

France 2019

Versailles and the Loire Valley

Janet Connery - Carla Conrad - Sheri Tiner

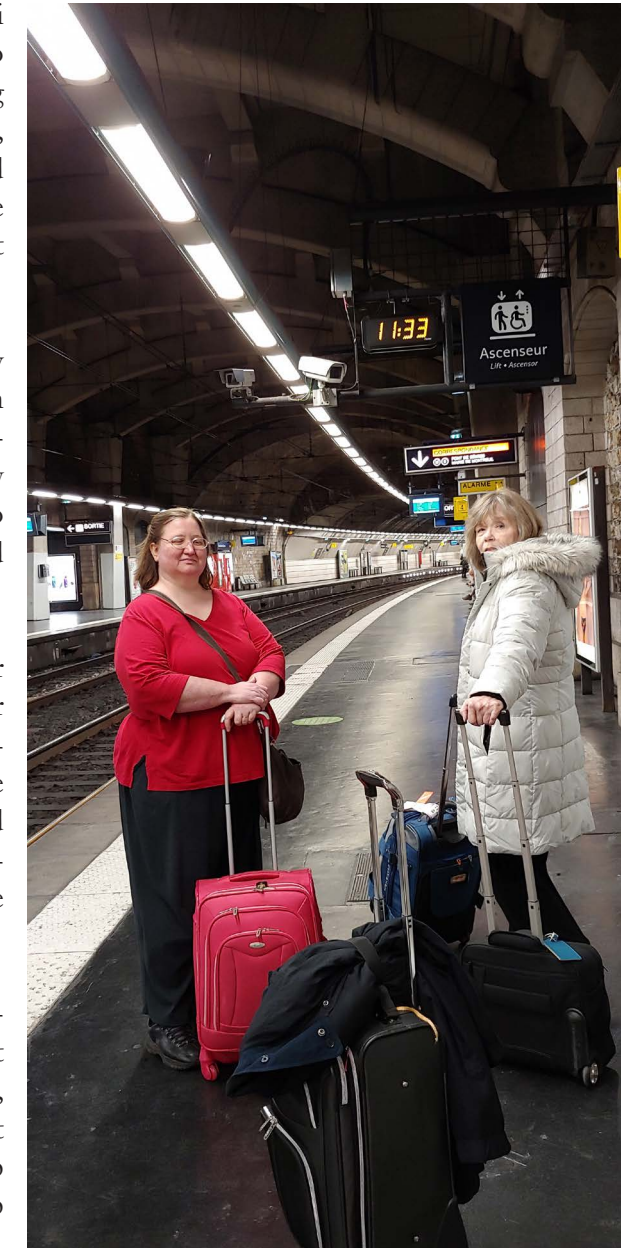
## Versailles - The Gardens

After meeting in the Paris airport we three intrepid travelers: Janet Connery, Sheri Tiner and Carla Conrad made our way to the train station and boarded the Metro bound for Versailles. Sleep deprived from the overnight flights, we caught the wrong C train and had to make a Metro U-turn. This is not generally a complicated issue, but the exit machine decided it didn't want Carla to leave, especially not if she wanted to take her luggage with her. Fortunately, Janet and Sheri were able to communicate the problem to the attendant in three words of French, and she persuaded the beast to release Carla AND her luggage.

Although our arrival in the village of Versailles was later than intended, Carla now experienced with evil exit machines, fought the turnstile beast at the train station and won! This battle with the turnstile became a pattern for her. The hotel was typically quaint for affordable French hotels, which really means small rooms and a tiny elevator. Throughout our two-night stay, we compressed ourselves or trudged to their rooms in shifts since the lift was a tight fit for one person with a suitcase and handbag or backpack.

Once reorganized and equipped for reconnoitering, we scouted nearby cafes for lunch. Janet, a vegetarian, ate quiche. Carla, a confirmed carnivore, though she never met an asparagus stalk she didn't like, ordered pepperoni pizza. Sheri, a hesitant omnivore with a decided preference for veggies and cheeses, enjoyed ham and cheese in a flaky pastry. Fortified with food, we walked the ten minutes to Versailles and gawked, dazzled by the gilded gates and façade before snapping several photos. Tomorrow we would take in the interior of the chateau. Today we rambled around the gardens.

The gardens at Versailles comprise about 2,000 acres. and when we weary travelers neared the end of our energy, we had only explored the formal gardens nearest the palace. Though the skies were heavily overcast and we had to dodge puddles, we managed to stay dry. The grounds are overpopulated with statuary. Sadly, most were draped with protective covering that can be seen in the photos. The cold, damp weather at the end of November can pose a danger to the marble should rain seep









into the stone and freeze.

A short distance to the rear of the palace stands the tiered Fountain of Latona, daughter of the last titan and mistress of Jupiter, king of the gods. This was the only fountain working that day. Inspired by Ovid's *The Metamorphoses*, the scene depicts the mother of Apollo and Diana holding her children and appealing to Jupiter for protection. His jealous queen incited the villagers to stone them, but Jupiter intervened and changed the mortals into frogs and lizards. The gilded figures are shown in various stages of transfiguration. It was rumored Louis XIV had this particular fountain erected in such a prominent place after courtiers criticized his liaison with Athena de Montespan. He made his point and the countess remained his official mistress for many years.



Between the Fountain of Latona and the Grand Canal lies the majestic Fountain of Apollo, depicting the Sun god bringing the dawn. Apollo's fountain shows the god guiding his chariot out of the water to carry the sun across the sky. Without sun, life would cease to exist. Louis XIV identified with Apollo and adopted the sun as his emblem, which one often sees boldly emblazoned at Versailles. The length and glory of his extravagant reign has associated this symbol with Louis so closely that history always titles him Louis XIV, the Sun King. It seems appropriate that the sun broke through the clouds while we three avid photographers photographed this fountain.

The lanes passed through several groves leading to fascinating sites. Many pictures were taken through bars and gates because most of these were closed for the season. The Ballroom Grove is designed as an amphitheater for music and dancing. The Colonnade Grove holds thirty-two Ionic columns in several shades of marble. The Enceladus Grove





shows a massive sculpture of the giant struggling to free himself from under a pile of rocks. The colorful Fountain of Flora is an allegory of spring. Then in another grove visitors find Bacchus, the ultimate party boy, drunk again with his satyr friends.

That evening Le Salamandre served Janet an excellent dish of thin-sliced eggplant with a local cheese while Sheri and Carla happily chewed steak and fries. Finally, after this marathon day of travel and walking we collapsed for the night, counting on Apollo to bring the dawn another day.





PELOUSES  
INTERDITES  
KEEP OFF THE GRASS  
PROHIBIDO  
PISAR EL CESPED



# Versailles - The Palace and an Opera



Carla and Sheri had been to Versailles before but this was Janet's first visit so it's unfortunate the weather didn't cooperate. The day was terribly cold and wet, but we spent the morning inside the chateau, spared the worst exposure for most of the morning. This would also be our longest day since we had tickets to attend the opera in the palace that evening. We left the hotel around ten a.m. and grabbed skip-the-line tickets from the Tourism Office to shorten standing in the cold rain while waiting to be admitted. No matter how miserable the weather, Versailles is always crowded with tourists.

Photographs have difficulty capturing the opulent extravagance of Versailles. The gilt gates merely hint at the grandeur inside. From the celestial glory of the white marble and gold Chapel to the Hall of Mirrors, a gallery other monarchs have tried to imitate but failed to duplicate in palaces throughout Europe, one encounters exquisite art, sumptuous draperies and silk wall coverings, ornate furniture, wide sweeping staircases, and elaborately painted ceilings that inspire open-mouth wonder.

The Hall of Mirrors stretches 73 meters long. The walls are lined with 357 mirrors to reflect the light from the 17 huge glass doors. It's many chandeliers and life-size candelabra once held twenty thousand candles casting light truly befitting the Sun King even on a cloudy day.

As impressive as the Chapel and Hall of Mirrors are, they are simply highlights along the route of other rooms also featuring lavish décor, such as the red and gold brocade drapes and bed hangings in the king's bedroom, the ostrich feathers and richly embroidered floral fabrics that now adorn Marie Antoinette's bedroom. Sadly, the tragic queen never saw her room decorated with these as the fabrics were discovered in a warehouse long after she was beheaded. The prince's apartments have been transformed into an art gallery.

The wonderful Bernini bust of Louis XIV can be seen in the Diana salon, where Louis liked to play billiards. The king was reputed to be quite skilled with a cue





stick, but consider this: what courtier would have the nerve to trounce his majesty? Louis posed for Bernini twenty times. The last time Louis was tired and asked Bernini if he could sit. The famous sculptor told the king he had to remain standing. Though Louis apparently said nothing, he never returned and Bernini had to complete the bust without his subject being present.

