

FRIDAY - SUNDAY, DECEMBER 19 - 21, 2008

WEEKEND JOURNAL.

EUROPE

Merry cookies

Our holiday tasting tour
of Europe's best biscuits



Everyday Champagnes | Books on golf and art

Contents

3 | Fashion

On Style: Locally grown design

Eyeglass chic

4 | Film

Morgenstern on 'Gran Torino'

Philip Seymour Hoffman and 'Doubt'

5 | Wine

Everyday Champagnes

Wines to woo the single guy

6-7 | Cover story Food

Merry cookies

Our tasting tour of Europe's best biscuits



PHOTOS: JORIS LUYTEN

8 | Sports

Golf Journal: Rare reads of the green

Collecting: stamps with staying power

9 | Books

Coffee-table classics

10 | Top Picks

Art in Stockholm, theater in London



11 | Taste

The Santa Delusion?

12 | Time Off

Our arts and culture calendar

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Hoop dreams

Obama's new team is brushing up on its basketball skills.
WSJ.com/Lifestyle

The big picture

For gifts this season, more lush books on photography, architecture.
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Trouble in paradise

Gated communities on Hawaii's Big Island are feeling the pinch.
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WEEKEND JOURNAL

EUROPE

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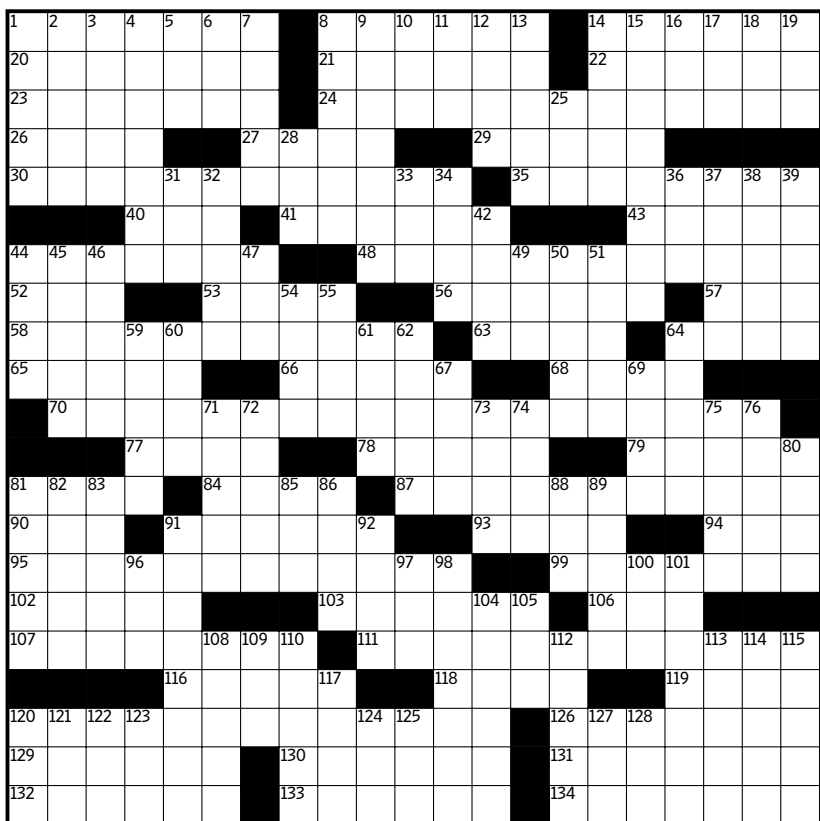
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THE JOURNAL CROSSWORD / Edited by Mike Shenk

Across

- 1 Best-selling bourbon
- 8 Curls target
- 14 Longtime Chevy model
- 20 "1984" location
- 21 Fielding novel
- 22 Main man
- 23 There's interest in their work
- 24 Deface an artwork?
- 26 Rock's Jethro ____
- 27 It's a form of hydrated silica
- 29 "SNL" producer Michaels
- 30 Wrong way to get syrup from the maple tree?
- 35 Won back
- 40 Since, informally
- 41 Unbelievable bargains
- 43 Valuable collection
- 44 Icon setting
- 48 Nutmeg crusher, for example?
- 52 Rose of rock
- 53 On deck
- 56 Settee setting
- 57 Spleen
- 58 Be the least coherent?
- 63 ____-a-brac
- 64 Identity concealer
- 65 Brother-in-law of Patty and Selma
- 66 Many choirboys
- 68 Final Four org.
- 70 Big Brother's eyeballs, perhaps?

Following the S&P / by Trip Payne



- 77 Barely sustained, with "out"
- 78 Funnel-shaped, in fashion
- 79 Sources of paper or pepper
- 81 Y chromosome carrier
- 84 Hayseed
- 87 Italian version of Cheez Whiz?
- 90 Pete's Wicked, for one
- 91 Top-of-Web-page ad
- 93 "The Flagship City"
- 94 Summer cooler
- 95 What an astronaut puts on a boo-boo?
- 99 Swanson entrees
- 102 Afghan, sometimes
- 103 Ought to
- 106 Jr.'s namesake
- 107 Los Angeles suburb
- 111 March king?
- 116 Wash up against
- 118 Its flag features a curved dagger
- 119 Diddly squat
- 120 Request to a shopaholic spouse?
- 126 Doorman protectors
- 129 "Yeah, yeah!"
- 130 "Yay, yay!"
- 131 Fox trot forerunner
- 132 Religious devotion
- 133 White poplar relatives
- 134 Tot tenders
- 13 Tastiness
- 14 Whitman's "____ the Body Electric"
- 15 #1 hit for Hall & Oates
- 16 Trading spot
- 17 "Thrilla in Manila" champ
- 18 Burgess's "Of Mice and Men" co-star
- 19 Braz. neighbor
- 25 Is for more than one
- 28 Faux ____
- 31 Subject of a popular touring exhibit
- 32 UV filterer
- 33 Foldable reference
- 34 Inconsequencia interruption
- 36 Bank offering
- 37 Sony Ericsson rival
- 38 Civil rights leader Medgar
- 39 Literature Nobelism Walcott
- 42 Striker's bane
- 44 Sprinter's event
- 45 Nationals, formerly
- 46 Economic downturn
- 47 According to
- 49 Fumble
- 50 Rapper's accessories
- 51 Former "Daily Show" correspondent Mo
- 54 Busy time for Hallmark
- 55 E-Z Pass payment
- 59 Giggly sound
- 60 Go a long way
- 61 Covered walkway
- 62 Workshop collection
- 64 "Blossom" star Bialik
- 67 Overlook
- 69 Air: Prefix
- 71 Place to dry out
- 72 Minneapolis suburb
- 73 Memo label
- 74 In the vicinity of
- 75 11th-century king of Denmark
- 76 Arm bones
- 80 Some business partners
- 81 Yawl pair
- 82 Letter opener?
- 83 Come to understand
- 85 King's domain?
- 86 Shoe brand since 1916
- 88 Bitty bark
- 89 Add more lubricant to
- 91 Puzzle
- 92 Bowl sounds
- 96 Basque cuisine staple
- 97 It's to the right: Abbr.
- 98 Old Volkswagen model
- 100 Placket coverer
- 101 One who both plays and sits on the bench
- 104 British tars
- 105 Material for forensic scientists
- 108 Like some lagers
- 109 LummoX
- 110 The younger Obama daughter
- 112 Pesky cloud
- 113 He loved Beatrice
- 114 Landscaper's device
- 115 Harsh sounds
- 117 General ____ chicken
- 120 Post-dubbing title
- 121 Abbas's gp.
- 122 Golfer known as the Big Easy
- 123 Warriors' org.
- 124 Prune
- 125 It gets refined
- 127 It ended on Nov. 11, 1918
- 128 Antonym creator

Last week's solution



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Crossword online
For an interactive version of The Wall Street Journal Crossword, WSJ.com subscribers can go to
WSJ.com/WeekendJournal

❖ Fashion

Thinking local when shopping

FOODIES TRANSFORMED our dining tables by teaching us to buy organic lettuce and tasty fresh eggs from local farms. Now, it's increasingly possible to "buy local" with fashion, as more small designers turn to selling directly to consumers in a tough economy.

Beyond the big corporate-owned fashion brands, many excel-

On Style

CHRISTINA BINKLEY

lent designers sell clothes, shoes and accessories from their own storefronts and studios. Michelle Obama has popularized Maria Pinto, a designer in Chicago who has built a regional clientele. But Ms. Pinto is just one of many rising local designers—people who may have just laid down their shears when they show you around the shop.

At the Hunt & Gather shop in Vancouver's Gastown district last Friday, chic designs hung in the front of the store—and in the back, designer Natalie Purschwitz felted wool for shawls, a process that involves raw wool, hot water and soap. "I'm working during the day while people are shopping," Ms. Purschwitz says. "It's crazy, I know."

Shopping at small shops isn't as fast as dashing into Zara or H&M, which have predictable merchandise from Los Angeles to Paris. But for consumers, the benefits are as clear as the crisp flavor of locally grown foods: The clothes are exclusive, and the designers often offer alterations and special orders—as well as the pleasure of personal interaction with them.

That's true luxury—without the layers of markups, showroom overhead and shipping that are built into the prices at upscale retail stores. "You don't pay for marketing for my shoes; you pay for craft," says George Esquivel, who sells custom-made shoes in Los Angeles to clients including the basketball player Yao Ming. Mr. Esquivel's shoes have an artisanal quality—no two pairs are precisely alike, and he can make them to fit any foot.

Local designers are often willing to custom-make their designs. "I can hammer out a bangle to fit any hand," says Judith Bright, a Memphis, Tenn., jewelry designer whose work can be found on the TV show "Gossip Girls" and at Henri Bendel.

Then there's the psychological satisfaction of finding good designs in your own neighborhood. The carbon footprint of locally bought designs is smaller than clothes that were designed in Paris, assembled in China and sold in Chicago. And, of course, it's fun to name-drop a small designer: You sound so in-the-know.

Though it's an intrinsic pleasure for the customer to "meet the artist," it's less obvious that designers would want to mingle with customers. Yet many artisans say that has become an increasingly important part of their business.

In the South End of Boston, Sara Campbell sells elegantly tailored womenswear from her shop



Stephen Sherman

A local angle

Many travelers cherish lists of local designers they've encountered. Here are a few recommendations I've collected around the country.

- **Vancouver** huntandgather.ca
- **Toronto** BrianBaileyDesign.com
- **Boston** saracampbell.com
- **New York** linoto.com, johnbartlettyny.com
- **Chicago** mariapinto.com
- **Los Angeles** esquivelshoes.com, carolyoung.com, elainekim.com, matrushka.com
- **Memphis** judithbright.com
- **Milan** rosesroses.it



Evans Vestal Ward for The Wall Street Journal

Sara Campbell (top) of Boston and Carol Young of Los Angeles (above) are among an increasing number of local designers selling directly to consumers. Above right, the Hunt & Gather shop in Vancouver.

on Plympton Street. Her design studio is in back. If you try on a dress or suit, it may well be Ms. Campbell who assists you. She thinks buying local is catching on. "I think society is going back to it—you know, the old barber shop," she says.

