

# THE EPOCH TIMES

# LIFE &

# TRADITION



Reality is often different from our romanticized dreams, but it offers us many lessons.

REFLECTIONS

## Finding the Ideal in the Real

Reality is even better than we imagine it

By Walker Larson

I have a confession: I'm not a very good homesteader.

My wife and I moved to a small acreage with dreams of an idyllic existence among the vegetables and animals: a simpler, more traditional life, gathering most of our food from outside our front door. The back-to-the-land movement that has swelled in this country, particularly among people of my gen-

eration, caught hold of us too. More and more, in our techno-industrial society, people grow nostalgic for a natural and traditional way of life—and not without reason. We couldn't resist the poetic appeal of growing our own food, living close to the rhythms of the natural world, and practicing time-enshrined skills—canning, butchering, milking, and the like.

We're now approaching the end of our second year here, and I find that the reality has been somewhat different from the

dream. When you envision homesteading, you don't picture the difficulty of watering cows in the recesses of a bitterly cold winter when your hose keeps freezing up. Or the unpleasantness of wading through six inches of liquid manure while trying to castrate a calf who probably should have been castrated a lot sooner. Or the exhaustion and dehydration that comes after a nine-hour day

▲ The reality of homesteading is that it's both hard work and the stuff of legends.

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## CULTURE

## Why Our Crumbling Culture Still Loves 'The Music Man'

Exploring the enduring appeal of a classic American musical

By Annie Holmquist

I was on my bike the other evening, riding through a local park, when I heard the strains of "Seventy-Six Trombones" wafting out from the pavilion on the

lake. A local community theater was producing "The Music Man," one of those old standby musicals that gets pulled out for an airing year after year. Judging from the number of cars covering the area, this classic play of small-town Americana had drawn a crowd.

"What is it about 'The Music Man' that brings out such a crowd?" I won-

dered to myself as I stood there, catching sideline glimpses of children and adults in early 20th-century hats and dresses as they ran on and off stage. In the chaos of recent years, the simple ideals expressed in "The Music Man" seem almost out of date and something we would be ashamed of—an Americana we're supposed to forget as a relic of the racist patriarchy or something. And yet, everyone was sitting there watching, a willing and eager audience.

Continuing my ride through the park, I began making a mental list of the possible reasons why we still love

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▲ Shirley Jones as Marian Paroo and Robert Preston as Harold Hill in 1962's "The Music Man."

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**The Epoch Times: What have you found to be the greatest benefits of living debt free?**



▲ There's something deeply, integrally good that can be found at the intersection of ideal and real. "American Homestead Spring," circa 1869, by Currier & Ives.

## REFLECTIONS

## Finding the Ideal in the Real

Continued from Page 1

day of fencing. Or the infestation of Japanese beetles devouring your ripening orchard. Or the panic when the steer makes a show of charging you (he really should have been castrated sooner).

These realities don't appear in the mind when you imagine your peaceful life in the country. The truth is, such difficulties, frustrations, failures, and exhaustions aren't uncommon. And this kind of work just doesn't come naturally to me. I've never liked dirty hands. I get headaches from the hot sun. I have to rely on outside help more than I would like to admit.

And, most of the time, I'm inside at my keyboard or reading a book, hiding from the homestead and its demands, especially when it's very hot or very cold. I'm not a very good homesteader.

### Living Up to Reality

It's easy to idealize. It's easy to romanticize. But then the reality strikes me across the face, and I stand there, stunned. At this point, I have a choice. I can either reject the ideal as illusory, a cruel trick. Or I can adjust my ideal to align with the reality, seeking to find the ideal in the real.

If I choose the former, I'll likely become more bitter, more disappointed. I'll have

## FAMILY

## Setting Up Your Finances to Be a Stay-at-Home Mom

Being smart about your finances makes it possible to be a thriving single-income family

By Barbara Danza

Many women dream of being able to stay home with their children rather than work outside the home and outsource their care. The growing popularity of homeschooling has only made this idea more enticing to some mothers.

