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Dear MyAMers,

My American Market is celebrating its first birthday this month! Hopefully it is the first of many milestones to come. We could not have made it without your amazing support and loyalty.

So from our whole team a resounding, THANK YOU!

There is a saying that food is our common ground and a universal experience. An American friend of mine living in Switzerland recently hosted a party where she prepared a variety of American treats (having stocked up on ingredients at MyAM). Sharing the taste of home was a fun and delicious part of celebrating both her birthday and where she came from with friends both old and new (and the "real" barbecue sauce went down particularly well)!

Our mission, however, is not only to provide you with your staple American foods, but also to entertain, to inform and to help you connect with the American community and its friends. I hope this newsletter achieves its goal and that you will have as much fun reading it as I had collaborating with its different writers. We have three new contributors this month, all popular bloggers. I leave you to discover who they are and what they have to share!

Yummily yours,

Anne-Claire



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Newsletter #10
May 2010

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Recipe of the month

> Gluten-free Chestnut Cake / Le Gâteau aux Marrons



Famous blogger Kristin Espinasse is sharing one of her most popular recipes with us this month. Originally from Phoenix, AZ, Kristin lives on a wine farm in Provence where she sends out the "thrice-weekly" [French Word-A-Day](#), a journal relating the stories of her sometimes bumpy, often comic, and always poignant French assimilation.

She is also author of "[Words in a French Life](#)" where she "recounts her adventures with honesty and humor, never afraid to have a good laugh at her own expense... [an] innovative and entertaining way of teaching the finer points of French." --Publishers Weekly

I didn't begin baking cakes until I moved to France. Because the French seem to dine out less (opting to have friends and family over for a meal), I saw a lot of cake-baking going on. I never dreamed I would one day join in to the flurry of *farine* (flour) by asking a hostess if there was something sweet I might bring! To this day making any kind of food for the French still intimidates me... thankfully, I have found ways around such cooking cowardess... by making recipes with 5 ingredients or less!

Here is one of my favorites (only 3 ingredients--not counting the topping or the optional corn starch!). This Chestnut Cake is a standby of my French aunt, Marie-Françoise. She sometimes surprises us with the cake on a hectic bottling day (we live on a busy vineyard), or during harvest time. And we are often treated to this delicious dessert during family get-togethers. It is a cake to make in a pinch and a cake that is a cinch!

Ingredients

1 can (500 grams or around 17 ounces) of canned chestnut puree

50 grams (around 2 ounces) of butter

3 eggs

1 or 2 tablespoons of cornstarch (= "*farine de maïs*" in French. Brand names include "*Maïzena*" in any supermarkets, "*crème de maïs*" at Leader Price, "*fine de maïs*" under the Francine brand).

Pecans

Instructions

Preheat oven to 150°C (300°F) Mix softened butter and chestnut spread together. Stir in 3 eggs (you can beat the eggs whites... or simply keep the eggs whole and whisk them in (as I do) with the butter and chestnut puree.

Optional: 1-3 tablespoons of corn starch can be added to the mix.

Pour mixture into a (greased-with-butter) shallow cake pan (a tart pan is perfect!). Place pecans over the top. Bake in the oven for 20-30 minutes (do not overcook! The "cake" is flat as a tart, therefore it tends to cook quickly!). Decorating the cake with confectioner's sugar is optional (and oh-so-good!).

PECAN NUTS RAW

(2 cups / 8oz / 225g)

Price: €6.99



Jean's legal tip

> Prenup and divorce in France



Jean Taquet is a French jurist and associate member of the Delaware Bar Association. If you'd like a personalized answer to one of your legal/immigration issues, I recommend you contact Jean:

Phone: (33) 01.40.38.16.11 / Email: qa@jeantaquet.com

QUESTION

I am American, and would like buy a house in France with my French husband. At the moment we are thinking of choosing French law to govern our marriage, in which case we have to declare a matrimonial regime. I am concerned about the outcome of a possible divorce and I would like to know the differences, in case of divorce, between *séparation des biens* (i.e., total separation) versus *communauté réduite aux acquets* (i.e., partial community) versus *communauté universelle* (i.e., Californian community property/universal community). My husband makes a lot more than I do and we have several sources of income. Making sure my name is mentioned on all assets can be complicated and tedious and I think it is likely I might not pay sufficient attention to this. So I would appreciate your comments regarding what can be done to protect me in case of divorce.

ANSWER

The matrimonial regime is often the subject of a major misconception, and people do not understand what it does. People almost always relate the prenuptial agreement with divorce, and therefore want the prenuptial agreement to address the consequences of divorce. While it is true that a well-written prenuptial agreement facilitates the splitting of assets and debts, among other things, in case of divorce, it is not really meant to do that. This legal document essentially just addresses one key issue: "WHO OWNS WHAT & WHY?"

