

# BACKGROUND

## HISTORY

With upwards of 12 million inhabitants, the greater metropolitan area of Paris is home to almost 19% of France's total population (central Paris counts just under 2.2 million souls). Since before the Revolution, Paris has been what urban planners like to call a 'hypertrophic city' – the enlarged 'head' of a nation-state's 'body'. The urban area of the next biggest city – Marseilles – is just over a third the size of central Paris.

As the capital city, Paris is the administrative, business and cultural centre; virtually everything of importance in the republic starts, finishes or is currently taking place here. The French have always said '*Quand Paris éternue, la France s'en rhume*' (When Paris sneezes, France catches cold) but there have been conscious efforts – going back at least four decades – by governments to decentralise Paris' role, and during that time the population, and thus to a certain extent the city's authority, has actually shrunk. The pivotal year was 1968, a watershed not just in France but throughout Western Europe.

Paris has a timeless quality, a condition that can often be deceiving. And while the cobbled backstreets of Montmartre, the terraced cafés of Montparnasse, the iconic structure of the Eiffel Tower and the placid waters of the Seine may all have some visitors believing that the city has been here since time immemorial, that's hardly the case.

## EARLY SETTLEMENT

The early history of the Celts is murky, but it is thought that they originated somewhere in the eastern part of central Europe around the 2nd millennium BC and began to migrate across the continent, arriving in France sometime in the 7th century BC. In the 3rd century a group of Celtic Gauls called the Parisii settled here.

Centuries of conflict between the Gauls and Romans ended in 52 BC, with the latter taking control of the territory. The settlement on the Seine prospered as the Roman town of Lutetia (from the Latin for 'midwater dwelling', in French, Lutèce), counting some 10,000 inhabitants by the 3rd century AD.

The Great Migrations, beginning around the middle of the 3rd century AD with raids by the Franks and then by the Alemanii from the east, left the settlement on the south bank scorched and pillaged, and its inhabitants fled to the Île de la Cité, which was subsequently fortified with stone walls. Christianity (as well as Mithraism; see [opposite](#)) had been introduced early in the previous century, and the first church, probably made of wood, was built on the western part of the island.

## INVASIONS & DYNASTIES

The Romans occupied what would become known as Paris (after its first settlers) from AD 212 to the late 5th century. It was at this time that a second wave of Franks and other Germanic groups under Merovius from the north and northeast overran the territory. Merovius' grandson,

## TIMELINE

3rd century BC	52 BC	AD 845–86	1066	1163	1253
Celtic Gauls called Parisii – believed to mean 'boat men' – arrive in the Paris area and set up a few wattle-and-daub huts on what is now the Île de la Cité. Here they engage in fishing and trading.	Roman legions under Julius Caesar crush a Celtic revolt led by Vercingétorix on the Mons Lutetius (now the site of the Panthéon) and establish the town of Lutetia.	Paris is repeatedly raided by Vikings for more than four decades including the siege of 885–86 by Siegfried the Saxon, which lasts 10 months but ends in victory for the French.	The so-called Norman Conquest (and subsequent occupation) of England ignites almost 300 years of conflict between the Normans in western and northern France and the Capetians in Paris.	Two centuries of nonstop building reaches its zenith with the start of Notre Dame Cathedral under Maurice de Sully, the bishop of Paris; construction will continue for more than a century and a half.	La Sorbonne is founded by Robert de Sorbon, confessor to Louis IX, as a theological college for impoverished students in the area of the Left Bank known as the Latin Quarter, where students and their teachers communicated in that language exclusively.

## MITHRA & THE GREAT SACRIFICE

Mithraism, the worship of the god Mithra, originated in Persia. As Roman rule extended into the west, the religion became extremely popular with traders, imperial slaves and mercenaries of the Roman army and spread rapidly throughout the empire in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. In fact, Mithraism was the principal rival of Christianity until Constantine came to the throne in the 4th century.

Mithraism was a mysterious religion with its devotees (mostly males) sworn to secrecy. What little is known of Mithra, the god of justice and social contract, has been deduced from reliefs and icons found in sanctuaries and temples, particularly in Eastern and Central European countries. Most of these portray Mithra clad in a Persian-style cap and tunic, sacrificing a white bull in front of Sol, the sun god. From the bull's blood sprout grain and grapes and from its semen animals. Sol's wife Luna, the moon, begins her cycle and time is born.

Mithraism and Christianity were close competitors partly because of the striking similarity of many of their rituals. Both involve the birth of a deity on winter solstice (25 December), shepherds, death and resurrection, and a form of baptism. Devotees knelt when they worshipped and a common meal – a 'communion' of bread and water – was a regular feature of both liturgies.

Clovis I, converted to Christianity, making Paris his seat in 508. Childeric II, Clovis' son and successor, founded the Abbey of St-Germain des Prés a half-century later, and the dynasty's most productive ruler, Dagobert, established an abbey at St-Denis. This abbey soon became the richest, most important monastery in France and became the final resting place of its kings.

The militaristic rulers of the Carolingian dynasty, beginning with Charles 'the Hammer' Martel (688–741) were almost permanently away fighting wars in the east, and Paris languished, controlled mostly by the counts of Paris. When Charles Martel's grandson, Charlemagne (768–814), moved his capital to Aix-la-Chapelle (today's Aachen in Germany), Paris' fate was sealed. Basically a group of separate villages with its centre on the island, Paris was badly defended throughout the second half of the 9th century and suffered a succession of raids by the 'Norsemen' (Vikings).

## CONSOLIDATION OF POWER

The counts of Paris, whose powers had increased as the Carolingians feuded among themselves, elected one of their own, Hugh Capet, as king at Senlis in 987. He made Paris the royal seat and resided in the renovated palace of the Roman governor on the Île de la Cité (the site of the present Palais de Justice). Under Capetian rule, which would last for the next 800 years, Paris prospered as a centre of politics, commerce, trade, religion and culture. By the time Hugh Capet had assumed the throne, the Norsemen (or Normans, descendants of the Vikings) were in control of northern and western French territory. In 1066 they mounted a successful invasion of England from their base in Normandy.

Paris' strategic riverside position ensured its importance throughout the Middle Ages, although settlement remained centred on the Île de la Cité, with the *rive gauche* (left bank) to the south given over to fields and vineyards; the Marais area on the *rive droite* (right bank) to the north was a waterlogged marsh. The first guilds were established in the 11th century, and rapidly grew in importance; in the mid-12th century the ship merchants' guild bought the principal river port, by today's Hôtel de Ville (city hall), from the crown.

## GOING UP & UP

The 12th and 13th centuries were a time of frenetic building activity in Paris. Abbot Suger, both confessor and minister to several Capetian kings, was one of the powerhouses of this period; in 1136 he commissioned the basilica at St-Denis (p182). Less than three decades later, work started on the cathedral of Notre Dame, the greatest creation of medieval Paris. At the same time Philippe-Auguste (r 1180–1223) expanded the city wall, adding 25 gates and hundreds of protective towers.

The Marais, whose name means 'swamp', was drained for agricultural use and settlement moved to the north (or right) bank of the Seine. This would soon become the mercantile centre, especially around place de Grève (today's place de l'Hôtel de Ville). The food markets at Les Halles first came into existence in 1183 and the Louvre began its existence as a riverside fortress in the 13th century. In a bid to do something about the city's horrible traffic congestion and stinking excrement (the population numbered about 200,000 by the year 1200), Philippe-Auguste paved four of Paris' main streets for the first time since the Roman occupation, using metre-square sandstone blocks. By 1292 Paris counted 352 streets, 10 squares and 11 crossroads.

The area south of the Seine – today's Left Bank – was by contrast developing not as a trade centre but as the centre of European learning and erudition, particularly in the so-called Latin Quarter. The ill-fated lovers Pierre Abélard and Héloïse (see the boxed text, p33) wrote the finest poetry of the age and their treatises on philosophy, and Thomas Aquinas taught at the new University of Paris. About 30 other colleges were established, including the Sorbonne.

In 1337 some three centuries of hostility between the Capetians and the Anglo-Normans degenerated into the Hundred Years' War, which would be fought on and off until the middle of the 15th century. The Black Death (1348–49) killed more than a third (an estimated 80,000 souls) of Paris' population but only briefly interrupted the fighting. Paris would not see its population reach 200,000 again until the beginning of the 16th century.

The Hundred Years' War and the plague, along with the development of free, independent cities elsewhere in Europe, brought political tension and open insurrection to Paris. In 1358 the provost of the merchants, a wealthy draper named Étienne Marcel, allied himself with peasants revolting against the dauphin (the future Charles V) and seized Paris in a bid to limit the power of the throne and secure a city charter. But the dauphin's supporters recaptured it within two years, and Marcel and his followers were executed at place de Grève. Charles then completed the right-bank city wall begun by Marcel and turned the Louvre into a sumptuous palace for himself.

After the French forces were defeated by the English at Agincourt in 1415, Paris was once again embroiled in revolt. The dukes of Burgundy, allied with the English, occupied the capital in 1420. Two years later John Plantagenet, duke of Bedford, was installed as regent of France for the English king, Henry VI, who was then an infant. Henry was crowned king of France at Notre Dame less than 10 years later, but Paris was almost continuously under siege from the French for much of that time.

Around that time a 17-year-old peasant girl known to history as Jeanne d'Arc (Joan of Arc) persuaded the French pretender Charles VII that she'd received a divine mission from God to expel the English from France and bring about Charles' coronation. She rallied French troops and defeated the English at Patay, north of Orléans, and Charles was crowned at Reims. But Joan of Arc failed to take Paris. In 1430 she was captured, convicted of witchcraft and heresy by a tribunal of French ecclesiastics and burned at the stake.

Charles VII returned to Paris in 1436, ending more than 16 years of occupation, but the English were not entirely driven from French territory (with the exception of Calais) for another 17 years. The occupation had left Paris a disaster zone. Conditions improved while the restored monarchy moved to consolidate its power under Louis XI (r 1461–83), the first Renaissance king under whose reign the city's first printing press was installed at the Sorbonne. Churches were rehabilitated or built in the Flamboyant Gothic style (see p46) and a number of *hôtels particuliers* (private mansions) such as the Hôtel de Cluny (now the Musée National du Moyen Âge, p114) and the Hôtel de Sens (now the Bibliothèque Forney, p191) were erected.

## A CULTURAL 'REBIRTH'

The culture of the Italian Renaissance (French for 'rebirth') arrived in full swing in France during the reign of François I in the early 16th century partly because of a series of indecisive French military operations in Italy. For the first time, the French aristocracy was exposed to Renaissance ideas of scientific and geographical scholarship and discovery as well as the value of secular over religious life. The population of Paris at the start of François' reign in 1515 was 170,000 – still almost 20% less than it had been some three centuries before, when the Black Death had decimated the population.

Writers such as François Rabelais, Clément Marot and Pierre de Ronsard of La Pléiade were influential at this time, as were the architectural disciples of Michelangelo and Raphael. Evidence of this architectural influence can be seen in François I's chateau at Fontainebleau (p368) and the Petit Château at Chantilly (p373). In the city itself, a prime example of the period is the Pont Neuf, the 'New Bridge' that is, in fact, the oldest span in Paris. This new architecture was meant to reflect the splendour of the monarchy, which was fast moving towards absolutism, and of Paris as the capital of a powerful centralised state. But all this grandeur and show of strength was not enough to stem the tide of Protestantism that was flowing into France.

## REFORM & REACTION

The position of the Protestant Reformation sweeping across Europe in the 1530s had been strengthened in France by the ideas of John Calvin, a Frenchman exiled to Geneva. The edict of January 1562, which afforded the Protestants certain rights, was met by violent opposition from ultra-Catholic nobles whose fidelity to their faith was mixed with a desire to strengthen their power bases in the provinces. Paris remained very much a Catholic stronghold, and executions continued apace up to the outbreak of religious civil war.

The Wars of Religion (1562–98) involved three groups: the Huguenots (French Protestants supported by the English), the Catholic League and the Catholic king. The fighting severely weakened the position of the monarchy and brought the kingdom of France close to disintegration. On 7 May 1588, on the 'Day of the Barricades', Henri III, who had granted many concessions to the Huguenots, was forced to flee from the Louvre when the Catholic League rose up against him. He was assassinated the following year.

Henri III was succeeded by Henri IV, who inaugurated the Bourbon dynasty and was a Huguenot when he ascended the throne. Catholic Paris refused to allow its new Protestant king entry into the city, and a siege of the capital continued for almost five years. Only when Henri embraced Catholicism at St-Denis did the capital welcome him. In 1598 he promulgated the

1358

The Hundred Years' War (1337–1453) between France and England and the devastation and poverty caused by the plague lead to the ill-fated peasants' revolt led by Étienne Marcel.

1429

French forces under Joan of Arc defeat the English near Orléans but three years later Joan is captured by the Burgundians, allies of the English, and burned at the stake in Rouen.

1532–64

The 16th century is a period of heightened literary activity which sees the publication of Rabelais' five-part satirical work *Gargantua and Pantagruel* over more than three decades.

1547–50

Some 39 Huguenots (French Protestants) are burned at the stake in place de Grève (today's place de l'Hôtel de Ville), which spurs a nationwide religious civil war.

1572

Some 3000 Huguenots in Paris to celebrate the wedding of the Protestant Henri of Navarre (the future Henri IV) are slaughtered on 23–24 August, in what is now called the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre.

1589

Henry IV, the first Bourbon king, ascends the throne after renouncing Protestantism; '*Paris vaut bien une messe*' (Paris is well worth a Mass), he is reputed to have said upon taking communion at the basilica in St-Denis.

Edict of Nantes, which guaranteed the Huguenots religious freedom as well as many civil and political rights, but this was not universally accepted.

Henri consolidated the monarchy's power and began to rebuild Paris (the city's population was now about 450,000) after more than 30 years of fighting. The magnificent place Royale (today's place des Vosges in the Marais) and place Dauphine at the western end of the Île de la Cité are prime examples of the new era of town planning. But Henri's rule ended as abruptly and violently as that of his predecessor. In 1610 he was assassinated by a Catholic fanatic named François Ravaillac when his coach became stuck in traffic along rue de la Ferronnerie in the Marais. Ravaillac was executed by an irate mob of Parisians (who were mightily sick of religious turmoil by this time) by being quartered – after a thorough scalding.

Henri IV's son, the future Louis XIII, was too young to assume the throne, so his mother, Marie de Médici, was named regent. She set about building the magnificent Palais du Luxembourg and its enormous gardens for herself just outside the city wall. Louis XIII ascended the throne at age 16 but throughout most of his undistinguished reign he remained under the control of Cardinal Richelieu, his ruthless chief minister. Richelieu is best known for his untiring efforts to establish an all-powerful monarchy in France, opening the door to the absolutism of Louis XIV, and French supremacy in Europe. Under Louis XIII's reign two uninhabited islets in the Seine – Île Notre Dame and Île aux Vaches – were joined to form the Île de St-Louis, and Richelieu commissioned a number of palaces and churches, including the Palais Royal and the Église Notre Dame du Val-de-Grâce.

## ANCIEN RÉGIME & ENLIGHTENMENT

Le Roi Soleil (the Sun King) – Louis XIV – ascended the throne in 1643 at the age of five. His mother, Anne of Austria, was appointed regent, and Cardinal Mazarin, a protégé of Richelieu, was named chief minister. One of the decisive events of Louis XIV's early reign was the War of the Fronde (1648–53), a rebellion by the bourgeoisie and some of the nobility opposed to taxation and the increasing power of the monarchy. The revolt forced the royal court to flee Paris for a time.

When Mazarin died in 1661, Louis XIV assumed absolute power until his own death in 1715. Throughout his long reign, characterised by 'glitter and gloom' as one historian has put it, Louis sought to project the power of the French monarchy – bolstered by claims of divine right – both at home and abroad. He involved France in a long series of costly, almost continuous wars with Holland, Austria and England, which gained France territory but terrified its neighbours and nearly bankrupted the treasury. State taxation to fill the coffers caused widespread poverty and vagrancy in Paris, which was by then a city of almost 600,000 people.

But Louis was able to quash the ambitious, feuding aristocracy and create the first truly centralised French state, elements of which can still be seen in France today. While he did pour huge sums of money into building his extravagant palace at Versailles, by doing so he was able to turn his nobles into courtiers, forcing them to compete with one another for royal favour and reducing them to ineffectual sycophants.

Louis mercilessly persecuted his Protestant subjects, whom he considered a threat to the unity of the state and thus his power. In 1685 he revoked the Edict of Nantes, which had guaranteed the Huguenots freedom of conscience.

It was Louis XIV who said '*Après moi, le déluge*' (After me, the flood); in hindsight his words were more than prophetic. His grandson and successor, Louis XV, was an oafish, incompetent

buffoon, and grew to be universally despised. However, Louis XV's regent, Philippe of Orléans, did move the court from Versailles back to Paris; in the Age of Enlightenment, the French capital had become, in effect, the centre of Europe.

As the 18th century progressed, new economic and social circumstances rendered the *ancien régime* (old order) dangerously out of step with the needs of the country and its capital. The regime was further weakened by the antiestablishment and anticlerical ideas of the Enlightenment, whose leading lights included Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet), Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Denis Diderot. But entrenched vested interests, a cumbersome power structure and royal lassitude prevented change from starting until the 1770s, by which time the monarchy's momentum had passed.

The Seven Years' War (1756–63) was one of a series of ruinous military engagements pursued by Louis XV. It led to the loss of France's flourishing colonies in Canada, the West Indies and India. It was in part to avenge these losses that Louis XVI sided with the colonists in the American War of Independence (1775–83). But the Seven Years' War cost France a fortune and, more disastrously for the monarchy, it helped to disseminate at home the radical democratic ideas that were thrust upon the world stage by the American Revolution.

## COME THE REVOLUTION

By the late 1780s, the indecisive Louis XVI and his dominating Vienna-born queen, Marie-Antoinette, known to her subjects disparagingly as *l'Autrichienne* (the Austrian), had managed to alienate virtually every segment of society – from the enlightened bourgeoisie to the conservatives – and the king became increasingly isolated as unrest and dissatisfaction reached boiling point. When he tried to neutralise the power of the more reform-minded delegates at a meeting of the États-Généraux (States-General) at the Jeu de Paume in Versailles from May to June 1789 (see p360), the masses – spurred on by the oratory and inflammatory tracts circulating at places like the Café de Foy (p188) at Palais Royal – took to the streets of Paris. On 14 July, a mob raided the armoury at the Hôtel des Invalides for rifles, seizing 32,000 muskets, and then stormed the prison at Bastille – the ultimate symbol of the despotic *ancien régime*. The French Revolution had begun.

