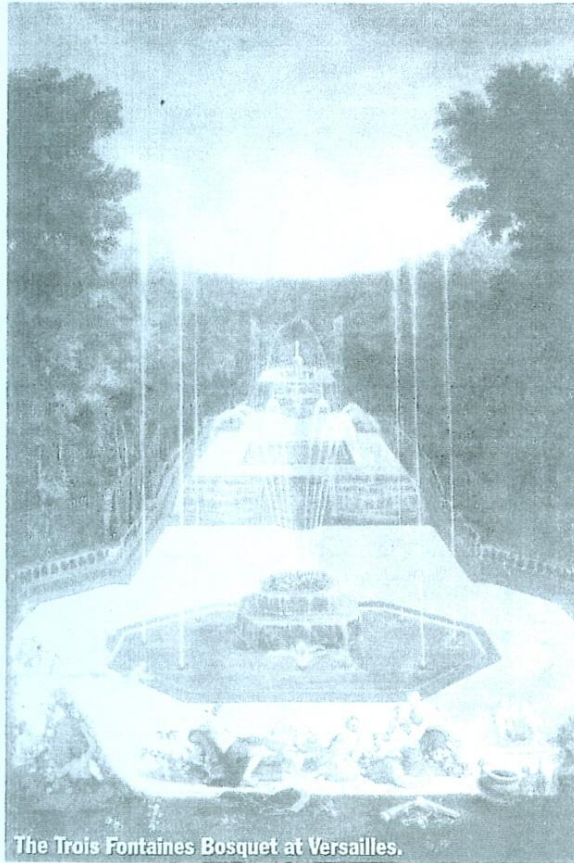


Coins for the Fountain



The Trois Fontaines Bosquet at Versailles.

PARIS — A shortage of American tourists has left shopkeepers and hoteliers up and down the Rue Saint-Honoré a bit bereft. But one group of visitors who share a love of luxury and all things French might make up for the deficit. The American Friends of Versailles, with Chicago philanthropist Catharine Hamilton leading the charge, will descend on Paris in mid-June for a week's worth of festivities surrounding the opening of the Trois Fontaines Bosquet at Versailles. The fountain is a glory designed by Louis XIV's legendary gardener, André Le Nôtre, in 1677 that has been languishing in a state of disrepair since 1830.

Restored to its original state via painstaking Baroque techniques, the fountain, which Hamilton describes as "the size of two football fields," will be toasted by the Friends with a series of soirees thrown by Paris' counts and countesses, princesses, dukes and viscomtes, including a cocktail reception hosted by Madame Bernadette Chirac. The festivities will culminate in Le Grand Bal du Bosquet, which will be held in the Versailles Orangerie.

Getting the fountain flowing again — seven years and \$4 million later — was only part of the Friends' mission, though. As Hamilton explains it, enhancing Franco-American ties was equally grave. "Restoring the Bosquet has been more difficult than we anticipated, first because of Kosovo, but then Afghanistan, the Iraqi war, the decline of the dollar and a dip in the Franco-American relationship," she says. "But we want to focus on our likenesses, not our differences."

Still, one difference neither group could ignore was their disparate fund-raising techniques. The Americans raised the cash the old-fashioned way — demanding it from their friends. The French, though unaccustomed to the method, soon picked up on it, sweet-talking florists and party planners into lowering their rates and cajoling friends into hosting dinners at some of France's most renowned chateaux. "Doing benefit dinners is not in the French culture," says Sandy de Yturbe, who is hosting a party at her country home, Chateau d'Anet. "The Americans are more generous, but for them, it's tax deductible. This is new in France." (Such donations generally have not been deductible in France, but new legislation to make them so is in the works.)

Anne-Marie de Gany, the French committee co-chairman, learned that a good dose of guilt means plenty of leverage. "The French couldn't resist giving because these Americans have," she explains. "They had to match the American enthusiasm for the monument. I don't know if we'd have the same reaction to a beautiful American monument, so it's very touching."

Of course, pleased as they may be with the results of their efforts, both the French and the Americans maintain a general distaste for fund-raising. "Asking for other things was a lot less embarrassing than asking for cash," de Gany concludes. "But it's still embarrassing."

— Jessica Kerwin

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