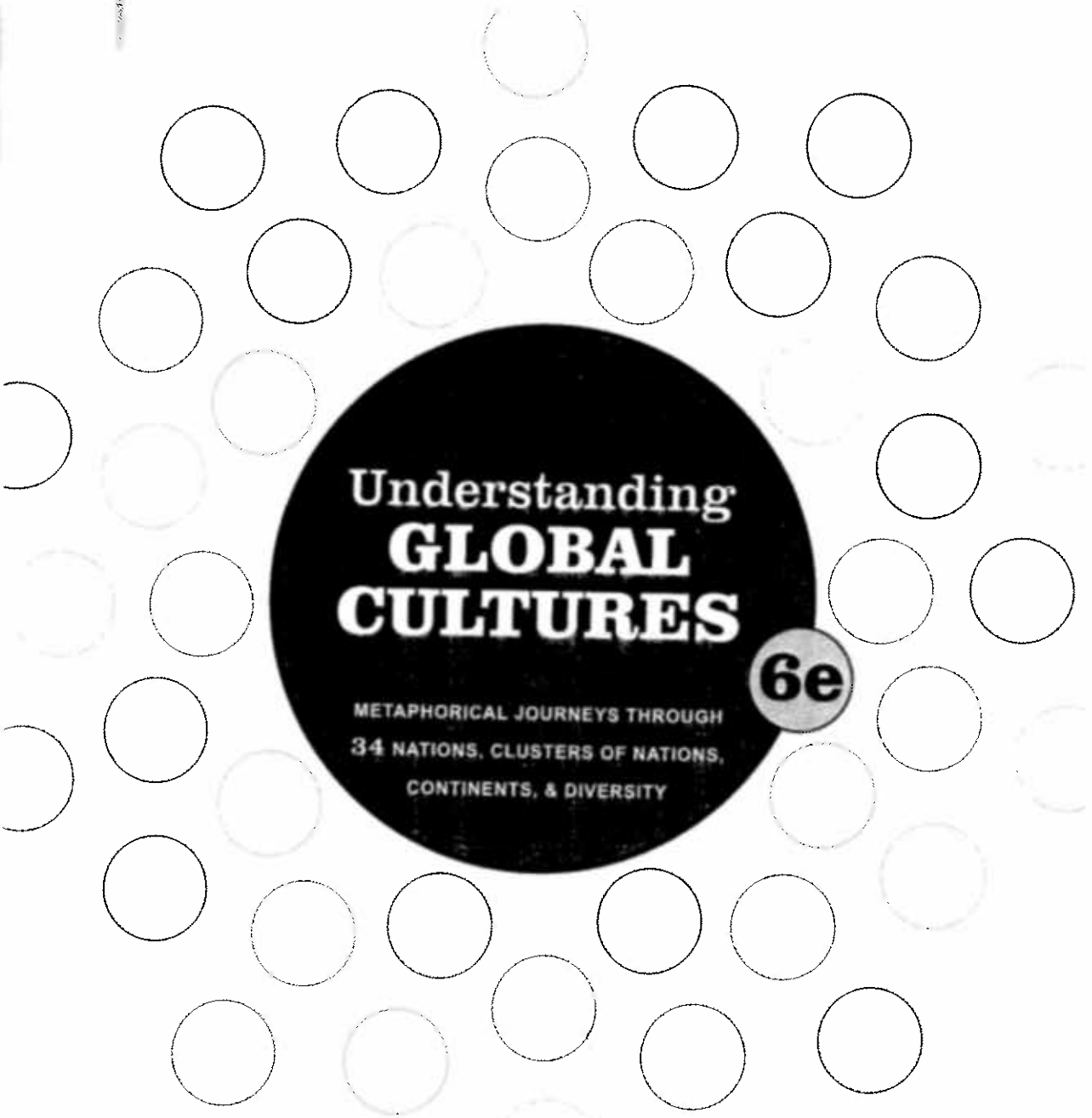

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CHAPTER 14

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French Wine

Wine making is really quite a simple business. Only the first 200 years are difficult.

—Baroness Philippine de Rothschild (quoted in Rachman, 1999, p. 91)

To describe French culture, it is useful and perhaps essential to consider French wine, the best of which is considered preeminent throughout the world. French viticulture has produced many of the leading wine practices for centuries and has created many of the best-known grape varieties, including cabernet sauvignon, chardonnay, pinot noir, syrah, and sauvignon blanc. Wine has played a vital role in determining the economy, traditions, and attitudes in France. It has shaped the country's disposition, weaving a common thread through all the varying walks of French life. Just as there are more than 5,000 varieties of French wine, so too the French have a variety of idiosyncrasies and personalities, many of which are puzzling to outsiders. Beneath these differences, however, is a culture that unifies the people and their institutions. Accordingly, wine appears to be an appropriate metaphor for describing and analyzing the French culture.

As the opening quote suggests, France, like wine, is a complex culture that seems simple to understand but in reality is not. It has taken centuries for the French to develop a nation that is the model for numerous nations because of its emphasis on the concepts of life and liberty. The United States is the only nation in the world that has added the pursuit of happiness to its constitution.

In many ways the French wine industry represents the classic tradeoff between globalization and cultural identity. France has been the leader in wine production among nations for centuries and is still regarded as the producer of the best wines at the top end of the market. But government regulation of French wine making has done serious harm in the form of fragmentation of the industry into many small growers who cannot take advantage of economies of scale found in other wine-growing nations, a confusingly large number of wine categories, and poor and inadequately funded marketing campaigns. The Bordeaux region of France by itself has 20,000 different producers, yet Gallo, based in California and the world's largest wine company, spends more than twice as much on advertising as all the Bordeaux wine companies together. The wine industry has also grown in many other nations, such as Australia and Chile, over the past few decades. Still, the preeminence of French wine, particularly of the finest vintages, is universally

acknowledged. Furthermore, French companies have established joint ventures in such nations as China and India that now produce superior wine at a reasonable price, and it is a mark of distinction to carry the French name on the wine bottle.

To focus this discussion of French culture within the metaphor of French wine, five principal elements of wine will serve as a guide: pureness, classification, composition, suitability, and maturation.

