

Pergola, patchwork and pink pants: Everyday life in Entre-deux-Eaux, Year 8, Weeks 15 - 18

It's a sad fact that it is usually when we're thinking of travelling to England, that I realise that we haven't communicated for a while, usually because not much seems to have happened in our rural tranquillity. So amid the present chaos, here is a quick update on E2E happenings. I say chaos, because the chain of purchasers for my mother's old flat is getting restless at delays (with solicitors and Housing Association and threatening to withdraw). So we are packing to leave on Friday to clear the flat in hope the sale is completed. At the same time, having long planned our first family Christmas here, and eight return tickets with Ryanair or BA having long been booked, Ryanair have just withdrawn their Stansted-Basel service from early December and BA are threatening to strike over Christmas. Hence chaos.

Meanwhile, you could probably write the annual autumnal newsletter - with resumption of the hunting season and international patchwork festival in September; sunshine, brilliant leaf colours and the international geography festival in October; visiting local ghouls ringing the doorbell at Halloween; then rain and mist in November! And so it has been this year. However, a few novelties have been the pink trousers, a convent's sale-of-contents and an abbey's plant sale. We've also had a few projects of our own on the go, including pergola, patchwork and plumbing.

The three quarter-length tight fitting bright pink trousers belong to our neighbour Mme Laine, together with some pink peek-a-boo shoes. I have for so long been accustomed to her more traditional outfits of Crimplene dress for best (with tightly permed hair) and flowered overall or brown stretch trousers for every day, that the new image stunned me, as we set out together for the E2E oldies' September afternoon of gossip, cards and cakes. Has the trip for two to Venice that she won last autumn in the oldies' lotto changed her horizons? She and her sister have also booked to go on all the oldies' organised coach trips. And there was also an ascent by balloon planned for fourteen family and friends. M. Laine, it should be added, was wisely staying out of all this, and just sticking to his occasional hunting pursuits. Sadly the balloon trip was cancelled, but the traditional village is changing!

Previous newsletters have mentioned the number of new houses being built in the village. Now that they have been there for a year or two the young couples are turning their attention to their gardens. This seems to involve a lot of lorries and earth shifting and boulder planting. At school we only learnt one French word for garden, which was *jardin*. However my local source of all local information, Mme Laine, insists that number 12 (we are 13) are not making a *jardin* but a *cour*. A yard? What would it have in it, I asked, anxious to improve my vocabulary. Oh trees, flowers and grass she replied. To her practical mind, I therefore presume, a *jardin* must consist of edible plants in neat rows. And, as she sighed, young people don't have *jardins* any more, they just buy everything. And, talking of vocabulary, Scrabble has resumed, with its quota of unfamiliar words, - often unfamiliar to all the group. My great coup was to make the very plausible-looking word *geophile*. When questioned as to

what it meant, I airily said it was a lover of earth. As it turned out to be the correct highest-scoring word, its meaning was checked, amid disbelief. It's, apparently, another word for *mille-pattes* or millipede! So we can't call our neighbours at number 12 *geophiles*, as the lorries shift endless piles of earth around (not to mention all over the road).

It's always good to do something a bit out of the ordinary with visitors, especially when those who come regularly have seen most of the tourist sights on previous visits. So while Ann and David (Hart) were here, we one day followed a very hearty lunch at the auberge St Alexis with a walk through the vineyards below, and then we queued to be let into the sale at the convent of the Clarisses at Sigolsheim. We'd previously learnt (whilst tasting and selecting wine at the Sigolsheim co-operative) that the convent was to close and the remaining four or five sisters dispersed, some to nursing homes. And now all their goods were to be sold to fund-raise for the order in Africa and for the upkeep of the elderly nuns. The village had provided enthusiastic volunteers and also contributed many more items to the sale. So we walked through the convent, examining books in one room, sewing things in another, crockery and cutlery in the kitchen areas, gardening and wash-day implements in another, with simple tables, cupboards and shelves lining the corridors. It was quite sad to see their few possessions, and also the esteem in which the sisters were held in the village. Ann and I bought some sewing items and John picked out a pretty jug.

