

The background of the cover is a photograph of a French-style interior. In the center is a round, rustic wooden table with a thick top and a turned pedestal. On the table are three glass vessels: a large round one on the left, a medium one in the center filled with small white beads, and a smaller one on the right. To the left of the table is a distressed wooden chair with a white cushion. To the right is a matching distressed wooden stool with a white cushion. The wall is a soft purple, and a framed abstract painting hangs above the table. Sunlight filters through white curtains on the left, casting shadows on the dark wood floor.

The French Connection

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French Class



A tasting room that is the ne plus ultra of avant-garde chic takes entertaining upscale. The seventeenth-century Italian refectory table is from Orion Antiques, Dallas. Chairs covered in heavily embossed leather are nineteenth-century Portuguese.



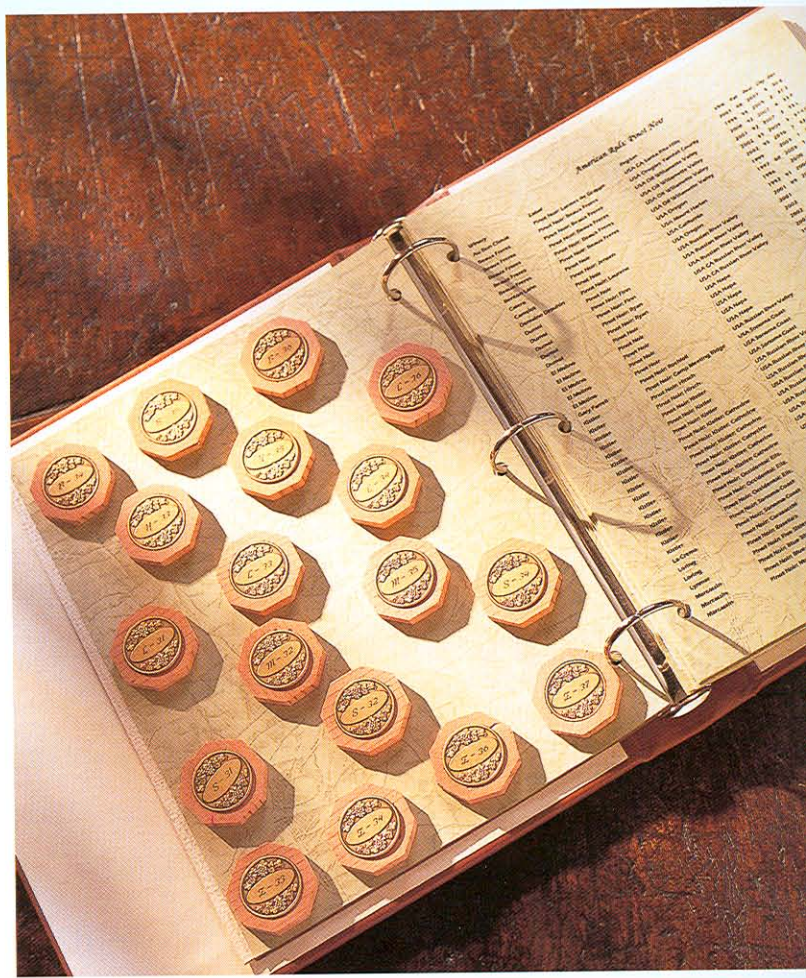
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In a world where glitz and grandeur often pose as glamour, the French typically take a more understated approach. Never mind that Louis XIV (1643–1715), the Sun King, shied away from minimalist thinking. Or that he adopted a bigger-is-better, more-is-more mind-set, morphing the modest hunting lodge built by his father Louis XIII (1610–43) into the ostentatious Château de Versailles. The French Revolution quashed desire for jaw-dropping opulence and led to classic simplicity promoted by the new Republic for the benefit of all.

By all appearances well-publicized signs of American affluence—such as bold baubles and imposing domains whose garages host high-performance cars

that call further attention to one's success—do not appeal to the steely sensibilities of archetypal French aristocrats. (Although the Revolution supposedly swept away the ruling class, it seems to have not disappeared. The 2005 edition of the French social registry, *Le Bottin Mondain*, which first appeared in 1903, lists 44,000 families, reported *The New York Times*.) In fact, all strata of a society that has reveled in egalitarian values for centuries tend to frown on frivolous trappings of wealth that boldly raise one's public profile.

OPPOSITE: A cellar—with twelve-foot ceilings and modulated humidity and temperature controls—adjacent to the tasting room accommodates more than three thousand bottles of fine wine within a 130-square-foot area. Ancient fossil ammonites inlaid in the stone floor add to the cave-like ambiance.



With centuries of experience, France continues to be the world leader in fine wines, but it's clear that American wines are also achieving deserved respect. The octagon-shaped wood pieces and engraved-brass inserts await installation in the cellar.

Ever since July 14, 1789, when several thousand angry Parisians demanded justice, storming the Bastille—medieval fortress widely viewed as a formidable symbol of monarchical power, given that it housed prisoners detained by *lettre de cachet* (royal command) from which there was no appeal—and, in time, overthrowing monarchy born in 987, the French have had a propensity for linking well-being with equality and leisure, above all else.

For them, a balance between work and play is central to a lifestyle that many believe is superior to what is perceived as the stressful, materialistic, frenzied pace of life in the United States—a notion that probably travels back centuries, say people who think about such things. As it echoes a refrain of Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–59)—the French aristocrat who in 1831, at age twenty-six, spent nine months in the States, and then later rather famously wrote in his *Democracy in America*—that Americans are uneasy with leisure and fixated on accumulating wealth. The way a wide swathe sees it, the old adage “money can’t buy happiness” is correct. Instead, it is France’s thirty-five-hour workweek, numerous holidays, six-week vacations, and mandatory retirement at age sixty-five, they say, that pave the way to this goal that renders life more fulfilling.

Many proclaim that time spent away from the workplace makes it possible to pursue those priorities that matter most: intellectual, cultural, and, not least, the meaningful relationships all humans crave. It is logical, they maintain, that less work and more play leads to added time with friends, families, and pets, which the vast majority openly admit to thinking of as children—shepherding them to play dates, grooming salons, portrait sessions, and yes, pricey restaurants where the most mannerly dine at tables set with Limoges porcelain.

In collaboration with nature, dry-stacked Millsap boulders—a soft rubble stone quarried in Millsap, Texas, and available through Roof Tile & Slate Company outside Dallas—lines the walls of a tasting room with double-groin vaulted ceiling abutted by a boulder ceiling over the stairs. In an arched niche sits a stone sink with Herbeau France fittings from Ann Sacks Tile and Stone.



