

JUST DO IT

Building Paris Zen Center

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There was a very nice apartment on a little street in Paris. Big living room, big dining room, big hallway with mirrors, three nice rooms with fireplaces, bathroom and a toilet. Kitchen not too big, enough for a maid to prepare a meal and bring it to the dining room.

It is 6:00 am. From every corner of the apartment people are coming. A line is forming in front of the bathroom; three or four people are squeezing over the sink. Well, I decide to brush my teeth after bows.

Fifteen people are in the dharma room, clumsily reciting the Four Great Vows in French. Students from Germany, Hungary, Poland, Nigeria, the United States, the Slovakian and Czech Republics.

No chanting; we think our neighbors wouldn't like it.

After practice, another attack on the bathroom.

In the meantime, Marica is preparing oatmeal, Andrzej is running to the boulangerie to buy baguettes, Udo and Azara are organizing the mats and cushions in the dining room.

While eating breakfast, we talk and laugh, but also organize work on the construction. Darek will tell everybody what to do today. Ewa will do the laundry for everybody. Marica cooking; Jarek woodwork; two Roberts and Jacek will scrub old paint from old windows. Ania, Dorota and Gosia will paint, continuing the work of Suzana and Pavel who left already. Piotrek and Karel will paint

beams and windows, work which Horst started while being here. Judith and Michael will clean the glass roof in the dharma room. Lali and Szandor will install lamps in an almost-finished part of the house. Silke will scrub layers of old glue and paint from the floors. Grzegorz will fill holes and cracks with gypsum. I am going shopping to buy more materials: gypsum, paint, brushes etc. Everybody is busy all day around the construction.

Lunch is brought to the construction site and we eat sitting on empty paint containers, using one of the doors as a table. Dirty but smiling faces. Today we have ice cream for desert.

Matthew is very happy to have so many aunts and uncles to play with. Playing Asterix [a French comics character] is so funny. One has to get used to new names, and new greetings: "Ave Centurion," "Ave Cezar." Yesterday he did two hundred bows with Darek. Today, preparing himself for Heila Downey JDPSN's visit, he didn't take his robe off and spent all day chanting in the dharma room.

A few weeks later...

Today after a Precepts Ceremony, our Hungarian friends and some of the German students have to leave. It's always a sad moment. We got to know each other, got used to being together. Part of the family has to leave. We hug for a long time, promising to keep in touch.

Now Ewa is cooking. "Yummy, yummy"—that's the best comment. Actually, our food karma is just wonderful.

After work, and before practice, the bathroom is most popular. The first three or four people will have warm water, and the rest will try to get there first tomorrow. It is difficult to get rid of paint with cold water—try mind is very useful, as is olive oil.

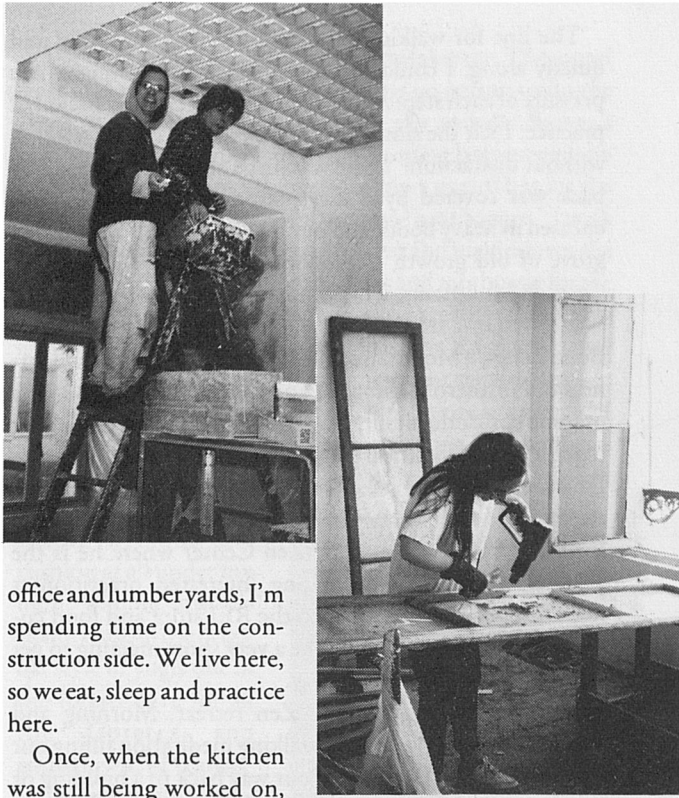
Today is time for a picnic, so we pack some sandwiches, tea, wine, and fruit, and off we go to Bois de Boulogne. Laying on grass all day by a stream, eating, laughing, we all get a very deserved rest.

