

HOW TO LIVE A ROMANTIC LIFE

(EVEN IF YOU
ARE SINGLE AF)

BY COCO GUERIN



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For Nicky-
who truly lived every day in every way.

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“Don’t have almost moments”

— Coco Guerin



Forward

The word *romance* usually conjures up very traditional images of roses, wine, and carriage rides through a park. Romance is special and something that, at least existentially, you think of as a rare treat. Like Carrie Bradshaw in *Sex and the City* who faints in the middle of a crowd because her Russian lover noticed the music playing on the street, how she looked in her dress, the light of the evening, and asked her to dance with him right there. Upon regaining consciousness Carrie exclaims, “*I’m an American. You have got to take it down a notch.*” This type of intense romantic gesture can be overwhelming. However, the idea that romance is a rare treat, something that is solely dependent on the whims of a lover, is utterly absurd. Every day won’t find you skipping off to the opera, hand in hand with your lover wearing Oscar de la Renta...but you can still have a daily romance, right?

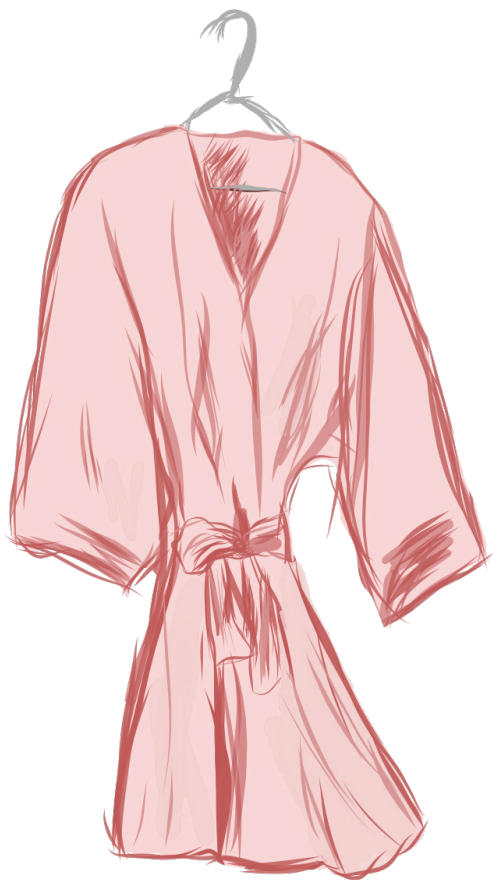
Europeans seem to have cultivated a sense of romance over the centuries. Growing up in the old romantic cultures of Europe presents you with a full course in how to work to live, not live to work as seems to be the American standard. They are taught how to find a balance in life that is effortless. It is simply part of their cultural composition. For many, work-life feels like it never stops. The expectations you set for yourself are usually part of the downfall. This is particularly prevalent with millennials. This generation has grown into adulthood with their phone as an appendage. They feel a rush of anxiety when their phone buzzes. You must reply immediately or else! The expectation of response time is so small that even a few hours seem absurd.

It can be argued that Germans have one of the most rigorous cultural work ethics. This is a culture that has been designed around excellence. They have been able to integrate that inherent value to work hard and play hard. They may not be at the French level of loving life, but not too far off. In essence they are the picture of work-life balance. From lunchtime beers to year-round festivals. European cultures have not abandoned their ability to enjoy life. So what are the Americans missing? Can you learn to work hard and still find the romance in a sunny afternoon? Yes.

Living a romantic life has nothing to do with having a lover or being in an intense relationship. Looking outside for romance is a pitfall that you can blame on a Disney upbringing. Romance is not limited to big romantic gestures and grandiose dates. Hopefully you can infuse a little bit of movie magic in life. For the most part, romantic moments are dependent each other. You usually do not have any control over those magic moments. It is part of their allure—the surprise of the unexpected. Those rare moments are the ones that make great stories to tell your children or older selves. It is the daily actions that you have control over crafting.

Squash the idea that romance is just for the movies or for shared moments with lovers. This idea of “*romantically living*” will open your eyes to the possibility that romance is something you can create as a way of existing. Every day you can have a dollop of romance. From how you wake up to how you fall asleep, these are universal actions. It is up to you to choose how you want to remember your days. So take some lessons from old Europe and learn a few tips and tricks to turn your days from a drama into a romantic comedy. No lover required.

*“There is no sunrise so beautiful that it is
worth waking me up to see it.”*
— Mindy Kaling, *Is Everyone Hanging Out
Without Me?*



WAKING & SLEEPING

With or without a lover, much of your life is spent in the bedroom. So it stands to reason that the feel and look of this space will have a big impact on how you view your day. You start and end your day here. It is the bookends of your daily experience. Cultivating a romantic bedroom and a wardrobe of sleep attire is one of the most alluring changes you can make to start living a romantic life.

The bed. You don't need an expensive bed to make it feel romantic and inviting. There are a lot of home items worth investing in but none are as important as bedding. Luxurious sheets are also important whether you prefer silk, cotton, or have a particular thread count that speaks to you. Choose soft, soothing, and romantic colors that bring a sense of serenity and calm. You want this to be an inviting space for you and anyone you choose to share it with. Traditional French decor tends to have a white accompanied by soft blues, greens, or pinks. Create a color palette that makes you feel invited to relax and enjoy.

Lighting. Overhead lighting is not a norm in traditional European rooms, especially bedrooms. Many rooms have no built-in lighting at all. No one needs harsh unflattering lights in this most intimate of rooms. Soft bedside lamps are preferred. Whether you are reading,



cuddling, or playing, you want the light to be bright enough to see the words on a page, but not so bright as to show the angles everyone would rather blend. Always have candles around in the bedroom. It is perfect for those evenings when you want to listen to the wind or rain out the window or create that perfect mood for a lover. There is something innately sensual about candlelight. It highlights the angles that are flattering and hides the areas you would like to have softened. It is the great equalizer.

Sleepwear. Most people want to just throw on shorts and a t-shirt and head to bed. If you are going to sleep in bed with your lover (or by yourself) try investing in romantic nightwear. Yes, get dressed up to go to bed. You might be surprised on how this changes the energy of your bed...and maybe even your dreams. Nightgowns make you instantly feel feminine and sexy. The fabrics of lace and silk wrap you in sensuality. So much of sex appeal and romance is interpretation and perception. Sleepwear should be no different. There is no need to drop a fortune at *La Perla*, unless you can. A simple wardrobe of three or so silk nightgowns as well as comfortable and stylish pants or shorts are perfect options that you can rotate based on the mood and weather. You may catch yourself excited about the idea of slipping into something silky and smooth with a hint of lace to end your day even if you are sleeping alone.

