SPECIAL 50TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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THE PARIS METRO

IS THIS STILL THE PARIS WE LOVED?

THE PARIS METRO

PUBLISHED EVERY FIFTY YEARS

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THE PARIS METRO was more than just a magazine. It was a complete living guide to Paris. Thank you for helping us celebrate our 50th anniversary.

BEHIND THE LINES

by Harry Stein

To Tom Moore — and his insane dream

I met Tom Moore in New York in early 1974, the day after joining the staff of a magazine called *New Times.* Tom had been there since its launch several months earlier, and among his tasks was producing the short news bits up front – a section that in most publications consists of little more than filler. Which is what I expected when, flipping through the forthcoming issue, I was drawn to a brief item about a special congressional appropriation being pushed by the White House to cover plastic surgery for soldiers grievously wounded in Vietnam. Reading the title Tom had put on it – "NIXON SAVES FACE" – I cracked up.

We were fast friends from that day on.

Tom would be *The Metro's* founder and its heart and soul, and we both would be a lot happier if he were writing this – especially him, since he died a year and a half ago.

So take the following as a joint celebration of the man and the magazine – even the parts about how, in our immense stupidity, we allowed what should have been a roaring success today enjoying a prosperous middle age, to instead die in the crib.

Would Tom object to that harsh characterization? Let's put it this way: Among the things in which we prided ourselves, and that from the first made *The Paris Metro* stand out in a local media environment marked by timidity and self-censorship, was that we'd run anything, no matter how tough on the locals or our fellow Anglophones or ourselves, if it was smart or funny enough, and especially if it was true. Where, even all these years later, *The New York Times* buries letters critical of its coverage, Tom always made sure the ones that savaged us ran first.

Some will already be familiar with the story of *The Metro's* brief life from the scribblings produced for the book memorializing the last reunion, among other accounts from us oldsters living on the fumes of past glories. So herein the shorthand version.

Our tale began in those *New Times* offices. During our time there Tom and I must have done okay work, because they kept giving both of us more responsibility and better titles, and even a little more money, instead of firing us for being so blithely indifferent to rules and practices. There was, for instance, the bumper pool table we installed in the back storage room, and for a month or so enjoyed over cigars, indifferent to the simmering fury of both our editor and the office manager; and once it mysteriously disappeared, there was the dartboard we installed in its place in the office proper, forcing the editor on the other side of the wall to endure a constant plink, plink, plink throughout the day.

Often over lunch during this period we would discuss a shared dream – starting a magazine in Paris. I'd earlier spent a year freelancing in Paris, and Tom had a live-in French girlfriend, and we were both ardent Francophiles. Still, at least for me, it always seemed a pipe dream, to be taken no more than half seriously. So I was gobsmacked when one morning Tom walked into the office, announced that he was getting a windfall for an article he'd co-written that was to be made into a film – soon to be called *Dog Day Afternoon* – and that he and Anne-Marie were taking off for Paris.

A year or so later, when I visited him there, the girlfriend was history, but he had some news. "Remember that magazine idea?"

"What'll you do for money?" I remember asking.

"We'll start with what I have left, and take it from there," he replied, with insane confidence.

Which is of course what happened. Tom set to work, and when I returned a month or so later to help out with editorial, he already had a preliminary design, had arranged for a fabulous office in the Marais at minimal cost, and had the name – *The Metro* – after the café across the square from his living room window.

The next couple of months were the journalism equivalent of a Mickey Rooney/Judy Garland picture. "New English language publication in Paris seeks writers," read the short and sweet ad in the *International Herald Tribune.* It included Tom's home phone number, and the calls started around 7 a.m., rousing me from a deep sleep on his living room couch, and continued through the next couple of days and nights. We ended up scheduling 10-minute interviews, two at a time, with me doing one in the living room while Tom did another in the dining room.

Most of those who came by were young, including college students spending a semester abroad, the rest being a motley assortment of expatriates and French people wanting to try their hand at English. Then, too, there was the guy in his mid-60s who, identifying himself as The Boulevardier, our future society columnist, swooped into the room, black opera cape flying dramatically behind, declaiming in a thick Transylvanian accent, "You must hire The Boulevardier, you MUST!"

We asked each would-be contributor what it was in Paris that he or she might be interested in writing about, made the assignment, then moved on to the next, figuring that if even a quarter of the pieces proved salvageable, we'd have enough material to keep us going for months.

In fact, only a tiny number of the promised pieces materialized – and most of those on a single theme. When we ran out of material after the first two issues, we threw them all into the third, the front page screaming "SEX IN PARIS."

Who knew it would brand us as a porno rag and all but kill advertising for six months?

Well, actually, *we* should have known.

Then, again, we were so ignorant about advertising that, swear to God, it hadn't even occurred to us that we should try to sell some ads until a few weeks before the launch. At which point we hired three comely young women, an American expat, a French architecture student and a Brit (whom Tom would not allow me to meet), and instructed them to go to restaurants door-to-door seeking ads; not, mind you, for multiple issues, but just for the first.

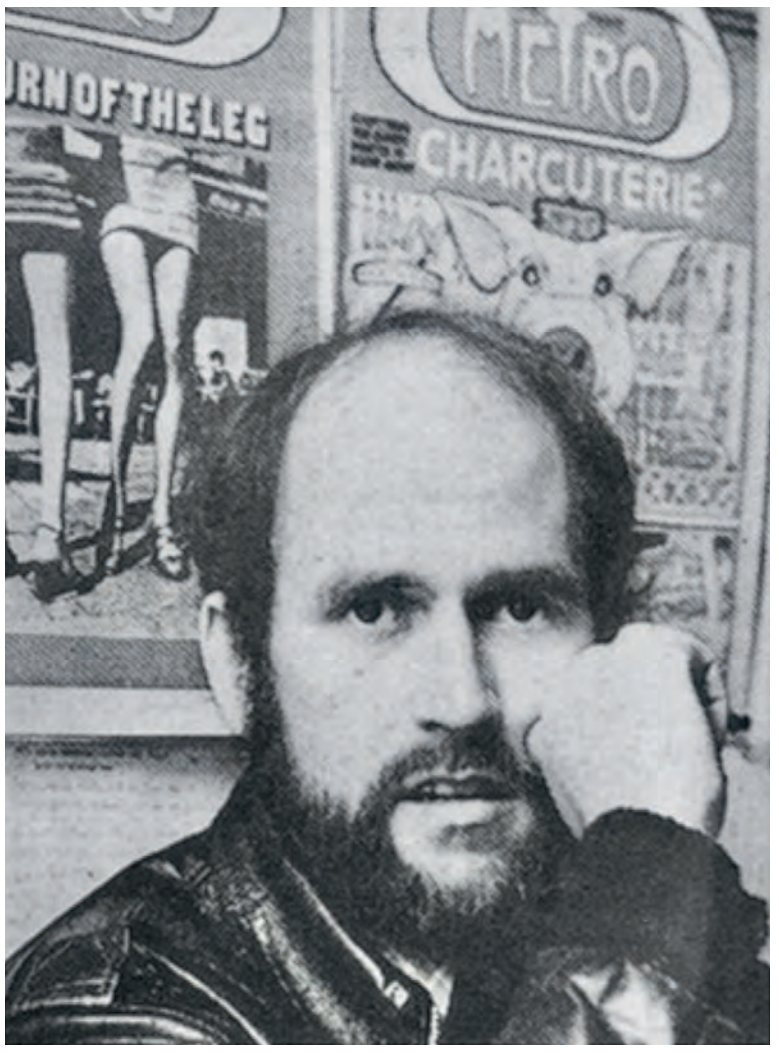
And we were equally clueless about promotion and marketing and everything else that fell under the general rubric "business." Joel Stratte-McClure, an old journalism school pal of mine who had just moved to Paris from South Africa, was and remains a gifted writer, but he had no more experience on the business side than we did, and he still dines out on the story of how he got hired to take charge of all that.

"Do you balance your checkbook?" Tom offered one afternoon, after a bout of serious drinking.

"Of course," Joel replied, "I'm a fanatic about it."

"Would you like to be publisher?"

It probably also bears mentioning that Joel, yet to embark on his now forty-plus years of sobriety, was a notorious wild man, much given to Hunter Thompson-like histrionic displays that tended to alarm as many French business executives as they amused.



> That we were not insiders — in fact hardly knew the city at all — bothered us not in the least.

Much later it occurred to me, I told him recently, that if we'd been smart we'd have realized there was a more promising candidate for the job under our collective nose – a guy who'd been a fellow junior editor with Tom and me at *New Times.* He'd had the good sense to quit journalism to pursue a business career, and was so successful at it that he ended up single-handedly financing the New York City Ballet. "Jesus," Joel has repeatedly exclaimed to me since, "why didn't we hire Peter Joseph?!!!"

Still, pretty much from the first, as an editorial product the magazine was what we'd hoped it would be, covering the town in a knowing, good humored, irreverent, insider sort of way.

That in fact we were not insiders, indeed hardly knew the city at all, bothered us not in the least; and more to the point, it seemed not to bother readers, who as time went on increasingly included locals, some of whom scarcely spoke English, but, this being Paris, wanted to be seen walking around with it.

Soon enough even the business side seemed in good shape, as an assortment of those with talent and experience in those mysterious arts simply materialized at the office and were signed up.

By six or eight months in, certainly after a year, everything was looking rosy. If a hawker showed up with a new issue at Joe Allen or La Coupole or any of a dozen other hot spots, he'd sell out in minutes. Jean Seberg, in *Breathless* mode, pitched us in print ads, her *Herald Tribune* T-shirt exchanged for one with *Paris Metro* across the front; JFK's press secretary Pierre Salinger, who was writing on the political scene in French for *L'Express,* signed on to write (the truth) in English for us; if you went to a party, Helmut Newton was liable to sidle over and ask if he might shoot a cover. (And he did.)

Perhaps most telling, banks and French-language publications were throwing money at us, wanting to be associated with whatever they thought we had. For our part, we took it, and though we were still far from profitable and not considering the matter of repayment, used it to double the magazine's size.

In fact, in the immensity of our delusion, we were already plotting the next steps. Metro Radio! Metro TV! *The Rome Metro.*

The Greeks called it hubris. The English-to-French translator on my phone has it, inexactly I think, as *orgueil.* Either way, it got us, big time. Little more than a year later, to general surprise, *The Metro* was kaput.

Fittingly, the very day we went under, a $40,000 photocomposition machine was delivered to the office (that's $193,078.29 today, I'm depressed anew to discover).

What was *The Metro's* legacy?

Hard to say. Did it change the media landscape in Paris? Maybe a little. I know for a fact there were French journalists encouraged by its example to be a bit more daring, and a little less tight-assed. Either way, as *The Paris Review* put it not long ago, in one of the many media appreciations over the years that continue to prove the point, "its legend has a long afterlife."

Indeed, it's hardly for nothing that half a century on – the distance from the Paris of Hemingway and Fitzgerald to that of *The Metro's* founding – so many of us who were part of it have traveled vast distances to commemorate that event. Every writer herein contributed to the magazine in its brief, luminous heyday, and whatever we've done since, it remains the time in our lives when we felt most keenly alive. That is Tom Moore's enduring gift to us. If he hadn't been the bold visionary he was, and, yes, so blithely indifferent to the odds, *The Metro* never would have happened. As it was, the rest of us got to hitch a ride on his lunatic dream. ■

Paris was Last Week

by Harry Stein

Back When We Had to Ask: What's SNL?

Richard Erickson

Almost exactly fifty years ago, I wrote a piece in this space entitled "Who Is Tony Scott?" I was a big baseball fan, and it dealt with the frustration of trying to keep up with the game from afar via the minuscule agate line scores in the *International Herald Tribune.* All I knew of this Tony Scott was that his name seemed to show up in that tiny print every other day. Was he a new Hank Aaron or just another bum briefly on a tear? Enquiring minds – in this case, *esprits curieux* – wanted to know.

As I also wanted to know what the big deal was about this new show "Saturday Night Live?" And why everyone who'd voted for Jimmy Carter suddenly couldn't stand the guy?

That's what it meant to be an American living in Paris then – being cut off from all the day-to-day stuff that adds up to a culture, and playing by the customs, understandings and norms of a vastly different one. You weren't in Kansas anymore – or even New York. While we expats could never presume to pass as French – "the French won't let you," as Jean Seberg wryly put it to me in *The Metro's* very first issue – we could, if our French was passable, at least begin to feel like we sort of belonged. (In my case, while my accent was good enough that I might actually be taken as fluent for a sentence or two, until I started groping for a word, usually a verb, at which point I was revealed, in the words of a French friend, as "probably a mental deficient.")

Still, I loved being part of this different world. I shopped street markets with the locals, and developed a taste for the *lapin à la moutarde* at the bistro down the street. I zipped around town on my mobylette, my man-purse (the one I'd gotten to avoid creating a bulge in my absurdly tight French jeans) slung across my chest. I loved all of it, loved it because it was all so…alien.

I even loved the parts of life that were objectively pretty crummy. How a storekeeper could greet a simple request for directions with – all quotations guaranteed verbatim – *"Ce n'est pas un service d'information, monsieur!"* How tough it could be to get a toilet or (if you were lucky enough to have one) a telephone fixed. My friend Craig, a fellow editor, had a Datsun that needed what seemed a routine repair, but after repeated assurances the car would be ready in a couple of days, the guy at the garage gruffly informed him, *"Il faut l'envoyer au Japon."*

Now? In all sorts of ways you may as well still be in the States. The obvious shorthand is McDonald's, its greasy wrappers littering the sidewalks before what used to be cafés or *pâtisseries.*

But what's truly startling to the newly arrived visitor from times past (even more than the space age appliances in the average kitchen), are the changes in Parisians themselves. French friends who used to sneer at the sight of an American jogging, blowing out their lips in that uniquely gallic expression of dismissive contempt, now have adult children who rush to early morning aerobics classes, gulping down energy drinks as they go. Stranger still, in a town where once relatively few spoke English – or, if even they did, often resented being expected to – these days everyone under thirty not only speaks it fluently, but is ready to try it out on you, the Académie Française be damned!

Blame it, like almost everything else, good and bad, on social media, with its awesome power to obliterate cultural distinctions, and throw in WhatsApp, which has done the same to the concept of long distance. The result? Today's Parisian young obsess over Taylor Swift, Bad Bunny and Stray Kids (the Korean boy band – look it up; I did), same as their contemporaries from Pittsburgh to Phnom Penh, and chances are they've seen more Simpsons episodes than you, and have been to at least one of the twelve Disneylands.

Which gives rise to a thought. Why not a theme park, more or less akin to the faux charmingly rustic village Marie Antoinette created at Versailles, for those of us nostalgic for the old Paris? You'd enter a Left Bank street to the sight of spindly-legged seven-year olds, backs bent under their 80-pound book bags, trudging up a steep cobblestone hill; then step into a café full of intensely self-serious French intellectuals holding forth on Jerry Lewis's genius versus Fernandel's. Sickened by the overpowering stink of stale Gitanes, you'd make your way down the spiral staircase to the hole in the floor called the Turkish toilet. But the highlight of the experience would be the phone booth just outside where, feeding in a five franc piece every ten seconds, you could shout to your friend back in the world you'd left behind: "No, no, never mind Carter! Quick, just tell me: Who the hell is Tony Scott?" ■

The Chilling Gaze of the French Snob

by Alessandra Stanley

Over dinner one night, the first Frenchman I dated in Paris asked if I was familiar with Céline. I squealed as a conga line of handbags danced in my head.

He looked at me pityingly. "I refer, of course, to the novelist, Louis-Ferdinand Céline," he said. Drawing from his briefcase his own battered Gallimard edition of *Voyage au bout de la nuit,* he instructed me to read it promptly and return it. We broke up soon after. I never finished the novel, but I still have his copy.

I should note – though this is probably already obvious to those who have spent any time in Paris – that said boyfriend was a product of one of the highly selective *grandes écoles* so revered by the French. He was so superior he managed to make me feel like a convenience store cashier from Booneville, Arkansas, even though he was 30, unemployed and living in a fifth-floor attic maid's room above his mother's apartment in the 16th.

Every nation has its own kind of snobbery, and in France education has long been the most brutal class signifier. While some Americans might revere the Ivy League, and Brits feel sorry for people who didn't go to Oxford or Cambridge, French snobbery isn't just about where you went to school, but how well you did once you got there. And afterward you're allowed to never stop reminding people that you know more than they do.

The French Revolution sought to uproot class distinctions by wiping out most of the aristocracy, and whoops, that failed. You can find French people today whose titles date back to the *ancien régime,* with their own codes, mores and vacation spots. And France also has its fair share of billionaires, even if they don't flaunt their money in any way near the extravagant follies of Jeff Bezos or Larry Ellison. (There is a Bernard Arnault space program?)

But neither the grandees nor the super wealthy have the iron grip on the nation's imagination of the educated elite. And it has been this way since Napoleon, that social zero from Corsica, used education to level the playing fields of privilege.

Quite simply, the French don't need a House of Lords, or a Somerset Club of Boston – they have the Académie Française.

As a young writer for *The Paris Metro,* the most crushing put-downs I received came from Frenchmen who could not resist pointing out my ignorance or my inappropriate enthusiasms. It turns out that loving middlebrow books, movies or art is even worse than knowing nothing at all.

In some ways France today is much more open and democratic than it was back then – it's multicultural, the shopkeepers and waiters speak English,

On the Money

by Psmith

New Math: It Cost FF1, Now It's €1

Remember the French franc?

In June 1976 one franc would get you a baguette at the *boulangerie,* an expresso at a café counter, a daily newspaper, a public telephone call, a game of pinball, access to a toilet or five Carambar Caramel candies.

Not anymore.

Today many daily necessities that in 1976 cost one French franc, or one hundred French francs, cost at least one euro, or one hundred euros.

WTF's going on?

Recalling that a euro was worth precisely 6.55957 francs when the currency was introduced over a quarter century ago, does it make any cents that a one-franc baguette should now cost at least one euro, that those five Carambars cost one euro or that a movie that cost 12 francs now goes for at least 12 euros?

Unfortunately it does.

That's because fifty years of inflation, which has multiplied prices by between six or seven times, have only recently (the actual date was July 31, 2025) cancelled out the currency conversion. If this is hard to grasp, the price for a baguette in French francs today would be between six and seven francs.

Gulp! Or choke rather.

Naturally there are always exceptions because not every purchasable product has tracked the franc/euro conversion rate nor the impact of inflation. Real estate, university tuition and concert tickets are off the charts, while air travel, international telephone calls, clothing and electronics are cheaper.

What's going to happen in the future? You can be sure that the "parity" between the franc and the euro isn't going to last. Soon almost everything will cost much more in euros than it once did francs.

But some prediction markets are taking bets that the European Union will fall apart and that countries will return to their old currencies. A "New French Franc" would now be worth 6.55957 euros. And a baguette would once again cost one French Franc.

Plus ça change….

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The Paris Metro was always attuned to currency fluctuations back in the day, because most of the staff were Americans. An article in our third issue read: "A dollar is a dollar – except when you try to change it for francs. The rate of exchange fluctuates from day to day and traveler's checks [remember those?] usually sell for more francs than cash. Even identical checks fetch varying prices at different *bureaux de change.* Recently *The Metro* found a French bank that would buy a dollar for 4.73 francs while a hotel cashier would pay only 4.60. Thirteen centimes don't go very far, but when you come to Paris with a million dollars you can save 130,000 francs — about $28,000 — by shopping at the right bank."

Naturally some people still have to cope with changing dollars to euros. Psmith, a self-admitted parity enthusiast, would prefer that the currencies had the same value, though that has only occurred a few times during the past quarter century. The most recent parity with the dollar was in mid-2022. Otherwise the euro has usually traded well above the dollar.

What's a dollar-based person supposed to do?

This might sound a bit anal but Psmith, knowing the history of the currency, went wild during the summer of 2022 and changed enough dollars to buy a few baguettes a day until the end of his life.

Speaking of parity, prices in the U.S. are currently very similar to those in Paris, which used to be considered an expensive city. In fact, many daily necessities now cost more in the U.S. as Psmith learned when he threw down a $10 bill, without a tip, for a "Dirty Chai" in rural Redding, California. It costs only €6.20 (just over $7) at the chic and hip Certified Café in the Beaupassage gastronomy venue off Boulevard Raspail.