Both Ms. Campbell and Ms. Purschwitz used to work out of private studios and sold their designs to retailers. When they



Hunt and Gather

needed new workspaces, they both happened to find studios that had storefronts. Voilà. Ms. Campbell says her shop is more profitable than her wholesale sales. "It's where my margin is," she says.

For designers, direct sales offer an instant payoff and a bigger cut of the profits than sales through stores. But studio sales are productive in other ways, too. Elaine Kim, in Los Angeles, began selling her graceful silk and wool designs from her studio this fall, and these days she can often be found moving from customer to customer, discussing different ways of wearing a garment. "I've learned so much about what works, what people want right now," says Ms. Kim, adding that customers seem pleased by the exclusivity of such sales.

Jason Evege sells his finely made bed linens online, but he has been holding what he calls "atelier moments" when customers come to his New York studio, Linoto. "That hands-on experience—with fabric, customers and a team of expert seamstresses—is the 'grounded' part of fashion that I really love," he says.

Many of these local designers report that customers tend to buy more when they're served by the designer rather than another salesperson. Little wonder: I find designers offer the best advice about how to wear their creations.

Customers may also be swayed by the rich experience of shopping in a design studio. When I visited the L.A. store Undesigned by Carol Young recently, the designer was editing photos for her Web site as she sat by the cash register. Dora, her beagle, waddled out to greet customers. In Ms. Young's design studio in back, patterns for her neatly minimal dresses, jackets and pants hung from one wall, while a big cutting table hid two sewing machines.

I have a number of items in my closet from local designers, and I cherish each item and the memory of buying it. When my driver in Milan last fall mentioned that his mother designs shoes with a label called Rose's Roses, I asked him to take me to her studio on the fashionable Corso Lodi. Next thing I knew, the designer, Rosa Aiuto, was helping me try on a pair of heels (which I bought at close to the wholesale price). You never know where such adventures can lead—it turned out that she had designed the shoes for Vera Wang's spring 2009 runway collection. I'll be back.

Email Christina.Binkley@wsj.com

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Close-fitting
Tell us about your favorite
local designers, at
WSJ.com/Runway



A spectacle of yourself

BY TERI AGINS

WHAT TYPES of eyeglasses are stylish, considering different facial shapes, coloring and age? Should I go with one or several different styles? How about add-ons, such as lenses that darken in sunlight or blended bifocals?

—J.T., New York City

You are wise to take special care in choosing your eyeglasses, which are a pricey investment that everybody notices. You might want to enlist a shopping buddy with a great sense of style to help steer you through the maze of options.

More people are treating prescription glasses as fashion accessories—and they collect several styles to match their moods. For starters, both sexes can't go wrong with brushed metal frames that match dark brown or gray hair. If your face is long, oval, rectangular and some round shapes will provide balance, while fuller-faced types will look good in rectangular lenses that aren't too big. Don't hesitate to try on snazzy variations of tortoiseshell, transparent, or even burgundy or navy frames.

Choose blended bifocals or lenses that darken if you hate toting around extra pairs of readers or shades. For glasses that disappear on your face, opt for frameless lenses with no-glare glass and wire temples without designer logos.

I'm a guy who is 180 centimeters tall and weighs about 86 kilograms. I always buy my tops and sweaters in size large, but now my girlfriend insists that I should go with a medium because the oversized look is out. What do you think?

—S.G., Princeton, N.J.

Fellows, there's a reason why the 80%-off sale rack still has so many oversized clothes: They are truly passé. No matter how old you are, you should think trim—though not necessarily tight—for all your shirts, sweaters, jackets and pants. You will smile when you look in the mirror, because body-conscious clothes make you look thinner, taller and, yes, even younger.

Stop thinking that "small" is for wimps. I have personally steered three six-foot guys into wool sweaters with an "S" on the label. These men were surprised to discover that the small sweaters were comfortably snug and the sleeves were long enough.

'Gran Torino' is the perfect Eastwood vehicle

NO ONE MAKES MOVIES like "Gran Torino" any more, and more's the pity. This one, with Clint Eastwood as director and star, is concerned with honor and atonement, with rough justice and the family of man. It raises irascibility to the level of folk art, takes unapologetic time-outs for unfashionable moral debates, revives acting conventions that haven't been in fashion for half a century and keeps

Film

JOE MORGENSTERN

you watching every frame as Mr. Eastwood snarls, glowers, mutters, growls and grins his way through the performance of a lifetime.

He plays Walt Kowalski, a Korean War vet, and newly a widower, whose pride and joy is the immaculate 1972 Ford Gran Torino fastback that sits in his garage. Detroit's suddenly acute problems add a layer of poignancy to a film that's already elegiac. During the industry's heyday Walt worked on Ford's assembly line, where he installed the steering column in his own car. Now he's retired and embittered, a hard-shell crustacean perched on his front porch watching foreigners he deplors as they invade the neighborhood.

Deplores is putting it genteelly. Mr. Eastwood and his writer, Nick Schenk, give Walt all of Archie Bunker's bile, though little of Archie's sly wit, at least for a while. No need to reproduce the radioactive epithets; suffice it to say Walt never lacks for political incorrectness. While the very sight of a Hmong refugee family next door produces pit-bull rumblings in his throat, another target of his ire is Christopher Carley's parish priest, Father Janovich, who wants to get him into the confessional booth. "I confess," Walt tells the baby-faced cleric, "that I have no desire to confess to a boy that's just out of the seminary."

If Walt were only a refurbished version of the lightning rod that electrified "All In the Family" audiences decades ago, "Gran Torino" might be an awkward curiosity and little more. But the filmmaker cares,



Clint Eastwood in 'Gran Torino'; right, Kate Winslet and David Kross in 'The Reader.'



The Weinstein Company

vailing doubt. We bring our own doubts, to be sure. They're based on what we've learned about predatory priests, and they're welcome too, for "Doubt" is not about dispensing answers, any more than it's about defending the priesthood. The movie is a mystery tour of human motives, and a cautionary tale about the dangers of being sure.

'The Reader'

People can give themselves away with a single word. Early in "The Reader," which is about words and literacy, and much more, Hanna Schmitz, a German tram conductor played by Kate Winslet, comes upon a teenage schoolboy who's obviously ill and takes him into her flat. "Have you always been weak?" she asks. The word sounds a faint alarm—weak as opposed to Germanic-strong?—that grows louder as the film swings between past and present, though also between impassioned and abstract.

The story starts in 1958. Hanna seduces the boy, Michael (David Kross), making him an eager slave who must read classic literature to her in exchange for their illicit sex. (He's under-age by several years.) Later, as a law student, Michael discovers that Hanna, as a young woman, was a concentration-camp guard. From that moment on, the young man (who's played in middle age by Ralph Fiennes) must struggle with the meaning of what he has learned—he loved her, after all—in something of the same way that modern Germany still struggles with the meaning of the Nazi era.

Stephen Daldry directed, skillfully, from David Hare's adaptation of a widely read novel by Bernhard Schlink. The elegant cinematography is the work of two of today's finest shooters, Chris Menges and Roger Deakins. (Mr. Deakins also shot "Doubt.") And the cast is superb: especially Kate Winslet, who transcends, by far, the limits of her character's narrow soul. Yet "The Reader" remains schematic, and ultimately reductive. It really is about literacy, which proves to be a disarmingly small answer to the enormous questions posed by Hanna's dark past.

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Opening this week in Europe

- Australia Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, U.K.
- Bolt Iceland, Turkey
- Christmas Tale Norway
- Let the Right One In Denmark, Germany
- The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas Norway
- The Duchess Italy
- Twilight Croatia

Source: IMDb
WSJ.com subscribers can read reviews of these films and others at WSJ.com/FilmReview

as he did in "Letters From Iwo Jima," about racial and ethnic reconciliation, and the education of Walt Kowalski begins when a young man from the Hmong family next door tries to steal his precious car. Soon he's involved with the family to an extent he never imagined, let alone wanted, and "Gran Torino" becomes a vehicle for another kind of reconciliation—Clint Eastwood's coming to terms with the vigilante tactics of Dirty Harry.

His new movie isn't an apology for all that, but it's a meditation, as affecting as it is entertaining, on the limits of violence and the power of unchained empathy. It seems to be exactly the movie he wanted to make at this point in his long career, even though some of the performances, by inexperienced or non-

professional actors, are less than successful. "Gran Torino" is defiantly old-fashioned, and occasionally, albeit endearingly, self-indulgent. Most of all it's heartfelt, and for me the feeling was mutual.

'Doubt'

"Doubt" leaves none in one respect: John Patrick Shanley was the right person to direct this fascinating screen version of his celebrated play, set mostly inside a parochial school in the Bronx in 1964. Otherwise, doubts abound, exactly as they're meant to, along with four examples of superlative acting.

Philip Seymour Hoffman is the charming, compassionate Father Flynn, a pillar of humanity set against the school's steely principal, Meryl Streep's Sister Aloysius; she

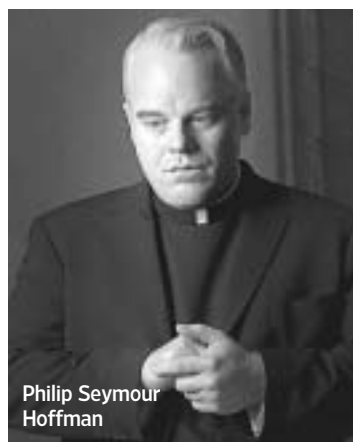
upholds her own authority, and that of the Church, with rigid conviction and a baleful gaze. In the wake of John F. Kennedy's assassination, Father Flynn preaches a sermon about loss of faith. Rather than decry it, he tells his congregation that "doubt can be as powerful and sustaining as certainty." But Sister Aloysius will have none of it. Rather than jump to a conclusion, she leaps to one heedlessly when Sister James, a naive nun played by Amy Adams, suggests that the priest may be paying improper attention to an altar boy named Donald Miller, the school's first black student.

Doubt is the vital essence of Mr. Shanley's drama. Every reason to believe in Father Flynn's decency, or to question Sister Aloysius's probity, comes accompanied by a counter-

Philip Seymour Hoffman on the benefit of 'Doubt'

BY LAUREN A.E. SCHUKER

PHILIP SEYMOUR Hoffman won an Academy Award nearly three years ago for his performance as writer Truman Capote in the film "Capote." The 41-year-old actor is also a two-time Tony Award nominee. Mr. Hoffman combines his love of theater and film in "Doubt," the big-screen adaptation of John Patrick Shanley's Pulitzer Prize-winning play, which opened in the U.S. last week and opens in Europe next month. "Doubt" tells the story of an authoritarian nun (played by Meryl Streep) who grows increasingly suspicious of a recently arrived priest, Father Flynn (Mr. Hoffman), who befriends a black student at her school. Mr. Hoffman discussed how the lessons of "Doubt" extend beyond the walls of the Catholic Church.



