appear in haute couture fashion shows and atop movie stars like Arletty, Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo, and Lauren Bacall. In 1938, seventeen-year-old debutante Michèle Morgan gave it a shot of glamor when she received one of the most famous kisses in French cinema from Jean Gabin under a streetlamp in *Port of Shadows*. Tommy gun in hand, beret firmly in place, Brigitte Bardot sang "Bonnie and Clyde" alongside Serge Gainsbourg. Today, the "Basque" beret—as Napoleon III called this curious hat worn by laborers working on his palace at Biarritz—graces the heads of Cara Delevingne, Rihanna, and Bella Hadid, always one step ahead of the trends. But you are unlikely to run into any Parisians wearing berets, except under the Arc de Triomphe on Armistice or Victory Day—and even then, they're likely to be pushing ninety.

Camembert—known familiarly as *claquos* or *calendos*—is legendary. This soft, bloomy-rind cheese related to brie and coulommiers is thought to have been first produced in Normandy in 1791 by Marie Harel, a farmer in the village of Camembert. Parisians discovered it in the nineteenth century, when the railroad was constructed to connect Paris with Lisieux and Caen: the Norman treasure could be spirited to the capital in a little under six hours, secure in its miniature wooden box. A victim of its own growing success, the manufacture of Camembert was industrialized in the twentieth century; production often took place outside of Normandy and the resulting cheeses were but pale imitations. Small producers fought to defend their fattier, tastier Camembert, made in Normandy using raw, unpasteurized milk from local cows. A dry camembert is a dishonor to any cheese plate, and finding a perfect “runny” specimen remains a high-stakes challenge in most French households. It is considered very inappropriate to comment on its possible odor or to make a fuss if it is a little overripe. Only pregnant women fearing listeriosis get a pass—and even that is cutting it close.

OPEN A BOX OF
CAMEMBERT AT
FROMAGES DE STÉPHANIE

This unique version is
made with 100 percent
organic Norman milk.

Le Champ Laudier,
61170 Saint-Léger-
sur-Sarthe
+33 (0)2 33 28 09 98

8



CAMEMBERT

For ages, Parisian waiters have gotten a bad rap from the rest of the world. Unpleasant, sullen (sourpuss soup is often on the menu), monosyllabic, incapable of speaking English, feigning not to have seen a customer if they've just decided to set the tables for lunch—all this, and worse. But is it true? In part, yes. But you have to understand French waiters. Descended from a long line of haughty types draped in white aprons, they think highly of their job. That's why

they don't appreciate being addressed with a loud "Garçon!" accompanied by a snapping of fingers. They aren't arrogant, they're sensitive—and yes, there's a difference. That's also why they'll nonchalantly continue cleaning the counter while clients wave frantically for the bill: the waiter determines how to manage his time—he has some self-respect after all. If they occasionally correct the pronunciation of "croak misyhur" when a tourist is trying to order a *croque monsieur* sandwich, they don't do it out of mockery, but rather to be helpful. Once you've understood that and relax—and carefully avoid engaging in any kind of power dynamic—everything will be fine.

9

CANTAN- KEROUS WAITERS