***

And speaking of having enough euros for a baguette a day until his death, a local investment opportunity that Psmith enthusiastically endorses is the lottery that offers Paris residents an opportunity to be buried in a local cemetery – think Père Lachaise next to Jim Morrison or Montparnasse next to Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir.

An abandoned heritage grave will be his if Psmith wins the lottery and agrees to pay restoration costs, sign a lease for the plot and fork over €4,000 for his tombstone. He entered the lottery, held last January, which awarded ten plots in three main cemeteries, but hasn't yet heard from either Paris officials or the Grim Reaper.

He's dying for another chance and can't wait to see if the new mayor of Paris, Emmanuel Grégoire, will keep or kill the lottery.

Why?

Because, as Oscar Wilde remarked, "When good Americans die, they go to Paris."

Even if the euro has replaced the franc. Or vice versa. ■

> A baguette today will cost you nearly seven times what it used to.

Richard Erickson

happily, and some strangers will even address you in the familiar *"tu",* something which 50 years ago was unthinkable anywhere but in monasteries and certain boxing gyms. One of my best friends, who came from what the French call a "good family," was brought up calling even her parents *"vous."*

Then again, to the extent it was ever gone, elitism made a lasting comeback, not so much by the well born as by the properly well educated and suitably well read.

And it's the attitude they bring to every encounter, within France or not.

Decades after my early years in Paris, I invited a young French cultural attaché in New York to dinner, and couldn't help raving about a new historical novel, *Au revoir là-haut,* by Pierre Lemaitre. The more I gushed, the more he looked down at his feet. Finally, I saw him exchange a knowing smile with his wife, and was crushed to realize that Lemaitre, who is also a very popular writer of crime thrillers, was not what anyone who hoped to pass for educated was *supposed* to be reading, let alone extolling.

It's true that there is much to admire in the French educational system. Even now, with people *"tutoyer*-ing" left and right, educational standards have never wavered. Good French *lycées* are more rigorous and demanding than even the best American prep schools, and competition to get into one of the top universities is merit based: French students don't need to row crew or write a personal essay about building wells in Haiti to get into a top school. They do have to take a test that is so academically arduous it can take three years of preparation to pass.

Nor is even the instinctive formality of former times, to the extent it endures, necessarily a bad thing. For instance, it is still considered bad manners – and very American – to ask strangers what they do for a living. It's even more of a gaffe to mention your own job. So dinner party conversation among the suitably well educated tends to flit around politics, culture and gossip, and you can get to dessert and brandy without any idea if the man on your left is a finance minister or a broom salesman.

But, inevitably, you will know just how much he admires/despises the writings of Michel Houellebecq.

Three years ago, I returned to Paris on a mission to recruit new writers for *Air Mail,* the online weekly I edited alongside Graydon Carter, who founded *Air Mail* after his legendary stint as editor of *Vanity Fair.* (Graydon, I learned recently, had applied to work at *The Paris Metro* after it started, but balked at the starting salary of zero.)

I invited a group of aspiring writers to dinner and sat next to one 20-something freelance writer covering European affairs. Certain the boy felt intimidated and hoping to set him at ease, I made some bland comment about strikes in Paris. *"Vous avez tort,"* he replied tartly. ("You are wrong.") I wasn't sure I heard him right, but I had a sickening feeling I had just been snubbed. Again.

He swiveled to the person on his right, then shortly after turned to me. *"Quoique vos remarques soient erronées et reflètent une perspective typiquement américaine,"* he said kindly, *"elles ne manquent pas totalement de pertinence."* ("Even though what you said was wrong and typically American, your argument is not entirely without merit.")

I blame myself and a *Night Porter*-ish compulsion to relive past humiliations. If I wanted to feel good about myself, I should have visited Canada. ■

6

Peter Turnley

Paris, Always and Forever

by Roger Cohen

New York hurtles into the day, Paris rues the dawn. The city, awakening with reluctance, is quiet enough for the trundling of a single suitcase to be heard. A shutter creaks open. High heels clack as a nightlong reveler heads home. The Seine is a mirror of stillness. The Île de la Cité points its willowed prow westward toward the Tuileries, where dew has settled in the supple folds of the backs of Aristide Malliol's bronze nudes. Her hair tied back, her sculpted form a miracle of sensual animation, *L'Été,* as one of the works is named, seems to breathe in time to a fading carillon of church bells. Come, she murmurs, let me show you the city's gifts of light and shadow and silence.

I head eastward, crossing to the Left Bank on the Pont du Carrousel, a broadbridge of subtle fulcrum. It's too early for the lingering lovers who favor this spot. I look back at the three keyhole entrances to the courtyard of the Louvre, where Emmanuel Macron, betraying his regal self-regard, chose to be elevated to the presidency in 2017. On the Louvre's facade there is a relief of a naked rider. Perhaps it is the young Napoleon III, perhaps Apollo, on a winged horse. Whoever it may be, his impossible gravity-defying pose puts earthly logic in its place. Search in vain for the source of the harmony of Paris. It is similarly mysterious. It cannot be pinpointed, it can induce vertigo. Such is the nature of magic. The city is grandeur and beauty; it is consolation for the weary, to whom it whispers that this too shall pass.

A ramp of uneven cobblestones leads down to the river bank. The reflection of the dome of the Académie Française, home to the 40 "immortals" who are the the official guardians of the French language in its losing battle against "brainless Globish," shimmers in the Seine's looking glass. The equally immortal *Paris Metro* magazine, which summons me now a half-century after its founding, held "brainless Globish" in even more withering contempt than the Académie. *Metro's* thing was elegant irreverence and taboo-toppling reportage hammered out, with perfect cadence, in some of the most irrefutable and irresistible declarative sentences the English language has ever known.

But where the hell did all that wondrous wordsmithing occur? Where was the seat of *le magazine hot,* whose explosion of creativity unsettled and captivated 1970s Paris? Go east, always east, murmurs Malliol's muse.

Familiar wafts of acrid urinous air announce the homeless under the Pont Saint-Michel. Their numbers mount lest anyone think the gilded nymphs and cherubs of manicured Paris do not have an underside. I look up at Notre-Dame de Paris and Victor Hugo's "nothing is more imminent than the impossible" comes to mind: The cathedral in flames, the delicate spire toppling into an inferno of 800-year-old beams, the nation's soul shattered. That was 2019. The spire is back, restoration almost complete. A single crane still extends an outsized metallic arm. The artisans of France have done the work instilled through generations. Democracy is fragile like that spire; it is also resilient.

Under the Petit-Pont-Cardinal-Lustiger, archbishop of Paris for more than two decades and a Jewish Pope manqué (he was born Aron Lustiger), I start to wonder. Where am I? I climb the stairs back to the street and soon find myself at the Pont de la Tournelle gazing at Paul Landowski's statue of Sainte Geneviève, the patron saint and protectress of Paris. Her elongated form reminds me of the elongated T in the logo of *Paris Metro,* but then I have *Metro* on the brain. After all, it changed my life.

Landowski hated the placement of the statue, arguing that it should face West toward Notre Dame, not East toward the glories of the Porte de Bercy. The architects would have none of this, arguing that as protectress of Paris she had to look East, the perennial source of danger to the Gauls since the days of Attila the Hun. Landowski was so furious he did not attend the inauguration of the bridge in 1928.

It must be said that the architects had a point, as the view from the bridge to the tip of the Île de la Cité confirms. Here, the Memorial to the Martyrs of the Deportation during World War II stands. Among the deported were the 76,000 Jews delivered by the collaborationist Vichy regime to the Nazis and to their camps dedicated to industrialized mass murder. For a half-century France chose to believe that this crime was the work of some alien incarnation of itself, whereas its true being resided in the resistance led by General Charles de Gaulle, who would march with the Allies into a liberated Paris in August 1944. Jacques Chirac finally buried this tenacious myth in 1995: Vichy was France, disfigured and defiled and desecrated and defeated, but still France. This is why the now plausible election of Marine Le Pen or another far-right candidate to the presidency in 2027 would so dishonor the Republic. Le Pen's father's roots lay in the fascism and anti-semitism of Vichy; no makeover of the National Rally, formerly the National Front, can efface this stain.

De Gaulle bridled at postwar American dominance, developing France's own nuclear deterrent and demanding that U.S. forces leave the country. This, in 1967, provoked Dean Rusk, then Secretary of State, to the famous, perhaps apocryphal, retort: "Does that include the dead Americans in the military cemeteries?" Such flare-ups in relations between the two republics, the oldest of allies, both born of revolutions and both making claims for the universality of their virtue, are commonplace. Perhaps the world is too small for two nations that see themselves as unique beacons of liberty. Still, the view is now widespread in France that Trump's America, with its trademark genius, has solved this problem by switching its allegiance to the "side of the tyrants," as Raphaël Glucksmann, a center-left presidential candidate, put it recently.

I am lost. I have overshot eastward, or so I am advised by the Muse of my morning, and head northwest toward the Right Bank via the Pont Marie. The first stone of the bridge, a plaque advises, was laid in 1614. Sunlight filters through the leaves of plane trees, falls on a limestone wall. The City of Light is also the city of etched shadows ever redrawing their lines.

How the hell, I abruptly wonder, did all those heedless *Paris Metro* Americans do it? How did they invade Paris in 1976 and not become hated symbols of U.S. imperialism, per Gaullist doctrine, but rather the risqué darlings of the city, the in-crowd with a finger on the pulse of Paris, "the center of a Parisian zeitgeist," as Adrienne Raphael put it in *The Paris Review?* A dose of sex, a dose of disco, a dose of shoe-leather investigative doggedness, and a heavy dose of temerity forged the magazine, you might say, but no, it was deeper and simpler than that. To the quintessentially French *"Non, pas possible," Metro* answered with a can-do American *"Sure."*

Aristide Maillol's L'Été at the Tuileries. Come, she murmurs, let me show you the city.

Anything was possible, even hiring me for Chrissake, a lost early twenty-something wannabe with zero journalistic experience. What did eventually prove impossible was to run a publication whose storytelling ambition exceeded bean-counter husbandry. The money ran out after 2-1/2 years and *The Paris Metro* passed into legend.

Oh, they had my number, alright. Joel and Tina and Tom and Harry and Elaine and Joan and the whole crew, they were onto me. I'd hardly published anything – well, a look at a hot disco in Montreuil called "La Main Bleue," a piece on the death of the "rat lady of the 14th" and a bizarre short story called "A Slit Skirt" – when they commissioned a piece on the best bars in Paris and introduced me to readers as someone with a "Jekyll/Hyde approach." (I had never heard this before but I have heard it since.) This, they assured readers, suggested I would "turn up not just a list of hours and drinks, but a look at who and where the Night People are and the cosmological implications of the poses they assume."

One thing about *Metro* was that assignments were never ambitious or demanding. After the bars and cosmology came a request to write about a minor urban project – the redevelopment of the hole in the heart of Paris where the Les Halles market had once stood – and treat it as a *metaphor for Parisian flux.*

Where am I? This city and memory form a giddying potion. Ah, yes, the café Les Philosophes on the Rue Vieille du Temple. The Philosophers! I am getting closer to the *Metro* quarter (the magazine's location comes to me at last) in the old Jewish district of the Marais. It is invaded now by guides with little flags and their large obedient tourist flocks. The Marais has become chic, full of young women taking pouting selfies or glancing to check their profiles in polished boutique windows. The Jo Goldenberg Jewish deli is gone, alas, replaced by falafel outlets and Lululemon and Jo Malone and Nespresso (housed in a former boulangerie) and Uniqlo and the predictable procession of global brands that form the cookie-cutter 21st-century urban landscape.

Paris has changed. It has not entirely resisted homogenization. Yet it is still the *Paris Metro's* city and mine of a half-century ago. My mind drifts to the Rue Mouffetard back then, how I would wander through the market gazing at the mackerel glistening on their bed of ice, the serried ranks of purple eggplant, the last of the silvery sardines being hawked for a song, the mineral oysters shucked by ruddy aproned men with glinting bloodshot eyes. The bawdy generous *"allez-allez-on-en-profite"* spirit of the Paris market endures today. *Quatre barquettes, cinq euros!*

The advice of A.J. Liebling, the New Yorker writer and gourmand of Paris, remains useful: "Each day brings only two opportunities for fieldwork, and they are not to be wasted minimizing the intake of cholesterol."

Much else endures, too, even if the whiff of a Gauloise or a mid-morning Sauvignon blanc in the metro (the other one) has gone. The city's texture – that web of zinc roofs and dormer windows and chimney pots and black-grilled balconies and peeling off-white shutters and cobblestone streets and gravel pathways and flat-topped pollarded trees and inviting bistros with names like Chez Ginette – has resisted. A café counter is still the best place to understand Paris, the most northern of Mediterranean cities. Style, Flaubert observed, "is the discharge from a deeper wound." I like to imagine he had Paris in mind when he penned these words.

My Muse has been silent but now she reveals all: *31 Rue des Francs-Bourgeois.* That is where it happened! The beautiful short-lived miracle of *The Paris Metro* that set me and countless other would-be journalists on their way. It is nearby, close enough to touch, and I am back in time on my Solex moped, aged 22, weaving through traffic in what *Metro,* introducing me to readers, called a "David Copperfield cap."

Now, with a shiver of recognition, an old(ish) man despite all that nonsense about 70 being the new whatever, I approach the 16th-century Hôtel d'Albret. A cartouche of a winged animal surrounded by garlands of flowers is set above the gate; it seems an appropriate symbol for our past endeavors. I gaze up at the handsome arched dormer windows. I wonder at how completely oblivious I was 50 years ago to the building's history as a meeting place of aristocrats and high finance, once frequented by Madame de Montespan and Madame de Maintenon, favorites of Louis XIV. But then perhaps we were all oblivious because immersed in a dream. The *Metro* had us. We were young and free and insouciant, and Paris somehow for a fleeting moment lay at our feet.

I look at my hands. The dew from the back of Malliol's statue drops from my finger onto the stones.

"Fluctuat nec mergitur," says the city's motto. "She is rocked by the waves but does not sink." Yes, Paris is eternal. In the Musée Carnavalet, a few steps away from the old *Metro* home, the turbulent history of Paris is recounted, with its religious wars, revolutionary terror and stubborn rebirths in the quest for universal human dignity. At the gift shop the museum sells coasters inscribed with the words: *Ici on s'honore du titre de citoyen,* or Here we are honored by the title of citizen. I love that. For me it represents the message of my haunting city: We are born equal, we have responsibilities as well as privileges, and what stands between civilization and barbarism is the idea that nobody is above the law.

With his famous wartime line from the movie *Casablanca* – "We'll always have Paris" – Rick (Humphrey Bogart) tells Ilsa (Ingrid Bergman) to leave him, stay with her husband, and console herself with memories of the city of their love. I am tempted to say, for the memory is also sweet and poignant and enduring, that we will always have *The Paris Metro.* ■

How Has Paris Changed Most?

We asked a variety of Parisians of a certain age what has changed most about Paris in the last 50 years. Here's what they replied.

Nicole Gersen, lawyer

It's the tourists

What's changed most over 50 years is me! I mean, there seem to be so many young people around now… No, but seriously, it's the tourists. I've been living on Rue Rambuteau for 55 years and it used to be a working-class neighborhood with a fairly mixed population. There was still a butter-eggs-and-cheese shop, which was a remnant of the former market at Les Halles. The Pompidou Center had not yet been built. It was a construction site. And in my street there were still fruit and vegetable wagons. All day long the guy would call out, "Go ahead – buy somewhere else more expensive!" It was nice. There were little bistros, little restaurants. We had butchers, a fishmonger, cheese shops. And little by little the area got gentrified, and it has now become a tourist district, with lots of Airbnbs. There's nothing along the street but fancy pastry shops for tourists, chocolate shops for tourists, sandwich shops for tourists. It's all oriented towards tourism. Everything that was useful for daily life has disappeared.

Jorge Ahumada, shoe repair shop owner

Bikes are everywhere

In my opinion, bicycles are the biggest change. The street where I work used to be like a parking lot, and it was the same out on the boulevard. People parked their cars everywhere, even on the sidewalks. It's nothing like that anymore. All that's parked on the street are the bikes, and it's been like that for a while. This is a very good thing – on account of pollution, not to mention the noise of the cars speeding by. I myself get around by bike. I don't use the free ones, I have my own bicycle. I'm about to turn 70 and I travel by bike every day. Something else that's new is the Bastille Opera, although it's not that new anymore. I never went, but I was invited several times by a Russian singer who came to my shop to buy clown shoes for his brother. Another change is that the neighborhood used to have silversmiths and goldsmiths, but they've shut down. Also the cafés stay open later now. The one on the corner used to close at 5 p.m. because they opened early. And even the bar-café-tobacco shop closed at 8:30 or 9 p.m., and now it's open until midnight.

Patricia Wells, food writer

Shops are open on Sundays

What's changed most is Sunday. When we first came here, nothing was open on Sunday except the bakery until noon and the butcher. We often used to travel for the weekend and get back on Sunday on the train, and there was absolutely nothing open. Well, on Easter Sunday I walked up to the Luxembourg Gardens and I was just laughing and shocked about how absolutely everything was open, including hairdressers! Then there are bikes. Nobody rode a bike. It's ok – I mean it's healthy and wonderful, but they don't look out for you. So you really have to look both ways to not get killed. Also people walking with phones and not looking. Drives me absolutely insane. And then buses. You used to go wait for the bus and you didn't have any idea, and now they have the wait times, and you say, "Oh good, mine will be here in three minutes." To me that's heaven. As for the food scene, I think younger chefs, younger diners, have a different view of things, a different palate. I can't remember which food writer was asked, "Where do you like to go?" and he answered, "Where they know me." We have three places within a block or two of us and the food's far from perfect, but it's good enough. The price is good enough. Things are just different. But I would say the quality of the ingredients we can find has improved. We have a place down the street, it's open 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. 365 days a year. They have everything – vegetables, fruits, incredible cheeses. And we have three organic supermarkets within a few blocks, and they're not too expensive, the quality's great and gets better and better. And the price of good wines, drinkable wines – it's absolutely fabulous.

Ulysse Gosset, foreign affairs commentator at BFMTV

We lost Les Halles

If I have one regret, it's the disappearance of Les Halles. The farmers and fishermen and merchants who came to the market to sell their wares incarnated the spirit of Paris. It was the heart of Paris – the heart of France – and it got moved out of town to Rungis, replaced by a boring shopping center. But the most spectacular change has been the banks of the Seine, with the end of car traffic. I love it that the riverbanks are open to pedestrians. You can take a walk beside the water on weekends and cross the city from west to east to go to work. The car used to be king in Paris, and it's become a city of bicycles! Thanks, Vélib! There's been a revolution in the way people live, get around and possess their city. The urban landscape has resisted change, but daily life has been profoundly transformed. The downside is the gentrification of Paris, which has caused property prices to soar and the middle classes to move out. At the same time, globalization has brought new flavors and dozens of new restaurants that are giving Paris a New York vibe. And also thousands of start-ups. My biggest fear is that Paris will become a museum – a magnificent tourist attraction, but a city that's reserved for a minority, too exclusive and too expensive to maintain social diversity.

Margo Berdeshevsky, poet

The Marais got fancy

I've been coming to Paris since 1950, when I was five years old and learning the language with the children in the Luxembourg Gardens and stealing their wooden hoops, and it was charmed. And when I moved here 25 years ago, I still felt that I was living a charmed life. But I walk around now and I see the Marais, where I live, which used to be a place where you could still hear the tradesmen sharpening knives from downstairs, and it's become a fancy, rich person's neighborhood. If I go out on the weekends, I have to walk on the tiniest streets to avoid not just the tourists but the people from Paris who have come here for shopping. There was a time when it was absolutely impolite to see anybody eating in the street. You had to eat at a table – you had to have lunch with your family. Now you walk around Paris and everybody's throwing their wrappers on the sidewalk. The good thing is that I've never been attacked. I can walk out at dawn and look at the full moon across the bridges, and that makes me feel blessed. I remember arriving once in the middle of the night and walking down the street where Mitterrand lived, the Rue de Bièvre. And the policeman walking up to me and saying, "Are you ok, Mademoiselle?" And him pointing out exactly where his apartment was. And I thought, I don't mind that I'm walking alone. You're a policeman, go be a policeman. And I felt perfectly safe. I walked down to the quai, and I walked along the Seine, and I thought, how wonderful, I'm here, in Paris.

