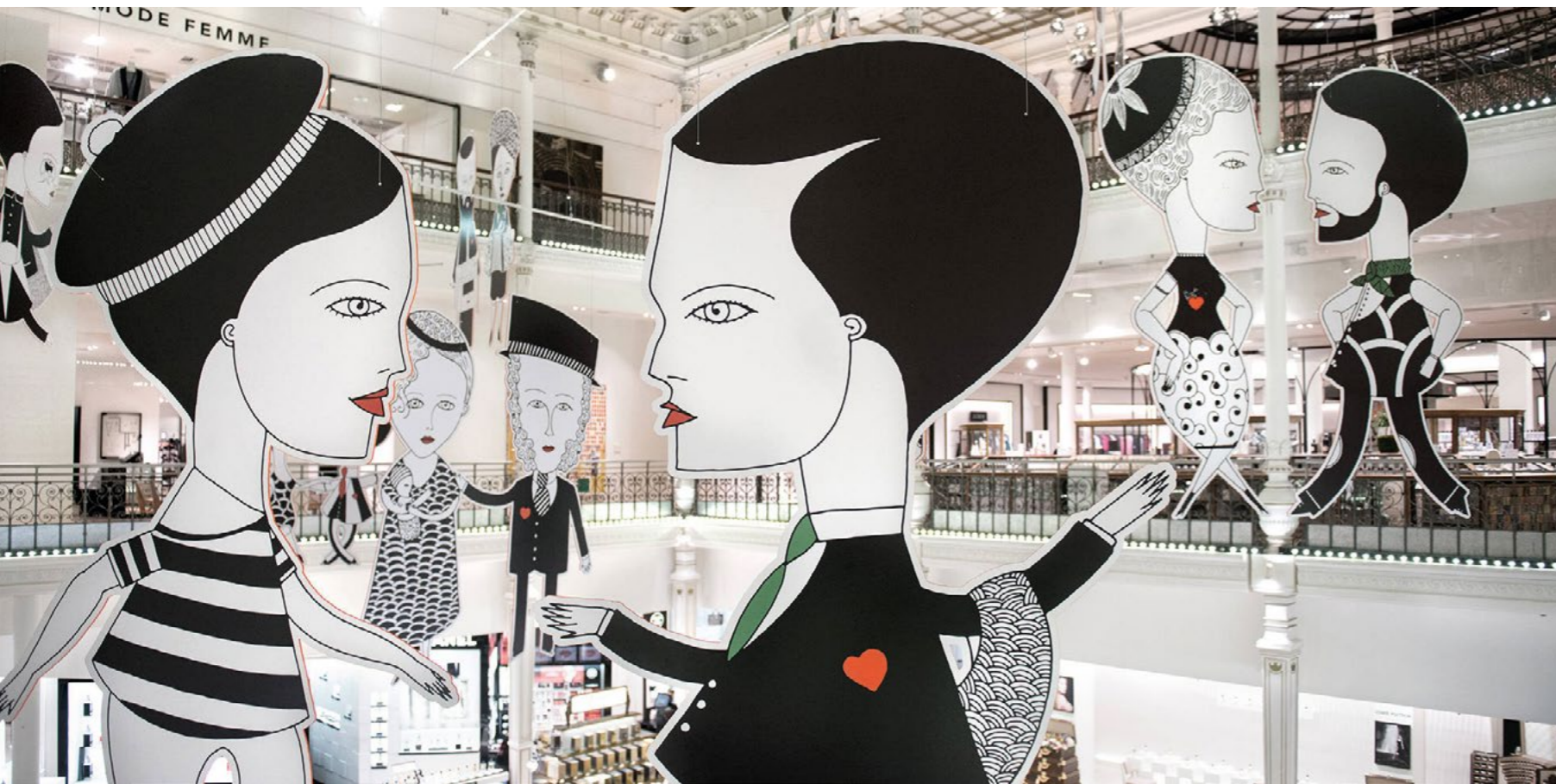


À PARIS

TANTALISING TIPS FOR THE CITY OF ROMANCE

By Caroline Von Krockow



I lived in New York, London, Madrid, Cologne and have travelled all over the world, but Paris is simply fantastic! I fall in love again and again with this city every day. The history of France and Paris is of course fascinating. The cultural scene is extraordinarily rich from the museums to the opera, from the galleries and art centres to the private initiatives. Then of course the fashion, parks, boulevards and restaurants all contribute to the unique savoir vivre, which makes every day a feast.



