

Le Monde

Paris and Versailles, France

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The Son King & His Mom



Gordon and Emily on the front stoop – sometimes called the Marble Court – of the Palace of Versailles. It was enlarged between 1661 and 1715 by Louis XIV, “le Roi Soleil” or the Sun King, from a royal hunting lodge into the 2,300-room seat of political power of the Kingdom of France. We walked through only a few hundred.

The largest single room at Versailles is the *Gallerie des Batailles* nearly 150 yards long depicting France's 33 greatest military victories over a span of 1,500 years. Early in the 19th Century, long before anyone had an idea the United States would one day become a world power, this picture of the "Siège d'Yorck Town" was commissioned as one of those battles. It shows General George Washington of the Continental Army, the Comte de Rochambeau, general of the French Army, and France's Marquis de Lafayette, namesake of Fayetteville, North Carolina and Arkansas, and who served in Washington's army, making their plans before the Battle of Yorktown in 1781. British General Lord Cornwallis' surrender ended the Revolutionary War and resulted in negotiations that ended in American independence, sealed by the Treaty of Paris, signed two years later.



Marquis de Lafayette >

Comte de Rochambeau

< General George Washington



Emily and I first ate at the Café Le Procope, the oldest continually operating restaurant in Paris, in 1992 when we vacationed here after I covered the Barcelona Olympics. It was called a café – French for coffee – because it was the first place in town to serve that exotic new drink from Arabia in the 17th Century. The writer Voltaire supposedly drank 40 cups a day here and it became known as a gathering place for France's greatest intellectuals. But for Americans, the café's significance is that Benjamin Franklin, our country's minister to France, hung out here and negotiated the military alliance between the two countries that led to victory in the Revolutionary War. His successor, Thomas Jefferson, also drank coffee here. We had wine and dinner, but I had a latté with dessert.



The central portion of the Louvre museum, originally built as a castle in 1202 and converted into a royal palace in 1546, from within the I.M. Pei-designed glass pyramid public entrance, which opened 1989. The Musée du Louvre, probably the world's most famous art museum, originally occupied a portion of the palace beginning in 1793 but eventually expanded to fill the entire structure. This is the palace the royal family moved from to Versailles, which was called the Château.



More than any single piece of art, the portrait known in Italy as *La Gioconda* – for Lisa Gherardini, wife of Francesco del Giocondo and artist Leonardo da Vinci’s probable subject – is what the Louvre is known for. It’s why these people are crowded against the barrier with their cameras. English speakers know her as the Mona Lisa and puzzle over her smile. I got my own picture of her in the inset at upper left.



The chancel (*chœur*) of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris, which was begun in 1163 and completed 182 years later. Unlike London's Westminster Abbey, where we were nearly two weeks ago, photography is allowed inside. A byproduct of Henry VIII's making himself the head of the Church of England, breaking from the Catholic Church, was the Abbey becoming the burial place for many of England's most accomplished subjects. Notre Dame, while the Abbey's counterpart as the most important church in France's capital city, remains at its heart a church, not a shrine to France's heroes.



Our morning walk from our hotel to the Louvre was through this narrow park along the right bank of the Seine called the *Cours-la-Reine*, commissioned by Queen Marie de' Medici, second wife of Henry IV, in 1616. He had his first marriage to Margaret of Valois annulled after she produced no children by him or any of her other lovers. The wedding to Marie in her hometown of Florence, Italy, drew 4,000 guests but no groom; the marriage was by proxy and necessary only to produce an heir to the throne. The king was assassinated the day after her coronation in 1610. The de Medicis were an Italian banking family that produced three popes.



The elevator track up the East Pillar of the Eiffel Tower. The tower at night (inset) is illuminated by lights installed for the Millennium celebration of Dec. 31, 1999 and kept because they were so popular. Under French law, the lighting is a copyrighted work of art that may not be photographed and distributed for commercial purposes without payment of a rights fee. Therefore, the normal subscription price that you pay for these newsletters is herewith waived **FOR THIS ISSUE ONLY**.