Pureness

To more fully appreciate the metaphor, we must first understand what wine is, what its origins are, and how it is made. A wine's characteristics are the summation of its past development within a given environment. Viniculture is the precise and patient process that further shapes the grape's transformation into wine. Fine wine is considered to be the distillation of 2,000 years of civilization. It is understandably viewed as an object of great pride; a survivor of nature's caprices and uncertainties; a product of patience and modesty; and, most important, a symbol of friendship, hospitality, and *joie de vivre*.

Vital to the quality of the wine are the soil, climate, vine type, and the viniculturist who tends the wine-making process. The complex interplay of these factors determines whether pride or disappointment reigns once the wine flows from its bottled womb. Soil and climate nourish growth in mysterious ways that defy chemical analysis. Contrary to what might be expected, the vine thrives in the type of soil in which little else will grow. Climate and vine type must complement each other so as to produce healthy grapes, and the viniculturist must make sure that the timing of harvest and maturation is meticulous and accurate. Vines are interbred, making it difficult to classify the wine produced because the offspring may resemble their parents or display entirely new characteristics. The wines recognized as the world's greatest—those that cost more than $100 a bottle—come from grapes grown in only a few select vineyards in France.

The art and science of viniculture also influence the wine's personality. Experience, diligent patience, and effort are required to propagate the wine through its various stages of cultivation. The *vendange*, or harvest period, brings a sense of urgency. A delay of even 12 hours between harvest and preparation for fermenting can spoil both taste and aroma. After transfer from vats to bottles, the wine continues its aging process. Age, then, influences personality development, with great wines requiring more than 50 years to mature to perfection.

A Perfect Land

The French, much like U.S. Americans, have a romantic view of their country as being special and unique. Like a flawless bottle of vintage wine, France displays perfection in the land and its people. The French have mentally massaged the image of their borders into a hexagon, perfectly situated midway between the equator and the North Pole, balanced in soil and climate. Symmetry, balance, and harmony—it all coalesced into one great land because the French supposedly willed it. This perception of symmetry and unity in the physical dimensions of this geographically diverse land is more wishful thinking than reality.

The north and the south disagree about the origin of the French people. In different parts of the country people have different identities: The northeast identifies with the German and Swiss,

the northwest with the English, the southwest with the Catalans and Basques, and the southeast with the Italians. Perhaps, then, the quest for unity has deep and stubborn roots in a past in which the French have been an aggregate of individuals struggling to forge themselves into a single entity.

One source of tension is that Muslims now number about 6 million in France out of a total population of 63.1 million. This is in Europe. Poverty and joblessness are much greater in Muslim communities and other immigrant communities, such as the Roma, than in non-Muslim communities. The tension results largely from the colonial legacy of France, particularly its acceptance of Algerians as French citizens after the Algerian War during the 1950s and the acceptance of members of other former French colonies. In French cities with large Muslim populations, it is now common to see Muslim women wearing the , which is a combination of a veil covering the face (the), a headscarf, and loose-fitting robes covering the remainder of the body. In 2010, France outlawed the wearing of the niqab or face veil from public places in accordance with the principle of strict separation of religious and public arenas. France had previously banned the wearing of headscarves, yarmulkes, and other visible religious symbols from the public schools. Still, yearly conversions to Islam have doubled in the past 25 years, totaling somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000 converts, even though France, which defines itself as a secular nation, has no official statistics broken down by race or creed (de la Baume, 2013).

Nevertheless, some of the tension is clearly productive. One example is the Muslim desire to eat hamburgers, that is, hamburgers made in accordance with Muslim law. There is no difference between the taste of halal and non-halal hamburgers. However, a French competitor of McDonald's, Quick, which had only one third of McDonald's market share, decided to introduce halal hamburgers. Sales boomed. Similarly, films stressing either an Algerian viewpoint or French viewpoint about the Algerian War have helped each side consider their joint issues from the other's perspective. In addition, the fact that French voters elected Nicholas Sarkozy, the child of a Hungarian father and mother with Greek Jewish roots, as president (now former president) a few years ago suggests a degree of open-mindedness that is greater than that in many other nations.

Historically, the French tend to give the impression that France is the center of the universe around which the rest of the world rotates. Many other nations have expressed a similar belief in their superiority. China, for example, was called , and for many centuries the Chinese drew maps of the world with China as its center. A similar phenomenon occurred in Europe when the early maps were drawn by Europeans, who placed Europe right in the center of each map. One can quickly learn to fight against the French belief in their cultural superiority along with their lack of immediate friendliness. But they readily defend their position in part by noting that international business and diplomacy were conducted in the French language until World War I and that French art, literature, and thought remain pervasive in education and society.

The extent to which the French defend this supposed superiority is extraordinary. A commission must decide which foreign words can be a part of the official language; the proceedings of conferences are required to be published in French, even when English would suffice; and the seventh summit devoted to the French language was held in 1997 in Vietnam, which France formerly ruled but in which only about 1% of the population speaks French. In the 11th summit, held in Bucharest, Hungary, in 2005, former Prime Minister Jacques Chirac warned of a unilingual world in which the dominance of English would limit cultural creativity and variety.

Historical Roots

The earliest traceable ancestry of the French people begins with the Celts, a Germanic people who later became known as the Gauls. They planted an extensive empire, which was subdued by the invading Romans under Caesar in 52 BCE. For the next 500 years, the Gauls were repeatedly subjected to invasions by other Germanic tribes and, last, by the Franks, who emigrated westward across the Rhine. Out of the Middle Ages and its feudal system emerged the Renaissance (rebirth), a time not only of increasing wealth and power for France but also of continuing turmoil.

A golden age burst forth in the person of Louis XIV, the Sun King, who proclaimed, "*L'état c'est moi*," or "I am the state." He orchestrated his rule from the extraordinarily lavish Palais de Versailles, and during his reign, France expanded and built an impressive navy. Its language was spoken and its culture was emulated all over Europe.

But the Sun King allowed a widening gap to develop between the wealthy and the poor, and in an increasingly financially stressed economy, that gap exploded in the French Revolution of 1789. The quest for *liberté, égalité, fraternité* first resulted in the brief rule of Napoleon III. He fostered a more organized France by enforcing the Code Napoleon, which gathered, revised, and codified a vast, disorderly accumulation of laws, both old and new. Unfortunately the oppressive restrictions that Napoleon III placed on laborers, peasants, and women are still felt today.