I'm glad that no visitors came over specially for the patchwork festival in Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines this year, as the quilts were not as interesting or innovative as in previous years (I may have said that last year too). However their fashion show was certainly "interesting", especially if you'd been longing to wear a busby of made from pink and purple rasta locks, with a skirt made of jagged bits of tartan, black striped tights and platform boots, an outfit unfairly, I thought, billed as *style anglais*. I, like the rest of the audience, much preferred the *flower power sevillan* with its flouncing flamenco dresses with flowers. However, uninfluenced by trends, I have been greatly enjoying making my own patchwork throw for Leila's new sofa. It's been fun digging out old dress and shirt materials and making random patterns of all the colours. Some of the garments did indeed date back to flower-power days - I'd forgotten quite how short some of them were (not to mention how much slimmer we both were then). And fortunately John's sister has given him a new dressing gown to replace the one cut up for the patchwork!

And while I've been engrossed in patchwork, John has been changing the plumbing. This was necessitated by the sewerage survey earlier this year. John has re-routed the cellar waste pipes of the old house to flow into the more modern (and compliant) septic tank and filter bed built for the new part. To do that, the WC pan in the barn also needed to be changed from vertical (directly into the old tank) to horizontal exit to join with the new pipes. So whilst installing a stylish new model, he also re-tiled the floor, and part-tiled and repainted the walls. Once we get the septic tanks emptied we should be completely legal! John has also added guttering to the re-roofed (thanks to Alistair's hard work) workshop. But I have to admit that I was much more excited by the pergola John made while I was swanning off with the train-gang

in Broadstairs. It was a lovely surprise.

So far we only have one rose and one honeysuckle growing up the new pergola, in what is definitely our *jardin*, as it is at the entrance to the vegetable patch. So when we saw that there was a sale of roses, shrubs and trees at an abbey we had never visited, we drove off towards Epinal to it. Our friend Nicola, who was a volunteer at the Chicago Botanical Garden, used to talk with enthusiasm about the garden. Whilst Roger, a structural engineer, subsequently said that the abbey church looks too structurally unsound for him to go inside. We did go into the church, and I particularly liked the recently painted icons. There were also large flower paintings. Later that day, undaunted by structural concerns, there was to be a concert and the candles were being lit. It seemed to be a very creative community. A single brother, Brother Symeon, had been responsible for developing the four hectares of grounds (which were definitely billed as *jardins*) over the 27 years that the Community of the Beatitudes has been there. There was a white garden with statuary, a hydrangea garden in front of a gîte that they let, a lake with paths shaded by trees and tall grasses, a heather garden and everywhere exotic trees like an Indian chestnut with small oval conkers. It was a very peaceful garden - ideal for contemplative strolling. We didn't buy a rose for the pergola, but perhaps we'll return in spring for their bedding plant sale. On the way back, John "collected" a few red oak saplings from the roadside, reasoning that the efficient verge-cutters would dispose of them if we didn't. So maybe one day our meadow will be as magnificent as brother Symeon's *jardin*.

With the Harts we also went to the new wine festival at Eguisheim. The village square, presided over by the statue of Pope Leo IX (who was born there) was filled with tables, stalls and a stage with a *chanteuse* and her accompanist. It was all very jolly. We sampled some of the potent new brew (in plastic beakers), Ann bought some freshly baked kugelhof, and we sat and watched the elderly dancers re-living their youth in a perhaps more stately version. Our own grapes at the end of the vegetable patch had fruited well this year and John made two large batches of grape jam, the second batch spiced a bit like mulled wine. Mm! It has joined the earlier plum jam and plum chutney (the "ornamental" plums were gathered from tall trees while Ann and Derek were here, using John's invented device made from a wire coat hanger, tights and a long pole). The walnut trees have produced a good harvest too, as the mice (who move into the barns with the bad weather) will attest. Piles of empty shells have been found. Drying and hanging facilities since have been changed (for walnuts, not mice).

So will all ten of us be sitting round at Christmas cracking walnuts and spreading spiced grape jam? It's just as well that, having investigated local suppliers, we haven't yet put our name down for a Christmas turkey or capon. Will anyone make it here next month? Watch this space.