There are many sculptures of Louis throughout Versailles, beginning with the recently restored equestrian statue fronting the chateau outside. In one photo Sheri stands before a bas relief depicting the king as a warrior, leading his armies. Famous paintings and tapestries also pay tribute the king's reign. Several are on display, including the Hyacinth Rigaud full-length portrait painted when Louis was sixty-five and a wax relief created when the king was in his seventies. Tinted and wigged, it is said to be an excellent likeness.

Prior to the trip, Carla had checked the weather forecasts for the days and areas we planned to visit. All forecasts indicated cold and wet which led her to the amused and farfetched supposition: What if it snowed while they were at Versailles?

We lunched in a café in the palace with Carla facing a window. Snow! She got up and walked to the window to be sure she was actually seeing snowflakes. Can't blame her. This is a rare sight when one lives near Houston. We planned to tour both The Grand and Petite Trianon, two mini palaces located on the site of what once was the village of Trianon and retains that name. It's a considerable hike from the main palace in bad weather or snow, no matter how charming. Rather than walk the distance, we purchased tickets









on a tram that delivered us to both Trianons after driving by pastoral meadows where the royal scenic sheep grazed before the grass became covered with the white stuff that fell more heavily than when it began.

We first visited the Grand Trianon with its amazing pink marble colonnade from Languedoc and checkerboard marble flooring in the peristyle that separates the two wings. We were only able to walk through the left wing because the right wing was closed. The reason why must have been on a need-to-know basis and they weren't privileged to know. The Grand Trianon was built as a getaway for Louis XIV and a few favorites because there were times he craved privacy and relaxation that he was unable to find at Versailles where his entire life seemed to be on public display and his days governed by ritual and ceremony.

The Grand Trianon seen today is Napoleonic in décor. Every self-declared emperor needs a palace, but Napoleon had no desire to restore Versailles. The massive chateau had been looted and ravaged during the French Revolution. Especially, since the Grand Trianon was palatial enough to suit his purposes and its restoration would leave more money for war. The Treaty of Trianon ending World War I for Hungary was signed here, and even today, visiting diplomats and important state visitors may find themselves housed at the Grand Trianon.

Another important feature of the Grand

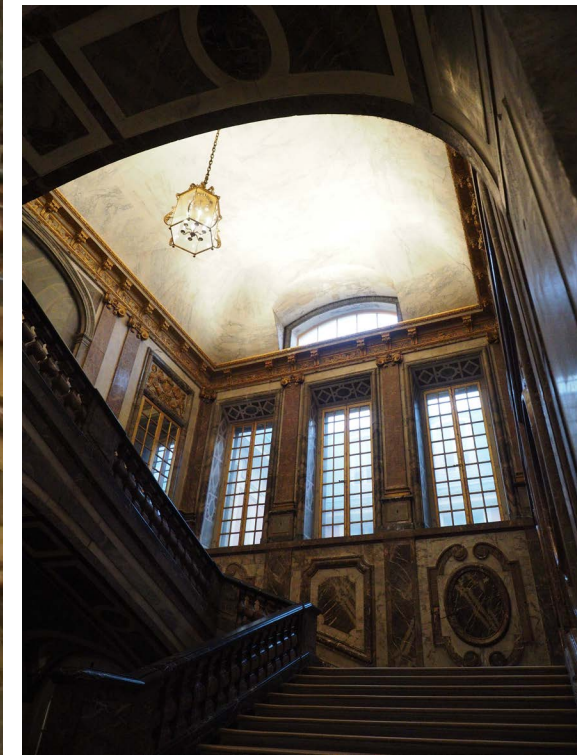
Trianon are the gardens. They are still prominent and must be lovely in the spring. Among the group, Janet held the most avid interest in gardens which will become even more apparent when we visit Villandry, also noted for its gardens. Janet was the only one of the group willing to brave the snow and frigid temperature to visit the celebrated Grand Trianon gardens this trip. Her wanderings also led her to the Temple of Love, where a statue of Cupid resides. Carla, admittedly an eternal romantic, later ventured close enough to snap a couple of photos of the temple containing the son of Venus.

The Petite Trianon was constructed by Louis XV, though Marie Antoinette later put her stamp on the small palace before deciding she wanted to be a shepherdess and constructing a small village nearby to fulfill her fantasy. Because the tram didn't go to the village and missing the last tram back to the chateau would mean a long, cold walk, we decided not to explore the village. Besides, we had other plans for the evening.

While planning the trip, Janet discovered there would be a performance at the Versailles Royal Opera. We agreed it was a must-see event. It was fabulous! That evening we arrived at the door to Versailles as guests rather than tourists. How lovely to walk the halls of the palace without crowds of tour groups, to be fortunate enough to hear wonderful



















music in a theater where Louis XIV and his court enjoyed similar performances. The opera performed was *Les Indes Galantes*, written by Jean-Philippe Rameau in 1735. The room was fantastic, the music beautifully played and sung, but the balcony seats were uncomfortable and we were all exhausted from our long day of activities. Rather than embarrass ourselves by yawning, snoring or falling out of the narrow seats we discretely left at intermission.

Before departing the palace, we sat on some convenient benches to organize our belongings. When she stood, Janet dropped her glasses, scooped them up, slid them on and walked about ten feet wondering why everything had become blurry. There was no glass in her frames! Both lenses had popped out when they hit the floor. We retraced our steps and were relieved to find the room empty and where we'd sat undisturbed. Janet located her lenses and was able to pop them right back into their frames.

Without enough time to eat before attending the opera, we were famished by the time we left the palace. Most restaurants nearby had closed for the night, but a small Mediterranean café, the Istanbul Café, welcomed us and satisfied both the vegetarian and the carnivore appetites. A beef sandwich for Carla and a delicious eggplant and rice dish Janet and Sheri enjoyed. This was probably one of the best meals of the trip.









# Traveling to Tours

The third day found us taking the train from Versailles to Tours. Our plans encountered a hitch when we arrived at the train station and discovered our tickets, which had been purchased in advance, were invalid. More than a little alarmed, we located an attendant, but she only spoke French. As the communication gap widened to a chasm, both sides resorted to translation apps on their smart phones. We learned our connecting train was unable to make it to the station because it had hit a cow. We were able to purchase new tickets from a machine with Sheri and Carla wondering if the train had hit a “scenic cow” (a little inside joke).

Arriving at Tours, we collected the Peugeot SUV Sheri had reserved and drove to a nearby mall that held a huge supermarket named Carrefour. This was a complete one-stop shopping experience, just Sheri, Janet, Carla and about a million French people. We hadn’t made allowances for shopping on Saturday, but managed to buy breakfast items, coffee that actually turned out to be hot chocolate mix, Cokes, beer and a variety of snacks. We hoped to arrive at the house they had reserved through VRBO before dark. No such luck. This turned out not to be our day for smooth traveling.

Sheri took the highway that skirts the outer edge of the city but hadn’t driven more than a mile before finding the road was closed for construction. She followed the detour signs and found herself in a long line of cars all trying to make an impossible left turn back onto the highway without a traffic signal. Finally giving this route up, she tried another option. Those streets circled back on themselves and were one-way in the wrong direction. The center of town turned out to be gridlocked with about 10,000 other cars on single lane, one-way streets and crowds of pedestrians attending some event or outdoor market. She spent nearly 30 minutes inching toward the Grand Theatre, and while it was grand, she and her passengers got tired of looking at it. A dozen turns and a many stops later we trav-





eled a rural highway in total darkness and Sheri couldn't find how to turn on the bright lights in a Peugeot. After accidentally turning off the lights completely twice, she stopped in the middle of the road and figured it out.

We arrived well after dark, but our hostess Marie was gracious about our tardiness, welcomed us with red wine from Chinon, a local goat cheese and gave us a tour of the house. She was a font of information about the area and places to visit. After each of us weary travelers chose a bedroom, we settled in, exhausted again but comfortable and happy.



# Loire Valley - Gardens, Queens and Kings

Dame Fortune smiled on us once again. Access to the Villandry chateau was supposed to be closed so we only expected to tour the gardens, but when we purchased our tickets, we found we had managed to make the last day the chateau was open to the public. So we smiled a lot and did a happy dance inside.

The chateau is a mixture of “old and older.” Jean Le Breton, secretary of state under Francois I, built a chateau on this site in 1532. Little remains of that structure that is visible except for a brownish square tower that forms a rear corner of the current chateau. Villandry passed through several noble owners and renovations, even through the Napoleonic empire. The Carvallo family purchased Villandry in 1906, and continue to live on the estate.

The décor is enhanced by enormous bouquets of flowers from the gardens and floral theme tapestries. Each of us chose a favorite bedroom for ourselves. Not surprisingly, each bedroom reflected our own personal taste. Janet would have nestled among a bower of flowers. Sheri would have resided in rich, jewel tones. Carla preferred light, airy sky blue with several windows. This was a family chateau, and each of us fantasized being the chatelaine.

Villandry is renowned for the amazing gardens, and we were fortunate to have a garden aficionado along. Janet is an enthusiastic gardener, and knew far more about the plants and flowers than Sheri and Carla.

