

France

magazine

THE BEST OF CULTURE, TRAVEL & ART DE VIVRE
Winter 2014-15

**LAFAYETTE'S
HERMIONE**
Returning to
America in 2015

**BEAUMARCHAIS'S
FIGARO**
Unbound in
Los Angeles

**ARCHITECTURAL
HIGH NOTES**
The new
Philharmonie
de Paris





After 17 years of construction, the Hermione took to the Atlantic last fall for two months of sea trials.

The *Hermione* *Sets Sail*

This summer,
a replica of the ship
that brought
Lafayette *to* America
will enchant crowds
in cities all along the
Eastern seaboard.

> SPOILED ALERT <

Prepare for a veritable French-American love fest.

By

Roland Flamini

There are no extant images of the *Hermione*, but the two frigates represented in this painting by Pierre-Julien Gilbert closely resembled that vessel. Here they are shown capturing Britain's *Argo* at the end of the American War of Independence.



On November 12,

the port of Rochefort seemed to have slipped back in time as an 18th-century three-masted frigate glided majestically toward the harbor entrance under a full pyramid of canvas. Crowds gathered on the dock admired the black and gold hull, the cerulean blue stern gallery and the name “*Hermione*” painted in yellow letters across the transom. After two months of sea trials, the recently completed replica of the French frigate that took the Marquis de Lafayette on his second and most important journey to America was back in port.

In a very real sense the original *Hermione* helped the Marquis de Lafayette—or, to give his full name, Marie-Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert de Motier—to play his historic role in the cause of American liberty and to become the personification, in France and America, of the two countries’ shared ideals. To celebrate that continued—if occasionally testy—alliance, the new *Hermione* will in 2015 re-enact Lafayette’s Atlantic crossing.

Lafayette left Rochefort on March 19, 1780, and arrived in Boston Harbor 38 days later—fast for a ship under sail. There the young French aristocrat, who was 22 at the time, rejoined his friend and mentor George Washington, giving him the news that King Louis XVI had agreed to provide military support for the revolution. On July 10, a contingent of 5,000 French troops led by Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, Count de Rochambeau,

