

# body + SOUL

may 27 2007

Herald Sun  
Sunday

## ooh la la

how to live life  
the French way

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master class  
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an indoor workout for  
the body and soul  
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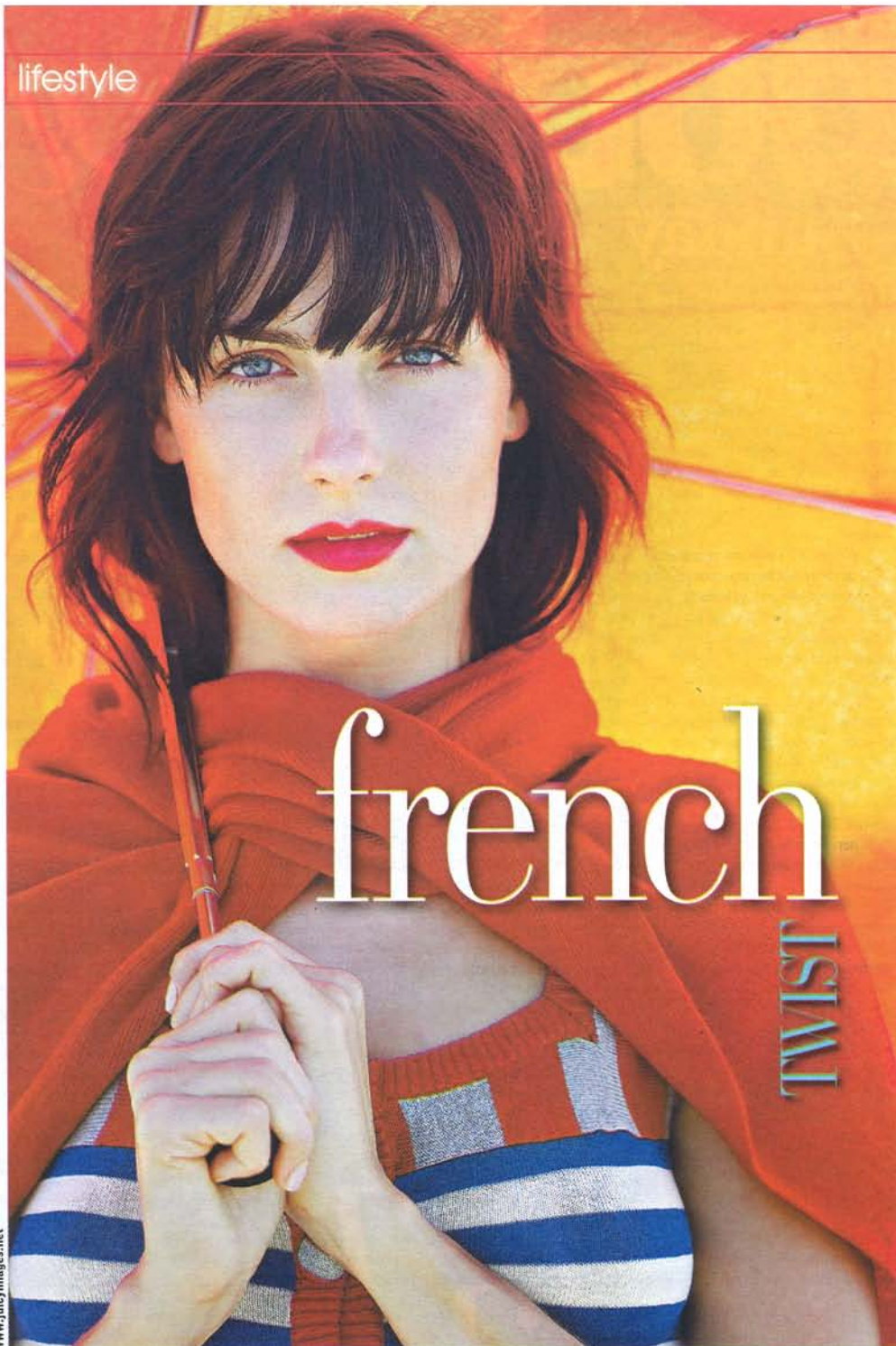
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lifestyle



# french

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The French know about more than fine wine. When it comes to living, they know to slow things down and ramp up the pleasure. By **Louisa Deasey.**

**I**n an age when instant communication, speed dating and fast food are the norm, it might be time to sign up for some lessons in the art of slow living from our French cousins.

So pour yourself a glass of wine, fling the diet books in the bin, vow never again to shop at a mega-store, and embrace your inner Francophile...

**FEED YOUR BRAIN** You didn't see Amelie plopping down in front of the TV with a tub of ice-cream after a tough day at work. Instead, she fed her brain with books and writing, fantasies and long, lingering walks, a grand way to solve problems and relieve stress, as opposed to McFries in front of CSI.

A US study in 2003 found that intellectual activities such as dancing, reading, learning a

new language and playing a musical instrument can help ward off Alzheimer's disease and senile dementia. Several other studies link TV watching with a higher risk of obesity.

Preferring to read, write, go to a gallery or meet up with a friend, the French girl feeds her brain with culture rather than Le Simpsons, which explains why "poet" is a respected job title in France.

So turn off the tube, skip the convenience food and invest your newfound hours in luxurious intellectual pursuits.

Some ideas? Visit a gallery, take an historic tour of your local area, read one book a week that's won a prize, sign up for a night class in something exotic, learn a language or begin an online course. You'll stop having nightmares about murders and DNA, and will reclaim countless lost nights spent in front of the box.