The Ornamental Garden consists of four squares where love is illustrated; Tender love is symbolized by hearts, Passionate love depicted with hearts broken by passion, Flighty love shown with butterfly wings, and tragic love grown to hedges in the shape blades showing jealousy.

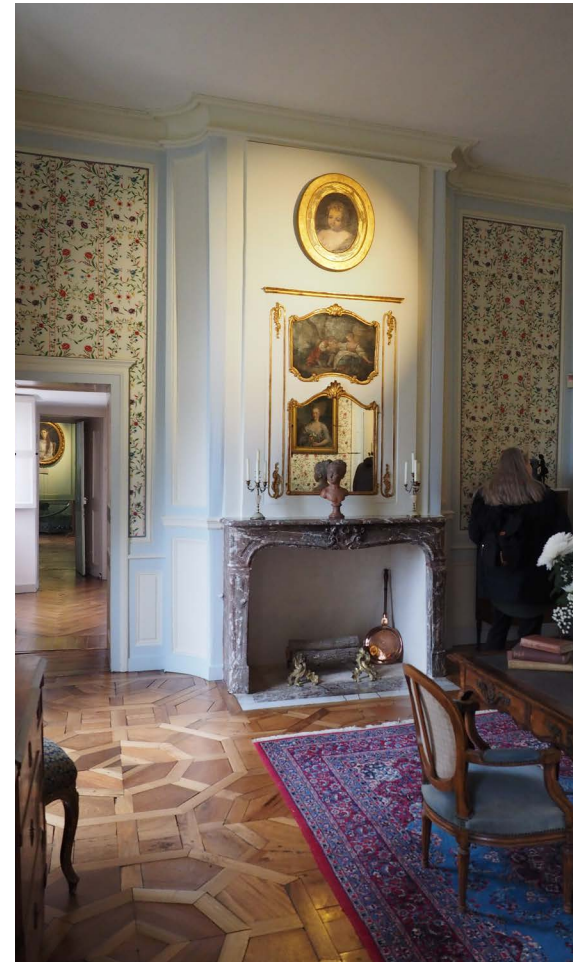
Outside, Janet bravely climbed to the highest terrace for broader views, while Carla and Sheri chose a more down to earth approach by wandering through the vegetable and water gardens,



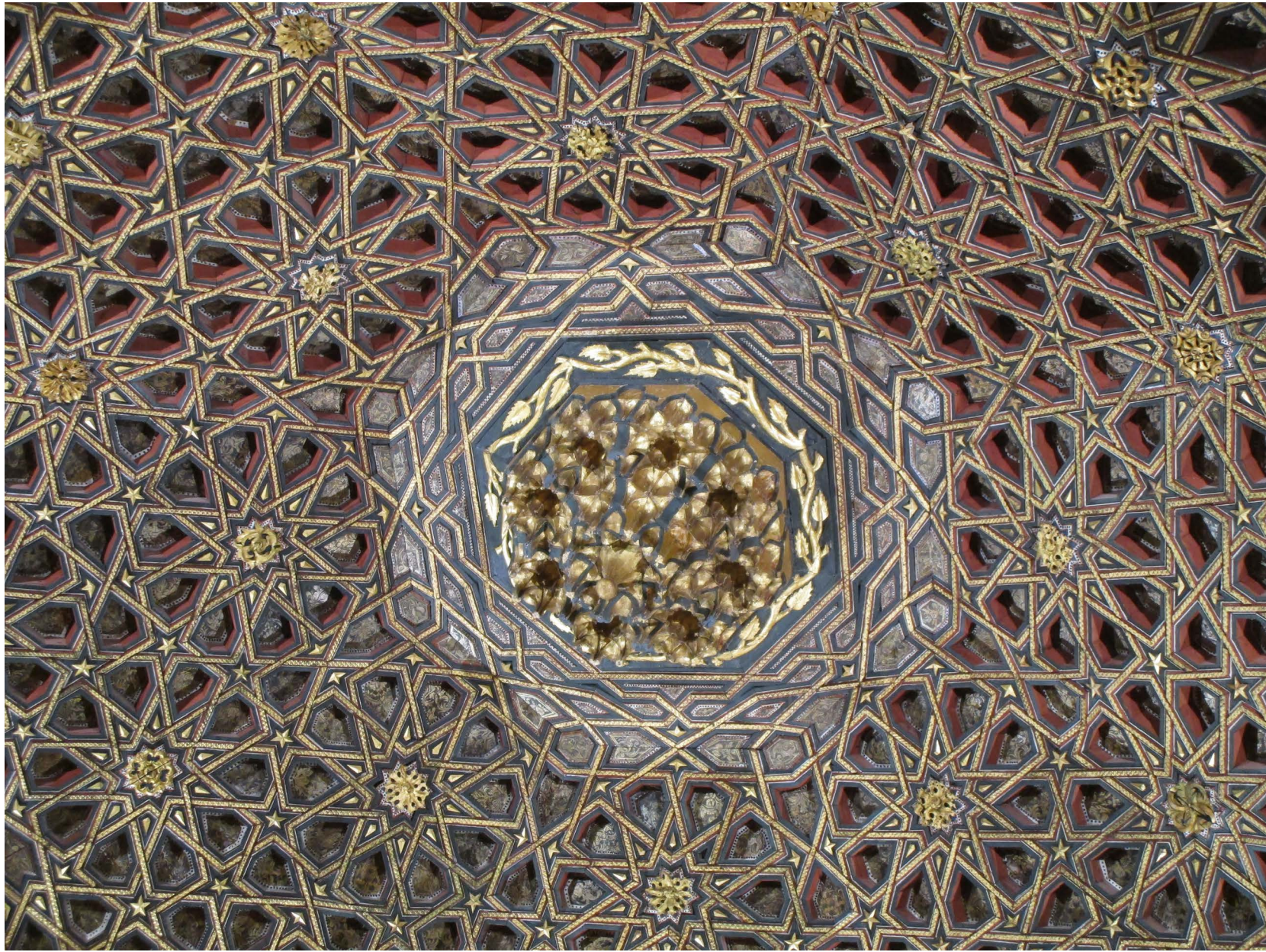




















From Villandry, we traveled to Chinon. The wonderful old town features medieval buildings and residences. Driving does take skill due to the very narrow streets, sharp hairpin curves and the lurking danger of sheer drop-offs.

The town is home to the fortress ruins of ancient Chinon castle. Earliest records date defensive battlements as Roman times, 446 AD. By 1154, Henry Plantagenet had inherited the castle as Henri, Count of Anjou, also newly crowned King Henry II of England. Although in ruins, the size of the fortress is still impressive as shown by our photo.

The Lion in Winter, an award-winning film that depicts a Christmas court where Henry in his later years has commanded all three of his bickering sons and his queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine, to gather at the castle. Much intrigue ensues, plots and counterplots, as each prince vies for power and the crown when Henry dies. Eleanor instigates and exacerbates the rivalries. This film contains the best dialogue ever written for a film and earned the top spot on Carla and Sheri's favorite movie list. We had to see Chinon, even if going inside wasn't feasible.