If you are excited to go to bed, others will soon be excited to join you. Look sexy, feel sexy.

A robe is an essential garment for your sleepwear closet. This is reminiscent of the movie stars of the golden age of Hollywood. They seemed to be eternally walking around their house in the most magnificent robes. It makes them seem put together and very romantic. Simply by putting on a robe, you can start to channel Lauren Bacall and feel like Gene Kelly is just waiting outside the door to whisk you away into an ethereal dance number under the stars, your silk robe frolicking in the wind—silk, cotton, jersey, cashmere, or your fabric of choice. It should be comfortable, flattering, and invoke whatever your sense of romance is at the moment. Think of what you would like to spend a lazy Sunday morning in drinking coffee and reading while still feeling sexy as hell. That is your go-to robe.

Going to sleep. If your circadian rhythm is pretty well set, or if you have a furry family member who will alert you if you stray too far from your appointed bedtime by disappearing from the room and nestling themselves right in the middle of the bed as a lighthouse beacon guiding you to the sleepy shore, then you probably already have some routine. Establish a bedtime ritual that you follow more or less every night...even when inebriated. If you don't already have a ritual in place, follow these basic guidelines to help cultivate a night of peaceful slumber. Don your sleep attire of choice, wash your face (every night even when you have had too much wine), brush your teeth (again even when wobbly), moisturize, brush your hair, and turn down the made bed in your room bathed in candlelight—every night without fail. Your hair, skin, and teeth are your most valuable accessory. They are always with you—every day—a part of who you are. Take care of

them so you can age gracefully and sleep soundly. This may cause you to crawl into bed a bit more tired (especially if you had a really fun night) but sleep more peacefully as a result. You will never be sorry you took 10 minutes to clean your face, teeth, and hair and crawled into bed feeling refreshed. Add a spritz of perfume over your head before heading to bed. Marilyn Monroe famously said she wore “*Chanel N°5 and nothing else*” to bed. You can always take a cue from Marilyn on all things sensual. This is very sage advice indeed. If you are feeling particularly adventurous, you can make a lavender linen spray out of alcohol, essential oils, and water to spray on your pillow if the mood strikes you. Spritz on your pillow when you are hoping for a really peaceful night of sleep. Spray it, take a deep breath and climb into your ready made cocoon of relaxation.

Your bedside table should always hold five items: a candle for when you need to create the mood at a moment’s notice or just want some ambience to read your new book in. A jar of lotion for hands, arms, and decollete. Chapstick—put some on your lips every night (to keep them kissable). A good book for those nights where you want to go into another world before heading off to a dream one. A sound source to drown out the thoughts going through your head. It can sometimes be difficult to unplug your mind and drift peacefully off to sleep. Having something to concentrate on such as nature sounds or an audiobook can help quell the mind’s constant churring and help you go to sleep without resorting to counting sheep.

Waking up. Wake up slowly and develop a counter ritual to your evening routine. Children and inboxes will always be begging for your attention. Everyone has time for something. Make it a priority. Develop a ritual that works for your life. This is the foundation of your entire day. Everyone has experienced the strife that can come

from “*getting up on the wrong side of the bed.*” So give yourself some care at the start of your day to feel grounded for the triumphs and tribulations to come. Try waking up with the sun. Put the hot water on for French press coffee and pour yourself a large glass of lemon water while the coffee is brewing. Look in the mirror, brush your hair, and put on a light layer of moisturizer so your skin can have a drink too. Play a soft playlist (a la Etta James, Billie Holiday, Norah Jones, or Diana Krall). Sit with your coffee. Read the news and watch the sun paint the room with morning light. Regardless of day of the week, schedule, or any other “pressing matters,” make yourself a morning ritual. If a complete 30-minute ritual isn’t in the cards for you, find one you can do in 10. Try at least once a week to get up early if needed and have a morning.

Other than water there are three major beverages: coffee, tea, and wine. This may sound limiting, but really, they cover all of your major needs throughout the hours. Due to the brevity of this list, it is important that they are the best versions. In Spanish you do not drink a beverage, you *take* a beverage. This change in rhetoric is very pronounced in these cultures living a romantic day to day. The French or other Latin cultures rarely take their coffee in to-go mugs. They would not be walking around with a triple caramel anything. They take these preparations seriously and the consumption of them equally so. Sit, listen, smell, taste, enjoy. This is the way you are meant to “*take*” your beverages. Time is shared equally. These cultures don’t have more or less than anyone else. It is what you choose to fill it with that is different. Yes, everyone has different levels of responsibilities, but your first responsibility is to yourself. Start the day off from a place of romance and peace.

Don't take your coffee to go. Take your coffee to enjoy. That five minutes matters. You may be surprised how it colors the rest of your adventures.



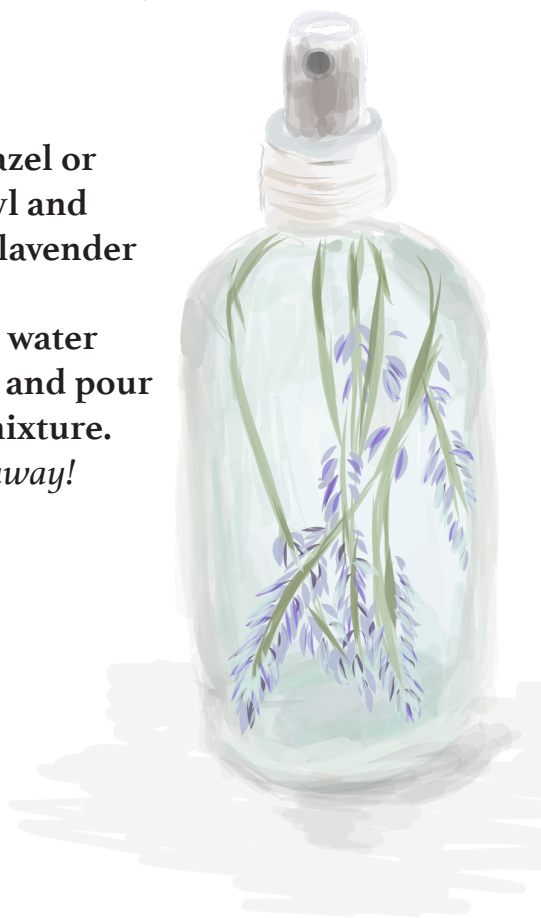
RECIPE FOR LAVENDER LINEN SPRAY

- *Glass or High-Quality Plastic Spray Bottle*
- *Distilled water (Tap water has minerals in it that can clog the spritzer.)*
- *Lavender Essential Oils (Use a high-quality therapeutic grade oil. Lavender is a great investment oil because it has many uses.)*
- *Witch Hazel or Vodka (This helps the oil mix with the water.)*

Add 2 tsb of witch hazel or vodka to a small bowl and stir in 10-12 drops of lavender essential oil.

