

Old World tradition doesn't meet her shopping ideals

A trip to Marseille showed me quickly one American institution I missed incredibly — the mall. I realized it because Marseille has a mall, or at least something very similar to one. Although three stories high, Le Centre Bourse was more on the scale of Teletop. Twelve with one major department store, Nouvelle Galeries, and about 20 other smaller stores.

The floors were layered in a non-conforming pattern, like Fairlane, and the entire third story was taken up by the FNAC — a French chain which specializes in electronic equipment, music, video books and has its own travel agency and information desk. Nonetheless, it was a MALL.

Not that I was a fanatical mall-goer when I lived in Southfield. Technically, I detest shopping. Especially when I'm really looking for something, because then I'm doomed never to find it. However, one aspect of mall shopping I miss is the "browsing without purpose" concept. Those days off from work or school when you go to the mall or downtown with a friend, just to look around, not necessarily with the intention to buy anything.

The shops in French cities do not allow for this leisure time activity. In France, one shops with a purpose and the minute you walk into a store or boutique downtown, the salesperson is at your service. After exchanging a brief greeting, he or she will wait until you've explained why you agitated the little bell over the door that announced your arrival.

"Je regarde seulement," (I am only looking) does not suffice in this situation as it will get an obnoxious salesperson off your back at the mall. This is for several reasons. First, the clerk does not know what to do with that response. And for the remainder of your time in that store, they either sit behind the register and stare at you making you feel like you're wearing an "I am a shop-lifter" sign, or they will follow you about the store anyway, explaining any minor thing at which you might glance.

The other reason the "I'm only looking" phrase doesn't work is because the store is generally not set up with that behavior in mind. You can't "just look" because there is nothing at which to look. Clothes are neatly folded on shelves out of reach, purses are lined up neatly behind the counter, jewelry is displayed in showcase glasses, and hats are stacked neatly wrapped on shelves behind the counter. And it is not your place to take a sweater or shirt, which is meticulously folded, off the shelf to check for size or overall appeal. That is the salesperson's job.

In fact, in the shop you're best off touching only the handles of the bag as the clerk hands your purchase to you.

The system is actually quite effective, if you have a vague idea for what you are looking and you feel comfortable with someone constantly hovering over you as you try to make a decision. The salesperson obviously

knows best what he or she has in stock and can quickly match those items they have to offer with the description you give. They can also be very helpful with suggestions, if you can give them an idea of whom you are shopping for when you are completely out of ideas. In addition, they will wrap anything for free if you just ask.

However, shopping is not a "pass the time" activity as it is at American malls, unless you plan

to limit it strictly to window shopping. And like French waiters, French salespeople can be quite intimidating, if you don't understand the system, when they realize you have no intention of buying or you are unable to explain what you are looking for.

Of course, not all stores are like this, but then rude doesn't come close to explaining their behavior, the other type is almost the complete opposite.

There are those stores which

are like Kmart and other discount places, where just about everything from electrical appliances to snack foods are for sale at lower prices and generally lower quality. At stores like Cora or Les Alémands, you don't have to worry about a salesperson harassing you. In fact, you'll probably have trouble finding one beyond the cash register and no one is there to answer any questions.

Thus, my "mall" discovery was a breeze from home and I com-

forted myself within its walls, browsing without purpose for hours. I examined every store and probably put my hands on everything within touchable distance.

Only once did I need to explain my purpose or lack of one for being there, and the clerk only too quickly ran off to straighten something else. At the end, I collapsed into a chair at the mall's cafe for a coffee and only then did a slight pang of homesickness twinge at my heart as I thought of

the Coffee Beanery's Cafe Mocha.

Born and raised in Southfield, Karen Martinek graduated from Marian High School and then attended the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor where she studied English and education. Taking a break from teaching high school English, she will be working as a nanny for a year in the town of Ales, which is located outside of Nîmes and Montpellier, along the southern coastline of France.

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Disney is theme in performance of 20 youths

The Neon Rainbow, a group of 20 young singers and dancers from The Academy of Popular Vocal Arts, will present their First Annual Christmas Concert at Oakland University in Varner Hall, Room 134, at 2 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 11.

Admission is only \$5 for adults and \$3 for senior citizens, children and students. Tickets will be available at the door. They can be purchased in advance by calling The Academy at (313) 625-7057. Do not call Oakland University.

This year's performance will feature some favorite holiday songs and some exciting new songs with choreography, including a medley of Disney cartoon themes. The entire program will be designed to generate a general feeling of peace on earth, goodwill to all.

Members of The Neon Rainbow, ages 8-12, have already recorded two albums. They have also sung "The National Anthem" at Tiger Stadium.