Philip Seymour Hoffman

film very different from how you act on stage?

No, not really. I have worked in the theater so much—I direct in theater and act in theater—that it doesn't make much of a difference anymore. I've never done a film adapted from a play before,

though, so doing this film was definitely a new, fresh experience for me.

Q: How did you prepare to play a Catholic priest? Your character in "Doubt" is so different from other roles you've played on screen.

Actually, a friend of mine who is a father helped me to prepare and learn about what the Catholic Church was like in the 1960s [when "Doubt" is set]. So he informed me about all the rituals—what he does during mass, where he puts things, how he addresses the audience. But after that, I kind of left it alone. I didn't want to learn too much more about the details because the idea of "Doubt" is that its story could take place in other places than the church. It's a parable that could take place in any sphere of society where there is a hierarchy, like the military for example, or

any place where there is a changing of the guard and that shift is messing up the order of things. It's really a story about hierarchy, and not just in the church.

Q: If the story could take place anywhere, as you say, then why is it set in a Catholic church, and about child abuse?

Well, that's the setting for a reason. Those issues are a real hot button for people, so it makes the battle between the new and old guards immediately palpable and dramatic. My character wants to bring people into the church, he's progressive—he wants them to come into the church whether they're in doubt or not. But the church doesn't have a lot of room for doubt, it's all about dogma—so it's a good setting to explore the idea.

Q: In "Doubt," you play a

priest whose conscience is in question. Do you believe your character is guilty of child molestation or did you not choose to feel one way or the other?

I can't tell you! That would ruin the movie. But I did choose a side—I have to decide, I can't decide not to know. But no matter what history I gave the character, he could still be guilty or not guilty. The play is about not knowing—so if I told you, it would ruin it. If you knew, you would only watch the film from one perspective. But the story is about having no evidence, not knowing whether to convict someone. It's called "Doubt" for a reason!

WSJ.com

Screening room
See clips from 'Doubt,'
'Gran Torino' and 'The Reader,'
at WSJ.com/Lifestyle

Champagnes with everyday flair

LARRY BRODSKY of New Bern, N.C., wrote to us recently with a question: "I have not been able to find a wine to complement beef teriyaki. The shoyu, ginger and sugar seem to kill any of the reds that I normally drink, which is anything but Merlot. What would you recommend within the limits of a grocery store selection?"

We responded: "For a red, try a Malbec

Tastings

DOROTHY J. GAITER
AND JOHN BRECHER

from Argentina, which should be available even in grocery stores. It's so spicy that it might be just the thing. From the other end, try a Cava from Spain. We have found that a nice bubbly like Cava often pairs beautifully with dishes with that kind of spice and complexity."

Later, Mr. Brodsky wrote back: "Eureka! Not with the Malbec—the teriyaki killed it, covered up the earthiness. But the Cava was wonderful with the teriyaki, before and during the meal. Now I think I will serve it this Thanksgiving with the traditional dinner. Many thanks for opening my eyes and tastes."

Mr. Brodsky's eureka moment is important to keep in mind throughout this holiday season: Sparkling wine is celebratory and fun, but it's also a very good match with all kinds of food. That is particularly true of Champagne, which tends to have the kind of mouth-watering acidity that matches well with food. This is the time of year when many people pick up a bottle of Champagne to celebrate the holidays or toast the new year and we'd urge you, when you do, to try some with dinner, too.

Which one should you get? We conducted a tasting of the nonvintage Brut Champagnes that you are most likely to see on shelves. We included the wines you will almost surely run into, such as Piper-Heidsieck, but a few others that are somewhat less widely available, such as Jacquart, which we first enjoyed at a spectacular small hotel in Reims now called Château Les Crayères more than two decades ago. We did not include grower's Champagnes, which can offer very special personality but, individually, are hard to find. Every Champagne—and we mean here real Champagne, from that region of France—has a number on the label. If the letters RM appear before the number, that indicates that it's a grape grower's own Champagne—small-production and pretty special. Still, while we are big fans of small-production Champagnes, we understand that most people this year will rush into a store and simply want to get a dependable, fairly priced Champagne with little fuss. And, after all, to so many of us, these names are old friends—Piper, Moët, Mumm. Don't they all remind us of various celebrations in our lives?

Most of the wines cost between \$30 and \$40. We tasted them in blind flights over several nights. We found the quality consistent. If you're an old hand at Champagne, you may find that these are not knock-your-socks-off wines, but they do offer reliably good tastes of fruit, yeast, chalky soil and citrusy acidity. The bubbles are generally small and pretty and, most important, integral to the taste, delivering a bit of mouthwatering flavor with each little pop. We were delighted that, after all these centuries, the Champagne houses continue to make a quality product and, overall, haven't dumbed down the wines, making them sweet or too obvious.

The Heidsiecks did well again. We've always said that's a good name to keep in mind, and that was true this time, too. Good old Piper was our best value (as it was in our last blind tasting, in 2005). We also liked Heidsieck & Co. In the past, we have also liked Charles Heidsieck, but it was not among our favorites this time. (Rémy Cointreau owns Charles and Piper. Vranken-Pommery owns Heidsieck & Co.) Year after year, if you need a reliable Champagne, you can't miss with



Shira Kronzon/The Wall Street Journal

The nonvintage Brut Champagne index

In a tasting of more widely available nonvintage Brut Champagnes that cost less than \$50, these were our favorites. Remember that Champagne corks really should not pop when you open the bottle; you could lose some bubbles and an eye. Instead, keep pressure on the cork until it "coughs apologetically," as we once heard in a movie. Also, while it's true that the best glass for Champagne is a flute, if those old-fashioned bowl shapes are special and celebratory to you, go ahead and enjoy them. Champagne prices are highly flexible during the holidays, but the prices below are generally representative. Here's to better times!

VINEYARD	PRICE	RATING	COMMENTS
Billecart-Salmon Brut Réserve	\$45.99	Very Good	Best of tasting. Pretty much all the aromas and flavors we want in Champagne—toasted nuts, yeast, minerals, a hint of zingy lemon and even some honeysuckle—all in a balanced, elegant package that gives it a relaxed sophistication.
Piper-Heidsieck Brut	\$34.99	Very Good	Best value. Always a winner. Lovely dark-golden color, with some mushrooms on the nose and a long, happy, juicy finish. Classy wine.
Ayala Brut Majeur	\$38.99	Good/ Very Good	Good food wine, with some intensity. Not as elegant as some, but rich and full, with plenty of toast and lemon.
Henriot 'Souverain' Brut	\$37*	Good/ Very Good	Pretty golden color and particularly lovely bubbles, with a floral nose. Finish is a bit weak, doesn't linger like others. Excellent for a garden party.
Heidsieck & Co. Monopole 'Blue Top' Brut	\$35*	Good/ Very Good	Relaxed, self-confident wine, complete and balanced, with an underlying soulfulness that's quite attractive. No fireworks.
Jacquart Brut Mosaïque	\$33.99	Good/ Very Good	Fun and easy, with a charming finish, a bit of oily mouthfeel and yet so crisp that it seems colder than others. Pleasant and good for an aperitif.
Laurent-Perrier Brut L-P	\$45*	Good/ Very Good	Too citrusy at first, but give it some time and it unfolds into a rich mix of fruit, mushrooms, yeast, and toast. Also, if you happen to see Laurent-Perrier Ultra Brut, which is not as widely available and costs about \$65, it's an extremely dry, highly personal, sophisticated wine.
Pol Roger Brut 'Extra Cuvée de Réserve'	\$40*	Good/ Very Good	A real crowd-pleaser, easy and relaxed, with ribbons of languid bubbles and excellent fruit. "It doesn't have too much of anything," Dottie said. "It walks the line perfectly." Buy more than you think you need.

Note: Wines are rated on a scale that ranges: Yech, OK, Good, Very Good, Delicious and Delicious! These are the prices we paid at wine stores in New York. *We paid \$32.95 for Henriot, \$39.99 for Heidsieck & Co., \$39.99 for Laurent-Perrier and \$37.99 for Pol Roger, but these prices appear to be more representative. Prices vary widely.

Piper-Heidsieck—and, because of its wide availability, stores often compete on its price, so you might be able to find a bargain if you look around. Our best of tasting was our old friend Billecart-Salmon, which is not as widely available as some but is worth keeping in the back of your mind when you shop.

By the way, we have said in the past that if you or your guests prefer Champagne that's a bit sweeter, Moët White Star is a good bet. That Champagne has been renamed Impérial.

There have never been so many good sparklers on shelves, from all over the world, including the U.S. Enjoy bubbly for the holidays—but when the holidays are over, don't forget that sparkling wine is a great match with all kinds of food, from sushi to veal in cream sauce. We got back to Mr. Brodsky after Thanksgiving to see how it went.

"Yes, we went with the Cava," he wrote. "I have always done Zinfandel, in part because I love Zin. I also felt that Zin held up to all of the

various Thanksgiving dishes. But there have always been attendees who did not prefer red wine so I usually gave them Chalone Chardonnay, occasionally trying to slip in a Sauvignon Blanc. However, the Cava was a big hit with everyone. It was remarkable how it stayed constant with all of the various sweet and savory dishes. The real bonus was that it cost far less than what I normally spend on Thanksgiving wines. Oh, we finished off the weekend with an Angus sirloin strip roast washed down with Ridge Monte Bello 1997—far better than turkey and Cava."

Hmm. It's hard to argue with that. Happy holidays!

WSJ.com

Holiday cheers

Watch John and Dottie taste and talk about nonvintage Brut Champagnes, at WSJ.com/Lifestyle



Eric Palma

Wines to woo the single guy

BY DOROTHY J. GAITER
AND JOHN BRECHER

PLEASE SEND ME the name of the wine that single, handsome men drink these days.

—Kristi Covey, Dallas

Unfortunately, asking this question is pretty much the equivalent of asking "What do men look for in a woman?"—the problem is that the answer too often is obvious and not one you want to hear. In the case of wine, the obvious and unfortunate answer is that too many young men, especially men with money, stick with fancy and often overpriced American Cabernet Sauvignon. But we'd guess that among very confident and cool young men who are not showing off for anyone, Malbec from Argentina would be a good bet. Malbec is nicely manly, with dark, spicy and somewhat mysterious tastes and it's a good value, too. On the other hand, we're so old that we still use terms like "cool." So we wondered how some of America's fine sommeliers would answer the question. Their replies:

Rachel Bassignani, sommelier at Spruce, San Francisco: "With the younger single crowd, and the hip, Burgundy is becoming a lot more popular."