Pour 2 oz of distilled water into the spray bottle and pour in the essential oil mixture.

Shake well and spray away!



RECIPE FOR AROMATIC COFFEE SPICE ADAPTED FROM FRENCH SPICE KING OLIVIER ROELLINGER

1 tsp cinnamon

1 tsp black pepper/unsweetened cocoa powder (spicy or sweet)

1/4 tsp ginger powder

1/8 tsp cardamom

1/8 tsp clove

Mix together and sprinkle over top of coffee or cappuccino for an aromatic adventure.



*“One can be over dressed
but never over elegant”*
— Coco Chanel



DRESSING FOR ROMANCE

French women are famous for their *petite* closets. However, they are equally known for always dressing *tres romantique* not to mention chic. You only need to know how to combine a few basics to strut out looking put together even if you are anything but. The combination of a few signature staple pieces can get you out the door looking effortless. The keyword is effortless. Nothing can create or squash the romance of a day like feeling as if you want to set your closet on fire. The problem most women have is the size of their wardrobe. In the fun French woman's guide *How to Be Parisian Wherever You Are* by Anne Berest, Audrey Diwan, Caroline de Maigret, and Sophie Mas, they quip, "If you only have one sweater, make sure it's cashmere." This perfectly encapsulates the French romance of dressing. Yes, you can buy 20 sweaters at Forever 21 for the price of one cashmere sweater. But do you want to? Think about how you will feel seeing this one beautiful, soft, and luxurious sweater in your wardrobe. You know that is going to drape perfectly and hug you the way only cashmere can. You will know that every time you put on this sweater, you will feel put together. The fabric exudes elegance and romance. It is a choice that values quality over quantity, which is always the better option.

Many of the older (and perhaps wiser) generations of European women often say they shop by "feeling" their

clothes. Slowly touching each garment and considering how it will feel on their skin throughout the day. This idea of how clothes make you feel is very important to how it will impact your day's charisma. Amy Schumer wrote and starred in *I Feel Pretty*. In the film she portrays a woman that feels like most of us do: that she isn't beautiful. Her self-esteem makes her feel unworthy of being more powerful in her career and holds her back from talking to potential lovers. She doesn't feel like she is worthy of attention. She then falls and hits her head in a hardcore spin class. When she regains consciousness nothing about her physical appearance has changed to the outside world. She has mentally changed and believes that she looks beautiful. She is finally happy with her body. She feels like she now deserves to wear beautiful clothes, go after high profile jobs, and pursue love interests. It is her confidence that has shifted. Her perception of herself is what was holding her back in the shadows, not her reality.

The French have a beautiful term for how they account for what could be viewed as unique forms of beauty: *jolie laide*. *Jolie laide* literally translates to mean "beautiful ugly." It is an oxymoron that helps them take their unique attributes and turn them into an asset. The term refers to gap in their teeth, the strong nose (the intense Austro-Hungarian influence plagues many faces throughout the country), the wide hips, or any of the other countless criticisms we give ourselves in the mirror. Think of Lindsay Lohan's character in *Mean Girls* watching in astonishment as the three beautiful "Mean Girls" examine themselves in front of the mirror pointing out all of their flaws like under a prescriptive microscope. "*I thought there was just ugly and pretty,*" Lohan's internal monologue projects.

Like Amy Schumer's character, you have the ability to alter your personal perception and change your reality. How you feel in your skin and clothes is a big part of that reality.

There are a few basic items that no matter your shape or the season are the ingredients for an effortless and chic look. Although trends are fun to indulge in, they rarely cross the line from flirty to romantic. Instead of buying the low cost versions of the newest trends, think of the pieces that will transcend trends and give you a classic look. It is the classic beauty that will enable you to look back at photographs of yourself in 20 years and not utter the oh so lamentable "*What was I wearing?!*". You will never be sorry you opted for a classic look of well-made jeans and a blazer vs the over the knee-high boots and pixie peasant dress.

The cultivation of these pieces is an experience to be enjoyed. Go slowly. Add to your collection of elegance with care—like you are ensnaring a lover. Each piece can be a story. This will become part of the relationship between you and your look. It is not that you are wearing a silk blouse. You are wearing the silk blouse you found one rainy afternoon walking alone, not really looking for anything. Then your fingers caressed the soft subtle texture of this blouse. Every time you put it on, part of that story gives your day a glow. It transforms a blouse into a part of your personal history. When you are draped in that history, your day becomes about possibility. You never know if you are going to turn the corner and find the perfect silk blouse or the next love affair.

The foundations of a perfect wardrobe:

A blazer: Literally NOTHING in life can put together an outfit like a great blazer. Invest in two or three that are perfectly cut in neutral colors (black, tan, white, beige, navy, and red). A blazer has the magical ability to transform

a look from shabby to chic. Jeans and t-shirt day? Throw on a blazer and you look like you planned the whole thing for days. If you are feeling particularly romantic, don some red lipstick. *Tres chic* indeed.

A good pair of jeans: Little did Levi Strauss know that by addressing this workman's need in May of 1873 that he would inspire the next 100+ years of fashion for both men and women. A good pair of jeans can go from work to play effortlessly. Pair with flats, a good tee, and a blazer *et voila!*

A silk scarf: Perhaps the most quintessential French accessory. Silk

scarfs are the most versatile piece you can add to an outfit. A silk scarf

can add color to an ensemble without having to make a hard decision like which necklace goes better.

There is something decadent about the feeling of silk on your neck that makes you feel instantly like a lady. You can drape it over your shoulders or tie it around your head like a movie star from the 1940s. It can protect your hair from the elements of wind and rain and make you look romantic while doing it.