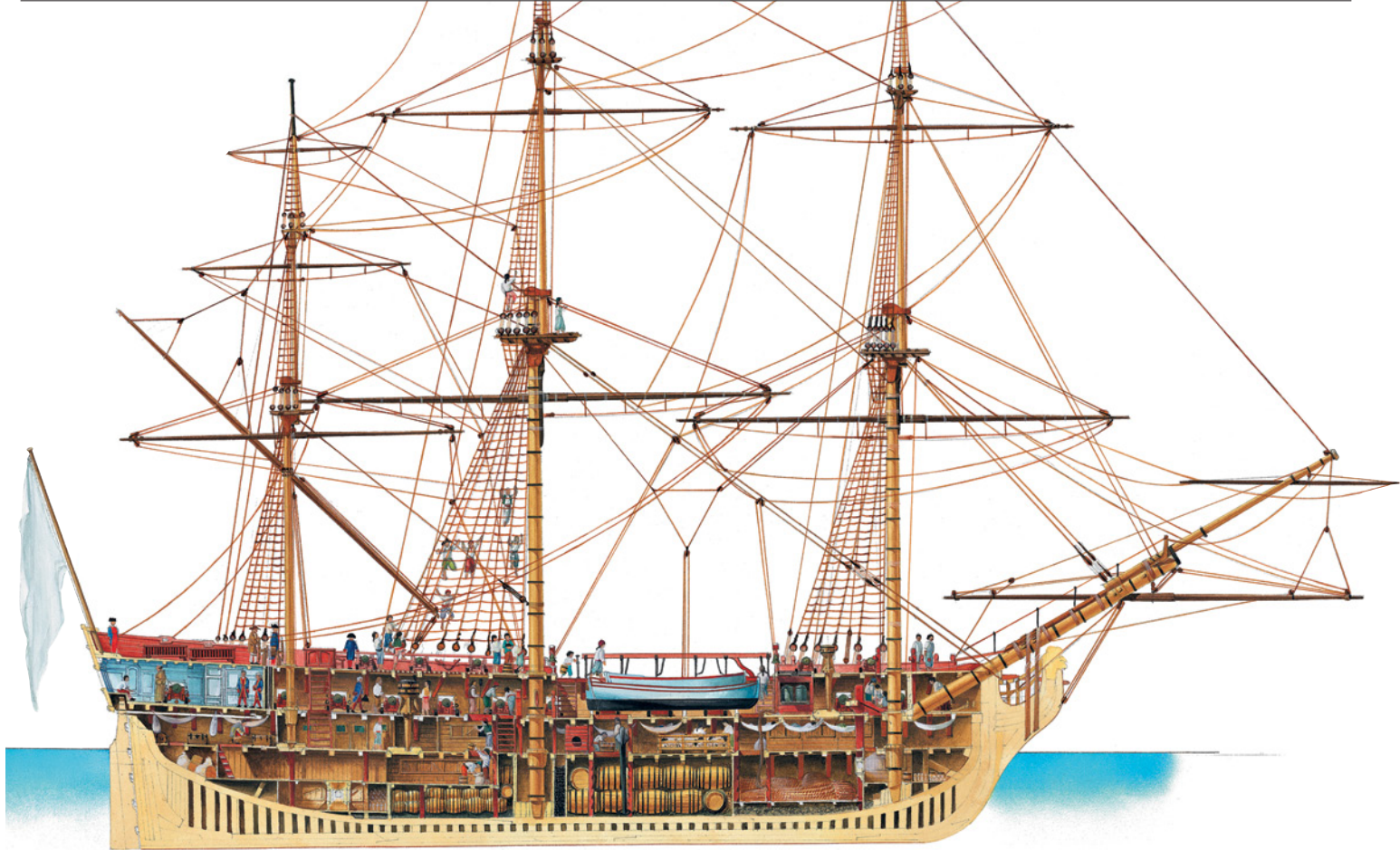
disembarked at Newport, Rhode Island. The following March, Lafayette, now a major general in the Continental Army, arrived with his army in Yorktown; in August, Rochambeau’s troops marched with Washington from New York to join him. Meanwhile, a French fleet under Admiral François de Grasse sailed from the West Indies and closed in on the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay to blockade the British and challenge the Royal Navy. The French had arrived just in time to join the Revolutionaries in mounting the siege of Yorktown, contributing expertise, weapons and troops. Lord Cornwallis’s surrender on October 19, 1781, was the decisive defeat that ended the war. France’s intervention was indeed “the tipping point,” commented Miles Young, president of The Friends of *Hermione-Lafayette* in America, in a recent interview with *The New York Times*. “The war wouldn’t have been won without French support.” As for Lafayette and the *Hermione*, “Both the ship and the man on the ship became pivotal.” The Friends of *Hermione-Lafayette* in America was formed to organize the *Hermione*’s voyage in the U.S. and Canada. The six-week tour starts with landfall in Yorktown in mid-June, followed by calls at Mount Vernon, Alexandria, Annapolis, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York City, Greenport, Newport, Boston, Castine, Lunenburg and Halifax. “In every stop along the way,” says Deborah Berger, the group’s coordinator, “we are planning bi-national cultural and educational programs and events. Tall Ships America’s full armada will meet and accompany the *Hermione* on the Philadelphia-to-Halifax leg of the trip. What a festive summer it will be!” And what a difference from the original *Hermione*’s experience