In the 20th century, France was heavily affected by World Wars I and II. Although a victor in World War I, France lost nearly 2 million men. World War II still lives in the memories of many French people as a time of hopelessness and disgrace under German occupation.

Troubled Years

The history of French wine has also endured notable difficulties. From 1865 to 1895, a disease called *Phylloxera vastatrix* destroyed virtually every vineyard in France (Vedel, 1986). This was a tragedy of major proportions that adversely affected thousands of wine growers. But, even in such dire circumstances, the French did not lose their resolve. After toiling for months, they discovered by trial and error that a viable solution was to graft French vine strains onto American stocks that were resistant to the disease. Forced into a corner, the French came together to save the industry. In subsequent years the vineyards regained their health, and the wine industry flourished once again.

Even from this brief overview, it is apparent that the lives of the French people have been planted, uprooted, and replanted throughout history. The conquering Romans left the French with a sense of pageantry and grandeur as well as an affinity for control and bureaucratic organization. The Romans introduced the concepts of centralization and a complex bureaucracy, which have taken root in French hearts and minds. France's present concept of grandeur was first thrust on the French people in the time of Louis XIV. From this epic era emerged the idea that the French were guardians of cherished universal values and that their country was a beacon to the world. The French saw themselves as favored, as possessors of ideas and values coveted and treasured by the rest of mankind. As the French poet Charles Péguy is said to have written, "How maddening, says God, it will be when there are no longer any Frenchmen."

It is true that the purest, finest wines must be grown in special soil. In this sense the French consider France to be a pure and proud country. Accordingly, those not born and raised in France need to guard against forming quick and negative first impressions without understanding past trials and tribulations as they relate to the formation of the French culture.

Classification

As noted earlier, France produces 5,000 varieties of wine precisely classified so that impostors cannot pass for superior wines. This insistence about nomenclature bestows on wine a pedigree that is displayed on each label. Through fermentation and the aging process in the bottle, wine develops its final personality, blend, and balance.

Although wine is classified in excruciating detail, those who are not connoisseurs might dare to divide it into four major classes: the *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée* wines, which are the best and most famous; respectable regional varieties, known as *Vins Délimités de Qualité Supérieur*, which are quite good for everyday use; the *Vins de Pays*, which are younger, fresher wines suitable for immediate consumption; and the *Vins de Table*, which lack taste and pedigree.

Similarly French society is clearly stratified and divided into four principal and generally nonoverlapping classes: the *haute bourgeoisie*, which includes the few remaining aristocrats along with top business and government professionals; the *petite bourgeoisie*, owners of small companies or top managers; *classes moyennes*, or the middle classes—teachers, shopkeepers, and artisans; and *classes populaires*, or workers.

People may know their place in society, but that does not imply that they feel inferior to others. The French are comfortable accepting and living within the confines of this classification system rather than resisting it. Workers in the *classe populaire* are just as accepted for their contribution to society as officials in the haute bourgeois class. This norm extends to French attitudes toward outsiders. Visitors to France sometimes have difficulty relating to the French, who can be just as ethnocentric as anyone else, because the French tend to behave independently of others who mistakenly expect tacit cooperation from them in an undertaking. The reason for this outlook is quite simple. In the French mind, France and a person's own particular social class tend to come first. The French interpret the phrase *tout le monde* (literally, all the world) to mean all who are French or, even more specifically, all who are in their particular social class. Outsiders are countenanced but not openly welcomed.

Creating Order

Rules, regulations, and procedures give certainty, definition, and order to French life along with guaranteeing the preservation of a particular quality of lifestyle. Still, *savoir-vivre* facilitates life, meaning there is a certain way to do something no matter what the situation is or how trivial it may appear. The rules provide an avenue for security where a threat is presupposed and certainty where fears and doubts exist. Consequently nothing is left to chance. Even as Napoleon codified civil law, Antonin Carême (1833) codified gastronomy in his five-volume *L'Art de la Cuisine Français au Dix-Neuvième Siècle*. Nothing has been omitted or forgotten; even slavery was codified, and it resulted in more humane treatment of slaves in France and its colonies than in England or Spain and their colonies.

On the other hand, *savoir-vivre* can lead to preoccupation with form over substance, transforming every aspect of life into a ceremony. Preoccupation with form is evident in the French sense of style and fashion and their flair for elegance. Some first-class French hotels have decrepit furniture, yet the rooms have such charm that all is forgiven and overlooked. Image, and the stress on the sensual, is more important than the facts in business advertisements as well. French

advertisements tend to be attention getting. They concentrate on creating a mood or a response instead of informing (Hall & Hall, 1990). French advertising campaigns must first produce pieces of art before trying to be effective. This is why many of the French believe that U.S. advertisements are not very good—the messages are too straightforward for French tastes. At least to many French commentators, American ads, when compared to French ads, are boring and predictable (Haley, 1996). Similarly it is no accident that the French subway system has reproductions of classic paintings on display at major stations.

That the French love classifying things is apparent not only with regard to wine but also with regard to the classification of people by title and in their fastidiousness with regard to and insistence on politeness and attention to social forms. Like labels pasted on wine bottles, labels that are applied to people stick. There is little room in French society for impostors and little fluidity in crossing class barriers. The French pay attention to status and titles and expect others to do likewise. Correct form must be followed. For example, when introductions are required, the person who makes an introduction must be of the same status as the person being introduced. In a business meeting, it is essential that the person with the highest rank occupy the middle seat. The importance paid to social standing is so great that even salary takes second place. Likewise, when honor is an issue, keeping one's word has more value than profit (Hall & Hall, 1990). Given this situation, it is little wonder that many people who seek social mobility have migrated to countries such as Canada and the United States in recent years. France ranked only 62 of 179 nations on the Index of Economic Freedom in 2014, which suggests that it should become more competitive, especially in a globalized world. Still, it is the world's fifth-largest economy and sixth-biggest exporter and has more big multinational companies in the global *Fortune 500* than Britain. It is especially outstanding in top-end goods and services such as luxury goods, food processing, pharmaceuticals, fashion, and of course the production of wine, although Italy is the world's leader in wine production.