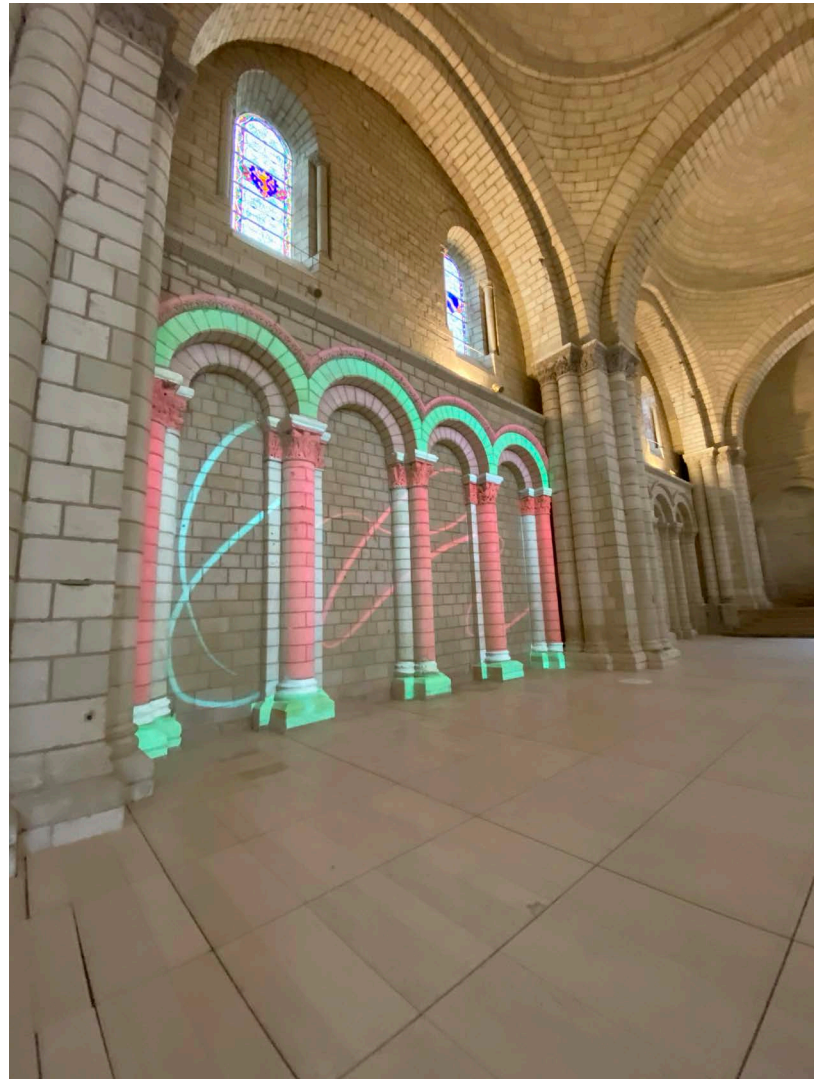
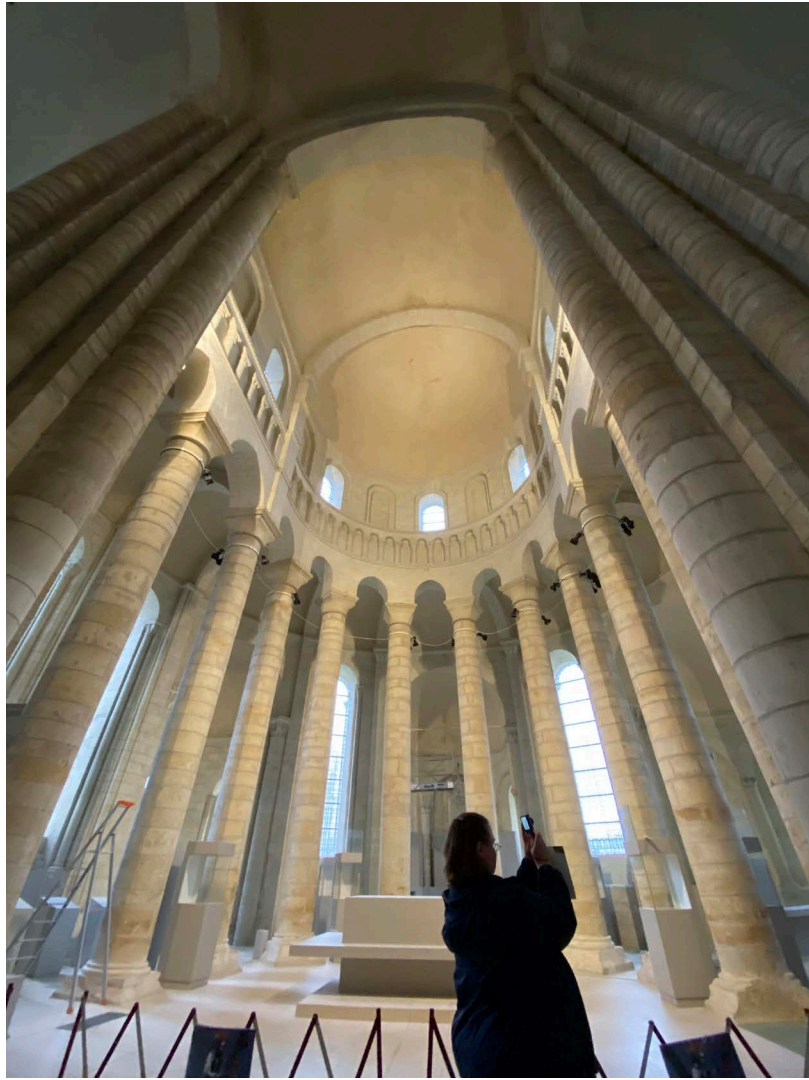




Our next stop was the Royal Fontevraud-l'Abbaye. Queen Eleanor spent various periods of her life at the abbey, and in death was laid to rest beside her royal husband, King Henry II. Their son, King Richard the Lion-hearted is also buried here beside one of his sisters. Janet was interested in the Saumur tapestries being exhibited here.

Another lesson learned this day is that our appetites and village restaurants don't keep the same hours. We found a small market and fortified ourselves with ham, cheese, salad, bread and pastries.









## Loire Valley - Royal Grandeur

We planned our Monday adventure based on the weather, which promised sunny skies, leading us to venture farthest from our base at Une Maison, Un Jardin to the Chambord chateau.

Breakfast was less cooperative. The toaster wanted Carla's toast as much as she did. Carla rallied the troops, and Sheri entered the mechanical fray armed with a butter knife and finally retrieved the bread. Fortunately, Carla had made sure to pull the electrical plug first. No toasters were harmed in the battle.

Sheri drove the Peugeot SUV along the Cher River while Carla and Janet gawked at chateaux along the way. Sheri managed to sneak a peek from time to time when traffic was sparse.

Chambord is spectacular and enormous. Construction began during the reign of Francis I. The most memorable exterior feature is the elaborate roofline, decorated with a thicket of dormers, buttresses, turrets, chimneypots and lanterns. Chambord was largely influenced by the Italian Renaissance. The central fascinating feature inside is the double helix staircase, believed to be inspired by a design of Leonardo DaVinci.







While most of the furnishings reside on the second floor, impressive portraits hang on the ground floor. The climb to the terraces is certainly worth the effort to see the Lantern Tower and spectacular view of the grounds. Once prized for hunting, Chambord still contains over two thousand acres set aside as a forest and wildlife preserve where the deer and wild boar roam.

For all its grandeur, Chambord is not a comfortable residence and neither Francis I nor later renovations by Louis XIV could dispel the frigid winter drafts or the hungry mosquitoes that made summers miserable. The Sun King spent a fortune to make Chambord habitable and only spent six weeks of his long reign there.

The three of us went our separate ways, agreeing to meet at the chateau's café for lunch. Sheri ascended the terraces while Janet walked the gardens, yet they could hear each other with only slightly raised voices. Guess there weren't many secrets among the courtiers back in the day.