Ali Messalhi, supermarket attendant

Paris has become inhuman

I see nothing positive about how Paris has changed. Fifty years ago is when things started going downhill. People no longer give each other the time or day – simple things like saying hello, thank you, excuse me, do you need a hand? People have become egocentric, thinking only of themselves, of their belongings, of their personal well-being. To tell the truth, this change can be explained in one word: money. The word money has disfigured the life of humanity, of politics, of science. Of course this is where the evolution lies, and respect for humanity has become inexistent. Paris used to be human, and today's Paris has become inhuman. There didn't used to be so many people sleeping in the streets. Maybe a neighborhood had one person sleeping in the street, and now there are hundreds. We're seeing more and more people camping out, areas overflowing with tents. We're seeing suffering and, how to put it, the I-don't-give-a-damn attitude of the people passing by, without a second glance, without wondering what's happening to Paris. Everyone's out for number one. I mean, it's possible for us to go to a restaurant, eat well, drink well, go out for coffee, and other people are waiting for a piece of bread or a glass of water.

Manuela Déprés, decorative painter

So many people

What's changed most is the population. There are a lot more people in Paris – in the streets, in the restaurants, at the theater. The density of the population has changed, and so has the type of population. Fifty years ago all of the social classes were present in Paris. Today that's not true. There are a lot more tourists and not very many Parisians, true Parisians. And the ones who are buying property and are able to live in Paris tend to be tourists and people from abroad. That's what's most striking to me. Another thing that's changed has to do with cars. There's been a major reduction in the space given over to cars, which has reduced the density of cars on the streets of Paris. There are no more parking places, or very few. And that's a problem for people who drive professional vehicles to Paris because they work here. At the same time, they've widened the bus lanes. There didn't used to be any bus lanes – I remember that period. Now we not only have bus lanes but they've made them wider, and this has also brought down the number of cars.

Danielle Hassoun, gynecologist

The buildings are brighter

What I remember is a Paris that was very dark. The buildings used to be black. They were blackened by pollution and hadn't been cleaned up yet. The street where I lived with my parents was really very black. And little by little we saw the buildings become much lighter, more and more beautiful. They renovated the facades all over the city – this is now mandatory. And that difference in color has affected me. What's also remarkable for me is the fact that I got rid of my car and now get around by bike, which certainly makes me see Paris differently. I always had the impression that there were a lot of cars in Paris – that has changed a lot. The other thing is that Paris used to have a huge number of food shops – bakeries, butchers, grocery stores. And now there are whole areas of the city that don't have a single food shop.

Locals Speak Their Minds

Peter Turnley

Bistros used to be a bigger part of life in Paris. As Bernard Kalaora recalls, "You'd wander in for no reason and stay for as long as you liked."

Suzy Menkes, fashion critic

I miss seeing a chic woman

I started to work from Paris for the International Herald Tribune in 1989, writing about fashion for more than 25 years. How it has changed! Until the end of the century Parisian style was so definite. Women, in particular, seemed to have a sense of pride and of "finish." Everything appeared to be carefully made and treated like a valuable member of a person's life. Looking well turned out was part of fashion life. Of course there are still elegantly dressed women in certain areas of Paris – but more dependent on "fashion" than a style or way of dressing. And, of course, there are so many more people – plus the ever increasing stylish males. Is it good or bad to make fashion fashionable for everyone across the wide world? Why not? It shows the strength of Paris and the long-lasting power this capital maintains over the industry. Even though I miss seeing a chic woman clattering her high heels through the streets of Paris with the quiet elegance that I myself never quite achieved.

Ben Cramer, environmental security analyst

Mindsets are more international

Things have changed dramatically. I have the feeling that French people have become, at least in Paris, much more internationally minded. For instance, you could not have breakfast in Paris, twenty years ago even, because it was not done. Only coffee. These days you have cafés where you can have anything you want – even fried eggs, whatever. This is the positive side of Paris. It has been able to recognize that it is an international society. In the metro, you have at least five or six languages being broadcast to the public. I find this fantastic. It didn't exist. This is a side effect of globalization. In our café in the 11th, you hear a lot of people speaking English or Arabic. Or even the other night I went for the *Nuit de la Solidarité* – you know, they have volunteers, like in California by the way, who are trying to get out and see what are the conditions of the homeless people. Well, amazingly enough, there were a lot of foreigners among the homeless, and I even managed to talk to one of them. He was from Ethiopia. Ok, there's a "bobo" [bourgeois-bohemian] tendency. But even the American community in Paris is nicer. From an architectural point of view it's true that Paris has improved a lot – from an esthetic point of view. There's something very negative about this, which is that a lot of people might fear that Paris risks becoming only a tourist attraction, and I think we have to face that. But as a Parisian I find that, yes, we still have the energy to make sure that it is a real, living city, and not only the showcase of French culture. And actually I think about the many things that are happening in this city all the time. Including humor! I mean, a sign at the café next to my place, near République, says, "We're open only until four o'clock a.m." Hilarious!

Bernard Kalaora, sociologist

The soul of Paris has disappeared

Paris has lost its soul. Everything that made it such a sensual city has disappeared – the smells, the feeling. There's not the same brouhaha, the intensity that makes a city more than its architecture. The soul of a city is a way of being together, of brushing shoulders with all kinds of people. Fifty years ago, the city wasn't clean, it wasn't harmonious, but it was lived in. Its beating heart was Les Halles – a place where people crossed paths, worked, mixed, often at night. You didn't choose who you'd run into. That Paris was porous and alive. Bistros were a big part of this. You'd wander in for no reason and stay for as long as you liked. Ordinary people stood at the bar talking with each other – it wasn't a theater set. Today all the cafés look alike. They're standardized. Or take the neighborhoods of Paris. They were denser. The Sentier garment district was bustling, Belleville was overflowing with working-class life, rough, unpredictable. Now the workshops are gone, along with the ambience. The aimless stroll has disappeared because you don't get lost anymore. It's kind of like a GPS – you know where you're going. There are no surprises. There's diversity, but people don't mix anymore. Paris has become a museum city for tourists and a city of ghettos for those who live here – ghettos of the poor, the rich, the young and hip. Of course I've changed too, but nothing looks like what I knew fifty years ago. Districts like the Latin Quarter, Montparnasse, the Marais have lost their character. They've all become foreign to me – I revisit them in my dreams.

—Interviews conducted by Meg Bortin

Tourists, Bikes: The City's a Mess

The Very *Feeling* of Life Has Changed

by Ron Blunden

Thirty years ago, Italians joked that the sound of car alarms going off accidentally (or not) was their national anthem. The equivalent in Paris today is the rattle of carry-on baggage being trundled over cobblestones, signaling the arrival of yet another tenant at an Airbnb. With French manufacturing and farming in the doldrums, tourism has become the number one source of foreign currency for the country. But the strategy has come with a price. As in other great Western cities, while the central districts have been gentrified at considerable expense, real estate prices have risen far more quickly than wages, and middle-class families have fled in droves, leaving the impression of a childless city.

But the changes of recent decades aren't measurable just in the busloads of tourists delivered to the foot of the Eiffel Tower, or in the endless maze of construction sites, some of them permanently "in progress," or in eye-popping parking fares, or even in the devastating loss of human capital. For a great many of us, the very feeling of what it is to live here day to day is different than it was. It's there in the streets teeming with bicycles whose owners ignore the most basic safety and courtesy rules, sailing through red lights and invading sidewalks. It's there in the frequency with which insults fly and minor confrontations end in fisticuffs. It's there in the challenge facing those who venture across familiar boulevards now split into four different lanes, each regulated by a different set of traffic lights. It's there in the belligerent mood of plumbers, carpenters, delivery van drivers and others who fix or feed the city, as their vehicles get ticketed again and again by drive-by patrol cars equipped with license-plate-reading cameras.

To be sure, Parisians were never laid-back or easy-going. But more than others anywhere, we reveled in the art of conversation and practiced it with gusto over a cup of coffee or a pleasant meal. Yet even our celebrated food culture has been a casualty of the shifting demographics. Outside the busy city center, the local bistro, if it can be found at all, is often Chinese owned and inevitably serves deep-frozen food, while that other once-dependable fixture, the business lunch, which did so much to keep alive the city's many Michelin-starred restaurants, has become a rarity as a result of expense account limitations and corporate ethics guidelines originally conceived across the Atlantic. Meanwhile – arguably worst of all – many residential neighborhoods are today bereft of even a single quality boulangerie.

What of that other variety of nourishment, the kind that feeds the soul? Even in Saint-Germain-des-Prés, bookstores have been replaced by boutiques selling footwear and handbags, and while concerts and outstanding art exhibitions are still to be found, they are no longer routinely part of the average citizen's existence. With tourists and tour operators making online reservations months in advance, today one cannot arrive at a major museum and expect to be admitted.

Aside from all the rest, the concentration of well-to-do foreigners has attracted all manner of predators, from pickpockets to gangs, to tourist hot spots. Paris' vast population of immigrants from Africa and the Middle-East lives out of sight of the affluent tourists, the most destitute in tents lining the streets of the 18th and 19th arrondissements, where open-air crack markets reappear as soon as they are shut down. The police have all but cordoned off those neighborhoods in an attempt to minimize interactions between the two groups, the fawned upon and the frowned upon, but with very limited success. The Champ-de-Mars, at the foot of the Eiffel Tower, has become especially dangerous at nightfall, and *parisiennes* also know to avoid the metro before and after business hours, if they can.

In retrospect, the Seventies may be looked back on as *une parenthèse enchantée.* May 1968 had been a symbolic putting to death of the father figure Charles de Gaulle, a youthful rebellion against a dour, stultifying and paternalistic regime, and we took to heart its slogan, *"Il est interdit d'interdire"* ("It's forbidden to forbid"). As formality and tradition had long been more ingrained here than almost anywhere else, they were tossed aside with special vehemence and abandon.

Little did we know what we were losing! All of a sudden, disposable income, leisure time and the advent of the pill converged to turn France into a country in pursuit less of happiness than of pleasure. In 1981, François Mitterrand won the presidency under the slogan *"Changer la vie!"* and we thought France would turn into a global showroom for what democracies can accomplish. But having no interest or expertise in the economy, Mitterrand nationalized key industries and hired 200,000 new civil servants, sending France into a tailspin. The hedonistic decade was over, and Paris, having been in its vanguard, never recovered.

The succession of socialist mayors since 2001 further dampened the laissez-faire spirit that so long defined civilized life in the city, their ideologically driven diktats now touching on everything from traffic flow to the definition of permissibly "inclusive" spelling in official documents.

That's a lot of melancholy history to lay out in so few words, but average Parisians of all ages, outnumbered and abused in their own city, feel its effects every day.

In a way we boomers might actually be seen as fortunate. Not only did many of us have the chance to acquire property at reasonable cost, but as a generation we still have vivid memories of the freewheeling, joyous, rebellious city that used to be.

Those who came after us have neither.

—A dual French/American citizen and long a top executive with the global publishing company Hachette, Ronald Blunden is currently involved in the launch of a new publishing group, Les Nouveaux Editeurs. He covered media for The Paris Metro.

Qëndrim Avdiu

A plague upon Paris? Bikes cluttering public space near Eglise Saint-Eustache in Les Halles.

How a Street Fought Back And Won (Sort Of)

In the August 2, 1978, issue of The Metro *appeared an article entitled "The Revolt of the Bourg Tibourgians." Written by Nasreen Eblagh, it was about the residents of one small street in central Paris, its "white-washed 18th and 19th century buildings not very different from scores of streets in the city." But what made the Rue du Bourg-Tibourg unique was that, faced with a problem that threatened their quality of life – and, indeed, their very safety – its residents did something almost unheard of among Parisians: They fought back.*

As Eblagh observed, while the "local tradition of fist-shaking is as old as the city itself … when it comes down to the crunch, Parisians have been extraordinarily docile in the face of officialdom, particularly in comparison with Anglo-Saxons. 'Civic participation,' understated one social scientist at a recent conference at Paris' Center of Urban Research, 'has never figured in the political mythology of France.' Poet Paul Valéry once defined local politics as 'the art of preventing people from taking care of their own affairs.'"

What prompted the Bourg Tibourgians to action was that seemingly most banal of problems – traffic – which in this case had taken on the dimensions of a full-blown crisis. Bourg-Tibourg, a short street in the Marais not far from the Hôtel de Ville, was so narrow that between delivery vans trying to squeeze through and a glut of crazily parked cars, normal life (and commerce) had been rendered all but impossible.

The residents' stories were harrowing. "Last year, a small child leaving my restaurant was crushed by a car," reported Monsieur Georges, the burly proprietor. "A young couple who'd recently opened a tailor shop on the street were busy sewing when, suddenly, the front end of a *camionnette*-Peugeot came hurtling through their window…"

"Almost every resident of the street has a specific complaint," wrote Eblagh. "Mothers of small children say it's impossible to push a pram on the narrow sidewalk. Old people hate to have to press themselves against the wall." Madame Legardinier told of a

Stop Griping! Paris Is Still Paris

What Matters Most Never Changes

by Geneva Overholser

A half century ago I lived in Paris for two years, young and entirely susceptible to enchantment: the silver light on stone façades, the songlike *"Bonjour, m'sieur-dame,"* the glide of the metro into tiled stations. It was both grand and human-scaled at once. I couldn't imagine that any city could feel this civilized, this beautiful.

I've returned often over the decades, sometimes for a month or more. One of those months was last November. We were halfway through our delightful (and delicious) stay when I had the pleasure of meeting with other *Paris Metro* alums to talk about the upcoming reunion.

We were discussing a publication to mark the event and thinking about "then and now" articles, when something curious happened. My companions, most of whom live in Paris, could hardly top one another in deploring its current state. Overrun, diminished, charmless, nothing but a tourist trap. I was flummoxed.

From the vantage point of living in New York, another great city full of extraordinary sights, also confronted with problems and crowded with tourists, what strikes me about Paris is not decline but deliberate change.

The magic is still there. The metro still runs every few minutes and takes you within blocks of almost anywhere in central Paris. Street washing still happens. Block after block of buildings still respect the street. The scale remains human.

The lilting greetings still mark the beginning and end of every small commercial exchange. The boulangeries are omnipresent; the smell of fresh croissants drifts down the block in the morning. You can still find a lovely *velouté* in the tiniest neighborhood café. The cheapest wine is still drinkable.

Yet alongside that wonderful continuity are changes that seem to me to make daily life palpably better.

Congestion pricing and pedestrianization have reshaped the city. I remember, years ago, crossing the Rue Royale near the Madeleine while hugely pregnant, terrified of the oncoming rush of cars. I wasn't alone. A Frenchman secured his own protection by positioning himself beside me as we crossed.

Today, it is noticeably easier to cross streets. Cars move more slowly; sidewalks feel wider; public space is reclaimed. There are more bike lanes, more pedestrian areas, more cafés spilling into spaces once dominated by traffic. Air quality has improved. You can walk, traffic free, along the Seine. The city feels, in a word, more livable.

Public transport has expanded. New metro lines are underway. We enjoyed day trips on trains knitting the country together with astonishing efficiency. Public toilets are more common, cleaner and often free (they even have toilet paper!). And the plumbing, as anyone who lived here in the 1970s can attest, has improved dramatically. It even seemed to me – miracle of miracles – that Parisians are allowing non-native French speakers to go on for several more minutes before being cut off by their heavily accented English. Meanwhile the little delights of mistranslation endure, like the Tuileries sign identifying a flower as "Susie Orange With Eye."

Culturally, the city has not retreated into nostalgia; it has reinvented itself. The Bourse de Commerce, once a commodity exchange, is now home to the Pinault Collection – a striking blend of historic architecture and contemporary art. The Musée de l'Histoire de l'Immigration, housed in what began as a colonial museum, offers a thoughtful and expansive exploration of who France has been and is becoming. And, oh my goodness, Notre-Dame. Not a restoration. A glorious, breathtaking rebirth.

Yes, tourism is heavy. Museums require reservations. Crowds can be thick. Perhaps tourism is harder on Paris than New York because a city of *flâneurs* is more visibly disturbed than a city of hard-chargers. But Paris has not turned into a French version of Venice. It does not feel like a theme park. It feels like a functioning city that millions of people understandably want to see.

I think of all the things that simply feel more civilized: fewer deafening sirens than in Manhattan; no helicopters pounding overhead; less visible rage on public transport; stronger social support and more accessible health care. And, oh, that little mechanical arm in the metro that springs out to alert the passerby that a poster is being affixed! Not to mention the clarinet repairman down the street from where we stay.

The writer Sylvain Tesson described France as "a paradise inhabited by people who think they're in hell." And of course, as with any great city, every generation believes it knew the place in its truest form.

But, seen across half a century and from the other side of an ocean, what strikes me about Paris is not decline but resilience and adaptation. Paris has preserved its essential character: the light, the scale, the daily rituals of civility, the density of art and thought. At the same time, it has made deliberate choices to prioritize pedestrians over cars, public space over speed, cultural reinvention over stagnation.

Turns out a paradise inhabited by people who think they're in hell is still, from a slight remove, unmistakably a paradise.

— Geneva Overholser, former editor of The Des Moines Register *and director of the USC Annenberg School of Journalism, also worked for* The New York Times *and* The Washington Post.

Qëndrim Avdiu

What's not to like? Bicyclists sailing past Notre-Dame along the quais of the Seine.

> The lilting greetings still mark the beginning and end of every small commercial exchange.

young man who "had an eye knocked out next to the Self Service when struck by the mirror of a larger van."

The people of Bourg-Tibourg might have gone on complaining aimlessly for years, but one resident of the street, Monique Micheau, at "35ish, younger than most," was very dynamic, and drew up a petition to determine how many favored banning traffic from the street. There were 250 apartments along the street; 300 people signed the petition.

The residents took their complaint to the Mairie (city hall), which in the normal course of bureaucratic affairs might have been the end of it. But with the guidance of one of the petition signers, who happened to be a member of a panel investigating environmental affairs, they kept pushing. "There was a feeling that we could at last do something on the local level instead of just putting up with thing for years on end," as one resident put it.

The result? When the piece appeared in *The Metro,* the Rue du Bourg-Tibourg was about to become the first "walking street" in Paris. Wrote Eblagh, "The city authorities have decided to give it a three-month trial period during which traffic will be banned."

2026 Update

Although not an official pedestrian zone, the Rue du Bourg-Tibourg is tranquil today, with iron-cast bollards, two meters apart, having been installed on both sidewalks to protect pedestrians and thwart careless vehicles, and there are now more spots for bicycles to park than there are for the delivery trucks that arrive early most mornings. Narrower than ever before in its long history, it is an ideal street for the *flâneur.* The renowned gourmet tea house Mariage Frères, founded in 1854 (and located at No. 30), has been joined by a host of upscale newcomers like Tibet Forever, Filibuster Skulls and Stone, Korean Cosmetics, and L'Orchestre Parfumerie. The small square at the Rue de Rivoli end of the street has more restaurants (10) than tall trees (8), and you can't get a room at the stylish Hôtel Bourg Tibourg for under €300 a night.

As resident Valérie Geoffroy observes, "this is now a fashionable, attractive, historical, multilingual neighborhood, and largely gay. So" – with a smile – "this little street is very safe place for everyone, especially women."

But as with gentrification elsewhere, the upside comes with a downside. "Despite the tighter streets and smaller apartments of Le Marais, property here is still priced high," notes Home Hunts, a search service for buyers of high-end French properties, "reflecting its valuable character, individuality and lifestyle benefits." Inevitably, as real estate in the neighborhood skyrocketed, some of the families who'd lived on the street for generations have taken the money and run, taking much of its character with them.

Too, there are the tourists. A cashier at Franprix estimates that fully three-quarters of the store's customers don't speak French. ■

Have French Women Lost Their Sense of Chic?

by Carolyn Pfaff

Young Parisians today wear the ghastly current fashion of girls on social media the world over. Take a walk in early spring on the Rue Saint Antoine in the 4th arrondissement and you're sure to see groups of look-alike girls in their teens, dead straight dark hair straggling down the back of outsized North Face jackets (blondes seem to have disappeared except for a few streaks); no apparent make-up except for eyes encrusted with mascara; the obligatory bulky jeans scuffing the floor; crop-top for a glimpse of bare midriff.

But let's leave the young girls aside, their tastes will change. I'm interested in the classic Parisienne who for so long embodied style for women everywhere simply by virtue of how she put herself together every morning and the seeming confidence with which she carried herself.