Finally, at the beginning of May, after changing the dates four times, we are moving to our new home.

Not that the house is ready, but at this point we don't care. There are a couple of bathrooms and toilets which work and that is already better than the apartment we have been in. The movers do not share our enthusiasm. They look at the condition of our new place, and freeze with the furniture in their hands and a strange expression on their faces. Their comment is that this is the first time they moved anyone into a middle of a construction site.

Here we can practice more freely: morning and evening, including chanting, interviews, dharma talks and Yong Maeng Jong Jins. There are not many of us, but the practice is strong, "don't know" is strong and "just do it" is strong.

Between running to the bank, City Hall, the architect's



office and lumberyards, I'm spending time on the construction side. We live here, so we eat, sleep and practice here.

Once, when the kitchen was still being worked on, this was the lunchtime scene

I found upon returning from some errands: Ewa sitting in the middle of the living room, cooking on a little portable stove with two pans on it. Around her many people working; assembling kitchen furniture, fixing windows, finishing walls. Ewa just cooked, sometimes lowering her head to avoid being hit by a passing ladder or a long piece of wood.

More images: Robert splashed paint directly into his eye, we got it clean—with olive oil.

Heidi, who is coming regularly once a week to help, burned herself with a heat gun. It is good that we have some Oxyfresh gel—it will help.

Kuba said another joke—everybody laughed.

Marcin can make delicious cakes, Robert delicious curry.

Dorota is a master of soy pate.

Ola can balance on the edge of the window on the second floor, cleaning them.

Wu Bong Soen Sa Nim came, and everybody is very happy. More teaching, and painting the new floors is going smoother.

Again we skip a few weeks...

More partings, and some new arrivals. Now Beata is cooking, while her husband Piotr, together with Marzena, Iwona, Piotr #2, Dorota, Nicholas, Victoria and Olek, are continuing the renovation work.

Little Hania from Szczecin is a wonderful companion for

all of us, but especially for Matthew. They are also building; tree houses from whatever construction leftovers they find.

Darek is still here, working hard. Robert left, then came back, so did Ania with her husband Tomek and son Mateusz.

We still don't have the necessary permits, so we cannot finish changing the rotting exterior. That means that for another few months our apartment will look like a camp with boxes for cabinets and closets.

The dharma room, however, is finished, as are a few other rooms, so practice is going smoothly and people are living more comfortably, and can get rest after hard work.

The third Yong Maeng Jong Jin in our new place was the biggest. Seventeen people from all over the Europe, including several French students who tried our style of retreat.

The chanting book was translated by Michel and Margarita, and Hania from Cologne worked hard setting it into a nice book format. The final result has not yet appeared, but the prototype presages a very beautiful chanting book.

Jean Michel wrote a nice announcement which was placed in a newspaper, so more people are calling and asking about the new Zen Center. My French must get better. Construction words are not enough, more dharma words are necessary.

Final image...

From a busy street between Place de la Bastille and Gare de Lyon, one can get into a courtyard. There is a green gate, behind which is a quiet, little garden and a house: Centre Parisien de Zen—Kwan Um.

On the steps a group of friends is sitting, drinking tea. It's a sunny late afternoon, and soon practice will start. Guests are coming. A little introduction in broken French, and an invitation to the next Yong Maeng Jong Jin with Wu Bong Soen Sa Nim, and to the Buddha's Eyes Opening Ceremony which is to take place at the end of this retreat.

The official Opening Ceremony has been scheduled for the coming Spring; Zen Master Seung Sahn promised to come. We are very happy.