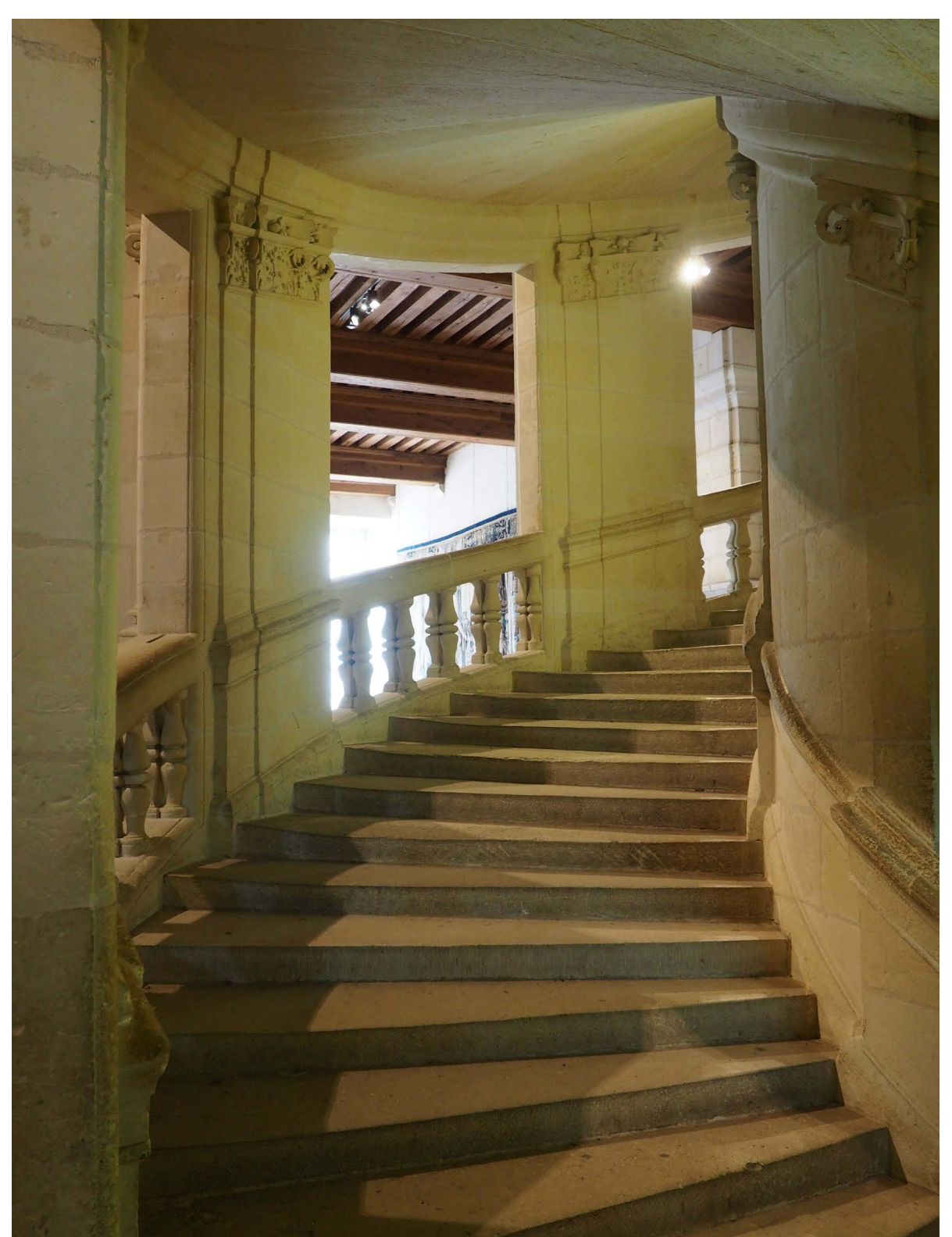


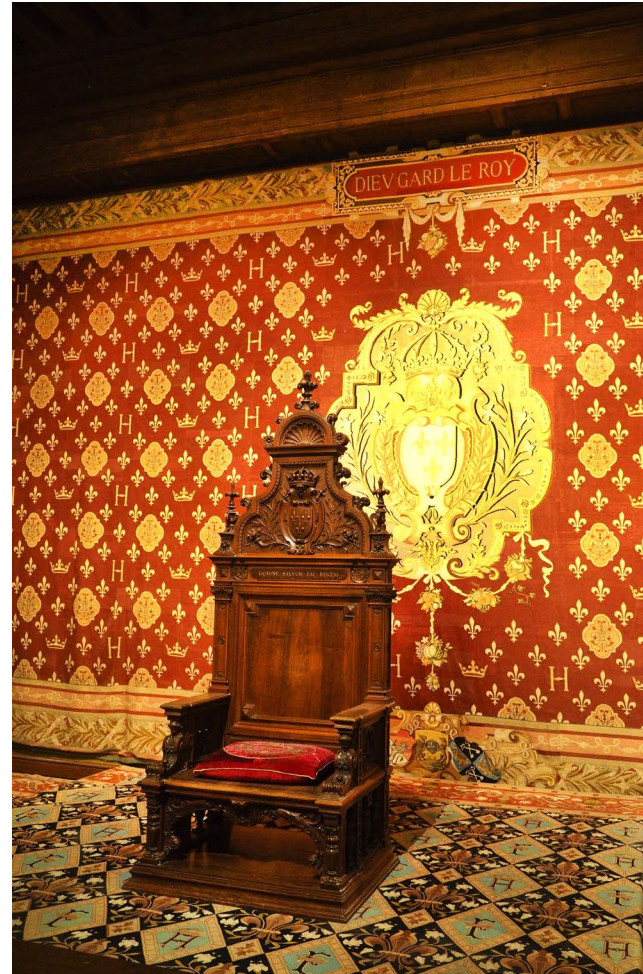
Language lack can produce some interesting confusion. Carla made it to the café first and ordered a salad and a Coke. Instead of Coca Cola, she was served croque monsieur, a ham and cheese sandwich.

Then Janet arrived, looked at the display and attempted to order bread and cheese, but she was also served croque monsieur, totally unappetizing to our vegetarian. It seems that no matter what was ordered you would receive croque monsieur. It all worked out in the end because Janet got the two salads, and Carla and Sheri shared the two sandwiches.

















We managed to arrive at our next stop chateau Cheverny only 90 minutes before closing. The grounds here were seasonally decorated with pumpkins and gourds. Much of Cheverny's serene beauty is due to continuity. Construction of the present chateau began in 1510, under the ownership of Raoul Hurault, and has remained in the Hurault family to this day. Of all the chateaux, we found Cheverny exceeded expectations. Without doubt, this is a chateau with all the history and substance of its age. However, it is home to the Huraults and one immediately feels that and feels a welcome visitor. We could have used a glass of wine if offered.

Carla and Sheri wandered the rooms, admiring the furnishings and the Lego replicas of the Mona Lisa among others. Janet went to her happy place, the gardens, finding the remarkable trees, statues and Garden of Love bronze statuary.

We stopped at a supermarket and purchased prepared beef bourguignon and a vegetable gratin, which were surprisingly good.











All in all, it was an excellent day.

Travelers 1—Toaster 0



## Chenonceau - A Lady's Castle

Tuesday only had one chateau on the to-do list: Chenonceau, a 40 minute drive, which took longer due to heavy fog. Since it hadn't burned off when we arrived, we only snapped a few shots before touring inside the chateau.

We took a time to warm ourselves by the roaring fire burning in the in the guards' room before exploring this beautiful chateau. Chenonceau was a gift from Henry II to his mistress Diane de Poitiers who built an attached bridge across the river. After the death of Henry II, his widow Catherine de' Medici, forced Diane to exchange it for another chateau and took Chenonceau for herself. Catherine's addition to the chateau was the galleries atop the bridge.

Throughout the chateau there are beautiful floral creations from the onsite floristry shop using flowers cut from the chateau's gardens.

We emerged outdoors to find the sun had burned off the heavy fog, enabling those clear photos of the bridge and the gardens denied us earlier.

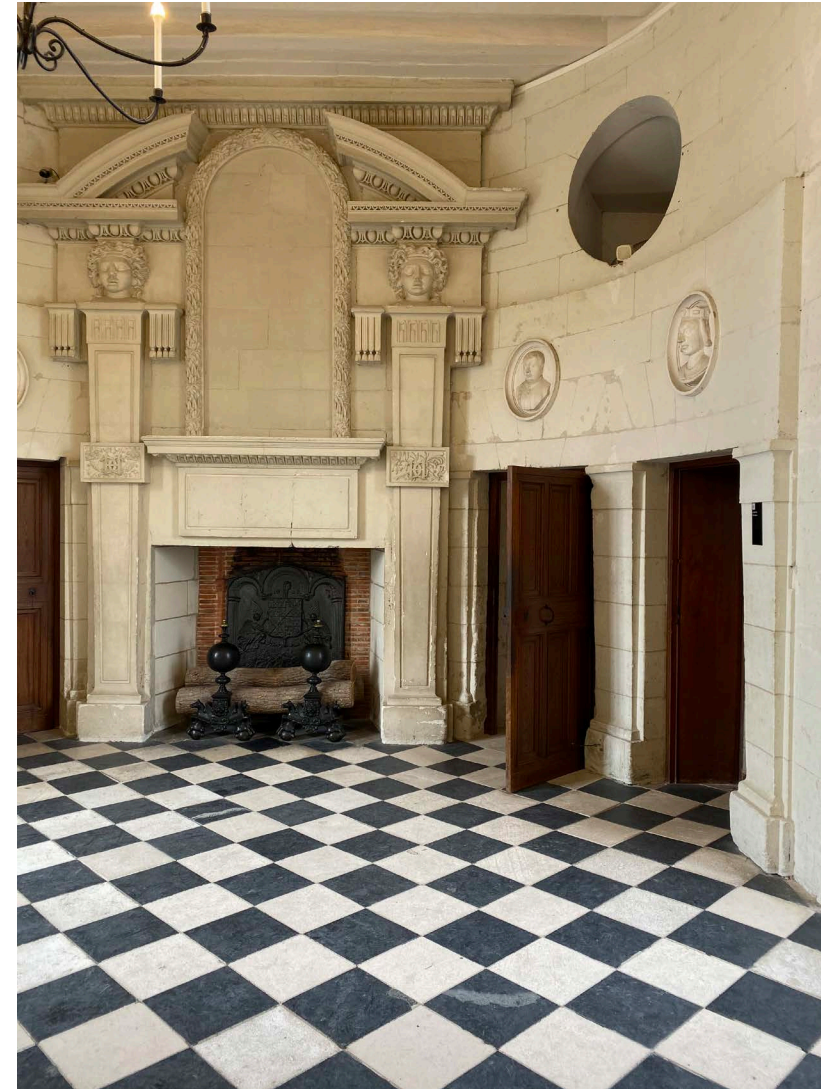
Without the fog, we would have managed faster time back to the house, except for the traffic in Tours and street blockage confusion caused by a construction zone. We were able to relax that evening because Marie, our wonderful hostess, had offered to cater a dinner of local favorites, a crisp green salad, Rillettes de Tours, Rollins de Tours, sautéed root veggies and a fresh apple pie, all accompanied by a lovely local wine.