Cartesian Legacy

Like the viniculturist, the French generally have a need to control and refine life and to order the universe. A significant portion of this desire can be attributed to the thinking of Descartes, whose desire to make humanity the master of nature led him to ponder a rational meaning of the universe. Because he elected to discover this meaning without leaving his study, due to his belief that "I think, therefore I am," his findings were not always accurate. But that did not matter to him as long as he was convincing. He has been described as the "intellectual father of the French preoccupation with form" (de Gramont, 1969, p. 318). One example of Cartesian thought would be a general who devises a perfect battle plan with incomplete knowledge of the enemy's strength and capacity and suffers defeat—but with style and elegance.

The legacy of the Cartesian method can also be witnessed in life's most commonplace occurrences. Preoccupation with shaping, organizing, and magically transforming raw material into a work of art is evident in food shop windows, where displays of colorful and elaborately prepared casseroles and desserts could vie with paintings in the Louvre as master-crafted creations. In sum, Descartes, who is frequently described as the founder of modern philosophy, left nothing unexplained, and neither do the French today.

French businesspeople are no less concerned with form. Presentations are given from the heart, and the French display eloquence much more than U.S. Americans do. Their obsession with form shows in their belief that how one speaks makes as much an impression as what one

says. The French love to discuss abstract and complex ideas spontaneously, in detail, and at length so that agendas, efficient use of time, and conclusions appear to have less importance.

In addition, French business tends to be highly centralized because of the enduring influence of the Romans. The person atop the hierarchy is most important and wields power in many, if not most, decisions. Thus the French tend to bypass the many intervening layers of bureaucracy and appeal directly to the pinnacle of power. The French manager with authority demonstrates it physically; the manager's desk is placed in the center of the office. Those with the least influence are relegated to the far corners of the room. It is little wonder that change in French organizations tends to come from the top downward, not from the bottom upward (Crozier, 1964). Behavior in France today mirrors Crozier's findings, at least anecdotally.

Also, as might be expected, the French are dubious about the effectiveness of capitalism that is not heavily regulated. This suspicion of capitalism has probably increased since the Great Recession beginning in 2008. In a 2010 survey that asked respondents if capitalism has been functioning reasonably well and should be preserved, only 15% of the French responded positively, compared to 45% in Britain and Germany, 55% in the United States, and 65% in China (Peet, 2012). Thomas Picketty (2014), a young but internationally recognized French economist, has painstakingly developed a unique historical data base from which he determined that the rate of return to capital is significantly greater than the rate of growth of national economies, that is, capitalists are actually inhibiting the growth of national economies at the expense of those who are producing the output of these economies. Ordinarily a serious book such as this one does not create a sensation among economists, policy makers, and the general public, but there was a long backlog of orders for this influential book, which topped several bestseller lists. This book reinforces the survey results in that he argues against a trickle-down theory of capitalism in which the investments made by those with capital are enhanced because they are taxed too lightly.

Managerial Style

Such a centralized social structure lends itself to the acceptance of autocratic behavior. Managers, therefore, display almost total control over their subordinates. In fact, French managers are often accused of not delegating authority, instead sharing vital information only within their own elitist network. As a result, lower-level managers can have great difficulty moving up the corporate ladder.

This tight inner circle of upper management can be likened to the tight inner circle of the highest-quality wines that win awards year after year. Only those wines from the best regions with the best color, brilliance, and taste can gain the status of *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée*—the highest distinction available. In the same way, gaining a top management position frequently requires education at the finest of schools and upbringing in the most affluent regions.

This high level of centralization can be regarded in a positive light, because it serves to maintain unity. The French remain a diverse people who tend to be proud of and loyal to their respective regions of origin. Throughout history the French have strived for unity, but they tend to detest uniformity, because they are a people who generally love to differ. For example, when the United States went to war in Iraq, several European nations were lukewarm in support of this action. Among these nations, France was most prominent, even to the point that some Americans organized a boycott of French wine that led to a significant decrease in sales. The answer to this dilemma of integrating diversity of opinion and unity of action may be in the modern autocracy of centralization. People who exist in a hierarchy of niches can find their own niche, security, and sense of belonging among members of the same social class.

Understanding France's hierarchical business structure can be instructive to American business managers. Just as the best bottle of wine is saved for presentation only to the most distinguished guests, so too should the most polished proposals be saved for presentation to a top manager in a French corporation. Efforts to persuade lower- and middle-level managers may prove frustrating, because few final decisions can be made without approval from the top.

In addition, one should be aware of how the French handle meeting unknown colleagues at a typical business lunch. Uncertainty brings unease and implies a lack of control, because it entails a threat that must be thwarted. The lunch, then, gives the French time and opportunity to reflect, study, and learn who outsiders are and how they can be expected to behave in various situations. Pleasure and business are intertwined, because there is no better way in the French person's mind to open up communication and understanding than with a leisurely repast of food and wine (Hall & Hall, 1990).

Interestingly, however, the average amount of time devoted to lunch during the busy day has decreased from 90 to 40 minutes, suggesting that the globalization of business has influenced even the diehard French. Similarly, the number of French brasserie cafés has decreased from more than 200,000 in 1960, when the population was 46 million, to about 50,000 today. Even the average number of gallons of wine consumed per French person per year has declined. Still, the number is impressive. According to the Wine Institute, Americans drank 10.46 liters per person in 2011; Italians, 37.63; and the French, 45.61. In France it is now common to drink wine only on special occasions, when dining out, or on the weekends but not at every lunch and dinner.

Classifying Behavior

Perhaps the best attempt to categorize and classify different types of French behavior was completed by the anthropologist Edward T. Hall (1966). According to Hall, France is at the middle of his context dimension, with Japan and the Arab countries representing high-context behavior while Germany and the United States represent low-context behavior. The French are high context in the sense that they frequently do not need explicit and/or written communication to understand one another. However, they tend to emphasize low-context behavior in the form of excessive bureaucratic rules and regulations. Everything is spelled out explicitly in written form and is typically repeated orally so that the message is clear. This seemingly contradictory behavior reflects the Roman emphasis on centralization and bureaucracy and, at the same time, the innate desire of many French people to know one another deeply before transacting business.