At first, the Revolution was in the hands of moderate republicans called the Girondins. France was declared a constitutional monarchy and various reforms were introduced, including the adoption of the *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme and du Citoyen* (Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen). This document set forth the principles of the Revolution in a preamble and 17 articles, and was modelled on the American Declaration of Independence. A forward-thinking document called *Les Droits des Femmes* (The Rights of Women) was also published. But as the masses armed themselves against the external threat to the new government – posed by Austria, Prussia and the exiled French nobles – patriotism and nationalism mixed with extreme fervour and then popularised and radicalised the Revolution. It was not long before the Girondins lost out to the extremist Jacobins, led by Maximilien Robespierre, Georges-Jacques Danton and Jean-Paul Marat. The Jacobins abolished the monarchy and declared the First Republic in September 1792 after Louis XVI proved unreliable as a constitutional monarch. The Assemblée Nationale (National Assembly) was replaced by an elected Revolutionary Convention.

In January 1793 Louis XVI, who had tried to flee the country with his family but only got as far as Varennes, was convicted of 'conspiring against the liberty of the nation' and guillotined

1635

Cardinal Richelieu, de facto ruler during the undistinguished reign of Louis XIII (1617–43), founds the Académie Française, the first and best known of France's five institutes of arts and sciences.

1682

Louis XIV, the 'Sun King', moves his court from the Palais des Tuileries in Paris to Versailles in a bid to sidestep the endless intrigues of the capital; the cunning plan works.

14 July 1789

The French Revolution begins when a mob arms itself with weapons taken from the Hôtel des Invalides and storms the prison at Bastille, freeing a total of just seven prisoners.

1793

Louis XVI is tried and convicted as citizen 'Louis Capet' (as all kings since Hugh Capet were declared to have ruled illegally) and executed; Marie-Antoinette's turn comes nine months later.

1799

Napoleon Bonaparte overthrows the Directory and seizes control of the government in a coup d'état, opening the doors to 16 years of despotic rule, victory and then defeat on the battlefield.

1815

British and Prussian forces under the Duke of Wellington defeat Napoleon at Waterloo; he is sent into exile for the second time, this time to a remote island in the South Atlantic where he dies six years later.

## A DATE WITH THE REVOLUTION

Along with standardising France's – and, later, most of the world's – system of weights and measures with the almost universal metric system, the Revolutionary government adopted a new, 'more rational' calendar from which all 'superstitious' associations (ie saints' days and mythology) were removed. Year 1 began on 22 September 1792, the day the First Republic was proclaimed. The names of the 12 months – Vendémiaire, Brumaire, Frimaire, Nivôse, Pluviôse, Ventôse, Germinal, Floréal, Prairial, Messidor, Thermidor and Fructidor – were chosen according to the seasons. The autumn months, for instance, were Vendémiaire, derived from *vendange* (grape harvest); Brumaire, derived from *brume* (mist or fog); and Frimaire, derived from *frimas* (wintry weather). In turn, each month was divided into three 10-day 'weeks' called *décades*, the last day of which was a rest day. The five remaining days of the year were used to celebrate Virtue, Genius, Labour, Opinion and Rewards. While the republican calendar worked well in theory, it caused no end of confusion for France in its communications and trade abroad because the months and days kept changing in relation to those of the Gregorian calendar. The Revolutionary calendar was abandoned and the old system was restored in France in 1806 by Napoleon Bonaparte.

at place de la Révolution, today's place de la Concorde. His consort, Marie-Antoinette, was executed in October of the same year.

In March 1793 the Jacobins set up the notorious Committee of Public Safety to deal with national defence and to apprehend and try 'traitors'. This body had dictatorial control over the city and the country during the so-called Reign of Terror (September 1793 to July 1794), which saw most religious freedoms revoked and churches closed to worship and desecrated. Paris during the Reign of Terror was not unlike Moscow under Joseph Stalin.

Jacobin propagandist Marat was assassinated in his bathtub by the Girondin Charlotte Corday in July 1793 and by autumn the Reign of Terror was in full swing; by mid-1794 some 2500 people had been beheaded in Paris and more than 14,500 executed elsewhere in France. In the end, the Revolution turned on itself, 'devouring its own children' in the words of an intimate of Robespierre, Jacobin Louis Antoine Léon de Saint-Just. Robespierre sent Danton to the guillotine; Saint-Just and Robespierre eventually met the same fate. Paris celebrated for days afterwards.

After the Reign of Terror faded, a five-man delegation of moderate republicans led by Paul Barras, who had ordered the arrests of Robespierre and Saint-Just, set itself up to rule the republic as the Directoire (Directory). On 5 October 1795 (or 13 Vendémiaire in year 6 – see the boxed text, [above](#)), a group of royalist *jeunesse dorée* (gilded youth) bent on overthrowing the Directory was intercepted in front of the Église St-Roch on rue St-Honoré. They were met by loyalist forces led by a young Corsican general named Napoleon Bonaparte, who fired into the crowd. For this 'whiff of grapeshot' Napoleon was put in command of the French forces in Italy, where he was particularly successful in the campaign against Austria. His victories would soon turn him into an independent political force.

## LITTLE BIG MAN & EMPIRE

The post-Revolutionary government led by the five-man Directory was far from stable, and when Napoleon returned to Paris in 1799 he found a chaotic republic in which few citizens had any faith. In November, when it appeared that the Jacobins were again on the ascend-

ancy in the legislature, Napoleon tricked the delegates into leaving Paris for St-Cloud to the southwest ('for their own protection'), overthrew the discredited Directory and assumed power himself.

At first, Napoleon took the post of First Consul, chosen by popular vote. In a referendum three years later he was named 'Consul for Life' and his birthday became a national holiday. By December 1804, when he crowned himself 'Emperor of the French' in the presence of Pope Pius VII at Notre Dame, the scope and nature of Napoleon's ambitions were obvious to all. But to consolidate and legitimise his authority Napoleon needed more victories on the battlefield. So began a seemingly endless series of wars and victories by which France would come to control most of Europe.

In 1812 Napoleon invaded Russia in an attempt to do away with his last major rival on the Continent, Tsar Alexander I. Although his Grande Armée managed to capture Moscow, it was wiped out by the brutal Russian winter; of the 600,000 soldiers mobilised, only 90,000 – a mere 15% – returned. Prussia and Napoleon's other adversaries quickly recovered from their earlier defeats, and less than two years after the fiasco in Russia the Prussians, backed by Russia, Austria and Britain, entered Paris. Napoleon abdicated and was exiled to the island of Elba off the coast of Italy. The Senate then formally deposed him as emperor.

At the Congress of Vienna (1814–15), the victorious allies restored the House of Bourbon to the French throne, installing Louis XVI's brother as Louis XVIII (Louis XVI's second son, Charles, had been declared Louis XVII by monarchists in exile but he died while under arrest by the Revolutionary government). But in February 1815 Napoleon escaped from Elba, landed in southern France and gathered a large army as he marched towards Paris. On 1 June he reclaimed the throne at celebrations held at the Champs de Mars. But his reign came to an end just three weeks later when his forces were defeated at Waterloo in Belgium. Napoleon was exiled again, this time to St Helena in the South Atlantic, where he died in 1821.

Although reactionary in some ways – he re-established slavery in France's colonies, for example – Napoleon instituted a number of important reforms, including a reorganisation of the judicial system; the promulgation of a new legal code, the Code Napoléon (or civil code), which forms the basis of the French legal system to this day; and the establishment of a new educational system. More importantly, he preserved the essence of the changes brought about by the Revolution. Napoleon is therefore remembered by many French people as the nation's greatest hero.

Few of Napoleon's grand architectural plans for Paris were completed, but the Arc de Triomphe, Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel, La Madeleine, Pont des Arts, rue de Rivoli and some buildings within the Louvre complex as well as the Canal St-Martin all date from this period.

## THE RETURN OF THE MONARCHY

The reign of 'the gouty old gentleman' Louis XVIII (1814–24) was dominated by the struggle between extreme monarchists who wanted a return to the *ancien régime*, liberals who saw the changes wrought by the Revolution as irreversible, and the radicals of the working-class neighbourhoods of Paris (by 1817 the population of Paris stood at 715,000). Louis' successor, the reactionary Charles X (r 1824–30), handled this struggle with great incompetence and was overthrown in the so-called July Revolution of 1830 when a motley group of revolutionaries seized the Hôtel de Ville. The Colonne de Juillet in the centre of the place de la Bastille honours

1848

After more than three decades of monarchy, King Louis-Philippe is ousted and the short-lived Second Republic is established with Napoleon's incompetent nephew at the helm.

1852–70

Paris enjoys significant economic growth during the Second Empire of Napoleon III and much of the city is redesigned or rebuilt by Baron Haussmann as the Paris we know today.

1870–1

Harsh terms inflicted on France by victor Prussia in the Franco-Prussian War leads to open revolt and the establishment of the insurrectionary Paris Commune.

1889

The Eiffel Tower is completed in time for the opening of the 1889 Exposition Universelle (World Exhibition) but is vilified in the press and on the street as the 'metal asparagus' – or worse.

1894

Army Captain Alfred Dreyfus is convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment on trumped-up charges of spying for Germany but is later exonerated despite widespread conservative opposition.

1905

The emotions aroused by the Dreyfus affair and the interference of the Catholic Church leads to the promulgation of *laïcité* (secularism), the legal separation of church and state.



those killed in the street battles that accompanied this revolution; they are buried in vaults under the column.

Louis-Philippe (r 1830–48), an ostensibly constitutional monarch of bourgeois sympathies and tastes, was then chosen by parliament to head what became known as the July Monarchy. His tenure was marked by inflation, corruption and rising unemployment and was overthrown in the February Revolution of 1848, in whose wake the Second Republic was established. The population of Paris had reached one million by 1844.

## FROM PRESIDENT TO EMPEROR

In presidential elections held in 1848, Napoleon's inept nephew, the German-accented Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, was overwhelmingly elected. Legislative deadlock caused Louis Napoleon to lead a coup d'état in 1851, after which he was proclaimed Emperor Napoleon III (Bonaparte had conferred the title Napoleon II on his son upon his abdication in 1814, but the latter never ruled). A plebiscite overwhelmingly approved the motion (7.8 million in favour and 250,000 against), and Napoleon III moved into the Palais des Tuileries.

The Second Empire lasted from 1852 until 1870. During this period France enjoyed significant economic growth, and Paris was transformed by town planner Haussmann (see the boxed text, [opposite](#)) into the modern city it now is today. The city's first department stores were also built at this time – the now defunct La Ville de Paris in 1834 followed by Le Bon Marché in 1852 – as were the *passages couverts*, Paris' delightful covered shopping arcades ([p188](#)).

Like his uncle before him, Napoleon III embroiled France in a number of costly conflicts, including the disastrous Crimean War (1854–56). In 1870 Otto von Bismarck goaded Napoleon III into declaring war on Prussia. Within months the thoroughly unprepared French army was defeated and the emperor taken prisoner. When news of the debacle reached Paris the masses took to the streets and demanded that a republic be declared.

## THE COMMUNE & THE 'BEAUTIFUL AGE'

The Third Republic began as a provisional government of national defence in September 1870. The Prussians were, at the time, advancing on Paris and would subsequently lay siege to the capital, forcing starving Parisians to bake bread partially with sawdust and consume most of the animals on display in the Ménagerie at the Jardin des Plantes. In January 1871 the government negotiated an armistice with the Prussians, who demanded that National Assembly elections be held immediately. The republicans, who had called on the nation to continue to resist the Prussians and were overwhelmingly supported by Parisians, lost to the monarchists, who had campaigned on a peace platform.

As expected, the monarchist-controlled assembly ratified the Treaty of Frankfurt. However, when ordinary Parisians heard of its harsh terms – a huge war indemnity, cession of the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine, and the occupation of Paris by 30,000 Prussian troops – they revolted against the government.

Following the withdrawal of Prussian troops on 18 March 1871, an insurrectionary government, known to history as the Paris Commune, was established and its supporters, the Communards, seized control of the capital (the legitimate government had fled to Versailles). In late May, after the Communards had tried to burn the centre of the city, the Versailles government launched an offensive on the Commune known as La Semaine Sanglante (Bloody Week), in which several

## HAUSSMANN'S HOUSING

Few town planners anywhere in the world have had as great an impact on the city of their birth as did Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann (1809–91) on Paris. As Prefect of the Seine *département* under Napoleon III between 1853 and 1870, Haussmann and his staff of engineers and architects completely rebuilt huge swaths of Paris. He is best known (and most bitterly attacked) for having demolished much of medieval Paris, replacing the chaotic narrow streets – easy to barricade in an uprising – with the handsome, arrow-straight thoroughfares for which the city is now celebrated. He also revolutionised Paris' water-supply and sewerage systems and laid out many of the city's loveliest parks, including large areas of the Bois de Boulogne ([p177](#)) and Bois de Vincennes ([p176](#)) as well as the Parc des Buttes-Chaumont ([p173](#)) and Parc Montsouris ([Map pp162–3](#)). The 12 avenues leading out from the Arc de Triomphe were also his work.

thousand rebels were killed. After a mop-up of the Parc des Buttes-Chaumont, the last of the Commune insurgents – cornered by government forces in the Cimetière du Père Lachaise – fought a hopeless, all-night battle among the tombstones. In the morning, the 147 survivors were lined up against what is now known as the Mur des Fédérés (Wall of the Federalists). They were then shot, and buried in a mass grave. A further 20,000 or so Communards, mostly working class, were rounded up throughout the city and executed. As many as 13,000 were jailed or transported to Devil's Island penal colony off French Guyana in South America.

Karl Marx, in his *The Civil War in France*, interpreted the Commune insurrection as the first great proletarian uprising against the bourgeoisie, and socialists came to see its victims as martyrs of the class struggle. Among the buildings destroyed in the fighting were the original Hôtel de Ville, the Palais des Tuileries and the Cours des Comptes (site of the present-day Musée d'Orsay). Both Ste-Chapelle and Notre Dame were slated to be torched but those in charge apparently had a change of heart at the last minute.

Despite this disastrous start, the Third Republic ushered in the glittering *belle époque* (beautiful age), with Art Nouveau architecture, a whole field of artistic 'isms' from impressionism onwards and advances in science and engineering, including the construction of the first metro line, which opened in 1900. *Expositions universelles* (world exhibitions) were held in Paris in 1889 – showcasing the then maligned Eiffel Tower – and again in 1900 in the purpose-built Petit Palais. The Paris of nightclubs and artistic cafés made its first appearance around this time, and Montmartre became a magnet for artists, writers, pimps and prostitutes (see [p184](#)).

But France was consumed with a desire for revenge after its defeat by Germany, and jingoistic nationalism, scandals and accusations were the order of the day. The most serious crisis – morally and politically – of the Third Republic, however, was the infamous Dreyfus Affair. This began in 1894 when a Jewish army captain named Alfred Dreyfus was accused of betraying military secrets to Germany – he was then court-martialled and sentenced to life imprisonment on Devil's Island. Liberal politicians, artists and writers, including the novelist Émile Zola, who penned his celebrated 'J'accuse!' (I Accuse!) open letter in support of the captain, succeeded in having the case reopened – despite bitter opposition from the army command, right-wing politicians and many Catholic groups – and Dreyfus was vindicated in 1900. When he died in 1935 Dreyfus was laid to rest in the Cimetière de Montparnasse. The Dreyfus affair discredited the army and the Catholic Church in France. This resulted in more-rigorous civilian control of the military and, in 1905, the legal separation of the Catholic Church and the French state.

1918

Armistice ending WWI signed at Fôret de Compiègne near Paris sees the return of lost territories (Alsace and Lorraine); the war, however, had seen the loss of over a million French soldiers.

1922

The doyenne at the centre of expatriate literary activity in Paris, Sylvia Beach of the Shakespeare & Company bookshop in rue de l'Odéon, publishes James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

1940

After more than 10 months of *le drôle de guerre* (phony war) Germany launches the battle for France, and the four-year occupation of Paris under direct German rule begins.

25 August 1944

Spearheaded by Free French units, Allied forces liberate Paris and the city escapes destruction, despite Hitler's orders that it be torched; the war in Europe ends nine months later.

1949

Simone de Beauvoir publishes her ground-breaking and very influential study *Le Deuxième Sexe* (The Second Sex) just four years after French women win the right to vote.

1954

As a portent of what is to happen to the rest of its overseas empire, France loses its bid to reassert colonial control over Indochina when its forces are soundly defeated at Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam.

## THE GREAT WAR & ITS AFTERMATH

Central to France's entry into WWI was the desire to regain the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine, lost to Germany in the Franco-Prussian War. Indeed, Raymond Poincaré, president of the Third Republic from 1913 to 1920 and later prime minister, was a native of Lorraine and a firm supporter of war with Germany. But when the heir to the Austrian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated by a Bosnian Serb in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, Germany and Austria-Hungary – precipitating what would erupt into the first-ever global war – jumped the gun. Within a month, they had declared war on Russia and France.

By early September German troops had reached the River Marne, just 15km east of Paris, and the central government moved to Bordeaux. But Marshal Joffre's troops, transported to the front by Parisian taxicabs, brought about the 'Miracle of the Marne', and Paris was safe within a month. In November 1918 the armistice was finally signed in a railway carriage in a clearing of the Forêt de Compiègne, 82km northeast of Paris.

The defeat of Austria-Hungary and Germany in WWI, which regained Alsace and Lorraine for France, was achieved at an unimaginable human cost. Of the eight million French men who were called to arms, 1.3 million were killed and almost one million crippled. In other words, two of every 10 Frenchmen aged between 20 and 45 years of age were killed in WWI. At the Battle of Verdun (1916) alone, the French, led by General Philippe Pétain, and the Germans each lost about 400,000 men.

The 1920s and '30s saw Paris as a centre of the avant-garde, with artists pushing into new fields of cubism and surrealism, Le Corbusier rewriting the textbook for architecture, foreign writers such as Ernest Hemingway and James Joyce drawn by the city's liberal atmosphere (p193) and nightlife establishing a cutting-edge reputation for everything from jazz clubs to striptease.