Link Landvik-Larsen, wine and beverage director at Craftsteak, New York: "Napa Cabernets. Big California Cabernet Sauvignon. Men prefer red. Groups of men sit together, perhaps even single, handsome men, drinking a heavy Cab with oysters. It's not the best pairing in the world."

Cat Silirie, wine director for Barbara Lynch Gruppo, Boston: "Single, handsome gentlemen at the Butcher Shop enjoy Rioja in New World style. They enjoy it, we think, because it's a big, rich, masculine wine, forward and easy to get. You can sip these without needing food—not too tannic or acidic that they cry out for a pairing or a piece of protein. The wine we've seen become quite popular is a Rioja from Bodegas Rug Vino called Big Bang."

Kristen Kowalski, sommelier and owner of the Wine Market and the Sage Market and Wine Bar, Mendota Heights, Minn.: "Probably a domestic California Cab. That seems to be the manly choice of wines because it's not intimidating, because men don't like to ask for direction and they can read the label and know it's a full, big-bodied wine. Whereas if they were to go to Bordeaux or Burgundy or Germany, or some obscure labels, they wouldn't know what is in there and they'd have to ask for help. Man goes right to what he knows."

Melanie Grayce West contributed to this column. Our email address is wine@wsj.com.

Merry cookies

Speculoos

Order a coffee at any time of day in Belgium and your cup arrives with a small treat—usually an unassuming little cinnamon-flavored caramelized biscuit wrapped in cellophane.

But the speculoos (or speculaas in Dutch) is much more than just a coffee-break afterthought. It's a versatile cookie that comes in a variety of sizes and can dress itself up or down to suit the occasion. Butter and cinnamon are the main flavors, but there's also a pleasant, slightly burnt aspect that gives the cookie its real oomph.

Originally a Christmastime delicacy, the speculoos—traditionally shaped like a bishop or St. Nicholas—is now eaten year-round in more secular formats. There's still almost always some kind of pattern in the dough (the word speculoos derives from the Latin for "mirror").

The cookie also finds its way into plenty of dessert recipes, its simple but flavorful ingredients adapting well to a variety of dishes. Mash a bunch of them up to make a crust for pie or cheesecake. Use them in place of ladyfingers in tiramisu. Or soak them in milk and stack them in alternating layers with chocolate sauce to make a kind of quick, no-bake cake. They're also a nice complement to vanilla ice cream.

Lotus is the best-known brand in Belgium and its cookies come in all shapes and sizes, up to the giant St. Nicholas versions that appear every December. The Jules de Strooper cookie company (www.destrooper.com) makes a particularly delicious variation on the speculoos called amandelbrood, or almond thin. If you get one of those with your coffee, you know you're at a classy establishment.

—Craig Winneker



Chocolate Olivers

The chocolate Bath Oliver is a British curiosity, a savory biscuit—the generic word for both cookies and crackers—coated in the dark chocolate that makes it the sophisticate's choice. (John Lennon is once supposed to have asked for his fee for appearing on "The Old Grey Whistle Test" television program to be paid in chocolate Olivers.) It's really an austere cracker inside a rich chocolate cookie.

The "O" is capitalized because the original biscuit, the Bath Oliver, is named for its creator, Dr. William Oliver (1695-1764), a physician who made his fortune treating the well-off with the fashionable waters of Bath Spa, insisting that his patients had to travel there because, he implausibly claimed, "the water contains an aetherial essence which is lost when transported elsewhere; it cannot be contained in bottles as it will pass through the corks."

Oliver bequeathed the Bath Oliver recipe to his coachman Atkins, who became rich from it. After four changes of ownership and 120 years, the recipe passed to James Fortt, whose family business, in 1952, was still baking 80,000 biscuits a day in Bath. The original Bath Oliver (normally eaten with cheese) is made simply from butter, milk, yeast and flour, the secret being that the dough is repeatedly rolled and folded as for puff pastry.

Bath Olivers are off-white, crisp and not very salty, which always meant you got a good hit of bitter-sweet chocolate in the chocolate ones. But the new, smaller version made by Huntley & Palmers (www.huntleyandpalmers.com) is almost all chocolate (containing a minimum of 52% cocoa solids) with a small, crunchy Oliver center, which, in turn tastes slightly of hops and malt (a new-fangled, 1930s addition).

I like the H&P version, because it does not have the ubiquitous cheap chocolate smell of synthetic vanilla, and the coating is pleasingly rich and dark. My wife hates them, because she prefers old-fashioned ones, with a thin coating of near-bitter chocolate over a regulation-size Bath Oliver.

—Paul Levy



Polvorones

The polvorón is a Spanish desert treat originally made from scraps to give to the homeless, but it soon became the sweet-tooth fix for royalty. From its humble origins in Andalucía, the polvorón now has a global following, especially in former Spanish colonies from the Philippines to Mexico.

A crumbly variation of a shortbread cookie, polvorón translates to "powder cake" and if made properly the cookie should dissolve like powder on the tongue. No chewing necessary.

Centuries ago, local merchants would donate leftover ingredients to convents so that nuns could bake Christmas treats for the needy. Sherry producers gave egg yolks since they used only the whites. Extra flour, cinnamon and sugar came from the bakeries and almonds from local orchards. The secret ingredient, though, is a lard rendered from the Ibérico pig, the same near-mythic swine that produces Spain's world-famous *jamón*. A dash of brandy enriches the batter.

By the middle of the 18th century, polvorones were being served as holiday tea cookies in palaces across Spain. Now, nearly 100 bakeries in Andalucía, each with a guarded recipe, produce polvorones from September through January. Most of the modern distributors opened in the 1950s, including La Estepaña. The company uses a family recipe that is over 100 years old (www.laestepena.com).

Because the cookies are so delicate, they are individually wrapped in colored paper. Biting into one can quickly lead to a mess of powdered sugar on one's clothes. Children have found a way around this by mashing the polvorón while it's still in the wrapper then pouring the crumbs into their mouths.

What sets polvorones apart from other shortbread cookies is their texture, and that's because of the Ibérico lard. It's crunchy at first, but once moistened it melts on the tongue. Too big of a bite, though, might clog the mouth with a thick paste of flour and fatback. Perhaps that's why a traditional Spanish toast before eating one is, "May you not choke on the polvorones this Christmas."

Or maybe they're so good that the warning makes you savor them.

—William R. Snyder

Our intrepid reporters sample Europe's best biscuits

Palets Bretons

As is so often the case in France, it all comes down to the butter. *Beurre* is so much better than everybody else's butter you think French cows must lead a charmed life. In Brittany, dairy producers take butter to an even higher level by adding flecks of coarse, crunchy sea salt. And that is the not-so-secret ingredient in the rugged region's justifiably famous baked goods—and especially in its signature cookie, the Palet Breton.

It may be named unceremoniously for the hockey puck it resembles, but the palet breton tastes like a bit of heaven. Most countries have some kind of shortbread cookie, but to my taste, none of them approaches the subtle flavor achieved by this one. The ingredients are basic: flour, sugar, butter, milk, salt and eggs. Dense and crunchy with a kind of sandy texture, the palet breton softens as you chew—the salty flavor cutting ever so subtly through the sweet. It's also sturdy enough to dunk in coffee, or to use as a kind of dessert pedestal.

A specialty of the town of Pont-Aven, on Brittany's southwest coast, the cookies can be found throughout the peninsula and in stores across France. The various brands usually make a point of playing up the butter angle, with descriptions on the label like "au beurre frais" (with fresh butter) or "au beurre de baratte" (which is a seller's way of pointing out that, unless you eat a cookie for which the butter was churned by hand, you are settling for less than the best).

Most French supermarkets have their own brand of palet breton, and they can also be found throughout Europe. The renowned La Mère Poulard inn on Mont-Saint-Michel markets the cookies under its brand name (www.mere-poulard.fr). A shop in Pont-Aven called Traou Mad—which means "good things" in the Breton language—ships them everywhere (www.traoumad.com).

—Craig Winneker





Photos: Joris Luyten

Zimtsterne

Germany is the land that popularized the Christmas tree, and German Christmas cookies often look good enough to hang on a bough as well as eat. Of the many different varieties, however, none combines the decorative with the delicious quite like Zimtsterne, or cinnamon star cookies—small, six-pointed treats with snowy-white glaze and a sweet-spicy kick.

Made out of little more than ground almonds, egg white, sugar and cinnamon, then covered in sugar icing, the Zimtsterne are a very happy medium between marzipan and gingerbread.

Starting at the end of November, you can find Zimtsterne everywhere in Germany—from neighborhood bakeries, which make their own, to supermarket shelves. Quality varies dramatically. After years of amateur field research, I can reveal that the best are made by Leysieffer, the country's exclusive chain of café-bakeries, based in the northwestern city of Osnabrück, near the Dutch border.

Leysieffer (www.leysieffer.com) makes all of their Zimtsterne by hand, without preservatives—all you get is the subtle sweetness of nuts and the earthy pull of cinnamon. Their version also has just the right consistency. Homemade versions, including those by smaller bakeries, tend to be too crunchy; while less expensive commercial varieties, which save money on ingredients, can be gummy. Leysieffer's have a firm, moist quality, and a complexity in flavor thanks to the addition of ground hazelnuts along with the traditional almonds.

Leysieffer's Zimtsterne are available at Leysieffer shops, which can be found in most major Germany cities, and are also on sale at select gourmet food shops around Europe. Zimtsterne are also sold on the firm's German-language website (www.leysieffer.com).

—J. S. Marcus

Pepparkakor

The farther north you go in Europe, it seems, the more cookie-like becomes the gingerbread.

Panforte, gingerbread's Italian cousin, is dense and gooey and chock full of dried fruit; think fruit-cake-flavored candy. Lebkuchen, Germany's contribution, really is a bit like bread—sweet and airy and chewy all at once. Swedish "pepparkakor," or gingersnaps, are thinner and less sweet than other variations, and that makes all the difference.

Pepparkakor—literally "pepper cookies"—are a highly spiced version of a simple rolled cookie: just flour, shortening and sugar, flavored with cloves, ginger and cinnamon. Eaten year-round, pepparkakor are especially popular at Christmastime. At their best, they have a rich but delicate crispiness, with just a trace of sweetness, allowing the punch of the spices to stand out.

The thinnest and richest of all come from the north of Sweden, from a firm called Nyakers, named after the village they're made in. One of a few premium Swedish brands, Nyakers pepparkakor are a featured brand in the food halls of Stockholm's NK department store. They can also be found on many Swedish supermarket shelves and are distributed to Scandinavian specialty stores and gourmet food shops around the world (www.nyakers.com).

Christine Olson-Giebel, a Wisconsin native of Scandinavian descent, discovered Nyakers after she moved to the San Francisco Bay area, where a Swedish acquaintance offered her a sample. "I bought them immediately," she recalls. Although she had grown up eating gingersnaps, Nyakers' version was a revelation. "I like that they're incredibly thin and crisp," she says. "They're like catnip for humans."