Wrap Dress: Diane Von Furstenberg

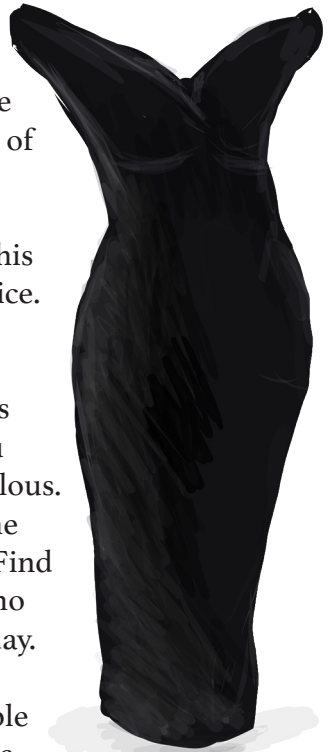
took the world by storm in the 1970s with the introduction of the wrap dress. DVF wanted to design something that could go into a suitcase and come out *ready to wear*—something that hugged women's bodies in all the right ways. She used fun prints to eliminate the need to over accessorize. One of her originals now hangs in the



Smithsonian. It is a piece that will grow with you as you age. It is an investment piece that you can always throw on and look effortlessly romantic. If you want to get an original, but aren't able to invest in a new piece, look at some of the amazing upcycle companies like *The RealReal*. Since the design is so timeless, you will have luck finding this item for a ridiculously reasonable price.

Little Black Dress: The LBD was made famous by the notorious Coco Chanel. This closet staple exists for your go-to day-to-night attire. You can always throw it on and look fabulous. Whether going on a first date or to the market. This item exists to be worn. Find a style that makes you feel fabulous no matter what you had for lunch that day. Above all, wear it.

A comfortable pair of heels: Comfortable being the key word. Nothing is more a buzzkill to an amazing day or evening than pinching shoes and blisters. You will not catch most European women in 3-inch heels or higher. That would prevent their ability to wear them with anything and everything, not to mention an ankle death trap on the cobblestoned streets that still flank most European cities. Spend time (and money if you can) investing in a pair of heels that you are comfortable in and can go anywhere with you. Once you find a pair that can transcend time and space, you will never want to wear those sky-high death traps again.



Flats: Ballet flats or loafers. Think of these as your everything shoes. Wear them around your house as slippers with your robe and feel like you could answer the door at a moment's notice. These are a favorite shoe to don for the everyday look. Dresses, jeans, shirts, shorts. They literally go with everything while being comfortable and chic. When buying these remember cost per wear. If you wear them often and the quality can stand the test of time, they are worth every penny.

Trench Coat: Some form of the trench coat has been around for centuries. And that is not a euphemism. Thomas Burberry had some designs of the now iconic Burberry Trench Coat dating back to the late 1800s. Needless to say if you want this to be an investment piece, the design and fabric will stand the test of time.

Handbag: The beautiful keeper of secrets. Handbags contain those items that are so precious we have to carry them with us every day. It is said that you can tell a lot about a woman by the contents of her handbag. You don't have to have any luxury letters to guard your secrets. Just ensure that it is versatile and good quality. It is one of the most personal things you own. Be proud to carry it.



Perfume: Nothing invokes a stronger reaction of the senses than smell. It can excite and allure without any additional effort.

That burst of luxury envelops the senses. Your emotional connection to scent is strong. So this is not the step to skip. Spend time finding the scents that work with your personality. Perfumes smell differently on different people. You can't smell too many at once or wear more than one in a day.

Go to your favorite department store and smell a few. Ask for samples. They will give you a day or two's worth. See how you feel wearing it for a day. It is an investment of a lifetime. Remember to: 1) Spray 2) Stay 3) Walk away! Never rub harshly. The notes must mix with the air and naturally fall on you to have the best and most lasting effect.

Lingerie: The single most important part of your outfit is the part few get to see. Nothing can make you feel more romantic than the secret of what you are wearing underneath all of that fabulousness. In one episode of the notorious TV show *Friends*, Phoebe shares with Joey that she and her lover have switched underwear. Joey then decides to give women's undergarments a try because he is man enough. After borrowing a pair of Rachel's, he remarks with excitement that there are so many options! "French cut, bikini, thong!" His excitement is well placed. This is an opportunity for women to have fun. Everyone has those undergarments that make you excited to put on...



and perhaps have someone take off. You never know what the day will bring. If nothing else you will have a beautiful secret to put a bounce in your step. Others will notice your confidence if nothing else. In Europe getting seasonal lingerie handmade for your measurements is a cultural tradition. You, or you and your lover, go in as you model different materials and styles. The experience is one that most couples enjoy doing together. It is a romantic outing that will have many hours of enjoyment for months to come.

With all of these pieces, try and train your mind to think about CPW (cost per wear). Think about how much you would pay on those mornings where your entire closet seems to be against you. If you have a few of these staples in there, you will never have the *“I don’t have a thing to wear”* moment again. More importantly you will feel beautiful, which is the entire point, isn’t it?

The change in weather provides the perfect backdrop to enjoy the romance in every season. Add hats, gloves, or scarves as a way to enjoy the seasons in style. They are your seasonal accessories. Use this as an opportunity to add a pop of color to a winter color palette.

The most important way to create a romantic wardrobe is to feel it. Literally. Have a tactile relationship with your closet. Fill it with things that you are comfortable in and make you feel beautiful. Ensuring that you are wrapped in confidence is the best gift you can give yourself daily. Spend time picking out your clothes. Bargain stores that specialize in a *“you can buy everything for under \$20”* model probably do not carry pieces that you will treasure for a lifetime. This is what you live your life in. The French and Germans agree on very little...but quality over quantity is one of them. That is because it is a universal truth. You are quality. Make sure your wardrobe makes you feel like it.

“You Gotta Work Bitch”
— Britney Spears



CREATING A WORKSPACE

The workspace is where you spend the majority of the waking hours. It is essential that you make it as inviting and a part of your daily tapestry of romance as possible. Most can't completely let their creative juices fly with company regulations to consider, but you can weave a bit of romance into the workspace to give it that little something extra. This is an intensely personal space. It is a space for work. It is a space for concentration and creativity. It needs to be a serene and inviting space that you want to be at for several hours a day.

If you work at home, try and find a dedicated space to work that is not intruding on one of the other sacred spaces (e.g. the kitchen table). The mentality of work hard play hard can only be embraced if the dishes aren't staring you in the face as you try and answer the ever-growing inbox. If you are surrounded by all of the daily chores you need to accomplish, your task list will never get under control. Take the time to set yourself up for success. Know what your limitations are. Can you successfully work on the couch/coffee shop/kitchen table without the distractions that surround you encroaching on your productivity? If you can't handle the distractions, there are amazing workspace rentals popping up all over the world. If you have the ability to work from home, look into these

options. They have memberships that span the globe. If you can work from anywhere, why not Paris for a few months?

