

# Stone Mason's Journal

by Michael Davidson

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Autumn 2002

*Two French thoroughbreds run pell mell through the rocky Mayenne of Brittany. Their raven haired mistress riders crop their eager backsides with smirking satisfaction as they stirrup and spur over hedgerow and ditch.*

*This is deep France. The air is fresh and briny with the smell of apples. There are apples on the breakfast tables, apples in the markets; and apples in the cheeks of fresh faced lovers who openly covert their ripe passions in youthfull display under the russet colored leaf and golden boughs of this rough buccolic paradise.*

*My outdoor breakfast table baths in the morning sun as I spy the riders in their compete for the last of the hill. The massive foremuscles of the beasts pump and furrow the fertile soil into the steep of the climb. Their hard hindquarters dig and lather wets the riders seat and saddle allowing it glisten in the sun. Clearly they are pleased with their skill as they disappear through the alleys and golden groves of orchards.*

*My breakfast is simple: black coffee and apple crepes with a brush of powdered sugar nestled next to a small "pitchet" (pitcher) of cool cider. I greedily welcome the crepes sweet nourishment amid the color and poetry of this primitive setting. From where I sit, song birds celebrate the crisp morning air from atop the stonewalls of a 15 century farmhouse; cut hay lays rolled in the fields and the sky is a crystal blue from the nearby sea. The peace of my meditation is broken when the riders suddenly crest the hill and break for a turn nearby my table. With arched eye and mischievous grin they pound past, showering the air with moist bits of warm turf. Humbly I am caught sweeping turf from my pants leg while mesmerized in the sight of their smartly arched backsides promenading in brisk canter to the paddock circle ..*

*"Bon Jour, Bon Jour" They call in unison. I answered back, "Bon Jour", smiling and pretending no dirt landed on me . They ride towards me and dismount; their steaming champions stand ready at bridle and paw the turf with well deserved pats. They introduce themselves as Sophie and Yvonique, historical building conservators for Brittany and the Mayenne region. They are jovial, yet seem in command of the new situation, and of me, I'm afraid to admit, I like them immediately.*

*Sophie has big round eyes; they are soft almost doe like. She looks at you with a bit of surprise and discovery. Like you are her unexpected gift. Her French welcomes you in. It is songlike. With little girl pouting of the lip. Her mouth blushes and pinks crimson as she kisses vowels and verbs. When she makes a point she softly scolds you, to listen only to her.*

*She is a professional architect and an expert on medieval*

*structures. Yvonique is more mischievous and high spirited in her humor. Her looks are pretty with flashes of natural raw passion. She speaks her French in cooing cadence allowing a creative little tongue to dart and dance sensuously along wetted lips quick to smile. Like Sophie she is a architect with a degree in historic preservation. Both play well off one another and both look smart in their black riding attire.*

*Yvonique peers through you with unsettling attention; its hard to read between the lines, as both are having a lot of fun. Cradling her crop, she straddles her long leg with black riding boot on the fence, then shakes her red hair down in wild ringlets from underneath her riding helmet. She then takes a towel from Sophie and begins to dry her inner thigh and boot free of the lather of horse sweat and the sweet smell of grass that has collected there. All of a sudden she tilts her head back and with a little smile apologises for being "so wet."*

*My French is bad, but not that bad. The double entendre of this culture defies reality; before I can comprehend her silliness they are already laughing at me and the earthy joke. I laugh too, responding that "Je ne pas parle bien Francais (I don't speak very good French) to which she abruptly cuts me off by saying, "but you don't have to." We all laugh now. I'm beginning to enjoy my role as the straight man; they too are at ease as any pretensions that were there before are dissipated into the fragrant morning air of this ancient place.*

*Our meeting has been pre-arranged by some stonemason friends who will join us later. They change clothes and we begin our tour.*

*The sites we are at are old, 15 century at least, with parts perhaps medieval. The walls of the farmhouses/ fortress drip with history. Oak beams wishbone throughout the exterior stonework. Chimneys climb high over ancient heavy slate roofs that are tied with decorative iron bars to peak and gable. Bullet holes and pocket blasts tell of war and revolution. Ivy turrets harbor master bedrooms and Napoleonic sleigh beds that we pat for comfort and fun .*

*Sophie and Yvonique coo like song birds over honeysuckle as they walk through the history and of the methods and materials of the construction. From the bedroom they have me look down past the bare of their arm into the courtyards below. The yards are worn cobble set in puddled clays mixed with lime. Draft horses clump by arched stone doorways. Inside the ivy covered walls there are interior rooms similar to the one we are standing in that boast of long 18" square oak beams, gnarled and buried in walls of stone that are stucco with natural plasters of mustard yellow and off white. I am intoxicated by the scent of their hair and person as I am led into ancient kitchens that have*

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