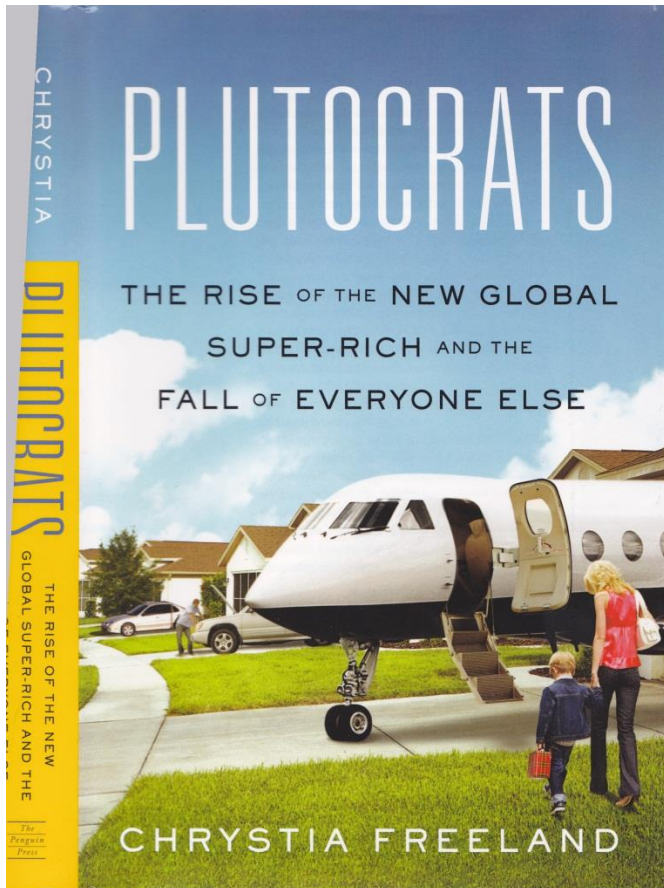


**Christmas 2012 in Town and Country**  
**Vernon and Marguerite Gras**  
**1339 Massachusetts Ave SE, DC 20003**  
**Grasmere Farm, Sperryville, Va 22740**

Well, 2012 had its "ups and downs" on both the personal and general level. As this was an election year, let's start with the general level. The re-election of Obama was an "up" but not a great one. The underlying issue of the election could best be described thus: who's really in charge of the country - the elected government or business? The Obama victory could be seen as a vindication of people's interests over Wall Street interests. The glorification of capitalism, especially since the downfall of communism in 1989, and because capitalism works and is the better economic system led to excesses that still haven't been curbed. When Greenspan and Donald Kohn look back on the financial shambles of 2008, they ruefully admit that as regulators on the Federal Reserve, they had too much faith that markets and bankers would correct and police themselves. Those corrections still haven't been made. One could say that the mind set of the regulators were captured. Through osmosis they identified with the goals, interests, and point of view of those they were to regulate rather than regulating for the collective good. They embraced the libertarian ideology that "what is good for Wall Street is good for the country". This mantra has produced a surge of income inequality in the US beginning in the 1970s and globally in developing countries now in the 21st century. It has become a world wide phenomena. What is fueling this growing inequality is the technical/electronic revolution (PCs went on sale 4 decades ago) and globalization. Financiers using leverage and technologists using scale are becoming billionaires overnight.

One doesn't mind the billions achieved by technocrats such as Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, or Eric Schmidt (Google) They contributed to the growth of the economic pie. But one does resent the banker billionaires who contributed nothing to the increase but are reallocating more and more of the existing economic pie to themselves. Let Chrystia Freeland In *Plutocrats: The Rise of the New Global Super-Rich and the Fall of Everyone Else (2012)* describe it: "In the US and elsewhere in the West, the bankers are becoming market oligarchs who divert national resources - most notably (in the US and Europe, ed.) in the bailout trillions - to themselves. These plutocrats get rich by using their political muscle to increase their share of the pre-existing pie, rather than by adding value to the economy and increasing the size of the overall pie. So. the question to ask: Are the interests of the state and its big businesses synonymous? If not, who decides? Does the state have the right (and the might) to curb specific businesses for the collective good?" The far right libertarians insist "NO! Never! The market is sacrosanct". Factual outcomes don't bother them because they have faith based Truth just like the religious fundamentalists. And as the entire Congress is awash in corporate lobbying money - corporate interests and not collective interests are usually served. Without campaign finance reform and

removal of the filibuster rule, reason and genuine problem solving won't take place in Congress. Doubt that these reforms will happen under Obama.