in American waters. After delivering Lafayette, the frigate joined de Grasse’s fleet and, like Lafayette, distinguished itself in the war, taking part in the final battles of the Chesapeake Bay and the blockade of Yorktown. A frigate was smaller than a ship-of-the-line, but the *Hermione*’s single gun deck was formidably armed with 26 guns firing 12-pound shells and an additional eight six-pounders. Thirteen years later, with the French Revolution in between, the three-master ran aground on a sandbank off the coast of Brittany, broke up and sank. One of its anchors still marks the spot. Returning to France from the new United States, Lafayette met a somewhat similar fate, becoming first a hero of the Revolution, then falling into disfavor (see sidebar, page 44). The original *Hermione* was one in a succession of French warships named after the Greek mythological figure who was the daughter of Helen of Troy and King Menelaus of Sparta (it was a French naval tradition to use classical female names for its frigates). The ship was one of the last four fast frigates built at the Rochefort shipyards in 1778-79. Long a thriving center of French shipbuilding, the river port’s fortunes declined after the naval arsenal was closed in the 1920s. In 1992, a group of local figures seeking to revive it came up with the idea of replicating the *Hermione*. As the newspaper *Le Monde* put it recently, “A group of dreamers, sailing enthusiasts and lovers of history” conceived the notion of

re-building the *Hermione* “out of a desire to revive the old Rochefort shipyards which had produced the most beautiful ships of the Royal Navy—and decided to accomplish this with period crafts, techniques and know-how. It was crazy, of course. But the whole area—city, department, Poitou-Charentes region—welcomed the idea and mobilized, raising public funds, recruiting historians, artisans, engineers, well-wishers.” From this fervor emerged the Association *Hermione-La Fayette*, with public relations executive and sailing enthusiast Benedict Donnelly, son of an American military father and a French mother, as president. At his side were, among others, Jean-François Fountaine, boat builder and former mayor of Rochefort, and Erik Orsenna, an award-winning novelist and member of the Académie Française. “The project we have nursed for more than 20 years—to rebuild the *Hermione* and turn the Rochefort shipyard into a cultural adventure—will be completed once the *Hermione* has reenacted Lafayette’s voyage to the United States,” says Donnelly. The frigate is scheduled to sail in April, which can still be a dicey season for ocean sailing. “It will be a challenge for a crew of professionals and volunteers in an 18th-century frigate,” he admits. “But the crossing is not in itself the objective. Above all, the voyage of the *Hermione* is a commemorative celebration and a celebration of French-American friendship. It’s going to be *une vraie belle fête*.”

The HERMIONE at a GLANCE

LENGTH: 210 feet	~	BEAM: 36.9 feet	~	WEIGHT: 1,166 tons	~	MAINMAST: 117 feet high	~	DISPLACEMENT: 550 tons
SAIL AREA: 21,000 square feet	~	CORDAGE: 15 miles	~	CANNON: 26 on the battery deck; eight on the quarter-deck				



America's Frenchman

A new biography details *how* Lafayette captured America's *imagination*—and heart



The Hermione owes its resurrection to its most famous passenger, the Marquis de Lafayette. Had the ship not been assigned to transport the 22-year-old French nobleman on his second trip to America in 1780, it would have remained merely another French naval vessel whose service ended when it sank off the coast of Brittany in 1793. But Lafayette's passionate commitment to the American Revolution and his enduring popularity in the United States earned the Hermione special mention in the history books and a new lease on life as a high-

profile, unique and colorful gesture of French-American friendship.

Coinciding with the frigate's reincarnation is Laura Auricchio's new biography, *The Marquis: Lafayette Reconsidered* (Knopf, 2014), which celebrates Lafayette's status as an almost Founding Father (foreign branch). A specialist in 18th-century French history and art, Auricchio says that after the war, "Lafayette had rock-star status in Revolutionary America." Even Abigail Adams, who was not given to gushing, spoke of "the universal joy of all who know the nobleman." And

Lafayette himself wrote to his wife of the artillery salutes he received wherever he went: "It is to the roar of cannons that I arrive and depart."

This was no accident. "Lafayette's popularity was the result of a masterly public relations operation," Auricchio says. America "idolized Lafayette because he wanted us to. He had the money, the platform and the connections, especially his friendship with George Washington, and he made it a point to make his American reputation known." The spread of the press during that period only amplified his efforts.

