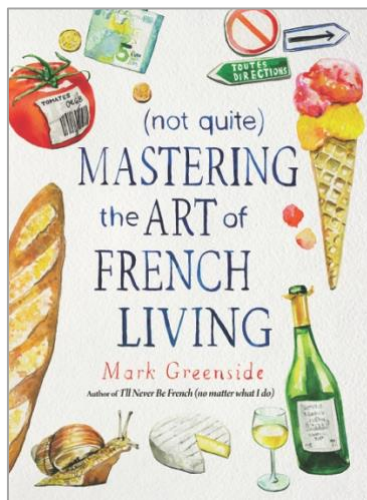


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Dear Friend,

Donna and I recently returned from seven weeks of summer (August) to fall (October) in Plobien. Up to the end, until a week before leaving, I thought this year—holy cow, miracle of miracles—we made it through trouble free. I think this every year even though it has never happened. Every year, right before we leave, there's a surprise.

A few years ago, it was the breakdown of the dehumidifier. BD, Before the Dehumidifier, the house was often damp and musty (it's a stone house on a river in an area that rains 270 days a year). AD, it's dry. Noé, the electrician son of Jean and Sharon, was at the house upgrading the fuse box, rewiring, adding sockets and switches, fixing plugs, so I asked him to try and fix it. He worked for about thirty minutes, wrecked the wooden cabinet it's housed in, and gave up. The thought, vision, and smell of returning to, not to mention renting out a non-dehumidified house were too vivid and imaginable to suffer, so I called Jean, Noé's dad—Jean, who fixed my stove, washing machine, the clothes dryer (twice); who installed my first shower; who came to the house in the middle of a nor'easter—a *tempête*—to fix a skylight that was gushing water. I called and left him a message.

“Bonjour, Jean. Je’ parti en trois jours et le déshumidificateur marche pas. C’est possible vous fait le reparation?”

With non-English understanding people I always worry about phone messages I leave because I know neither they nor I can be sure of what they heard or I said, but Jean is bilingual and fluent in English, so I confidently leave messages for him in French. If he doesn't understand, he can (and will and does) call back and ask what I want, need, or said.

He called back, and said, "I don't think I can fix it," which actually made me happy, because (1) he understood me, and (2) it's what he always says before he fixes whatever is broken, which he did. He fixed the dehumidifier, and he re-glued and re-screwed the cabinet. It looks better and works better and is stronger than it was when it was new. That was eight years ago, and the dehumidifier still works.

Over the years, there have been many last-minute surprises: a downed tree, tumbling stone wall, blocked kitchen pipe, leaking toilet, broken shutter, rusted-through drain pipe. Last year, the furnace broke, and there was no hot water. Monsieur Castan, my ever trusty and ready plumber was on vacation in Spain, so I called Monsieur Claude, my fuel guy, who, amazingly, with his eyes dilated and unable to see, answered his phone in the middle of an eye exam and said he'd be right over. Thankfully, Laure, his wife, drove. I watched, concerned, as she helped him out of the car. I listened, anxiously, as she explained why he was wearing Ray Charles glasses. I pleaded, imploringly, for him to go home as she led him to the furnace, where he took the burner apart and cleaned it like a magician reassembling a tank, blindfolded.

This year, it's the clothes dryer—*sèche linge*—two words I wish I didn't know. The dryer was old, cheap, and used when I bought it. Twenty years later, it was covered with pock-marks of impetigo-looking rust, and the door latch was broken—the door had to be held shut by lifting and leaning a large, heavy slab of slate against it—but it worked. It dried well.... and then it didn't.

The first four weeks of August-September were beautiful: seventy degrees, sunny, beachy, spectacular cloudless and cloudy skies and starry nights, laundry waving hello and goodbye to us, blowing in the breeze on the clothes line. Then the rains came. It rained every day for the last three weeks, which is not atypical, but was unfortunate timing, as that was when we had several going away, see-you-next-year-dinners at the house, each using table-for-eight tablecloths, multiple cloth napkins, and

lots of dish towels. We also had friends visiting, adding sheets, bedding and towels to Donna's normal, regular, de rigueur double and triple clothes changes per day and my planned seven-day recycling of everything I had to wear. During the fourth load on a wet and miserable day, the dryer stopped. Dead, at 5:45 on a Saturday night.

Unlike a downed tree, tumbling stone wall, blocked kitchen pipe, leaking toilet, broken shutter, rusted-through drain pipe, and dirty furnace, there was no one to call for help. Making things right was up to us. That was the bad news.