Corporate American is almost an antonym for romance. There are a few ways that you can inject your workspace with passion and zeal without alerting HR. Fresh flowers are the best way to transform a grey cubicle worthy of an *Office Space* reference into a place fit for human life. Spend \$10 once a week on fresh flowers or invest in beautiful silk ones. They also have a special classification of green potted plants that need very little sunlight. Their leaves are coated with a waxy substance that makes them nearly impossible to kill and they can thrive where few other plants can: under the harsh fluorescence. The color alone is worth the investment. Artwork in small form is a wonderful way to add personality and color to your day. Edgar Degas and Gustav Klimt are favorites for workspace romance. Edgar Degas' ballet dancers capture the last fading light of the *Belle Époque* era of Paris. Their beauty, grace, and tranquility are a welcome break for the eyes after staring at your inbox for an hour straight. Gustav Klimt transports you into a world of ethereal beauty. Klimt's signature style of strategically placing gold leaf gives a bit of sparkle to your day. Adding pieces to your workspace that bring joy without overwhelming the space is a delicate balance. Try to have at least one piece of art, a candle (with a light scent if any as to not offend the one person in the office with a sensitive nose), and a beautiful notebook with a solid pen. If you can play soft music, light a candle, give your eyes a break to gaze at a beautiful piece of art, and take notes in a good notebook with an elegant pen, your workday will not only be more pleasurable, but it will become a personal expression. Remember the mantra from the start of this

book: Work to live, don't live to work.

One the greatest pleasures of working is truly enjoying your days off. It often feels like the whole thing would fall apart if you weren't there. In reality the world of work will keep turning. Playing hooky for the day is a personal secret pleasure that you can enjoy by yourself, with a friend, or a lover.

Ingredients for a romantic day of playing hooky:
Get up slowly. Stay a little longer in your sleepwear than you normally do. Read the paper or finish that last chapter in a book you have been meaning to finish for ages. Have two cups of coffee—not because you need the caffeine to be productive, but because it tastes rich and creamy and you want to savor the taste in the morning light.
Take a bath in the morning. Spend time really taking care of yourself. Instead of the usual internal calculation of “do I have time to wash my hair or not?”, clean, soak, relax, and actually enjoy the process. French women swear by spritzing cold water on their breasts post bath. You can buy bottles of *Evian* aerosols for this purpose. Maybe it is all mental, but a little French mentality may be just what you need. ***Get dressed slowly.*** Perhaps even try a few new clothing combinations you have been too scared to experiment with on a busy morning. Ensure you feel sensual and comfortable. You want the day to be able to take you anywhere. ***Turn off your phone for a few hours*** or at least put it on silent less you start hearing the buzzes and feel guilty about not answering immediately. Let the day take you. Get to know your own city. ***Cultivate your own secret places.*** Go to the park, a museum, or another hotspot you try to avoid with the crowds on weekends. Enjoy the quiet of your own thoughts. With your ever-growing to-do lists and constant stimulation from devices, these walks in the park or trip to a museum is like walking back into

a simpler time. **Take yourself to a cafe for lunch.** Order a glass of wine and be an observer. **Create an air of mystery** with your solitude and silence. It is fascinating to watch the singles and pairs come and go. An anthropologist in your own city. Read, write, or even sketch. Indulge in a few stolen moments to dive into something you love—a forgotten talent or story that you want to catch up with like an old friend. **Go to a market** or store and spend time picking out ingredients. Smell, squeeze, examine the produce to ensure you are getting the best one of the bunch, not just the first one on the pile. Spend the evening at home making a fantastic meal. Even if it is just for yourself. **Open a bottle of wine** and put on Jazz music as you cook. End the evening with a romantic classic like *Sabrina* or *Chocolat*. Enjoy the romance of these movies by candlelight devouring their stories like a box of chocolates (maybe even have some chocolate while you watch). **Go to bed as slowly as you awoke** enjoying the feeling of your legs in the sheets, the coolness of the pillow against your cheek. Remember this delicious day you stole for yourself and make a mental note to do it again soon. The world did keep turning and no one is the wiser. Plus the mental high you got from this day will absolutely increase your work performance. So really you did them a favor.



***“Happiness. Simple as a glass of chocolate or
tortuous as the heart. Bitter. Sweet. Alive.”***

— Joanne Harris, *Chocolat*



EPICUREAN DELIGHTS

Food is very sensual by nature. It is the event that most couples share as the prelude to all other activities. It is the main course in an evening of getting to know each other. There is a huge juxtaposition between eating out of a bag in front of the television and sitting at a table in candlelight enjoying edible and conversational delights. Meal times are sacred in Europe. They are long affairs that segment the day and create an opportunity for romance. Although the epidemic of desk eating is spreading across the continents, it still has not altered the core of this cultural habit.

In Janet Fitch's amazing novel *White Oleander*, the young protagonist, Astrid, meets a woman who embodies mystery and charm. Olivia is a beautiful African-American woman. She wears beautiful clothes and listens to Jazz at night. One night while sharing a meal, Olivia shares with young Astrid an important life lesson: how to enjoy your food. She explains the time she takes while eating oysters and drinking white wine, and how she feels their texture and briny flavor in her mouth, how the white wine balances these textures and flavors on her palate. She eats them slowly, savoring their essence with the music. The condensation from the wine glass on her hand adds another layer to the experience.

What if all meals were an opportunity for this type of romance—an abundance of flavor, smells, and textures? It would make those meals in a bag consumed in a frenzy of temporal constraints feel like a missed opportunity. How sensual Olivia made the simple act of sharing a meal sound. Is it possible to infuse every mealtime with this sense of culinary ecstasy? You can sure as hell try.