But America loved Lafayette from the start. He first came to the United States in 1777 as a foreign volunteer to fight alongside the Revolutionaries. His bravery and flamboyance quickly captured the American imagination, casting him as "the Frenchman of the Revolution." On his return trip on the *Hermione*, he carried the welcome news to Washington that he had persuaded the government of King Louis XVI to go public with its covert support of the American Revolution and send troops and a fleet to join the conflict.

What was hitherto little known, says Auricchio, is that Lafayette returned to America a disappointed man. He had lobbied for command of the French contingent sent to America, but the king instead appointed Rochambeau, an older soldier with considerable experience. "When Lafayette first arrived in America, he was rather green, he had never spent a day on the battlefield," says Auricchio. "Washington took him under his wing and mentored him, so we see Lafayette's maturation as a general. He became part of Washington's war council." —RF

Right: Laura Auricchio's new biography. **Below:** "Portrait of Gilbert Motier, the Marquis de La Fayette, as a Lieutenant General" (1791) by Joseph-Désiré Court.



Yet although it was Rochambeau who successfully directed the siege of Yorktown, the pivotal engagement in the Revolution, the French general never became part of American Revolutionary folklore. The reason, says Auricchio, is that "unlike Lafayette, Rochambeau had a full military career and did not make America the center of his life. Lafayette did."

After returning to Paris in 1782, "Lafayette continued to work with the United States to forge good relations between France and America. He kept a gold decorated copy of the American Declaration of Independence displayed in his house and hosted dinners every Monday, sending out engraved invitations in English to Americans in the French capital, including Thomas Jefferson."

Initially, the Marquis supported the French Revolution; he was given command of the National Guard and tried to steer a middle course. But then the radical Jacobins took control; in 1792, he was denounced as an aristocrat and tool of the king. Lafayette fled to Austria—and was promptly imprisoned as a revolutionary. He remained incarcerated for five years; his wife and daughters eventually joined him, but his son was sent to live with George Washington.

In 1824, he made a triumphant return to America. "That was when his fame really kicked in," says Auricchio. "A large number of memorabilia bearing his image were on sale, and politicians flocked to meet him." A similar scene is expected in every port where the *Hermione* will dock this summer. Indeed, all that will be missing from the festivities is America's favorite Frenchman himself. —RF



Louis-Charles Auguste Couder's "Siege of Yorktown, October 17, 1781" (1836). Rochambeau, pointing in the center, while Lafayette can be seen behind Washington's left shoulder. The Marquis's 4,500 troops were instrumental in the American victory that ended the Revolutionary War.

Construction of the original *Hermione* took 11 months—at the time, Rochefort employed hundreds of skilled workers. Creating the replica in the same cavernous, cobbled shipyard took 17 years because of the group's commitment to use almost exclusively 18th-century ship-building techniques.

The first challenge was to find the carpenters, sail makers, blacksmiths, caulkers and other craftsmen required to perform the dozens of required skills. The team was assembled from workers hailing from France, Germany, Britain and Scandinavia. Then the organizers discovered that construction plans for the original *Hermione* had been lost. Luckily—and somewhat ironically—they were able to borrow draftsman's drawings of its sister ship, *La Concorde*, from Britain's Royal Navy, which had captured the frigate and pressed it into service against its former owners, as was customary at the time.

The next problem was finding 2,000 oak trees in France to supply

timber for the 400,000 hand-sculpted pieces that went into this giant puzzle of a ship. A core group of expert craftsmen trained assistants, many of them young volunteers, and by the end of 1997 they had laid the keel and attached ribs to form a skeletal shape. Over the years, the extremely complex work went on in public, with hundreds of visitors lining up every day to watch its progress. From the beginning, education was a major aspect of the project, and schools throughout France organized field trips to the site. By all accounts, it was a lively scene, brimming with enthusiasm. The completion of every stage of the construction was marked by a celebration.

