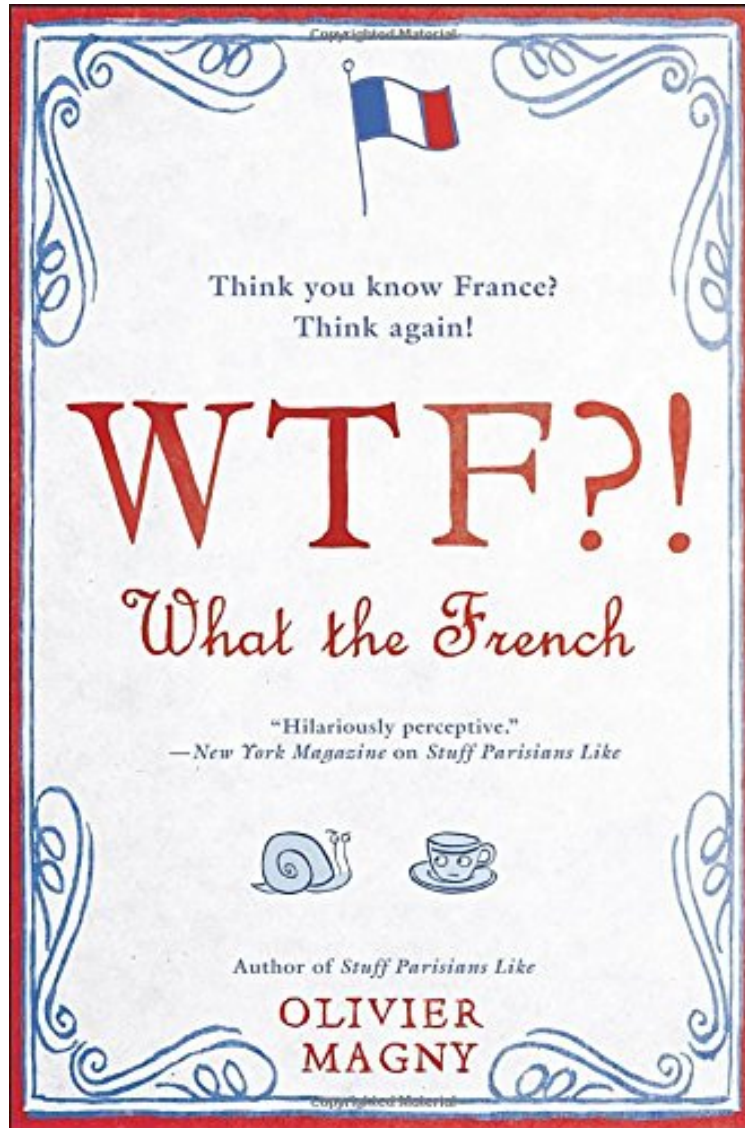


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## WTF?!: What the French

*Olivier Magny*

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**Olivier Magny : WTF?!: What the French** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised WTF?!: What the French:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Loved this bookBy TCHLoved this book. The author's self-deprecating style easy-to-read humor made for a great read. Having lived in France for ~14 months, so many of the anecdotes hit home. Highly recommended if you love France the French.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Eye OpeningBy Nelson NappiEducational and humorous. An honest assessment of life in France, the good,

the bad, the light the dark. An eye opening read. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. WTF: It's worth buying/reading By Customer I've been to France several times; primarily Paris Bretagne. I found WTF funny, enlightening, an easy read on a series of subjects broken into chapters. I also learned a lot. I would recommend it, especially for someone traveling to today's France.

With *Stuff Parisians Like*, Olivier Magny shared his hilarious insights into the fervently held opinions of his fellow Parisians. Now he moves beyond the City of Light to skewer the many idiosyncrasies that make modern France so very unique. In France, the simple act of eating bread is an exercise in creative problem solving and attempting to spell requires a degree of masochism. But that's just how the French like it—and in *WTF*, Olivier Magny reveals the France only the French know. From the latest trends in baby names, to the religiously observed division of church and state, prepare yourself for an insider's look at French culture that is surprising, insightful, and chock full of *bons mots*. INCLUDES PHOTOGRAPHS