When the couple expresses no preference, then the law determines by default the aspects of the marriage having to do with the couple's assets and debts. This is the legal reality in most countries.

Because the prenuptial agreement deals with this issue, it has a crucial effect on the consequences of divorce. By determining how assets and liabilities are split between the spouses during the marriage, it also facilitates their division in a divorce. It has the same effect on the definition of the estate or of the ability to give assets as a generation-skipping gift.

The choice of the marital regime depends on the nature of the work done by the spouses as well as their personal dynamic. One choice does not fit all, by any means.

That being said, for the vast majority of people, a community regime makes more sense – either partial community, known in France as *communauté réduite aux acquets*, or universal community such as that familiar in California as well as the Germanic and Scandinavian countries. This is true because most people do not need the extra protection that comes with the separation regime, and have a daily life of significant sharing of emotions, decisions, and finally assets and liabilities.

Let me try to describe each of the three types of regime so that the mechanics of each is clear.

Total separation – *séparation des biens*

I call this the "two bag" regime. Under this system, wedding creates no joint ownership at all. Everything is owned according to its status when it was purchased. Any purchase jointly made or liability jointly incurred is divided between the two bags.

The main advantage and security that comes with a total separation regime is that when one spouse runs a business and therefore can incur huge liability, the other spouse can be declared owner of all major family assets – house, savings, and so on – in such a way that if there is a financial disaster, the family is protected.

The main risk lies in the financial imbalance intrinsic to this type of contract. If the couple does not make sufficient effort to correct this imbalance, the wealth will be unevenly divided throughout the marriage. In a traditional setting, the husband needs to give the wife money to cover daily expenses and to balance the stream of income more evenly. But this does not happen as often as it should with this regime.

(Continues page 4 ►)

Partial French community – communauté réduite aux acquêts

I call it the “three bag” regime. The wedding creates joint ownership of all assets and liabilities thenceforth acquired or incurred. Each spouse keeps separate ownership of the things owned or acquired before the wedding, plus any inheritance coming after the wedding (because in France you generally inherit from blood relatives so the right exists from birth).

The main advantage is that, since the community is created by the wedding, the natural consequence is that as time passes the common assets and debts grow, thus automatically protecting the financially weaker spouse.

The main risk with this regime is that unless the spouses scrupulously document their use of the personal money and other assets that they had before the wedding, there is a natural tendency for the separate assets to blend with the common assets and debts, and before you know it only the few things that had a title or proof of origin stay personal.

Universal community – communauté universelle

This is the “one bag” regime, in which the wedding creates joint ownership of everything each spouse owns. To define the assets and the liabilities of one spouse, you take 50% of what is in the bag.

The main advantage is that it greatly simplifies issues related to ownership, gifts and debts.

The main risk is that it can considerably reduce the assets of the wealthier spouse, especially when the marriage lasts only a few years. There have been movies made about this, since California law requires this kind of regime and the movie industry is still mainly based there, which implies a lot of very wealthy people and the prenuptial reflex when one gets married in that state.

Now, no prenuptial agreement or marital regime will ever address the issue of divorce properly, since by its very nature it is not about settling in advance disputes arising from a legal separation.

Given the way you have presented your situation, you would be much better off addressing this issue in stages.

1. What regime do you choose and why?
2. The best reason I can think of for choosing universal community is if a couple runs a business together and shares everything. The protection aspect does not interest them but the idea of having maximum leverage with their personal assets is essential. This analysis is often totally overlooked and I like the idea that couples can address such a difficult issue before the wedding.
3. What personal modifications to a standard contract would you want, for instance, about the contribution of the spouses to the finances of the household, the choice of the family home, and so on? It is not always necessary to significantly alter the template; the main thing is that if the couple comes up with some ideas for specific provisions in the contract, it means they have discussed the issues, which is an excellent thing.
4. What guidelines would you need to follow in case of divorce regarding:
 - a) the guardianship and the education of the children, including either joint custody or visitation rights
 - b) the use and the ownership of the family home
 - c) alimony and child support

Here, on the contrary, I have strong objections to writing things so they are too specific. In theory, the idea is excellent and would avoid many disputes. But as it happens, this set-up does not really work with international marriages, since the consequences of divorce (and the settlement of estates) differ greatly from one country to the next. This means the prenuptial agreement could make excellent provisions for one country that will be declared null and void by lawyers or judges in another country. And yet, if the provisions are so vague that they fit all possible legal systems, they are probably not worth writing. This issue can quickly become a huge can of worms with international marriages.