Hall's framework may help explain why the French tend to evoke strong emotional reactions in many short-term and long-term visitors to their country. Frequently visitors complain about the rudeness that greets them in France, a complaint not unlike those voiced by some visitors to the United States. This rudeness or directness in speech among the French seems to represent both low-context and emotional behavior, which is interpreted, correctly or incorrectly, as rudeness. Conversely, other visitors paint an opposite picture of the French, describing them as concerned about their feelings and welfare and as going to extreme lengths to demonstrate hospitality and friendship. This may represent more high-context and emotional behavior.

In both instances it is best to reserve judgment, because initial external manifestations of behavior can be misleading. For example, the French tend to smile at someone only after they know a person for some time, a cultural practice that is centuries old. This can be a major problem in any situation but particularly in a service-related industry. Today it is common to teach

"surly" waiters and clerks in France to smile and speak in a friendly tone, even to new customers (Swardson, 1996). In 2013, the Paris Tourism Board published a guide for treating visitors politely, and the 35,000 copies were quickly accepted by all types of businesses that saw poor service as problematic. The Tourism Board then reprinted another 20,000 copies because of the high demand (Alderman, 2013).

Composition

Many experts on wine emphasize that it is extraordinarily intricate and complex and even inconstant in quality from one year to the next, as it involves many factors and ingredients such as climate, harvesting at just the right time to capture the ideal smell and taste, competitive pricing, and marketing. And so it can be said of the French. Who they are has been determined by their ancestry, the region of the country where they were raised, and the social and educational systems that have influenced them. Their society is changing, and so are they. Perhaps their adaptability is an outgrowth of their complexity. The French tend to do many things at once, and they do everything with alacrity—especially in an urban setting such as Paris, where the pace is rapid. In this sense the French are **polychronic**. This pace encourages quick decision making and contributes to impetuousness. For example, in a highly centralized structure, many businesspeople try to skirt cumbersome intervening layers of hierarchy to accomplish their objectives, even when doing so poses some risk to their own careers.

To the consternation of U.S. Americans trying to do business in France, the French tend to tolerate disruptions for the sake of human interactions because, to them, it is all part of an interrelated process. This makes planning difficult, even for the French. After all, given life's uncertainties, one never knows what obstacles may prevent promises from being kept.

Still, Edward T. Hall (Hall & Hall, 1990) points out that the French tend to be **monochronic**—doing one activity at a time—once they have defined a goal they wish to attain. This **simultaneous emphasis** on polychronism and monochronism is, once again, a reflection of the fact that France is at the midpoint of the high-context/low-context continuum. Given this intermediate position, it is easy to understand why foreigners have difficulty comprehending French behavior.

Work and Play

The French work hard and prefer to be their own bosses, although few have this opportunity, given their country's relatively rigid social structure and governmental regulations. At the very least, most French people would like to be recognized as leaders, even if what they lead is the smallest unit in the organization.

By law the French must devote 5 weeks, including all of August, to vacation. About 40% of them spend this time in vacation spots such as the Côte d'Azur. Holidays, like food and wine, are taken seriously, and the French tend to prepare carefully and meticulously for them.

Weekends tend to be devoted to family matters. Of the 85% who ascribe to Catholicism, fewer than 15% attend Mass, usually on Saturday evenings or Sunday mornings. Saturday afternoons are often reserved for shopping. Regarding religion, some argue there is an antichurch sentiment; others disagree, asserting instead that the French have no particular persuasion on religious matters and that they are more irreligious than antireligious. This is probably the true state of affairs,

given the justified pride that the French manifest toward their magnificent cathedrals such as Chartres, which are found throughout the country.

Geert Hofstede's (2001) analysis of 53 nations regarding cultural dimensions tends to confirm this profile of the French and the apparent contradictions that emerge when the metaphor of wine is employed. Not surprisingly, the French tend to accept a high degree of power distance among individuals and groups in society and to dislike uncertainty, preferring to be in familiar situations and to work with long-term colleagues. But the French also tend to be individualistic and even iconoclastic, and they cluster with other nations who value a high degree of individualism.

Still, Hofstede (2001) shows that France is a feminine society in which aggressiveness, assertiveness, and the desire for material possessions are of much less importance than the quality and pace of life. The French have deep-seated needs for security and getting along with insiders, colleagues, and family members. In short, the French accept centralization and bureaucracy but only insofar as these forms of organization allow them to be individualistic and buffer them from life's uncertainty so that a high quality of life can be maintained. The GLOBE study (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004) is in remarkable agreement with the Hofstede study regarding these findings.

Conversational Style

An integral part of maintaining a high quality of life in France is conversation. Like French business, however, conversation is not without classifications, rules, and hierarchical structure. By way of contrast, this is quite different from the free-flowing Irish conversational style (see Chapter 11). Just as the process of making wine is complex, intricate, and meaningful, so too is the art of French conversation. The French seem to feel an innate restlessness, wanting to explore every conceivable issue or topic through lengthy and lively conversation. Whether the topic is politics, weather, history, or the latest film, contrasts and controversy challenge the French intellect and raise their spirits.

Many consider the French to be argumentative—no one more so than the French themselves. They can be quick to criticize, but this is often only to stimulate discussion. Few French people are satisfied by mere superficial discourse. If a conversation is worth beginning, like the production of a tasty Burgundy, it is worth cultivating into a meaningful discussion.

For example, late one evening in the small town of Dijon, a U.S. American caught a cab to save himself a 25-minute walk. No sooner had he sat down than the cab driver quickly blurted out, "*Ah, vous êtes Américain?!*" Not expecting such quick questioning, the American cautiously replied, "*Oui, je suis Américain . . . pourquoi?*" The cab driver responded excitedly that he had never been to the United States and wanted to learn more about it. Conversation continued briskly and was quite philosophical at times. The cab driver was mostly interested in comparing the respective styles and mannerisms of the U.S. Americans and the French. Meanwhile, time—and the money meter—was ticking away. The passenger knew pretty well the different ways to get home, and the cab driver's route was not one of them. Finally, after 30 minutes or so, the cab arrived at its destination. The U.S. American was a bit angry that the ride had taken so long and was worried that he didn't have enough money. Just as he reached for his wallet, the driver said abruptly, "*S'arrête! Je ne veux pas d'argent. Merci pour la conversation,*" and, after a pause, "*Bonne nuit.*" What did this mean? "Stop! I don't want any money. Thank you for the conversation. Good night." Other Americans have had similar experiences.

