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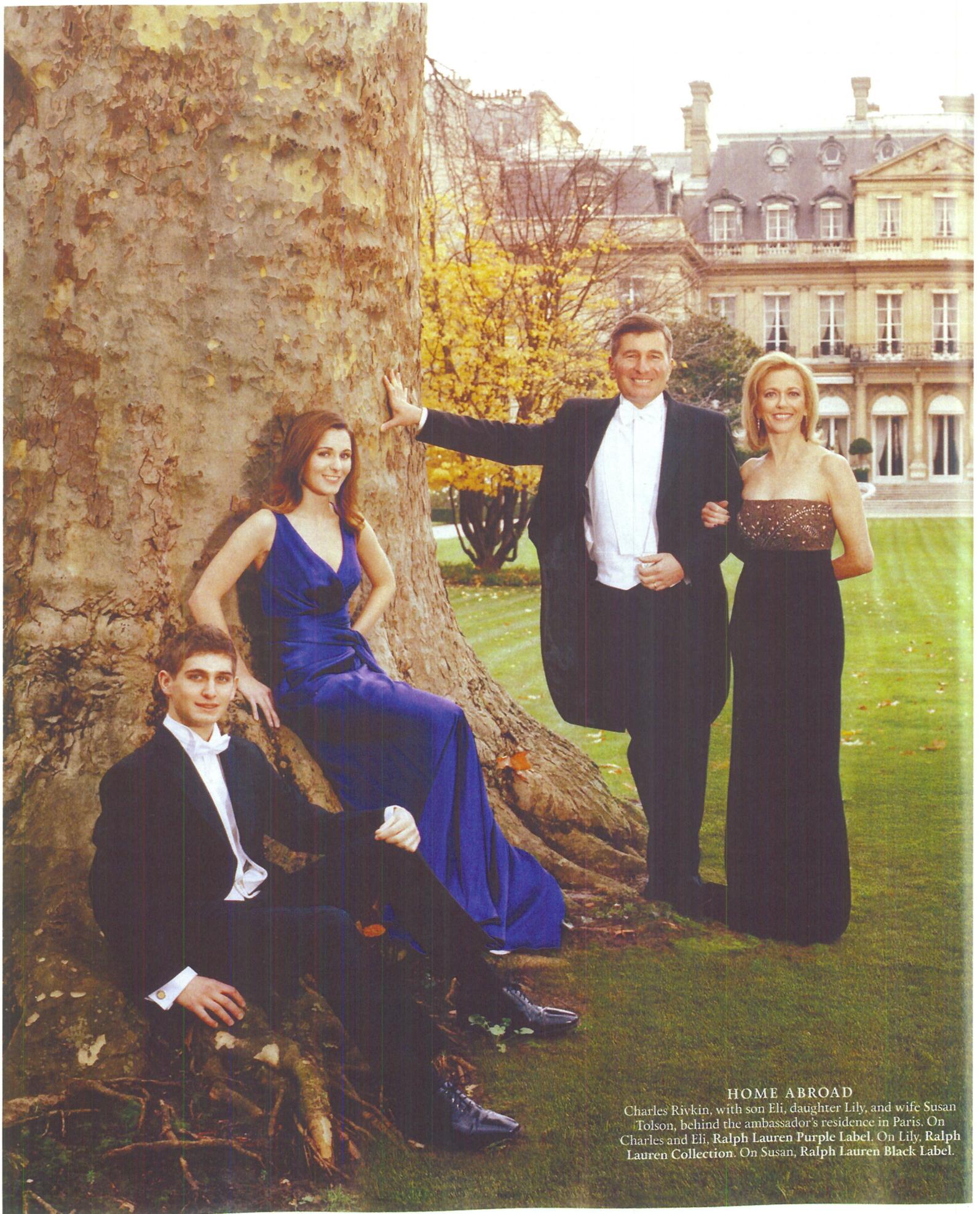
BILLIONAIRES
TO BE!


PLUS:
A PRINCE
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*Inside Harry's
World*