The first kings were the Merovingians, a Salian Frankish dynasty that ruled the Franks for nearly 300 years in France during the 5th century. The dynasty was founded by Childeric I (457-481), the son Merovech, but it was his famous son Clovis I (481-511) who united all of Gaul under Merovingian rule. They reigned from the Conciergerie, now a tourist attraction, formerly a prison, which is located on the Île de la Cité. It used to be the royal palace, the Palais de la Cité and the Merovingians ruled from there. Charlemagne was the next big king of France, who united much of Europe during the early middle ages and laid the foundations for modern France. Francois I, attracted and influenced by Italian art, then invited Leonardo da Vinci to stay in his court. The Bourbons ruled the country in the 16th century. Henry IV (1553-1610) also known as Good King Henry was the first French monarch of the House of Bourbons. He resided in The Tuileries Palace which, along with the Louvre Palace, was the usual Parisian residence of most French monarchs until the Paris Commune in 1871.

The period of the 18th century was the “Enlightenment” and France, mostly Paris, played a strong intellectual role. This was the time of the philosophers Voltaire and Rousseau, the time of poetry and romance. Louis XIV was crowned king and during his reign France enjoyed a rebirth of art, music, drama and literature. In 1789 the French Revolution resulted in the end of the monarchy and the death of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. After the reign of terror

Napoleon Bonaparte conquered Paris and almost all of Western Europe. Much later, Paris survived two World Wars and thankfully General Dietrich von Choltitz disobeyed Hitler’s command to destroy one of the most beautiful cities in the world. If we fast forward to today, with this year’s election coming up, property prices stable and with potential tax incentives, Paris could be the next place to



invest. Regardless, one should never miss a visit to the city of love.

We have seen a growth of many new hotels opening, spoiling our visitors for choice. I recommend staying in Hotel de Crillon, re-opening after four years of renovation this September on the Place de la Concorde. Karl

Lagerfeld is currently designing the most prestigious suites and bringing his discerning eye to create an unforgettable experience. He is a great connoisseur of the 18th century and combines French art de vivre and modernity in the most elegant manner. A dear friend, Aline d’Amman, is in charge of the artistic direction along with four established decorators. The excitement mounts as we come closer to the much anticipated opening party. Another option is Hotel Le Bristol on Rue du Faubourg St Honore just by the Champs-Elysees and Avenue Montaigne. It belongs to my German friends, the Oetker family. One cannot resist the quirky pool at the top, the brand new Spa, the cosy courtyard for outdoor lunch and one of the coolest bars, traditional yet trendy. The newly opened Ritz on Place Vendome, where Karl Lagerfeld’s latest haute couture creations were shown, is of course perfect for the start of the fashion season. Even if you don’t stay in the Ritz you should definitely have a drink in the Bar Hemingway. Only there will you receive roses with your champagne and a special signature drink. Ask for my friend Roman Devaux, the head bartender and you will be treated like royalty. If you want to stay on the other side of the river, Rive gauche, Hotel Lutetia is still under renovation, but soon re-opening and a good option as well. Conveniently located opposite Le Bon Marche, which in addition to having every single fashion and beauty item one requires, also hosts contemporary art thanks to its owner the great Bernard Arnaut. This year Chiharu Shiota’s “Where are we going” is transforming this the department store into a sea of white strings.



Another hidden gem is the relaxed, homey, family run Hotel Dauphin in Saint Germain. My friends Marie and Marc Tournier lovingly decorated it and are now also the new owners of the hotel Jeanne d'Arc in the Marais area, perfect for art lovers. In addition to the multitude of fantastic galleries there is also the new Picasso museum, a must see.