Financially, being a stay-at-home mom usually calls for some smart strategizing. I asked financial expert and Ramsey personality Jade Warshaw for her advice for moms who want to stay at home and still allow their families to thrive financially. Here's what she said.

**The Epoch Times: You've shared publicly that you paid off \$460,000 in debt. How did you do it?**

Jade Warshaw: In 2008, we realized we had to draw a line in the sand and deal with our six-figure debt. We started listening to "The Ramsey Show" and followed the "baby steps" to become debt-free. This meant not caring about what other people thought, and doing whatever it took to dig our way out.

**The Epoch Times: What is the first thing a couple should do if they aim to shift from a dual-income lifestyle to a single-income one?**

Ms. Warshaw: Knowing that I don't owe anything to anyone. I'm also able to help people every day, and walk alongside them on their debt-free journey, because I've been there. Being able to provide hope in such a toxic money culture is the reason I live the way I do.

**The Epoch Times: Many mothers dream of being able to stay at home with their children. Some perceive the world to be set up to require two incomes to manage family life. Do you believe it's possible in this day and age for families to thrive financially if one parent stays home?**

Ms. Warshaw: Absolutely, but life is going to have to change a lot of things about your life that revolve around money. Look at every area of the budget and find ways to cut costs. Things like insurance, cutting back on luxuries, downsizing or refinancing your home, or selling a car. You're going to be preparing more meals at home and cutting back on things like entertainment and vacations. I tell people to really think about being content and not be pressured by what society thinks you should do. Mom-guilt is real no matter what you decide to do.

**The Epoch Times: What are the most common mistakes you see families make when it comes to managing their money?**

Ms. Warshaw: This is not a sexy date night. But after the kids are in bed, the dishes are done, the laundry is folded, and you've got some one-on-one time, you've got to sit down face-to-face and talk about the budget. To win, you've got to have a game plan. I don't care if it's an old-fashioned legal pad, an Excel spreadsheet, or our free EveryDollar budget app—you've got to visualize how you're going to swing this thing. You can't just hope it all works out. Trust me, it won't. List your income. List your expenses. Subtract your expenses from your income to find out how much margin you have. That's how you determine your lifestyle and how it has to change.

**The Epoch Times: What are some strategies you'd encourage families to consider to be able to succeed financially while one parent stays at home with their children?**

Ms. Warshaw: First, remember this is a season. You're doing what's right for your family right now. It's not forever. The budget is going to be tight. I don't need to tell you that the price of everything is through the roof. You have to commit to a budget and stay on it. Every dollar has got to have a job. And I always encourage people to look for side hustles: things you can do at home to bring in extra money, even if it's just grocery money.

**The Epoch Times: What are the most common mistakes you see families make when it comes to managing their money?**

Ms. Warshaw: We live in a toxic money culture. Debt has been normalized. We've got to have it now. So I don't think it's so much about "mistakes" people make as it is falling into the mindset that broke is normal. Some of the decisions people make, like buying new cars with outrageous car payments, actually rob families of their future. You've got to stop being normal because normal sucks. Stop believing things like "you can't go to college without borrowing money" and "you're always going to have a car payment." Reject those things. Have a plan to increase your income, and make a plan for your money.

**The Epoch Times: What do you believe are the most important things to do in the long run to become financially free?**

Ms. Warshaw: It's simple to say and hard to do. You've got to stop borrowing money. Forever. Get out of debt and stay out of debt. Get on a budget and live on a budget. These things will change your money mindset, and you'll realize doing these things doesn't confine your money; it defines it.

Barbara Danza is a mom of two, a beach lover, and a kid at heart and has an MBA. Here, she dives into the challenges and opportunities of parenting in the modern age. She's particularly interested in the many educational options available to families today, the renewed appreciation of simplicity in kids' lives, the benefits of family travel, and the importance of family life in today's society.

unyielding to our whims—because it's real. And that's a good thing.