France's efforts to promote a separatist movement in the Rhineland, and its occupation of the Ruhr in 1923 to enforce German reparations payments, proved disastrous. But it did lead to almost a decade of accommodation and compromise with Germany over border guarantees, and to Germany's admission to the League of Nations. The naming of Adolf Hitler as German chancellor in 1933, however, would put an end to all that.

## WWII & OCCUPATION

During most of the 1930s, the French, like the British, had done their best to appease Hitler. However, two days after the German invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939, Britain and France declared war on Germany. For the first nine months Parisians joked about *le drôle de guerre* – what Britons called 'the phoney war' – in which nothing happened. But the battle for France began in earnest in May 1940 and by 14 June France had capitulated. Paris was occupied, and almost half the population of just under five million fled the city by car, by bicycle or on foot. The British expeditionary force sent to help the French barely managed to avoid capture by retreating to Dunkirk, described so vividly in Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) and in a dreamlike sequence in Joe Wright's 2007 film of the book, and crossing the English Channel in small boats. The Maginot Line, a supposedly impregnable wall of fortifications along the Franco-German border, had proved useless – the German armoured divisions simply outflanked it by going through Belgium.

The Germans divided France into a zone under direct German rule (along the western coast and the north, including Paris), and into a puppet-state based in the spa town of Vichy and led by General Philippe Pétain, the ageing WWI hero of the Battle of Verdun. Pétain's collabora-

tionist government, whose leaders and supporters assumed that the Nazis were Europe's new masters and had to be accommodated, as well as French police forces in German-occupied areas (including Paris) helped the Nazis round up 160,000 French Jews and others for deportation to concentration and extermination camps in Germany and Poland. (In 2006 the state railway SNCF was found guilty of colluding in the deportation of Jews during WWII and was ordered to pay compensation to the families of two victims.)

After the fall of Paris, General Charles de Gaulle, France's undersecretary of war, fled to London. In a radio broadcast on 18 June 1940, he appealed to French patriots to continue resisting the Germans. He set up a French government-in-exile and established the Forces Françaises Libres (Free French Forces), a military force dedicated to fighting the Germans.

The underground movement known as the Résistance (Resistance), whose active members never amounted to more than about 5% of the French population, engaged in such activities as sabotaging railways, collecting intelligence for the Allies, helping Allied airmen who had been shot down, and publishing anti-German leaflets. The vast majority of the rest of the population did little or nothing to resist the occupiers or assist their victims or were collaborators, such as the film stars Maurice Chevalier and Arletty, and the designer Coco Chanel.

The liberation of France began with the Allied landings in Normandy on D-day (Jour-J in French): 6 June 1944. On 15 August Allied forces also landed in southern France. After a brief insurrection by the Résistance, Paris was liberated on 25 August by an Allied force spearheaded by Free French units – these units were sent in ahead of the Americans so that the French would have the honour of liberating the capital the following day. Hitler, who visited Paris in June 1940 and loved it, ordered that the city be burned toward the end of the war. It was an order that, gratefully, had not been obeyed.

## POSTWAR INSTABILITY

De Gaulle returned to Paris and set up a provisional government, but in January 1946 he resigned as president, wrongly believing that the move would provoke a popular outcry for his return. A few months later, a new constitution was approved by referendum. De Gaulle formed his own party (Rassemblement du Peuple Française) and would spend the next 13 years in opposition.

The Fourth Republic was a period that saw unstable coalition cabinets follow one another with bewildering speed (on average, one every six months), and economic recovery that was helped immeasurably by massive American aid. France's disastrous defeat at Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam in 1954 ended its colonial supremacy in Indochina. France also tried to suppress an uprising by Arab nationalists in Algeria, where over one million French settlers lived.

The Fourth Republic came to an end in 1958, when extreme right-wingers, furious at what they saw as defeatism rather than tough action in dealing with the uprising in Algeria, began conspiring to overthrow the government. De Gaulle was brought back to power to prevent a military coup and even possible civil war. He soon drafted a new constitution that gave considerable powers to the president at the expense of the National Assembly.

## CHARLES DE GAULLE & THE FIFTH REPUBLIC

The Fifth Republic was rocked in 1961 by an attempted coup staged in Algiers by a group of right-wing military officers. When it failed, the Organisation de l'Armée Secrète (OAS) – a group of French *colons* (colonists) and sympathisers opposed to Algerian independence – turned to

1958

De Gaulle returns to power after more than a dozen years in the opposition to form the Fifth Republic, in which power is weighted in the presidency at the expense of the National Assembly.

1962

War in Algeria is brought to an end after claiming the lives of more than 12,000 people; three-quarters of a million Algeria-born French citizens arrive in France and many taken up residency in Paris.

1968

Paris is rocked by student-led riots that bring the nation and the city to the brink of civil war; as a result de Gaulle is forced to resign the following year.

1977

The Centre Pompidou, the first of a string of *grands projets*, huge public edifices through which French leaders seek to immortalise themselves, opens to great controversy near Les Halles.

1986

Victory for the opposition in the National Assembly elections forces President Mitterrand to work with a prime minister and cabinet from the right wing.

1989

President Mitterrand's *grand projet*, Opéra Bastille, opens to mark the bicentennial of the French Revolution; IM Pei's Grande Pyramide is unveiled at the Louvre.

terrorism, trying several times to assassinate de Gaulle and nearly succeeding in August 1962 in the Parisian suburb of Petit Clamart. The book and film *The Day of the Jackal* portrayed a fictional OAS attempt on de Gaulle's life.

In 1962, after more than 12,000 had died as a result of this 'civil war', de Gaulle negotiated an end to the war in Algeria. Some 750,000 *pied-noir* (black feet), as Algerian-born French people are known in France, flooded into France and the capital. Meanwhile, almost all of the other French colonies and protectorates in Africa had demanded and achieved independence. Shrewdly, the French government began a programme of economic and military aid to its former colonies to bolster France's waning importance internationally and to create a bloc of French-speaking nations – *la francophonie* – in the developing world.

Paris retained its position as a creative and intellectual centre, particularly in philosophy and film-making, and the 1960s saw large parts of the Marais beautifully restored. But the loss of the colonies, the surge in immigration, economic difficulties and an increase in unemployment weakened de Gaulle's government.

In March 1968 a large demonstration in Paris against the war in Vietnam was led by student Daniel 'Danny the Red' Cohn-Bendit, who is today copresident of the Green/Free European Alliance Group in the European Parliament. This gave impetus to the student movement, and protests were staged throughout the spring. A seemingly insignificant incident in May 1968, in which police broke up yet another in a long series of demonstrations by students of the University of Paris, sparked a violent reaction on the streets of the capital; students occupied the Sorbonne and barricades were erected in the Latin Quarter. Workers joined in the protests and six million people across France participated in a general strike that virtually paralysed the country and the city. It was a period of much creativity and new ideas with slogans appearing everywhere, such as '*L'Imagination au Pouvoir*' (Put Imagination in Power) and '*Sous les Pavés, la Plage*' (Under the Cobblestones, the Beach), a reference to Parisians' favoured material for building barricades and what they could expect to find beneath them.

The alliance between workers and students couldn't last long. While the former wanted to reap greater benefits from the consumer market, the latter wanted (or at least said they wanted) to destroy it – and were called 'fascist *provocateurs*' and 'mindless anarchists' by the French Communist leadership. De Gaulle took advantage of this division and appealed to people's fear of anarchy. Just as Paris and the rest of France seemed on the brink of revolution, 100,000 Gaullists demonstrated on the av des Champs-Élysées in support of the government and stability was restored.

## POMPIDOU TO CHIRAC

There is no underestimating the effect the student riots of 1968 had on France and the French people, and on the way they govern themselves today. After stability was restored the government made a number of immediate changes, including the decentralisation of the higher education system, and reforms (eg lowering the voting age to 18, an abortion law and workers' self-management) continued through the 1970s, creating, in effect, the modern society that is France today.

President Charles de Gaulle resigned in 1969 and was succeeded by the Gaullist leader Georges Pompidou, who was in turn replaced by Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in 1974. François Mitterrand, long-time head of the *Partie Socialiste* (PS), was elected president in 1981 and, as the business

community had feared, immediately set out to nationalise privately owned banks, large industrial groups and various other parts of the economy. However, during the mid-1980s Mitterrand followed a generally moderate economic policy and in 1988, aged 69, he was re-elected for a second seven-year term.

In the 1986 parliamentary elections the right-wing opposition led by Jacques Chirac, mayor of Paris since 1977, received a majority in the National Assembly; for the next two years Mitterrand was forced to work with a prime minister and cabinet from the opposition, an unprecedented arrangement in French governance known as *cohabitation*.

In the May 1995 presidential elections Chirac enjoyed a comfortable victory (Mitterrand, who would die in January 1996, decided not to run again because of failing health). In his first few months in office Chirac received high marks for his direct words and actions in matters relating to the EU and the war in Bosnia. His cabinet choices, including the selection of 'whiz kid' foreign minister Alain Juppé as prime minister, were well received. But Chirac's decision to resume nuclear testing on the French Polynesian island of Mururoa and a nearby atoll was met with outrage in France and abroad. On the home front, Chirac's moves to restrict welfare payments (designed to bring France closer to meeting the criteria for the European Monetary Union; EMU) led to the largest protests since 1968. For three weeks in late 1995 Paris was crippled by public-sector strikes, battering the economy.

In 1997 Chirac took a big gamble and called an early parliamentary election for June. The move backfired. Chirac remained president but his party, the *Rassemblement Pour la République* (RPR; Rally for the Republic), lost support, and a coalition of Socialists, Communists and Greens came to power. Lionel Jospin, a former minister of education in the Mitterrand government (who, most notably,

## top picks

### HISTORICAL READS

- **Paris: The Secret History**, Andrew Hussey (2006) – a book not unlike Peter Ackroyd's *London: The Biography*, this colourful historical tour of Paris opens the door to (but does not solve) many of the city's mysteries.
- **Paris Changing**, Christopher Rauschenberg (2007) – modern-day photographer follows in the footsteps of early-20th-century snapper Eugène Atget in this 'spot the difference' album of before-and-after photos.
- **The Flâneur: A Stroll Through the Paradoxes of Paris**, Edmund White (2001) – doyen of American literature and long-term resident (and *flâneur* – 'stroller') of Paris, White notices things rarely noticed by others – veritable footnotes of footnotes – in this loving portrait of his adopted city.
- **The Seven Ages of Paris: Portrait of a City**, Alistair Horne (2002) – this superb, very idiosyncratic 'biography' of Paris divides the city's history into seven ages – from the 13th-century reign of Philippe-Auguste to President Charles de Gaulle's retirement in 1969.
- **Is Paris Burning?** Larry Collins & Dominique Lapierre (1965) – this is a tense and very intelligent reportage of the last days of the Nazi occupation of Paris.
- **Paris: The Biography of a City**, Colin Jones (2005) – although written by a University of Warwick professor, this one-volume history is not at all academic. Instead, it's rather chatty, and goes into much detail on the physical remains of history as the author walks the reader through the centuries and the city.
- **Cross Channel**, Julien Barnes (1997) – This is a witty collection of key moments in shared Anglo-French history – from Joan of Arc to a trip via Eurostar from London to Paris – by one of Britain's most talented novelists.

1994

Eurostar trains link Waterloo station in London with the Gare du Nord in Paris in just over three hours.

1998

France beats Brazil to win the World Cup at the spanking-new Stade de France (Stadium of France) in St-Denis north of central Paris.

2001

Socialist Bertrand Delanoë becomes the first openly gay mayor of Paris (and of any European capital) but is wounded in a knife attack by a homophobic assailant the following year.

2002

President Jacques Chirac overwhelmingly defeats Front National leader Jean-Marie Le Pen to win second term.

2003

Hundreds of mostly elderly and house-bound Parisians die from complications arising from an unusually hot summer; a review of the health and emergency-response systems gets under way.

2004

France bans the wearing of Muslim headscarves and other religious symbols in schools.



promised the French people a shorter working week for the same pay), became prime minister. France had once again entered into a period of *cohabitation* – with Chirac on the other side of the table this time around.

For the most part Jospin and his government continued to enjoy the electorate's approval, thanks largely to a recovery in economic growth and the introduction of a 35-hour working week, which created thousands of (primarily part-time) jobs. But this period of *cohabitation*, the longest-lasting government in the history of the Fifth Republic, ended in May 2002 when Chirac was returned to the presidency for a second five-year term with 82% of the vote. This reflected less Chirac's popularity than the fear of Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of the right-wing Front National, who had garnered nearly 17% of the first round of voting against Chirac's 20%.

Chirac appointed Jean-Pierre Raffarin, a popular regional politician, as prime minister and pledged to lower taxes with declining revenues from a sluggish economy. But in May 2005 the electorate handed Chirac an embarrassing defeat when it overwhelmingly rejected, by referendum, the international treaty that was to create a constitution for the EU.

In the autumn of the same year riots broke out in Paris' *cités*, the enormous housing estates or projects encircling the capital, home to a dispossessed population of mostly blacks and Muslims. In some of the worst violence seen since WWII, there thankfully was no deaths but 3000 arrests and millions of euros in property damage. Parisians began to talk about and debate ethnic origin and affirmative action but this remained essentially a problem 'out there' in the *banlieues* (suburbs).

The trouble became more central – both literally and figuratively – in March 2006 after parliament passed the controversial *Contrat de Première Embauche* (CPE; First Employment Contract). Supporters argued that the plan would reduce unemployment by 20% while detractors said it would encourage a regular turnover of cut-rate staff and not allow young people to build careers. The majority of the nation's universities went on strike, workers and students mobilised and 1.5 million protesters took to the streets nationwide. In Paris, demonstrators torched cars and clashed with police, who responded with tear gas and water cannons. The government decided to withdraw the CPE altogether later in 2006.

## PARIS TODAY

With this backdrop it came as no surprise that Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, President Chirac's loyal henchman and heir apparent who had never even been elected to public office, did not even make it to the first post in the national elections of spring 2007. Instead, the get-tough Interior Minister Nicolas 'Sarko' Sarkozy, who famously fanned the flames during the 2005 race riots by calling the rioters *racaille* (rabble or riffraff) and whose loyalty to Chirac seemed to blow with the prevailing wind, stood as the UMP (Union for a Popular Movement) candidate against Socialist Ségolène 'Ségo' Royal, who appeared to be the left's only hope of ending a dozen years of right-wing incumbency. Neither candidate received an absolute majority in the first round of voting but in the second Sarkozy took 53% of the popular vote.

In his first year as president, Sarkozy succeeded where his predecessors failed in getting unions and employee groups to compromise on benefits and saw the national unemployment rate fall to 7.5%, the lowest level in more than two decades. But many of even his staunchest supporters were less than impressed with his performance and his popularity in the polls one year on stood at less than 40% (against 67% just after the May 2007 election). That's partly due to what the

2005	2007	2008
The French electorate overwhelmingly rejects EU Constitution; the suburbs surrounding Paris are wracked by rioting by Arab and African youths.	Pro-American pragmatist, Nicolas Sarkozy, Interior Minister under Chirac, beats Socialist candidate Ségolène Royal to become France's new president.	Mayor Bertrand Delanoë wins re-election to a second term of office.

## STAR-CROSSED LOVERS

He was a brilliant 39-year-old philosopher and logician who had gained a reputation for his controversial ideas. She was the beautiful niece of a canon at Notre Dame. And like Bogart and Bergman in Casablanca and Romeo and Juliet in Verona, they had to fall in love in medieval Paris of all damned times and places.

In 1118, the wandering scholar Pierre Abélard (1079–1142) found his way to Paris, having clashed with yet another theologian in the provinces. There he was employed by Canon Fulbert of Notre Dame to tutor his niece Héloïse (1101–64). One thing led to another and a son, Astrolabe, was born. Abélard did the gentlemanly thing and married his sweetheart. But they wed in secret and when Fulbert learned of it he was outraged. The canon had Abélard castrated and sent Héloïse packing to a nunnery. Abélard took monastic vows at the abbey in St-Denis and continued his studies and controversial writings. Héloïse, meanwhile, was made abbess of a convent.

All the while, however, the star-crossed lovers continued to correspond: he sending tender advice on how to run the convent and she writing passionate, poetic letters to her lost lover. The two were reunited only in death; in 1817 their remains were disinterred and brought to Père Lachaise cemetery (p154) in the 20e, where they lie together beneath a neo-Gothic tombstone in Division 7.

French now calling *peopolisation*, another Anglo-French neologism, this one meaning excessive media interest in and coverage of politicians' private lives. Mind you, Sarkozy's divorcing his wife of 18 years just three months after taking office and his subsequent marriage to Italian-French model/pop singer Carla Bruni would have tongues wagging in even the most taciturn of societies. Indeed, his well-publicised holidays with the rich and famous and what some French people see as his extravagance have earned him the sobriquet 'President Bling-Bling', a reference to an American hip-hop term meaning showy, often crass jewellery. Waiting in the wings are the Socialists, encouraged by their successes in the March 2008 local elections, which included holding on to the power base of Paris. But will it be a replay of the 'Sarko-Ségo' show next time around in 2012, or will the president be eclipsed by Mayor Bertrand Delanoë's rising star?

## ARTS

Paris is a bottomless well when it comes to the arts. There are philharmonic orchestras, ballet and opera troupes, theatre companies and copious cinemas from which to choose your art form. And its museums are among the richest in the world, with artwork representing the best of every historical period and school from the Romans to postmodernism. Generous government funding allows local venues to attract top international performers, and the number of international arts festivals hosted here seems to grow each year.

## LITERATURE

Literature is something that matters deeply to French people, and it is an important focus in their sense of identity. Problem is, nowadays there are no schools or clear literary trends emerging, some authors are impossible to read and, relatively speaking, little contemporary literature finds its way into English translation. Much French writing today tends to focus in a rather nihilistic way on what the nation has lost in recent decades (such as identity, international prestige etc), particularly in the work of Michel Houellebecq, who rose to national prominence in 1998 with his *Les Particules Élémentaires* (Atomised). And accessibility? In 2002 the winner of the Prix Goncourt (Goncourt Prize; see the boxed text, p37) – *Les Ombres Errantes* by Pascal Quignard – was denounced even by some of the prestigious prize's judges as 'over-erudite' and 'inaccessible' to the average reader.