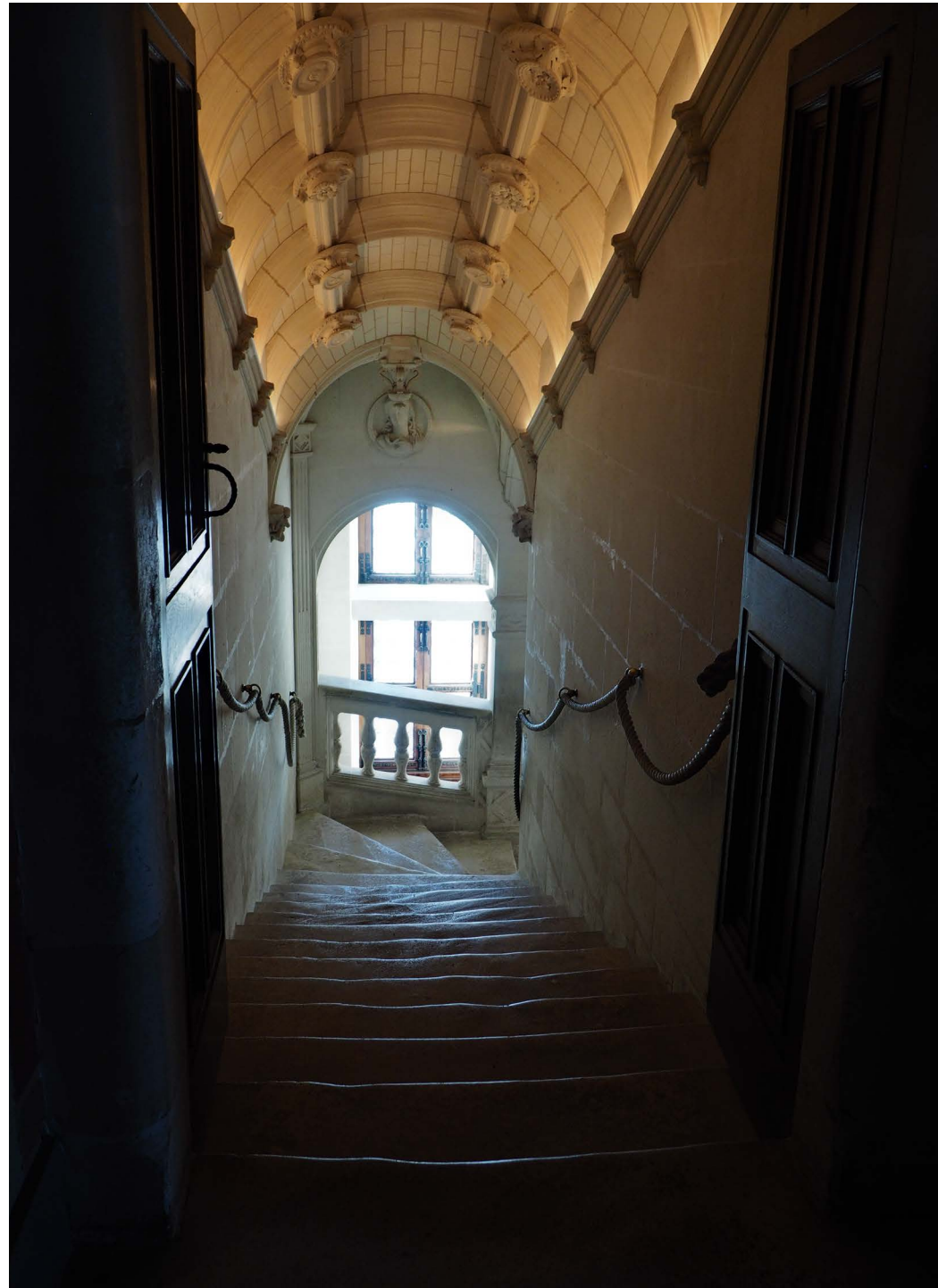






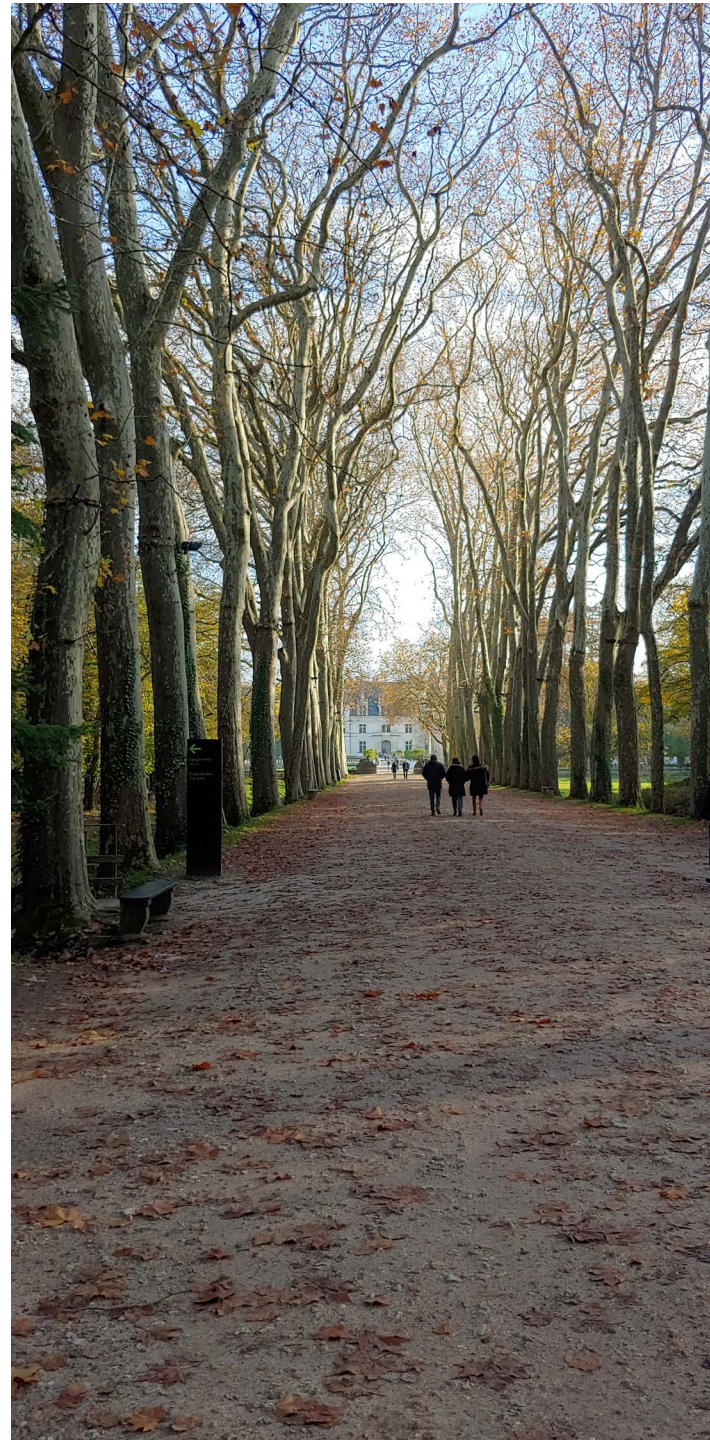














tome de Savoie "TOURS"  
  
 Sainte Maure de  
 Clouaine  
  
 Assiette Tourangelle :  
 - Rillettes de TOURS ★★ ★  
 - Rillons of TOURS ★★ ★★  
 Flower Market on Wednesday  
 Saturday  
 H. de vil  
 Boulevard Béranger





## Amboise - Art and Inventions

We visited Amboise on Wednesday, stopping for a tasty lunch at Bigot, a tearoom in old town. Afterward, we took a few photos of the old chateau, but didn't bother with a tour because we understood it wasn't furnished. We did stroll the streets of old town, taking in the sights.

Parking to visit Clos Luce, proved problematic in that it meant climbing a long steep hill on foot to reach the chateau King Francis I provided Leonardo da Vinci. This was where the renowned Italian artist and inventor spent the last few years of his life. The gardens are filled with fully constructed replicas of Da Vinci's inventions. Large, translucent panels featuring copies of his art hang in the trees to catch this light.

Since Sheri wasn't that into seeing this one, she left Carla and Janet at a much more convenient entrance at the top of the hill and returned for them an hour later. To pass the time, she dropped in on the Royal Chateau Gaillard where they were nice enough to let her walk the grounds and snap a few pics. Then she found a sunny bench and read for a while. Give Sheri a book in the garden of a French chateau, and she's set for hours!

We returned to Une Maison, Un Jardin by the road that borders the north side of the Loire River to avoid the nightmare of Tours traffic. That was a fortuitous choice as it enabled us to see the hotel which has rooms built through caves with windows overlooking the Loire. We also saw an intriguing chateau high on a hill that we tried to see but were unable to gain access.





