In Europe lunch is not a salad that is consumed quickly while strategically going on and off mute during a conference call. Going out to lunch is a daily event. A favorite local cafe, preferably with outdoor seating weather permitting, is a daily treat that is viewed as a non-negotiable ritual. Your entire day might feel differently if you really took an entire hour (or even 2!) and sat at an actual table while enjoying a wonderful meal. Most cultures, other than American, are not snacking cultures. There are no mid-morning granola bars. No afternoon chips. Their desks do not have drawers filled with every kind of snack one could possibly crave. Their appetites are saved so they can have an amazing lunch and enjoy every sensual mouthful. If you could look forward to an amazing dijon chicken with a seasonal salad and fresh bread and butter as a lunchtime meal, I doubt you would want to rip open a protein bar that tastes like cardboard with a hint of corn syrup at 10am. It is a reversal of the mind. The goal is not to simply consume for the sake of consumption. It is to enjoy, to have a break in the day where bright computer monitors are not the only source of stimulation. The images of outdoor cafes packed to the brim on a sunny weekday afternoon on a side street in Paris are not staged. It is their reality. It can be yours as well. Create your own midday ritual that works for you. It could be a local cafe or a park bench and your homemade leftovers. Get up, go away from your desk, and enjoy your meal while giving

your eyes a break from the LED.

The evening meal has the most opportunity to spice up romance. The pleasure and pride in preparing a meal adds to the creation of a romantic evening. It is something you have made—the secret ingredients that you cherish, even if it is only a little extra garlic and olive oil. For many in the United States, the idea of adopting the European habit of shopping almost every day for that specific meal seems well...foreign.

If you really want the ability to go out to dinner if the mood strikes you, meet someone on a whim and talk for hours, get lost in a park or museum, decide you are just going to have wine and cheese for dinner, or whatever the situation may be, then this shopping habit makes the most sense. The key is to have some tried and true recipes that you can whip up easily and without thought, prep, or real effort. The ease is part of the romance. Romance is created by the magical combination of ease and class. Every good European girl (and boy!) has a few recipes that they can whip up quickly, and a few that are immensely complicated. The recipes you are only able to complete due to years of watching your mothers and grandmothers cook them. There are usually no actual recipes and they never use measurements to cook (only bake). It is, in short, cooking from the heart. This mentality enables you to use whatever is fresh at the market and add a “pinch of this and that.” It is not the decadence of the meal that creates the romance. It is the simple act of creating something that is going to be shared that sparks the flare of romance.

Try and inject every part with a bit of passion. Put on a soundtrack to help flavor the food. Billie Holiday or Louis Armstrong always added a delicate and well-balanced flavor to meals. These small adjustments can turn what could be considered a chore into an enjoyable

experience—one that you will want to repeat. The pride you feel from creating a wonderful meal nourishes the evening turning it into an affair. Sharing a meal is so natural. We are celebrating life by feeding it and presenting it with an evening concentrated on the meal and the company even if that is just you.

In postadolescence, when you are able to indulge in such luxuries as a table, the ritual of eating upon it should have become non-negotiable. Most grow up with this rule, but disregard it during your college years. If your collegiate career is behind you, invest in things such as candlesticks, place mats, and matching dishes. This sets the mood for the romance of the meal. As you are putting the finishing touches on the meal, set the table, and fold the napkins (you can even *You Tube* some simple but fun and elegant methods to fold them to truly add a flair of decadence to the evening). Light the candles and put on a great conversation station (fan favorites are Louis Armstrong & Diana Krall, although sometimes a Feist or Florence and the Machine station creeps in).

The important part is to sit and actually enjoy the food you are consuming. Talk to friends or simply reflect on your own. Sometimes there is wine and sometimes not. If you have guests there should always be dessert. Normally this is something you can skip during the week. It makes those nights when you do indulge in a rich chocolate fondant completely guiltless, unless upon going to the bakery you find a treasure you could not live without—like a *pain au chocolat*. If you do have guests, dessert is a great time to move to more comfortable chairs. Share that amazing dessert (or a box of wonderful chocolate), wine, and talk in the flickering candlelight. This is better than any show on television. That's a guarantee.

Chocolate is one of the most romantic foods we consume. We give it to lovers. It dominates romantic holidays such as Valentine's Day. It is viewed as a rich indulgence. If you haven't sought out a truly amazing chocolatier in your area: DO IT. Not all chocolate is created equally. Audrey Hepburn had a piece of dark chocolate every day in the afternoon with her tea. What a wonderful thought to add to the afternoon. Imagine taking a break in the afternoon and not reaching for that bag of chips or bad office sheet cake but reaching for an intensely rich truffle and a steaming cup of Earl Grey. The difference is staggering. It is the same amount of time. The health implications are arguably better with the latter. Why is this not practiced more often? Finding a truly passionate chocolatier will change your relationship with this soul food. Think Juliette Binoche in *Chocolat*. Why buy whatever crap is packaged at the checkout counter when you could experience something truly special? This is where you will find jewels like rosé champagne ganache chocolates... enough said.



FRENCH CHOCOLATE FONDANT

Ingredients

*7-8 oz of dark baking chocolate (highest quality you can get—
make sure it is at least 70%)*

3/4 cup sugar

5 eggs

14 tb butter (unsalted)

*2 tb all-purpose flour (You can substitute almond flour or coconut
flour for a gluten free option.)*



In a metal bowl over boiling water, melt the butter and chocolate together (you can cut or break them into chunks for easier melting). Once melted thoroughly, add the sugar slowly.

In a separate bowl beat eggs until frothy. Slowly add to chocolate/butter/sugar mixture until completely combined. Whisk in flour or substitute.

Butter a pan (spring pan or a tart pan about 9 inches in diameter).

Pour mixture into pan and bake for 35-45 minutes at 350°F or until a knife or toothpick comes out clean.

Let cool for 15 minutes. You can then add your toppings: berries, homemade whipped cream, powdered sugar.

“Convenience is not an acceptable foundational value for society. It’s a disease.”

— Cameron Diaz, *The Body Book*



TREAT YOURSELF

The phrase *treat yourself* has become a bit of a cliché as of late. Self-care and love should not be something that you feel is a treat. It should be a daily part of your life. Baths are a hallowed custom in Europe. Mineral Baths are extremely popular, and unlike many of the spas in the United States, completely affordable. A day pass can set you back only € 15-€ 40. If you don't live near an affordable spa, you can absolutely recreate the experience at home.

Ingredients for a Perfect Home Spa:

- 1) ***Good Quality Candles***—As much fun as it is to think about a birthday cake-scented candles, these chemical stimulants usually are too overwhelming for relaxation. Stick to more natural scents that are appealing without being overpowering. (Fan favorite: *Voluspa Prosecco Rose*. They have a fragrant and decadent scent that make you feel oh so luxurious with a reasonable price tag.)
- 2) ***Bath salts***—They help get out the strain of the workweek and workouts. You can either purchase bath salts with a scent or buy unscented and add your own oils. If you stick to the latter, you can control the type of oil and the amount of fragrance. If you have fragrant candles burning you may not want competing scents. They tend to not come with such a large price tag too. (Fan favorite: *San Francisco Salt Company*.)