Surely *she* will still be elegant.

Indeed, according to the marketing surveys, today's French woman ought to be more glorious than ever, thanks to bodies honed by Pilates, and faces cured of lines by Botox, not to mention the freedom from anxiety that comes with well paying jobs.

But *non!* Take a walk today down the Rue de Passy on a Saturday afternoon in the sedate 16th arrondissement, and what will you see? Well-heeled women with their tell-tale luxury handbag and boots, make-up discreet, hair neat with no curls, but, horror of horrors, every one *sensibly* dressed, in look-alike jackets and flared slacks. Not the merest suggestion of elegance or *savoir-faire.* Might as well be Scarsdale!

What's happened?

You'll get a different spin on the identical answer, depending on who you ask.

The reaction of a French businessman friend in his 50s is, I think, characteristic of those men who recall what they regard as a better time. "My women friends just won't make an effort anymore," he declares, "at least here in Paris. I'm just back from a trip to Milan, and there you still see some really elegant women." His theory is that women in Paris are suffering from what he calls "latent feminism." As he puts it, there is "a general agreement, a new consensus, to dress down. It reflects a vague disenchantment with jobs, life and men that declares: 'Take me as I am, no artifice, no make-up, casual style, feeling comfortable.' "

My best French friend, Annick, does not disagree with that premise *en principe,* but she puts an entirely different twist on it. Back in the 70s and 80s she was the most with-it Parisian I knew, always smart and daring in her fashion choices. She would ricochet between styles —Yves Saint Laurent smoking jackets, Laura Ashley flowered print frocks, tight jeans with stiletto heels, no bra under diaphanous blouses – never less than fantastic looking. She's a grandmother today, and meeting up with me in a café recently she showed up in flared blue jeans, two-toned sneakers, a baggy cream woolen sweater, straight gray hair smoothed back and no visible makeup. "No one dresses up anymore," she said simply and without apology, recalling those days and her old self with a rueful laugh.

Peter Turnley

The way it was.

Does she miss those times, and that atmosphere? I ask, which led us into a nostalgic back and forth about how *interesting* it was back in the '70s, and what it was about them that produced such a vibrant fashion scene. This was, after all, a generally conservative era, the time of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, that aristocratic president who championed the TGV, Airbus and a host of nuclear power plants. Yet at the same time (and probably for that reason), elegance was the order of the day, with the big fashion houses always hosting luxury events attended by Le Tout Paris. Meanwhile, celebrities like Serge Gainsbourg and Jane Birkin doubled as mainstream fashion icons, upholding the vaunted French reputation for *ooh-là-là* and shock. So, too, in their way did *intellos* like Bernard Henri Lévy and the other "Nouveaux Philosophes," who became as well known for their laid back sartorial style as for their philosophy. Fashionwise, Paris was still the place to be in Europe.

Now? While Paris is still officially recognized as the fashion capital of the world (with Italy running a close second), what you see on the runways is definitely not what you see on the streets.

Of course, the myth of the Paris fashion scene is still alive in the collective imagination elsewhere. Witness the Netflix extravaganza *Emily in Paris,* a worldwide sensation roundly criticized by the French, who fail to recognize in it either their city or their lives. "It's worse than a cliché," as one French woman aptly put it to an interviewer on NBC. Still another complained that the series is racist — too many white people pictured in swanky locations eating fancy food and having sex.

In the show, the American protagonist, Emily, dresses in a dazzling variety of short skirts and wonky color combinations, definitely not what they're wearing in Paris today, while her boss, in classic French *femme fatale* mode, is unfailingly stylish and bitchy, enjoys kinky sex and never puts on weight. Reality check: Clichés notwithstanding, the latest figures show a shocking 14.5% of Parisian women are overweight, and in France overall the figure is 27%.

As in so many other respects, how people present themselves reflects the reality of a culture in the throes of extended malaise.

Who or what is responsible for the change? Above all, it is Covid and its lingering aftereffects. Indeed, fashion mags all trace the desire for comfort and homey styles back to that awful plague. It's there in every marketing survey, and the trends in beauty. For instance, skincare leads the category, not makeup, the idea being stress healthy glow and never mind the wrinkles. To the contrary, ads say women should be pro-age, whatever that is, as opposed to anti-aging – again presumably making for a sharp divide between female customers and their husbands, boyfriends and lovers.

It even turns out that fewer French women are going to the hairdresser or dying their gray hair. This is revolutionary; France used to have three times as many hair salons as the UK. Now, according to the latest industry stats, there are over ten thousand hair professionals currently seeking work.

Too, as in all things, social media has played its nefarious part. Today over half of a woman's fashion budget is spent online. One famous influencer, fashion model Caroline de Maigret, recommends to her more than one million followers a basic wardrobe for women of 40 consisting of: an oversized blazer, a silk or cotton blouse, a pair of jeans either straight or flared, a trench coat, completed with elegant but comfortable sandals. That's it. Unsurprisingly, this "style" comes direct from the USA where it's called Normcore, defined as the liberation of being nothing special. Accordingly, clothes are basically anti-fashion, unisex and sustainable.

Needless to say, comments from men about women not looking as good as they used to drive feminists bonkers, especially since feminism is often blamed for the phenomenon.

Where do French women in fact stand on feminism today? A study from the Fondation Jean Jaurès finds that 75% of those under 25 identify as feminists. The numbers go down to 60% for over 35s, but they actually go up again for the over 60s. Why the middle bracket who have lived through the white heat of this movement should show a certain disenchantment today is a question for the analysts.

One especially telling comment about *Emily in Paris* came from a Frenchman who said he felt sorry for first time visitors to Paris who'd be disappointed by the reality of life, fashion, all of it. Those of us who live here will identify, having often heard from friends abroad how lucky we are.

But they are buying into an image ever less genuine with the passing years; indeed, one that was already somewhat out of date four and five decades ago. I recall how before returning to my native Sydney in the early eighties, I carefully planned my outfit for the flight. I was to be met by my very old world aunt and uncle, for whom elegance was a Bibi hat, wisp of spotted veil, fur carelessly slung around pencil slim suit (or, after the War, crinoline skirt, large hat, wasp waist, stiletto heels, God knows what else), and I didn't want them to be disappointed. Just before landing, I redid my Carita makeup, struggled into a slim fitting striped knit by Sonia Rykiel, then all the rage in Paris, and a pair of two-tone Chanel shoes.

I stepped off the plane, hair tied back with a chic bow, scarf trailing, carrying my mid-size vintage Louis Vuitton suitcase, and spotted my aunt at the gate. I waved confidently, but she looked right through me. I waved again. Still no reaction. Finally we were face to face. "Oh, there you are, my dear," she said. "I didn't recognize you. I expected someone looking more Parisian." ■

Mais Non! Our Sense of Chic Is Eternal

by Dominique Torrès

Do French women no longer know how to dress? It's true the street has become so globalized that an American, Chinese or African woman will no longer feel out of place in Paris. Casual is the new normal.

But beneath that generalization lie subtleties. For one thing, how women dress differs within Paris itself, from one arrondissement to another, reflecting the character of those neighborhoods. For instance, in the 11th, where I live, this past winter it was a straight black or beige coat and cap in the same shade, suede boots and straight-leg corduroy trousers. (Last year's down jacket was just a bad memory.) And this summer, as dresses and skirts return, and strappy sandals replace boots, the skirts will billow up as everyone rides a bike. Meanwhile, in the chic and laid-back 16th, women wear black jeans as evening wear, paired with a crisp, loose-fitting white poplin blouse and a large shawl. Or go to Le Vauban in the 7th for a first-class dinner and you'll see the men in pressed jeans and button-down shirts, sleeves rolled up workman style, and their wives and girlfriends in short denim jackets … maybe orange.

But it's not these little neighborhood differences that are the most important thing. What above all still sets Parisian women apart is *how* they wear their clothes. Okay, it may be just jeans and a T-shirt. But while wearing them, a Parisian secretary carries herself with a breezy confidence that Victoria Beckham or a Hollywood star can only aspire to, adding an accent here or a tiny detail there that makes the outfit distinctly her own.

The Parisian woman never overdoes it. She borrows. How many times have I seen fashions in *Elle* – a luxury cowboy look(?!) – that are impossible for real people to wear? Yet lo and behold, I'll soon see dozens of Parisian women, having filched a detail or two, pulling it off.

If the Parisian woman can make such miracles as a matter of course, why can't others? Their problem, not ours...

The fact remains, whatever it is, we still know *how* to wear it.

The Most Influential Influencer in Town: Meet Messy Nessy

How a British-born blogger crossed the Channel and attracted more than 625,000 followers

by Joel Stratte-McClure

How has a modest, London-born Millennial blogger, who dropped out of NYU after her freshman year abroad, almost single-handedly accomplished what *The Paris Metro* did not?

Indeed, Vanessa Grall, 41– dubbed Nessy by her French father and American mother – has developed a Parisian entrepreneurial empire that includes media, publishing and retail projects.

I caught up with her one day recently when she was collecting water from the local river to filter and sell as Eau de Seine (€25) in her nearby shop. "Being British born, I don't like the word 'empire,'" she avers. "I'd prefer to be known as a woman running a small, independent business and writing a blog on a street near my Left Bank apartment."

That would be a considerable understatement. With over 625,000 followers on Instagram *(@MessyNessy Chic)*, Grall is not just the most-talked-about English-language blogger in Paris, but its most influential Influencer. In addition, she runs a thriving boutique called "The Cabinet" (Of Curiosities) which is about to triple its footprint.

Located at 19 rue de Bièvre, the boutique features a range of Paris-related items, from the Seine Water and Catacomb Sand to eclectic antiques like 1930 Ritz ashtrays, to guillotine earrings and a card game for "Parisphiles," to Messy's series of non-guide guide books, "Don't Be A Tourist."

In fact, the boutique began as her writing office, when she started "using the window as a showcase for my books, and I gradually became a shopkeeper. The shop celebrates Paris history, curiosities and secrets. And my two children can play in the park across the street."

She met her husband Alex the first week she arrived in Paris in the autumn of 2013, and calls him her "co-founder at large, magic elf and chief technical boss man."

Nessy came to Paris from London where, after dropping out of college and deciding she wouldn't make it as a singer/songwriter, she got her first job at a magazine called *matchbox* in Notting Hill and for four years was the main in-house writer.

"I filled the magazine with articles in areas I liked, including fashion, hot lists and lifestyle," she recalls. "It was great training but we separated, or maybe they fired me, when I refused to write puffy advertorials."

She started her blog in London in 2011; in magazine format and dealing largely with fashion, it took off when one of her first posts – an offbeat account of a Congolese subculture of dressed dandies – went viral on Reddit.

She published the first in her "Don't Be A Tourist" series about Paris in 2016, and Messy Nessy Chic gradually became a cultural and travel go-to for readers entertained by her cultural discoveries and quirky news stories. "I was lucky to be slightly ahead of the curve because there weren't many lifestyle blogs at that time," she says, adding that her posts led her to become an influencer almost without effort. "Instagram became a happy accident after the success of the blog and it's especially useful to publicize the shop."

Nessy's shop sells surreal shell people and a Parisian door knocker, among other curiosities.

Isabel Raggio

Vanessa Grall, aka Messy Nessy, fielding calls at her boutique at 19 Rue de Bièvre in the 5th.

"Parisian Pursuit" is a card game with 50 questions about Paris, its culture and secrets.

the curve because there weren't many lifestyle blogs at that time," she says, adding that her posts led her to become an influencer almost without effort. "Instagram became a happy accident after the success of the blog and it's especially useful to publicize the shop."

One particular reader favorite, still going strong, is the weekly column she launched fourteen years ago entitled "13 Things I Found on the Internet." Another is the"people watching" pieces she posts, often shot from her balcony on Boulevard Saint-Germain. It has led not only to a "People Watching Club," but to companies like Zara, Gucci, Valentino and, most recently, Celine paying "influencer rates" for stories focusing on their clothes.

For all that, Nessy has not lost the personal touch. Her Writers and Readers Club (messynessychic.club/com) caters to a mere twenty people jammed into the shop (though reservations must be made months in advance), and paid subscribers to her blog not only have access to Nessy's vast library of past articles, but ready access to Nessy herself, with queries about restaurants or her choice of "wild card" summer activities in Paris.

"I want people to come to my shop and blog looking for inspiration for their next creative project or researching a niche topic," she explains. "I want them to think of me and my work as their personal library."

When I first met Nessy a few years ago, I told her about *The Paris Metro* and how we'd had similar aspirations. We not only published an irreverent magazine, but also created a Metro Club for social events, Metro Travel (to take readers on trips throughout France and the rest of Europe), and were planning an English-language radio station. We sold "Paris Metro" T-shirts, and just before going broke, were thinking of starting a day-care center for the first *Metro* staff baby.

"You must have been ahead of your time," Nessy responded sympathetically. "I would have been the first in line to write for it."

Messy Nessy's Five Wild-Card Suggestions for A Summer Paris Outing

1. Pretend to be an antiques dealer for the day. You're just as welcome as any fine arts collector or antique dealer at one of the world's oldest public auction houses. Items typically go on display for close-up browsing the day before bidding starts, so it's practically a free museum too. Auctions usually start after two p.m. over 3 different floors and there's something for all budgets. *Drouot.com*

2. Climb aboard a floating burlesque show on the Seine. Find the Parisian equivalent of Dita Von Teese aboard an old barge parked across from Notre-Dame cathedral. Below the deck of La Nouvelle Seine, there's a red velvet theater where a talented and glamorous troupe of burlesque artists put on an enchanting and memorable show at the weekends after dark. *Lanouvelleseine.com*

3. Hang out with the Parisian Surrealists in an Art Nouveau townhouse. The outrageously overlooked Giacometti Institute houses the world's largest collection of works by surrealist sculptor Alberto Giacometti, who was a key player in the bohemian Surrealist circle in early 20th century Paris. You'll find a recreation of his old studio in the stunning townhouse, works by Picasso, Dali and Meret Oppenheim, as well as personal letters, art and objects exchanged between artists. *Fondation-giacometti.fr*

4. For date night, I'd recommend Augustin Marchand d'Vins, an incredible wine bar and eatery in the 6th *(26 rue des Grands-Augustins)* whose chef is an artist who makes one sculpture per night for guests who request it. She roasts a quail inside the sculpture and breaks it open before you when it comes out of the oven. They'll read excerpts of French literature depending on the plates you order. It's a beautiful, moving, theatrical and romantic place.

5. Meet a subculture of 1920s & '30s time travelers at the jazz ball. Get on your glad rags and head to La Coupole *(102 boulevard du Montparnasse)*, the legendary Hemingway haunt and brasserie of the "années folles," which plays host to a monthly jazz cabaret, showcasing an incredible troupe of musicians, performers and dancers. Keep up with the decade dressers and French ballroom society around the city with the woman behind it all – La Baronne de Paname *(@laBaronnedeParname on Instagram).*

From Paris to the Front: Ex-Metro Scribes' War Stories

Right Bank Advice: 'Don't get yourself killed'

by Edward Girardet

Paris in the late 1970s was a romantic hub for foreign correspondents. Since World War II, when Hemingway and his fellow war writers "liberated" the Ritz bar, the city had drawn correspondents from *TIME, The Washington Post, ABC, CBC* and dozens of other newsrooms. It was also the heart of photojournalism, home to legendary agencies like *Magnum, SIPA* and *Sygma,* and legends like Catherine Leroy and Raymond Depardon.

That's all gone now, dismantled bureau by bureau over four decades of budget cuts, digital disruption and the shrinking public appetite for news from more than a time zone away. What's left is a handful of wire service reporters and a thin community of freelancers.

But back then, Paris was not merely a city but a credential. For a foreign correspondent, it meant you had arrived; that you consorted with politicians, film stars and spies, and had an expense account that took you to the French Riviera and the vineyards of Bordeaux.

And also, of course, in some cases, to Angola, Iraq and Afghanistan.

For it was the war correspondents who set the standard for all the rest. In the 1970s, the Left Bank cafés – La Coupole, Le Select, Le Luxembourg – doubled as unofficial war rooms, where reporters swapped stories of firefights in Rhodesia, brawls with French Foreign Legionnaires in smoky Marseille bars or commandeering bottles of wine from bombed-out restaurants in Beirut. Among this colorful cast were the hardened veterans who treated war zones as personal playgrounds. Their advice often veered into the crass and absurd. "Somalia's whores are stunning," declared Jean-François Chauvel, a grizzled Grand Reporter for *Le Figaro,* puffing on his ever-present Gauloise. "But they've all got crabs. Stick with the aid workers."

Others carried themselves with quiet authority, like Pierre Issot-Sergent. A French cameraman with a war-scarred elegance, Pierre had parachuted into combat zones in Vietnam and even played a suave plantation owner in a Chuck Norris movie. Over drinks at Le Select, he once told me: "It's too easy to stay here in Paris. None of this is real. Wars are terrible, but they teach you how to live."

His words stuck with me, part challenge, part warning. Paris offered comfort and culture; in that regard there was no place better. Having first arrived to teach English, I'd wrangled a job with *UPI,* and had covered everything from European politics to art, Alpine conservation, the Cannes Film Festival and the French Open. But the longer I stayed, the more I felt I was missing the stories that really mattered. I wasn't chasing history; I was watching it from a safe distance.

After three years at *UPI,* I quit and embraced the uncertainty of freelancing, eager to explore radio, television and in-depth magazine features, hoping one day to write books. My efforts paid off when I was selected for a Journalists in Europe Fellowship, led by Philippe Viannay, a former underground editor in the French Resistance. An ebullient, ever-optimistic man of ideas, Viannay shared with me experiences like tossing copies of the clandestine magazine *Défense de la France* from the back of a speeding Citroën under the noses of Nazi officers enjoying their apéros on the Champs-Élysées. Viannay became a mentor and opened my eyes to a subject that would become central to my career: the role of resistance in time of war.

"Resistance is never a story of the majority," he told me. "Most people just try to survive. A few fight. A few collaborate. History judges them all."

That idea and the messy, fragile nature of courage, with often the most ordinary people undertaking the most extraordinary exploits, whether as partisans or quiet subversives, would shape the rest of my career.

Paris was great. But it was time to find myself a war.

Over coffee at a side-street café near the Paris Opera, I asked *TIME* magazine's Bill Dowell, a former Indochina correspondent who had become a close friend, for advice. Lebanon? Southeast Asia? The Horn of Africa? A tall, imposing American with a dark sense of humor, Bill had been wounded in Vietnam, a Viet Cong shell stopped only by his camera bag. Despite this harrowing experience, he still retained a certain whimsical nostalgia. Journalists often find themselves longing for the danger rushes of the past, conveniently forgetting the harsher realities.

Bill pondered my dilemma. "There are too many journalists who already know Southeast Asia. Lebanon is pretty much saturated, and I wouldn't bother with North Africa. No one's interested," he said pointedly. He then looked up with a decisive look.

"Why not go to Afghanistan? There's a small war brewing there. You'll get some good reporting experience." And besides, he added, "Even the most obscure conflicts have a nasty habit of coming back to haunt us, particularly if you ignore them."

He studied me for a moment. "Get in early. Just don't get yourself killed."

That was all I needed. I booked a flight to Pakistan, and a few weeks later found myself in Afghanistan.

It was October 1979, two months before the Soviet invasion. The beginning of a war I would go on to cover as a Paris-based foreign correspondent for, among other outlets, *The Christian Science Monitor* and the *PBS NewsHour,* and which, in 2026, has yet to end.

— Edward Girardet is editor of Global Geneva *magazine. This piece is drawn from his forthcoming book, "The War That Followed Me – From the Hippie Trail to Afghanistan's Frontlines."*

Iran-Iraq: The boys with the plastic keys

by Kenneth R. Timmerman

Our government minders organized a trip down to Basra, Iraq's second largest city and the scene of a recent Iraqi "victory" in the war. We traveled in a convoy of two luxury motor coaches and a few jeeps down the main highway, hugging the border with Iran.

"You can see that the Iraqis are confident," said Pascal Boniface, a young Socialist Party defense analyst. He was trying to impress an attractive female Swiss journalist across the aisle.

"Do you think the Iranians can see us?" she asked.

"They wouldn't dare shell a convoy of foreign journalists," he said.

Patrick Denaud, a *CBS News* cameraman assigned to work with me on this trip to the front, had to clap both hands over his mouth to keep from laughing.