BY SARAH LYALL

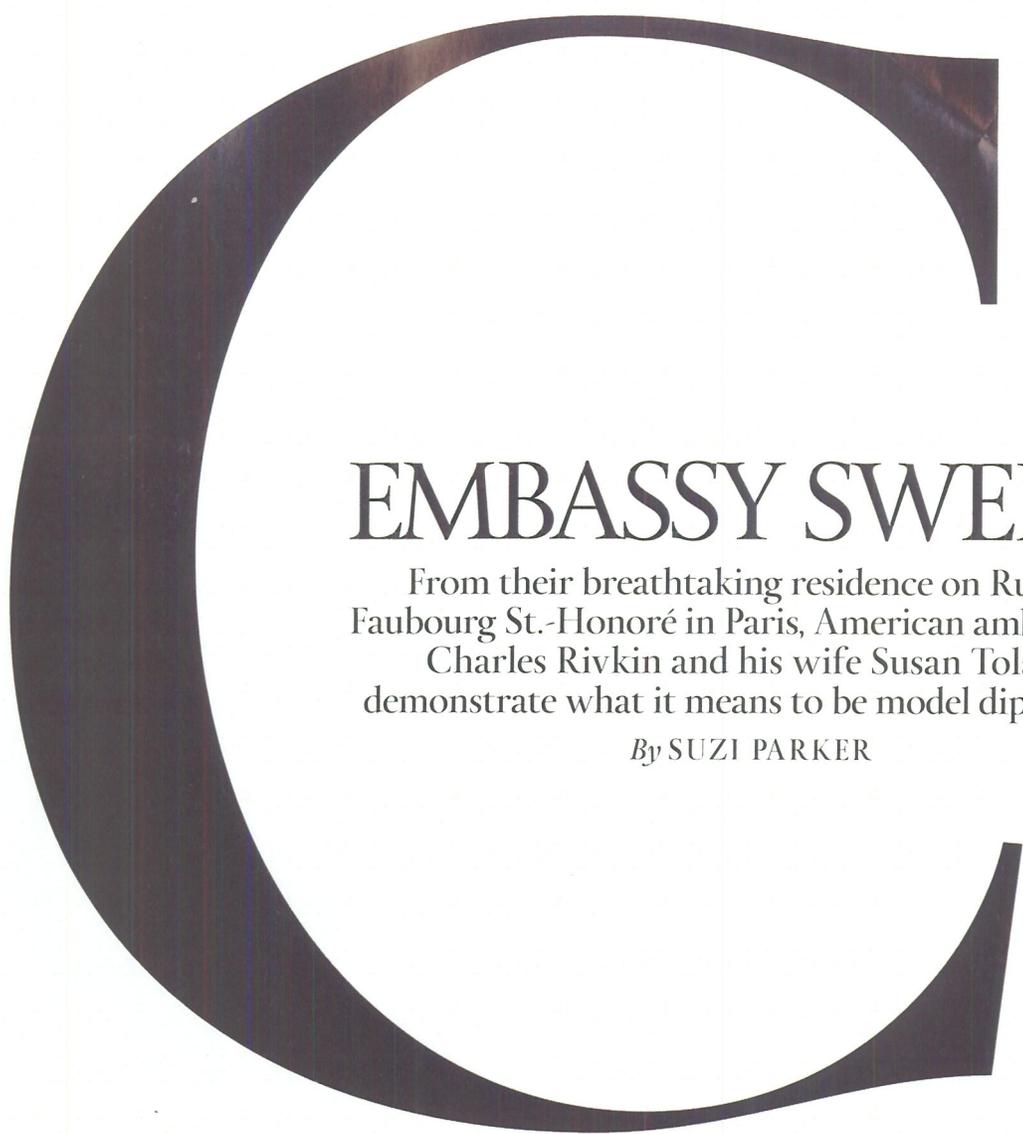
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HOME ABROAD

Charles Rivkin, with son Eli, daughter Lily, and wife Susan Tolson, behind the ambassador's residence in Paris. On Charles and Eli, Ralph Lauren Purple Label. On Lily, Ralph Lauren Collection. On Susan, Ralph Lauren Black Label.



EMBASSY SWEET

From their breathtaking residence on Rue du Faubourg St.-Honoré in Paris, American ambassador Charles Rivkin and his wife Susan Tolson demonstrate what it means to be model diplomats.

By SUZI PARKER

CHARLES RIVKIN WAS STRAPPED INTO A PARACHUTE, and he didn't let strong winds deter him as the helicopter hovered over Normandy. The occasion was a mass jump with the U.S. Army's Golden Knights to commemorate the 68th anniversary of D-Day, last June, and it was the ambassador's first free fall.

Some jumpers landed in trees and were injured, but not Rivkin. Twelve thousand feet later, he came down on France's coast and became the first American ambassador to participate in the yearly event.

"An unforgettable memory, but I think the State Department would prefer that this particular initiative does not become an ambassadorial tradition," Rivkin says.

It was all in a day's work for a man who has seamlessly made the transition from managing Muppets to managing international relations. The former CEO of the Jim Henson Company was appointed United States ambassador to France and Monaco by President

Obama in 2009, at age 47, and since then Rivkin and his wife Susan Tolson have become a dynamic duo at the historic Paris embassy. They are known as impressive hosts and are sought-after guests at Paris's most spectacular events. They are also the parents of two teenagers, Eli and Lily.

"This is the first time in a generation that teenagers have lived at the U.S. ambassador's residence, and it is something that they will never forget," Rivkin says. Their current home, the Hôtel de Pontalba, on the Rue du Faubourg St.-Honoré, is a mansion that was owned by the Rothschild family from 1876 until World War II, when it was occupied by the Nazis. After the

Photograph by JONATHAN BECKER



LIVING HISTORY

Memorabilia from Charles Lindbergh's first transatlantic flight, in 1927, fills the Lindbergh Bedroom. The Pontalba Salon (left), designed by an American Creole named Baroness de Pontalba, who bought the property in 1836, opens into the Samuel Bernard Room (right), which is named for Louis XV's banker and contains four gilded Louis XV chairs.