She also recommends using the cookies as the lone ingredient in a fine cheesecake crust. "You just put them in the blender, turn it on, and you're done," she says.

—J. S. Marcus

Basler Lächerli

For non-Swiss cookie connoisseurs, Basler Lächerli can be as hard to pronounce as they are chewy to eat (it's "LACK-er-ly").

First made in the 14th century as a simple gingerbread, the cookies were upgraded in 1431, during the Council of Basel, to satisfy the more refined tastes of papal emissaries to the city on the Rhine. With the addition of nuts, honey and candied lemon and orange to the wheat flour dough, Lächerli became a favorite with city-dwellers, who in the early 18th century baptized the cookie "Leggerli," as the citizens of Basel pronounce it in their heartwarming dialect.

Since that time, Lächerli have been made with a thin sugar-topping and include honey, small pieces of almonds, hazelnuts, orange and lemon peel and a very faint dash of Kirsch. Given their honey-based sweetness, the cookies swiftly became bestsellers and remain popular across Switzerland.

Although easily recognizable by their rectangular form and sold in almost all supermarkets in the country, the cookies can vary in density and taste. The original Lächerli are chewy rather than hard and have a tantalizingly spicy flavor that balances all the key ingredients.

Basel still makes the best Lächerli. One of the top destinations for cookie-lovers is "Lächerli Huus," or Lächerli House, which was founded in 1904 and claims to follow the original recipe (www.laeckerlihuus.ch).

The cookies are enjoyed year-round, often with a cup of coffee or tea, but they're also given away as a special Christmas treat. Lächerli Huus sells them covered with chocolate or with a special lemon twist, and in decorative Christmas boxes.

—Goran Mijuk

WSJ.com

How the cookie crumbles
Hear our reporters talk about Europe's best biscuits, in an interactive audio guide, at WSJ.com/Europe

Rare reads of the green

THE NEXT BEST THING to playing golf is reading about it, and as the air gets colder, the favorite armchair is beckoning.

"Golf is a sport with a great body of literature," says William Shinker, publisher of Pearson's Gotham Books imprint and an avid golfer. "There's an aphorism in our business that is absolutely

Golf Journal

JEFFREY TRACHTENBERG

true: the smaller the ball, the better the books sell."

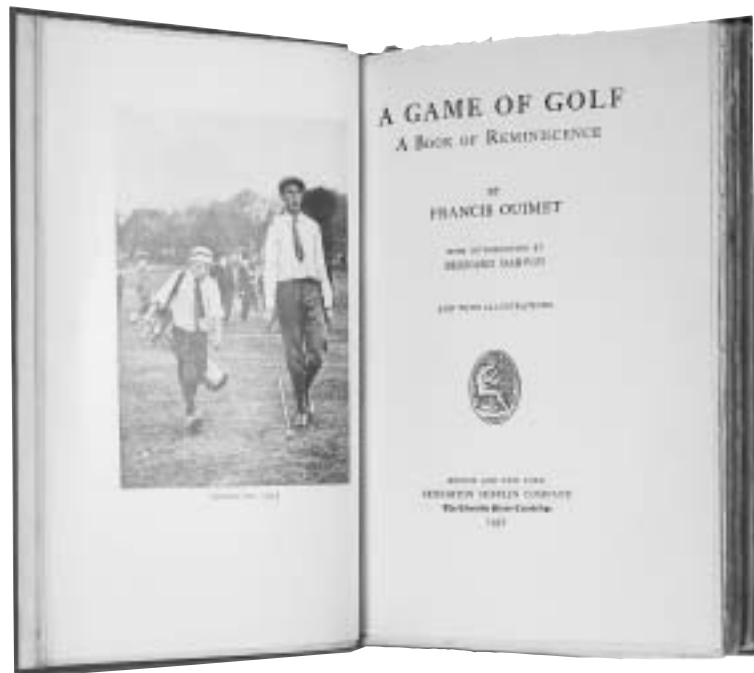
Many believe the best-selling golf novel of all time is "Golf in the Kingdom," by Michael Murphy, a co-founder of the feel-good Esalen Institute in Big Sur. The best-selling nonfiction book may well have been Ben Hogan's classic "Five Lessons: The Modern Fundamentals of Golf," written with Herbert Warren Wind and published in 1957.

"The only exception was the years when 'Harvey Penick's Little Red Book' was selling well," suggests Mr. Shinker. Mr. Penick's book was first published in hardcover in 1992.

But for collectors of golf books—and they are legion—these are far from the most valuable volumes. A signed edition of the 1972 edition of "Golf in the Kingdom" is for sale online at \$500, while a signed first of Mr. Penick's book is priced at \$750. Neither are rarities.

Harder to find are the likes of these: a handful of late-19th-century titles whose small print runs have made them scarce, and therefore desirable. In 1895, a year after five golf clubs banded together to form what became the U.S. Golf Association, James Lee penned "Golf in America: A Practical Manual," which he hoped would teach players the fundamentals of the game and broaden its appeal.

An online description by Valu-



able Book Group, which specializes in golf titles, says the book "provides a great historical snapshot of the game in the late 19th century." The book's practical nature appealed to new players still learning the basics, and the title was quickly printed in a cheaper edition. Many consider this one of the first golf titles published in the U.S., with first editions selling between \$500 and \$1,500.

Looking back, it's clear that 1895 was a bellwether year for the game. In addition to the publication of "Golf in America," Charles Blair Macdonald won the first U.S. Amateur championship that year. Mr. Macdonald later established himself as one of the country's leading golf course designers and is sometimes referred to as the father of American golf architecture.

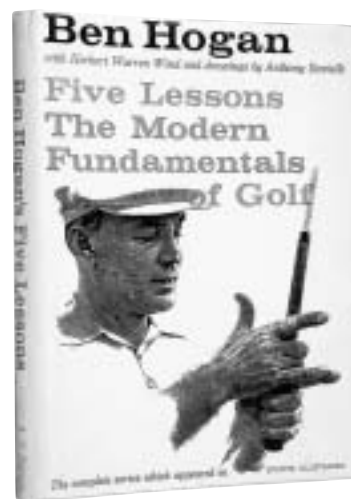
He also wrote a book that summarized his thoughts on the game, "Scotland's Gift: Golf," published in 1928. A fine first edition runs \$600 to \$800, but as serious golf collectors can attest, the signed, limited edition is considerably

more expensive. "Only a few years ago that book sold for \$3,000; today it's \$11,000 or \$12,000," says Kenneth Andersen, owner of Kenneth Andersen Books, based in Auburn, Mass.

Mr. Andersen, who specializes in scarce golf titles and has been in business since 1978, isn't your typical rare book dealer. He doesn't have an open store, and he doesn't maintain a presence on the Internet. The reason? He says he's got more than enough customers for the scarcest books he can find. "The trick is finding them," he says. "I have no trouble selling books. I have trouble getting books."

Over the years, Mr. Andersen has bought and sold a number of difficult-to-find titles. But those he appears to value most have been written by authors whose links to the game have special historical resonance.

These include Francis Ouimet, a 20-year-old amateur golfer born of blue-collar immigrants in Massachusetts who entered the U.S.



Left, Francis Ouimet's coveted 'A Game of Golf'; above, Ben Hogan's big-selling 'Five Lessons.'

Open in 1913 and competed against Harry Vardon, the British champion and one of the best-known players of his era. To everyone's astonishment, Mr. Ouimet won the match, a victory that Mr. Andersen says helped popularize golf across the U.S. The contest was the subject of Mark Frost's popular 2002 account, "The Greatest Game Ever Played."

Mr. Ouimet himself wrote a book coveted by collectors, 1932's "A Game of Golf," with an introduction by Bernard Darwin, the grandson of the English naturalist Charles Darwin and a golf writer of renown. Mr. Andersen says that the signed, limited edition of that book sells for \$2,500 to \$3,000 when it's available. A very good trade edition in its original dust jacket is currently listed online for \$650.

Other desirable titles include Bobby Jones's autobiography, "Down the Fairway." There were only 300 signed limited copies published in 1927, making that edition extremely difficult to find. Copies sell for more than \$10,000.

"Many people think he was the greatest golfer ever," says Mr. Andersen. "Anything signed by him is valuable."

Whether golf books make good investments during a difficult economy is less clear. Mr. Ander-

sen is convinced their value is increasing.

Not all agree. John Sabino, owner of the Valuable Book Group in Princeton Junction, N.J., an Internet-based rare book dealer that specializes in golf books, says the market for scarce titles tracks the financial markets more closely than some expected.

"With all this chaos, prices are going down," he says. "Liquidity and excess capital are factors. Nobody needs a rare golf book. It's discretionary."

Perhaps it's not surprising, then, that Mr. Sabino says that as much as 40% of his company's sales in the past year have shifted to Europe. "Their currencies are stronger," he says.

Be warned: Golf bibliomania can become a consuming pursuit. Michael Hurdzan, a golf-course designer and partner in Hurdzan/Fry Environmental Golf Design, based in Columbus, Ohio, says he's amassed 4,000 to 5,000 golf books and magazines; 300 comic-book covers with golf on them, and 140 pieces of sheet music related to the game. "The search hasn't lost any of its intensity," he says.

What should a novice collect? A good starting point would be "The Game of Golf and the Printed Word: 1566-2005" by Richard E. Donovan and Rand Jerris. After studying it, says George Fox, a golf-book specialist at PBA Galleries, a San Francisco auction house, readers should be able to narrow their focus. "Are you interested in the history of golf in America, or the history of the game itself?" he asks. "You could create a list of 100 titles, and then begin to collect."

The most famous golf title in the U.S., he adds, is the limited edition of "Down the Fairway." An edition with the original slipcase and glassine wrapper could be worth nearly \$20,000 today.

"He's such a legendary player that some people only collect Bobby Jones material," says Mr. Fox.

One investment that's holding its value: collectible stamps

THE COLLECTOR MARKET for rare stamps is holding its own in turbulent times—so much so that Geneva philatelic specialist and auctioneer David Feldman plans to launch a rare stamp investment fund in 2009.

Collecting

MARGARET STUDER

"It doesn't seem like a time to start a fund, but we think it could be in the case of stamps," he says.

Mr. Feldman believes that unique stamps will be increasingly seen as a sound investment. He says rare stamp prices are not subject to big ups and downs, and are supported by a "passionate" collector base (around 300 million people worldwide).

Last month, Mr. Feldman privately sold the famous Mauritius Post Office Ball Envelope to Sin-



Four 1840 'One Penny Black' stamps sold at Spink in 2008 for £92,100.

gapore collector Vikram Chand. The Ball Envelope is franked with a one-penny stamp issued in Mauritius in 1847 that was first used to pay postage on invitations to a fancy dress ball thrown by the gov-

ernor's wife. Only three such envelopes survive; one is in the British Library Museum, another is owned by Queen Elizabeth II. The price paid was not released; but the envelope, according to Mr. Feldman, is insured for \$4 million.