Our luck held, and once we rolled into the Basra Sheraton, we learned why. The four-story atrium, draped with flowering bougainvillea, was completely deserted. We were the only guests. From the sandbagged bar on the roof, opened for our benefit, we could see a half dozen coastal tankers and bunkering ships in the Shatt al-Arab waterway, some shot full of holes and beached at crazy angles in the muck. The Iraqi army had used massive amounts of artillery to stomp out the child soldiers brigadooned into Khomeini's Islamic horde like hobnailed boots squashing bugs, driving them from the area through sheer brute force. Three weeks after the battle was over, Basra's residents were still shell-shocked.

It was 100 degrees Fahrenheit by 10 o'clock the next morning when we departed for the front.

The first sign that things were getting serious was the pontoon bridge over the Shatt al-Arab, with a misspelled sign that read, "Far well." Our giant luxury motor coach rumbled slowly across the murky waters, heading toward a marshy lowland where the skeletons of uprooted palm trees littered the bare ground.

"That used to be the border," Patrick said. "We are now in Iran."

About a mile in, we saw sand-colored pick-ups and Range Rovers speeding across dusty side roads, their windshields and windows smeared with mud. "That keeps down the reflections," Patrick said. "The Iranians will shoot at anything that catches the sun."

"Like us," I said.

"Theoretically, yes."

We both laughed nervously.

Our first stop was a command bunker, about a ten minute drive due east into Iran. Our four-car convoy spread out at 20-meter intervals along a giant earthwork berm that sheltered us from the 200,000 Iranians who faced us somewhere in the shimmering distance. An open tent had been set up, and an officer welcomed us with ice-cold refreshments and snacks. Window air conditioners, set at ceiling level into the corrugated tin walls, wheezed like old hunting dogs dreaming of the chase.

The forty-year old Iraqi division commander described the recent battle for us.

"I felt sorry for my men," he said, and the group of staff officers around him tut-tutted and shook their heads knowingly. "It broke their hearts to kill so many boys. They just kept coming, wave after wave of them, clutching their tiny plastic keys. We had to chain our men to their machine-guns to keep them from giving into pity and running away."

> 'I felt sorry for my men,' the Iraqi commander said. 'It broke their hearts to kill so many boys.'

He gave a quick, barking laugh and his officers joined in. It was my introduction to Baathist humor. I gave an involuntary shudder as the meaning of what he said sunk in. The boys were sent out to breach the minefields. They walked shoulder to shoulder, clutching the plastic keys Khomeini had told them would unlock the gates of heaven when they died. To the Iraqis, they were like Halloween ghouls. They were terrified of them.

"We'd like to shoot at the front," Patrick said, indicating his video rig.

We packed into two Land Rovers, one for us and the second as armed escort, and headed through a cut in the berm that was rutted from tank traffic.

"Do you see anything?" I asked Patrick.

"Just desert," he said. "And trenches."

Then we entered the Valley of the Turrets. Every 20 meters or so, a tank turret emerged from the hard-scrabble dirt, and as we got close, we could see that the tanks had been buried in pits, with only enough room around them for a man to walk. This was right out of Soviet armor training manuals, I learned later.

We drove at breakneck speed for another five minutes, due east into Iran, then the officer up front pointed and the driver cut the wheel hard and we skidded in the desert gravel and dirt and swerved into a vacant tank pit.

We climbed down into the trench and advanced another two hundred meters, until the trench ended in a mud-crusted wooden ladder.

"Up here," Patrick said. "Do your stand up and let's get out of here."

So I stood out in the Iranian desert with my back facing the hordes of invisible Iranian troops and practiced reciting the couple of sentences I had composed in my mind while we were driving. Patrick shot two or three takes, and then we heard the muffled booms of departing artillery behind me and Patrick turned me around just in time so I could see the white puffs of smoke.

"Incoming!" he said, and dove down into the trench.

Our escort's radio exploded in static just as the shells landed, overshooting us. "We can't go back," he said, indicating the trench we had taken to the front. "Follow me!"

The Iraqi officer scrambled up to the desert floor and fell flat to the ground, where I joined him.

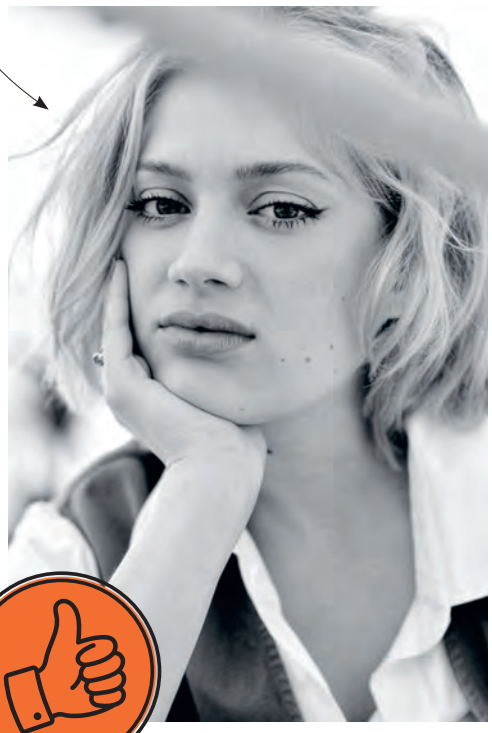
"This way!" he said. And then he was off.

Patrick had turned red and could hardly breathe. We had both run out of water, and he was dehydrating quickly. I grabbed him under the shoulder and ran in a crouch after our guide. Patrick stumbled out of my grip and lurched forward, pulled by the weight of the camera. Now we could hear a change in the Iranian artillery. Instead of whistling high overhead, it went silent after the thud of the outgoing rounds and in the next instant I saw the flash and then heard the sound of the incoming tank shell, ramming into the trench we had just left. They were bracketing us. Our guide ran toward us, and grabbed Patrick under the arms and half-carried, half-dragged him across the open ground as I lugged the camera. All of a sudden the two of them disappeared, and I thought for an instant they had been vaporized. But my legs kept moving until I crashed down on top of them in a hidden trench.

It was a hard brutal bloody slog of a war and I would go back to Baghdad and different parts of the front repeatedly and rarely did it get any better.

— From his base in Paris, Kenneth W. Timmerman covered the Middle East and many of its wars during the 1980s and early '90s, working for USA Today, The Atlanta Constitution, Newsweek, The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, CBS News, ABC News and many others. This piece was adapted from "And the Rest is History: Tales of Hostages, Arms Dealers, Dirty Tricks, and Spies" (Post Hill Press; 2022).

Nadia Tereszkiewicz



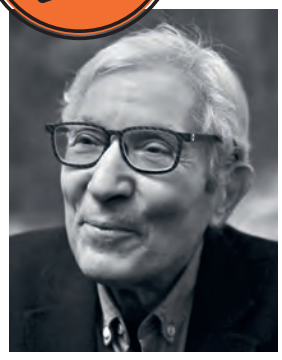
IN & OUT

When *What's In/What's Out* in Paris appeared in *The Metro* in 1977, it was – really, check it out! – the first time such a feature had appeared anywhere, ever. In fact, it began as a lark. Dominique Torrès was confined to bed at home in the Paris suburbs, seven months pregnant with a broken leg, and when a visiting *Metro* editor suggested she might use her free time to do an article, she replied in disgust: "About what, how my curtains are the best in Paris? How everyone should have bedding like mine?"

And that's how it started, Dominique's "research" consisting of recording her personal preferences (on everything from bicycles to the era's reigning political figures), with an occasional nod to the opinions of friends. So we were as shocked as anyone, when the article appeared, at how many people actually put it on their walls and used it to guide to their own purchases and behavior. Which proved either that *The Paris Metro* had a lot more influence than we thought or that the French were even more suggestible. Or both. Anyway, Dominique is back (this time from knee replacement) with as good a guide as any into what's currently In/Out in Paris.

by Dominique Torrès

Dachshunds



Boualem Sansal

iVision Tech sunglasses

Raphaël Glucksmann

Notre-Dame de Paris

ACTORS
1977
IN Gérard Depardieu, Patrick Dewaere, Alain Delon
OUT Jean-Paul Belmondo, Jean-Louis Trintignant
2026
IN Pierre Niney (moves seamlessly from a letter-perfect Yves Saint Laurent to a brilliant Count of Monte Cristo); Timothée Chalamet (for being half French and declaring himself a big fan of AS Saint-Etienne)
OUT (couldn't be more) Gérard Depardieu

ACTRESSES
1977
IN Brigitte Fossey, Isabelle Huppert, Miou-Miou
OUT Catherine Deneuve, Annie Girardot
2026
IN Adèle Exarchopoulos and Nadia Tereszkiewicz (although, and partly because, pronouncing their names is so hard); Catherine Deneuve (quietly, among some, for standing up against Me Too zealotry)
OUT Catherine Deneuve (loudly, among many, for "excusing" inexcusable male behavior)

AUTHORS
1977
IN Jean-Edern Hallier, the New Philosophers, Malraux
OUT Sartre, Camus, Karl Marx
2026
IN Boualem Sansal, whose criticism of Islam landed him in an Algerian prison; Kamel Daoud, for publicly defending his friend Boualem; "Proustian" Goncourt laureate Laurent Mauvignier
OUT Sartre (still), Malraux (maybe), Arthur Koestler (hélas)

BICYCLES
1977
IN Chinese
OUT English
2026
IN Electric (dangers and all)
OUT Fossil-fuel powered, especially Vespas

CARS
1977
IN Land Rovers
OUT American
2026
IN None. Every make and model **OUT!!!** If one admits to having one, it must be "in a garage en province"

CIGARETTES
1977
IN Time (and other cigar-like cigarettes), Gauloise (as always)
OUT American-brand "blond" filters
2026
IN In old films (if unfiltered)
OUT All brands everywhere else

DOGS
1977
IN Eskimo dogs
OUT Afghans
2026
IN King Charles Spaniels (drawing "Oh, qu'il est mignon!" with every jaunty stroll down the block)
OUT Dachshunds (especially in summer, when absurdly overdressed in little coats)

DINNER GUESTS
1977
IN Gays, Arabs; among celebrities, Claire Bretécher, Régis Debray
OUT White-collar types; among celebrities, Roger Peyrefitte, David Hamilton
2026
IN Palestinian filmmakers (hard to find), attractive Iranian women journalists
OUT Gay intellectuals, Israeli journalists (no matter how attractive)

EXPRESSIONS
1977
IN Le pied, c'est chié
OUT Super, terrible, chouette, vachement (followed by any adjective)
2026
IN C'est une tuerie!, il me calcule (or il ne me calcule pas), en mode (example: je suis en mode panique)
OUT Pas de souci

EYEGLASSES
1977
IN Large rims in transparent plastic
OUT Small rims, metal rims, aviator sunglasses
2026
IN Aviators, Ray-Bans, especially the iVision Techs Trump mocked Macron for wearing indoors at Davos
(the publicity saved a little firm in the Jura from shutting down)
OUT Chanel and Vuitton (unless looking to pass for a Saudi Arabian tourist)

FASHION TRENDS
1977
IN Punk, the gentleman farmer look
OUT Garments and accessories with initials – Louis Vuitton, UCLA, etc.
2026
IN Classy and easy to wear; jeans (which never left) – for men, particularly the ones from the APC shop in the Marais, which enhance working class appeal; for women, even a pink jean outfit from Monoprix
OUT Suits for men and even more so for women

ILLNESSES
1977
IN Colitis, spasms, depression
OUT Crises de foie
2026:
IN Zona (aka shingles – and definitely no joke)
OUT Crises de foie (still)

INTERIOR DESIGN
1977
IN The back-to-nature look (whitewashed walls, tile floors, plenty of plants)
OUT Plastic, lacquer paints (except on stairways)
2026
IN Natural chic; Cordelia de Castellane is everyone's designer of choice!
OUT Any space that looks overly designed

NECKWEAR
1977
IN For women, long white silk "aviator" scarves, worn untied; men's silk ties
OUT Ascots, wide ties
2026
IN For men, Paul Smith striped scarf (and matching socks); for women, Mongolian brown cashmere
OUT For women, Hermès silk scarves – except when worn as belts

PAINTING SCHOOLS
1977
IN 19th century romanticism, photorealism
OUT Impressionism, Pop
2026
IN African, Chinese
OUT Abstract (at last!)

PARISIAN PLACES
1977
IN The Louvre, the Eiffel Tower
OUT Notre-Dame
2026
IN Notre-Dame (a miracle, in every sense of the word); small sailboats (bateaux du vert galant) on the Seine
OUT The Louvre (greatly heightened security since the robbery, and even larger crowds), the Eiffel Tower (magnet for pickpockets), bateaux mouches

POLITICAL FIGURES
1977
IN Brice Lalonde (ecologist)
OUT All party bigshots – Left, Right, Center – especially ex-premiers Debré, Chaban-Delmas, Messmer
2026
IN Raphaël Glucksmann (since Mélenchon made an anti-Semitic joke about his name); Robert Mesnard, mayor of Béziers (for his openness to ideas across the political spectrum)
OUT Daniel Cohn-Bendit (the May '68 hero has long overstayed his time in the limelight); Dominique de Villepin, formerly Chirac's flamboyant prime minister, now embarrassingly "close" to autocratic Arab states…

PUBLICATIONS
1977
IN Le Matin, Libération, Mode Internationale
OUT Le Quotidien, L'Express, Charlie Hebdo
2026
IN Franc Tireur (sharp and witty, pro-laïcité, opposed to both extremes), VIEUX (the most despised of all concepts repurposed as a happy-go-lucky celebration of the good life)
OUT Libération, Le Nouvel Obs, l'Express, Courrier International

QUARTIERS
1977
IN Les Halles, Bastille, the Marais, unrenovated 14th
OUT (VERY) Saint-Michel, Saint-Germain-des-Près
2026
IN The 11th (left-wing producers), the 20th (left-wing reporters), Montmartre (rich right-wing actors)
OUT 7th, 8th, 16th, 17th (areas where today almost impossible to find a café on the corner)

RESTAURANTS
1977
IN La Ciboulette, Dodin Bouffant, Tai Yien, Train Bleu (still in: La Coupole, Lipp, Chez Edgar)
OUT Le Coupe-Chou, Julien, Lapérouse
2026
IN Cafés/restaurants in museums, especially the cafeterias of the Musée d'Orsay and the Musée de la Marine and the salon de thé at the Musée Jacquemart-André (and – still in! – Le Train Bleu inside the Gare de Lyon)
OUT The brasseries of Montparnasse (La Coupole, La Rotonde, Le Dôme)

SEXUAL LIFESTYLES
1977
IN "Partouzing" with one's spouse, bisexuality
OUT Having affairs on the sly
2026
IN Abstinence; traditional marriage, starting with the white dress
OUT Partouzing (most well-known "swinging" clubs are gone)

SPORTS
1977
IN Cross-country skiing, mountain climbing, tennis (at lunch hour), skateboarding, windsurfing
OUT Squash, waterskiing
2026
IN Cross-country skiing, yoga
OUT Distance running

TV NEWS SHOWS
1977
IN Voir, L'Huile sur le Feu
OUT Les Dossiers de L'Ecran, le Grand Echiquier
2026
IN Darius Rochebin on LCI (serious and fair minded), C dans l'air, C à vous
OUT CNews

WEEKENDS
1977
IN A day at Beaubourg (very in)
OUT Going by car
2026
IN Les Vaux de Cernay (castle, lake, horses, three restaurants one hour from Paris)
OUT La Grande Cascade in the Bois de Boulogne

Arthur Koestler

Musée du Louvre

Hermès silk scarves

Daniel Cohn-Bendit

A Smooth Cultural Revolution As Tabacs of Paris Change Hands

by Meg Bortin

Chunzi Ye was a pioneer in the Chinese takeover of the tobacco shops of Paris. In 2006, at the age of 23, she acquired a scruffy *café-bar-tabac* from an elderly couple from Auvergne, obtained a license from the state tobacco monopoly and, with just six days of training, went into business running L'étincelle, one of the French capital's 650 tobacco shops.

Today, L'étincelle ("The Spark"), lying halfway between Bastille and République, is packed from morning to late into the night. Chunzi turned the place into one of the neighborhood's most happening establishments by preserving (and improving) everything French she inherited from her Auvergnat predecessors – the classic bistro menu at lunchtime, the copper bar, the frescos on the walls, the wavy pink neon lighting. From a business point of view, cigarettes (from which she earns €1.1 per pack) have become almost a sideline.

Chunzi Ye's success fits into a social phenomenon that has been much remarked upon in Paris over the last 20 years – the smooth passage of a majority of the city's Frencher than French *bureaux de tabacs* into the hands of Asian newcomers.

Her story helps explain why Chinese immigrants began investing in tobacco shops in France – as opposed to, say, England – and how an initial trickle turned into a wave, such that a majority of the *tabacs* of Paris are now run by Asians, mainly Chinese. It shows how tobacco shops like L'étincelle are still able to turn a profit despite anti-smoking campaigns and a flourishing black market in contraband cigarettes (sold all over Paris for €5 a pack instead of the official rate of €13.50 per pack of Marlboros). And, as Chinese-run *tabacs* help the government rake in €13 billion a year in tobacco taxes, used primarily to cover the medical costs of smokers, it raises questions about France's overall approach to its tobacco problem.

Chunzi's story is typical in many ways. Like the vast majority of Paris tobacco shops, L'étincelle had been run for years by *bougnats,* as people from the rugged Auvergne region of central France are known. The *bougnat*s moved up to Paris en masse in the mid-19th century and worked selling coal, wood, drinks and food, and becoming *buralistes* – holders of a *bureau de tabac.*

"When we first visited L'étincelle twenty years ago, the Auvergnats who ran the place were very old," Chunzi recalled on a recent afternoon. "The monsieur had had too much pastis, he was very ill. This was at the moment of transition between the Auvergnat *buralistes* and their children, who had gone to school and didn't want to take over their parents' businesses. So they were obliged to sell. And that's how it happened. I became one of the first Chinese *buralistes* of Paris."

In her case, acquiring the place was relatively easy because she was already French, a prerequisite for getting a license to run a bureau de *tabac.* Chunzi's father, Pierre Ye, a merchant from the port city of Wenzhou, in Zhejiang province, south of Shanghai, had moved to France in the 1980s as a political refugee. China still had a one-child policy at that time, "and there were three of us," Chunzi explained. "My father left first, and then he brought the rest of us two years later through family reunification."

Qëndrim Avdiu

Chunzi Ye became a pioneer in the Chinese takeover of Paris tobacco shops when she acquired L'étincelle twenty years ago.

A majority of Parisian tobacco shops are now run by Asian newcomers, mainly Chinese.

She arrived in Paris in 1989, went through the French school system and acquired French nationality along the way. After a string of unsatisfying jobs, she considered moving back to China, where she felt her prospects might be better. But her family opposed that, countering, "Would you like us to put together a little business for you?" So they scraped together enough cash for a down payment on L'étincelle and Chunzi applied for a license to run it.

These licenses are provided by the French customs service, which oversees the state tobacco business. Cigarettes, cigars, loose tobacco and vapes may be sold legally in this country only at a *bureau de tabac,* and the number of these outlets is strictly regulated by the state. This French approach is key to the sector's attractiveness to the Chinese.

"In other countries, tobacco sales are allowed in every supermarket – in England, in Germany," Chunzi said. "It's only in Paris that you have *bureaux de tabac.* This is why the Chinese wanted to take over these businesses. Because there's no competition."

Philippe Alauze, who heads the Fédération des Buralistes de Paris-Ile de France, agrees.

"Why do people invest in tobacco? Because it's a monopoly market and business is guaranteed," Alauze told me recently at his office near Gare Saint-Lazare.

In fact, he said, the prospect of running a *tabac* is so attractive that a number of Chinese men – in his words "a large proportion" – have served five years in the French Foreign Legion to obtain the French citizenship needed for a license.

To get her license, Chunzi did four days of training with the customs service on how to go into business, and two days with *Française des Jeux,* which runs the national lottery and other games of chance on offer at tobacco shops. She was then able to set up shop at L'étincelle.

Alauze estimates that 60% of Paris tobacco shops are now run by ethnic Asians, mainly Chinese, but he admits that this may be on the low side as no surveys have been done recently. (Chunzi put the figure at more like 90%.) Interestingly, most of the ethnic Chinese who run a Paris *tabac* have roots in the same city, Wenzhou, which historically has supplied the largest portion of Chinese emigration to France.