# Angers - Castles and Tapestries



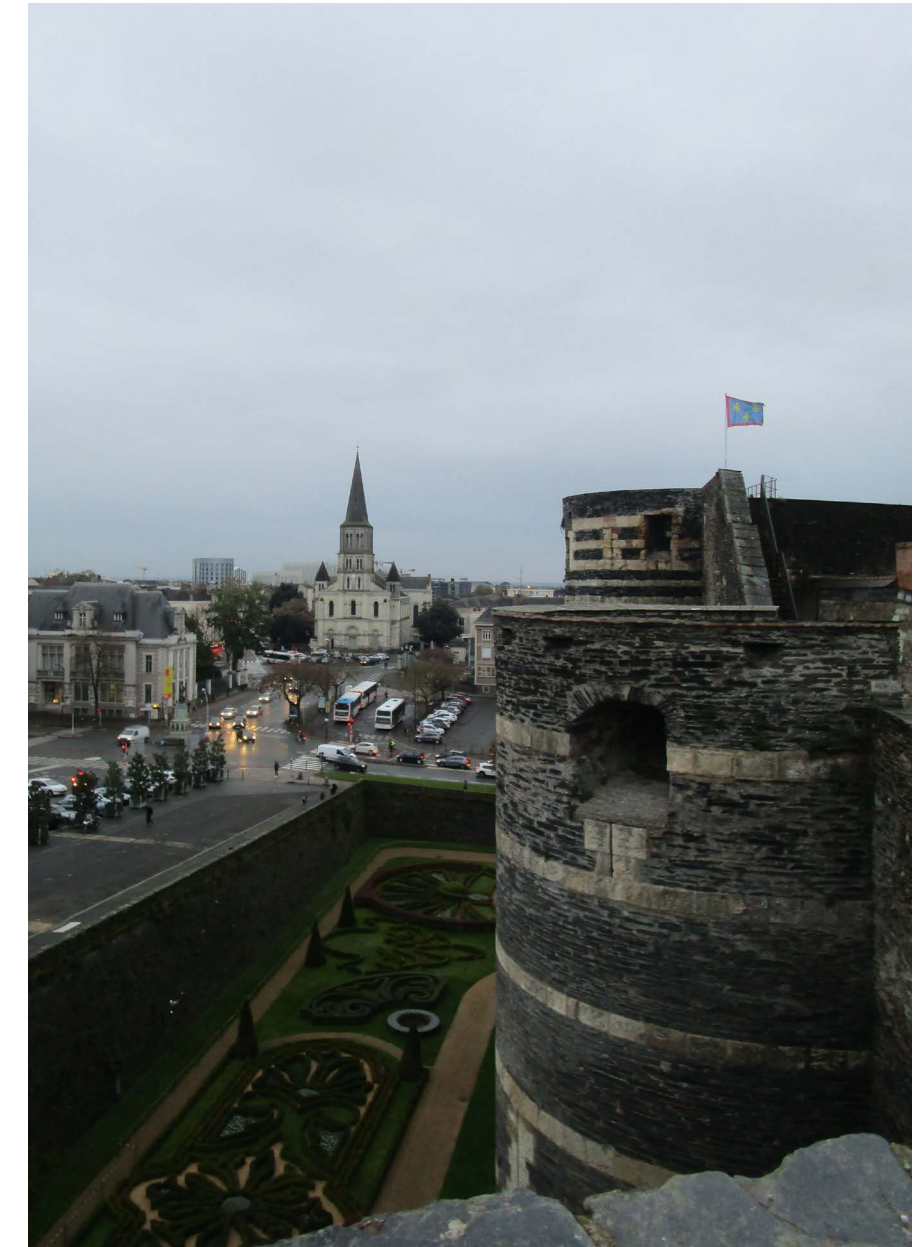
Today we journeyed west to the city of Angers to satisfy Janet's tapestry fetish. The chateau there has the ancient tapestry of the apocalypse which is so long, it wraps around a corner into a second room.

After lunch at an Australian themed bar, we took advantage of the City Pass which let us into several museums in addition to the chateau.

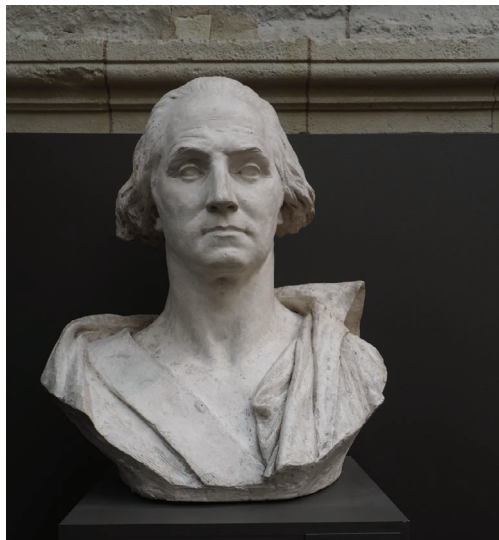
The Galerie David D'Angers houses the sculptures and other works of Pierre-Jean David. The museum building is a church from the 13th century that partially collapsed in 1815, then was restored with a glass roof in the 1980s. Most of his work is from the early 1800s, and his subjects include several prominent Americans. His most famous work features Gutenberg atop a pedestal that displays writers and thinkers from the four known corners of the world: Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas. This was Sheri's favorite museum.

The Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Angers displays a wide range of art, from 1305 through to almost the present day. Key pieces include a Jacob Jordaens self-portrait and Lorenzo Lippi's Allegory of Simulation (a woman holding a mask and a pomegranate).

The Château d'Angers dates back to the 9th century and was built as a fortress and walled city to protect against Norman invasions. It is one of the few castles never to be taken by force in its long history. A climb up to the ramparts provides a wonderful view of the grounds and the surrounding city.

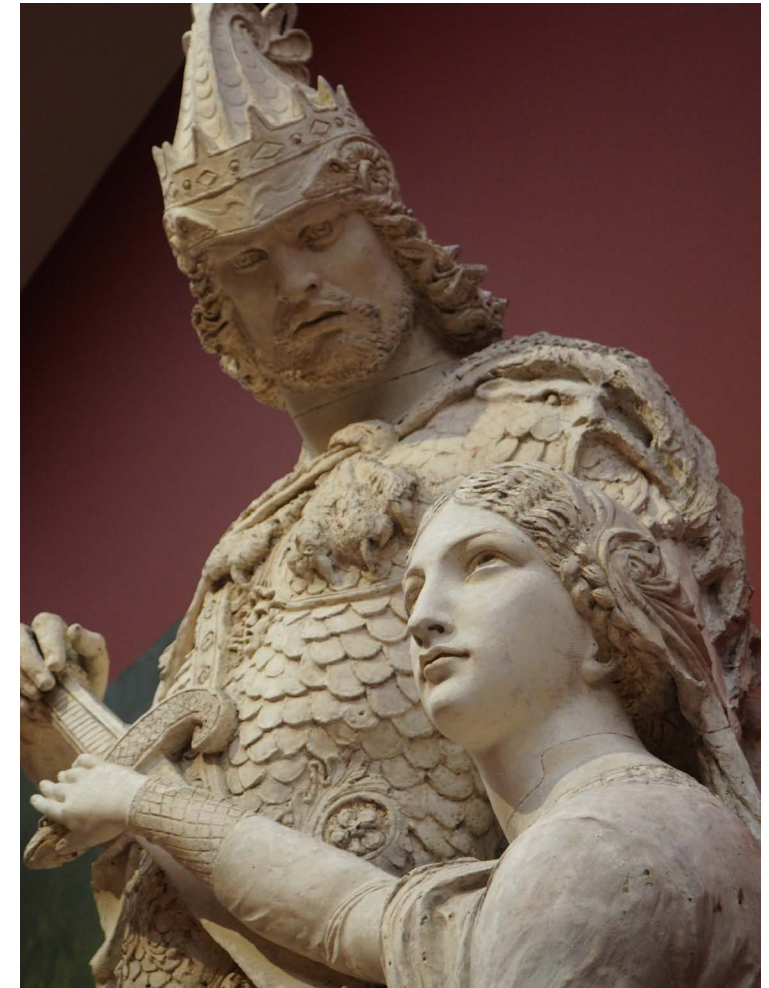






In 1373 the owner of the chateau, Louis I of Anjou, commissioned the Apocalypse Tapestries. These tapestries are made up of six sections, each 78 feet wide and 20 feet tall. Only 71 of the 90 different scenes depicted from the story of Revelations survive, many of those still remarkably vibrant.

It got dark as we were leaving Angers so we took the toll road instead of the scenic route and could drive a decent speed of 130 kph (about 80 mph) instead of hitting little towns and slowing every few miles. The toll was a crazy 10 Euros, but since we were late and hungry we wanted to get back to Une Maison where Sheri enjoyed a long conversation with Marie about art and life in general. If anyone wants to know where to stay while touring the Loire Valley, we heartily recommend Une Maison, Un Jardin. It's a spacious house and Marie offers exceptional hospitality.