Therefore, I advise you to stick with the fundamental purpose of the prenuptial agreement and choose the regime that fits your couple best. Then, once this is done, if you wish to add things to it, get the help of an excellent lawyer and put in the provisions you believe will help you as a couple and as a family, including dealing with a possible divorce.




Self improvement

> A review of materials to learn and master French for all budgets



Kari Masson writes for language learning, travel and cross-cultural publications and works as a media consultant for both profit and non-profit companies. France is the third francophone country she has called home, but she is originally from the Atlanta area. In 2007, she started [Lyon Eats](#), a blog for Americans looking to replicate their favourite comfort food in France. We're so thrilled she has offered to share her extensive knowledge and experience in MyAM's newsletter!

[Bien-dire magazine and audio CD](#) is published every two months for intermediate and advanced learners of French. It is available by single issues or as a subscription. Cultural insights, news, vocabulary, slang expressions... it's all there. (Want to take a peek? [Sample articles](#) on their website.) Each article is graded for difficulty and has keywords translated into English in help boxes at the bottom of the page. 

6 Issue Subscription + 6 CDs (1 year)
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MyAM newsletter subscribers get 10% all orders by entering promo code KMOFF10 at check-out.



[Language Routes blog](#) features weekly posts by Pascale who writes about the French language for non-native speakers. For example, [new words](#) added in the Petit Larousse, common [abbreviations](#), popular [expressions](#), etc... Also check out the post on [learning French by speaking English](#).

Price: FREE!



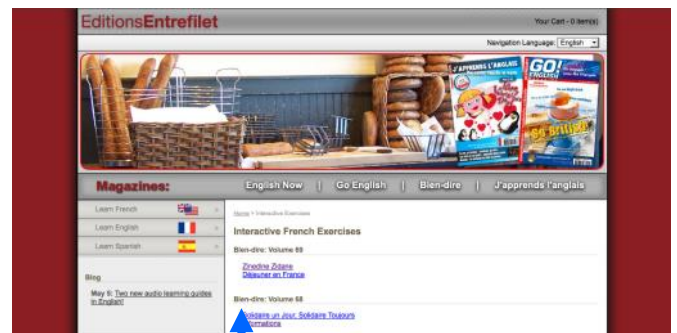
[TELL ME MORE](#) by Auralog is the award-winning software to learn and speak a foreign language. It's an interactive language learning technology that immerses the learner in French. It truly addresses the need to master a language, as opposed to merely learning basic words and sentences. TELL ME MORE has already become the solution for over 7 million learners and thousands of companies and schools. Could it be your material of choice?

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[Interactive exercises with audio](#), based off recent articles in Bien-dire magazine. You can listen to or read the article, then do the exercises to test your comprehension. The keywords are translated into English (scroll over and they pop up), so the exercises are useful for all levels of French-speakers.

Price: FREE!

[5 French pronunciation tips](#) from Fluent French. Free MP3s include the 'French R Trick', which according to David, publisher of [Fluent French Audio](#), is the biggest key to making your French sound great. (And I'd have to agree.) 

Price: FREE!



Expat Blog Highlight

> Selling American Nostalgia: the Paris Cupcake Scene



Lindsey Tramuta is the brilliant creator of [Lost In Cheeseland blog](#). She is a Paris transplant from Philadelphia, married to a Frenchman and on a permanent quest to understand the idiosyncrasies of the French. She had originally published this article for [bitchbuzz.com](#) and was kind enough to let us share it with you.

In real life, Lindsey is in charge of Marketing & Communications for an online multi-brand boutique. You can follow her on twitter: [@LostNCheeseland](#).

I'd like to make one thing clear. The seemingly newfound obsession with cupcakes is not a trend. In fact, the passion for cupcakes has existed long before Carrie Bradshaw popularized the childhood indulgence on *Sex and the City* with her unabashed love for NYC's Magnolia Bakery. I've been eating cupcakes since I started going to birthday parties where the fluffy, diminutive treats were central to the festivities.

Cupcakes are not only fun and delicious but evoke the nostalgia of childhood memories, similar to the importance of diners from the '50s and '60s for our parents. The memory of spending an afternoon in the kitchen with my mother while we prepared cupcakes for me to bring to school for a bake sale is deeply ingrained in my childhood and this is true for many Americans.

What *is* a trend, however, is the proliferation of cupcake-centric bakeries popping up left and right in the States, many of which are now outside major metropolitan areas. What's more, they're catered to adults. The current cupcake culture is ostensibly a departure from the image of housewives slaving over a batch of cupcakes for little Jenny to bring to school. Times have changed and what used to be merely a kitschy, lighthearted American pastry has transformed into big business, even in Paris.