Such novels do not help the traveller get into the head of Paris, to see and feel how the city thinks and works. For now perhaps it is better to stick with the classics of French literature or even those writers who are more descriptive and thus accessible. The *roman policier* (detective novel), for example, has always been a great favourite with the French, and among its greatest exponents has been Belgian-born Georges Simenon, author of the Inspector Maigret novels. *La Nuit du Carrefour* (Maigret at the Crossroads) portrays Montmartre at its 1930s sleaziest and seediest best. And then there are the works of all those foreigners, such as Gertrude Stein and George Orwell (p36) and, more recently, Cara Black (p35).



Going back in time, in the history of early medieval French literature Paris does not figure largely, though the misadventures of Pierre Abélard and Héloïse (see the boxed text, p33) took place in the capital as did their mutual correspondence, which ended only with their deaths. And here they lie.

François Villon, considered the finest poet – in any language – of the late Middle Ages, received the equivalent of a Master of Arts degree from the Sorbonne before he turned 20 years of age. Involved in a series of brawls, robberies and generally illicit escapades, ‘Master Villon’ (as he became known) was sentenced to be hanged in 1462 supposedly for stabbing a lawyer. However, the sentence was commuted to banishment from Paris for 10 years, and he disappeared forever. As well as a long police record, Villon left behind a body of poems charged with a highly personal lyricism, among them the *Ballade des Pendus* (Ballad of the Hanged Men), in which he writes his own epitaph, and the *Ballade des Femmes du Temps Jadis*, which was translated by the English poet and painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti as the ‘Ballad of Dead Ladies’.

The great landmarks of French Renaissance literature are the works of François Rabelais, Pierre de Ronsard and other poets of the group referred to as of La Pléiade and Michel de Montaigne. The exuberant narratives of the erstwhile monk Rabelais blend coarse humour with erudition in a vast *œuvre* that seems to include every kind of person, occupation and jargon to be found in the France of the mid-16th century. Rabelais had friends in high places in Paris, including Archbishop Jean du Bellay, whom he accompanied to Rome on two occasions. But some of Rabelais’ friends and associates fell afoul of the clergy, including his publisher Étienne Dolet. After being convicted of heresy and blasphemy in 1546, Dolet was hanged and then burned at place Maubert in the 5e arrondissement.

During the 17th century, François de Malherbe, court poet under Henri IV, brought a new rigour to the treatment of rhythm in literature. One of his better-known works is his sycophantic *Ode* (1600) to Marie de Médici. Transported by the perfection of Malherbe’s verses, Jean de La Fontaine went on to write his charming *Fables* in the manner of Aesop – though he fell afoul of the Académie Française (French Academy) in the process. The mood of classical tragedy permeates *La Princesse de Clèves* by Marie de La Fayette, which is widely regarded as the precursor of the modern character novel.

The literature of the 18th century is dominated by philosophers (see p38), among them Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Voltaire’s political writings, arguing that society is fundamentally opposed to nature, had a profound and lasting influence on the

## top picks

### BOOKS ABOUT PARISIANS & THE FRENCH

- **An Englishman in Paris: L’Éducation Continentale**, Michael Sadler (2003) – rollicking, very funny (mis)adventures of a self-proclaimed Francophile teacher in the City of Light with a preface from Peter Mayle.
- **Culture Shock France**, Sally Adamson Taylor (2005) – subtitled ‘A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette’, this was the first (and remains the best) introductory handbook to France and its foibles, Parisians and their peculiarities.
- **The Last Time I Saw Paris**, Elliot Paul (2001) – a superb classic work by an American expat that looks back on the working-class Paris of the inter-war years in a series of interwoven episodes.
- **The French**, Theodore Zeldin (1983) – dated but highly acclaimed survey of French passions, peculiarities and perspectives by British scholar now advising the Sarkozy government.
- **Un Peu de Paris**, Jean-Jacques Sempé (2001) – wordless, very gentle portrait of Paris and Parisians in cartoons from a national institution whose work appears frequently in *The New Yorker*.
- **Savoir Flair**, Polly Platt (2000) – subtitled ‘211 Tips for Enjoying France and the French’, this book by a 30-year Paris expat resident will help you understand what makes the French tick.
- **Paris in Mind**, Jennifer Lee (2003) – an anthology of essays and excerpts by 29 American writers – from Edith Wharton and James Baldwin to David Sedaris and Dave Barry (who discusses how to pronounce the French ‘r’).
- **Sixty Million Frenchmen Can’t Be Wrong**, Jean-Benoit Nadeau and Julie Barlow (2003) – a Paris-based Canadian journalist couple explains the essence of what it means to be French and how they got to be the way they are.
- **The House in Paris**, Elizabeth Bowen (1949) – Paris through the eyes and ears of an 11-year-old English girl sequestered for 24 hours in a Parisian townhouse. Dark, evocative, classic.

century, and he is buried in the Panthéon. Rousseau’s sensitivity to landscape and its moods anticipate romanticism, and the insistence on his own singularity in *Les Confessions* made it the first modern autobiography. He, too, is buried in the Panthéon.

The 19th century brought Victor Hugo, as much acclaimed for his poetry as for his novels, who lived on the place des Vosges before fleeing to the Channel Islands during the Second Empire. *Les Misérables* (1862) describes life among the poor and marginalised of Paris during the first half of the 19th century; the 20-page flight of the central character, Jean Valjean, through the sewers of the capital is memorable. *Notre Dame de Paris* (The Hunchback of Notre Dame; 1831), a medieval romance and tragedy revolving around the life of the celebrated cathedral, made Hugo the key figure of French romanticism.

Other influential 19th-century novelists include Stendhal (Marie-Henri Beyle), Honoré de Balzac, Amandine Aurore Lucile Dupin (better known as George Sand) and, of course, Alexandre Dumas, who wrote the swashbuckling adventures *Le Comte de Monte Cristo* (The Count of Monte Cristo) and *Les Trois Mousquetaires* (The Three Musketeers). The latter tells the story of d’Artagnan (based on the historical personage Charles de Baatz d’Artagnan, 1623–73), who arrives in Paris as a young Gascon determined to become one of the guardsmen of Louis XIII.

In 1857 two landmarks of French literature were published in book form: *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert and *Les Fleurs du Mal* by Charles Baudelaire. Both writers were tried for the supposed immorality of their works. Flaubert won his case, and his novel was distributed without censorship. Baudelaire, who moonlighted as a translator in Paris (he introduced the works of the American writer Edgar Allan Poe to Europe in editions that have since become classics of English-to-French translation), was obliged to cut a half-dozen poems from his work and was fined 300 francs, and he died an early and painful death, practically unknown. Flaubert’s second-most popular novel, *L’Éducation Sentimentale* (Sentimental Education), presents a vivid picture of life among Parisian dilettantes, intellectuals and revolutionaries during the decline and fall of Louis-Philippe’s monarchy and the February Revolution of 1848.

### CARA BLACK

Cara Black ([www.carablack.com](http://www.carablack.com)), who divides her time between Paris and San Francisco, is the author of a best-selling murder-by-arrondissement series set in Paris and featuring the intrepid, half-French-half-American sleuth Aimée Leduc. The latest is *Murder in the Rue de Paradis*.

**A Francophile from California... How does that work?** Francophilia goes way back. I had French nuns in school, my uncle studied under Georges Braque on the GI Bill after the war and in 1971, while travelling through Paris, I went to Rue du Bac and knocked on the door of my favourite writer, [two-times Prix Goncourt winner] Romain Gary. He invited me to his café for an espresso and a cigar. We both had both.

**Ah, smoke – but fire? All this murder and darkness in the City of Light?** That all came about much later, in 1993. I was walking around the place des Vosges and remembered a visit to Paris almost a decade before when I stayed with my friend Sarah. She had taken me on a tour of the pregentrified Marais and shown me the ancient abandoned building where her Jewish mother had hidden during the war and from where the rest of the family had been deported to Auschwitz. The idea for my first book *Murder in the Marais* came to me on the plane going home.

**Does your research get down and dirty?** I crawl under buildings, explore restrooms in old cafés, visit ghost metro stations, go down into the city sewers and even the tunnels under the Palais Royal. I interview police – I’m one of only two American women writers to have spent time in the Préfecture – and private detectives. Some of them have become friends and I take them to dinner.

**Now we’re cooking! What’s on the menu? Murder most fowl? Steak saignant (‘bleeding’, or rare)?** Anything but the *écrevisse* [freshwater crayfish] that come from the Seine. They feed on corpses. I discovered that while researching *Murder on the Île Saint-Louis*. One restaurant was still selling them.

**Why are you always Right and not Left? How about murder in the sexy 6e or the louché Latin Quarter?** I don’t write about the Paris of tourists, where people wear berets and carry baguettes. I’m not really comfortable on the Left Bank. I feel better where my friends live – the Marais, Belleville, Montmartre. I understand these places better.

**I wish I could...** Tie a scarf the way French women do.

**I wish I hadn’t...** Buried Baudelaire in Père Lachaise cemetery. He’s actually in Montparnasse.

**I’ll always come back to Paris for...** Hot chocolate at Ladorée, bicycle rides along the Canal St-Martin, the old stones of the Place des Vosges and the ghosts. Paris is full of ghosts and they communicate. You only need listen.

*Interviewed by Steve Fallon*

## STRANGERS IN PARIS

Foreigners (*étrangers*, or strangers, to the French) have found inspiration in Paris since Charles Dickens used the city alongside London as the backdrop to his novel on the French Revolution, *A Tale of Two Cities*, in 1859. The glory days of Paris as a literary setting, however, were without a doubt the interwar years (p193).

Both Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Moveable Feast* portray bohemian life in Paris between the wars; many of the vignettes in the latter – dissing Ford Maddox Ford in a café, 'sizing up' F Scott Fitzgerald in a toilet in the Latin Quarter and overhearing Gertrude Stein and her lover, Alice B Toklas, bitchin' at one another from the sitting room of their salon near the Jardin du Luxembourg – are classic and *très parisien*.

Language guru Stein, who could be so tiresome with her wordplays and endless repetitions ('A rose is a rose is a rose', 'Pigeons on the grass, alas') in books like *The Making of Americans*, was able to let her hair down by assuming her lover's identity in *The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas*. It's a fascinating account of the author's many years in Paris, her salon on the rue de Fleurus in the 6e and her friendships with Matisse, Picasso, Braque, Hemingway and others. It's also where you'll find that classic recipe for hashish brownies. Stein's *Wars I Have Seen* is a personal account of life in German-occupied Paris.

*Down and Out in Paris and London* is George Orwell's account of the time he spent working as a *plongeur* (dishwasher) in Paris and living with tramps in Paris and London in the early 1930s. Both *Tropic of Cancer* and *Quiet Days in Clichy* by Henry Miller are steamy novels set partly in the French capital. Mention should also be made of Anaïs Nin's voluminous diaries and fiction, especially her published correspondence with Miller, which is highly evocative of 1930s Paris.

For a taste of Paris in the 1950s try *Giovanni's Room*, James Baldwin's poignant account of a young American in Paris who falls in love with an Italian bartender, and his struggle with his sexuality. *Satori in Paris* by Jack Kerouac is the sometimes entertaining (eg the scene in the Montparnasse gangster bar) but often irritating account of the American Beat writer's last trip to France.

The aim of Émile Zola, who came to Paris with his close friend Paul Cézanne in 1858, was to transform novel-writing from an art to a science by the application of experimentation. His theory may now seem naive, but his work influenced most significant French writers of the late 19th century and is reflected in much 20th-century fiction as well. His novel *Nana* tells the decadent tale of a young woman who resorts to prostitution to survive the Paris of the Second Empire.

Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé created the symbolist movement, which strove to express states of mind rather than simply detail daily reality. Arthur Rimbaud, apart from crowding an extraordinary amount of exotic travel into his 37 years and having a tempestuous sexual relationship with Verlaine, produced two enduring pieces of work: *Illuminations* and *Une Saison en Enfer* (A Season in Hell). Rimbaud stopped writing and deserted Europe for Africa in 1874, never to return. Verlaine died at 39 rue Descartes (5e) in 1896.

Marcel Proust dominated the early 20th century with his giant seven-volume novel *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (Remembrance of Things Past), which is largely autobiographical and explores in evocative detail the true meaning of past experience recovered from the unconscious by 'involuntary memory'. In 1907 Proust moved from the family home near *avenue des Champs-Élysées* to the apartment on *blvd Haussmann* that was famous for its cork-lined bedroom (now on display at the Musée Carnavalet in the Marais, p96) from which he almost never stirred. André Gide found his voice in the celebration of gay sensuality and, later, left-wing politics. *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* (The Counterfeiters) exposes the hypocrisy and self-deception to which people resort in order to fit in or deceive themselves.

André Breton led the group of French surrealists and wrote its three manifestos, although the first use of the word 'surrealist' is attributed to the poet Guillaume Apollinaire, a fellow traveller of surrealism who was killed in action in WWI. As a poet, Breton was overshadowed by Paul Éluard and Louis Aragon, whose most famous surrealist novel was *Le Paysan de Paris* (Nightwalker). Colette (Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette) enjoyed tweaking the nose of conventionally moral readers with titillating novels that detailed the amorous exploits of such heroines as the schoolgirl Claudine. Her best-known work is *Gigi* but far more interesting is *Paris de Ma Fenêtre* (Paris from My Window), dealing with the German occupation of Paris. Her view, by the way, was from 9 rue de Beaujolais in the 1er, overlooking the Jardin du Palais Royal.

After WWII, existentialism developed as a significant literary movement around Jean-Paul Sartre (see p38), Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus, who worked and conversed in the cafés

of *blvd St-Germain* in the 6e. All three stressed the importance of the writer's political engagement. *L'Âge de Raison* (The Age of Reason), the first volume of Sartre's trilogy *Les Chemins de la Liberté* (The Roads to Freedom), is a superb Parisian novel; the subsequent volumes recall Paris immediately before and during WWII. De Beauvoir, author of *Le Deuxième Sexe* (The Second Sex), had a profound influence on feminist thinking. Camus' novel *L'Étranger* (The Stranger) reveals that the absurd is the condition of modern man, who feels himself a stranger – more accurately translated as 'outsider' in English – in his world.

In the late 1950s certain novelists began to look for new ways of organising narrative. The so-called *nouveau roman* (new novel) refers to the works of Nathalie Sarraute, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Boris Vian, Julien Gracq, Michel Butor and others. However, these writers never formed a close-knit group, and their experiments took them in divergent directions. Today the *nouveau roman* is very much out of favour in France though the authors' names often appear in print and conversation.

Mention must also be made of *Histoire d'O* (Story of O), the highly erotic sadomasochistic novel written by Dominique Aury under a pseudonym in 1954. It sold more copies than any other contemporary French novel outside France.

In 1980 Marguerite Yourcenar, best known for her memorable historical novels such as *Mémoires d'Hadrien* (Hadrian's Memoirs), became the first woman to be elected to the Académie Française. Several years later Marguerite Duras came to the notice of a larger public when she won the Prix Goncourt (see the boxed text, below) for her novel *L'Amant* (The Lover) in 1984.

Philippe Sollers was one of the editors of *Tel Quel*, a highbrow, then left-wing, Paris-based review that was very influential in the 1960s and early 1970s. His 1960s novels were highly experimental, but with *Femmes* (Women) he returned to a conventional narrative style.

Another editor of *Tel Quel* was Julia Kristeva, best known for her theoretical writings on literature and psychoanalysis. In recent years she has turned her hand to fiction, and *Les Samuraï* (The Samurai; 1990), a fictionalised account of the heady days of *Tel Quel*, is an interesting document on the life of the Paris intelligentsia. Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault are other authors and philosophers associated with the 1960s and '70s.

So-called accessible contemporary authors who enjoy a wide following include Patrick Modiano, Yann Queffélec, Pascal Quignard, Denis Tillinac and Nicole de Buron, a very popular mainstream humour writer whose books sell in the hundreds of thousands. Fred Vargas is a popular writer of crime fiction.

More-serious authors whose careers and works are closely scrutinised by the literary establishment and the well-read include Jean Echenoz, Nina Bouraoui, Jean-Philippe Toussaint, Annie Ernaux and Erik Orsenna. Others are Christine Angot, *'la reine de l'autofiction'* famous for her autobiographical novels, the best-selling novelist Marc Levy, and Yasmina Khadra, a former colonel in the Algerian army who adopted his wife's name as a *nom de plume*.

Two recent winners of the Prix Goncourt have been controversial for rather less-than-literary reasons. Jonathan Littell, who took the prize in 2006 for *Les Bienveillantes*, is actually a New

## AND THE WINNER IS...

Like the UK's Booker or the Pulitzer in the USA, the Prix Goncourt (Goncourt Prize) is the most highly respected and coveted literary prize in France, awarded annually since 1903 to the best volume of imaginative work in prose published during that year. In the event of a tie, novels are to be given preference over collections of short stories or sketches. The winner is announced by the 10-strong Académie Goncourt each year at the Drouant (p233), a swanky restaurant in the 2e arrondissement. Though the prize comes with a purse of less than €10, it guarantees much media attention and soaring sales.

Among writers who have won the Prix Goncourt in the past and are still read are Marcel Proust (1919), André Malraux (1933), Julien Gracq (1951), Simone de Beauvoir (1954) and Marguerite Duras (1984). Winners in recent years:

- 2002 Pascal Quignard, *Les Ombres Errantes* (Wandering Shadows)
- 2003 Jacques-Pierre Amette, *La Maîtresse de Brecht* (Brecht's Mistress)
- 2004 Laurent Gaudé, *Le Soleil des Scorta* (The House of Scorta)
- 2005 François Weyergans, *Trois Jours chez Ma Mère* (Three Days at My Mother's)
- 2006 Jonathan Littell, *Les Bienveillantes* (The Kindly Ones)
- 2007 Gilles Leroy, *Alabama Song*

York-born American, though he was largely educated in France and writes in French. And it wasn't enough that the original title of Gilles Leroy's award-winning *Alabama Song* was in English, the theme – the story of the descent into madness of Zelda Fitzgerald, wife of novelist F Scott Fitzgerald and written in the first person – is centred squarely on the other side of the puddle.

## PHILOSOPHY

France may be one of the few countries in the world to require its secondary-school students to demonstrate a solid mastery of philosophical concepts before pursuing an academic career. Forced to expostulate upon such brain ticklers as 'Can demands for justice be separated from demands for liberty?' (discuss) or 'Do passions prevent us from doing our duty?' (elaborate) in order to receive a *baccalauréat* (school-leaving certificate), many people here develop a lifelong passion for philosophical discourse. Most French towns of any size have at least one bar or café that will sponsor a regular '*philocafé*' in which anyone may contribute their ideas on a particular philosophical question; in Paris one of the most popular *philocafés* is at Café des Phares (p288), which goes into debate from 11am to 1pm on Sunday.