By 2000, the main deck had begun to take shape. A gallery running the width of the stern was built to house the captain's quarters, which traditionally consist of an office, dining area and sleeping alcove. Cast-iron cannons, made at the same foundry near Ruelle that produced the originals, were brought on board, fitted on gun carriages and lashed firmly to the deck in front of each gun port. By 2009, the *Hermione* was being painted by hand in its distinctive colors, and 250 gold leaves were lavished on the royal coat of arms over the stern and other decorative flourishes.



Top two rows, left to right: The replica of the Hermione was constructed almost entirely using 18th-century shipbuilding techniques. Shown here: A carpenter studies plans for the bulwark; ropemakers craft the rigging at Rochefort's Corderie Royale; a sail maker sews one of the vessel's sails; a woodworker carves its coat of arms.

Bottom two rows: The ship's 72-member crew—average age 27—hails from around the world. Shown here: Women sailors, who make up a third of the crew; Captain Yann Cariou, a 30-year Navy veteran, and Charlène Gicquel, his second-in-command; crew and frigate at the port of La Rochelle.

Opposite: The completed Hermione heads out to the Atlantic for sea trials.





The culmination of the Hermione's maiden cruise was a three-day stop in Bordeaux, where an 18th-century village was set up along the city's docks to celebrate its arrival. **Clockwise from left:** The Hermione sailing down the Charente River on its way to the Atlantic, then Bordeaux; docked at the city's historic waterfront; participants in the festivities garbed in period attire.



In July 2012, the Hermione was launched before a crowd of 65,000 people and made its way under tow up the Charente River to Rochefort's commercial port for the final act of its construction: the stepping (installation) of its three masts, held in place by a profusion of rigging. By the time it went down the slipway, the ship had been visited by 4 million people. The overall cost of the project to date is said to be \$32 million, with more than half coming from entrance fees to the Rochefort site; the remainder was provided by the French

government, the European Union and corporate sponsors. Maryse Vital, executive director of the Association Hermione-La Fayette, says an additional half-million euros (\$620,000) is still needed "to make the budget for the voyage."

The project organizers enlisted a committee of historians to ensure accuracy and fidelity, but concessions were made to contemporary naval construction, in part to meet international maritime safety regulations. For example, the Hermione is required to have an engine

and modern navigational equipment. Also, sailors' living conditions on 18th-century warships were appalling. The berths below decks where they ate and slept were cramped, dark, airless and unsanitary. By comparison, Hermione's crew has luxurious quarters, with showers and a choice of beds or hammocks.

On September 7, 2014, amid flags, bunting and thousands of followers on land and sea, the Hermione sailed down the Charente toward the Atlantic for two months of sea trials. On the quarter-deck was its new captain, 57-year-old Yann Cariou, a 30-year veteran of the French Navy who next spring will take the Hermione to the United States. Cariou's second is Charlene Gicquel, 29, a former navy lieutenant. The sea trials "will give us the opportunity to see how the ship behaves and to assess its seaworthiness," Cariou told the press at the time. "Above all, it will be very emotional. It's the Hermione, and nobody has sailed a ship like this for two centuries."

Ten days later, the Hermione was forced to put into port at La Rochelle when its engine failed. Luckily, a spare was found and installed, and the frigate was able to resume its trials after only a few days' delay. The high point of the cruise was the ship's triumphant three-day visit to Bordeaux, where scores of vessels of all sizes escorted it up the Garonne and a band provided a musical welcome as the ship tied up at the city's historic dock. An 18th-century village was set up on the quay, Mayor Alain Juppé and other VIPs visited the vessel, and the 87 châteaux from the legendary 1855 Bordeaux Classification each donated a bottle from their 2010 vintage to be auctioned to benefit the project. Tickets to tour the ship sold out immediately.