3) **A Good Read**—It is nice to have some sort of non-screen related stimulation. Plus this eliminates the fear of dropping devices in the bath. No one needs that kind of pressure when they are trying to relax. Bath reading classics are the fabulous five (*Vogue*—French and US editions, *Elle*—and *Elle Decor*, and *Vanity Fair*). You can always head to a local book shop and pick the brain of the shopkeeper about what books you should read based on your preferences. Local book shops have seen a resurgence as of late. Think of them as a live version of an *Amazon* algorithm that can help you find something based on items you have purchased.

4) **A Great Playlist**—If you are reading you want something that you can listen to without being sucked into the words of the song over the words on the page. Smooth jazz, nature sounds, classical, or if you are a Kenny G fan, go for it. Cliché for a reason right? If you have a connected smart device such as an *Alexa* or *Google Home*, ask it for a suggestion. They have a ready-made list labeled clearly “bath time” on most music streaming services for this exact purpose.

5) **Body Oil**—The spa does not end when you pull the plug from the drain. An essential step that is so often skipped is moisturizing post bath/shower. After a long steamy bath, use a body oil to seal in the moisture to your skin. (Fan favorite: Rose scented body oil from *The Body Deli*. It is made from all-natural ingredients so you won't break out and the scent is just enough but not too much. It leaves your skin with a hint of rose petals and a lot of luxury.)

“There must be quite a few things that a hot bath won’t cure. But I don’t know any of them.”

— Sylvia Plath



“You’re always with yourself, so you might as well enjoy the company.”

—Diane Von Furstenberg



ROMANTIC EVENT REHAB

Romantic events usually end up being anything but (even when the theme is romance). Here is your guide to making these events truly live up to the hype.

Valentine's Day. This is always viewed as a couples holiday. Everyone goes out to meals that are only prepared for two and celebrates the fact that they have someone to celebrate with. The doors of office buildings are being bombarded with flower delivery services as hopeful eyes peer over cubicles to the entryway wondering if these petals are for them. Screw that. Make the day your own. Go out all dressed up and have a martini at the bar. You won't be alone for long. Or drink a bottle of wine and watch *Practical Magic*. That will put your bad romance choices into perspective. If you are celebrating as a couple, use this day as an occasion to enjoy an epicurean meal together, to appreciate each other, to make love for hours and not be *too tired* for romance. It has the power to make you realize what your days (and nights) have been missing, just in case you forgot. The pressure of gifts can kill the spirit of romance. Love letters are a great tradition to start and the ability to look back through the years of love is far richer a gift than anything that comes in small box, even a Tiffany blue one.

Weddings. The business of weddings has become just that: a business. This day is supposed to be wrapped in love and family. Yet on more than one occasion, you will find a bride crying over things like center pieces. Just everyone, stop. Take a page out of the French handbook. Have a small ceremony and then go to restaurant or family/friend's house to celebrate afterward. People are not coming for the food or the centerpieces. They are coming to be a witness to your life and celebrate with you. There should be no reason to spend the equivalent of several Chanel handbags on a wedding. This is supposed to be a celebration of love and a chance to bring families together, not a stage 5 meltdown as you cry at 3am trying to punch out hearts to sprinkle on the tables. These things do nothing to add to the romance of the day and you won't remember them in 10 years' time. So put down the craft bag, save your money and sanity. Spend your time picking out the perfect lingerie or spend your money on exceptional wine for the occasion. It is difficult to really celebrate with more than 50 people. Keep the guest list thin so you can truly enjoy the time with those close few. No one has the ability to have meaningful conversations with 200 people in a night. So don't. If you have that many people to celebrate with, hold separate little parties at your favorite restaurants. Ensure that this event is romantic. Just as a staged photo looks like fake happiness so to does an overly planned wedding. What are you compensating for? It is the things that cost nothing that you remember. The speeches, the dancing, the embraces. That is what embodies romance and how a marriage should start.

Holidays. From the sparkling frost to mistletoe, the holiday season is buzzing with romance. It is the time to enjoy in the epicurean delights that are anticipated all year. Food, gifts, and a New Year's kiss. That being said visiting family isn't exactly romantic. As children are screaming and schedules are colliding, the romance of *Hot Toddy's* and crackling fires is lost in translation. You have to collect these moments for yourself. Spike some hot chocolate and go for a walk hearing the symphony of snow or leaves under your feet. There is something about brisk air that makes you want cuddle close to those inside (brisky=frisky). Plus the alone quiet time away from the frenzy of family makes walking back into the fray feel charming versus overwhelming. The whole idea of winter makes you want to get cozy with a warm body. There is a popular winter time drink in Europe called *glühwein*. This spiced wine is served steaming hot. Leave it to the Europeans to take wine and make it the centerpiece of their holiday beverages. They have huge open-air markets for crafts and goods to be sold. It is usually snowy and chilly and this warm wine, infused with holiday spices of cloves and cinnamon, make your whole body feel warm from the inside out. Remember to kiss a lot under the mistletoe and that your family is much better enjoyed after a glass of *glühwein*.

RECIPE FOR GLÜHWEIN

Ingredients:

1/2 cup sugar (or raw honey)

1-2 cinnamon sticks (depending on how much you like the flavor and size)

3/4 cup water

1 orange (bright and juicy)

10-12 cloves (again depending on freshness and pallet preferences)

1 bottle of red wine (table wine will do!)

Combine first 3 ingredients and bring to a boil. Ensure all ingredients have been dissolved completely. Reduce heat and simmer.

Use a vegetable peeler to peel the orange. Careful not to get any of the white rind in the peeling. Set the peeled skins aside. Cut the orange in half and squeeze the juice into the simmering mixture. Add the skins from the orange and the cloves. Simmer for 25-30 minutes until the mixture has reduced to a thick syrup.

Add the wine and heat until hot but not simmering (as to not cook out any of the alcohol). At this point you can choose to remove the orange peels, cloves, and cinnamon sticks or leave them to steep and ladle around them. Serve steaming into mugs, and enjoy!