Praise for *Stuff Parisians Like* “A well-deserved spanking for all Parisians.”—GQ “Hysterically funny.”—Girls’ Guide to Paris About the Author Olivier Magny is the author of *Stuff Parisians Like* and *Into Wine*. He’s also the founder of one of the best wine bars in Paris: *Ô Chateau*. Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. LE TERROIR Understanding France—and wine while you're at it—requires being acquainted with a word the French language had the elegance to give birth to and to nurture. That word is *terroir*. Ask a wine lover what makes a great bottle of wine so great: *le terroir*. Why is this winemaker so excited about this small little parcel on that particular hill? *Le terroir*. What is so wonderful about Burgundy or Piemonte? *Le terroir*. *Le terroir* is *somewhereness*; it is the essence of a place, its signature. It is what's unique, nonreproducible, and singular about it. In the world of wine, this translates into the unique combination of soil, subsoil, climate, topology, etc., all of which contribute to giving a unique taste to the grapes and therefore ultimately to the wine produced in that particular place. French wine is so complex and diverse because, to the very core of how it is organized, farmed, and sold, it values *terroir*. In France, names of places—not of grapes—define wine. People in France order Bordeaux, Beaujolais, Sancerre, and Champagne, which are all regions, not Merlot, Pinot Noir, or Sauvignon Blanc, which all refer to grape varieties! Wine, for the French, is about where it's from far more than about what grape(s) it's made from. Ultimately, *terroir* is what makes one place different from another. The *terroir* of the American South at the beginning of the last century gave us jazz, just like that of the Bronx in the 1980s gave us hip-hop. France is home to countless *terroirs*, which have been shaped over millennia. It is also home to a culture that recognizes, appreciates, and sometimes even reveres them. Anyone who has traveled extensively through France can grasp the tremendous variety in architecture, cuisine, wine, accents, crops, sports, and cultural references from one French region to the next. Normandy is immediately and irremediably distinguishable from Alsace, in the same way that Provence is different from Brittany, or Corsica from the Alps. Most French people are *gourmands*, so when they travel to these regions, they have high expectations. Go to Normandy and your intake of Calvados and cider will automatically increase. Visit Brittany and *crêpes* will be your passage obligation. Head to Marseille: *bouillabaisse* and *rosé* wine will most likely be on the menu. Off to Alsace? You'd miss out by not sipping Alsatian wine or beer while enjoying a good *choucroute*. While the expression of *terroir* in the world of wine—since it is complex, extremely varied, and thus requires some getting acquainted with—makes many people consider French wine as “too complicated,” visiting France shows how wonderfully diverse, tasty, and unpretentious the culture of *terroir* truly is. In a global world that threatens to obliterate differences, recognizing, appreciating, and seeking expressions of *terroir*—whether in wine, food, music, architecture, or language—are the ticket to a more delectable and richer life. If wine has one thing to teach us, it really is the beauty and value of *le terroir*. For while the word is French, the reality is not. *Terroirs* are everywhere. So come along, dear reader, and join the joyful bunch known as the *terroirists*! Useful tip: If you want to experience wines that express their *terroir* the most, ask for “biodynamic” wines at your local wine store. Sound like a French person: “*L'amour du terroir, c'est important quand m?me dans la culture fran?aise.*” (The love of *terroir*—it's actually an important part of French culture.) L'APfRO There is no understanding French culture without understanding the paramount importance of *l'ap?ritif*. *L'ap?ritif* is the moment preceding a meal when drinks and finger food are consumed. It's the warm-up, the buildup, the foreplay before a meal. In and of itself, the mere existence of the concept of drinks and food before drinks and food should suffice to guarantee an irrevocable spot for France in the hall of fame of the world's greatest nations. The *ap?ritif* is an absolute landmark of French culture—and is typically referred to by its familiar nickname *l'ap?ro*. It is essential to realize that even though food can be served, *l'ap?ro* is really about the drinking. Heck, French supermarkets even have a section of the drinks aisle called *ap?ritifs*, where all the traditional *ap?ro* drinks are gathered. Meals in France are a serious matter—you should ease into them. *L'ap?ro* is that buffer between the harshness of nonmeal life and the pleasant parenthetical that a proper French meal should be. It is about transitioning to your more relaxed, more social, and more joyful self. *Prendre l'ap?ro* is more about sharing a moment than just having a drink. It's about taking the time to do it. So the first thing your server should ask after you are seated at a French restaurant is: “*Un ap?ritif pour commencer?*” That is one legitimate question! It is essential to pick up signals when it comes to the *ap?ro* culture. If a friend offers you an

