

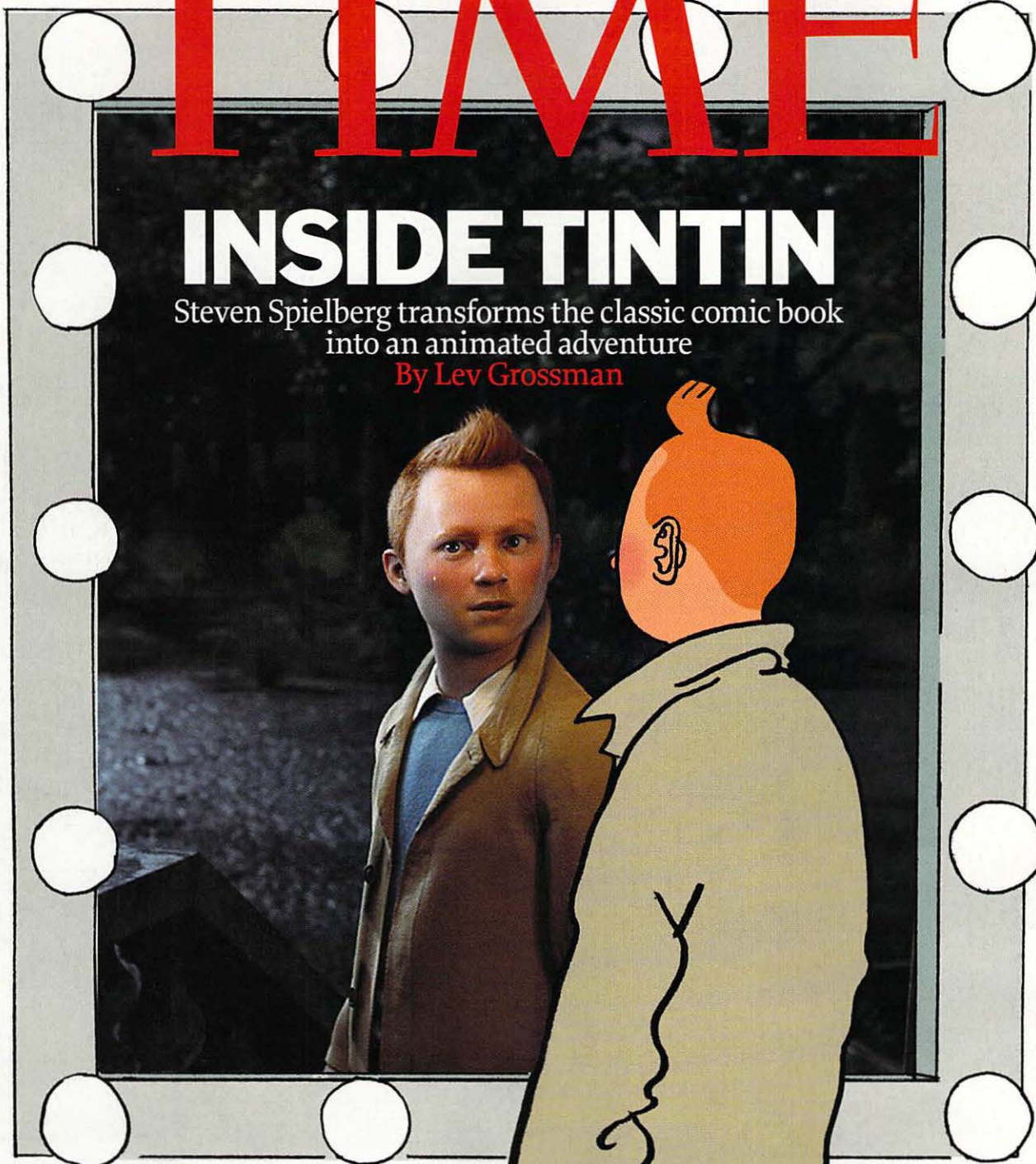
America's Silent Majority *By Joe Klein*

TIME

INSIDE TINTIN

Steven Spielberg transforms the classic comic book into an animated adventure

By Lev Grossman



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Finishing school
is different these
days



The Culture

SOCIETY Etiquette goes global—a peek inside Switzerland's last traditional finishing school / **GLOBAL ADVISER** Cafés, cabaret and clubbing; nightlife in Casablanca

Dishes should be offered from the left

A Blue Sash signals that a student is pretending to be a man and therefore should be served drinks after the female guests but before the hostess