The truth is that the reality is better than what we dream up on our own. Harder, but better. It's, in some sense, more ideal than what my limited imagination could generate. Maybe the problem isn't that the real is disappointing but only that I often fail to penetrate into the mystery of the richness of a world that so exceeds my expectations and my limited framework of understanding.

### The Simple Stuff of Legend

In J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Two Towers," Aragorn is asked, "Do we walk in legends or on the green earth in the daylight?"

Aragorn answers, "A man may do both. For not we but those who come after will make the legends of our time. The green earth, say you? That is a mighty matter of legend, though you tread it under the light of day!"

It's possible that our simple, daily activities—particularly the frustrating ones—are indeed part of an ideal far beyond our reckoning. The grass, the trees, and mending broken fences—these are the stuff of legend.

I still believe in everything I wrote in the introduction regarding the value of homesteading—maybe now more than ever. It isn't that my romanticized vision of country life was false, exactly. Just immature. A seedling. The ideal wasn't a lie, it just needed refinement, growth. It needed to be tempered by reality, like a good steel. Or aged like a good wine.

I look out at the pasture—the one I enclosed with my own hands, the one I watered with blood and sweat—and I see those cows being what they're meant to be, doing what they're meant to do, peacefully wandering the hillside while the great stand of pines sways and murmurs behind them and a royal sky blooms overhead, and I think, there's something deeply, integrally good here. Something ideal. And all the more so because it's real and not merely my romanticized version.

When I pause to reflect instead of growing irritated at the inconvenience of an overturned water barrel or an overgrown garden, I can enter into unity with these remarkable living things that I'm trying, haphazardly, a bit lazily, to care for. I enter into unity with the epochs-old tradition of farming, so entwined with the human experience. And I'm left with a feeling of gratitude—gratitude that I can be a part of this reality, however poorly I fulfill my role.

Walker Larson teaches literature and history at a private academy in Wisconsin, where he resides with his wife. He holds a master's in English literature and language, and his writing has appeared in *The Hemingway Review*, *Intellectual Takeout*, and his *Substack*, "The Hazelnut."



Many mothers dream of being able to stay at home with their children, and with some serious financial planning, this can become a reality.



Robert Preston conducts a band recital in the 1962 Warner Bros. musical comedy "The Music Man."

## CULTURE

## Why Our Crumbling Culture Still Loves 'The Music Man'

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"The Music Man" in this callous and careless age. In short, I realized that we still love it because it speaks to some of the most basic needs and experiences of life, including the following four.

### Community

River City, Iowa, where professor Harold Hill sets up camp in "The Music Man," is a classic village where everyone knows everything about everyone else—and maybe even some more they don't want to know. The town's residents are concerned about their children, and they're concerned about their town streets. They don't want trouble on those streets, and they certainly don't want their children to be the ones causing that trouble!

In short, they are a tight-knit group of individuals who do get on each other's nerves—but they're still a group. They have each other, their homes, and a sense of belonging.

Unfortunately, the same can't be said for many Americans today. We don't know our neighbors well enough to greet them by name, let alone gossip about them. With costs so high, those in the younger generations have difficulty purchasing a home, so they drift around renting various apartments, even relocating regularly to different cities, leaving little time to put down roots. And belonging? With families broken and churches shunned, there are few groups in which today's Americans feel they can make friends and discuss things that matter.

Thus, the first reason we are drawn repeatedly to "The Music Man" is likely that it gives us a vision of the community many of us don't have but secretly desire.

### Patriotism

"The Music Man" shows small-town America at its finest. There are patriotic marches. There are speeches by politicians. There's entertainment provided by the town's citizens (even if it isn't very high quality!). And of course, there is a willing audience eager to come together and celebrate their nation, even if it's not explicitly stated.

Such celebrations aren't the provincial or homely affairs that many assume. In reality, they are a direct response to an exhortation John Adams made in the early years of our nation, namely to remember the founding of our country "with Pomp and Parade, with Shews, Games, Sports, Guns, Bells, Bonfires and Illuminations from one End of this Continent to the other from this Time forward forever more."

