

Forget the Freedom Fries. All Is Forgiven, Chérie.



Philippe Halsman/Magnum, courtesy of Taschen

Images from "The Frenchman," recording the 1948 conversation the photojournalist Philippe Halsman had with the French comic actor Fernandel, who responded wordlessly, but unmistakably, to questions like, "Would a Frenchman let a Kinsey researcher interview him?" (far right).

By **WILLIAM GRIMES**

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WE came crawling back, of course. Is anyone out there skipping over the Burgundies on the wine list and, just to twist the knife a littler harder, opting for a tangy Finger Lakes Riesling instead? Does a trip to historic Valley Forge still seem like a better idea than a week in the Dordogne? I personally have returned to Camembert and Époisses after an unsuccessful attempt to love the carefully matured, individually wrapped cheeses from the caves of Kraft.

THE FRENCHMAN by
Philippe Halsman. Illustrated.
108 pages. Taschen. \$19.99.

It was never going to work out, this break-up with France. The French-American love affair just keeps on going, a folie à deux that's lasted nearly three centuries. It's tempestuous, hot and heavy, beyond reason. Like all the great, impossible mismatches — F. Scott Fitzgerald and Zelda, Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, Pamela Anderson and Tommy Lee — it cannot end. The United States and France just can't keep their hands off each other. And no wonder. France is a high-maintenance double diva, demanding and capricious, but she's just too beautiful to resist, probably, as we now know, because she eats such tiny portions. Even Jacques Chirac cannot dampen her allure.

It would be nice to understand why. For that reason, there can never be too many books on France and the French.

In 1948, a photojournalist named Philippe Halsman collared the comic actor Fernandel and subjected him to a mock interview. Mr. Halsman posed the questions, and Fernandel answered, wordlessly, with a French expression. The resulting book, "The Frenchman," documents the Gallic male as Americans saw him in a period when, in fact, not that many Americans had ever seen one.

"Does the average Frenchman still pinch pretty girls in a crowd?" Mr. Halsman asked. Fernandel obliged with an unembarrassed ear-to-ear grin. And how about those American sweater girls? A big grin and a big O.K. sign. And so it goes, through the great French repertory of facial expressions and body language.