Switzerland's Last Finishing School

Where good etiquette is still good business

By William Lee Adams/Montreux

IF LUNCH AT THE INSTITUT VILLA Pierrefeu (IVP) often feels like a rehearsal, that's because it is. Under the watchful eye of Rosemary McCallum, a Cordon Bleu-trained chef and expert on table manners, 13 female students practice the skills they've studied in courses on European etiquette and table service. As the meal unfolds in a stately dining room with corniced ceilings, McCallum gently

The instructor, a *Cordon Bleu* graduate, offers pointers on European table service

This student has live-in staff at home

Each setting should be at least 55 cm apart

Wine glasses should be removed by lifting them from near the bottom of the stem—never the top



reminds the five student servers that they must pick up champagne glasses near the bottom of the stems and offer the pear-and-Roquefort tarts from the left. Back home, four of the five women serving have live-in staffs. But the program requires them to rotate through the service role anyway so they can better train and manage their employees. Vera, a 30-year-old playing the role of

Practice makes perfect

Students learn dining, serving and other customs at Switzerland's Institut Villa Pierrefeu, which costs about \$20,000 for a six-week course

hostess, steers the conversation from her work with orphans back home in Lebanon to a Mexican guest's love of horseback riding. All goes well until Vera's fondness for Toblerone mousse leads her to commit a crucial error. "Your husband is still eating, and you've already finished," McCallum says. "Remember to pace yourself." Vera glares across the table at her husband, played by a female classmate from India.

Not your mother's charm school

IVP has expanded its curriculum and recruiting strategy. These students hail from Nigeria and Lebanon, front row, and Oman, Hong Kong and India



“Well,” Vera says, “my husband should learn to eat faster.”

For nearly 60 years, IVP—Switzerland’s last traditional finishing school—has taught women social graces, from floral arrangement and table decoration to the art of serving afternoon tea. Updated annually, its intensive six-week course consists of 216 hours of class and, for those working toward a diploma in international etiquette and protocol, 45 exams. Daily practice brings students up to speed on how to whip up the trendiest desserts—like mascarpone mousse and balsamic cream, a fresh alternative to tire-some tiramisu—and how to gracefully adhere to local customs in 20 countries, including Mexico (where you may shake your waiter’s hand) and Japan (where you should never use chopsticks as decorations in swept-up hair). But contrary to stereotype, the motive is not marriage; it’s money. “Lots of people have M.B.A.s, but few have the extra knowledge we can give them,” says Viviane Néri, the school’s principal. “People now realize that good manners make for good business.”

Among those who agree is P. Christopher Earley, the incoming dean at

Purdue University’s Krannert School of Management and a co-author of *Cultural Intelligence*. Before globalization became the norm, “cultural issues were of less immediacy to businesses,” he says. “But that’s all changed in the past several decades with the flow of goods, services and information across transparent borders as well as the increasing interdependence of firms and subsidiaries.”

It’s this reality that draws midcareer executives to enroll at IVP, where they hope to gain an edge with international clients; younger students come to prepare for careers in public relations and the foreign service. Princesses and the daughters of Presidents and Prime Ministers enroll to better perform such duties as entertaining dignitaries and giving gifts while abroad. During *TIME*’s recent visit, the school’s roster listed 36 women, ranging in age from 18 to 46 and hailing from 14 countries including Syria, Thailand and the U.S. Given their high-profile backgrounds—as lawyers, consultants and captains of industry, as well as the daughters of business magnates—the students don’t share their last names with teachers or with one another.

“This isn’t about staying at home and saying yes to everything my husband says or serving him,” says Polly, a 39-year-old wearing pearls, a blue dress and a pink cardigan. “It’s about knowledge that empowers you as a modern lady.” Polly, who speaks fluent English, Mandarin and Cantonese, retired from a lucrative job as an investment banker in 2007 and now manages her family’s funds from her home in Hong Kong. She plans to deploy her new knowledge—like how to peel and eat kiwis using only cutlery—at philanthropic events where she encounters Indian, Malaysian and Chinese investors. “Good manners are essential to business,” she says. “If you don’t have good manners, then your clients and colleagues will question your competence.”

Refinement comes at a price: a six-week course, which includes room, two daily meals and weekend excursions, costs about \$20,000. Student housing consists of well-appointed rooms with bathrooms en suite and names like Rose and Violet. Married students, including a Supreme Court judge from a European country who recently studied at IVP,

THIS PAGE: MONIKA FISCHER AND MATTHIAS BRASCHLER FOR *TIME*

A Brief History of Swiss Finishing Schools

1885

Château Mont-Choisi, one of the most famous Swiss finishing schools and one of the country's earliest, is founded in Lausanne. It later educated Carla Bruni Sarkozy, who became France's First Lady in 2008.