There are several major players in the Paris cupcake scene, only two of which I would even consider faithful to the beloved dessert. [Little Miss Cupcake](#) likens herself to be the first American cupcake baker in Paris. She has a hugely successful at-home catering company with individual and corporate clients.

She fills my heart with joy each time she posts a picture of her latest masterpiece to [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) or her [Flickr](#) page. British and Greek, Synie Georgoulas became a caterer after she grew tired of her career as a lawyer. Last August she launched [Synie's Cupcakes](#), a cupcake bakery just a quick trot from Le Bon Marché where she offers a selection of 17 different flavors and a handful of savory cupcakes each day for the discerning gourmand.

Synie also somehow manages to find the time to teach weekly cupcake courses at [La Cuisine Paris](#), a cooking school founded by a Franco-American duo targeting locals and Paris visitors alike. What Synie and LMC have in common is that their creations actually taste like the cupcakes I ate as a child, even better. [...]

But consuming cupcakes in France is different – there isn't the innate nostalgia and connection to traditional female domestic roles that exist in the States. However, the French have a terrible sweet tooth and while there may not be a cupcake heritage, it's an indulgence that Parisians can get on board with. When I asked Synie about selling cupcakes in Paris, she said that she definitely needed to adapt to the French culture of consuming pastries.

From a very young age, the French develop a habit of having a pastry or piece of chocolate with some baguette at 4pm – *l'heure du goûter*. It's deeply ingrained in the French identity and continues well into adulthood. The cupcake is well on its way to being on par with having a slice of bread slathered in Nutella, but they're still trying to figure out whether they like it because it's good or because it's fashionable.

(Continues page 7 ►)



Instead of bringing a tired old tarte tatin to a dinner party, some epicurean Parisians have begun picking up boxes of Synie's or Little Miss Cupcake's treats to dazzle their friends.

The inevitable backlash

Recently, a whole slew of anti-cupcake manifestos have surfaced arguing that they are [essentially the it-bags of the dessert industry](#), turning adult women into drooling morons who can't come up with any adjectives other than "cute" or "adorable" to describe them.

While I in no way condone such language, I do think the outcry about them, be it good or bad, merely attests to their widespread appeal. The fact is, they are an affordable, recession-proof indulgence that make people feel good. Will the novelty wane? Perhaps. But until then, it's healthy competition for the French macaroon!

Complements from MyAM:

1/ Shortly after Lindsey's article, the New York Times magazine published ["Ceci n'est pas un macaron"](#) from Alexandra Marshall which also depicted the French cupcake's phenomenon. Great minds think alike....



The New York Times **Style** Magazine

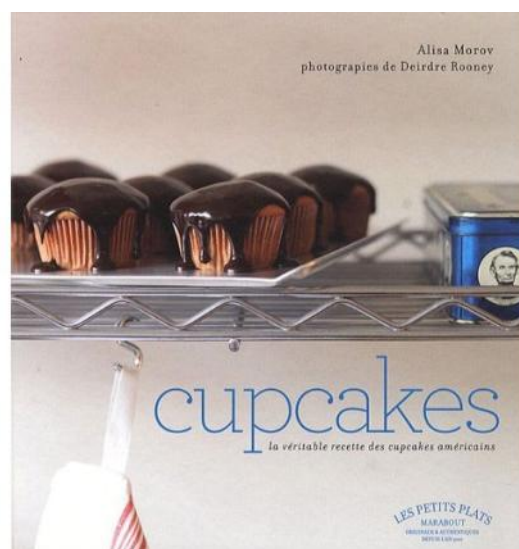


2/ To all cupcake fans, from the curious to the fanatics, My American Market is a proud sponsor of the first cupcake camp in France!! What is a Cupcake Camp you might ask? Based on [BarCamp](#), it's an gathering born from the desire for people to share and eat cupcakes in an open environment. The entrance is free and you don't have to bring cupcakes to attend. Bakers of every level are invited to come show off their cupcakes. Will you dare enter the competition?

Save the date now! Sunday, 4 July from 4:30-6:30 PM in Paris (2nd Arr.)
More information [here](#).

3/ If you are looking for a good book to learn or improve your cupcake techniques, Amazon, as well as your local bookstore, offers a wide selection of cookbooks with tasty recipes. I know how overwhelming it can be to make a choice, so, let me ease your way! I recommend Alisa Morov's ["Cupcakes"](#)! Alisa moved from Los Angeles to Paris in 2002, where she launched an Authentic American-Style Artisanal baking company called Sweet Pea Baking.

She has also published a book about meringues, titled (appropriately) ["Meringues"](#).



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