*“The best way to spread Christmas Cheer
is singing loud for all to hear.”*

—Buddy the Elf



“I’ve been too fucking busy and vice versa.”
—Dorothy Parker



THE ART ♥ OF THE SALON

Sharing a meal is such an integral part of all cultures. It is how you celebrate all of the important moments of life. In 1920s, in Paris, a tradition was born that raised the simple dinner party to new heights: *The Salon*. These dinner parties were a coalescence of artist, writers, philosophers, entertainers, and, of course, the stars of the day. Although she would never take credit, it was an American woman named Gertrude Stein that brought this cultural phenomena to the legendary stature of today. Although you probably won't have a home at 27 *Rue de Fleurus* filled with artists such as Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali, Paul Cézanne and writers like Ernest Hemingway, F.Scott Fitzgerald, and Ezra Pound, you can steal a bit from Stein's salon magic. The purpose of these gatherings was to enjoy rich conversation and even vigorous diatribes. There were no polite conversations. This was a meeting of the minds—a battle fueled by a robust wine collection and diverse attendance.

When putting together your list of invitees, think about who would help create interesting conversations. If you combine this with Coco Chanel's famous notion that there should never be more than 6 people at a dinner table, you have the two most important ingredients for a fantastic dinner party. This way the conversation can be truly

salacious and people will feel comfortable sharing their secrets in this most intimate of settings.

Ingredients for a perfectly romantic dinner party:

Decor: Set your table simply. You don't need to spend a fortune on table décor and frilly accessories. Place mats, silverware, cloth napkins, water glasses, wine glasses, salt, pepper, butter, a water pitcher (for still water), a bottle of sparkling water if using, a bottle (or two of wine), and of course candles. Keep it simple but classic.

Ambience: Create two separate spaces for your guests—a comfortable area to receive guests in such as a living room. Arrange the seating in a circle so that it enhances guests' ability to converse and gather. Ensure the lighting is dim and enchanting. Candlelight has a comforting glow that enriches the romance and comfort of the evening. Music can be set low. Jazz is a classic for a reason. Know your crowd and make a playlist that works to nourish the mood.

Meal: Keep it simple. You want the appearance that this is all very typical and no trouble at all. And in truth it shouldn't be. Part of the romance is that you are able to enjoy the evening as well. So keep your recipes simple and classic—something that doesn't require a lot of maintenance during the 45 minutes leading up to the meal. Start the meal with simple anti-pastas, crudités, or a cheese plate whose ingredients you can simply purchase and transfer to a beautiful dish with no fuss. Again ease and simplicity are key to the spell not being broken. For the main meal stick to a classic recipe (dietary restrictions notwithstanding) that is a crowd pleaser without the intensity of Gordon Ramsey level plating and preparation.

Conversation: Many people caution to stay away from topics such as politics, sex, and religion. To each their own, and definitely know your crowd, but having

zealous conversations about issues that truly define humanity are full of passion and yield lively and exciting conversations. If you need to find a middle ground, have some conversational gems such as literature, films, or music in your back pocket to give the intense topics a break for a while.

Buy a baguette for the table so people can eat it with their meal. In many countries in Europe, it is customary to eat with a fork in one hand and a small piece of bread in the other. You use this as a type of knife scooping juices and morsels around for easy loading onto your fork. You take small bites as you go and then wipe your plate clean with the remaining bit of bread to complete your meal. Often it is the best part.

Americans have a way of demonizing dessert. No such thought exists in European countries. A simple chocolate fondant takes less than 30 minutes hands-on and can be ready in about an hour. You, and anyone else lucky enough to be invited over, will love this simple and incredibly rich and decadent dessert. Serve this after dinner to bring the conversation back up. It can be made beforehand and has almost no prep time. Top with some homemade whipped cream with a few berries on top to truly take it to the next epicurean level. Serve with an *apéritif* or coffee to complete your flawless meal.

FRENCH ROASTED CHICKEN

A roasted chicken done correctly has the ability to transport the eater to France in minutes. Below is a classic recipe for the traditional French chicken. It will make your house smell amazing and entertain year-round.



Ingredients

1 chicken (Try and find a local butcher. They will give you the freshest. If not organic, free range, and hormone- and antibiotic-free is a great start.)

2 lemons (Make sure to wash them if they are not organic.)

2 tb cinnamon

1 onion or shallot

4 tb unsalted butter

4-5 cloves of garlic

5-6 sprigs fresh thyme

Preheat 350 degrees

Pour the juice of 1 lemon over the chicken. Stuff the inside of the chicken with the squeezed lemons.

Cut the second lemon and squeeze juice over the other side. Cut into fourths and stuff squeezed lemon slices under skin of chicken on top of breast.

Mince onions/shallots, garlic and thyme. Combine with butter.

Lift skin of chicken and rub the butter/onion mixture over the meat under the skin.

Rub the cinnamon onto the skin of the chicken.

Cook in the oven for 2 hours. After 1 hour turn chicken over. After another 45 mins turn it back over and baste broth. Add any vegetables to bottom of pan after 1:45 (for the last 15 minutes—broccoli, asparagus, cherry tomatoes or small heirlooms all complement this dish well).

“I gave you life so you could live it.”
— **Maria Portokalos,**
My Big Fat Greek Wedding



La Fin

LAISSEZ LES BON TEMPS ROULER

Romance. One little word, so many meanings. Life is a balance sheet of priorities. Sometimes your life can feel like it is being lived without you. The biggest way you can change your daily life to be more romantic is to literally stop and smell the roses. There are more important things to life than having a complete to-do list. Inject a bit of magic in the in-between moments of your day. Tap back into the roots of your ancestors—back to a time before text messages and 24/7 news cycles when people wrote each other love letters and ate their meals together with no other engagements other than themselves.

Start small. Buy a silk scarf and see how you feel with the supple texture on your neck. Take a long bath focused on self-care and relaxation. Build your personal lexicon of daily romance.

It is the choices you make that dictate the tone of your life. These choices define you from how you dress to how you share this time with others. Everyone has bad days and stressful periods in their lives. If nothing else think about what you are doing and how you could make a shift to a slightly rosier view. Live your life and do it with grace and romance whenever possible. No lover required.



Romance is not just for the movies. In fact it is not just for lovers. Take a page out of the French handbook and learn how to make your days romantic. ***No lover required.*** Explore the eupicurean and simple ways that you can turn your life into a romantic state of being. Join *The European American* as she adapts her lifestyle blog ***CocoLikeChanel*** into her first book.



Coco Guerin is the creator of the lifestyle blog **CocoLikeChanel**. She host the podcast *TEA with Coco*. Coco believes that we all have life to live it. She shares secrets, tips, and tricks from her European upbringing to help everyone feel and live the most romantic and whole life.