The reason Adams gave such an exhortation is simple, and one I discovered while attending a concert in the park last July Fourth. Namely, hearing the patriotic tunes together in a group brings joy, setting people to smiling, dancing, and cheering. It also brings tears to the eyes and swells the heart with love for those who sacrificed so that we could have freedom.

When we cut out these celebrations, as is so common these days—the mayor of my hometown even cut the public display of

fireworks for the past few years—it's much easier to forget our heritage and to be disgruntled instead of grateful. For that reason, "The Music Man" serves as a reminder to never forget and to freely engage in celebrating our country and its freedoms.

### Work Ethic

A third theme shining throughout "The Music Man" is hard work. In this respect, Marian Paroo and Harold Hill are exact opposites—he works hard to get out of hard work by pulling con jobs, while she works hard to earn a respectable living and support her family through two jobs, one at the library and the other at home teaching piano lessons.

The interesting thing is that Marian is a hard worker who doesn't treat herself as a victim of circumstances. Sure, she'd like it if she didn't have to be the breadwinner of the family, but she accepts the tasks and duties she has been given and works at them doggedly. Hill, on the other hand, grows tired of trying to escape his alleged life of ease, and the end of the play suggests that he settles down to good, honest, useful work.

Such a picture subtly gives us clues about embracing diligence. If, like Marian—and Hill at the end—we want to feel like worthwhile contributors to society, then we must put our chins up, embrace what life throws at us without complaining, and roll up our sleeves to participate in the longstanding tradition of the good ol' Protestant work ethic America is famous for.

**If we want to feel like worthwhile contributors to society, then we must put our chins up, embrace what life throws at us without complaining, and roll up our sleeves.**

Family Finally, "The Music Man" gives a lesson on the importance of family. Here we have Marian, a pretty, intelligent, good girl who has apparently missed the boat on love given her librarian (read: spinster) title. Yet her aloof exterior hides the fact that she'd really just like someone to love her and start a family with.

Hill, on the other hand, is the bad boy whose past really doesn't give him much hope of landing the type of girl who would make a good wife. Yet when he finds Marian and reforms, the two overcome the odds, giving us hope that love, home, and family are worthy goals that might not be as unattainable as we think—an encouraging lesson in an age when young people seem to struggle to find a life partner and start a family.

So why do we still love "The Music Man" in a day and age when the callous cynicism of the past often wins? I suspect it's because, despite the scorn we dish on traditional values, we still long for the community, patriotism, hard work, and family portraits it presents. Perhaps it's time we start incorporating those values back into our own lives so they're more than just a nostalgic feeling instigated by the community theater once a year.



▲ A 1957 poster for Broadway's "The Music Man."

Annie Holmquist is a cultural commentator hailing from America's heartland who loves classic books, architecture, music, and values. Her writings can be found at Annie's Attic on Substack.



▲ We are but a small part of everything. "Landscape with Two Praying Monks," between 1695 and 1697, by Antonio Francesco Peruzzi. Oil on canvas. Städel Museum, Frankfurt, Germany.

#### PROFILES IN HISTORY

## Eddie Rickenbacker: 'The Great Indestructible'

An ongoing series of lesser known but significant figures who shaped our world

By Dustin Bass

Eddie Rickenbacker (1890–1973) had a knack for danger and an affinity for new technology. He had, according to him, 135 scrapes with death. His passion for speed, whether in cars or in airplanes, was a prime reason for these close encounters.

He was born into poverty to Swiss immigrant parents who were both religious and disciplinarians. As a child, he was a bit of a troublemaker, but when his father died in a construction accident (though there's some suspicion about foul play) when he was 13, he left school and started working to help the family.

He held numerous jobs, including selling newspapers, eggs, and goat's milk, and eventually, after lying about his age in order to skirt the child labor laws, landed a job at the Federal Glass Factory. He then worked at the Buckeye Steel Cast-



ings Co., then at a beer factory, a bowling alley, and a cemetery monument yard, and later became an apprentice at the Pennsylvania Railroad.