In addition to being a shake-down cruise, the sea trials gave the 72-member crew—average age 27, a third of them female—a chance to get their sea legs. When Lafayette sailed on the Hermione, it had a crew of more than 120. That was because men were needed to man the guns as well as sail the ship. The replica

Hermione is not expected to meet any enemy ships en route to or from the United States; indeed, while the ship's cannons may be the same size and weight as the originals, they have no shooting mechanism. With working weapons, the Hermione would have been classified as a warship and subject to different international regulations.

The level of comfort may have improved since the 18th century, but sailing this ship remains a tough challenge. For example, members of the crew are still required to climb the rigging and move out onto the yards (horizontal spars) to manhandle the sails, often in heavy seas. One blogger on the Hermione wrote that with 10-foot seas causing the deck to roll, climbing the rigging was "like climbing a 135-foot metronome."

But no one is complaining. For this crew, the American visit promises to be the adventure of a lifetime. "Activities pier-side and within each city are now being prepared," says Deborah Berger. "And history, language, literature, technology and art of the period will be explored, experienced and shared in museums, theaters, schools and community centers. We believe it will leave a legacy of French-American collaboration for years to come."

The myriad educational events already in the works include exhibitions of photos, documents, artifacts and other items at numerous


The Hermione project has received the support of major figures on both sides of the Atlantic.

Top to bottom: Benedict Donnelly (left) and Erik Orsenna (right), co-founders of the Association Hermione-La Fayette, meeting with Bordeaux mayor Alain Juppé; Association co-founder Jean-François Fountaine; Sylvain Boivert (center) donates 87 bottles of wine from the 1855 Bordeaux Classification to raise funds for the voyage (he is flanked by Stéphane Delaux, assistant to the Mayor of Bordeaux, and Benedict Donnelly); IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde and Charlie Rose attend a New York fundraiser for the ship.



venues (Lafayette College in Easton, PA; the Navy Museum and The Society of the Cincinnati in Washington, DC; the New York Historical Society; the Boston Athenaeum...). New York's French Institute Alliance Française is producing a one-act play based on Lafayette's correspondence, and an exchange program will be launched that is designed to extend beyond 2015. There's even a web-based game that explores Lafayette's American adventures and the building of the Hermione.

Meanwhile, fundraising efforts continue apace. In October, the Friends of Hermione-Lafayette kicked off a series of events with a gala on the USS Intrepid aircraft carrier, now permanently docked off New York's West Side Highway. In March, the action moves to Florida, with galas at the Sailfish Club in Palm Beach and the Naples Sailing and Yacht Club. Other efforts are planned during the tour itself: Moët Hennessy is offering bottles of rare vintage cognac for auction during Hermione's stops at Mount Vernon and New York, and Lafayette College asked Hermès to produce a commemorative scarf—a bargain at \$325!

Some 600 guests attended the glittering New York soirée, which turned out to be a veritable French-American love fest. Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, one of the guests of honor, said Charles de Gaulle was terrific. Philosopher and author Bernard-Henri Lévy said TV personality and part-time Paris resident Charlie Rose was terrific. Charlie Rose said Christine Lagarde, managing director of the International Monetary Fund, was terrific. Lagarde, ever preoccupied by the world's economic problems, was a bit more circumspect. All however enthusiastically agreed with Benedict Donnelly, who said the Hermione "is destined to become a historic monument." 

CREDITS

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PRNewsFoto/Friends of Hermione-Lafayette

Illustration Hermione coupe, page 51

*Droits négociés et payés à l'illustrateur Jean
Benoit Héron*

Portrait of Gilbert Motier the Marquis De La
Fayette as a Lieutenant General, 1791

by Joseph-Désiré Court, page 52

Wikimedia, public domain

Siege of Yorktown, October 17th, 1781.

Couder, Louis-Charles Auguste

(1789-1873), page 53

*Nous possédons l'image du tableau dont nous
avons une copie dans les murs de l'ambassade.*