Left Bank philosophers Bernard-Henri Levy, Jean-François Revel, André Glucksmann and the late Marc Sautet, who founded the Café des Phares and died in 1998 at the age of 51, have achieved a level of celebrity normally reserved for film stars. Even politicians are expected to show a philosophical bent. In 2003 then Foreign (and later Prime) Minister Dominique de Villepin quietly published *Éloge des Voleurs de Feu* (translated as 'On Poetry'), an 824-page critique and homage to such 'Promethean rebels' as Villon and Rimbaud (p33) in French poetry.

René Descartes, who lived in the first half of the 17th century, was the founder of modern philosophy and one of the greatest thinkers since Aristotle. After making important contributions to analytical geometry and algebra, Descartes sought to establish certainty from a position of absolute doubt. Descartes' famed aphorism 'Cogito, ergo sum' (I think, therefore I am) is the basis of modern philosophical thought. His method and systems of thought came to be known as Cartesianism. In positing that there is an external reality that can be grasped through reason, Descartes rendered possible the development of modern science.

Blaise Pascal, a contemporary of Descartes, was also a mathematician, but addressed the absurdity of the human predicament in a manner that foreshadowed the existentialists of the 20th century. Pascal's central concern was in reconciling his religious devotion – he was a convert to Jansenism, an almost Calvinist branch of Roman Catholicism – with his scientific background. Thus, in *Pensées* (Thoughts) he put forth 'Pascal's Razor', which stated that the most logical approach is to believe in God. If God does not exist, one has lost nothing; if God does exist one has assured oneself of a favourable afterlife. The difficulty in this argument is that it makes it possible to argue that one should believe in all religions.

As one of the major thinkers of the 18th century, the so-called Age of Enlightenment, Jean-Jacques Rousseau addressed the relationship of the individual to society. His 1762 work *Le Contrat Social* (The Social Contract) laid the foundations for modern democracy by arguing that sovereignty resides with the people who express their will through majority vote. Liberty is an inalienable 'natural' right that cannot be exchanged for civil peace.

In the late 19th century the philosopher Henri Bergson abandoned reason as a tool towards discovering the truth, arguing that direct intuition is deeper than intellect. He developed the concept of *élan vital* (creative impulse), a spirit of energy and life that moves all living things, as the heart of evolution – not Darwin's theory of natural selection. His thoughts about the subjective experience of time greatly influenced his brother-in-law, Marcel Proust, and the writer's *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (Remembrance of Things Past; p33).

The 20th century's most famous French thinker was Jean-Paul Sartre, the quintessential Parisian intellectual who was born in the capital in 1905 and died there in 1980. For most people he embodied an obscure idea known as existentialism. It's one of the great 'isms' of popular culture, but even philosophers have trouble explaining what existentialism really means. The word derives from Sartre's statement, 'Existence precedes (or, more accurately in English, takes priority over) essence', meaning that man must create himself because there is no eternal 'natural self' or 'meaning of life'. Realising that there is no meaning of life provokes 'existential dread' and 'alienation'.

Simone de Beauvoir, Sartre's lifelong companion, applied existentialist concepts to the predicament of women in French society. There is no essential 'female' or 'male' nature, she opined in her seminal work *Le Deuxième Sexe* (The Second Sex), published in 1949. According to Beauvoir, women's status as the perpetual 'other' relegates them to remaining 'objects' of the subjective male gaze.

Sartre and de Beauvoir were strong advocates of communism until 1956 and the Soviet invasion of Hungary. Disillusionment with communism and with the political engagement implied by existentialism led a new generation towards the social science called structuralism. Coined by the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, structuralists believe that sociological, psychological and linguistic structures shape individuals. Individuals do not shape themselves as the existentialists believe. Beginning as a scientific method for studying differences between cultures, structuralism soon came to represent a rejection of all the universal ideas – reason, progress, democracy – that had held sway since the Age of Enlightenment.

As a poststructuralist, Michel Foucault rejected the idea that it was possible to step outside the 'discursive practices' that claim to reveal knowledge and arrive at an ultimate truth. The search for knowledge cannot be separated from the power relationships that lie at the heart of every social and political relationship.

Jacques Derrida, first published in the influential *Tel Quel* (p33) in the 1960s, introduced the concept of deconstructionism. This concept suggests that outside language there is nothing to which we can refer directly, since all language is indicative only of itself (*il n'y a pas de hors-texte* – there is no subtext). So knowledge outside of language is literally unthinkable; it is not a natural reflection of the world. Each text allows for multiple interpretations, making it impossible to find certainty in textual analysis. But deconstructionism posed an obvious paradox: how can one use language to claim that language is meaningless?

In recent decades French philosophers have returned to political commitment and moral philosophy. Bernard-Henri Levy was an outspoken critic of the war in Bosnia and made several films on the subject in the 1990s. Known as France's No 1 'anti-anti-Americanist', Levy's recent (and most popular work in English) is *American Vertigo: Travelling America in the Footsteps of Tocqueville* (2006), in which he follows in the footsteps of his compatriot and forerunner, Alexis de Tocqueville, crisscrossing America and commenting on the state of the union. André Glucksmann's *Ouest contre Ouest* (West against West; 2003) looked at the Iraq war and the paradox that those groups for and against the war both claimed to be inspired by the same principles. In fact he was one of the few French intellectuals to back the invasion of Iraq. He supported Sarkozy in the 2007 national elections.

## PAINTING

The philosopher Voltaire wrote that French painting began with Nicolas Poussin, the greatest representative of 17th-century classicism who frequently set scenes from ancient Rome, classical mythology and the Bible in ordered landscapes bathed in golden light. It's not a bad starting point.

In the 18th century Jean-Baptiste Chardin brought the humbler domesticity of the Dutch masters to French art. In 1785 the public reacted with enthusiasm to two large paintings with clear republican messages: *The Oath of the Horatii* and *Brutus Condemning His Son* by Jacques-Louis David. David became one of the leaders of the French Revolution, and a virtual dictator in matters of art, where he advocated a precise, severe classicism. He was made official state painter by Napoleon Bonaparte, glorifying him as general, first consul and then emperor, and is best remembered for his *Death of Marat*, depicting the Jacobin propagandist lying dead in his bath.

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, David's most gifted pupil in Paris, continued in the neo-classical tradition. The historical pictures to which he devoted most of his life (eg *Oedipus and the Sphinx*) are now generally regarded as inferior to his portraits. The name of Ingres, who played the violin for enjoyment, lives on in the phrase *violon d'Ingres*, which means 'hobby' in French.

The gripping *Raft of the Medusa* by Théodore Géricault is on the threshold of romanticism; if Géricault had not died early aged 33 he would probably have become a leader of the movement, along with his friend Eugène Delacroix. Delacroix's most famous – if not best – work is *Liberty Leading the People*, which commemorates the July Revolution of 1830 (p25).



The members of the Barbizon School brought about a parallel transformation of landscape painting. The school derived its name from a village near the Forêt de Fontainebleau (Forest of Fontainebleau; p371), where Camille Corot and Jean-François Millet, among others, gathered to paint *en plein air* (in the open air). Corot is best known for his landscapes (*The Bridge at Nantes*, *Chartres Cathedral*); Millet took many of his subjects from peasant life (*The Gleaners*) and had a great influence on Van Gogh.

Millet anticipated the realist programme of Gustave Courbet, a prominent member of the Paris Commune (he was accused of – and imprisoned for – destroying the Vendôme Column), whose paintings show the drudgery of manual labour and dignity of ordinary life (*Funeral at Ornans*, *The Angelus*).

Édouard Manet used realism to depict the life of the Parisian middle classes, yet he included in his pictures numerous references to the Old Masters. His *Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* and *Olympia* both were considered scandalous, largely because they broke with the traditional treatment of their subject matter.

Impressionism, initially a term of derision, was taken from the title of an 1874 experimental painting by Claude Monet, *Impression: Soleil Levant* (Impression: Sunrise). Monet was the leading figure of the school, which counted among its members Alfred Sisley, Camille Pissarro, Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Berthe Morisot. The impressionists' main aim was to capture the effects of fleeting light, painting almost universally in the open air – and light came to dominate the content of their painting.

Edgar Degas was a fellow traveller of the impressionists, but he preferred painting at the racetrack (*At the Races*) and in ballet studios (*The Dance Class*) than the great outdoors. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec was a great admirer of Degas, but chose subjects one or two notches below: people in the bistros, brothels and music halls of Montmartre (eg *Au Moulin Rouge*). He is best known for his posters and lithographs, in which the distortion of the figures is both satirical and decorative.

Paul Cézanne is celebrated for his still lifes and landscapes depicting the south of France, though he spent many years in Paris after breaking with the impressionists. The name of Paul Gauguin immediately conjures up studies of Tahitian and Breton women. Both painters are usually referred to as postimpressionists, something of a catch-all term for the diverse styles that flowed from impressionism.

In the late 19th century Gauguin worked for a time in Arles in Provence with the Dutch-born Vincent Van Gogh, who spent most of his painting life in France and died in the town of Auvers-sur-Oise (p382) north of Paris in 1890. A brilliant, innovative artist, Van Gogh produced haunting self-portraits and landscapes in which bold colour assumes an expressive and emotive quality.

Van Gogh's later technique paralleled pointillism, developed by Georges Seurat, who applied paint in small dots or uniform brush strokes of unmixed colour, producing fine mosaics of warm and cool tones in such tableaux as *Une Baignade, Asnières* (Bathers at Asnières). Henri Rousseau was a contemporary of the postimpressionists but his 'naïve' art was totally unaffected by them. His dreamlike pictures of the Paris suburbs and of jungle and desert scenes (eg *The Snake Charmer*) have had a lasting influence on art right up to this century.

Gustave Moreau was a member of the symbolist school. His eerie treatment of mythological subjects can be seen in his old studio, which is now the Musée National Gustave Moreau (p150) in the 9e. Fauvism took its name from the slight of a critic who compared the exhibitors at the 1905 Salon d'Automne (Autumn Salon) with *fauves* (beasts) because of their radical use of intensely bright colours. Among these 'beastly' painters were Henri Matisse, André Derain and Maurice de Vlaminck.

Cubism was effectively launched in 1907 with *Les Femmes d'Alger* by the Spanish prodigy Pablo Picasso. Cubism, as developed by Picasso, Georges Braque and Juan Gris, deconstructed the subject into a system of intersecting planes and presented various aspects simultaneously. A good example is Braque's *Houses at l'Estaque*.

In the 1920s and '30s the so-called École de Paris (School of Paris) was formed by a group of expressionists, mostly foreign born, including Amedeo Modigliani from Italy, Foujita from Japan and Marc Chagall from Russia, whose works combined fantasy and folklore.

Dada, both a literary and artistic movement of revolt, started in Zürich in 1915. In Paris, one of the key Dadaists was Marcel Duchamp, whose *Mona Lisa* adorned with moustache and goatee epitomises the spirit of the movement. Surrealism, an offshoot of Dada, flourished between

the wars. Drawing on the theories of Sigmund Freud, it attempted to reunite the conscious and unconscious realms, to permeate everyday life with fantasies and dreams. Among the most important proponents of this style in Paris were Chagall, as well as René Magritte, André Masson, Max Ernst, André Breton and Piet Mondrian. The most influential, however, was the Spanish-born artist Salvador Dalí, who arrived in the French capital in 1929 and painted some of his most seminal works (eg *Sleep*, *Paranoia*) while residing here (see Dalí Espace Montmartre, p170).

WWII ended Paris' role as the world's artistic capital. Many artists left France, and though some returned after the war, the city never regained its old magnetism, with New York and then London picking up the baton. A few postwar Parisian artists worth noting have been Jean Fautrier, Nicolas de Staël, Bernard Buffet and Robert Combas. Popular installation artists include Christian Boltanski, Xavier Veilhan and Ben Vautier.

## SCULPTURE

By the 14th century, sculpture was increasingly commissioned for the tombs of the nobility. In Renaissance Paris, Pierre Bontemps decorated the beautiful tomb of François I at the Basilique de St-Denis (p182), and Jean Goujon created the Fontaine des Innocents (p89). The baroque style is exemplified by Guillaume Coustou's *Horses of Marly* at the entrance to the av des Champs-Élysées.

In the mid-19th century, memorial statues in public places came to replace sculpted tombs (see the boxed text, p120). One of the best artists in the new mode was François Rude, who sculpted the Maréchal Ney statue (Map pp116–17), *Maréchal under Napoleon*, outside La Closerie des Lilas, and the relief on the Arc de Triomphe. Another sculptor was Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux, who began as a romantic, but whose work – such as *The Dance* on the Palais Garnier and his fountain in the Jardin du Luxembourg – look back to the warmth and gaiety of the baroque era. At the end of the 19th century Auguste Rodin's work overcame the conflict between neoclassicism and romanticism; his sumptuous bronze and marble figures of men and women did much to revitalise sculpture as an expressive medium. One of Rodin's most gifted pupils was Camille Claudel, whose work can be seen along with that of Rodin in the Musée Rodin (p130).

Both Braque and Picasso experimented with sculpture, and in the spirit of Dada, Marcel Duchamp exhibited 'found objects', one of which was a urinal, which he mounted, signed and dubbed *Fountain* in 1917.

One of the most influential sculptors to emerge before WWII was the Romanian-born and Paris-based Constantin Brancusi, whose work can be seen in the Atelier Brancusi outside the Centre Pompidou (p88). After the war César Baldaccini – known simply as César to the world – used iron and scrap metal to create his imaginary insects and animals, later graduating to pliable plastics. Among his best-known works are the *Centaure* statue (Map pp116–17) in the 6e and the statuette handed to actors at the Césars (French cinema's equivalent to the Oscars). Two sculptors who lived and worked most of their adult lives in Paris and each have a museum devoted to their life and work are Ossip Zadkine (p121) and Antoine Bourdelle (p165), though the museum of the latter was under renovation at the time of research.

In 1936 France put forward a bill providing for 'the creation of monumental decorations in public buildings' by allotting 1% of all building costs to public art, but this did not really get off the ground for another half-century when Daniel Buren's *Les Deux Plateaux* sculpture (p88) was commissioned at Palais Royal. The whole concept mushroomed, and artwork appeared everywhere: in the Jardin des Tuileries (*The Welcoming Hands*; p85), throughout La Défense (p179), Parc de la Villette (eg *Bicyclette Ensevelie*, 1990; p172) and even in the metro (see boxed text, p156). In addition, Paris counts some 120 commissioned murals, including a fine set of wall paintings by a group of four artists at 52 rue de Belleville, 20e (Map p155); and one by Robert Combas at 3 rue des Haudriettes, 3e (Map pp98–9).

## top picks

### ART & SCULPTURE MUSEUMS

- Musée du Louvre (p80)
- Musée Rodin (p130)
- Musée d'Orsay (p130)
- Musée Atelier Zadkine (p121)
- Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (p135)

## MUSIC

In the 17th and 18th centuries French baroque music influenced much of Europe's musical output. Composers François Couperin and Jean Philippe Rameau were two luminaries of this period.

France produced and cultivated a number of brilliant composers in the 19th century, including Hector Berlioz, Charles Gounod, César Franck, Camille Saint-Saëns and Georges Bizet. Berlioz was the founder of modern orchestration, while Franck's organ compositions sparked a musical renaissance in France that would go on to produce such greats as Gabriel Fauré, and the musical impressionists Maurice Ravel and Claude Debussy. The latter's adaptations of poems are among the greatest contributions to the world of music.

More-recent classical composers include Olivier Messiaen, for decades the chief organist at the Église de la Trinité in the 9e, who (until his death in 1992 at the age of 84) combined modern, almost mystical music with natural sounds such as birdsong. His student, the radical Pierre Boulez, includes computer-generated sound in his compositions.

Jazz hit Paris with a bang in the 1920s and has remained popular ever since. France's contribution to the world of jazz has been great, including the violinist Stéphane Grapelli and the legendary three-fingered Roma guitarist Django Reinhardt.

The most popular form of indigenous music is the *chanson française*, with a tradition going back to the troubadours of the Middle Ages. 'French songs' have always emphasised lyrics over music and rhythm, which may explain the enormous success of rap in France in the 1990s, especially of groups like MC Solaar, NTM and I Am. The *chanson* tradition, celebrated by street singers such as Lucienne Delisle and Dahliä, was revived from the 1930s onwards by the likes of Édith Piaf and Charles Trénet. In the 1950s singers such as Georges Brassens, Léo Ferré, Claude Nougaro, Jacques Brel and Barbara became national stars; the music of balladeer/folk singer Serge Gainsbourg – very charming, very sexy and very French – remains enormously popular a decade and a half after his death.

The turn of the new millennium saw a revival of this genre called *la nouvelle chanson française*. Among the most exciting performers of this old-fashioned, slightly wordy genre are Vincent Delerm, Bénabar, Jeanne Cherhal, Camille, Soha and a group called Les Têtes Raides.

France was among the first countries to 'discover' *sono mondiale* (world music). You'll hear everything from Algerian rai and other North African popular music (Khaled, Cheb Mami, Rachid Taha) and Senegalese *mbalax* (Youssou N'Dour) to West Indian *zouk* (Kassav, Zouk Machine) and Cuban salsa. In the late 1980s, Mano Negra and Les Négresses

## top picks

### CDS

- **Édith Piaf: Live at the Paris Olympia** – a collation of live recordings made in the 1950s and '60s, this album contains 20 of the belle of Belleville's classics, including 'Milord', 'Hymne à l'Amour' and, of course, 'Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien'.
- **M: Le Tour de M** – everybody's favourite sing-along gives a little Prince and a titch of Zappa, and even gives Brel a nod with 'Au Suivant' in this double CD with two-dozen tracks.
- **Georges Brassens: Le Disque d'Or** – everything you need to know about one of France's greatest performers (and the inspiration for Jacques Brel) is in this 21-track double helping.
- **Anthologie Serge Gainsbourg** – three-CD anthology includes the metro man's most famous tracks, including 'Le Poinçonneur des Lilas' and 'Je t'aime... Moi Non Plus' in duet with Brigitte Bardot.
- **Carla Bruni: No Promises** – OK, the breathy voice might not do much for you but Italian-French model-cum-singer Carla Bruni's only album thus far in English in which she sets to (her own) music a dozen poems by the likes of WB Yeats, Emily Dickinson, WH Auden and Dorothy Parker is more than just a *curiosité* now that said model-cum-singer is Mme Sarkozy.
- **Luaka Bop Présente Cuisine Non-Stop** – there's something for everyone in David Byrne's homage to *la nouvelle chanson française*, with Arthur H coming over all Serge Gainsbourg on 'Naïve Derviche', and Têtes Raides light and breezy on 'Un P'tit Air'.
- **La Nouvelle Chanson Française** – like it or not, this five-pack by various artists gives directions to the way vocals are heading in French music, with everything from traditional and cabaret to folk-electronic and Paris club sound.