Once they arrive, like the Auvergnats before them, the Chinese newcomers stay in touch with the folks back home. Those wishing to invest in a tobacco shop get help from their relatives in the form of interest-free loans, according to a former head of the Paris federation of *buralistes*, Gérard Bohélay. "Then the word spreads, because you can make a lot of money in the sector," Bohélay told *Le Parisien* back in 2014.

Indeed. The annual revenue of the tobacco sector has been growing by nearly 1% a year for the last decade to reach €19.3 billion in 2025, according to government figures for mainland France. In addition, the government noted, "a large portion" of the €24.8 billion made by the national lottery, sports bets and horse racing in 2023 was brought in by tobacco shops.

At the same time, the number of customers stopping in for tobacco has declined sharply – by 20% since 2020, according to Alauze – due to the combined effects of Covid, anti-smoking campaigns and skyrocketing cigarette prices. For example, today's €13.50 pack of Marlboros cost just €8.20 in 2019, with virtually all of the increase due to taxes.

Tabac owners also face competition from black market sales, which have exploded as the cost of a pack has surged. According to the European think tank IREF, contraband cigarette sales represent nearly a quarter of the French market today. Alauze puts the figure at 45% in the Paris region – and complains that the authorities are doing precious little about it.

I found this to be the case on a recent afternoon when I happened across young men selling cigarettes outside the Gare du Nord. "Five euros," one said, holding out a pack. I said I wasn't interested but asked where they came from. "Switzerland," he replied, adding quickly, "For you, madame, four euros." There were no police in sight.

"We do not understand this illegality that the state does not wish to combat," Alauze said. "When we sign a license with the customs department, we are signing into a monopoly market on tobacco in France. They are selling us a monopoly that doesn't exist."

France still has one of the highest smoking rates in western Europe, at around 25%, surpassed only by Austria, as well as one of the highest rates of tobacco taxation (84%). The government justifies the high taxes as a means of discouraging smoking. Alauze and many others argue that the high-tax policy is fostering the parallel market.

The cigarette taxes are turned over to Social Security, the national health program. They bring in about €13.1 billion a year – less than the €16.4 annual cost of treating smoking-related diseases. Acknowledging France's black market problem, the customs service says that illegal cigarette sales have created a gap of €4.3 billion a year in uncollected taxes.

Faced with declining tobacco sales, and with a tiny profit margin after taxes, tobacco shops have diversified to stay afloat. In addition to the items they sell as government agents – smoking and vaping materials, lottery tickets, scratch cards and betting

A Hidden Gem of a Street

Photos by Anne Swardson

Along the Rue Fortuny: at top, No. 9 now houses a tech company; bottom left, a detail of No. 17; at center, No. 35 housed Sarah Bernhardt's sculpture studio; at right, No. 27 was home to La Bello Otero, actress and courtesan.

by Anne Swardson

Anyone who thinks Paris is nothing but broad boulevards, cream-colored stone buildings and iron-filigree balconies should visit the Rue Fortuny.

It's a small street in the 17th, running between the Avenue de Villiers and the Rue de Prony. You won't see it in the standard tourist guidebooks or websites, but its concentration of Belle Epoque architecture is unequaled anywhere else in the city. Just as important are the many leading cultural figures who lived here.

The Rue Fortuny always reminds me how so much of what makes Paris Paris is kept behind closed doors or high walls. The Eiffel Tower and the Arc de Triomphe are meant to be seen, certainly. But what of the government ministries that can only be visited once a year? Or the huge gardens visible on Google Maps behind monasteries or convents? You have to dig to find the real story.

It took a bit of research to learn that No. 35 was built for the actress Sarah Bernhardt by the architect Nicolas-Félix Escalier in 1876, at the height of her fame. It was her sculpture studio; she lived at No. 37 with eight servants, various family members and some pets until financial pressure led her to sell in 1886. Sadly, No. 37 was torn down in 1956. I hope "La Divine" could enjoy that nice balcony at No. 35.

The houses on the Rue Fortuny were built just as the Baron Haussman was finishing his redesign of the principal axes of the city, tearing down swaths of Paris to build the wide boulevards and homogenous buildings that even now embody the City of Light.

The overhaul opened up new sections of the city – in particular, Plaine-Monceau, covering a chunk of the western half of the 17th north of the Etoile. A hunting ground before the Revolution and farming territory after, the Monceau area was developed by Eugène and Isaac Pereire starting in 1850. By 1876, 16 years after the area was annexed by the city of Paris, houses were sprouting on the Rue Fortuny (itself named after a Catalan painter, Mariano Fortuny y Marsal.)

No. 13 was occupied at different times by the painter Paul Vayson and, much later, the author and filmmaker Marcel Pagnol. Edmond Rostand, author of Cyrano de Bergerac, lived at No. 2, on the corner. And No. 27 was the home of Caroline Otero, otherwise known as La Belle Otero. She was a Spanish actress, dancer and, as we say, *reine de nuit.*

You can't tell who many of the current tenants are, though the Arab League seems to be at No. 36. And a technology company operates out of No. 9, one of the most striking buildings – especially its ceramic decorations. It has quite a history. Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo, son of the painter whose name the street bears, founded a fashion school there that trained haute-couture professionals for decades. Mariano *fils* was an influential figure in Paris fashion and designed the Fortuny pleat. His company still exists.

The street is tiny; you can walk it in five minutes. But I suggest spending more time, looking up houses that strike your fancy and imagining Rue Fortuny at the height of its influence. And ask yourself: Are there other obscure Paris streets with rich and little-known histories that you can find?

—Anne Swardson has lived in Paris for 27 years, first working for The Washington Post *and* Bloomberg News *and now writing blog posts and mystery fiction about the Paris that tourists never see. Visit her blog at anneswardson.com.*

– *tabacs* offer candy, gum, postage stamps, pens, CBD products, Kleenex and phone cards. Some sell train tickets. Some have a newsstand. You can pay certain taxes at a *tabac,* and for the last 13 years you've been able to open a bank account. Like L'étincelle, many *tabacs* also function as bars and/or restaurants.

The Asians now running a majority of the *tabacs* of Paris – not just from China, but also from Vietnam, Cambodia, Korea, Sri Lanka and India – have made a success of it by working harder than the French who preceded them, according to Alauze.

"This is the primary value of this Asian community," he said. "They didn't revolutionize the points of sale. They said, 'He opened at 7 a.m., we're going to open at 5 a.m. He closed at 10 p.m., we'll close at midnight. He closed on Sunday afternoon? We'll stay open all day.'"

This is precisely what happened in Chunzi's case. When she acquired L'étincelle, it opened at 8 a.m. and closed at 4 p.m. "and at lunchtime they always had the same ten clients. It was really funny," she said. "When I opened, I started at 7 a.m. and closed at 10 p.m., seven days a week. For three years. I hired my sister on salary, and she helped me."

Now L'étincelle stays open until 2 a.m., its bar packed with young people. It gets about 1,000 clients a day, Chunzi says. Of the two-thirds who come in for cigarettes, many stick around for coffee, a snack, a drink, classic bistro food at lunchtime and, another innovation, popular Vietnamese dishes, like *nems* (crispy spring rolls), from noon to midnight.

Even in a cosmopolitan city like Paris, there have been tensions over the growing Asian presence. Customers have largely deserted the BHV department store since its introduction last year of the Chinese fast-fashion giant Shein. And people grouse about Asian restaurants supplanting Paris bistros. As a New York friend half joked recently, "Can you still get French food in this town?"

> A flourishing black market in cigarettes costs €4.3 billion a year in uncollected taxes.

But Parisians seem to have accepted the Chinese takeover of their tobacco shops, with no notable protests.

Chunzi says the biggest challenge she's faced as an ethnic Chinese working with Parisians is "showing them that in fact we're the same. We're like them, and that reassures them."

She has done this through her enlightened approach to hiring – the people behind L'étincelle's bar are straight, gay and trans, Asian, black, white and everything in between – and by preserving the look of the place.

"I wanted it to remain authentic, with its 1950s charm," Chunzi said. "There are paintings dating to 1950 which are a bit worn now – they're signed, with the date. I changed the neon lighting, which was white, to pink." The sign out front, "L'étincelle," is pink too.

Business has been good for the Ye family. Chunzi's sister now has her own tobacco shop about a 10-minute walk away, while Chunzi's brother has become her associate.

And the Chinese presence has also been good for the tobacco trade. As Alauze sums it up, "Seeing how they came and invested and worked hard, we are naturally very favorable." ■

Qëndrim Avdiu

L'étincelle has become one of the neighborhood's most happening establishments.

Where to Go in Paris? A Young Parisienne Brings Us Up to Date

by Joel and Nina Stratte-McClure

Sonia Stratte-McClure

The authors lunching at Le Train Bleu in the Gare de Lyon, where the toilet "definitely doesn't have a train station vibe."

Nina, my 8.75-year-old granddaughter, is a highly discerning urinator.

She made this clear three years ago when I was giving her a history lesson about the Gallo-Roman architecture in the Arènes de Lutèce and suddenly she "really had to go." I assured her there was a perfectly nice, if not quite pristine, park toilet in the first-century amphitheater, but Nina is fastidious ("I don't go in nature!") and would have nothing to do with it.

"Papi Joël," she chastised. "Find me a decent toilet."

Indeed, as a veteran Parisienne, Nina boycotts all those free Ville de Paris public toilets on sidewalks throughout the city, rightly observing, "They have spiders and rats and are never clean!" But she is a big fan of public libraries and cemeteries, noting (as she did on a recent visit to Jean Seberg's and Serge Gainsbourg's graves in the *Montparnasse Cemetery, 3 Boulevard Edgar Quinet, 75014),* "They are always clean and always have toilet paper."

She is also keenly aware, for instance, that there are free well-maintained public toilets on the Rue de Rivoli side of the *Tuileries Gardens* as well as two clean free public toilets in the *Luxembourg Gardens* – though the latter, she adds, also has "the smelliest *urinoir* in France near the boules courts, which should make the French Senate who runs that park very ashamed."

In this regard, it must be confessed, my granddaughter is far from a chip off the old block. In 1970, after leaving a party on the Left Bank and thinking at the time it was customary to go "in nature," I did so, naturally, and was approached by a scowling *flic.*

"This is France," I declared. "Anyone can pee anywhere!"

"Perhaps," the cop replied, after a moment of hesitation. "But not in the middle of the Boulevard Saint-Germain on a Saturday night."

Who knew?

Still, even today, if the need arises, I'll go anywhere (even in the smelly but free men's urinoir in those public sidewalk toilets). But now, since almost no one will refuse a kid, I often exploit Nina's presence – and her innate ability to find a free clean loo anywhere in town is a huge bonus. I haven't yet explained to her why I need to know so much more about the location of free toilets today than I did fifty years ago.

What follows is Nina's carefully curated list of good, bad and ugly free toilets in Paris.

1. Nina of course knows that department stores generally have exceptionally clean and well-maintained toilets. Her number one choice on the Right Bank is the very upmarket *La Samaritaine (9 Rue de la Monnaie, 75001),* where the old advertising slogan continues to hold: "You can find everything at La Samaritaine." The store was reopened by LVMH as a luxury showcase for expensive brands in 2021. Nina has lured Papi Joël inside ostensibly to use the spa-like toilets, but then forced him to look at designer sunglasses on the way out.

2. On the Left Bank, Nina favors *La Grande Épicerie de Paris (38 Rue de Sèvres, 75007),* the vast gourmet grocery store at Le Bon Marché department store. "If you're in a hurry and need quick access," she notes helpfully, "the toilets are right down the escalator past the champagne and wine when you enter."

3. Hotels are another obvious go-to place for the discriminating. "Papi Joël told me that when we go into a hotel it doesn't matter that we're not staying, just act like we own the place – and it works!" Among the many hotel options, Nina of course has her favorites, strategically placed around town. Her go-to hotel on the Right Bank at the moment is *Fauchon L'Hôtel (4 Boulevard Malesherbes, 75008),* just off the Place de la Madeleine. Nearby, she points out, it's also worth visiting the ornate and classic *subterranean public toilet* near the church "because they have different colored toilet paper —red, orange, pink, blue and violet — and very clean, roomy stalls. They also let kids, well me anyway, go for free instead of paying €2."

4. Nina's second fave hotel on the Right Bank is the resplendent *Hôtel de Crillon (10 Place de la Concorde, 75008),* right next to the American Embassy, "because the luxurious marble restrooms have the best and thickest toilet paper in town," though she enthuses, "I can't wait to try the toilets at the new *Hôtel Louis Vuitton (103-111 Avenue des Champs-Élysées, 75008)* when it opens."

5. On the Left Bank, she highly recommends the *Hôtel Lutetia (45 Boulevard Raspail, 75006).* "It's so big that you can walk through the restaurant and go to the bathroom off the lobby and no one notices." She also highly rates the bathroom downstairs at the *Pullman (18 Avenue de Suffren, 75015)* near the Eiffel Tower. "Location, location, location," she chimes in.

6. While some cafés and restaurants will, reluctantly, let passersby use their toilets for free (again, especially with a child or two as a prop), Nina knows that the sensible and courteous buy a drink before heading downstairs, upstairs or to a back room to the toilet. Their quality is highly variable. "I find toilets in most cafés too small but there are exceptions," she says. Notable among these, unsurprisingly, is the newly renovated *La Tour d'Argent (15 Quai de la Tournelle, 75005)* where, "even though they let me go for free, I make sure to ask Papi Joël to order me a Perrier *menthe* at the bar."

7. On the Right Bank she's bonkers about *Le Train Bleu* in the Gare de Lyon. "I would normally never use a toilet in a train station, but the one in this Belle Epoque restaurant definitely does not have a train station vibe," she explains. "And the kids menu is great."

8. "Museums are also good in a pinch and Papi Joël has a Musées de Paris pass to get us in for free," she says. "I really, just for fun, get a kick using the toilet at the former homes of *Honoré de Balzac (47 Rue Raynouard, 75016)* and *Victor Hugo (6 Place des Vosges, 75004)* even if they're a bit small. I mean, if they were good enough for Balzac and Hugo….."

9. For some reason, Nina does not consider the spacious riverside women's public toilet beneath the *Pont Louis-Philippe* on Île Saint-Louis to be "in nature" because "it's very big and welcoming, and the men stay in the men's restroom next door, though I'm not sure where all the pee goes. Incidentally watch out for the few public toilets that do charge, like the one near Sacré-Coeur which scams tourists for €2."

10. Nina also has one very crucial bit of advice wherever you wind up going in Paris. "You have to be careful. There are a lot of places that I haven't mentioned because they might not have toilet paper. Papi Joël told me he even went once to the Hôtel Ritz and there was no toilet paper. So now I tell every girl that she should *carry a pack of tissues* just in case."

> Nina is a fan of public libraries and cemeteries. 'They're always clean and they always have toilet paper.'

And if you don't trust Nina…

- Find a list of Paris public toilets online at *opendata.paris.fr* (search for toilettes).
- See what people are saying about Paris toilets at *reddit.com* (search for paris toilets).
- Check out *parisinsidersguide.com* (click on Essentials to get to the site search, then search for toilets).

(This is probably all news to Nina, whose parents – rightly – don't let her go online.)

The Age of Irreverence: How an Era Shaped a Film Critic

When the new journalism hit Paris in the 1970s, I was up for adventure. I was lucky enough to be working for *The Paris Metro,* which had an underground approach to interviewing that breached the distance between a ragged bunch of cub reporters and the previous generation. In a period of transition, the style was not yet the gossipy exposé stance of *People* magazine, but was investigative and irreverent, marking the beginning of a genre that was to impact the entire French press, also in a period of transformation.

This was the age of coming out of the closet, of political and sexual audacity. We were all single (I newly so) and saw ourselves as lone adventurers, reveling in being down and out in Paris. We went to the movies together – and to hear Ingrid Caven sing at Le Pigall's. We smoked and drank everything, and fell into bed, and sometimes in love, with this one and that with few second thoughts.

The *Metro,* which lasted a mere two-and-a-half years, coincided with a time of exuberant experimentation. The Pompidou Center's first major exhibition, "Paris-New York" in 1977, showed the dynamics in the art world, and the artists were coming through Paris and dropping by *Metro's* magnificent squat in the Marais. I contributed to an article for *Time* magazine on the opening, interviewing the architects, musing about Zola's Les Halles . . .

Movies were shot in the courtyard of our *hôtel particulier* on Rue des Francs-Bourgeois. We enjoyed our own sneak previews, glimpses of Romy Schneider, visits by Frédéric Mitterrand who had opened his unique movie complex, L'Entrepôt, in the 14th arrondissement.

It was a vital moment for independent cinema and for David Overbey, *Metro's* critic, a radical movie-lover who became a key programmer at the Toronto Film Festival. At the paper, he got to express his appetite for emerging cinemas, to report on the latest Lino Brocka, Fassbinder's scandalous antics and the long walk Werner Herzog took to visit his ailing friend Lotte Eisner, the *grande dame* of the Cinémathèque. We also got to visit Lotte at her home in Neuilly. I remember being introduced by Gene Moskowitz, a friend, *Variety* critic known as "Mosc" and a founding member of Cannes' *Semaine de la Critique.*

David, too, became a friend, and a helpmate. When he became one of the founders of the Toronto Festival, I was invited and beautifully received. He also played favorites among filmmakers – Fellini was not one, and he had little love for Truffaut. He was an old friend of Fritz Lang and of Claude Chabrol, the most Lang-ian of New Wave filmmakers. Later, David took me to Hong Kong, Vietnam and Taiwan, where I met Hou Hsou Hsien and Edward Yang, who became a friend. In Vietnam, we attended screenings that marked the birth of national cinema. We also had a fabulous time.

In the fall of 1977, I saw Wim Wenders' *The American Friend,* adapted from a Patricia Highsmith novel. Highsmith and her "Mr. Ripley" intrigued me. Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train,* also adapted from her novel, had made her famous in France (as would Chabrol's adaptation of her novel *The Cry of the Owl* in 1987). And I was from the world of books and fascinated by a writer who seemed to have no style and yet built something beyond style.

Joan Dupont

The author on a boat with Clint Eastwood as he basks in the success of "Bird" at the Cannes film festival in 1988.

Movies were shot in the courtyard of *Metro's* magnificent squat on the Rue des Francs-Bourgeois.

My first attempt at a portrait, "The Mysterious Patricia Highsmith," turned out to be a long, hard encounter in the garden of her farmhouse near Fontainebleau. I interviewed Highsmith for the *Metro* in 1977 as she swilled beer, cursed her mother and various writers she disliked – Jimmy Baldwin and Philip Roth. Three years later, I interviewed her for *The New York Times Magazine* in the stony Ticino region of Switzerland, where she lived until her death. She disliked almost every movie made from her books. Haunted by her characters, their stories and her own story, she forever touched and baffled me.

My 1978 interview with Mary McCarthy, "Portrait of a Lady," made waves. McCarthy was 65, a revered figure on the Paris scene, a kind of star writer in residence, and the nearest figure to what we could call an intellectual. This reverence must have come through in my first draft of the profile. When I turned it in, my editor, Tom Moore, asked me: "What did you really think?" This made me go back and reconsider.

What Tom said was very simple, but it changed the story. I had found McCarthy's attitude difficult to cope with. I felt that she was withdrawn and didn't like me being there. I had recently seen Fred Zinnemann's *Julia,* adapted from Lillian Hellman's autobiographical *Pentimento,* and when I rewrote the McCarthy profile, I opened it thus:

"In the movie *Julia,* Jane Fonda as Lillian Hellman plays on the typewriter as though it was a honky-tonk piano, a cigarette clenched in her pretty teeth. At one point, in a fit of pique against the machine ("The Children's Hour" is lagging), she throws it out the window into the snow. Now, that's the kind of spirit the public likes to see women writers display: mannish, manic. But I saw Mary McCarthy standing at the Place de la Concorde at high noon, a Sulka shopping bag clutched to her side, her face powdered pale, dressed in pearl-grey, like a widow, hair and handsome chin set . . . "

Joan Dupont

Juliette Binoche presenting Joan Dupont with the Plume d'Or award in 2006.

It was no secret that McCarthy and Hellman were enemies – that opening must have sent chills up her spine. Thereafter, she made a point of leaving every party of the festive '70s if she heard I might appear.

I must have annoyed more than one subject with my manner of acting all ears, a new age feminist Nancy Drew on the scent of a secret. I felt that my mission was to reveal the character's cover-up – for my interviewees were characters to me, not quite real people.