apŽritif for lunch on a weekday, the plan is clear: boozy lunch. Not much solid work is going to be achieved that afternoon. At night, apŽros can be had solo at home to take the edge off, or with friends or colleagues, or at a bar. Girls like to have un p'tit apŽro entre filles (a girls-only apŽro), while guys typically prefer un apŽro entre mecs (a guys-only apŽro). What is served depends on social class, trends, regions, and seasons. During spring and summer, apŽro rhymes with rosŽ. Go to the South of France and pastis (and its derivatives like mauresque) will be your go-to apŽro drink. In Burgundy, kir (black currant liqueur mixed with white wine) is the traditional choice. Climb the social ladder and l'apŽritif is equated with Champagne. Head to Martinique, Guadeloupe, or RŽunion Island and rum will dominate the scene. Foodwise, anything could potentially be on offer, from sad little cacahou?tes (peanuts) all the way to fancy amuse-bouches. The most common option is simply g%oteaux apŽritif-think a better, more eclectic version of crackers (which undoubtedly constitute another very French section of local supermarkets). Every French person is highly familiar with the few typical g%oteaux apŽritif, and everyone has a favorite (e.g., les Curly, les Tucs, etc.). When French people have friends or family over, l'apŽritif is an essential part of the event. It is not held at the dinner table and requires a separate venue (outside, on the sofa, by the coffee table, etc.). Only once l'apŽro is finished (and the food is ready) will guests be asked to sit down for the meal. L'apŽro is such a pleasant time of any French social experience that it has morphed into an experience in and of itself. It went independent! Over the past few years, l'apŽro stopped simply preceding meals and started to frequently supplant them. L'apŽritif d'natoire was born: no formal dinner, but enough food to satisfy all guests. Many corporate events or family affairs now take the form of more flexible and mingly apŽritifs d'natoires. But the real fun in the new, reinvented world of apŽritifs is to be had by the younger crowd. Younger French people don't do dinner parties as much as their elders, frequently lacking the time, space, money, desire, or cooking skills. Yet they love to meet up for un apŽro. There is something very open and noncommittal about it that fits the Millennial lifestyle. The invitation implies that everyone can leave early or invite friends. It also implies that things can get wild and go all night if the vibe is right. No definite script. The atmosphere is usually more relaxed than more formal social functions, so apŽros tend to be great fun and may end up lasting even longer than your good old traditional French meal. Incurable Frenchies! Useful tip: Always bring a bottle of wine. Not too fancy. Sound like a French person: "On fait un apŽro vendredi soir. Tu veux passer?" (We're having an apŽro Friday night. Wanna stop by?) FRENCH DANCING You may be surprised to find that there is such a thing as French dancing. It can be summed up in two words: bad dancing. In France, dancing is about acknowledging the music. Following it is secondary. Who's that good at dancing anyway? In France, just getting your body in motion will qualify you as an utterly fun person. A French party animal is just someone that moves some body parts when she hears music. Coordination is irrelevant. It is quite okay to look bad. It is actually okay to look like you might-just possibly-suffer from some mild and heretofore discreet mental affliction. The French are open-minded like that. Here, there is always a mild feeling of relief when the music stops and people get back to normal: they were not impaired; they were just French! Now, while the majority of French people specialize in erratic motions, some step it up a notch. On the dance floor, these ones do not look like they might have a disease; they just suck. When it comes to dance skills, plain sucking will make you one of the best dancers in France. No questions asked. You're a natural. French dancing is primarily arm dancing. Sooner or later, French dancing will provide the observer with the ultimate French dance move: the arms-up move. When the chorus of a song comes up, 80 percent of the people on the dance floor will raise their arms to the sky-again, most likely not in time with the music. For the most energetic people or the greatest tunes, their bodies will follow their arms skyward and then their feet toward the ground. The French will start jumping along with the music. That moment is the peak of a French party. If your guests leave without jumping with their arms up in the air, the party-no matter what the guests may say-was just a little underwhelming. A party climax in France is all about the jumping. Extra cool points will be scored by those raising only one arm. This tricky maneuver is typically employed by smokers or people holding a drink. Double score if you can hold both a cigarette and a drink while raising one or two arms. You are obviously incredibly coordinated and so, indeed, just plain cool. Some social groups have decided not to let their Frenchness deter them from owning the dance floors. As such, they have specialized in a specific type of dancing, which incidentally will give them away immediately. Here are a few of these other types of dancing ^ la fran?aise: Dance le rock and you are no doubt about it un bourge-spawn of the dying breed known as the proper French Catholic bourgeoisie. Rock dancing can be fun and sometimes impressive to watch. Usually, however, even when fully mastered, it is rendered with no rhythm whatsoever. Mechanical masterpiece, groove tragedy. Dance la tectonique and you'll be viewed as un jeune-a youngster. Older people will lament that, in their day, you didn't dance on your own; you had a companion. Young adults will look down on you for mastering something they don't, and that reminds them they're no longer on the cutting edge. They will try to bust one or two moves, jokingly. French soft hilarity typically ensues. Dance le hip-hop and you're une racaille-a hoodlum. While twenty years ago outliers would faire du modern-jazz, now the new generation of young French girls fait du hip-hop. In all fairness, though, it should be noted that, thanks to the spread of hip-hop culture, France is home to some of the best hip-hop dancers in the world. On the subject of dancing, one thing has become clear to most young French people: Les AmŽricaines, elles dansent comme des putes-American girls dance like prostitutes. Young French boys will join in with awe and excitement evident on their faces, while French girls will offer some of the most disgusted-looking Gallic shrugs of