Regardless of where you're staying, a memorable day in Paris could look something like this: Fresh croissants and café creme in the literary Café Flore, which dates back to 1885 and got its name from a flower sculpture. Writers like Joris-Karl Huysman and Remy de Gourmont had their habits here and Frédéric Beigbeder founded the Prix de Flore, a French literary prize to reward young authors in 1994. It is awarded yearly in November and the laureate wins 6,000 Euros, as well as a glass of Pouilly-Fumé, at the Café de Flore every day for a year.

I would then recommend a stroll through St-Germain-des-Près heading to Place de Furstenberg. The circular island in the middle of the square is framed by four Paulownia trees, surrounding a central and rather gothic lamp post, which have become focal points for many artists. Do visit Yveline Antiques, which opened in 1954, with its wonderful collection of objects and antiques. My friend Agathe Derieux, Yveline's grand-daughter, continues the tradition. A few steps further is the Delacroix Museum, which used to be Delacroix's studio and transformed into a museum in 1971. It exhibits memorabilia, works and pictures from nearly every phase of his career, including the artist's only three attempts at fresco from Valmont (1834); the Education of the Virgin painted in Nohant in 1842; and Magdalene in the Desert exhibited at the 1845 Salon. Continue along your stroll and you will come across tiny, sheltered streets around Place de Furstenberg, dotted with independent art galleries, custom made shoe stores, boutiques, and luxury furnishings, expect not only excellent shopping but some of the best people watching in the city too.

For lunch there are endless options and it depends in which of the 20 arrondissements of the Parisian snake you wish to be in. In culinary terms the city is full of delights. If you want to stay in the 7th arrondissement the traditional Voltaire restaurant is good. Recamier, just by Le Bon Marche, has the best soufflés in town and Brasserie Lipp is an institution where you can eat oysters and a hearty steak with its famous bernaise and fresh fries. For the afternoon, a stroll through Jardin Luxembourg watching the

children on the old fashioned carousel or sitting in the rose garden by the pond is rejuvenating. The Tuileries Park by the Louvre is quite central and the Bois de Boulogne lends itself to an extensive walk.

The exhibitions in Paris are also of such a high standard it would be sad to miss out. I never miss an exhibition in the Louvre, the Grand Palais, the Musée d'Art Moderne and the Centre Pompidou. A recent favourite was the Second Empire exhibition in the Musée d'Orsay, with exceptional Mellerio jewellery, truly mesmerizing. Bernard Buffet is not uplifting, but powerful and prolific, despised by the French until now. They did not want to see an artist rich and mundane with friends like Brigitte Bardot at the Cannes Film Festival, a sad fate his final suicide. Now it's atonement time and the Musée d'Art Moderne has the biggest exhibit of him ever. My dear friend Diane de Polignac is also showcasing powerful Buffet pieces at her exceptional gallery in the 7th arrondissement. There is also of course the Palais de Tokyo, a must for art aficionados. It is a building dedicated to modern and contemporary art and has the Tokyo Art Club with many exclusive events in the pipeline. The Christian Lacroix store, opposite the Hotel Le Bristol, transformed into the Musée de la Parfum with white flowers and various smells and other surprises. Off the beaten track in the 12th arrondissement on Boulevard de la Bastille is La Maison Rouge, the private museum, which was opened in 2004 by the political scientist and supermarket dynasty heir Antoine de Galbert. Numerous top collections, like those of Thomas Olbricht or Harald Falckenberg, have made their appearances at La Maison Rouge. Thematic and monographic exhibitions also take place here, as well as projects with artists ranging from Arnulf Rainer to Gregor Schneider.