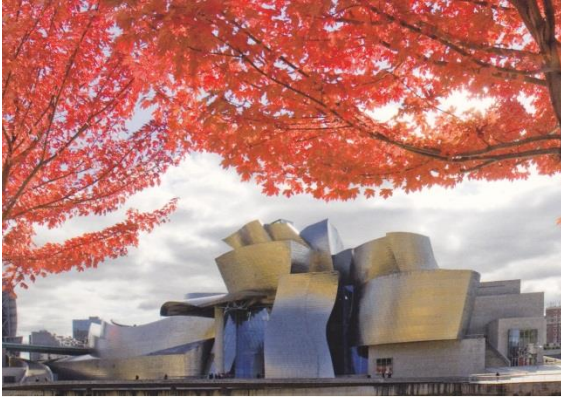
Most of what I spoke about in the preceding re economics comes from this book. She's a business reporter, makes her living writing about the economy, knows many plutocrats because she interviewed them, and likes capitalism. The book gives great insight into the global economy.

The American people can't even get their representatives in Congress to protect them from wackos who can purchase rifles at any gun show that shoot 100 rounds in less than one minute. Including the Sandy Hook massacre, there were 16 mass killings in the US in 2012 using such weapons. This is shameful. Hundreds of people dead so that the arms manufacturers (NRA) can make greater profits? The same scenario of corporate profit effectively blocking collective good plays out with environmental issues, too.

But let's leave this. On the personal level, the highlight of the year for me was a long overdue trip to Europe (Glasgow, Berlin, Wuerzburg, Kaufbeuren, Augsburg,

Madrid) instigated by Juergen Konrad who threw a magnificent reunion in Kaufbeuren of old classmates from 25 years ago (and who came - 120+ of them !). As house gifts to my four hosts during the trip, I gave them T. Colin Campbell, *The China Study*. Because I've become a non-dairy vegetarian, I alerted them that they should prepare for my coming as if Jesus were making a house call. They did observe the dietary amenities. Using *The China Study* as my sacred scripture, I attempted to change their (and the prevailing) view that heart disease, strokes, cancer, and diabetes were just natural results of aging, instead of being due to bad nutrition. If every cell in your body is replaced in circa 7 years and you get heart disease, cancer, or diabetes, could it be that something is wrong with your intake? You betcha! As Goethe said, "Man ist was man iszt" (you are what you eat). The companion volume to *The China Study* is Caldwell Esselstyn *Prevent and Reverse Heart Disease* which is a proven nutrition based *cure* of heart disease. Drugs don't cure anything, they just relieve symptoms. After his by-pass surgery, Bill Clinton followed Esselstyn's plan and is certainly looking great these days. He's also very intelligent, not stupid, even though a bit randy. So, relatives and friends, go and save your life from premature departure.

My trip to Madrid was really to visit the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. Without doubt, it is the greatest edifice built in the 20th century. It's a sculpted building and ranks right up there with the Parthenon and Gothic Cathedrals. Go see it before you die. It needs a whole day (See pictures). It owns two large Anselm Kiefer paintings, too.



GuggenheimBILBAO

Climate change affected the US big time in 2012. Too much rain and floods in New England, widespread drought in the midwest corn belt, a lot more tornadoes and severe storms in the south and coastal areas. Three big trees went down on the farm - one a majestic red oak that damaged our azalea garden and the bridge to the gazebo. (See pictures) I'll include some seasonal pictures of the farm.



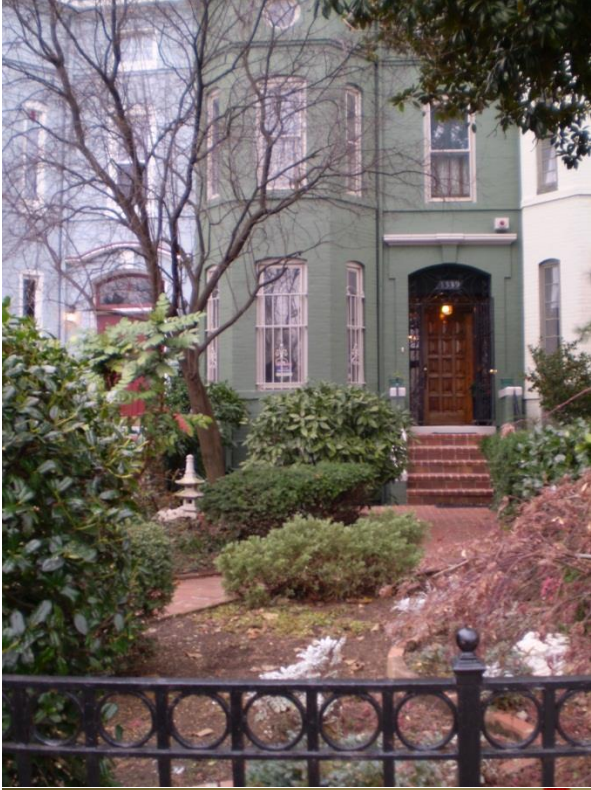




In DC, I added to my wall collection of masks and other pinups. And I gave our townhouse a new paint job, a facial rejuvenation. (See pictures)









I don't like to end on a down beat, but for the first time, I can't predict that Marguerite will make 95. She is now perceptibly declining, i.e. fading away from old age, not disease.

While I doubt that 2013 will be much better than 2012, there will always be something to cherish and enjoy. Do so.

Love to all - Vernon and Marguerite