"I'M FORTUNATE TO SERVE AT A TIME WHEN FAVORABLE VIEWS

war the Rothschilds sold it to the U.S. government. "Susan sometimes describes our house as a combination three-star restaurant, hotel, and conference center. We receive more than 15,000 visitors here each year, and we're hosting or attending an event almost every night."

With his connections to Hollywood, Rivkin has placed American culture at the forefront of his embassy's mission. Last year Warner Bros. installed a digital screening room with 3-D technology in a former ballroom to promote diplomacy via film. Last July, on the eve of a Paris concert by Tony Bennett, Rivkin and Tolson hosted a screening, in honor of the singer, of the documentary film *The Zen of Bennett*. "Films can be some of our best cultural ambassadors," Rivkin says, "and we have established regular screenings at our house of some of Hollywood's best movies as a great way to bridge our two cultures."

Tolson, a former money manager at the Capital Group in Los Angeles, often sits in the front row at Paris's fashion shows, and she and her husband have hosted a dinner for Ralph Lauren, as well as Woody Allen and Clint Eastwood. During Paris Fashion Week in 2011 the couple gave a garden dinner for 200 guests to celebrate Michael Kors's 30th anniversary in fashion, with Mary J. Blige performing.

Rivkin, who speaks fluent French as a result of years spent studying and working in France in his youth, realizes that celebrity can mend fences, too. Early in his tenure he invited Samuel L. Jackson to speak to a group of aspiring film students in the Paris suburb of Bondy, which is home to many African Muslims often overlooked by French politicians. "In many ways, as ambassador you are America's chief salesman, and the ability to speak French and connect with French people from all walks of life is essential," Rivkin says. He admits, though, that his task could be tougher. "I'm fortunate to serve in France at a time when favorable views of America in this country are at an all-time high."

The pair have made youth outreach a main component of their work. Rivkin says his wife is very proud of the organic garden she created at the ambassador's residence, in partnership with a local horticultural school. The project is modeled on Michelle Obama's White House garden. Tolson has also initiated a project, *Maison pour Tous*, that helps at-risk youth.

The U.S. embassy under Rivkin is the first in the Foreign Service to have a fleet of electric cars. "At the embassy we're very conscious of our environmental footprint," he says. And for the first time in the embassy's history, the "Art in the Embassies" program features American



OF AMERICA IN THIS COUNTRY ARE AT AN ALL-TIME HIGH.”

photography, mixing 18th-century architecture with modern art. Rivkin hosted an event last November to honor the centennial of the birth of African-American photographer Gordon Parks.

Many diplomat watchers say that Rivkin, who raised more than \$500,000 for President Obama's reelection campaign, is the embodiment of what an ambassador in a friendly country should be: fluent in the language, savvy about diplomacy, and well connected among the cognoscenti, both diplomatic and indigenous. Which is not surprising, perhaps. His father William R. Rivkin was ambassador to Luxembourg under President Kennedy and also served as ambassador to Senegal and Gambia under Lyndon Johnson. The younger Rivkin says he was “temporarily speechless” when Obama appointed him.

“I was deeply humbled by the president's call, because I knew that it would make me the youngest U.S. ambassador to France in nearly 60 years, at a time when we are working closely with France on all the major international issues of the day,” he says. “Whether it's transferring security to the Afghan people and winding down the NATO mission, saving civilian lives in Libya, or coordinating a firm response to the Iranian nuclear weapons program, France is a vital partner.” ●

THE AMBASSADOR'S ADDRESS BOOK

Charles Rivkin and Susan Tolson's favorite Parisian spots.

La Cigale Récamier, famed for its sweet and savory soufflés.
4 Rue Récamier, 33-1-45-48-86-58

The cozy **Voltaire**, near the Eiffel Tower, which serves some of the city's best traditional French cuisine at intimate tables in a dimly lit, wood-paneled space.
27 Quai Voltaire,
33-1-42-61-17-49

Bofinger, a 145-year-old brasserie serving endless quantities of French onion soup and foie gras, and towers of seafood. It's where François Mitterrand celebrated his election as France's president, in 1981. 5-7 Rue de la Bastille, 33-1-42-72-87-82

L'Avenue, a favorite of the fashion and celebrity crowds, near the Plaza Athénée. 41 Avenue Montaigne, 33-1-40-70-14-91

The **Musée d'Orsay**, where Ambassador Rivkin dedicated the original prototype of the Statue of Liberty last July. 5 Quai Anatole France, 33-1-40-49-48-14

Le Duc, a discreet bistro serving fabulous seafood. 243 Boulevard Raspail, 33-1-43-20-96-30

The walk from the **8th Arrondissement** to the **Marais**, or as far as **Bercy**, where the couple like to admire some of the city's most historic architecture.