

The house at 17 Emile Dunois

By Steve Glines

It was unusually cold for an August evening. The rain was unremitting and I ran the last thirty yards to the restaurant entrance. Once inside I saw him, back to the door, hunched over slightly in a French trench coat. Oddly I remembered the shape of the back of his head, his ears I guess. What a strange thing to remember after 30 years but it was unmistakably the back of the head of Dr. Roger Malina. Grey had replaced the jet-black hair of youth, but the back of his head, was unmistakable.



The last time I saw Roger was in 1972. He had just graduated from MIT and was heading to Berkeley, driving cross-country, for graduate school. In these pre-Internet dark ages I lost track of him but occasionally would hear about how he had done this, had done that, had done very well or so the gossip many times removed had said.

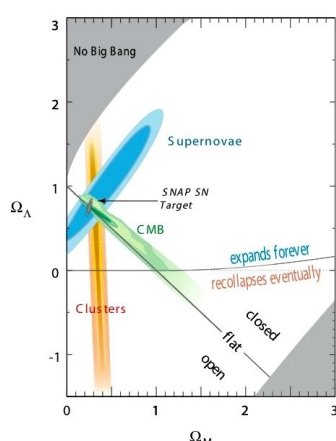
I met Roger by accident. In 1970 I arrived in Cambridge Massachusetts with all my worldly belongings strapped to the back of my Yamaha motorcycle. I had intended to go to MIT but I couldn't afford it. I had intended to share an apartment with a high school friend but when I arrived in Cambridge he had moved into a smelly, overcrowded Fraternity house filled with mock sophistication and demonic seniors. The Frat boys took me in telling me I could pledge when I got the cash together to attend the 'tute. A few months later some of the ex-frat members rented an apartment and asked me to join them. Roger was one of them.

When the Internet made it easier to reconnect lost souls I found Roger at the University of California at Berkeley. Somewhere along the line he mentioned that he was thinking of turning his mothers house in Paris into a *pancion*. I told him to put me down as the first tenant. I can't remember how long ago that was, early 1990's I think. Getting to Paris and bringing my wife, who has never been to Europe, became as goal ... as soon as our children became self-sufficient. About

2 years ago I emailed Roger with our plans. Just after Christmas 2005 I emailed him our detailed itinerary. In April Roger emailed back that he would be in Boston in August to deliver his son to Tufts University.

I got a telephone call. It was Roger. In his lovely English accented voice he announced, "I'm here. Let me know where you'd like to meet." To an American Roger sounds English but to an Englishman he sounds completely American. Roger was born and grew up in Paris, went to prep school in England, and spent most of the next 30 years in Cambridge Massachusetts, Berkeley California and Aix-en-Provence France. The accent I was hearing, have always heard when I think of Roger is a remnant of his grade school days in England.

When I saw his face it hadn't changed much save for the grey beard on what I remember to be a boyish clean-shaven undergraduate. Time has been kind to Roger. Our chatter picked up as if it had never stopped. My greatest fear was that we might not have anything to say after 30 years. Roger is an astronomer, a cosmologist, interested in what happened during and just after the big bang.



He's helping to build a [satellite](#) called SNAP that will attempt to map any fine structure in the "Dark Matter," that esoteric stuff that most theories of physics predict make up 90% of the mass in the Universe. Heady thoughts and the kind of things I love to chat about and can with Roger. If there is granularity, a fine structure to Dark Matter, can it form a black

hole? Could we tell the difference between a black hole made of Dark Matter and ordinary matter? What happens at the Schwarzschild radius? Can a black hole made of Dark Matter evaporate the same way an ordinary Black Hole can? Lets put Stephen Hawking on it so he can finally get the Nobel.

Nothing had changed except age but we did not have the luxury of endless chatter. We brought each other up to date the same way we would have if we had not seen each other for a month or two. I got married, had kids. He got married, had kids. The passing of time creates brevity of talk that none of us really like. Can the life of a man, great or not, be summed up in an hour's conversation? Yes, it sometimes has to be and can if you know the back-story.



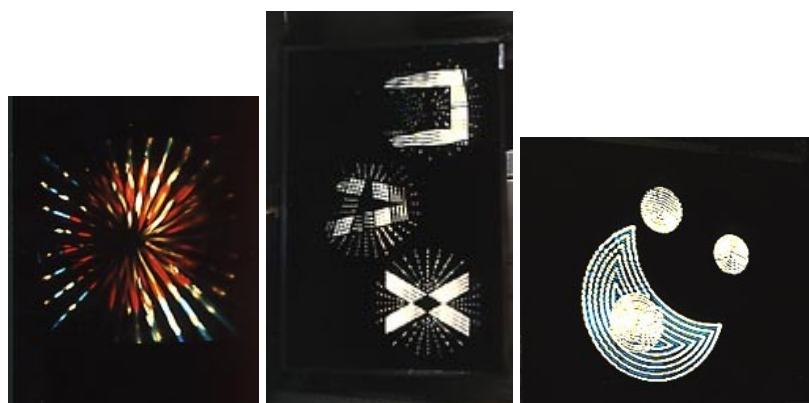
As we finished dinner Roger handed me a small purse made of Provincial cloth, lined with silk and containing two brass skeleton keys. These were the keys to his *pancion* in Paris. We had never discussed the always-touchy subject of rent for the week and I was prepared to pay whatever he asked. Roger is one of those people I implicitly trust. But before I could broach the subject he said, just make a contribution to "Leonardo." "Leonardo" is the reason my trip to Paris is possible and the key to understanding who Roger is.