Over the years, I interviewed Eric Rohmer, Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol (I was on the set of his *M.* with a TV crew when the Berlin Wall came down), Alain Resnais, Jacques Rivette – filmmakers whose creations were often inspired by literature. And Jean-Luc Godard, inspired by his own mysterious take on life.

My relation to the movies was no longer the sheer fun of watching Mel Brook's *Blazing Saddles* and going with the gang to Joe Allen's for beer. It became more complex as I saw more, went further and got closer to my subjects.

At the Cannes festival, there were hard times. I interviewed Shohei Imamura for TV on the beach of the Carlton in 1983 – the wind carrying his words, conveyed by the stoic translator, out to sea. At a loss for words myself, I felt that I was there as a recording device.

But there were also good times, magical meetings: Bloody Marys for breakfast with Fassbinder; tea with Satyajit Ray at the Hotel Suisse; Lars Von Trier young and bald and monosyllabic; Godard, hooted by critics after the press screening of *Sauve Qui Peut;* Clint Eastwood on a boat, basking in the success of *Bird.*

I got close to the vast family of critics, to my colleagues at *Le Film Français,* my colleagues from New York and L.A., to festival directors and certain filmmakers. We ate and drank, argued and traded funny stories. I once recalled for them that when I interviewed Sergio Leone at his lavish home, he suddenly pointed a finger at me and roared: "You, you are Jewish!"

Quite unnerved, I responded, "Yes. How did you know?"

"Ah, because me, I'm Jewish too!"

The father of the Spaghetti Western! Who knew?

I always felt we were family. Family from all over, from Paris, Berlin, Venice, Locarno, Taormina, Cannes, Toronto, Rotterdam, L.A. or New York, who got together to see, to feel, to react, to write and to talk about movies. ■

United Archives / Alamy

There were magical meetings – Bloody Marys for breakfast with Fassbinder (above), tea with Satyajit Ray at the Hotel Suisse.

The Hard Truth About Oeufs Durs Mayo

by Sophie Reinauld

Who ever thought that *oeuf mayonnais*e was part of French gastronomy? No one in my family would have dared serve a hard-boiled egg with mayo and call it a dish!

Tell me instead about *oeuf cocotte,* like my mother used to make it, with the egg deliciously baked in cream with mushrooms or salmon or even foie gras. Or *oeuf mimosa,* where the hard-boiled egg is topped by crumbs of egg yolk and a little bit of mayonnaise.

When I was growing up in the French Alps, near Briançon, my parents ran an inn. My mother was an excellent cook, having started making Sunday lunch for her family at the age of 10. So she knew what she was doing when she put a meal on the table. Hard-boiled eggs could be part of *crudités,* or served with cold veal roast for a picnic, but never ever as a dish on their own. Not in a traditional French bourgeois family.

The first time I heard someone actually order *oeuf mayonnais*e was back in 1976, when the publisher of *The Paris Metro* took me to lunch. He informed me at a café on the Rue des Francs-Bourgeois, across the street from our offices, that I had won the job as production manager after a three-month trial. Now part of an American tribe, I understood that *oeuf mayo* – as the cheapest choice on any café menu, and with a good baguette to go with it – would often be my choice as well.

At the time, this humble dish was a bistro staple. It was the kind of food Parisians might enjoy with a glass of Beaujolais at the counter of their favorite café. But it then fell out of fashion – which made it all the more surprising when *oeufs durs mayonnaise* made a dramatic culinary comeback and emerged as one of the stars of restaurant menus in Paris.

Now it's served around town in so many iterations that an annual prize is awarded for the best version of *oeufs mayo.* The dish ranges in price from a mere 90 centimes at the elegant Le Voltaire, on the quais along the Seine, to 12 euros at La Rôtisserie d'Argent (an offshoot of the legendary Tour d'Argent), which won the prize for 2021, and even more elsewhere.

Courtesy Bouillon Chartier

Oeufs durs mayonnaise, at just €2, is a popular first course at Bouillon Chartier.

In the classic version, the eggs are boiled until they're only just hard, with the yolks retaining a bit of their bright orange color. The other essential is to serve the eggs with homemade mayonnaise. Mayo out of a jar? Forget it.

More elaborate versions started emerging in Paris during the current bistronomy wave, in which bistro cooking uses the techniques of traditional French gastronomy to create a new taste adventure. This gave *oeufs mayo* a legitimate place on the menus of star chefs, with the recipe often revisited but usually staying close to the original, and delivering a supposedly new experience.

The current revival can be attributed in part to the prominent food critic Claude Lebey, who so feared the extinction of *oeufs mayo* back in the '80s that he founded a non-profit, *l'Association de Sauvegarde de l'Oeuf Mayo,* to glorify the dish and give it more visibility. In 2010, the association began sponsoring a World Championship for restaurants featuring *oeuf mayo* on their menus. Laureates range from the ridiculously simple (Le Bouillon Pigalle, 2019) to the sublime (La Grande Brasserie, 2022).

iMarzi/Shutterstock

Prettily topped by swirls of mayo, oeufs mimosa is a variation on the classic dish.

The initiative caught the eye of Britain's King Charles III. Speaking at a state banquet in honor of President Emmanuel Macron of France last year, the king said, "Ladies and gentlemen, in what other country of the world could so flourish something called *l'Association de Sauvegarde de l'Oeuf Mayo?"*

Last year's champion was Marie Gricourt, the 32-year-old chef at Le Gric in Orléans. Her menu features *oeufs mayonnaise* with céleri remoulade (grated celeriac in a tangy remoulade sauce) and *sarrasin soufflé* (puffed buckwheat). It's priced at 11 euros.

Gricourt, who in 2017 became the first woman hired as a chef at the Elysée Palace, was asked recently by France 3 television about how to cook an egg:

"What counts is to put the egg in water that is already hot and cook it for precisely 8 minutes and 40 seconds," she said. Not a second more, not a second less. "The idea is to have the yolk be a little bit creamy." As for the mayo, "You want to season your egg yolks with salt and pepper before beating them" and use colza oil, which she finds milder than olive oil, and whole-grain mustard.

The only surprise to me is that no one from *The Paris Metro* has ever competed for the *oeufs mayo* award, despite having so much experience at tasting them.

Ten places to go for oeufs mayonnaise in Paris

- Le Voltaire, 27 Quai Voltaire, 75007, €0.90
- Boullion Chartier, 5 Rue du 8 Mai 1945, 75010, €2
- Bouillon Pigalle, 22 Bd de Clichy, 75018, €2.50
- Brasserie Bellanger, 140 Rue du Faubourg Poissonnière, 75010, €3
- Chez Marcel, 7 Rue Stanislas, 75006, €7
- Le Moulin à Vent (2024 champion), 20 Rue des Fossés Saint-Bernard, 75005, €10
- La Rôtisserie d'Argent (2021 champion), 10 Quai de la Tournelle, 75005, €12
- La Grande Brasserie (2023 champion), 6 Rue de la Bastille, 75004, €13
- A l'Epi d'Or, 25 Rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 75001, €14
- Au Bon Coin, 21 Rue de la Collégiale, 75005, €14 (oeufs mimosa)

Will Joe Allen Rehire Me? Watch This Space…

by Joel Stratte-McClure

When the Joe Allen restaurant opened its doors on the rue Pierre Lescot in 1972 as the first place in Paris serving authentic American hamburgers, it launched a revolution. Catering to expats and locals alike, including more than a few celebrities, it was almost instantly one of the hottest restaurants in town. Its vibe was see-and-be-seen. Reservations were *de rigueur.*

Part of the appeal was that everything was quintessentially American. As in its flagship counterpart in New York, Joe Allen in Les Halles featured posters of Broadway shows on its red brick walls and red-and-white checkered tablecloths on its tables, along with a bar staffed by American and French barmen. In addition to a range of burger offerings, the menu included classic American steaks and a superb Apple Brown Betty made by Louisiana-born Stella.

So self-evident was the fact of Joe Allen's hipness (in the terminology of the time), so quickly did the place assume the rank of a quasi-institution, that a mere four years after its launch, a Hemingway parody in *The Paris Metro* could safely begin: "We went to Joe Allen many evenings in Paris that fall of 1976, and the hamburgers were hot. I enjoyed the hamburgers and sometimes I even loved them, when they came with Heinz Ketchup and not the watery brand, and we had a gay time eating them…"

Little wonder it was quickly followed by a slew of similar American-style emporiums, places like Mother Earth, Conway's and The Front Page.

Now, fifty years on, all its early imitators are gone and Joe Allen is still there. But what is gone, long gone, is its cachet. Today it is the ubiquitous French-style burger places that rule the scene. Tripadvisor, for instance, credits a burger joint in the 13th called *Il était un square* as being the best in town, followed by Tata Burger in the Marais and the vegan burgers on offer at Green Farmer's in the 9th. Joe Allen does not even make the list.

As it happens I have a strong personal interest in Joe Allen's fate, since I had the distinction of being its first American waiter, hired soon after its 1972 opening. And I had a glorious time working there. I still cherish the friendships I made there, like the one with fellow waiter Christian Briaud, who frequently joined me for late-night dinners after work at Au Pied de Cochon. And I got on famously with a lot of the customers, including stars like Françoise Hardy, Claude François, Sylvie Vartan and, among other visitors from the States, Faye Dunaway.

Alas, it did not even last a year. Indeed, I had the distinction of also being the first American waiter fired. What went wrong? As I explained to the manager, Claude, and anyone else who had ears, I gently pushed an obstreperous customer who then overdramatically fell to the floor in hopes of impressing the two women at his table. He, however, told Claude that he was "not pushed but punched to the ground, and greatly embarrassed."

But ill feelings? *Au contraire.* Joe Allen himself – who, when he was in town, used to sit at the bar in jeans and white tennis shoes, slowly sipping water as he read the *International Herald Tribune* – couldn't have been nicer.

But Joe died in 2021, and since late 2017 the Paris restaurant has been owned by a French company called Joe Allen France SARL. Though it now has no financial ties to either the New York Joe Allen or the branch in London, the decor is unchanged. It still has much the same menu, but the food has gone seriously downhill, according to a former frequent customer.

It also still draws its fair share of the elite. Regulars include former tennis star Yannick Noah and past prime minister Elisabeth Borne, and the place is always packed on Halloween and Thanksgiving. Still, in a town where everyone now serves burgers, Joe Allen is a shadow of its former self. Covid, the decline of the Les Halles neighborhood generally and periodic spasms of anti-Americanism haven't helped. Neither has management's inability to change with the times.

"The business requires an increased budget to hire professional waiters who can recreate the former ambiance and more pleasantly interact with customers," one well-placed insider told me, noting that Joe Allen doesn't even have a budget for social media. "Otherwise we could soon find ourselves in survival mode."

Watch this space to see if they rehire me. ■

The Best Assignment in Town

Fifty years later, it remains an impressive list: Linda Ronstadt, David Bowie, Bob Marley, Bette Midler, Hall and Oates, Blondie, Emmylou Harris, Santana, Tom Waits, Link Wray, Greg Allman, Todd Rundgren, Bob Seger, Jefferson Starship, Supertramp, Tom Petty, Dolly Parton, Iggy Pop, Frank Zappa, Richie Havens, Brian Ferry, Meatloaf, Chet Atkins, Robert Gordon, Ian Drury, Cher, Bob Dylan, The Ramones, Santana, Al Jarreau, The Manhattan Transfer, George Benson, Peter Frampton, Gary Wright, Brenda Lee, Bonnie Raitt, Fleetwood Mac, Nils Lofgren, Elton John, Randy Newman, Patti Smith and The Band.

These are some of the musicians I covered, interviewed, often partied with and, in some cases, followed during their tours around Europe, when I covered rock'n'roll for *The Paris Metro.* The pay was dismal but the benefits were spectacular. The record companies and concert promoters were entirely supportive, not only supplying me with an artist's entire back catalogue but virtually every new LP the record company released. Albert Koski, the preeminent promoter at the time, along with his gal Friday, Véronique, went to great lengths to help me secure backstage access and interviews. By the time *The Metro* folded, I had amassed a fabulous collection of nearly 18,000 albums, most in mint condition.

Most of the concerts were held in a cavernous pavilion at the Porte de Pantin on the northern edge of the city that had once been a slaughterhouse. Pantin could accommodate up to 10,000 spectators, but for musicians who were less known to Parisians, like Chet Atkins or Randy Newman, or who requested a more more intimate venue, Koski usually booked the elegant Salle Pleyel on the tony Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré or the popular Olympia, where Edith Piaf once held forth, and where The Beatles played on their first trip to France in 1964. Both halls could accommodate up to 2,000. Punk bands like Blondie and The Ramones or "fringe" solos like Link Wray or Robert Gordon could usually be found at The Bataclan, the gritty but now infamous nightclub where terrorists were to massacre 130 innocents in 2015.

When Martin Scorsese, along with Robbie Robertson, came to Paris to promote *The Last Waltz,* their documentary about The Band's farewell performance, the Invitation Only premiere was held at Le Palace, Paris's trendiest disco, often compared to Studio 54 in New York. As a respected, if not somewhat flawed, member of the press, I never stood on line to get into Le Palace, but was always on the VIP list thanks to owner Fabrice Emaer and his efficient press attaché, Sylvie Grumbach. After the screening, Sylvie beckoned me over to a relatively secluded table to meet Scorsese. Marty, as everyone knows, is a fast talker, but that night he was in overdrive, holding forth in a pace that was literally rat-a-tat-tat. I suspect in those days Scorsese was not adverse to a little blow, the numero uno drug of choice and always on sale somewhere in the dark recesses of Le Palace.

The disco hosted several unusual events but among the most memorable was the the black-and-white themed wedding of Paloma Picasso to director Rafael Lopez-Sanchez. Celebrity guests included Yves Saint Laurent and Loulou de la Falaise who were appropriately attired but outnumbered by dozens of freaks, transvestites and people of non-definitive gender. Visiting the restroom, I found no less than three couples fucking, both inside and outside the stalls.

At one point I was yanked off the rock'n'roll beat and commissioned to write the paper's guide to the best discos and private clubs in Paris, including the exclusive Régine's and Castel. The assignment became a full month of overindulgence and put me off the BeeGees forever. *The Metro* convinced fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld to pose for the cover, dressed in a three-piece white suit while he mimicked John Travolta's iconic pose, chest out, one arm pointing up, the other pointing down, from *Saturday Night Fever.* Naturally, we shot it on stage at Le Palace. Where else?

After suffering through the insufferable Q & A with French journalists who tended to ask about the "symbolism" in their work, most musicians were relieved, if not delighted, to come face-to-face with another American who could recommend the best after-hours bars or where to obtain natural or synthetic stimuli to keep things rolling. I quickly learned the best interviews were conducted when I was last in line...the complete antithesis of usual journalistic practice.

This strategy enabled me to hang out until dawn with Tom Waits, escort Dolly Parton around town searching for sexy lingerie, introduce Al Jarreau to his first taste of oysters, or eventually to being hired as an assistant road manager for Frank Zappa, on his swing through France and Germany.

After performing more than two hours, most rockers were exhausted when we sat down back stage to finally talk. Tom Waits, a poet and innovative singer-songwriter whose vocal cords sound like they were shredded by razor blades, came right to the point even though we had never met. "Can you help me find some cocaine to get me out of this bottomless pit?" Luckily, I did.

Bob Marley, on the other hand, never came down. He was stoned on stage and continued his high after the curtain came down, reaching into an equipment case nearby and pulling out an enormous bag of weed. He then rolled what to this day was the biggest and fattest joint I had ever seen. After a few tokes, he passed it to me. "Here mon, have a taste." A few moments later I was so stoned I couldn't even scribble in my notebook. Not wanting to blow the interview, I thought the hell with subtlety: drastic measures were called for. I looked through my kit and retrieved a tiny vial of white powder. After taking a hit, I was securely back in the saddle. "Would you like some?" I asked the Rasta Man. "Oh no, Robert...that be the devil's dandruff."

Stevie Nicks, lead singer of Fleetwood Mac, seemed a far cry from rock 'n' roll's femme fatale as she huddled in her dressing room, exhausted, head buried deep in her hands. In fact, my first reaction was to forgo the interview. The band was going through another rough patch with persistent rumors about the group's "imminent" breakup, which was taking an obvious emotional toll. But Nicks snapped out of it with that professional aplomb evolved from years of doing interviews and opened up. "Somehow it [the concert] all worked out... You only get one chance, so either you walk away from it and go back and work in a fuckin' store, or you say, I'm strong. I'm not a baby. I'm going to do this."

Elton John, on the other hand, was not the least interested in discussing the pressure of being on the road when we met in the Presidential Suite of the Paris Hilton. His matching set of luggage, all monogrammed E.H.J. (Elton Hercules John), was already packed, at the door awaiting a bellman. In fact, music was the last thing on his mind. "Just make sure that guy in Amsterdam has some good looking boys

lined up," he shouted at his manager.

I was standing stage right, as close as one could get, when I sensed in the darkness a slight, rumpled figure next to me. He was not wearing a pass allowing either Backstage or Access All Areas, always *de rigueur* especially when the artist performing was none other than Bob Dylan, whose staff took security very seriously.

A split second later I realized it was Keith Richards who seemed as enthralled by the music as I was. We exchanged a quick hello as Dylan changed pace and switched from electric to acoustic guitar. I had seen the Rolling Stones in concert years before but this was the first time I had encountered one as a "civilian." Much later, when my drinking got out of hand and I joined Alcoholics Anonymous, Marianne Faithful was a member of our little group. Marianne was Mick Jagger's girlfriend for several years and traveled with the band. There were always rumors she also bedded Richards. During a cigarette break I told her about seeing Dylan that night. "The lads loved Dylan," she explained. "They say they were mostly influenced by the Blues but Dylan had a great impact, especially on Mick in the songwriting department. Mick was fascinated by the mystery in his lyrics and, of course, the cadence."

I was especially looking forward to interviewing Dylan after the show but as he began his encore, Véronique came up to me and said any interviews had been cancelled. *"C'est comme ça!"*

A decade later, in Los Angeles, I finally met Bob who was accepting an award from ASCAP. I told him about my experience in Paris that night and how much his music meant to me over the years. I even sheepishly confessed we had named our two boys after him. Bob seemed genuinely flattered, then grabbed the microphone attached to the tape recorder. "Hello...Jesse and Jake D Y L A N and Miss Elaine," he intoned in that unmistakable twang.

Sex, Drugs & Rock'n'Roll wasn't simply an expression that defined the times. For some of these hard core rockers, it was genuinely a way of life. But contrary to what many of his fans assumed, Frank Zappa never did drugs...nor would he permit any members of his band to use. (Of course, they did). When two members of the group were busted with grass at the airport in London, Frank wanted them permanently kicked off the tour, but with a concert scheduled the following night, he had no other choice than to relent.

> To watch Frank Zappa play solo for more than an hour during rehearsal was nothing short of amazing.

If I write more about Frank than other musicians, it's because I spent more time with him, professionally and socially, than all of the other artists I covered. He was truly a Renaissance Man and a visionary to boot. He was obsessive about his work and the performance of his musicians, in addition to being one of the most talented guitarists in the world of rock. To sit in an empty concert hall and watch him play solo for more than an hour during rehearsal was an experience nothing short of amazing. No gimmicks, no stylized concert lighting. Just Zappa, wailing on his axe.

Years later, in Prague, interviewing Czech president Vaclav Havel (also a Zappa fan), we talked about how Frank genuinely enriched our lives. Frank was one of the first major musicians from the West to perform in the Czech capital following the 1989 Velvet Revolution. Havel had a stack of Zappa CD's piled high on his desk and listened to them often. He said many of the songs genuinely inspired him. It's one of the reasons rock 'n' roll was then, and remains today, such a powerful force.

— Robert Wiener retired as senior executive producer of CNN after two decades with the network.

Photo by David Burnett

"You only get one chance," Stevie Nicks of Fleetwood Mac told R.M.M. Wiener when he interviewed her in Paris in 1978.

Rival Billionaires and Edgy Galleries

Courtesy Atelier JR © Atelier JR

Preparatory sketch of JR's "La Caverne du Pont Neuf," an ephemeral inflatable cave. The public is cordially invited to visit or glimpse the bridge from June 6 to 28.