Vertes were two bands that combined many of these elements – often with brilliant results. Magic System from Côte d'Ivoire has helped popularise *zouglou* (a kind of West African rap and dance music) with its album *Premier Gaou*, and Congolese Koffi Olomide still packs the halls.

In recent years a distinctly urban and highly exportable Parisian sound has developed, often mixing computer-enhanced Chicago blues and Detroit techno with 1960s lounge music and vintage tracks from the likes of Gainsbourg and Brassens. Among those playing now are Parisian duo Daft Punk, who adapt first-wave acid House and techno to their younger roots in pop, indie rock and hip-hop; Air; and erstwhile Mano Negra leader Manu Chao, whose music is simple guitar and lyrics – plain and straightforward. One could be forgiven for thinking that popular music in France is becoming dynastic. The very distinctive M (for Mathieu) is the son of singer Louis Chédid; Arthur H is the progeny of pop-rock musician Jacques Higelin; and Thomas Dutronc is the offspring of 1960s idols *père* Jacques and Françoise Hardy. DJs to note are Étienne de Crécy, who has made quite a noise internationally; Claude Challe, responsible for the Buddha Bar compilations; and Wax Tailor.

Despite its problems (the lead singer, Bertrand Cantat, was imprisoned for the murder of his girlfriend), Noir Désir is the sound of French rock; there's talk the band could reform since Cantat's release from jail in 2007. Worth noting are Louise Attack, Mickey 3D and Nوسفell, who sings in his very own invented language. It's a long way from the *yéyé* (imitative rock) of the 1960s as sung by Johnny Halliday, otherwise known as 'Johnny National' until he took Belgian nationality for tax reasons.

## CINEMA

Parisians go to the cinema on average once a week – the 5pm *séance* (performance) on Sunday is a very popular time. They also take films, especially French films – France is the leading film producer in Europe, making over 200 films a year – very seriously. Parisians always prefer to watch foreign films in their original language with French subtitles.

France's place in film history was firmly ensured when the Lumière brothers from Lyon invented 'moving pictures' and organised the world's first paying public film-screening – a series of two-minute reels – in Paris' Grand Café on the blvd des Capucines (9e) in December 1895.

In the 1920s and 1930s avant-garde directors, such as René Clair, Marcel Carné and the intensely productive Jean Renoir, son of the artist, searched for new forms and subjects.

In the late 1950s a large group of young directors arrived on the scene with a new genre, the so-called *nouvelle vague* (new wave). This group included Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, Claude Chabrol, Eric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette, Louis Malle and Alain Resnais. This disparate group of directors believed in the primacy of the film maker, giving rise to the term *film d'auteur* (literally, 'author's film').

Many films followed, among them Alain Resnais' *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (Hiroshima My Love) and *L'Année Dernière à Marienbad* (Last Year at Marienbad), and Luis Buñuel's *Belle de Jour*. François Truffaut's *Les quatre cents coups* (The 400 Blows) was partly based on his own rebellious adolescence. Jean-Luc Godard made such films as *À Bout de Souffle* (Breathless), *Alphaville* and *Pierrot le Fou*, which showed even less concern for sequence and narrative. The new wave continued until the 1970s, by which time it had lost its experimental edge and appeal.

Of the directors of the 1950s and 1960s who were not part of the new wave school, one of the most notable was Jacques Tati, who made many comic films based around the charming, bumbling figure of Monsieur Hulot and his struggles to adapt to the modern age. The best examples are *Les Vacances de M Hulot* (Mr Hulot's Holiday) and *Mon Oncle* (My Uncle).

The most successful directors of the 1980s and 1990s included Jean-Jacques Beineix, who made *Diva* and *Betty Blue*, Jean-Luc Besson, who shot *Subway* and *The Big Blue*, and Léos Carax (*Boy Meets Girl*).

Light social comedies *La Vie Est un Long Fleuve Tranquille* (Life is a Long Quiet River) by Étienne Chatiliez, *8 Femmes*, with its all-star cast (including Catherine Deneuve and Isabelle Huppert) by François Ozon and the Marseille comedy *Taxi* have been among the biggest hits in France in recent years.

Matthieu Kassovitz's award-winning *La Haine* (Hate), apparently inspired by American films *Mean Streets*, *Taxi Driver* and *Do the Right Thing*, examined the prejudice and violence among young French-born Algerians. Alain Resnais' *On Connait la Chanson* (Same Old Song), based

on the life of the late British TV playwright Dennis Potter, received international acclaim and six Césars in 1997.

Other well-regarded directors active today include Bertrand Blier (*Trop Belle pour Toi*; Too Beautiful for You), Cédric Klapisch (*Un Air de Famille*; Family Relations), German-born Dominik Moll (*Harry, un Ami qui Vous Veut du Bien*; With a Friend like Harry), Agnès Jaoul (*Le Gout des Autres*; The Taste of Others), Yves Lavandier (*Oui, Mais...; Yes, But...*), Catherine Breillat (*À Ma Sœur*; Fat Girl) and Abdellatif Kechiche (*La Graine et le Mulet*; The Secret of the Grain), who won his second César in 2008.

Among the most popular and/or biggest-grossing French films at home and abroad in recent years have been Jean-Pierre Jeunet's feel-good *Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain* (Amélie); Christophe Barratier's *Les Choristes* (The Chorus), about a new teacher at a strict boarding school who affects the students' lives through music; *De Battre Mon Cœur s'est Arrêté* (The Beat My Heart Skipped) by Jacques Audiard, a film noir about a violent rent collector turned classical pianist confronting his own life and that of his criminal father; and *Paris, Je T'aime* (Paris, I Love You), a two-hour film made up of 18 short films each set in a different arrondissement. The runaway success story so far this decade has been Olivier Dahan's *La Môme* (La Vie en Rose), starring Marion Cotillard as Édith Piaf. Not only did Cotillard pick up a César, Golden Globe and BAFTA for her efforts, she was the first French woman to win an Oscar for best actress since Simone Signoret was so honoured for *Room at the Top* in 1959. In early 2008 *Bienvenue Chez les Ch'tis* (Welcome to the Ch'tis), a simple film about a postal worker from the south who moves to Picardy in the north and falls for the charm of the locals, broke French box-office records.

## THEATRE

France's first important dramatist was Alexandre Hardy, who appeared in Paris in 1597 and published over a relatively short period almost three dozen plays that were enormously popular in their day. Though few of his works have withstood the test of time, Hardy was an innovator who helped bridge the gap between the French theatre of the Middle Ages and Renaissance and that of the 17th century.

During the golden age of French drama the most popular playwright was Molière who, like William Shakespeare, started his career as an actor; Laurent Tirard's 2007 biopic *Molière* is a fictionalised account of his early years. Plays such as *Tartuffe*, a satire on the corruption of the aristocracy, won him the enmity (and a ban) of both the state and the church but are now staples of the classical repertoire. Pierre Corneille and Jean Racine, in contrast, drew their subjects from history and classical mythology. Racine's *Phèdre*, for instance, taken from Euripides, is a

# top picks

## PARIS FILMS

- **À Bout de Souffle** (Breathless; France, 1959) – Jean-Luc Goddard's first feature is a carefree, fast-paced B&W celebration of Paris – from av des Champs-Élysées to the cafés of the Left Bank.
- **Last Tango in Paris** (USA, 1972) – in Bernardo Bertolucci's classic, Marlon Brando gives the performance of his career portraying a grief-stricken American in Paris who tries to find salvation in anonymous, sadomasochistic sex.
- **La Haine** (Hate; France, 1995) – Matthieu Kassovitz's incendiary B&W film examines the racism, social repression and violence among Parisian *beurs* (young French-born Algerians).
- **Les Quatre Cents Coups** (The 400 Blows; France, 1959) – based on the French idiom *faire les quatre cents coups* (to raise hell), François Truffaut's first film is the semiautobiographical story of a downtrodden and neglected Parisian teenage boy who turns to outward rebellion.
- **La Môme** (La Vie en Rose; 2007) – biopic so faithful to the person and the time it's as if Édith Piaf – played by the highly honoured (and deservedly so) Marion Cotillard – had just woken up from a long sleep at Père Lachaise cemetery. *Incroyable*.
- **Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain** (Amélie; France, 2001) – one of the most popular French films internationally in years, Jean-Pierre Jeunet's feel-good story of a winsome young Parisian do-gooder named Amélie takes viewers on a colourful tour of Pigalle, Notre Dame, train stations and, above all, Montmartre.
- **Paris, Je T'aime** (Paris, I Love You; France, 2006) – an ode to Paris in 18 short films shot in different arrondissements (the 11e and 15e were dropped at the last minute) by different directors, including the Coen Brothers and Gus Van Sant.

story of incest and suicide among the descendants of the Greek gods, while Corneille's tragedy *Horace* is derived from the historian Livy.

Theatre in France didn't really come into its own again until the postwar period of the 20th century with the arrival of two foreigners, both proponents of the so-called Theatre of the Absurd, who wrote in French. Works by Irish-born Samuel Beckett, such as *En Attendant Godot* (Waiting for Godot; 1952), are bleak and point to the existentialist meaninglessness of life but are also richly humorous. The plays of Eugène Ionesco – eg *La Cantatrice Chauve* (The Bald Soprano; 1948) – can be equally dark and satirical but ultimately compassionate.

Plays performed in Paris are – for obvious reasons – performed largely in French but more and more mainstream theatres are projecting English-language subtitles on screens. For information on theatres that host English-speaking troupes and/or stage plays in languages other than French, see [p315](#).

## DANCE

Ballet as we know it today originated in Italy but was brought to France in the late 16th century by Catherine de Médici. The first *ballet comique de la reine* (dramatic ballet) was performed at an aristocratic wedding at the Parisian court in 1581. It combined music, dance and poetic recitations (usually in praise of the monarchy) and was performed by male courtiers with women of the court forming the corps de ballet. Louis XIV so enjoyed the spectacles that he danced many leading roles himself at Versailles. In 1661 he founded the Académie Royale de Danse (Royal Dance Academy), from which modern ballet developed.

By the end of the 18th century, choreographers such as Jean-Georges Noverre had become more important than the musicians, poets and the dancers themselves. In the early 19th century, romantic ballets, such as *Giselle* and *Les Sylphides*, were better attended than the opera. For 10 years from 1945 Roland Petit created such innovative ballets as *Turangalila*, with music by Olivier Messiaen, and *Le Jeune Homme et la Mort*. Maurice Béjart shocked his audiences with his *Symphonie pour un Homme Seul* (which was danced in black in 1955), *Le Sacre du Printemps* (The Rite of Spring) and *Le Marteau sans Maître*, with music by Pierre Boulez.

Today French dance seems to be moving in a new, more personal direction with such performers as Maguy Marin, Laurent Hilaire and Aurélie Dupont. Choreographers include the likes of Odile Duboc, Caroline Marcadé, Jean-Claude Gallotta, Jean-François Duroure, Boris Charmatz and, perhaps the most interesting and visible of modern French choreographers, Philippe Decouflé.

## ARCHITECTURE

Parisians have never been as intransigent as, say, Londoners in accepting changes to their cityscape, nor as unshocked by the new as New Yorkers appear to be. But then Paris never had as great a fire as London did in 1666, which offered architects a tabula rasa on which to redesign and build a modern city, or the green field that was New York in the late 18th century.

It took disease, clogged streets, an antiquated sewage system, a lack of open spaces and Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann ([p27](#)) to drag Paris out of the Middle Ages into a modern world, and few town planners anywhere in the world have had as great an impact on the city of their birth as he did on his.

Haussmann's 19th-century transformation of Paris was a huge undertaking – Parisians endured years of 'flying dust, noise, and falling plaster and beams', as one contemporary observer wrote; entire areas of the city (eg the labyrinthine Île de la Cité) were razed and hundreds of thousands of (mostly poor) people displaced. Even worse – or better, depending on your outlook – it brought to a head the *vieux* (old) Paris versus *nouveau* (new) Paris, a debate in which writer Victor Hugo played a key role and which continues to this day ([p49](#)).

## GALLO-ROMAN

Traces of Roman Paris can be seen in the residential foundations and dwellings in the Crypte Archéologique ([p106](#)) under the square in front of Notre Dame; in the partially reconstructed Arènes de Lutèce ([p109](#)); and in the *frigidarium* (cooling room) and other remains of Roman baths dating from around AD 200 at the Musée National du Moyen Âge ([p114](#)).



The Musée National du Moyen Age also contains the so-called Pillier des Nautes (Boatsmen's Pillar), one of the most valuable legacies of the Gallo-Roman period. It is a 2.5m-high monument dedicated to Jupiter and was erected by the boatmen's guild during the reign of Tiberius (AD 14–37) on the Île de la Cité. The boat remains the symbol of Paris, and the city's Latin motto is *'Fluctuat Nec Mergitur'* (Tosses but Does Not Sink).

## MEROVINGIAN & CAROLINGIAN

Although quite a few churches were built in Paris during the Merovingian and Carolingian periods (6th to 10th centuries), very little of them remain.

When the Merovingian ruler Clovis I made Paris his seat in the early 6th century, he established an abbey dedicated to Sts Peter and Paul on the south bank of the Seine. All that remains of this once great abbey (later named in honour of Paris' patron, Sainte Geneviève, and demolished in 1802) is the Tour Clovis (p193), a heavily restored Romanesque tower within the grounds of the prestigious Lycée Henri IV just east of the Panthéon.

Archaeological excavations in the crypt of the 12th-century Basilique de St-Denis (p182) have uncovered extensive tombs from both the Merovingian and Carolingian periods. The oldest of these dates from around AD 570.

## ROMANESQUE

A religious revival in the 11th century led to the construction of a large number of *roman* (Romanesque) churches, so-called because their architects adopted many architectural elements (eg vaulting) from Gallo-Roman buildings still standing at the time. Romanesque buildings typically have round arches, heavy walls, few windows that let in very little light, and a lack of ornamentation that borders on the austere.

No civic buildings or churches in Paris are entirely Romanesque in style, but a few have important representative elements. The Église St-Germain des Prés (p115), built in the 11th century on the site of the Merovingian ruler Childeric's 6th-century abbey, has been altered many times over the centuries, but the Romanesque bell tower over the west entrance has changed little since 1000. There are also some decorated capitals (the upper part of the supporting columns) in the nave dating from this time. The choir, apse and truncated bell tower of the Église St-Nicholas des Champs (Map pp92–3), just south of the Musée des Arts et Métiers, are Romanesque dating from about 1130. The Église St-Germain L'Auxerrois (p85) was built in a mixture of Gothic and Renaissance styles between the 13th and 16th centuries on a site used for Christian worship since about AD 500. But the square belfry that rises from next to the south transept arm is Romanesque in style.

## GOTHIC

The Gothic style originated in the mid-12th century in northern France, where great wealth attracted the finest architects, engineers and artisans. Gothic structures are characterised by ribbed vaults carved with great precision, pointed arches, slender verticals, chapels (often built or endowed by the wealthy or by guilds), galleries and arcades along the nave and chancel, refined decoration and large stained-glass windows. If you look closely at certain Gothic buildings, however, you'll notice minor asymmetrical elements introduced to avoid monotony.

The world's first Gothic building was the Basilique de St-Denis (p182), which combined various late-Romanesque elements to create a new kind of structural support in which each arch counteracted and complemented the next. Begun in around 1135, the basilica served as a model for many other 12th-century French cathedrals, including Notre Dame de Paris and the cathedral at Chartres.

In the 14th century, the Rayonnant – or Radiant – Gothic style, which was named after the radiating tracery of the rose windows, developed, with interiors becoming even lighter thanks to broader windows and more-translucent stained glass. One of the most influential Rayonnant buildings was Ste-Chapelle (p107), whose stained glass forms a curtain of glazing on the 1st floor. The two transept façades of the Cathédrale de Notre Dame de Paris (p104) and the vaulted Salle

des Gens d'Armes (Cavalrymen's Hall) in the Conciergerie (p106), the largest surviving medieval hall in Europe, are other fine examples of the Rayonnant Gothic style.

By the 15th century, decorative extravagance led to what is now called Flamboyant Gothic, so named because the wavy stone carving made the towers appear to be blazing or flaming (*flamboyant*). Beautifully lacy examples of Flamboyant architecture include the Clocher Neuf (New Bell Tower) at Chartres' Cathédrale Notre Dame (p377), the Église St-Séverin (Map pp110–11) and the Tour St-Jacques (p90), a 52m tower which is all that remains of an early-16th-century church. Inside the Église St-Eustache (p89), there's some outstanding Flamboyant Gothic arch work holding up the ceiling of the chancel. Several *hôtels particuliers* (private mansions) were also built in this style, including the Hôtel de Cluny, now the Musée National du Moyen Age (p114) and the Hôtel de Sens (now the Bibliothèque Forney, p190).

## RENAISSANCE

The Renaissance, which began in Italy in the early 15th century, set out to realise a 'rebirth' of classical Greek and Roman culture. It had its first impact on France at the end of the 15th century, when Charles VIII began a series of invasions of Italy, returning with some new ideas.

The Early Renaissance style, in which a variety of classical components and decorative motifs (columns, tunnel vaults, round arches, domes etc) were blended with the rich decoration of Flamboyant Gothic, is best exemplified in Paris by the Église St-Eustache (p89) on the Right Bank and Église St-Étienne du Mont (p109) on the Left Bank.