1914

Some 70 finishing schools are open for business around Lake Geneva, where parents send their daughters to further their education before marriage since most universities do not yet admit women. With the outbreak of World War I, travel becomes more difficult, halting the expansion of finishing schools.

1960s

Corporations begin buying out finishing schools for their stunning views of the lake and mountains. Meanwhile, at the holdouts, some school owners' emancipated daughters choose not to carry on the family business. The decline of the Swiss finishing school begins.



1991

Institut Alpin Videmanette in Rougemont, which Princess Diana attended, closes.

2011

Institut Villa Pierrefeu, the country's last traditional finishing school, remains open, in part by catering to businesswomen.

the kind of school where you just walked around with books on your head," she says. "We've always targeted the career woman."

Néri believes there is more pressure on women in the business world. "Generally their mistakes are less easily forgiven than those of men," she says. To help more of her students obtain C-level suites (CEO, COO, CFO, etc.), Néri serves as an encyclopedia of cultural taboos and international savoir faire: Don't ask a Spanish businessman about his family. (He'll consider it invasive.) It's not acceptable to talk about money in Europe (unless you're in Russia). And never correspond with Buddhists in red ink. (They use that color only to write the names of the dead on coffins.) "We're actually antisnob," Néri says. "The snobs are the ones who operate by secret codes and don't explain them to you."

Dissecting etiquette in a formal setting also gives women the opportunity to learn some unpleasant truths. "If a student's outfit is in bad taste, then we tell her it doesn't work," Néri says. "She comes to get the feedback she won't get from her friends or colleagues." Teachers are equally quick to tell students if their table settings look rushed or violate the rule of keeping plates at least 55 cm apart. Anna, a 40-something financial controller at an international company in the construction industry, rolled her eyes when teachers brought out irons during a class on folding napkins. But an hour later, she was hooked. "You see the exactness and the symmetry, and it gives a completely different atmosphere," she says. "If your table is slightly sloppy, your deal could fall through. The client might think, If the table is set like that, how will she treat my contract and our relationship?"

Back in the dining room, the five student servers—stomachs grumbling—have more pressing concerns. Their hostess's husband continues to spoon his Toblerone mousse. "Take your time," says Nouf, a 19-year-old business student from Oman who makes no effort to hide her sarcasm. "We don't want to eat lunch or anything." When the man of the house finally finishes, they clear the table and escort the guests to the drawing room for coffee. The waitresses return to the dining room, take off their gloves, wipe their foreheads and let out a massive sigh of relief. "I've been thinking about my servants all the time," says Nouf. "It's really hard work. I definitely have more respect for them." For a true lady, that unexpected lesson may prove the most lasting. ■

often elect to stay in nearby hotels with their families and nannies.

Dropping Courses like Sewing

PERCHED ON THE HILLS OVERLOOKING Lake Geneva, Néri's school is set in and around the former home of a Dutch baroness, built in 1911 as the Belle Epoque drew to a close. Néri's mother acquired the property and established the school in 1954. "She wanted a house that would correspond to the type of house the students would have and entertain in," she says. "The kitchen is downstairs because it assumes you have servants." The ground-floor layout assumes students also have six chandeliers, 16 paintings and a marble staircase.

By the time Néri took the helm in 1972, many of her traditional rivals—the more than 60 finishing schools established around Lake Geneva before World War I—had shut down or fallen into decline. In some instances, it was an issue of succession: the founders' emancipated daughters simply didn't want to take the reins. In other cases, schools sitting on prime real estate were sold to the highest bidder. Subsequent decades saw the closure of iconic

schools like Mon Fertile, which refined Camilla Parker Bowles, and the Institut Alpin Videmanette, which counted Princess Diana among its alumni. Le Manoir now serves as the headquarters of Tetra-Pak, a food-processing company, and Le Matin Calme was transformed into a private residence that has passed through several owners, including Shania Twain.

But IVP has managed not only to stay open but also to keep filling up months in advance. Néri and her staff members—who frequently visit the Middle East to tutor royalty in the comfort of their palaces—may be as good at strategic planning as they are at party planning. As early as the 1970s, Néri began courting students from Latin America and Asia who slowly replaced gap-year students from Britain and Germany. Néri dropped courses like sewing and expanded the curriculum to reflect the changing demographics of global influence and power. She started teaching classes in English instead of French and eventually broadened courses to cover the customs of each of the BRICs—Brazil, Russia, India and China—the emerging markets where women are increasingly likely to conduct business. "This was never