At Mr. Feldman's "Rarities of the World" auction in October a unique Imperial Russian cover with stamps from 1857 and 1858 sold for €1.3 million, a new world auction record for a Russian philatelic item. The "Countess Caroline" cover from 1883, so named because the letter was sent from Shanghai to Germany addressed to Gräfin Caroline Tattenback, fetched €1.17 million, the highest auction price ever for a China cover.

At London dealers Stanley Gibbons, investment portfolio manager Geoff Anandappa says the financial crisis has not brought a downturn in demand for investment-quality stamps. Stanley Gib-

bons publishes an annual May-to-May Great Britain Rarities Index which was up 38.6% on an annual basis this May. Mr. Anandappa expects to see the index up again when published next year. "British stamps are very active," he says.

At Spink, the world's largest stamp auctioneers, London specialist David Parsons is cautious. "We have to wait for sales in the New Year to really assess what impact the financial crisis will have," he says. But he notes that recent auctions have performed well.

A highlight of the year at Spink was the "Monarch" collection, a two-part auction held in May and October which fetched £3.12 million. The collection was assembled over 20 years by a private collector who strove to own an example of nearly every philatelic item related to King George V (1865-1936), an ardent stamp collector.

A Royal Philatelic Collection provenance can boost prices. At

Spink on Dec. 3, a number of such items fetched well above estimates, including a Queen Victoria, two-pence, deep lilac-rose stamp from 1871 which went for £21,850 (estimate: £6,000-£7,000).

Here, some stamp auction highlights at the start of 2009:

Spink's British Empire auction on Jan. 22 features rare highlights from British Guiana, Cape of Good Hope, Madagascar, Trinidad, New Zealand and Nyasaland.

Bonhams auction house in London on Jan. 28 will have stamped mail delivered by the German Zeppelin aircraft to various European countries in the 1930s; and World War II British prisoner-of-war mail from Japanese-occupied Asia.

The Spink Shelves Galleries sale in New York on Feb. 18-19 will feature London-based art collector Joseph Hackmey's famed New Zealand and Ceylon stamps. They are expected to fetch more than \$10 million.

❖ Books

Pictures at a private exhibition

BY ERIC GIBSON

ICONIC FIGURES LIKE John James Audubon (1785-1851) can sometimes seem forbiddingly inaccessible, their achievements—in his case, the monumental “The Birds of America” (1827-38)—so magisterially complete in themselves that they come to occupy some remote promontory in the cultural landscape. We admire them from afar but never get close enough to look carefully.

All the more reason, then, to celebrate the publication of “Audubon: Early Drawings” (Harvard University Press, 250 pages, £75). The book consists of 116 of his youthful efforts at depicting birds and other wildlife. It includes as well instructive essays by Audubon biographer Richard Rhodes, Harvard ornithologist Scott V. Edwards and Houghton Library curator Leslie A. Morris.

“Early Drawings” is a record of nature and of Audubon’s own artistic apprenticeship—we can watch Audubon becoming Audubon. The earliest drawings—done in watercolor and, later, pastel—are simple profiles of birds silhouetted against the blank page with little in the way of natural context. They are delicate, hesitant, almost childlike renderings. Later drawings—made after Audubon had invented his celebrated technique of pinning dead birds into naturalistic poses—are more lifelike and animated, more confidently rendered. These look toward the fully realized images of “The Birds of America,” with their intense drama and implied narratives. Even at an early stage this self-taught artist possessed a powerful sense of color and a keen sensitivity to the way light can model a form. Yet we see him reaching the limits of his technique in his almost-but-not-quite depiction of the male wood grouse’s variegated plumage. Mastery would come later.

Each rendering in “Audubon: Early Drawings” gets both a full-page reproduction and a facing-page commentary. About a bird known as the Willet, shown with a worm squirming in its beak, we read: “The May date of this drawing tells us that Audubon crossed paths with the Willet during the spring migration between its wintering grounds on the Gulf Coast of Mexico and the Caribbean and its breeding areas in wetlands of the interior West.” We are right there with Audubon, his traveling bird and the unlucky worm.

Claude Monet’s water-lily paint-

ings, executed between 1892 and Monet’s death in 1926, are among the most sublime works of the Impressionist movement. At his country estate at Giverny, Monet’s eye was captivated by the mix of form (the flowers) and formlessness (water), as well as by the ways in which the pond shaped his perception of nature: Water itself became tapestry (showing the play of light and color on its ever-shifting surface); window (allowing us to see the barely perceptible aquatic undergrowth) and mirror (reflecting the clouds and sky). Monet’s first efforts were conventional easel paintings—measuring 90 to 100 centimeters to a side. By the end of his life—as the famous installation in Paris’s Orange-rie Museum attests—they had become mural-scale, works so big that you feel you aren’t so much looking at them as standing in them. A new kind of painting had been born.



Ericka Burchett/The Wall Street Journal

Arbitrage

Listerine Coolmint mouthwash

City	Local currency	€
Hong Kong	HK\$33.90	€3.17
New York	\$4.72	€3.44
London	£3.80	€4.24
Frankfurt	€4.70	€4.70
Paris	€5.50	€5.50
Brussels	€7.16	€7.16
Rome	€8.00	€8.00



Note: 500-ml bottle; prices, including taxes, as provided by retailers in each city, averaged and converted into euros.

“Monet Water Lilies: The Complete Series” by Jean-Dominique Rey and Denis Rouart (Flammarion, 159 pages, £24.95) is both a survey of these works and a catalog raisonné. It is lavishly illustrated, but it is more than a coffee-table book. The text traces Monet’s career before the water-lily paintings and then provides a comprehensive, in-depth analysis of their form, meaning and influence.

The authors note: “What his efforts lead to . . . is an unprecedented relationship with the components of nature, which are no longer treated as forms but intuited as forces, and where landscape, obliterated as perspective but recreated as perception, ceases to be an end in itself and becomes a vehicle for pure painting.”

Surely the most entertaining art book of the season is Kenneth Clark’s “One Hundred Details From the National Gallery” (Yale University Press, 159 pages, £15.95). The late Lord Clark became a household name in the 1960s when he hosted “Civilisation,” the TV series on the art of the West that launched a thousand imitators.

Lord Clark (he died in 1983) was director of London’s National Gallery from 1934 to 1945 and was clearly a born educator. This book, a reprint of one he published in 1938, aims to help us discover buried treasure or, in his words, “to encourage us to look at pictures more attentively, and show us some of the rewards of patient scrutiny.”

That may sound like an eat-your-peas assignment, but in Mr. Clark’s

hands it is a pleasure—and an adventure. The book presents a succession of two-page spreads showing a detail from two paintings—e.g., portrait heads, sleeping figures, still lifes—and then follows them with both paintings reproduced in their entirety. It is interesting to look at the juxtapositions and compare the approach to similar subjects across time—Renaissance artist Piero di Cosimo’s tightly painted, placid hound versus William Hogarth’s frenzied 18th-century cat, for instance. But the book’s real rewards lie in Lord Clark’s commentaries. His vast erudition is conveyed in an easy, conversational style that both informs us and makes us eager for more.

Another pleasure for the season is “The Cone Sisters of Baltimore: Collecting at Full Tilt” by Ellen B. Hirschland and Nancy Hirschland Ramage. (Northwestern University Press, 279 pages, £29.95). As expatriate Baltimoreans in Paris in the early 20th century, Dr. Claribel Cone and her sister, Etta, were among the earliest collectors of the work of Matisse and Picasso. They were guided by Gertude Stein and her brother, Leo, both eager avant-gardists. But the Steins were the exception, not the rule, of American taste at the time. For the Cone sisters to do what they did was intellectual daring of a high order. Yet they were not buccaneers; they bought what they believed in.

“Hiroshige: One Hundred Famous Views of Edo” by Melanie Trede and Lorenz Bichler (Taschen, 295 pages, £80) is this year’s coffee-

table book of choice. A lavishly produced, large-format volume, it reproduces every print in Hiroshige’s celebrated documentary cycle, one per page with facing commentary. Hiroshige’s lush color, keen eye for natural detail (birds swooping to capture a fish) and innovative ways of composing an image make these prints some of the greatest in the history of art.

Two other books of note:

“The Minbar of Saladin: Reconstructing a Jewel of Islamic Art” edited by Linette Singer (Thames & Hudson, 206 pages, £29.95). In August 1969, an arsonist set fire to the interior of al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. Among other destructions, the fire almost totally consumed the Minbar of Saladin, an elaborately decorated wooden pulpit dating from the 12th century that was one of masterpieces of Islamic art. There was no question of restoration; it was reconstruction or nothing. But to do so required resurrecting long-forgotten knowledge of Islamic art and aesthetics and ancient craft skills. Nonetheless, the work was accomplished in 2006. Readers can argue over whether or not what was produced was a “true” minbar or a little more than a museum reproduction. What is beyond dispute, however, is that the reconstruction was an extraordinary cultural achievement.

“Egyptian Wall Painting” by Francesco Tiradritti. (Abbeville, 391 pages, £90) must surely be the definitive study on an aspect of Egyptian art that receives much less attention than the pyramids and monumental sculpture. We learn that the Egyptians had only about four words for specific colors—a narrow range belied by the richness of the entrancing creations on display here.

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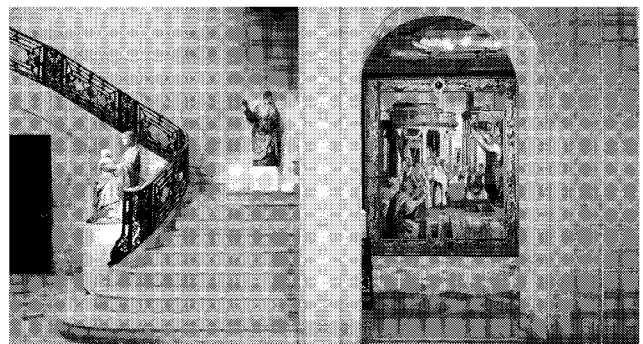
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◆ Top Picks

Playing with perception

Stockholm ■ art

Western art has many traditions but none quite so strong as that invoked by the Greek term mimesis, or "representation." Mimesis means that art, no matter how realistic, preserves the distinction between art and life by representing or plainly imitating reality, rather than intruding on it.

But Western art has another tradition, nearly as old, which does just the opposite. Through the use of optical illusions of one kind or another, artists can break down the barrier between reality and its representations. Consider the work, "A Woman Sitting at a Window" (1799), by French painter Louis-Leopold Boilly (1761-1845). The artist has drapery from inside a room hang out of an open window and, apparently, out of the painting itself; in response, we feel that we are not only viewing a scene but are somehow present in it. The Boilly painting is one of more than 150 similar works included in a far-reaching exhibition at Stockholm's Nationalmuseum called "The Deluded Eye: Five Centuries of Deception."