What about some shopping? The Parisians are known to dress well and not surprisingly, there are plenty of guides on how to be and dress like a Parisian woman, such as Ines de la Fressange's en masse. Montaigne Market and Chanel on Avenue Montaigne are my personal favourites, but Colette also has a great selection. Paul Smith, Azzaró, Roger Vivier, Jimmy Choo and Christian Louboutin on Rue du Faubourg St Honore are perfectly situated and accessible. Isabel Marant on rue de Charonne in the 11th is more relaxed and Stella McCartney and Pierre Hardy in Palais Royale are beautifully located. Azzedine Alaïa in the Marais is equally tempting. Around Rue St Dominique and Rue Cler in the 7th one can expect many bargains. For presents I recommend Sephora for perfumes, Taschen books

on rue de Buci in the 6th, Diptyque candles or the delicious chocolates from La Maison du Chocolat and macarons from Pierre Hermé. For bigger presents perhaps Baccarat, Christophle or Hermes?

With children, a pleasant outing would be the Rodin gardens. After passing the roses there are two sand boxes tucked at the end behind the fountain, which provide shade during the summer. In the Tuileries gardens there is a trampoline, a carousel and a playground. The Invalides with its' canons and Napoleon's grave also have lots of grass squares to play football on. The Aquarium and Guignol marionette theatre are great when it's raining. The Jardin d'Acclimatation is a perfect, child-friendly entertainment place for a full day of fun. For children shopping go to Bonton, Jacadi, Bonpoint or Tartine et Chocolat.

Paris is also full of fabulous book shops. During the Belle Epoque privileged women like Countess Greffuhle's held their salons inviting writers like Marcel Proust amongst their midst. Some years later, the American Gertrude Stein, opened her own book store, a place to mingle with the intellectual elite. These type of Paris salons don't exist anymore, but literature still plays a great part in Paris culture. There are readings, book signings and Paris salons constantly on offer. My dear friend Michele Rossi organizes several prestigious prizes all year round. An exceptional place for English speakers is my preferred bookshop Shakespeare and Company in the 5th. Interesting readings take place there on Tuesdays and Sundays, there is The Other Writers Group where young writers can share their writing too.

For home decorations I suggest India Madhavi, Pierre Frey, Silvera, Christian Liagre or the more bohemian Merci on 111 Boulevard Beaumarchais. If you're renting an apartment and would like to do some food shopping I recommend oysters and fish from the fish store on rue du Bac, Barthelemy cheese on rue de Grenelle, the official provider of L'Elysee (the President) or Petrossian for a fabulous caviar dinner. There are countless exceptional restaurants for dinner and it really depends what you are in the mood for. Excellent high-end choices are Apicius, Lasserre, Jule Verne in the Eiffel Tower or Joel Robuchon's L'Atelier. Fish lovers should go to Marius and Jeannette or Le Duc. The best meat in town is served at Chez L'Ami Louis and Suresa is the best Italian in Paris! After a play or opera the Closerie de Lilas or Brasserie Lipp are still open for evening escapades. Gilbert Costes has trendy restaurants all over town. Hotel Costes, Societe and Invalides are the best for evening occasions. Another cool option is Monsieur Bleu or Loulou, not far from the Louvre.

If you still have energy and feel like dancing, Castel is a fashionable lounge bar with retro cool spirit. You can have dinner in the main level restaurant before hitting the basement dance space that is consistently one of the best in Paris. More than a decade following its founder's death, Castel remains a Paris nightlife institution with its famous street front perch in the 6th. Today, the club has been revamped by André Saraiva and Thomas Lenthal. Raspoutine is a totally different experience. Just walking through the front door you are swept into another time, long ago when clusters of harlots would clamor over visiting gentlemen amongst the dark nooks of this Paris bordello that later became a well known cabaret club and now is known as a popular VIP boite for models, billionaires and fashion society. Silencio is another option, belonging to David Lynch, who has transferred his club in Mulholland Drive from screen to Parisian reality. Falling somewhere between private bar, arts club and nightclub, it is open only to members and their guests before midnight, though has free but selective entry after midnight. Situated deep underground in the building that once housed radical newspaper L'Aurore. ☺

I hope I have tantalized your tastebuds and inspired a visit to one of the forever remaining romantic cities in the world, Paris!