The good news was Donna and I recently bought a new washing machine in California so we knew what we were looking for: something simple, mechanical, not digital; no LED screen, computer, or impossible-to-touch-right touch-screen; a stainless steel drum; clear, easy to read and operate directional knobs; large capacity; quiet; eco-friendly; front loading; easy access to filters; good warranty; instruction booklet in English, and not made in China (crap) or France (looks great, doesn't work.) In the U.S., we bought a U.S.A. made Speed Queen, the exact machine that exists in every laundromat I've ever been to, only better, because I don't need a zillion quarters to run it.

DARTY, the store where I buy most of my household appliances is a thirty-minute drive and closes at 7:00. I know this from years of many just missed DARTY shopping experiences. I also know the store is closed Sunday and Monday, and if I wait until Tuesday the dryer will be delivered after we're gone when the house is empty.

I drive like a Frenchman, taking the highway, avoiding all but four round-points, and arrive at the store at 6:10. By 6:20 we've ascertained there are no Speed Queen or Speed Queen types, and every machine, except those that look like toys or junk (and are mostly French-made), have LED screens, computers, and touch screens. I settle on an Electrolux because I think it's English and will have an information booklet in English, but even when I find out it's Swedish, built in Poland and Mexico, and the information booklet is in every European language except English, I'm not dissuaded: it has only one dial that points to words, many of which I know, two buttons, and a tiny, tiny touch screen.

We buy it at 6:55 on Saturday and schedule it to be delivered the following Wednesday, four days before we leave, which ought to be more than enough time for

any reasonable, accomplished, compos-mentas adult to figure out how to work a clothes dryer.

Wednesday afternoon two youths arrive and quickly remove the old pock-marked, broken-door machine and set up the new, shiny Electrolux, and explain how it works—in French. There's an on/off power button, button #1: *marche / arret*, which is easy enough and clear. There's the dial, where the words I don't understand, like *refraicher* and *facile repass* (little ironing, easy ironing) now seem to outnumber those I do. Button #2, *sechage*, sets the temperature and drying levels, which as far as I understand, are very dry, dry, semi-dry, damp, and why bother? Pushing this button also sets the time of the cycle, like when, for instance, the dial is turned to *sport*, whatever that is, the *sechage* automatically sets (and cannot be changed) to the driest dry—very dry, which the machine, unbelievably says takes ninety minutes to complete. To start the dryer, I have to touch something that looks like this >II on the tiny LED touch screen.

I put a load of wash into the dryer, push button #1, *marche*, turn the dial to *chemise*, push button #2, setting it to dry in seventy minutes, and push >II. Nothing happens. I push >II again and again, turn the dial to *duvet*, semi-dry in sixty minutes, push *arret / marche* twice, and >II. More nothing. I call Donna, show her everything I did and hand her the information booklet—hoping she can figure it out from the illustrations or the French—and return to the house. An hour later she comes back, and says, “I can't do it.”

Clearly, *hopefully*, this requires a French woman—and lucky for us, Françoise and Bruno are coming to Plobien this weekend. They have a dryer, and they can read French, and there's nothing I've seen that Françoise can't do—except, apparently, this. After playing with the machine, reading the directions, pushing and turning and tapping and touching, she gives up, and calls Bruno, who comes over and turns the dial, pushes the buttons, and touches the screen in a way I hope someone—like Donna or I—can duplicate. It takes two women and Bruno to semi-dry one load and none of us is sure we can do it again.

Meanwhile, Donna and I now have a machine that costs more, dries less, takes longer, with a hidden second filter that's impossible to find, get to, or clean—and somehow I'm not surprised....



Latest news about (not quite) Mastering the Art of French Living:

- For one brief week in July—maybe two—*(not quite) Mastering the Art of French Living* was on the *Wall Street Journal's* best seller list. The book is a best seller!!
- *Audible* has bought the audio rights to the book and the book (as of November 12) is available on [Amazon](#). The reader is Richard Poe, someone I don't know and never heard, but who has read lots and lots of books I wish I had written. If you listen to it, let me know what you think.
- The story about the first time I ate langoustine in the chapter *I'm Eating What?* will be anthologized in *Flash Nonfiction Food*, one of a series of flash (short-short, 750 words) writing books. The book is slated for Spring 2020 release.

Most important and meaningful, though, are your emails and reviews on [Amazon](#) and [Goodreads](#). Whenever I need a boost, I reread them. If you haven't reviewed the book yet, please consider doing so, as those reviews are critical for the book's success and my mental health. If you'd like to contact me, I can be reached at:

- Email: mark@markgreenside.com

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- Amazon author page: amazon.com/author/markgreenside
- BookBub author page: bookbub.com/authors/mark-greenside

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Happy Thanksgiving to you and yours, and may all your surprises be welcome ones.

Yours Sincerely,

Mark

