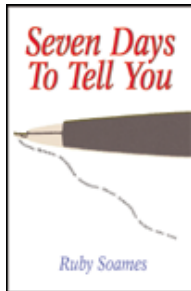


BOOKSHELF: BEACH EDITION

We've had quite a few submissions lately and here are a couple of titles (quite different from each other) you might like to have with you under the parasol

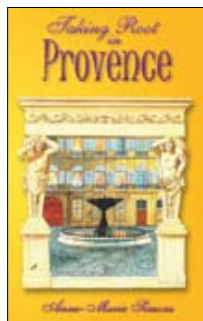
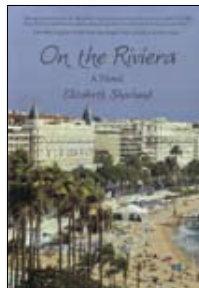
First a novel – *Seven Days to Tell You* (UK: Hookline Books) – by Ruby Soames who happens to live in Nice. Here's the basic story: Kate, a young medic, is abandoned by her boyfriend while on holiday in France. At a hospital coffee machine in Aix she falls in with Marc, a drop-dead gorgeous Frenchman. He later turns up in London and they get married. Wonderful until Kate wakes up one morning and he's no longer there. For three years she pines, sleeps around, gets engaged to another MD, continues to be tortured by uncertainty. Then Marc returns, asking for just seven days to explain himself. Now read on ... and you'll want to. That brief outline may suggest a girly romcom but you won't feel ashamed to be reading this book. After all, Ms Soames is a former Arvon Lady and offers a rather McEwanish sophistication of style and structure (lots of flashbacks, skilfully handled). She spent seven years getting this book out – while working and looking after two kids and Elvis the dog. But it certainly deserved – to end with a moan – rather better editing: there never was an English poet called “Swinbourne”, there's no town on the Coast called “Theole” and no child disappeared on the Algarve called Maddie McGann, and Ms Soames should have noticed that the guys in uniform who deal with parking offences at the airport are policemen, not “gendarmes”. But it's a good read. **P.M.**



in winter, and especially when, as with Aix, there are lots of places to visit in the area.

Across 40 short chapters – that's good because it's easy to skip repellent subjects (like, for me, opera) – she covers in a lively style a wide range of topics, from donkeys and gypsies to weddings and truffles. You feel, reading Ms Simons, that she's sharing her ongoing awareness of Provence and its culture. She avoids the too obvious and you learn things from her that you feel oddly pleased to know – how the Romans came to invent foie gras, for example, and why pigeon shit was once given as a dowry. At the same time, she's not wearing rose-tinted glasses: Aix, she decides, “is shamefully dirty” (she is Dutch, remember) and she warns that village people “never forgive, never forget”. One quibble: she quotes the menu at Aix train station's restaurant as offering “believed ham” as a translation of *jambon cru*, among other weird renderings. A joke, surely? Anyway, if you take this book to the beach you won't be bored. **C.V.Z.-P.**

Poor editing is a self-publishing pandemic; it prevents the reader from becoming immersed in a story. Such is the case with Elizabeth Sharland's *On the Riviera: A Novel* (US: iUniverse). Sharland, originally an actress with the Old Vic Company, claims to have written ten books and is an editor at Palm Beach Society Magazine. After reading her latest novel that takes place in a clichéd Cannes, I have to question how that's possible. Aside from the abysmal editing, the book's fictitious actress spends 105 pages talking about how she is supposed to be writing a book. At the end, you're left wondering the same thing. **N.H.**



There are dozens of books extolling the joys of living in the South of France, a genre given a huge boost by Peter Mayle's success, and some of them are pretty awful. In her *Taking Root in Provence* (US:

Distinction Press) Anne-Marie Simons has produced a book which merits a positive judgement. Born Dutch, with many years in America, along with her Argentinean husband she chose Aix-en-Provence to retire to rather than somewhere on “the flashy and crowded Riviera”. She insists on the advantage of city living against some of the downsides of the country, particularly



of an expat's life in '60s Paris. The book, however, is sparse on details and many of the stories seem sorely abridged. **P.J.H.** ■

Initially, John Kirby Abraham's account of living in the City of Light, entitled *Paris Made Me* (Canada: Trafford), seems overly florid. A few pages in, though, and you're reading an interesting account

Guidebooks on the Riviera are a dime a dozen but two recent releases, one English and one French, are worth noting. America's best-known travel books have finally brought *Fodor's Provence & the French Riviera 9th Edition* (US: Fodor's



Travel) into full colour (with 200 photos), making it a much more competitive product in a very saturated market. Geared towards a North American public, it includes Top Experiences, Great

Itineraries, 24 maps and covers Arles and Camargue up to the Vaucluse, south to the Central Coast (Aix and Marseille) over to the Western Var, and north to Nice and the Côte d'Azur. Fodor's uses locally-based writers, always an advantage, who offer firsthand tips and tidbits. A very portable format makes it practical for travel but it's an informative read of the region even if you stay home.

Les Guides S'installer à Nice Côte d'Azur (France: HélioPoles) is part of a series of “anti-tourist guides” – also available for Paris, Lyon and Marseille – released in association with AVFs across the country. Very attractively designed, these books are incredibly detailed with all you need to know about living in a new city, including quality of life, healthcare, housing, safety, children, education, transportation, economy and employment. In each edition there's a Practical Moving Guide which, intended for those moving from one department to another, gives guidelines as to changing banks or licence plates, registering to vote, updating identity cards, etc – citing websites with the Cerfa forms to download. There's also a calendar leading up to your move of what needs to be done when.



Author Vincent-Xavier Morvan, a correspondent for *Le Figaro*, has thoroughly tackled Nice. His statistics (10,000 new arrivals per year; Nice is ranked 2nd in France for scams and fraud) and insight of how things work in Nice are enlightening, even if you are not intending to move. My only complaint is that under local media, he refers to a local English monthly newspaper but fails to mention this publication, which has existed for 25 years.

HélioPoles, by the way, is looking for partners to invest in English versions of *Les Guides S'installer à*. Interested parties should contact Zoé Leroy (see page 38). **N.H.** ■