Landmark events

Two landmark 2026 events are emblematic of the evolution of the Parisian art scene over the past half century. On the one hand, the unveiling of a constellation of local and international off-site exhibitions coinciding with the Pompidou Center's closure for refurbishment. On the other, the rewrapping (or rather pumping up) of the Pont Neuf by star street artist JR (short for his first name, Jean-René) four decades after the trailblazing husband-wife duo Christo and Jeanne-Claude enveloped the French capital's oldest bridge in drapes of cloth.

JR's privately funded "La Caverne du Pont Neuf" – an ephemeral inflatable cave – will be remembered as a free gift to the general public, who are cordially invited to cross the bridge on foot or to catch a glimpse of it from the banks of the Seine or on board a specially moored *bateau-mouche* (access to this sightseeing boat at no extra charge). The concept? Monumental within and without. Inside, for fans of augmented reality, an immersive thrill. Sound-tracking by Thomas Bangalter of Daft Punk. Outside, the Instagram spot par excellence. When? June 6-28. Full details on the *"Paris je t'aime"* tourist app.

The Pompidou Center's "Constellation" program, a selection of projects to be implemented outside its walls by the iconic museum of modern and contemporary art during its five-year revamping, points to an escalating trend: the branding of flagship museums, promoted as cultural ambassadors, exporting at once their collections and their savoir-faire.

Exporting curatorial expertise via museum branding is hardly an *exception culturelle française.* Think Guggenheim Bilbao by the architect Frank Gehry – a tourist hotspot since 1997. However, this trend has turned out to be a game changer for "Paris the Brand." Jean Nouvel's Louvre Abu Dhabi, inaugurated in 2017, springs to mind, along with Pompidou Malaga, launched in 2015 in Picasso's city of birth. Known as "El Cubo," this cube-shaped beacon of the visual arts, conceived by Daniel Buren (whose black-and-white striped columns greet visitors to the Place du Palais-Royal, within steps of the Louvre), has the impact of an XXL 3D logo. Often compared to a giant Rubik's Cube, it features bold-colored sheets of glass incorporating Buren's trademark vertical stripes. Rubik meets Mondrian meets ©DB.

On the marketing front, the exportation of museums as global brands is a win-win-win strategy, boosting not only the image of the museum and its place of origin, but also the attractiveness of its host city. The latter aspect, referred to as "the Bilbao effect," can have unfortunate side effects like overtourism – but let's not go there just now.

jr-art.net

Street artist JR.

Pinault vs. Arnault

Paris has become the theater of a Business-2-Art battle between rival billionaire collectors, and this has changed the face of the City of Light, already metamorphosed by President François Mitterrand's legacy of Grand Projects bearing the signature of major architects, notably I.M. Pei's Louvre Pyramid.

> Exporting museums like the Pompidou Center as global brands is a win-win-win strategy.

Arnault vs. Pinault. Two types of art patron. Bernard Arnault, among the top ten in the Forbes real-time world's richest list as we go to press. François Pinault, honorary chairman of the luxury group Kering (as in Gucci, Yves Saint Laurent, Balenciaga…), co-owner with his family of the Christie's auction house, with the eighty-somethings on the Forbes billionaire list in terms of his rank (81) as well as his age (89), and at the helm of a gargantuan art collection. Kering's slogan – "Creativity is our legacy" – reflects the magnate's desire to go down in history as a planetary tastemaker.

"Pinault, François Pinault..." (FP to his close collaborators) has joined forces with the Japanese architect and Pritzker Prize winner Tadao Ando to house his acquisitions, converting historic buildings into temples of contemporary art. Hot on the heels of avant-garde venues in Venice (the Palazzo Grassi and Punta della Dogana) came Ando's fresh take on the Bourse du Commerce in Paris, a glass-domed former grain exchange designed to showcase the Pinault Collection's gems. To be seen at this space until August 24: "Clair-obscur," a thematic overview highlighting "the legacy of chiaroscuro as it resonates in the present day."

Bernard Arnault's positioning as a top-notch art collector capitalizes on the "art-ification" of Louis Vuitton, a universally recognized division of his fashion, beauty, champagne and cognac empire (LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton). LV is still, according to Forbes, among the world's top ten most valuable brands, and its Maison Champs-Elysées store on the corner of Avenue George V is a crowd puller, the ultimate tourist shopping experience. In 2023, it was the focal point of a multisite product launch/art event entitled "Creating Infinity." Potential clients were beckoned into the legendary *malletier's* emporium by a King Kong-sized air-filled doll perched on its roof resembling Yayoi Kusama, the Japanese painter-sculptor-installation artist, whose trademark polka dots were scattered over the building's façade. A cheeky celebration of the ongoing seamless partnership linking Kusama to Vuitton, Yayoi's larger-than-life self-portrait amused some Parisians more than others.

Frédéric Reglain/Alamy

The Yayoi Kusama doll draped over Louis Vuitton's emporium in 2023.

This arty storefront was part of a citywide tribute to the "princess of polka dots," further embodied by a gigantic effigy installed in front of another pillar of Vuitton-dom: the renovated La Samaritaine department store on the Rue du Pont-Neuf. After the totemic statue became the target of environmentalists, who denounced it as a monument to street-marketing/art-washing, it was divested of the LV logo on its handbag on the grounds that the bag and its logo had been absent from the blueprint submitted to the City of Paris.

Across town in the Bois de Boulogne, the spectacular Louis Vuitton Foundation dreamt up by Frank Gehry – likened to a cloud of translucent glass or a cluster of icebergs – awaits lovers of cutting-edge art. The foundation's objective since it opened in 2014? To stage two major temporary shows each year: one modern, one contemporary. This time last year, "David Hockney 25" was the turnstile-buster of the spring-summer season. This year the foundation is featuring Alexander Calder.

Museographic credibility was a key facet of the image-building drive vital to the prestige of both the Pinault Collection and the Vuitton Foundation if they were to be acknowledged as must-see art spaces with institutional clout, as opposed to mere soft-power investments or brand boosters. Top-flight directors were required. To this end, the billionaire collectors have called upon experts able to deliver museum-quality retrospectives and oversee multidisciplinary teams. Pinault banked on Jean-Jacques Aillagon, an ex-Minister of Culture and Communication and former president of the Pompidou Center and the Château de Versailles. It was in the same spirit that Arnault picked Suzanne Pagé, formerly at the head of ARC, an experimental art incubator housed in the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, which flourished under her directorship until he hired her in 2006. Aillagon and Pagé had the perfect credentials.

Sponsoring the reconstruction of Notre-Dame Cathedral provided an opportunity for "Arnault & Pinault" to shine in the heritage sector. In addition to handsome economic contributions (€200 million from LVHM and Arnault's family, €100 million from FP's), they brought a zest of 21st century creativity to the enterprise. CEO-extraordinaire Bernard Arnault made all of his group's teams available, including creative, architectural and financial specialists, while the stained-glass windows that will grace six of the restored edifice's chapels are a government commission attributed to a Pinault-vetted artist, Claire Tabouret.

François Pinault's passion for art is hands on. Famous for his career-launching studio visits, France's ultra-courted discerning eye is an art fair VIP. Receiving FP's seal of approval (that is to say, entering his collection) is a ticket to worldwide success.

From last December to March

Make Paris a Blockbuster Destination

of this year, the Chanel-sponsored Grand Palais hosted a two-woman show spotlighting Tabouret's series of preparatory paintings and sketches for Notre-Dame, along with fellow Paris Beaux-Arts graduate Eva Jospin's ancient-Rome-inspired "Grottesco" environments-within-an-environment made of her signature raw material: cardboard. Living proof that FP and LV approval can go hand in hand, these two creative sparks are on the "A for art" list of female artists commissioned to design Lady Dior bags. In 2020, Tabouret produced her mock-horror version: a revisited self-portrait depicting her as a vampire. Jospin's 2023 interpretation of the coveted "it bag" is but one of her *haute culture* collaborations with LVMH's Christian Dior. In 2021, she conjured up a magical embroidered catwalk scenography for the couture house's Spring-Summer collection.

The appointment of hip-hop musician-songwriter-producer/high-end streetwear designer-retailer/art maker-curator-purchaser Pharrell Williams as artistic director of LVMH Homme in 2023, and his dazzling debut men's fashion parade on the Pont Neuf, underscored the emergence of a branding- and storytelling-related music-into-art trend, which artsy Frenchies have picked-up on: remixing anything and everything from Cubism to K-pop.

Let the remixing begin

Speaking of branding, I had intended to describe the Nouvelle Vague of on-the-cusp tinker-tailor painter-sculptors in the process of making their mark globally – typically, "X-ennials" born in the early 1980s – as "YFAs" (Young French Artists), in a nod to the "YBAs" (those infamous Young British Artists who once ruled over Cool Britannia), but thought I'd better put my searching cap on first, just in case, and… LOL and behold, the acronym is taken by an association located in the 11th arrondissement: Young Future Art.

Born to be wired, these youngish almost-famous artists grew up immersed in visual meme and musical sample culture, so remixing images comes naturally to them.

Of course, there is nothing new about playing around with references to past masterpieces. Marcel Duchamp's Mona Lisa-with-mustache postcard (a 1919 ready-made) is perhaps the most parodied of parodies, and urban artists get a kick out of helping themselves to the history of art's greatest hits. Frida Kahlo and her unibrow keep popping up. To say *nada* of winks to Picasso's "Guernica."

On both sides of the Atlantic, all the way through to the Asian art market, gatekeeper-galleries are calling the shots, confirming the prominence of post-Duchamp conceptualists and post-Basquiat super-daubers with a foot in street art. The archrivals of world-class art dealership – Larry Gagosian "Born in the USA" and Thaddaeus Ropac, hailing from Austria – have mega-spaces in Paris and on its northwestern outskirts (respectively, a two-level 1950s warehouse in Le Bourget redesigned by Jean Nouvel and a rehabilitated factory in Pantin).

Considered the capital of the arts during the first half of the 20th century, "artee-Paree" has re-emerged as a force to be reckoned with on the contemporary art front. The custodians of this newly acquired reputation are a cohort of Paris-based movers and shakers with outposts deployed strategically across the globe. Kamel Mennour promotes his gallery as "present from Asia to the Americas, and from Africa to the Middle East;" Emmanuel Perrotin has branches in NYC, LA and Las Vegas, London, Hong Kong, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Dubai; Almine Rech in Tribeca, Mayfair, Brussels, Gstaad, Monte-Carlo… and Shanghai, too. All three show and/or represent auction record-breakers such as Maurizio Cattelan, the creator of the beyond-famous $6.2 million duct-taped banana, so when they anoint young artists as being worthy of interest, this catapults them into mainstream recognition. Getting a dub from these key players amounts to the Holy Grail for emerging artists. On the primary market for fresh talent, the competition between Perrotin and Mennour is as notorious as the Pinault vs. LV and "Gago" vs. Ropac rivalries.

© EPV / Christophe Fouin

Guillaume Bresson's "Untitled" (2024, detail).

Almine Rech-Picasso has an additional claim to soft power. In 2002 she co-created FABA – a foundation dedicated to the study of Pablo Picasso's work "from an aesthetic, historical and technological perspective" – with her collector-businessman husband Bernard Ruiz-Picasso, one of the maestro's grandchildren.

> Remixing images comes naturally to young artists immersed in visual meme and musical sample culture.

Last summer, the Fundación Museo Picasso in Malaga introduced museumgoers to a rising star. Farah Atassi – French with Syrian roots, Belgian-born and raised, a Paris Beaux-Arts diploma holder, the recipient of several U.S. university accolades – is, at 45, a gifted remixer. Unabashedly Picassian, with a dash of geometric playfulness reminiscent of the *très* eighties-funk Milan-based design group Memphis, her compositions (which she alludes to as "stages," "sets" or "displays") incorporate quirky cubist patterns, Mondrian-style grids and slinky reclining nudes *à la* Matisse.

Courtesy Bredin Prat Foundation

Farah Atassi.

Farah Atassi belongs to a vanguard of painters who narrowly escaped becoming a Lost Generation. During their student years, painting was almost a dirty word. Future artists were discouraged from espousing the palette and paintbrush, and as a general rule were redirected towards more conceptual modes of expression. "New century, new media" was the subtext of their syllabus. More often than not rejected upon graduation by museum advisory boards and acquisition committees, those who stuck to their guns owe their current triumph to collectors and commercial galleries rather than national institutions.

"Mirror, mirror on the wall… Who is the king of the (painterly) remix?" In all fairness, the most striking of them all is… Guillaume Bresson, aged 44. Same generation and same Paris Beaux-Arts training as Claire Tabouret (represented by Rech and Perrotin, and the Night Gallery in Los Angeles, where she lives); Eva Jospin (whose immediately identifiable cardboard forests appealed to everyone from day one); and Farah Atassi. Same frustrations. Different stable. Now a Frenchman in New York, this ex-graffiti artist and breakdancer was snapped up by Galerie Nathalie Obadia in 2010, thenceforth going from strength to strength and accumulating honors.

From January to May 2025, Bresson was treated to a retrospective at the Palace of Versailles. Orchestrated in the château's Africa Rooms, it consisted of a "battle-against-battle" museography juxtaposing gilt-framed colonial warfare scenes painted by Horace Vernet under the reign of Louis-Philippe with a series of oil paintings by Bresson mounted on concrete panels. These Renaissance and Neo-Classicism infused figurative *mises en scène* captured the body language of the street fights young Guillaume witnessed while growing up in the suburbs of his native Toulouse. In certain all-male social groups, it's a fine line between bear hugs and parking lot brawls. Hence, his thought-provoking approach to his principal theme: violence. Bresson calls upon friends from way back to pose as models and sets up photographic choreographies that constitute the basis for his narrative canvases. He edits these digital images using Photoshop, much as musicians rely on samplers as a creative tool.

Contemporary-art-fueled soft power is sometimes perceived as a form of force feeding or product placement, a kid-gloved invasion: the fruit of megabuck investments, along the lines of the €3.8 million raised for the "Bouquet of Tulips" Jeff Koons donated to the people of Paris as a gesture of Franco-American friendship and as a memorial to the victims of the terrorist attacks of 2015 and 2016. High up on the list of donors figures… guess who?... Bernard Arnault. Poised in front of the Petit Palais, this floral remix of the Statue of Liberty (bouquet instead of torch and flames) has joined the ranks of the city's Instagramable landmarks. Dismayed reels and posts are all over the social networks. "What happened to Paris? How did this happen?" And, "How did our capital turn into a blockbuster destination, more like an overcrowded museum than the model of *art de vivre* it used to be?" This is the million-dollar question everyone is asking as we rev up for the 2030s. ■

Courtesy Xippas, Geneva

"Dancer at the Studio" (2021) by the rising star Farah Atassi, an unabashedly Picassian remixer with a dash of playfulness.

THE PARIS METRO

IN THE METRO

"In France, the woman is always the equal of men and sometimes the superior. She goes everywhere with him, she understands everything, she discusses everything, whereas in America, the country of great liberty, the women don't participate."

—**Henry Miller**, *writer*

"Many of my films are simply not understood here as they are in Anglo-Saxon countries…It is always a pleasure to read American and English critics after the really bad notices I get in France."

—**Claude Chabrol**, *director*

"I'm one of those people who took French all through high school and for four years in university, so I can read Racine. But it's not much help when you're ordering a taxi."

—**Margaret Atwood**, *novelist*

"I see in Jerry so many things. I see the Jewish-American inferiority complex, the man smothered by his mother, resulting in aggressive anarchic behavior toward society… Once Jerry said to me 'Maybe you look too deep in my movies.' He was not able to see the scheme of his own films."

—**Robert Benayoun**, *film critic for* Le Point *and France's leading Jerry Lewis expert*

"There's something so stiff-assed about it that it creates problems for any kind of emotional breakthrough. So you rarely see any kind of true emotion. That also has a lot to do with the French character, I think."

—**Jean Seberg**, *actress (on the French language)*

"You have to be very serious with French journalists, because they have no sense of humor. But there's a good side to that – you can tell them anything and they'll believe you."

—**Joe Dassin**, *American-born French pop star*

Q: How's your French?
A: Strictly private. *(laughs)*

—**Rudolph Nureyev**, *legendary ballet star*

"I can't stand her. I think every word she writes is false, including 'and' and 'but.'"

—**Mary McCarthy**, *author (famously, on Lillian Hellman)*

"American men haven't yet discovered their women. They don't look at them. They don't react to them. So naturally the women are introverted, inhibited. That's expressed in their way of dressing."

—**Sonia Rykiel**, *fashion designer*

"Sex comes from inside. Eroticism starts in your head and moves down to your pants."

—**Juliette Gréco**, *legendary chanteuse*

"Occasionally I would see that he was looking at something, and I would say, 'Ah, you are right, this is where the camera should be.' François would say, 'No, no, I didn't mean to suggest…' I'd say, 'But François, you are standing in the right place. We'll put the camera where you are.'"

—**Steven Spielberg**, *filmmaker (on directing François Truffaut in* Close Encounters…*)*

"I am the best novelist in the world. Not just in America. In the world. It's not an ego trip, either. I really believe it. I have no competition. None."

—**Harold Robbins**, *America's leading writer of potboilers*

"I shall be a very old lady before I get good reviews, except in France. To them I am a writer. In America I am a naughty kid, this notoriously crazy woman. It is wonderful to be accepted as a writer instead of some weird subversive – which I am too!"

—**Kate Millett**, *feminist luminary, writer*

"Elegance has many sides. You can be elegant as a tramp. If you walk on the Quai de Conti, beneath the footbridge there's a painting of a rose, a cornet and a wine bottle, and the words: *Clochard de Luxe.* The tombstone of a clochard, Gerard somebody, painted by his friends."

—**Sterling Hayden**, *actor*

"In America, there is always new ground being broken. In France you can't even break the language. America is always giving birth to new words to express more things, here they have an academy that keeps the language 'perfect.'"

—**Gregory Corso**, *poet*

"In *les rues,* in *les rues.* I learned it here in Paris when I was a soldier during the war… If I was captured by the SS, damn right, I'd have thrown away my dog tags. But I would have had a lot of trouble getting a fast nose job."

—**Mel Brooks** *(on where he learned his rudimentary French)*

"French girls have no sense of show. It's that puritanical Catholic tradition. They can't be natural in front of a camera – they feel ridiculous if you tell them to run or jump up and down. American, English and Scandinavian girls will do it with pleasure. They're exhibitionists at heart."

—**Johnny Casablancas**, *renowned modeling agent*

"I don't believe in movements, because if you belong to a movement some things are 'wrong' and some things are 'right,' and that stops conversation. That's what's terrible with politicians: they have to lie because they have to stick to their program."

—**Liv Ullman**, *Swedish film star*

"I think I finally understood what rape was about when I read [Susan] Brownmiller's book: it is the equivalent of theft… It's like looting, if you can buy something, why not steal it?"

—**Patricia Highsmith**, *novelist*

"There's a great curiosity on the part of European actors about exactly how things work in Hollywood, the capital of cinema. So when I was offered this role I considered it rather like an anthropological expedition."

—**Marie-France Pisier**, *film star (on being in the Hollywood potboiler* The Other Side of Midnight*)*

"Bergstrom, honey, it's too sweet. Try to be nasty… That's it, Jerry, look down at her, be bitchy… Perfect, Gunilla, perfect. Now grab at that dress, pull her to you. Perfect!"

—**Helmut Newton**, *fashion photographer (prompting models during a photo shoot for Vogue)*

"Sex? I love sex. It is very important to me. This is flesh, you know. As for some sort of sex symbol for others, that's their problem, their fantasies.… Being nude on the screen is fine. It's my body; that's what I work with."

—**Gérard Depardieu**, *(now disgraced) film star*

"Feminism is reaching the height of seriousness, of obtuseness, of totalitarianism, of dogmatism. God knows I'm a feminist! But I can't take it anymore... The Leftists of my generation have become poor, ridiculous things."

—**Claire Bretécher**, *celebrated cartoonist/social satirist*

"Abominable, this rock played so loud by musicians who don't even know how to tune their guitars. Django [Reinhardt] and I created the first rock group, the first ensemble with three guitars. I followed Django and Django followed me. If that sort of thing works, it's extraordinary."

—**Stéphane Grappelli**, *legendary jazz violinist*

"The things the French see in my films – the metaphysics and such – may be there, but I didn't put them there. Unless I did it subconsciously. But if I go around Paris denying those things, they get upset and think I am denouncing my own work."

—**Robert Aldrich**, *American film director*