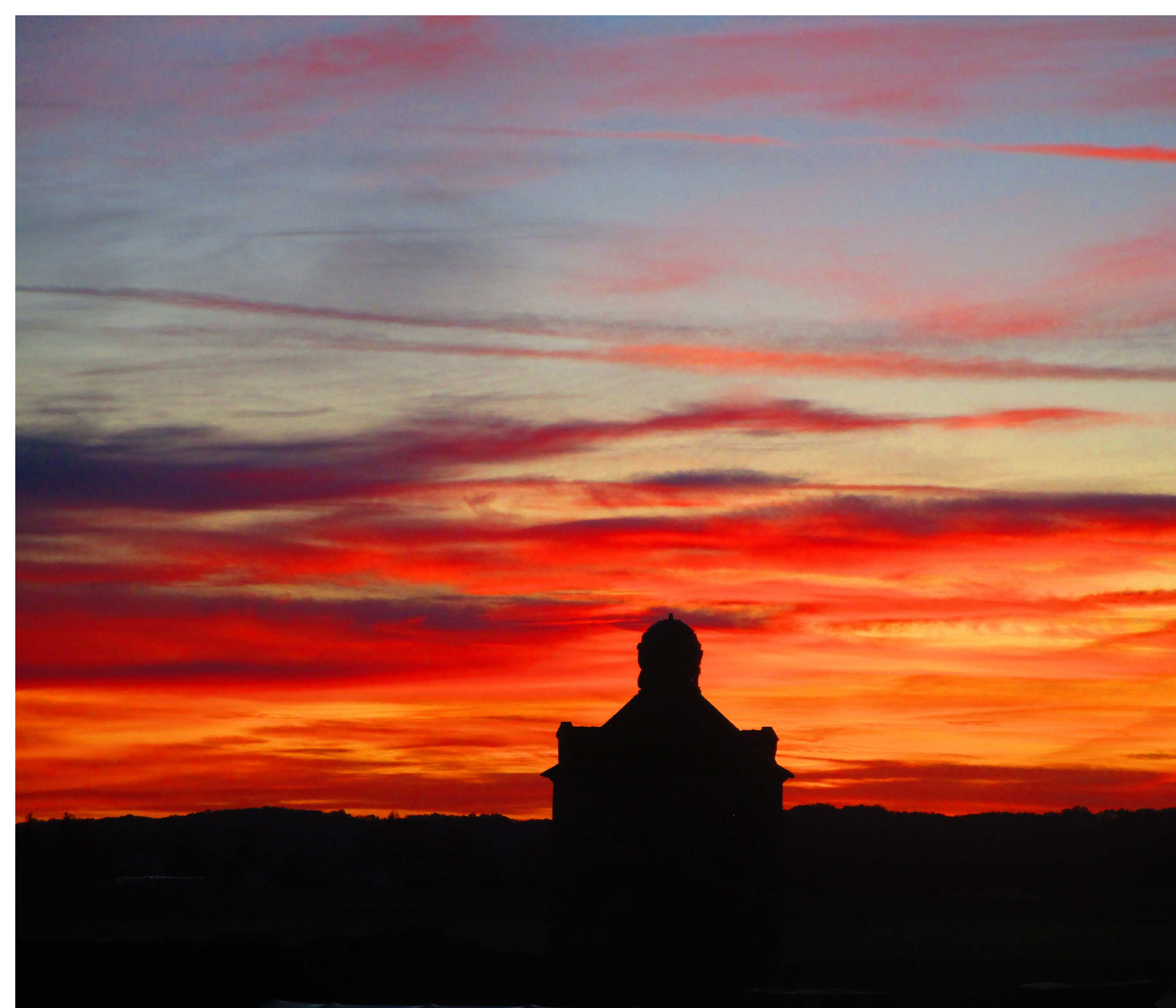
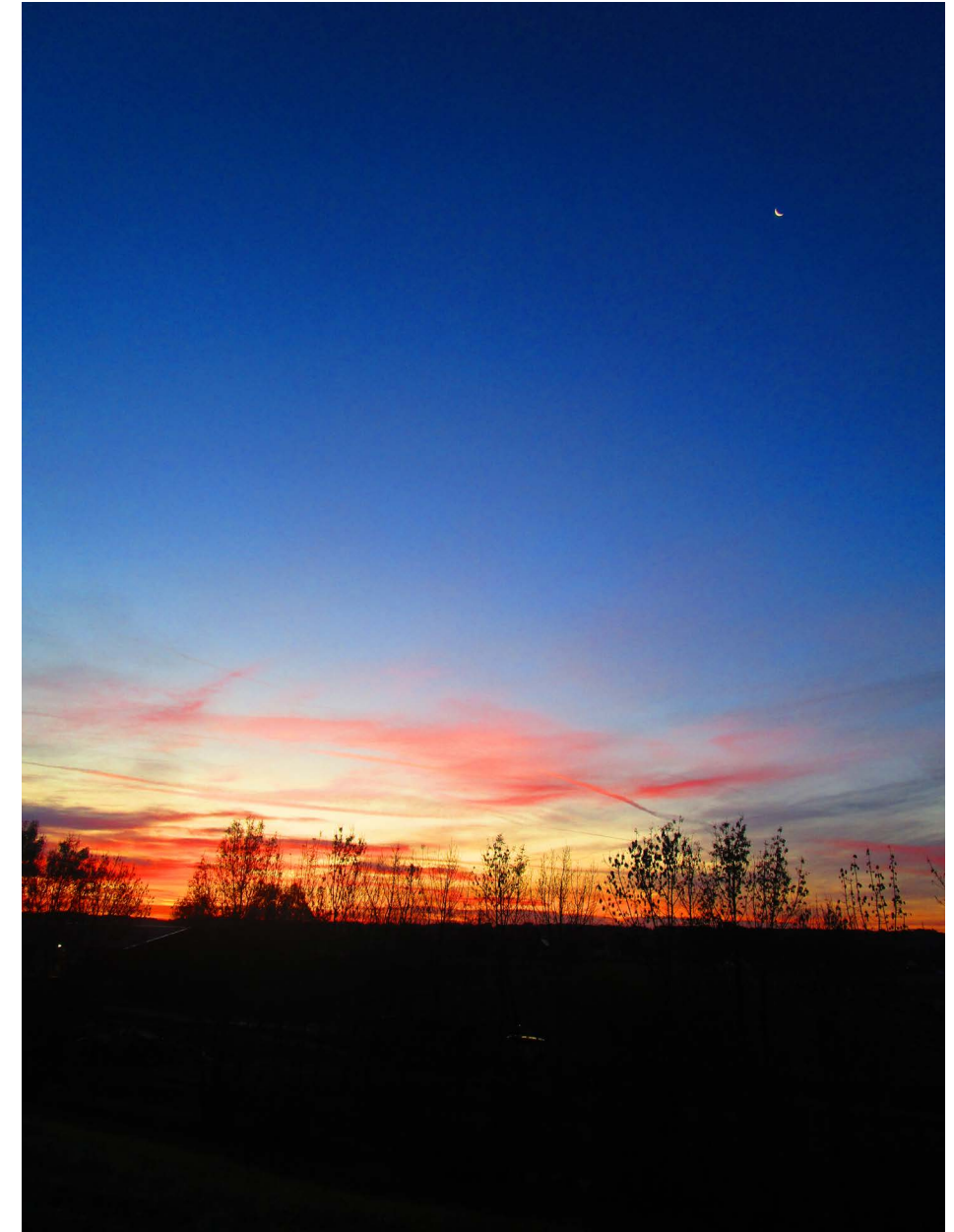




## Two Rivers, Lunch and Relaxing

We planned a lazy last day as we prepared to leave the Loire Valley. So with full intention to sleep in, Janet found herself wide awake at 7:00 a.m., looked out the window and saw the moon, no clouds for once. She took a long walk down the narrow, country lanes to the Loire in order to catch beautiful shots of the sunrise over the river.

We had a nice lunch at La Maison du Passeur in the small town of Savonnières then walked for a while. Residents have built wonderful replicas of boats that traveled the Cher and Loire rivers hundreds of years ago. On the way back to the house we stopped for one last shot of the small church at Berthenay and took a picture of the house on the wrong side of the levee that has a bridge from the front door to the road. Tomorrow we catch the train back to Paris then fly home Sunday. We will miss France.









# A Train Ride, Dinner and Flying Home

We had a relaxed morning then loaded the car with our bags and treasures and left for the train station. After a stop in Savonnières for lunch, we fought with several gas pumps and never found one that would accept any of our credit cards. Although Sheri tried hard to explain the gas situation when we returned the rent car, neither Avis agent spoke English.

We had a long wait in the little Saint Pierre des Corps Railway Station but it ended with a nice first-class ride back to the airport. The CDG Hilton reminded us of a slice of America in France, but we weren't homesick, just a little weary. Dining at the hotel restaurant, Sheri finally got onion soup and the most amazing dessert, Pain perdu, caramel, glace vanilla (French toast, caramel and vanilla ice cream). Yes, it was as good as it sounds.

The next morning we took the Hilton shuttle to the airport terminal and finally figured out the confusing mess that is Charles de Gaulle and got checked in. We said our goodbyes and headed to our gates for the very long flight home.