your life. Contempt and jealousy combined will do that. At that point, they'll go back to the dance floor acting like they'd rather be somewhere else. Compared with many other cultures, the French culture does not grant a significant role to dancing. While many French girls take dance classes in their childhood and find dancing fun, most Frenchmen dread it. The dance floor at a typical French wedding will frequently be filled with women only. Occasionally, a few girls will try to drag their dates or husbands out of their chairs. Actual pulling will occur. Usually unsuccessfully. Frenchmen prefer to stay seated and drink the night away with their buddies: "J'aime pas danser. Putain, pourquoi elle m'emmerde?" (I don't like dancing. Damn, why is she bugging me?) Useful tip: If you are a good dancer and a woman, you will become the center of attention on any French dance floor. Sound like a French person: "Moi j'aime beaucoup danser mais avec Michel, c'est vrai que c'est pas tous les jours!" (I love to dance, but with Michel, it's only once in a blue moon!) BLOWING AIR Among humans, most communication is nonverbal. Among French people, however, a fair bit of the nonverbal communication remains mouth-centric. While unmistakably French mouth shrugs are a well-known Gallic trait, another essential mouth movement escapes the sagacity of most visitors and observers. That movement consists of blowing air. Short of an attentive study of the French air-blowing ways, foreigners will miss the bulk of the small refinements that make up the richness and depth of social interactions in France. Several emotional states can be expressed much more conveniently through blowing air than by using words. Blowing air can mean a number of different things: 1. "I'm impressed!" To show that you are impressed, curve your mouth, both corners pulled downward (think sad smiley face). Keep your lips relaxed. Then push air out gently through the tips of your lips. Once. A small, lean sound will ensue. Accompany this sound and movement by a nod and/or chickenlike tilt. That, right there, is French for "Wow-that's amazing." 2. "I have no idea." French people typically have the answer to most questions. In the rare occurrence that they happen not to, they shall express it through air blowing. To achieve a nonverbal Je ne sais pas, repeat the movement explained above and add to it a concomitant shoulder shrug. Nothing more, nothing less. 3. "I'm frustrated." Acting frustrated being so quintessential to Frenchness, it is key to be able to recognize and communicate that state of mind efficiently. Fortunately, it is a piece of gâteau. The pattern is as follows: Inhale through your nose; then expel that breath through the mouth in a generous, continuous, louder-than-usual blow. Once this general frame is understood, small variations will open the doors to truly blending in. In order to capture or express the wide palette of the French forms of frustration, one must focus on two things: the level of intensity and the shape of the lips.