April is here and the sun just came out. Of course, it went away before I could finish writing this sentence, as the weather has been nothing but bad news lately.

The good news is that our kitchen, which Eddy, le gendre of our port neighbors, started remodeling for us in October, is finally finished.

The delay wasn't Eddy's fault. He put in a new hardwood floor and installed new cabinets and counter tops just as he promised, and we have been enjoying our new kitchen for months. But it was still an unfinished project because, after Eddy finish his work, we decided that we needed a hood over the stove. Having an extractor installed sounded simple, but this is one of the things that make living on a boat so "interesting". With our low ceilings, most extractor fans made for houses just wouldn't work, and we needed to find a solution.

Shopping for something unusual like une hotte in Paris, means that you discover new neighborhoods, and learn new French words at the same time. We spent several days wandering in an out of shops, asking questions and looking at options. We were losing hope, when one day, while we were out doing another errand, we stopped in at Cap Bastille, a kitchen store on rue Lacuée, just across from the port. There we met François, who immediately took an interest in our project. Whereas everyone else that we questioned in other kitchen stores was polite, no one jumped right on the problem like François did; he was bound and determined to find a solution for us.

He walked back to the boat with us to take measurements in the kitchen, and he climbed up on the front deck to look at the kitchen roof to see how the exhaust pipe should be placed to protect our air draft. He took lots of notes, and then shook our hands with a promise to call us as soon as he had found something for us.
He called a week or so later to say that he had found just the right product, and he came by the boat with the man who would be doing the installation. They had a plan that would guard our air draft and make la hotte flush with the ceiling. Just one small problem. La hotte itself only cost a bit over 200 euros, but with the installation, le devis came to over 3000 euros. After we recovered from the shock and explained how many dollars that would be for us right now, François said that he could sell us la hotte, and that we would just need to find someone else who could figure out how to do the job in a way that would be less expensive. We needed someone who understood boats.

We looked at each other with knowing smiles, and reading each others minds, we knew that the solution to our problem was to call on Super Henk.

Henk Hýdra is Dutch, has built 35 barges himself, and even though he may look mild mannered in this photo, he is an action hero. When barge owners have a problem that they just can't solve, they call on Henk.

Henk has been trying to retire for the last five years, but boaters keep finding jobs that only he can do. He sold his shipyard, and he and his wife Jacqueline, who is an artist, live on the last barge that he built, a 22 meter masterpiece that other boaters have labeled a "one meter" barge. (That means that Henk's barge is so perfect that even when you are standing just one meter away, you don't see any flaws.) Henk's reputation proceeds him wherever he travels, and in the floating village of barge owners, that means that he is often called on to solve an unsolvable problem. Because Henk and Jacqueline are as nice as they are talented, they made a detour to come to the Paris-Arsenal on their trip from Roanne to Amsterdam, just to help us.

The Seine was flowing so fast with all of the recent rain, that even though Henk and Jacqueline said that they would arrive at 11 on Sunday, they called us at 9am to say that they were already in the Arsenal lock. It must have been a wild ride to get them from St. Mammes to Paris so quickly, but we weren't too surprised because, superheros know how to fly.

When Henk works for you, he shows up for work at 9 sharp dressed in his special blue jump
suit, takes a half hour for lunch, and finishes at 4pm. Like other superheroes, he attacks the job to be done forcefully. He moves at the speed of light, bends steel, and with his amazing skills, he creates something out of nothing. People who watch Henk in action can only stand there bo uche bée.

Now that Henk has come to our rescue, we no longer have to open the doors and windows everytime we want to grill something on the stove. Thank you Super Henk.