The finest wines result from following carefully a detailed, meticulous set of rules (Johnson, 1985). If one of these rules is forgotten or ignored, the quality of the wine will be greatly diminished. The same is true of speaking and conversation in France. Even small mispronunciations have the unnerving effect of fingernails scraping on a blackboard. Conversation is a highly developed art and follows very specific rules.

Not surprisingly, the French language is governed by a seemingly endless (and annoying, in many ways) set of rules. For example, all French nouns are either masculine or feminine, and articles and adjectives must agree. Verbs have so many different endings and participles that they are almost impossible for many nonnative speakers to keep track of. Proper sentence structure often places the verb at the end of the sentence, as opposed to its beginning or middle, a practice that is sometimes difficult for English speakers to grasp.

There are two very different forms of addressing a person in French. The second-person singular, ***tu/toi***, is reserved for only the closest of friends and family members of the same age or younger. ***Vous***, which is the second-person plural as well as singular, is used on a more formal level. Care needs to be taken in using *tu* and *vous*, because the wrong usage can spoil a conversation or jeopardize a relationship at an early stage. Until you know a person well, the *vous* form should be used. As you become better acquainted, an occasional usage of *tu* is not considered offensive. But only much later, when friendships have thoroughly developed, should you use the *tu/toi* form regularly—but not with elders or superiors. Among the younger generation a more informal conversational style is rapidly replacing these formal rules, although even young people revert to the more formalized style once they join the full-time workforce.

Relationships

An implicit conversational rule among the French is that **to smile at someone you don't know** and say hello is frequently considered provocative, **not friendly**. On the other hand, to pass a friend on the street or bump into family acquaintances without offering conversation would be considered rude (Taylor, 1990). These differing interaction styles for different levels of friends in France are not so common in the United States, where a friendly hello and small talk are the norm.

Like a glass of vintage Bordeaux, the family tends to be important to the French because it is a source of acceptance, nourishing them in the midst of life's vicissitudes. The French often look to their families for emotional and economic support. Similarly, as when the horrible disease struck the wine industry in the late 1800s, wine growers looked to each other in times of trouble. Likewise, ordinary French people vigorously supported the resistance of wine growers who eventually forced the large American firm, Robert Mondavi, to sell the land on which it planned to harvest wine grapes in southern France in 2001. Relationships among family members are close. Family bonds are strengthened by eating weekend meals and taking extended holidays together. These are times for catching up on family matters, planning, and simply enjoying each other's company.

Paradoxically, although French people can be very romantic about love, the concept of marriage and children tends to be approached in a businesslike, practical manner. Children are considered the parents' obligation, and children's behaviors directly reflect proper (or improper) upbringing. French parents are not as concerned about playing with children as they are about civilizing them (Carroll, 1987). Parental guidance continues through adolescence and often

through university. In fact, it is not uncommon for parents to help their children out considerably with housing or other expenses, even after marriage. It sometimes seems that the French support their children financially until they are stepping on their beards.

The French are very private with regard to their homes, so an invitation to dinner implies a high level of intimacy. The home is mostly reserved for family or very close friends. Restaurants are used for acquaintances and first-time get-togethers. One should never ask to visit a French home if not invited, and if you want to stop by for some reason, telephone first.

Women's Role

Furthermore, similar to a fine vintage selection patiently awaiting its proper time for opening and enjoying, the women's movement in France has been in no great rush to achieve full equality, even though many women are now prominent in business, politics, and the professions. French women see themselves, and are regarded as, the equals of men—equal but different. Presented with opportunities to play the same roles as men, women have shied away from doing so. Accordingly, many milestones in women's rights came about much later in France than in other countries. Only in 1980 did the Académie Française admit its first woman member. Until 1964, a wife still had to obtain her husband's permission to open a bank account, run a shop, or get a passport, and only in 1975 and 1979 did further laws remove inequalities in matters of divorce, property, and the right to employment. The negative U.S. American reaction to then-President Bill Clinton's sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky was puzzling to the French, and one prominent French politician formed a group to support Clinton. The French countenance the fact that many politicians, such as former president François Mitterand, have a second, unofficial family. Thus, given the Frenchwoman's tendency to prefer femininity over feminism, it is not surprising that the growth of the women's liberation movement has been relatively slow in France. This movement will most likely be just as successful in France as in America, but like the best wines of France, its growth will be patient and organized.

Suitability

The most meaningful occasions in the French person's life often center on food and drink. Certain wines "marry" certain foods; furthermore, the type of wine served dictates the shape of the glass. The wine must be drunk properly with one's hand on the stem so as not to warm the liquid. A fine wine must be gently swirled, checked with a discerning eye for clarity, sniffed to detect bouquet, and tasted critically before it can be served to guests. Meals can last for hours, consisting of several courses served in proper sequence and with appropriate wines to match each course.

This challenging and often controversial business of pairing wine with the proper food requires much mating and matching, contrasting and complementing (Johnson, 1985). In the same way, the French people constantly struggle to find a political system that is the best match for the nation. During the Third Republic alone, from 1872 until 1940, France had 102 governments, while the United States had only 14 over the same period. In the 12 years of the Fourth Republic, from 1946 until 1958, there were 22 governments.

People and Politics

On three separate occasions since 1981, France was governed by what the French term "cohabitation": a president, responsible primarily for defense and foreign policy, from one political party and a prime minister from another party. In all three instances, the two were directly at odds with each other on many issues, particularly over nationalizing private industry versus privatizing a number of state-run organizations.

Part of the reason for such political instability is that the president, with the consent of the prime minister, has the power to dissolve the national assembly at any time except during a crisis. This would be the equivalent of a U.S. president telling the 535 members of the Senate and House of Representatives that their jobs have been terminated. Dissolution of the assembly can also operate another way: That is, the president or prime minister can resign voluntarily, causing a new round of national assembly elections to take place. Such upheaval and constant change make matching the government (wine) with the people (food) extremely difficult.