His love of adventure, close scrapes, engines, and technology culminated in the automobile, which he first saw in 1905. His life forever changed in 1906 when he started working for Lee Frayer,

a professional race car driver and founder of Frayer-Miller cars built by the Oscar Lear Automobile Co. Rickenbacker soon became Frayer's mechanic during races.

Over the ensuing years, his career revolved around cars, ranging from salesman to chauffeur of politician William Jennings Bryan as part of Bryan's 1909 speaking tour in Texas. In 1911, he raced in the inaugural Indianapolis 500. By the end of 1916, Rickenbacker was the manager of the Prest-O-Lite Racing Team.

Prest-O-Lite was an automotive headlight company formed by the founders of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Although Rickenbacker never won the Indy 500, he did make the record books by breaking the world speed record in 1914 at Daytona, reaching 134 miles per hour.

In his final year of racing in 1916, he boarded an aircraft flown by Glenn Martin, an aviation pioneer whose company eventually became Lockheed Martin. Despite his fear of heights, Rickenbacker fell in love with aviation, and with America's entrance into World War I early the following year, he would get his chance at the most daring of flights.

▲ 1st Lt. Eddie Rickenbacker, 94th Aero Squadron, in his S.XIII plane. U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.

#### TRADITIONAL CULTURE

# Letting Go of Everything We Know

Motivation, roadblocks, and self-transformation

By James Sale

Self-help, personal development, self-improvement, learning and development, education—we have a million and one names for this process, but what they all boil down to is this age-old spiritual idea of self-transformation.

While the concept of religion is far too big to address in an article such as this, one broad truism that we might draw from the vast corpus is that virtually all the world's religions, Eastern and Western, introspective and esoteric, big and small, revolve around this idea that human beings need mechanisms to help improve themselves, whether these be commandments, rituals, practices, abstinences, worship, or divine intervention—and not forgetting faith itself.

There's also something implicit and subtextual in this: Deep down, all healthy human beings want to keep improving and transforming.

#### Motivation and Roadblocks

For myself and other authorities in the field of motivation, our role is to help people enact this self-transformation, much like the spiritual guides of old. The first hurdle is following through on that desire for change. We have a word for this desire for change: motivation, which is a form of energy (not thought), as intellectually wanting something and having the motivation to do something are two very different things.

While our motivations are partly aligned with our desires—for our motivations describe the direction(s) of our energy—we can of course desire things without the drive to reach them. For example, we might want to be famous but might not be particularly motivated by some of the activities that can lead us to fame, such as content creation or networking.

If we study motivation, we have to conclude that if we want to get what we want, we have to start aligning what we want with our motivators (and, strangely enough, this also works in reverse: aligning our motivators with what we want). This bidirectional process, with our motivators influencing our desires or end goal and vice versa, can lead us to make astonishing progress.

However, even if we're able to make this progress, often, there comes a moment when we hit a roadblock. As a coach myself, I've observed that, sometimes, the more serious the issues people face, the easier it is to support and help them. To use fitness as an example, it's easier to get someone who has never done a day of exercise in his or her life to the point where they can run a mile than it is to

get someone who runs half-marathons regularly to win Olympic gold.

As Patrick McKeown highlighted in his book "The Oxygen Advantage: Simple, Scientifically Proven Breathing Techniques to Help You Become Healthier, Slimmer, Faster, and Fitter," the difference in performance between elite athletes is often a margin of 1 percent or less.

So it's paradoxically the people who are doing all the right things who sometimes struggle to change and, therefore, can't transform their selves.

#### The Leap of Faith

There's a wonderful story in the "Sayings of the Desert Fathers" (from Thomas Merton's "The Wisdom of the Desert: Sayings From the Desert Fathers of the Fourth Century") that might help us with this issue. In this scripture, Abbot Lot is struggling on his spiritual pathway:

"Abbot Lot came to Abbot Joseph and said, 'Father, to the limit of my ability, I keep my little rule, my little fast, my prayer, meditation and contemplative silence; and to the limit of my ability, I work to cleanse my heart of thoughts; what more should I do?'"