From Southern California to the suburbs of Paris

During World War Two the American military was interested in perfecting rockets for obvious reasons. Out in the desert of the American southwest there was a group of scientists and engineers interested in exploring space with rockets. It was an uneasy marriage. One of those looking upwards was Frank Malina, a rocket scientist, Rogers's father. He developed a small rocket called a [WAC Corporal](#) that could be flown alone or atop a German V2 with instrumentation designed to explore outer space. America's first space program was born. Frank went on to found the [Jet Propulsion Laboratory](#) at Caltech and the [Aerojet-General Corporation](#), a manufacturer of rocket engines.

But that wasn't enough. Frank Malina walked away from a career building rockets, moved to Paris to become a [kinetic sculptor](#), found a [Salon](#) and raised a family. Along the way Frank Malina founded the magazine "[Leonardo](#)." "Leonardo" is an academic journal devoted to the merger of arts and science.



Its manifesto states:

“Although visual or plastic fine art is one of the oldest fields of human endeavor, there are no journals of international origin that are by and for the artists themselves. There are numerous journals for aestheticians, for historians of art and for the general public. This situation, as regards the failure of artists to write on aspects of their own work, is partly due to the highly individual character of artistic expression, but also because a strong opinion has held sway that artists should leave verbal description and analysis of their works to other professions. When we look at the basic and applied sciences we find that workers in these fields, who are no more skilled than artists with the written word, are expected to write about original aspects of their work. These writings are of benefit to their colleagues, and help to expand and improve man's understanding of nature and to advance the use of this understanding for man's purposes.”

The House at 17 Emile Dunois had been built to be the studio of Portuguese sculptor, Ernesto Canto da Maia in the first decades of the 20th century, during the “Modern Era.” The history of this wonderful house can be read on the website of [Leonardo-on-line](#):

Boulogne sur Seine also known as Boulogne-Billancourt, was, in the beginning of the XXth Century, a booming place. Industrial activity - the Renault factories, LTM telephone equipment, the cinema Studio Billancourt were installed in this socialist municipality. Innovative architectural and urbanistic experiments were being made by Perret, Tony Garnier, Mallet Stevens and Le Corbusier. Paul Marmottan gathered his collections there. Artists like Juan Gris, Vieira da Silva and Arpad Szenes, the historian Salomon Reinach, the art dealer Henry Kahnweiler lived there and the tradition of opening their houses on Sundays, joining together writers, critics, the artistic vanguards was one that Frank Malina would recreate in the 1950's and 60's.

Several sculptors had installed there their ateliers, such as the Russian prince Toubetskoy, Joseph Berard, Landowski. Canto da Maia, Lipchitz, Imenitoff, Max Blondat were some of the younger artists who settled in Boulogne after the war. Canto da Maia lived in Boulogne from 1923, having bought sculptor Landowski's old atelier. Later he built no.17, where he never actually lived, as he separated from his wife Mathilde soon after construction was completed. He remained living in Boulogne until, participating with success in the Parisian artistic scene. In his work, the stylisation and elegance of decorative arts are used to express his particular kind of delicate, melancholic intimacy. Canto da Maia

returned to Portugal in 1938. Matilde and his children remained in the no. 17 until it was sold to Marjorie and Frank in 1954.

Roger grew up in this milieu of artists, writers and, of course, scientists. I asked Roger if he had any inclination to be an artist himself. "No," he laughed, "I spend all my free time associating with artists." Frank Malina's legacy is a vision of the beauty to be found both in the heavens and crafted by the hand of man. It was the passion of Leonardo da Vinci himself. "Leonardo," the magazine, the organization, and the vision has become Rogers's passion. The Universe and the Artist; The Universe as artist; The Artist as creator of the Universe.

We wandered into the rainy night and into a melancholy mood. When you are young everything is possible. We are no longer young; everything is no longer possible. It's hard to look back. As we parted he drifted off into the night and into his own thoughts. I too drifted off into a swirl of memories I had forgotten and rewritten over the years. I prefer the rewrites, the myths, to the original. We all do.