Boilly's paintings, the curators tell us, were the inspiration for the term "trompe l'oeil," meaning "to deceive the eye." Trompe l'oeil quickly became a pejorative term, associated with decoration, or at best artistic pranks, rather than art itself. The Stockholm show, by presenting an astonishing range of work, from minor Old Master paintings and decorative oddities to contemporary installation art, manages to avoid the issue of greatness. Instead, we are confronted with the more urgent issue of perception, as work after work wears at our ability to look at reality in a predictable way.

Rene Magritte's "The Promenades of Euclid" (1955) shows us a view of a European city in which a triangular parapet resembles an adjacent boulevard, which narrows, triangularly, in the distance. An 18th-century Swedish card table has a game of cards inlaid on its surface. Spanish painter Pere Borell del Caso (1835-1910) negates his own canvas in "Escaping Criticism" (1874), showing a young boy abandoning a painting by crawling out of its trompe l'oeil frame. As we approach our own era, the art on view goes from the merely witty or gimmicky to the genuinely moving or haunting. A round surface of black fiberglass, called "Void IV" (1989) by Anish Kapoor, reverses the standard effect of trompe l'oeil. By creating an ominous tunnel—which seems to suck us in, rather than coming out to greet us, like the boy in "Escaping Criticism"—Mr. Kapoor turns a play on our perceptions into something like an existential crisis.

—J.S. Marcus

Until Jan. 11
☎ 46-8-5195-4410
www.nationalmuseum.se

Stockholm ■ art

Superlatives aren't much use when considering the achievement of Max Ernst, the great—but not the greatest—Surrealist artist, whose long and fruitful career is carefully chronicled in a retrospective called "Dream and Revolution" at Stockholm's Moderna Museet.

Surrealism was always closely associated with Sigmund Freud's theory of the unconscious, and later associated itself with the tempered radicalism of France's anti-Fascist Popular Front. The exhibition's organizers want to steer us away from the movement's reliance on ideas, emphasizing instead what they call Ernst's "visual diversity." They accomplish this by celebrating his many innovative techniques.

Having started with the Dada art of collage, Ernst moved on in the mid 1920s to "frottage," which created an image on



'Circumstance' (2007),
by Lotta Hannerz,
in Stockholm.

Photo: Lars Noord/Göteborgs Konstmuseum

paper by placing it over a rough surface and then rubbing until random patterns appeared. A few years later, he came up with "grattage" (the application of frottage to painting), then "decalcomania" (a kind of random paint spreading), and finally "oscillation," which let a paint-filled perforated can splatter patterns over canvas.

"Approaching Puberty," a perverse, otherwise inscrutable Dada collage from 1921, uses parts of different photographs to create a one-shoed, headless nude, floating in a roughened blue-gray background. Two related paintings from 1929, "Snow Flowers" and "Flowers on a Yellow Ground," use grattage to combine roughness and delicacy in near-abstract floral patterns.

—J.S. Marcus

Until Jan. 11
☎ 46-8-5195-5200
www.modernamuseet.se

London ■ theater

As part of its T.S. Eliot Festival, the Donmar Warehouse is staging "The Family Reunion" with a stellar cast. Bunny Christie has designed a dark-paneled set for Wishwood, the north of England country house that is being preserved for Harry, eldest son and heir to Amy, the des-



Kunsthhaus Zürich

'La ville entière' (1935-36),
by Max Ernst, in Stockholm.

perate Dowager Lady Monchensey, movingly played by Gemma Jones.

One of the high windows is cracked, and a pile of sand drifts into one corner of the drawing room—heavy-handed symbolism, I thought at first. Artifice though, is at the heart of this verse play—not merely the prosody, but Eliot's enlisting the conventions of Greek tragedy: in the unison speaking of the chorus; in all the violent actions happening offstage; and in the appearance of the Eumenides (here three milky-complexioned, nicely dressed little boys).

It's a tough one to carry off. But with superior acting talent, director Jeremy Herrin succeeds as much as is possible with a drama that blends the formal elements of Greek tragedy with those of an Agatha Christie country-house thriller.

The Tony and Pulitzer prizewinning "August: Osage County" is also a play about a family reunion. The Chicago theater company Steppenwolf's production, at the National's Lyttelton Theatre, demands that the audience believe that playwright Tracy Letts's Oklahoma characters are obsessed with T.S. Eliot. Even the Native American servant (played with elegant understatement by Kimberly Guerrero), the only wholly sympathetic character in this sprawling tragic-comedy, sits cross-legged in her eyrie reading and brooding on "The Hollow Men."

Anna D. Shapiro directs a genuinely distinguished cast in this well-made secular companion piece to "The Family Reunion."

—Paul Levy

"The Family Reunion," until Jan. 10
☎ 44-870-060-6624
www.donmarwarehouse.com
"August: Osage County," until Jan. 21
☎ 44-20-7452-3000
www.nationaltheatre.org.uk

A Child-like Faith

My 8-year-old son, Caleb, puts his hand on my shoulder; he wears an expression that shows he wants to have a man-to-man talk. “Dad,” he says, “I know there’s no Santa Claus.” He rattles off his indictments, starting with the pure physics of the enterprise. There’s no way one guy can visit every house in a single night. And how does he get into houses with no chimneys? Then there’s the matter of zoology—not a single nature book on our shelves mentions flying reindeer. Perhaps most important for an 8-year-old, there’s the weight of public opinion—none of Caleb’s friends believe in Santa any more. He leans close, his voice taking that tone of worldliness that is at once endearing and saddening to a parent. “He isn’t real, is he?”

Perhaps a more responsible parent would confess, but I hesitate. For this I blame G.K. Chesterton, whose treatise “Orthodoxy” had its 100th anniversary this year. One of its themes is the violence that rationalistic modernism has worked on the valuable idea of a “mystical condition,” which is to say the mystery inherent in a supernaturally created world. Writing of his path to faith in God, Chesterton says: “I had always believed that the world involved magic: now I thought that perhaps it involved a magician.”

Magic-talk gets under the skin of many, like renowned scientist and atheist Richard Dawkins. This is doubly so when it is what the Christ-figure Aslan, in C.S. Lewis’s “The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe,” calls “the deeper magic,” an allusion to divinity.

Mr. Dawkins is reportedly writing a book examining the pernicious tendency of fantasy tales to promote “anti-scientific” thinking among children. He suspects that such stories lay the groundwork for religious faith, the inculcation of which, he claims, is a worse form of child abuse than sexual molestation.

Santa reminds us that belief in God is belief in mystery.

I suspect that fairy tales and Santa Claus do prepare us to embrace the ultimate Fairy Tale, the one Lewis believed was ingrained in our being. New research from the Université de Montréal and the University of Ottawa indicates that children aren’t overly troubled upon learning that Santa is a myth. But the researchers remained puzzled because while children eventually abandon Santa, they keep believing in God. Lewis would say this is because God is real, but Mr. Dawkins fears it is the lasting damage of fairy tales. While Mr. Dawkins stands ironically alongside Puritans in his readiness to ban fairy tales, Christian apologists like Lewis and Chesterton embraced them, precisely because to embrace Christian dogma is to embrace the extrarational.

Today’s Christian apologists, by contrast, seek to reason their way to God by means of archaeological finds, anthropological examinations and scientific argumentation. That’s all well and good, but it seems to miss a fundamental point illuminated by Chesterton, which is that, ultimately, belief in God is belief in mystery.

As a parent, I believe (with the older apologists) that it’s essen-

tial to preserve a small, inviolate space in the heart of a child, a space where he is free to believe impossibilities. The fantasy writer George MacDonald—author of “The Light Princess” and “The Golden Key”—suggested that it is only by gazing through magic-tinted eyes that one can see God: “With his divine alchemy,” MacDonald wrote, “he turns not only water into wine, but common things into radiant mysteries.” The obfuscating spirit of the “commonplace,” meanwhile, is “ever covering the deep and clouding the high.”

This sheds light on a seeming paradox in St. Paul’s letter to Roman Christians: “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made. . . .” How does one see “invisible attributes”? Only people raised on fairy tales can make sense of that. It belongs in a terrain where magic glasses can illuminate what was heretofore hidden, where rabbit holes open into wonderlands. No wonder some atheists like Mr. Dawkins want to kill Harry Potter.

I know Caleb and his brothers will figure out the Santa secret eventually, but I’m with Chesterton in resisting the elevation of science and reason to the exclusion of magic, of mystery, of faith. That’s why I’m not giving up on Santa without a fight. Not everything we believe, I explain to Caleb, can be proved (or disproved) by science. We believe in impossible things,

and in unseen things, beginning with our own souls and working outward. It’s a delicate thing, preparing him to let go of Santa without simultaneously embracing the notion that only what can be detected by the five senses is real.

This all sounds like madness, I know, to people like Mr. Dawkins. But Chesterton held that believing in impossible things is actually the

scientific principles, yet for whom “everything does not seem worth understanding,” or the madman, who in trying to “get the heavens into his head” shatters his rational (but woefully finite) mind.

Interestingly, the curse leveled by Lewis’s White Witch on Narnia—an endless winter absent Christmas—evokes both: an unholy snow smothering wondrous creation in false uniformity, and at the same time a kind of madness well understood in snow-bound regions. It’s not surprising that one of the first signs of the Witch’s coming demise is that Father Christmas appears: “I’ve come at last,” says Santa. “She has kept me out for a long time, but I have got in at last.”

Oxford University Press recently announced that it will be dropping words like “dwarf,” “elf” and “devil” from its children’s dictionary to make room for words like “blog,” “Euro,” and “biodegradable”—a blow not just to language but to the imagination. I’m sticking with Santa, however, knowing that my children will

gradually exchange the fairy tales of youth for a faith—I hope—in mysteries that even diehard Christians seem increasingly embarrassed to admit as such. In our house, at least, there’s no shame in believing the impossible.

Mr. Woodlief blogs about family and faith at www.tonywoodlief.com.



A Cultural Conversation with Tony Foster / By Tom Nolan

Where This Artist Goes, Danger Often Follows

Los Angeles
No doubt many consider landscape painting a relaxing pursuit through which one escapes the pressures of everyday life. But for certain artists it becomes something resembling an extreme sport. Take Tony Foster, a contemporary English watercolorist who has specialized in wilderness scenes for the past quarter century.

There was the time Mr. Foster waited in Death Valley with a friend who was dangerously ill with heatstroke, while the two others in his party went for help. “We were running out of water, and we all of us had to come to terms with the fact that we really seriously might not survive,” the 62-year-old said here on a recent Sunday afternoon, after a lecture at the Autry Center for Western Art. “One of the two who left to get help was my brother, who was with another good friend; and I thought, ‘This might well be the last time we ever see each other.’ Sitting in an absolutely beautiful place . . . I thought, ‘Well I’ve done everything I feel I can do up to this point in my life; I’ve done what I wanted to do, and if this is as far as I go—well this isn’t a bad place to die.’”