First, let's commend Father Lot. By any standard, he's clearly an extremely disciplined person. Yet he senses that although he's going through the external motions—the rituals of fasting, prayer, meditation, and silence—he isn't reaching the deeper levels. His question—"What more should I do?"—is relevant to us all in our odyssey through life. And I'm sure you can see how difficult it is to answer, given the fact that Abbot Lot is doing so much right. Indeed, Abbot Lot specifically refers twice to the "limit of [his] ability." He's doing his absolute best already.

Before I share the conclusion of the story, it's worth taking the time to reflect on what your answer or approach would be to Abbot Lot (or a person with a similar complaint). What would you say?

Abbot Joseph's reply is revealing: "The elder [man] rose up in reply, and stretched out his hands to heaven, and his fingers became like ten lamps of fire. He said, 'Why not be utterly changed into fire?'"

While the imagery is incredibly startling, this may seem impenetrably symbolic or obscure to modern readers. What does it mean? Beneath the spiritual symbolism, we also find some strangely practical advice.

But first, for the sake of thoroughness, let's unpack the symbolism on a spiritual level.

Abbot Joseph's 10 fingers glow like "lamps of fire." The number 10 is highly significant, not just representing his literal 10 fingers but also the 10 command-

ments—the law—the very rules and regulations that Abbot Lot is consumed by following and that he believes will bring him to heaven.

In a more esoteric sense, the fingers could also refer to the 10 spheres or emanations upon the Tree of Life in Jewish Kabbalah. These 10 spheres (called Sephiroth in Hebrew) reflect the tenfold nature of God's mind or true essence, forming a map or blueprint of the universe itself. Again, this correlates with ideas of order and structure, the rigid framework around which Abbot Joseph clearly perceives. And second, there's no "my" or "I" with which to even experience this limitation! Philosopher and author Jason Gregory described this as "the cosmic joke" one reaches after enlightenment, a term that might remind us of Dante's "Divine Comedy," which is, of course, another story of self-transformation.

Ultimately, self-transformation is never an easy road—nor does it have a definitive end-point. For even when we advance far along the path like Abbot Lot, we often discover that there's so much further to go. But by bearing in mind this story, we can look out for these key moments when we, or a client we're helping, feel blocked, and ask ourselves, "What more could I be doing?" If the answer comes, "Why not be utterly changed into fire?" then we know what we must do!

The best analogy I might give is drawn from music. A diligent student might well memorize the 24 key signatures, practice their scales, and know every "accidental" (a sharp or flat) that makes up these signatures. But a master can simply play and find harmony and beauty without rigidly following a particular pattern. They've internalized the "laws" that make up this universe of sound and thus can interpret them freely.

#### Self-Transformation

The final step of self-transformation at the highest level, therefore, is to forget everything we knew before; to allow the transformation to occur; to let go, rather



▲ Humans have a seemingly innate desire to rise above darkness. "Meditation of Ophelia," 1850, by Jozef Israëls. Dordrechts Museum in Dordrechts, Netherlands.

By the end of World War I, he had flown 300 combat hours—the most of any American pilot.

He graduated as a first lieutenant and joined the 94th Aero Squadron near Toul, France. It would become the first all-American air unit to experience combat. He flew Nieuport 28s and Spad XIII and had his first confirmed victory on April 29, 1918. By May 28, he was an ace, having shot down a total of five German planes. His sixth victory came two days later.

His successes continued and the U.S. Army took notice, promoting him to captain and making him commander of the 94th. By the end of the war, he had flown 300 combat hours (the most of any American pilot), had 27 confirmed victories (also the most), had shot down five observation balloons, and was dubbed by the press as America's "Ace of Aces."

He was awarded eight Distinguished Service Crosses and was also awarded by France with the Legion of Honor (chevalier) and two Croix de Guerres, with

to find the attendant asleep outside the room and Rickenbacker struggling to breathe. It would be the first of two times that Adelaide would save his life.