Mannerism, which followed Early Renaissance, was introduced by Italian architects and artists brought to France around 1530 by François I; over the following decades French architects who had studied in Italy took over from their Italian colleagues. In 1546 Pierre Lescot designed the richly decorated southwestern corner of the Cour Carrée of the Musée du Louvre (p80). The Petit Château at the Château de Chantilly (p373) was built about a decade later. The Marais remains the best area for spotting reminders of the Renaissance in Paris proper, with some fine *hôtels particuliers* from this era such as Hôtel Carnavalet, housing part of the Musée Carnavalet (p96) and Hôtel Lamoignon (p190). The Mannerist style lasted until the early 17th century.

## BAROQUE

During the baroque period – which lasted from the tail end of the 16th to the late 18th centuries – painting, sculpture and classical architecture were integrated to create structures and interiors of great subtlety, refinement and elegance. With the advent of the baroque, architecture became more pictorial, with the painted ceilings in churches illustrating the Passion of Christ and infinity to the faithful, and palaces invoking the power and order of the state.

Salomon de Brosse, who designed Paris' Palais du Luxembourg (see Jardin du Luxembourg, p119) in 1615, set the stage for two of France's most prominent early baroque architects: François Mansart, designer of the Église Notre Dame du Val-de-Grâce (Map pp110–11), and his young rival Louis Le Vau, the architect of the Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte (p372), which served as a model for Louis XIV's palace at Versailles.

Other fine examples of French baroque are the Église St-Louis en l'Île (p108); the Chapelle de la Sorbonne (p114); the Palais Royal (p88); and the 17th-century Hôtel de Sully (p96), with its inner courtyard decorated with allegorical figures.

## Rococo

Rococo, a derivation of late baroque, was popular during the Enlightenment (1700–80). The word comes from the French *rocaille* (loose pebbles), which, together with shells, were used to decorate inside walls and other surfaces. In Paris, rococo was confined almost exclusively to the interiors of private residences and had a minimal impact on churches and civic buildings, which continued to follow the conventional rules of baroque classicism. Rococo interiors, such as the oval rooms of the Hôtel de Rohan-Soubise (see Archives Nationales, p97), were lighter, smoother and airier than their baroque predecessors, and tended to favour pastels over vivid colours.

## NEOCLASSICISM

Neoclassical architecture, which emerged in about 1740 and remained popular in Paris until well into the 19th century, had its roots in the renewed interest in classical forms. Although it was, in part, a reaction against baroque and its adjunct, rococo, with emphases on decoration and illusion, neoclassicism was more profoundly a search for order, reason and serenity through the adoption of the forms and conventions of Graeco-Roman antiquity: columns, simple geometric forms and traditional ornamentation.

Among the earliest examples of this style in Paris are the Italianate façade of the Église St-Sulpice (p115), designed in 1733 by Giovanni Servandoni, which took inspiration from Christopher Wren's Cathedral of St Paul in London; and the Petit Trianon at Versailles (p360), designed by Jacques-Ange Gabriel for Louis XV in 1761. The domed building housing the Institut de France (p119) is a masterpiece of early French neoclassical architecture, but France's greatest neoclassical architect of the 18th century was Jacques-Germain Soufflot, who designed the Panthéon (p114).

Neoclassicism really came into its own, however, under Napoleon, who used it extensively for monumental architecture intended

to embody the grandeur of imperial France and its capital. Well-known Paris sights designed (though not necessarily completed) under the First Empire (1804–14) include the Arc de Triomphe (p138); the Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel (p85); Église de Ste-Marie Madeleine (p139); the Bourse de Commerce (p90); and the Assemblée Nationale (p127) in the Palais Bourbon. The climax of 19th-century classicism in Paris, however, is thought to be the Palais Garnier (p147), designed by Charles Garnier to house the opera and to showcase the splendour of Napoleon III's France.

## ART NOUVEAU

Art Nouveau, which emerged in Europe and the USA in the second half of the 19th century under various names (Jugendstil, Sezessionstil, Stile Liberty) caught on quickly in Paris, and its influence lasted until about 1910. It was characterised by sinuous curves and flowing, asymmetrical forms reminiscent of creeping vines, water lilies, the patterns on insect wings and the flowering boughs of trees. Influenced by the arrival of exotic *objets d'art* from Japan, its French name came from a Paris gallery that featured works in the 'new art' style.

Paris is still graced by Hector Guimard's Art Nouveau metro entrances (see boxed text, p156). There are some fine Art Nouveau interiors in the Musée d'Orsay (p130); an Art Nouveau glass roof over the Grand Palais (p139); and, on rue Pavée in the Marais, a synagogue designed by Guimard (p91). The city's main department stores, including Le Bon Marché (p212) and Galeries Lafayette (p215), also have elements of this style throughout their interiors.

## MODERN

France's best-known 20th-century architect, Charles-Édouard Jeanneret (better known as Le Corbusier), was born in Switzerland but settled in Paris in 1917 at the age of 30. A radical modernist, he tried to adapt buildings to their functions in industrialised society without ignoring the human element. Not everyone thinks he was particularly successful in this endeavour, however.

# top picks

## PARIS ARCHITECTURE BOOKS

- **Guide de l'Architecture Moderne à Paris/Guide to Modern Architecture in Paris**, Hervé Martin (2001) – excellent and very complete guide to all types of architecture; includes walking tours of the city.
- **Paris: Architecture & Design**, edited by Christian van Uffelen (2004) – a well-illustrated and very useful introduction to Paris' new architecture, inside and out.
- **Paris 2000+ : New Architecture**, Sam Lubell & Axel Sowa (2007) – as new as tomorrow, this richly illustrated coffee-table book focuses on 30 buildings that have gone up since 2000.
- **Paris, Grammaire de l'Architecture: XXe-XXIe Siècles**, Simon Texier (2007) – contemporaneous with the preceding title, this is a far more serious French-language tome examining late-20th- and early-21st-century structures.
- **Paris: A Guide to Recent Architecture**, Barbara-Ann Campbell (1997) – dated, with B&W photos, this pocket-size book is for serious aficionados of the subject.

Most of Le Corbusier's work was done outside Paris though he did design several private residences and the Pavillon Suisse, a dormitory for Swiss students at the Cité Internationale Universitaire (Map pp162–3) in the southeastern 14e bordering the blvd Périphérique. Perhaps most interesting – and frightening – are Le Corbusier's plans for Paris that never left the drawing board. Called Plan Voisin (Neighbour Project; 1925), it envisaged wide boulevards linking the Gare Montparnasse with the Seine and lined with skyscrapers. The project would have required bulldozing much of the Latin Quarter.

One of the best examples of modernist architecture in all of Paris is the **Maison de Verre** (Map pp128–9; 31 rue St-Guillaume, 7e; M Sèvres-Babylone), the exquisite 'Glass House' designed by Pierre Chareau and completed in 1932. It may soon be open for limited tours.

Until 1968, French architects were still being trained almost exclusively at the conformist École de Beaux-Arts, which certainly shows in most of the early structures erected in the skyscraper district of La Défense (p179). It can also be seen in buildings like the Unesco building (Map pp128–9), erected in 1958 southwest of the École Militaire in the 7e, and the unspeakable, 210m-tall Tour Montparnasse (1973; p123), whose architects, in our opinion, should have been driven in tumbrels to the place de la Concorde and guillotined.

## CONTEMPORARY

France owes many of its most attractive and successful contemporary buildings in Paris to the narcissism of its presidents. For centuries France's leaders have sought to immortalise themselves by erecting huge public edifices – known as *grands projets* – in the capital, and the recent past has been no different. The late president Georges Pompidou commissioned the once reviled but now beloved Centre Beaubourg (Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers, 1977), later renamed the Centre Pompidou (p88), in which the architects – in order to keep the exhibition halls as spacious and uncluttered as possible – put the building's insides outside.

Pompidou's successor, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, was instrumental in transforming the derelict Gare d'Orsay train station into the glorious Musée d'Orsay (p130), a design carried out by the Italian architect Gaetano Aulenti in 1986. Jacques Chirac's only *grand projet* of 12 years in office was the magnificent Musée du Quai Branly (p134), the first major art gallery to open in Paris since the Centre Pompidou. By contrast, his predecessor François Mitterrand, with his decided preference for the modern, surpassed all of the postwar presidents with a dozen or so monumental projects in Paris costing taxpayers a whopping €4.6 billion.

Since the early 1980s, Paris has seen the construction of such structures as IM Pei's controversial Grande Pyramide (1989; see Musée du Louvre, p80), a glass pyramid that serves as the main entrance to the hitherto sacrosanct – and untouchable – Louvre and an architectural *cause célèbre* in the late 1980s; the city's second opera house, the tile-clad Opéra Bastille (1989; p102) designed by Canadian Carlos Ott; the monumental Grande Arche de la Défense (p180) by Danish architect Johan-Otto von Sprekelsen, which opened in 1989; the delightful Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse (1990; p173) and Cité de la Musique (1994; p173), designed by Christian de Portzamparc and serving as a sort of gateway from the city to the whimsical Parc de la Villette; the twinned Grandes Serres (Great Greenhouses) built by Patrick Berger in 1992 at the main entrance to the Parc André Citroën (Map pp166–7); the Ministère de l'Économie, des Finances et de l'Industrie (pp158–9) designed by Paul Chemetov and Borja Huidobro in 1990, with its striking 'pier' overhanging the Seine in Bercy; and the four glass towers of Dominique Perrault's Bibliothèque Nationale de France (National Library of France; p161), which opened in 1995.

One of the most beautiful and successful of the late-20th-century modern buildings in Paris is the Institut du Monde Arabe (p112), a highly praised structure that opened in 1987


## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION


Those wanting to learn more about French architecture should visit the new Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine (p134) in the Palais de Chaillot. Contemporary architecture in the capital is the focus of the permanent exhibition called 'Paris, Visite Guidée' (Paris, a Guided Tour) at the **Pavillon de l'Arsenal** (Map pp92–3; ☎ 01 42 76 33 97; www.pavillon-arsenal.com; 21 blvd Morland, 4e; admission free; 🕒 10.30am–6.30pm Tue–Sat, 11am–7pm Sun; 📍 Sully Morland), which is the city's town-planning and architectural centre. It also has rotating exhibits.

## BUILDING NEW INSPIRATION

For the most part, skyscrapers and other tall buildings are restricted to La Défense (p179), but that doesn't mean other parts of Paris are bereft of interesting and inspired new buildings. Some of our favourites:

### 1er arrondissement

**Immeuble des Bons Enfants** (Map p86; 182 rue St-Honoré;  Palais Royal-Musée du Louvre) Home to the Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication (Ministry of Culture & Communication), this inspired structure (Francis Soler and Frédéric Druot, 2004) is actually two separate and disparate buildings 'linked' by a metallic net of what can only be described as tracery that allows in light and also allows the diversity of the existing buildings to be seen.

**Marché de St-Honoré** (Map pp82–3; place du Marché St-Honoré;  Tuileries or Opéra) This monumental glass hall (Ricardo Bofill, 1996) of offices and shops replaces an unsightly parking garage (now put underground) and evokes the wonderful *passages couverts* (covered shopping arcades) that begin a short distance to the northeast (p188).


### 7e arrondissement

**Musée du Quai Branly** (p134) Jean Nouvel's structure of glass, wood and sod takes advantage of its 3-hectare experimental garden designed by Gilles Clément. A wall of the block facing the Seine is a 'vertical garden' (p52) of no fewer than 15,000 plants representing 150 varieties.

### 9e arrondissement


**Hôtel Drouot** (p215) We like this zany structure (Jean-Jacques Fernier and André Biro, 1980), a rebuild of the mid-19th-century Hôtel Drouot, for its 1970s retro design.

### 10e arrondissement

**Crèche** (Map pp152–3; 8ter rue des Récollets;  Gare de l'Est) This day nursery (Marc Younan, 2002) of wood and resin in the garden of the Couvent des Récollets looks like a jumbled pile of gold- and mustard-coloured building blocks. A central glass atrium functions as a 'village square'.

### 12e arrondissement

**Cinémathèque Française** (p157) The former American Centre (Frank Gehry, 1994), from the incomparable American architect of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, is a fascinating building of creamy stone that looks, from some angles, as though it is falling in on itself.

**Direction de l'Action Sociale Building** (Map pp158–9; 94–96 quai de la Rapée;  Quai de la Rapée) The headquarters of Social Action (Aymeric Zublena, 1991) is unabashed in proclaiming the power of the state, with a huge square within and vast glass-and-metal gates. When the gates close, the square turns into an antechamber worthy of a palace.

### 13e arrondissement

**Passerelle Simone de Beauvoir** (p161) This delightful footbridge (Eiffel, 2006), built by the same company responsible for the icon, glides across the Seine, linking the 12e and 13e arrondissements, and at night looks like a blade of light.

### 14e arrondissement

**Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain** (p123) Jean Nouvel set to 'conceal' the Cartier Foundation for Contemporary Arts when he designed it in 1993. In some ways the structure (lots of glass and what looks like scaffolding) appears at once both incomplete and invisible. There's a 'vertical garden' (p52) here too.

### 19e arrondissement

**Les Orgues de Flandre** (Map pp174–5; 67–107 av de Flandre & 14–24 rue Archereau;  Riquet) As outlandish a structure as you'll find anywhere, these two enormous housing estates are known as 'The Organs of Flanders' due to their resemblance to that musical instrument and their street address. Storeys are stacked at oblique angles and the structures appear to be swaying, though they are firmly anchored at the end of a park south of the blvd Périphérique.

**Philharmonie de Paris** (Map pp174–5; Parc de la Villette;  Porte de Pantin) The ambitious new home of the Orchestre de Paris, due to open in 2012, will have an auditorium of 2400 'terrace' seats surrounding the orchestra.

and successfully mixes modern and traditional Arab and Western elements. It was designed by Jean Nouvel, France's leading and arguably most talented architect. We can't wait to see his Philharmonie de Paris (opposite).

However, not everything new, different and/or monumental that has appeared in the past two decades has been a government undertaking. The vast majority of the buildings in La Défense (p179), Paris' skyscraper district on the Seine to the west of the city centre, are privately owned and house some 1500 companies, including the head offices of more than a dozen of France's top corporations. Unfortunately, most of the skyscrapers here are impersonal and forgettable 'lipstick tubes' and 'upended shoeboxes', with a few notable exceptions including the Cœur Défense (Défense Heart; 2001), the Tour EDF (2001) and the Tour T1 (2005). But outranking them all in size, beauty and sustainability will be Tour Phare (Lighthouse Tower), a 299m-tall office and retail tower that torques like a human torso and, through awnings that raise and lower when the sun hits them, uses light as a building material. It will be completed in 2012.

## ENVIRONMENT & PLANNING THE LAND

The city of Paris – the capital of both France and the historic Île de France region – covers an area of just under 87 sq km (or 105 sq km if you include the Bois de Boulogne and the Bois de Vincennes). Within central Paris – which Parisians call *intra-muros* (Latin for 'within the walls') – the Right Bank is north of the Seine, while the Left Bank is south of the river.

Paris is a relatively easy city to negotiate. The ring road, known as the Périphérique, makes an irregularly shaped oval containing the entire central area. The Seine cuts an arc across the oval, and the terrain is so flat that the 126m-high Butte de Montmartre (Montmartre Hill) to the north is clearly visible for some distance.

Paris is divided neatly into two by the Seine and also into 20 arrondissements, which spiral clockwise from the centre in a logical progression. City addresses *always* include the number of the arrondissement, as streets with the same name exist in different districts. In this book, arrondissement numbers are given after the street address using the notation generally used by the French: 1er for *premier* (1st), 2e for *deuxième* (2nd), 3e for *troisième* (3rd) and so on. On some signs or commercial maps, you will see the variations 2ème, 3ème etc and sometimes IIe, IIIe etc.

There is almost always a metro station within 500m of wherever you are in Paris so all offices, museums, hotels, restaurants and so on included in this book have the nearest metro or RER (a network of suburban lines) station given immediately after the contact details. Metro stations generally have a *plan du quartier* (map of the neighbourhood) on the wall near the exit(s).

## GREEN PARIS

For a densely populated urban centre inhabited for more than two millennia, Paris is a surprisingly healthy and clean city. Thanks mainly to Baron Haussmann (p27), who radically reshaped the city in the second half of the 19th century, a small army of street sweepers brush litter into the gutters from where it is hosed into sewers, and a city ordinance requires residents to have the façades of their buildings cleaned every 10 years.

These days, despite the city's excellent (and cheap) public transport system, Haussmann's wide boulevards are usually choked with traffic, and air pollution is undoubtedly the city's major environmental hazard. But things have improved tremendously on that score: the city leadership, which came to power in coalition with the Green Party, first restricted traffic on some roads at certain times and created lanes only for buses, taxis and bicycles. Then, in 2007, in an unprecedented move for a city its size, Paris launched the

## top picks

### PARKS & GARDENS

- Parc de La Villette (p172)
- Jardin du Luxembourg (p119)
- Parc des Buttes-Chaumont (p173)
- Parc Floral de Paris (p176)
- Bois de Boulogne (p177)



## GROWING UP IN PARIS

The architectural feature *du jour* (currently) in Paris is the vertical garden – called a *mur végétal* (vegetation wall) in French – especially that of Patrick Blanc ([www.verticalgardenpatrickblanc.com](http://www.verticalgardenpatrickblanc.com)). His signature works can be found in several locations around Paris but the most famous is the one facing the Seine at the Musée du Quai Branly (p134). Seeming to defy the very laws of gravity, the museum's vertical garden consists of some 15,000 low-light foliage plants from Central Europe, the USA, Japan and China planted on a surface of 800 sq metres. The reason why they don't fall is that they are held in place by a frame of metal, PVC and non-biodegradable felt but no soil.

Other places to view M Blanc's handiwork:

- Centre Commercial des Quatre Temps, La Défense (p181)
- Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain, 14e (p123)
- Marithé + François Girbaud branch, 6e (p200)

Vélib' communal bicycle rental programme (p389) with more than 20,500 bicycles available at more than 450 stations. The City of Light (and life for foot-sore Lonely Planet authors) will never be the same.