That was in 1991. Mr. Foster has traveled much since then—to the West Indies, the Bolivian Andes, Greenland and Nepal, among other places. His art projects center on themes—“Rain Forests,” “Deserts,” “Volcanoes”—each of which takes three or four years to complete. On his journeys, he obeys the rule of wilderness backpackers—“What you carry in, you must carry out”—and his pictures are colored with paints all contained in a single box the size of his hand.

The artist conceives of his breathtaking pictures as “watercolor diaries of journeys in wilderness,” with the scenes bordered by written, printed or stenciled notes on events of the trip. “It’s a holistic way of talking about landscapes,” he says. “All the journeys are done in some slow physical way,

either on foot or by canoe or raft. My assertion is that the work gets better, the longer I stay in these places. So I travel very slowly; I try to absorb what I see.

I look for places where there is no mark at all of human beings.”

He takes no photographs—because “they don’t contain enough information for the work I want to do. If you look into the shadow of a photograph, for example, it just looks flat; whereas you know if you go and sit somewhere with a shadow, you can see that it has all sorts of color within it.” Instead, he captures on paper as much detail on-site as he can, then later adds bits and shadings in his studio in Cornwall, England. He lives

there, “happily,” with his wife, who does not enjoy wilderness camping and so stays at home while he travels.

Mr. Foster’s splendid pictures are collected in the just-published

“Painting at the Edge of the World” (University of Washington Press). The book not only is a comprehensive representation of his extraordinary oeuvre but is rich with entries from the artist’s travel diaries, which are almost as vivid as Mr. Foster’s spoken accounts of his adventures—including his 2005 trip to paint Mount Everest.

The worst moments of that expedition, he tells me, came at a height above 17,000 feet: “After four days, I was coughing blood. My hands and feet were swollen up; I couldn’t put my gloves on, I could hardly put my boots on. The trouble is that your brain swells up, so you don’t make sensible decisions. . . . But after four days I said, ‘This is getting worse and worse, I’d better go down.’ So I started to walk back down to a rescue area kept by sherpas. What happens is they put you completely inside a Gamow bag which they pump up with oxygen, using a foot-pump; they keep you in there at high pressure for an hour. That gives you enough energy to hike further down to a safe hut.

“When I got down to the clinic a few days later, I said to the doctor, ‘You know, I felt as if I could have just had one good night’s sleep, I’d have been all right.’ And

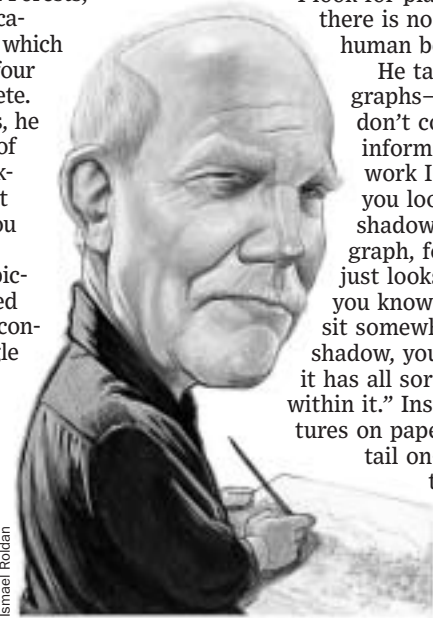
he said, ‘One good night’s sleep and you’d have been dead.’”

Mr. Foster returned to that treacherous slope—and climbed higher: to 17,800 feet. It was at the end of his third Everest trip that it was suggested he may have become the only person to have painted the triangular-shaped crag from all three sides, and that one of his pictures (the three-by-six-foot one) was the largest painting of Everest ever done on site.

Given his history of arduous travel, it’s not surprising to learn that Mr. Foster’s reading-matter on such journeys consists of other people’s accounts of their extreme voyages—the more horrific, the better.

“I find,” he says, “if you’re in somewhere really uncomfortable—in the rain forest, being bitten to death by insects; or in Death Valley; or in Greenland, freezing cold—all you have to do is read a book about somebody who’s having a worse time than you, and then you feel so much more comfortable.”

Mr. Nolan is editor of “The Archer Files: The Complete Short Stories of Lew Archer, Private Investigator,” by Ross Macdonald (Crippen & Landru).



time off



Joachim Fliegner

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Amsterdam

photography

"The Chocolate Expedition" presents photographs from Frits Lemaire (1921-2005) taken in the Sahara desert in 1951-1952, during a road trip with two cameramen on assignment to shoot a film about cocoa.

Tropenmuseum
Until May 15
☎ 31-20-5688-200
www.tropenmuseum.nl

art

"Melchior d'Hondecoeter Fowl" exhibits six paintings of indigenous and exotic birds by the Dutch painter Melchior d'Hondecoeter (1636-1695).

Rijksmuseum
Until March 9
☎ 31-20-6747-000
www.rijksmuseum.nl

photography

"Water in Photography" showcases works by Dutch photographer Marnix Goossens (born 1967), documenting the relationship of the Dutch to the ever-rising water on their coastline.

Huis Marseille
Until March 1
☎ 31-20-5318-989
www.huismarseille.nl

Berlin

art

"Atmospheric Landscapes—Paintings by Walter Leistikow (1865-1908)" presents paintings, graphics and handcrafts exploring the work of Berlin Secession artist Walter Leistikow.

Bröhan-Museum
Until Jan. 11
☎ 49-30-3269-0600
www.broehan-museum.de

art

"Kirchner in Berlin" exhibits paintings of street life, cabaret and circus in Berlin from 1911-1917 by German Expressionist Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938).

Brücke-Museum
Until March 15
☎ 49-30-8312-029
www.bruecke-museum.de

art

"Cassandra: Visions of Catastrophe" showcases paintings, photography and film work by visionary German artists warning of future totalitarian states, nationalism and Fascism between 1914 and 1945.

Deutsches Historisches Museum
Until Feb. 22
☎ 49-30-2030-40
www.dhm.de

Bielefeld

art

"Sonia Delaunay's World of Art" presents 350 items, including paintings, drawings, prints and fashion designs by French artist Sonia Delaunay (1885-1979).

Kunsthalle Bielefeld
Until Feb. 22
☎ 49-521-3299-9500
www.kunsthalle-bielefeld.de

Bremen

art

"Wilhelm Heinrich Focke—Painter and Inventor" shows about 60 paintings, more than 100 watercolors, prints, sketchbooks and models of inventions by German painter, inventor and aviator Wilhelm Heinrich Focke (1878-1974).



Above, 'Bag' (2007), by Hendrik Kerstens, in London; top right, 'Thinking About It' (2002), by John Isaacs, in Bremen.

Focke Museum
Until Jan. 11
☎ 49-421-6996-000
www.focke-museum.de

art

"Go for it! Olbricht Collection (a sequel)" is a selection of 100 works from the contemporary art collection of scientist Thomas Olbricht (born 1948).

Neues Museum Weserburg
Until Dec. 31
☎ 49-421-5983-900
www.nmwb.de

Helsinki

photography

"Black and White—Classics of Japanese Photography" presents 64 works from eight contemporary Japanese photographers.

Ateneum Hall
Until Feb. 8
☎ 358-9-1733-6401
www.ateneum.fi

art

"Rafael Wardi—The Soul of Colour" exhibits works by Finnish artist Rafael Wardi (born 1929) from the 1950s to today.

Didrichsen Art Museum
Until April 19
☎ 358-9-4778-330
www.didrichsenmuseum.fi

Leipzig

art

"A Hundred Years of Advent Calendars" showcases about 200 historic advent calendars from several German collections.

Stadtgeschichtliches Museum
Until Jan. 11
☎ 49-341-9651-30
www.stadtgeschichtliches-museum-leipzig.de

Lille

art

"Echappées Nordiques: Breakaway Artists from the North" presents 104 works by Nordic artists who worked in France between 1870 and 1914.

Palais des Beaux-Arts
Until Jan. 11
☎ 33-3-2006-7800
www.pba-lille.fr

Liverpool

photography

"Liverpool through the Lens" shows

images of life in Liverpool from the 1920s to the 1960s by Irish-born photographer Edward Chambré Hardman (1898-1988).

Victoria Gallery & Museum
Until Jan. 31
☎ 44-151-7942-348
www.liv.ac.uk/vgm

London

photography

"Taylor Wessing Photographic Portrait Prize 08" showcases 60 works by emerging young photographers competing for the Taylor Wessing Photographic Portrait Prize.

National Portrait Gallery
Until Feb. 15
☎ 44-20-7312-2463
www.npg.org.uk

Madrid

photography

"Vogue: Rocks" shows 38 photographs of fine jewelry by Boucheron, Chanel, Cartier and Van Cleef & Arpels, interpreted by photographers Cecil Beaton, Jean Loup Sieff, Terry Richardson, Steven Meisel and Irving Penn.

Museo del Traje
Until Feb. 1

Paris

art

"Futurism in Paris: An Explosive Avant-Garde" exhibits more than 200 works and documents relating to the 1909 art movement known as Futurism and its successor, Cubism.

Centre Georges Pompidou
Until Jan. 26
☎ 33-1-4478-1233
www.centrepompidou.fr

television

"40 Years of TV Advertising" shows 40 historic advertising films in celebration of 40 years of French TV advertising.

Musée des Arts Décoratifs
Until April 12
☎ 33-1-4455-5750
www.ucad.fr

art

"Pollock and Shamanism" presents shamanic artifacts such as masks, amulets and totems from American Indian tribes, alongside the abstract paintings of American artist Jackson Pollock (1912-1956), exploring the influence of Native American culture on his work.

Pinacothèque de Paris
Until Feb. 16
☎ 33-1-4634-7440
www.pinacothèque.com

Stuttgart

ethnology

"Shamans of Siberia" highlights the ancient belief systems of Siberian tribes through 200 objects, including costumes, musical instruments and art.

Linden-Museum Stuttgart
Until June 28
☎ 49-711-2022-3
www.lindenmuseum.de

Vienna

art

"Lucia Nimcova Unofficial III" shows the "Unofficial" project by contemporary Slovak artist Lucia Nimcova (born 1977), combining found and original photography with film work.

BA-CA Kunstforum Tresor
Until Jan. 18
☎ 43-1-5373-326
www.ba-ca-kunstforum.at

art

"2x Japan Katagami: Textiles" exhibits Japanese robes made of precious materials—kimonos, warrior dresses, a painted fire brigade jacket and costumes, as well as less elaborate printed fabrics using stencils, known as Katagami.

MAK
Until March 29
☎ 43-1-7113-60
www.MAK.at

Zurich

art

"Surinomo" shows 19th-century Japanese poetry and art cards known as Surimono, printed and designed to be exchanged on New Year's Day.

Museum Rietberg—Park-Villa Rietter
Until April 13
☎ 41-44-2063-131
www.rietberg.ch

Source: ArtBase Global Arts News Service, WSJE research.