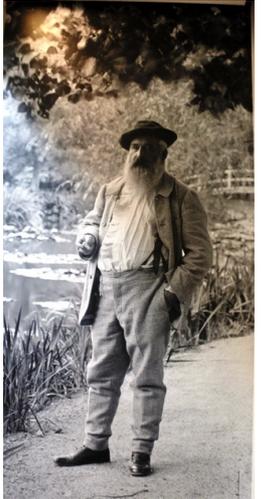




*Spring 2018
Monet at Giverny*

Monet's House & gardens at Guverny in full bloom was a wonderful way to start the season. Both the village and the sunny house and gardens were full of charm.



Claude Monet, the leader of the Impressionists, lived here from 1883-1926. Fascinated by the idea of capturing a moment in time rather than detail, he produced, among many others, a series of paintings (the Water Lilies) showing the same scenes in different lights (displayed at the Musée Marmottan Monet in Paris). We spent two scorching days in Paris where the temperatures reached the high 30's in mid-April! It was the start of weird fluctuations in temperature that soared to 37C, then plunged to 9C with torrential rain and arctic winds from snow in the Pyrenees in May, during our travels through the small market towns and cities of the Canal du Midi!



One of the great joys of the Canal is the trees. From the 18th century, mulberry trees were planted to produce silk which were then replaced by Italian poplars, pines and cypress. By 1789, there were 100,000 trees. Today, there are around 60,000 which provide welcome shade. Many huge, old trees have had to be felled in recent years due to disease but a huge replanting project continues. Throughout Languedoc, the vineyards stretch right down to the canalside.



The Canal du Midi – from Agde to Toulouse east to west across southern France. 241 km. long, 126 bridges, 6 dams, 63 locks incl. 1 x 7 chamber lock, 1 x 4 chamber lock, 4 triple locks, 19 double locks, a tunnel, and a couple of aqueducts – and we did them all! At Narouze, having been lifted up a total of 191 m, we crossed the watershed and started going down again. The locks on the way up can get quite turbulent.

The Canal du Midi – was the architectural masterpiece of the 17 century, topped only by Versailles. It was the fulfillment of a 1000 year old dream conceived in Roman times to link the Mediterranean with the Atlantic and thus avoid the dangerous sea route around the Iberian Peninsula, and later promote trade in salt, wheat and wine. It was achieved after many centuries through the will and courage of Pierre Paul Riquet, an uneducated, self-made merchant who devised a brilliant water catchment system, but cost him his fortune financing it and ruined his health, dying just 2.5 km before completion of this hugely ambitious project that had stumped the best engineers of the time. It was eventually built during the reign of Louis XIV from 1661-1681, amid much political intrigue and regional jealousies, not to mention huge technical challenges as they tried to find a way to cross the watershed at 191 m. and the often raging floodwaters of the River Aude (which we also experienced!). It was dug by hand, but the workers were given paid sick days and paid days off which was unheard of that time. It became a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1996 and is now used by canal cruisers, hikers and cyclists, but no longer commercially.