Though upwards of some 96,500 trees (mostly plane trees and horse chestnuts) line the avenues and boulevards of Paris, the city can often feel excessively built-up. Yet there are more than 455 parks and gardens (with another 87,500 trees) to choose from – some not much bigger than a beach blanket, others the size of a small village. Over the past 15 years, the city government has spent a small fortune transforming vacant lots and derelict industrial land into new parks. Some of the better ones are Parc de Bercy (p157) and the unique Promenade Plantée (p157), the 'planted walkway' above the Viaduc des Arts, both in the 12e; the Jardin de l'Atlantique (p123), behind the Gare Montparnasse, and Parc André Citroën (Map pp166–7) on the banks of the Seine, both in the 15e; Parc de la Villette (p172) and Parc des Buttes-Chaumont (p173), both in the 19e; and Parc de Belleville (p154), 20e. If you'd like a hand in the 'reforestation' of the capital and elsewhere and don't mind spending €5, visit **1 Parisien, 1 Arbre** (1 Parisian, 1 Tree; [www.1parisien1arbre.com](http://www.1parisien1arbre.com)).

In just about every park in Paris, regardless of the size, you'll see a signboard illustrating and explaining the trees, flowers and other plants of the city. Most are rich in birdlife, including magpies, jays, great and blue tits, and even woodpeckers. In winter, seagulls are sometimes seen on the Seine, and a few hardy ducks also brave the river's often swift-flowing waters. Believe it or not, 32 mammals live in the parks of Paris, there are crayfish in the city's canals, and the Seine is teeming with roach, carp, bleak, pike and pike-perch.

If you want to keep Paris clean, leave your car at home and resist the temptation to rent one unless you're touring around the Île de France (p360). Instead, bring or rent a bike (p389), bearing in mind that the Vélib' rental system is more of a way of getting from A to B than a recreational facility; enjoy the city on foot – Paris is an eminently walkable city (see the walking tours in the Neighbourhoods chapter); or use the public transport system, which is cheap and extremely efficient. For further tips on how you can reduce your impact on the environment, contact **Les Amis de la Nature** (☎ 01 42 85 29 84; [www.amisnature-pariscentre.org](http://www.amisnature-pariscentre.org), in French; 18 rue Victor Massé, 75009) or the **World Wildlife Fund France** (☎ 01 55 25 84 84; [www.wwf.fr](http://www.wwf.fr), in French; 1 carrefour de Longchamp, 75116).

In theory Parisians can be fined up to €183 for littering (that includes cigarette butts) but we've never heard of anyone having to pay. Don't be nonplussed if you see locals drop paper wrappings or other detritus along the side of the pavement, however; the gutters in every quarter of Paris are washed and swept out daily and Parisians are encouraged to use them if litter bins are not available.

## URBAN PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

In 1967 stringent town-planning regulations in Paris, which had been on the books since Haussmann's time, were relaxed and buildings were allowed to 'soar' to 37m. However, they had to be set back from the road so as not to block the light. But this change allowed the erection of high-rise buildings, which broke up the continuity of many streets. A decade later new restrictions required that buildings again be aligned along the road and that their height be in proportion to the width of the street. In some central areas that means buildings cannot go higher than 18m.

In 2007 Mayor Bertrand Delanoë challenged the law – and Parisians' way of thinking – when he invited a dozen architectural firms from around the world to submit drawings for towers exceeding 100m in three different areas of the city, including Porte de la Chapelle in the 18e and the Masséna-Bruneseau district of the 13e but not the traditional skyscraper district of La Défense. The move was opposed by all opposition parties and, in a municipal survey, 63% of all Parisians.

## GOVERNMENT & POLITICS

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Paris is run by the *maire* (mayor), who is elected by the 163 members of the Conseil de Paris (Council of Paris). They serve terms of six years. The mayor has around 18 *adjoints* (deputy mayors), whose offices are in the Hôtel de Ville (City Hall).

The first mayor of Paris to be elected with real powers was Jacques Chirac in 1977; from 1871 until that year, the mayor was nominated by the national government as the capital was considered a dangerous and revolutionary hotbed. After the 1995 election of Chirac as national president, the Council of Paris elected Jean Tiberi as mayor, a man who was very close to the president and from the same party. In May 2001, Bertrand Delanoë, a socialist with support from the Green Party, became the first openly gay mayor of Paris (and of any European capital). The next election, which should have taken place in 2007, was deferred until March 2008 in deference to the national elections that year. Delanoë handily won re-election to a second term in the second round of voting.

The mayor has many powers, but they do not include control of the police, which is instead handled by the Préfet de Police (Chief of Police), part of the Ministère de l'Intérieur (Ministry of the Interior). Delanoë continues to enjoy widespread popularity, particularly for his efforts to make Paris a more livable city by promoting the use of bicycles and buses, reducing the number of cars on the road and creating a more approachable and responsible city administration.

Paris is a *département* – Ville de Paris; No 75 – as well as a city and the mayor is the head of both. The city is divided into 20 *arrondissements* and each has its own *maire d'arrondissement* (mayor of the *arrondissement*) and *conseil d'arrondissement* (council of the *arrondissement*), who are also elected for six-year terms. They have very limited powers, principally administering local cultural activities and sporting events.

### NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

France is a republic with a written constitution adopted by referendum in September 1958 (the so-called Constitution of the Fifth Republic) and adapted 18 times since, most notably in 1962 when a referendum was organised calling for the election of the president by direct universal suffrage; in 1993 when immigration laws were tightened; in 2000 when the president's term was reduced from seven to five years; in 2003 when parliament approved amendments allowing for the devolution of wide powers to the regions and departments; and in 2007 when it banned the death penalty.

As the capital city, Paris is home to almost all the national offices of state, including, of course, the Parlement (Parliament), which is divided into two houses: the Assemblée Nationale (National Assembly) and the Sénat (Senate). The 577 deputies of the National Assembly are directly elected in single-member constituencies for terms lasting five years (next election: 2012). Until September 2004 the rather powerless Senate counted 321 senators, each elected to a nine-year term. Now the term is six years and the number of senators will increase to 346 by 2010 to reflect changes in the France's demographics. Senators are indirectly elected by one half every three years. The president of the republic is directly elected for a term lasting five years and can stand for re-election.

Executive power is shared by the president and the Conseil des Ministres (Council of Ministers), whose members – including the prime minister – are appointed by the president but are responsible to parliament. The president serves as commander-in-chief of the armed forces and theoretically makes all major policy decisions.

## MEDIA

The main national daily newspapers are *Le Figaro* (centre-right; aimed at professionals, business-people and the bourgeoisie; [www.lefigaro.fr](http://www.lefigaro.fr)), *Le Monde* (centre-left; popular with professionals and intellectuals; [www.lemonde.fr](http://www.lemonde.fr)), *France Soir* (right-wing; working and middle class; [www.francesoir.fr](http://www.francesoir.fr)), *Libération* (left-wing; popular with students and intellectuals; [www.liberation.fr](http://www.liberation.fr)) and *L'Humanité* (communist; working-class and intellectuals; [www.humanite.fr](http://www.humanite.fr)). The capital's own daily is *Le Parisien* (centre; working class; [www.leparisien.fr](http://www.leparisien.fr)) and is easy to read if you have basic French. *L'Équipe* ([www.lequipe.fr](http://www.lequipe.fr)) is a daily devoted exclusively to sport and *Paris Turf* ([www.paris-turf.com](http://www.paris-turf.com)) to horse racing.

News weeklies with commentary include the comprehensive, left-leaning *Le Nouvel Observateur* (<http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com>) and the more conservative *L'Express* ([www.lexpress.fr](http://www.lexpress.fr)).

For some investigative journalism blended with satire, pick up a copy of *Le Canard Enchaîné* ([www.lecanardenchaine.fr](http://www.lecanardenchaine.fr)) – assuming your French is of a certain level, of course. *Paris Match* ([www.parismatch.com](http://www.parismatch.com)) is a gossipy, picture-heavy weekly with a penchant for royalty and film stars; they milked the Sarkozy divorce-and-rebound-remarriage *histoire* (story) for all it was worth – and then some. No group of people in Europe blog as much as the French do – the total at the moment is more than three million and growing – and there is no better way to understand what the French are thinking at the moment than entering the French blogosphere (see p17).

Public radio is grouped under the umbrella of Radio France ([www.radiofrance.fr](http://www.radiofrance.fr)), which broadcasts via a network of dozens of radio stations, of which seven are the most important. These include national stations France Inter (87.8 MHz FM in Paris), the flagship talk station specialising in music, news and entertainment; the very highbrow France Culture (93.5 MHz FM); France Musique (91.7 MHz FM), which broadcasts over 1000 classical-music and jazz concerts each year; Radio Bleu, a network of stations for over-50s listeners; and France Info, a 24-hour news station that broadcasts headlines in French every few minutes and can be heard at 105.5 MHz FM. FIP (105.1 MHz FM) has a wide range of music – from hip-hop and *chanson* to world and rock – while Le Mouv' (92.1 MHz FM) is bubblegum pop.

Radio France Internationale (RFI; [www.rfi.fr](http://www.rfi.fr)), France's voice abroad since 1931 and independent of Radio France since 1986, broadcasts in 19 languages (including English) and can be reached in Paris at 738 kHz AM. Arte Radio is a Franco-German web radio station featuring news reports and music.

Among the private radio networks, RTL (104.3 MHz FM) is still the leading general-interest station with over eight million listeners and three stations: RTL 1, RTL 2 and Fun Radio. The droves of FM pop-music stations include Hot Mix Radio, Nostalgie and Chérie FM, most of which follow the phone-in format with wisecracking DJs. Hard-core clubbers turn the dial to Radio Nova at 101.5 MHz FM for the latest on the nightclub scene; Radio FG (98.2 MHz FM) is the station for House, techno, garage and trance; and Paris Jazz (88.2 MHz FM) offers jazz and blues.

By law, radio broadcasters in France have to play at least 40% of their music in French – a law passed to protect French pop from being swamped by English-language imports – and stations can be fined if they don't comply. This helps explain why so many English-language hits are re-recorded in French – not always very successfully.

More than half of France's seven major national terrestrial TV channels ([www.francetelevisions.fr](http://www.francetelevisions.fr)) are public: France 2 and France 3 are general-interest stations designed to complement each other: the former focuses on news, entertainment and education, while the latter broadcasts regional programmes and news. France 5 targets its audience with documentaries (eg a daily health programme) and cartoons for the kids. The French/German public channel Arte, which shares with France 5, is a highbrow cultural channel.

The major private stations are the Franco-German TF1, M6 and Canal+. TF1 focuses on entertainment – *télé-réalité* (reality TV) is a big deal here – and sport; with about one-third of all French viewers, it is the most popular station in France. M6 lures a youngish audience with its menu of drama, music and news programmes. Canal+ is a mostly subscription-only channel that shows lots of films, both foreign and French – which isn't surprising, as it's the chief sponsor of the French cinema industry.

## FASHION

'Fashion is a way of life,' Yves St Laurent once pronounced, and most Parisians would agree. They live, breathe and consume fashion. After all, to their reckoning, fashion is French – like gastronomy – and the competition from Milan, Tokyo or New York simply doesn't cut the mustard.

But what few Parisians know (or want to admit) is that an Englishman created Parisian *haute couture* (literally 'high sewing') as it exists today. Known as 'the Napoleon of costumers', Charles Frederick Worth (1825–95) arrived in Paris at the age of 20 and revolutionised fashion by banishing the crinoline (stiffened petticoat), lifting hemlines up to the oh-so-shocking ankle length and presenting his creations on live models. The House of Worth stayed in the family for four generations until the 1950s.

Indeed, the British are still key players on the Paris fashion scene today, notably in the form of erstwhile *enfant terrible* and now chief designer for Dior, John Galiano. In 2007, some six decades after house founder Christian Dior (1905–57) revolutionised the postwar fashion scene with his New Look, Galiano, dressed as a matador, hosted a star-studded event (at the Château de Versailles, no less) with top models parading such outfits as a flamenco-inspired, heavily embroidered gown that took some 10 stitchers up to 900 hours to create. Marie-Antoinette would have certainly approved.

Galiano is hardly the only eccentric couturier in Paris; Jean-Paul Gaultier draws his influence from the punk movement, dresses men in skirts and is famous for fitting Madonna into her signature conical bra. But you probably won't encounter women clad in Gaultier (or even Galiano) rubbing shoulders in the metro. Paris style remains quintessentially classic, with Parisian women preferring to play it safe (and sometimes slightly sexy) in monotonous. It could be said that today's *parisiennes* are the legitimate daughters of the great Coco Chanel, celebrated creator of the 'little black dress'.

Indeed, nostalgia for Chanel as well as Givenchy, Féraud and other designers from the heyday of Paris fashion in the 1950s have contributed to the big demand for vintage clothing. Twice a year the big auction house Hôtel Drouot (p215) hosts *haute-couture* auctions.

But it's not all about yesterday and looking backward. There are, in fact, several contemporary 'Paris styles' that often relate to certain geographical areas and social classes. The funky streetwear style, heavily inspired by London, can be associated with the trendy shops around rue Étienne Marcel in the Louvre & Les Halles neighbourhood and the Marais. Meanwhile your more upper-crust 'BCBG' (*bon chic bon genre*) girl shops at Le Bon Marché (p212), Max Mara (Map pp140–1; ☎ 01 47 20 61 13; 31 av Montaigne, 8e; 📍 Georges V) or Chanel (p214) and rarely ventures outside her preferred districts: the 7e, 8e and 16e. The chic Left Bank *intello* (intellectual) struts her agnès b (p199) and APC (p202) though if she's a bit down on her luck she may discreetly buy used designer clothes at Chercheminippes (p204), an upmarket secondhand boutique in the 6e.

The eastern districts of Oberkampf, Bastille, the area of the 10e around Canal St-Martin and the Batignolles section of Clichy in the 17e tend to be the stomping ground of the *Bobo* (bourgeois bohemian), whose take on style is doused in nostalgia for her voyage to India, Tibet or Senegal and her avowed commitment to free trade and beads. Younger professional *Bobos* frequent Colette (p199), Kabuki Femme (p200) and Isabel Marant (p202). Parisians with Mediterranean roots have a penchant for the more flamboyant Christian Lacroix (p214), whose collections conjure up images of the south in a theatrical and colourful style. The flagship Louis Vuitton (p214) store on the av des Champs-Élysées draws in hordes of overseas shoppers, even on Sundays.

### THE SHOW OF SHOWS

The Paris fashion *haute-couture* shows are scheduled in late January for the spring/summer collections and early July for autumn/winter ones. However, most established couturiers present a more affordable *prêt-à-porter* (ready-to-wear) line, and many have abandoned *haute couture* altogether. *Prêt-à-porter* shows are usually in late January and September. All major shows are ultra-exclusive affairs – even eminent fashion journalists must fight tooth and nail to get a spot on the sidelines. For an overview of Parisian fashion, check out Le Bon Marché (p212), which has an excellent collection of all the big labels and *couture* designs. For some catwalk action, there's a weekly fashion show at Galeries Lafayette (p215). In some stores you can join mailing lists to receive fashion-show invitations, but you need to be in Paris at the right time to attend.

## SPEAKA DA LINGO

Verlan, a kind of French Pig Latin, has been the lingua franca of choice among the *branché* (hip) street-smart of Paris for almost two decades now. It's really just a linguistic sleight of hand, and its very name is illustrative of how it works. *L'envers* means 'reverse' in French, right? Well, twist it around – take the 'vers' and have it precede the 'en' and you get *verlan* – more or less. Of course that's the easy bit; shorter words – 'meuf' for *femme* (woman), 'keum' for *mec* (guy), 'teuf' for *fête* (party), 'keuf' for *flic* (cop) and 'auch' for *chaud* (hot; as in cool) are a bit trickier to recognise for the uninitiated.

In recent years the language has started to go mainstream and a few words of verlan – for example *beur* (French-born Algerian) – have entered the lexicography (if not dictionary) of standard French. Of course, the whole idea of verlan was for it to be a secret language – a kind of Cockney rhyming slang – for youths to communicate freely in front of parents, and criminals in front of the police. The next step was obvious: re-verlan words already in the lingo. Thus *beur* becomes *reub* and *keuf* is *feuk*. Fun (that's English verlan for 'enough').

Despite the invasion of 'Made in China' clothes for clones, Parisians never look like fashion victims nor do they go in for anything remotely vulgar or brassy. They stick to a neutral palette: black, grey, beige, brown and white, adding good accessories and great haircuts. They may mix and match designer labels with H&M, making it look like it was all bought on the posh av Montaigne in the 8e. And it is this elegance that attracts visitors from around the globe.

This is a society that coined the expression *lèche-vitrine* (literally 'window-licker') for window-shopping; 'tasting' without buying is an art like any other so don't be shy about just having a look. The fancy couture houses on av Montaigne may seem daunting, as many of their gleaming façades sit behind little fences, giving the impression of luxurious private homes. In most, however, no appointment is necessary and you can simply walk on in. Don't expect overly friendly service but do expect courtesy; after all, how are they to know that behind your jeans-and-sneakers façade you're not hiding a significant trust fund and a penchant for Lagerfeld?

No doubt about it, Parisians take fashion seriously and nowhere is that more obvious than in the new Cité de la Mode et du Design (p161), known as 'Docks en Seine'. The undulating green 'wave' that dances across the front façade is best appreciated from the other side of the river.

## LANGUAGE

Respect for the French language is one of the most important aspects of claiming French nationality, and the concept of *la francophonie*, linking the common interests everywhere French is spoken, is supported by both the government and the people. Modern French developed from the *langue d'oïl*, a group of dialects spoken north of the Loire River that grew out of the vernacular Latin used during the late Gallo-Roman period. The *langue d'oïl* – particularly the *françien* dialect spoken in the Île de France encircling Paris – eventually displaced the *langue d'oc*, the dialects spoken in the south of the country.

Standard French is taught and spoken in schools, but its various accents and subdialects are an important source of identity in certain regions. In addition, some languages belonging to peoples long since subjected to French rule have been preserved. These include Flemish in the far north; Alsatian on the German border; Breton, a Celtic tongue, in Brittany; Basque, a language unrelated to any other, in the Basque Country; Catalan, the official language of nearby Andorra and the autonomous Spanish republic of Catalonia, in Roussillon; Provençal in Provence; and Corsican, closely related to Tuscan Italian, on the island of Corsica.

French was *the* international language of culture and diplomacy until WWI, and the French are sensitive to its decline in importance and the hegemony of English, especially since the advent of the internet. It is virtually impossible to separate a French person from his or her language, and it is one of the things they love most about their own culture. Your best bet is always to approach people politely in French, even if the only words you know are '*Pardon, parlez-vous anglais?*' (Excuse me, do you speak English?). Don't worry; they won't bite.

For more on what to say and how to say it *en français*, see p416. Lonely Planet also publishes the more comprehensive *French phrasebook*.

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