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BOOK REVIEW

The Frenchman

Philippe Halsman
*Taschen, hardback, 108 pages,
£9.99, ISBN 3-8228-4641-4*

This is a hilarious book and an ingenious concept. It is a photographic interview, with answers articulated through the facial expressions of the interviewee – in this case the 1940s French movie star, Fernandel. When asked questions in 1948 about the US, he responded with elastic and animated expressions and gestures. For example, the far right image is his response to the question, 'How do you like America?'; while in the top right picture he was asked, 'What measures are being taken by the French government to raise the birth rate?' and in the bottom right photograph, 'We hope that you have tasted our California champagne?' The images were taken by Philippe Halsman, a well-known portrait photographer who, after emigrating to the USA from France in 1940, worked for *Life* magazine portraying the stars of the era. Out of print for 50 years, this book has now been brought back to life in this recent publication. I would be interested to see a more contemporary version of this idea, as it could be fascinating. **Ben Brain**