Internationally, France has been careful to guard its individual sovereignty. For example, in 1966, President Charles de Gaulle informed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) that France was going to withdraw its land and air forces from NATO to maintain sovereignty over its own territory. In 1982, when U.S. President Ronald Reagan was planning an air strike on Libya, French President Mitterrand refused to allow U.S. aircraft to fly over French air space. Similarly France was vigorously opposed to the Iraqi war that the United States led in 2003, ostensibly because it viewed the action as unauthorized by the United Nations. As indicated previously, this created anti-French feelings in the United States and anti-American feelings in France, even to the extent that some U.S. restaurants renamed french fries. However, Nicholas Sarkozy, who was elected prime minister in 2007, took several steps to smooth over the relations between the two nations. For example, France strongly supported the United States in its quest to replace Muammar Gaddafi, ruler of Libya, in the spring of 2011. His successors have continued to emphasize this approach, at least at times.

Paradoxically, the French welcome governmental instability. They tend to be proud of their wide range of active political parties—six in all. Abundant political choice is consistent with the concept of French devotion to individual freedom. Furthermore, the political process is helped along by a free press and a love of political discussion. It is little wonder that France averages about 10,000 public protests of all types a year (Fleming & Lavin, 1997).

The related issues of immigration and racism have been in the political spotlight. Although the percentage of immigrants in France has remained relatively constant at about 7% during the past 25 years, immigrants are disproportionately economically deprived and unemployed. There is also tension between Catholics, who make up the majority of the population, and Muslims and Jews, some of whom do not want to assimilate into French culture. In 2002, Jean-Marie Le Pen, an avowedly racist politician heading the National Front political party, actually won the first round of the presidential election, although he ultimately failed in his quest. Pen's daughter, Marine, has succeeded her father as the head of this revitalized political party and has become a major political leader.

The French seem determined to maintain their governmental system despite the frequent controversies it engenders. Many observers point out that no matter where you set foot on French soil, you will find yourself engaged in political discussions. Thus, although the wine and food of French politics don't always suit each other, their very unsuitability stimulates conflict and a spirited involvement of the citizens in the political arena.

The Maturation Process

Viniculturists strive for disciplined growth, tirelessly pruning and training the vines to conform to their will (Carroll, 1987). This disciplined growth is also reflected in the French educational system, which is strictly controlled by the state. Children begin their education at the age of 6, with many enrolling in preschool by age 2. Unlike other countries such as Japan, where promotion from one grade to another is generally automatic, French students do not advance until they attain certain skills. The result is that children of widely varying ages are in the same class. French education is known to be rigorous, with 30 days of the school year tagged for examinations. But unlike the *vendange* or harvest and its intense preoccupation with accomplishing its mission in 12 hours, young students must focus their developing minds on 35 intense hours of instruction each week. Mercifully, the French have a short school year. Recently France changed its school schedule from four days a week with longer days in school to five days a week and shorter days, thus mimicking what other nations do and lessening stress on students.

For children who continue in the school system, educational growth is controlled so as to be directed toward a certain diploma. The teachers who tend their crops of young students decide their academic paths—and ultimately their careers. There is a tendency to stress mathematics because proficiency in that area is seen as a key to success and guarantees treatment as a member of the elite. Today the most able children are being trained as scientists, technologists, and businesspeople to operate in an international culture. Some critics feel that this preoccupation with mathematics reaches into inappropriate realms of study such as music classes, which also require mathematics proficiency. As might be expected, the best French students compare favorably to their counterparts in other Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development nations regarding mathematics, language, and the sciences, but many students do not, and this is a festering issue that has not be adequately addressed.

Destiny Determined

The destiny of less able or privileged children is to glean careers from the leftovers. Parents of these children lack the education and influence to mold a bright future for their offspring. In a real sense, social status more than anything else determines children's educational opportunities or fate. The elite, who understand the importance of education, begin to prepare their children early in life to attend the *grandes écoles* (elite universities similar to American Ivy League universities) and *universités* or *facultés* (specialty colleges and universities, e.g., in journalism), and this practice tends to reinforce existing sharp social class differences.

Educational choices are limited in other ways. It is difficult for those who do not belong to the upper social groups to have any freedom of choice in their vocations. Rather, the system early on categorizes them and shapes and defines their destinies. One young Frenchman, son of a successful flower shop owner who had built his business selling flowers on the street, did not want to carry on the family business. Because of the intense competition in his country, he was convinced that he had no chance of going to the *lycées* (elite secondary schools) or *universités, grandes écoles,* and *facultés,* which most privileged students attend. As a result, he pursued educational opportunities in the United States, which were better than his choices in France. Immigrants to France, such as those from Algeria, have frequently reached the same conclusion, namely that their educational and career opportunities are very constrained. Many live in the poorer districts, and some of these immigrants have been involved in violent riots in recent years to protest the system.

This elite approach to education has been widely criticized, because it tends to lead to a narrow perspective on problems, both in business and government. For example, the 5,000 graduates of the elite École Nationale d'Administration (ENA) tend to dominate government bureaucracies and then, later in life, frequently become chief executives in the firms they once regulated.

Acquaintances and Friends

The French tend to take many things seriously, even life's joys. Among the French, one of life's greatest pleasures is friends; therefore, friendship is taken seriously, as might be expected of a society emphasizing high-context behavior. Friendship must be carefully cultivated and tended over the years. The growth of friendship is a slow and deliberate thing. The French are critical of the quick and seemingly casual manner in which U.S. Americans make and discard friendships. Such behavior is uncouth—not unlike chugging a glass of wine when a sip is appropriate. A friendship, then, is not to be taken lightly, but like a carefully selected wine, it is to be savored and enjoyed to the fullest. A good wine and a good friend—they are the joie de vivre.

A helpful guide to building meaningful friendships in France is to recognize the parallels of this process to cultivating wine: Don't rush the process but instead allow quality to improve over time. That is, approach the relationship in a high-context manner. For Americans venturing into France for the first time, it is important to acknowledge that the American conversational style is quite different from the French conversational style. Whereas Americans tend to have many small conversations with a number of people, the French prefer fewer conversations on much deeper levels.

For example, a U.S. businessperson had been in France just over 3 weeks, working on a 1-year project, when he came into contact with a French colleague critical to the success of the project. The two naturally had to spend a great deal of time together. The U.S. American appreciated this opportunity to brush up on his French-speaking skills, because his colleague was a traditional French person who supposedly did not speak English. The U.S. American did his best to communicate effectively but often felt frustrated that he couldn't express himself clearly and feared that he might convey the wrong message unintentionally. Then suddenly, after 4 or 5 weeks of such effort, the two were preparing for a business meeting when the Frenchman said, "You can speak in English if you would feel more comfortable." The U.S. American was astonished. The Frenchman then explained that the French are cautious in dealing with foreign business colleagues and are careful not to overexpose themselves before a more serious, respectful relationship is established. In recent years many politicians and businesspeople have become comfortable speaking English to their monolingual American colleagues.

