



POSTCARD FROM *Provence* Carol Drinkwater on life in the sunny south

What a week of comings and goings! Michel, my husband, cooked up a plan with Dominique, mayor of a nearby village, to found the Olive Farm Cinema Club. That might sound crazy when Cannes, famous for its glitzy film festival, is a hand's touch from our terraces, but their idea, backed by a local social committee, was to concentrate on documentaries. And who better to oversee proceedings than Michel who is an award-winning documentary filmmaker? It was decided that *The Tea Route* would be screened. Shot in glorious high definition on location in China and Tibet, it was produced and directed by Michel... "I hope this doesn't look too self-interested," I muttered when informed of the choice. My concern was ignored. Enthusiasm was running high. An open-air cinema in the olive groves? I enquired. Heads shook. "Our Mediterranean light is brilliant, varies in tone, ideal for painters, less suitable for alfresco screenings." So, how to adapt our living room was the question. A large roll-down screen was purchased. Several men arrived and one small woman. All began shunting furniture. When I discovered various treasures perched beneath trees in the garden or resting on tables in the sun, I began to grow a little anxious.

The counting of chairs preceded inspections of the rooms to see what else might be requisitioned. Pictures were being picked off walls and rested against one another like books in a library. Drilling began. Dust clouded the spaces. "How many are we expecting?" I asked. "Two dozen."

It seemed a lot of disruption for two dozen, but this is France and the arts are taken very seriously, even when on a modest scale. Claude, a rotund pensioner

with a wiry grey beard that brushed the buttons of his waistcoat, climbed from a small blue Peugeot. Here was the director of the social committee. "Refreshments must be served. China tea, *bien sûr*. We won't trouble you for crockery, Madame. Our mayor is a potter."

And so it was decided that alongside the cinema club there would also be a celebration of local crafts, starting with products fired from Provençal earth. Vallauris, kilometres from our farm, has been producing pottery since antiquity. Here Picasso designed exquisite ceramics, putting the village and its local industry firmly back on the map. Dominique, the mayor, agreed to lend his offerings and six wooden crates were

delivered. Packed tightly within layers of straw were 100 strikingly painted goblets.

"So many?" I queried.

"Word is getting about; the response is positive," confirmed Michel. Perhaps everyone will go to the beach, I hoped silently.

Sunday arrived, bright and warm. Rows of plastic chairs were unloaded from a lorry. Our living room was rearranged again. Finally the mayor appeared, dressed in an orange silk shirt with mandarin collar. The audience was drifting in. Cars parked everywhere and I feared for the olive trees, for their fattening drupes, but all were respected. Ninety-one people showed up. Seated silently for close to two hours, they were entranced by the beauty of the images on the screen.

Afterwards, Dominique's goblets flowed with green tea while numerous speeches were made, a journalist recorded the occasion for the local paper and everyone was pleased as punch. When the cinemagoers had dispersed, Michel pulled out the Irish whiskey. For me? No. For the committee who were fixing the date for the next screening. 🍵

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