**2 WALK, DON'T RUN** If you've ever wondered why French women can eat cheese, drink wine and still sink into a size eight camisole at the end of the day, look to their favourite mode of transport: walking. French women walk everywhere. Walking is the one exercise that uses all the muscles and bones in the body, is a great stress reliever, and provides sightseeing to boot.

A Boston study conducted by the US's National Heart, Blood and Lung Institute in 1999 and published in the New England Journal Of Medicine showed it doesn't matter how fast or slow you walk, but merely logging between 6000 and 10,000 steps a day is enough to dramatically reduce your risk of heart problems. Do it the French way and leave the car at home and slowly enjoy the view on foot.

**3 SAY "NO"** There are numerous studies that show not having enough time to do the things we enjoy, because we have so many unenjoyable obligations, impacts enormously on our stress levels – not to mention our happiness.

While western society tends to value Superwoman-type multi-tasking, our French counterparts retain their dignity, their sanity and their precious time by saying "no", tactfully and with ease.

The French woman realises her life is composed of her time, and she won't waste it.

In *Entre Nous: A Woman's Guide To Finding Her Inner French Girl* (St Martins Press), Debra Ollivier writes, "No (non!) is one of the most useful words in a French girl's vocabulary. The French girl's preference for quality over quantity ties directly into her ability to say no: no to excess in people, things or ideas; no to what doesn't grace her world."

Beware of "shoulds". They are often a sign you want to say "no".

**4 GO SLOW** It's well known that French recipes involve lots of cream, wine, rich meats and high-cholesterol ingredients, so how do the French maintain their health? They have a completely different attitude to food, and it's all about slow pleasure. Did you know it's almost impossible to buy a takeaway coffee in France? They wouldn't see the point, preferring to sip, where we wolf and gulp our food down in a hurry.

Australian Margaret Ambrose is a self-confessed Francophile, which led to her

writing the bestselling *How To Be French* (New Holland).

Ambrose says: "French recipes like coq au vin take hours to cook. Yet we rush through supermarkets, choose meals that are quick to prepare, and then eat while we watch television. The French would be baffled by this scenario."

Melbourne artist Mirka Mora, who immigrated to Australia from France in her twenties, writes in *Love And Clutter* (Penguin) that she once cooked muttonbird in brandy for three days until she got it right: "But finally, it tasted beautiful."

It's this art of slow that is the real secret behind the French paradox. So slow down, and double the time you take to eat a meal. You may find you eat less, but enjoy it so much more.

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**5 DEVELOP A "TOILETTE"** Ambrose says one daily ritual French women never rush through is their "toilette".

"Rather than seeing it as a tiresome task that takes up too much time when we are already running late in the morning, a French woman takes care with her personal grooming," she says. "At all times she is loofahed, moisturised and dehaired."

Ollivier writes that this self-care extends to the French woman's bathroom: "It's a personal oasis, a little shrine that compels her body to linger. She devotes herself to this private, self-care time with a conviction that borders on the religious: no interruptions. No phone. No excuses."

Ambrose says it's a reflection of French women's self-worth: "The one great life lesson women can learn from their French counterparts is that they are worth it and it's okay to spoil themselves. French women rarely

look haggard, and that's because they will spend the time doing what we call pampering oneself, but what they would call living."

**6 DEVELOP A SIGNATURE** From her wardrobe to her bookshelf, the French woman abhors the chainstore look and adds her own personal signature to everything, no matter how small her budget.

Iconic French fashion designer Coco Chanel proved that budget is no excuse for dressing poorly; she couldn't afford the fashions popular during the Depression, so she rejected them and made her own, using everyday men's clothes.

It's this creative self-possession that's more alluring and attractive than any chainstore trend that's just hit the racks. So take a tip from the French and start to dress, and shop, for things that are particularly "you".

Buy bags, clothes, even things for your home in cuts, colours or fabric styles that you adore.

Says Ollivier: "When the French girl shops, it's part of a lifelong process of editing her environment, making small but meaningful additions or adjustments to her home, her closet, her life."

**7 CULTIVATE RITUALS** France is the home of many lasting beautiful rituals and traditions, from the wedding dress – in *Entre Nous*, Ollivier writes that white gowns became the custom after Anne of Brittany wore white when she married Louis XII in 1499 – to Champagne, and this all ties in with the French appreciation of the sensual pleasures of life.

Says Ambrose: "The French way of life is all about the pursuit of beauty, whether that be a beautiful experience, a sensory delight such as food, the vision of a magnificent boulevard after the rain, or a beautiful sensation."

Ambrose says there are many ways in which we can add ritual to our lives, such as laying the table with fresh linen and cut flowers for dinner, even if you are dining alone.

"The table is very important to French women – eating is not about administering food to one's body; it's an experience, a feast not just for the body but also the senses."

- [www.slowmovement.com](http://www.slowmovement.com)
- [www.margaretambrose.com](http://www.margaretambrose.com)
- [www.debraollivier.com](http://www.debraollivier.com)

in short

Gina Flaxman dishes the latest health, fitness & diet news.

Chosen frozen

Are fresh vegetables really so much better than frozen? Choice magazine tested fresh, week-old, frozen and canned versions of a variety of veggies and found, in most cases, the frozen or canned varieties fared better than their fresh counterparts. The magazine found that "fresh" vegetables in supermarkets have often been kept for a couple of weeks, so once bought, it's best to use them as quickly as possible as they continue to lose nutrients. Visit [www.choice.com.au](http://www.choice.com.au)

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