The second time was during World War II, when he was sent by Secretary of War Henry Stimson to inspect the equipment and personnel in the Pacific. When the pilot of the B-17 got lost and the plane ran out of fuel, the eight passengers had to bail out. After several weeks, the U.S. Army planned to end the search for survivors, but Adelaide implored and demanded that it continue. Found days later, seven of the eight passengers survived. Upon hearing of Rickenbacker's survival, The Boston Globe heralded him as "The Great Indestructible."

Rickenbacker quickly recuperated and returned to completing "civilian" missions in China, India, and the Soviet Union, from which he shared his information with the U.S. War Department and Britain's Winston Churchill.

After the war, he would continue his work in and promotion of aviation. At Rickenbacker's funeral, Gen. James "Jimmy" Doolittle, of the famed "Doolittle Raid," gave the eulogy.

Dustin Bass is an author and co-host of *The Sons of History* podcast.

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▲ Capt. E.V. "Eddie" Rickenbacker wearing the Congressional Medal of Honor.



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▲ Elegantly set on an island in the river Indre (Loire Valley), the Château of Azay-le-Rideau is considered to be one of the earliest buildings designed in the French Renaissance style. The famous water mirror dates from the 20th century, when the river branch expanded to border the château's foundation. Ever since then, the château's glorious façade has been reflected in a water mirror and continues to charm visitors.



▲ The château is famous for its staircase, to the right of the main building. Although its architect is unknown, the grand staircase is the most innovative element of Azay-le-Rideau, demonstrating the importance of Italian influences in 16th-century France. Up until then, French châteaux had spiral staircases, while this one is straight with banisters on either side. Other key elements of this monumental staircase include the open bay windows and carved portraits of kings and queens of France.

**In the 19th century, the Biencourt family restored the property in the Neo-Renaissance style.**

LARGER THAN LIFE: Art that inspires us through the ages

# A Gem of the French Loire Valley

The Château of Azay-le-Rideau

By Ariane Triebswetter

French writer Honoré de Balzac described the Château of Azay-le-Rideau as "a faceted diamond set in the Indre." A gem among the numerous châteaux of the Loire Valley, it's also one of the earliest examples of French Renaissance architecture.

The primary structure was built between 1518 and 1528 by Gilles Berthelot, a financier of King Francis I. This exceptional site conveys all the charm of the early Renaissance, blending both French tradition and innovative Italian decor. It soon became representative of a new way of building structures in the Loire Valley, a favored place of residence for the French court.

Financiers of the crown such as Berthelot started to build magnificent homes to establish their social status, incorporating Italian architectural innovations (influenced by their military campaigns in Italy) with the French Renaissance style.

The Château of Azay-le-Rideau represents this transition, and the grand

central staircase is a key element of this shift. It's decorated with Italian Renaissance features such as half columns, pillars, pilasters, carved shells, and a coffered vault featuring profile medallions. Another highlight is the building's façade, with its turrets and sharply pointed roofs, reminiscent of the Gothic style.

Unfortunately, Berthelot couldn't complete his project, as Francis I confiscated the château in 1535 after Berthelot's exile. Some architects believe that Berthelot originally planned to add a wing to form a symmetrical U-shaped floor plan following Italian designs, instead of the current L-shaped floor plan.

In the 19th century, the Biencourt family restored the property in the Neo-Renaissance style. Today, the château is classified as a historical monument, and a recent restoration project restored it to its former glory, renovating both its exterior and interior with original Renaissance furnishings.

*Ariane Triebswetter is an international freelance journalist, with a background in modern literature and classical music.*



▲ The stately apartments are richly decorated in the Neo-Renaissance style, a 19th century architectural style revival of the Renaissance. Here, the Biencourt Salon illustrates the taste of the Biencourt family for the château's past style. The large fireplace is the centerpiece of this room, along with the wooden paneling. As for the walls, they are covered in leather-patterned wallpaper and portraits from the Renaissance, acquired by the Biencourt family in the spirit of authenticity. Overall, the luxurious yet comfortable atmosphere was faithfully reproduced, with original furniture from Mobilier National.

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