Health and Fitness

Another area where maturation, as well as adaptation, appears in France is in the country's gradual response to the health and fitness craze sweeping from the United States into European countries. Traditionally the French have shown a disdain for such trends, choosing continued adherence to national pastimes such as fine wine and cuisine. But times are changing. Nowadays, joggers are everywhere: in the Parc de la Tête in Lyon, on the coastal roads of Brittany, and at the foot of the Eiffel Tower. Smoking, traditionally popular in France, has become decidedly unchic, and tobacco consumption has dropped sharply. The government has taken advantage of this social change by passing a law that makes smoking more difficult in public places.

By most accounts the health craze began about 1990. There are Gymnase Clubs in many cities, all filled with people eager to trim down or get into and stay in shape. As if this were not enough, today's French are actually concerned about what they eat. They are subscribing to nutritionist services in record numbers, and the book *Eat Yourself Slim* (*Je mange, donc je maigris!*; Montignac, 1987) was a best seller for more than a year. More recently a French doctor created the Dukan diet, which has become popular not only in France but in other European nations and the United States. Thus, it is not surprising that overall wine consumption has declined. Ironically, while the French have increased in body weight in recent years, comparatively speaking weight gain is a minor issue when France is compared to other developed nations. For example, in 2007, a best seller in France and around the world was *French Women Don't Get Fat* (Guiliano, 2005).

The Changing Portrait

As our discussion implies, the French have a predilection to think in terms of greatness. This is understandable, given the glories of their past in such areas as music, art, philosophy, and innovation. Greatness also applies to the reputation the French have developed and maintained in the wine industry. French wines are the best, a fact that the whole world acknowledges, and for the French, that acknowledgment tends to extend to their other accomplishments and to themselves as well. The assumption of greatness tends to be instilled in the French from birth, even in the most rustic villager.

Undoubtedly the French imagine greatness to be part of their future. In an era of technological upheavals, they are excelling in high-tech areas. De Gaulle exhorted his compatriots to shape their own destinies independently of the United States, to find their own place in the sun, and to become a nuclear power in their own right. This they have done with lightning speed, making rapid advances in numerous areas of importance. They enjoy an impressive network of highways, and more than 75% of the nation's energy is provided by nuclear power.

Economic Constraints

Sometimes, however, the French penchant for going it alone hurts the economy. For example, the French developed Minitel, which about 15 years ago was the world's largest database, connecting every conceivable service in Paris and some other cities, as well, by computer. However, the French were slow to use the World Wide Web as an alternative. Today use of the Web is widely accepted and employed and the Minitel is a thing of the past.

With the building of the Concorde, the French married high-tech grace and excellence; the supersonic jet was, indeed, a work of art on wings. Ironically the Concorde was a joint project with the British, but people commonly attribute the accomplishment to France, not Great Britain. Could it be because prestige and grandeur seem typically French? However, due to poor market demand, the Concorde was decommissioned in 2003.

The famous Train à Grande Vitesse (TGV) is the bullet-shaped orange train that streaks past vineyards and villages at more than 170 miles per hour. Riding the TGV at night with blackened windows is to experience complete absence of motion. To incorporate both transport and motionlessness in this train is typical of French creativity: mastering nature, striving for perfection, and blending unlikely and diverse elements. Of course, other nations such as Germany and China now have similar types of trains.

In spite of its various wrinkles, the societal system in France functions well, giving its citizens a safety net that cuddles them like a blanket at birth and softens the unpleasant jolts life can bring in old age. It provides 98% of its citizens with a level of medical care and benefits unknown to U.S. Americans and citizens of many other nations. Income is guaranteed to those over 65 even if they have never worked, and the wealthy collect, too, because it is their right under the law.

The French would revolt if this system was taken from them, but it is costly. While benefits are being cautiously pared to reduce a large federal deficit—for example, the retirement age of government employees was recently changed from 60 to 62—pension benefits are almost equal to an average wage. Moreover, mothers and babies alike get free care with the goals of boosting the birth rate and elevating standards of living. The fertility rate for women is now 2.0, not far from the full replacement rate of 2.1, unlike the recent experiences of many European nations that are facing a future with a sharply declining population base.

An Evolving Culture

Even as wine has a maturation or aging process that alters its personality, so do the French. Also, just as the flavor of wine changes with different blends of ingredients, France's cultural composition is evolving. The French have experienced many changes in their history, and more will follow. France is one of the few European countries that actually encourage assimilation by granting citizenship to all who are born on its soil. Recently, many have emigrated from France's former colonies. Well over 100,000 political refugees have been allowed into the country. There is resentment, prejudice, and discrimination against these newcomers, as noted previously. Still, France is one of the few nations that have welcomed so many outsiders and refugees.

However, while the face of France is slowly changing in numerous and complex ways, short-term and long-term visitors to this country will most likely continue to have strong emotional reactions to the French. The French most likely will continue to invest a great amount of time nurturing relationships, being wary of outsiders, being sensitive to social class differences, accommodating themselves to the centralized bureaucracy, and being individualistic and iconoclastic. While such activities may appear on the surface to be contradictory, they reflect an approach to life that welcomes, and even thrives on, many different and contrasting ideals. The secret of being able to accommodate such difference is moderation, and wine offers good training in the exercise of moderation. Healthy in itself, it must be taken with restraint, as in excess it can cause serious problems.

In more than 2,000 years of wine cultivation, French wine makers have accumulated a wealth of experience from which they have learned successful techniques and procedures. Throughout the history of viniculture and cultural development in France, the quest for quality has mobilized the collective energy of the French people. While nature ensures that each vintage is different, the human element at each step along the way determines the ultimate outcome. The best wines are objects of great pride and, at the same time, offer lessons in patience and modesty. In this respect the French obsession with rules, procedures, classifications, and form help develop a product—and a culture—that is world renowned. Thus, whatever paths the people of France choose to follow, the metaphor of composing a fine wine will continue to give insights into their fundamental motivations and system of values.