

La Tour Loses
Drouant
MAMVP Makeover
Sojfer Umbrellas
Le Rouvray Quilts
Rémi Does it Again

PARIS

n o t e s

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Euro Feb 9: .835
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Nat'l Holidays: April 16, 17

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NATURE NURTURED

By Vivian Thomas

Much more than a garden, the 366-year-old Jardin des Plantes is a natural wonder

I fell in love with the Jardin des Plantes on my very first stay in Paris, when I moved into a tiny studio near the Panthéon in the 5th arrondissement. Loving the city but missing the outdoor lifestyle and open spaces of California, I stuck to my routine of a morning run, and a friend suggested the Jardin des Plantes as an interesting nearby destination.

It was. From my apartment I headed to the Place de la Contrescarpe, downhill on the Rue Lacépède, across Rue Linné at the Cuvier fountain, and I was in the park. A brisk uphill trot through the Labyrinth brought me to the curious metallic gazebo that crowns the hill. Here I allowed myself a breather and an admiring look down at the park and buildings below me.

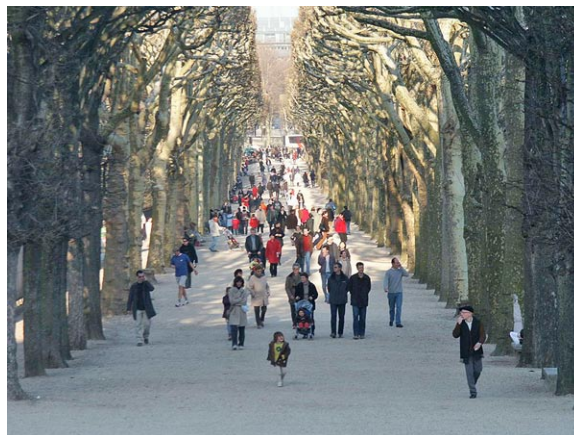
I went down the hill again, past a towering cedar of Lebanon and a huge greenhouse with organ-pipe cactus visible through the glass, to the wide flowerbeds of the esplanade, stretching from the statue of Buffon before me all the way to Lamarck's monument at the riverside end of the park. The charm of the itinerary lay in its variety: the esplanade's formal lawns and flowerbeds were bordered by a garden of antique roses and another was filled with iris. On the other side was the menagerie, which I bypassed because of its admission charge, but I could still enjoy it—I heard the peacocks' cries, occasionally spotted the great horned owl high in an aviary tree, and glimpsed the wallabies from afar.

It was only much later, after I'd learned more about Paris and its past, that I came to appreciate the garden's long and fascinating history, and the importance of those men whose statues grace the lawns and whose names remain on the surrounding streets. And if my morning run was good for my health, that was quite in keeping with the garden's original *raison d'être*.

The Jardin des Plantes began when Louis XIII bought a parcel of land in 1633. About a quarter of the garden's present size, it was destined to become a garden of medicinal herbs. At the time, the plot was well outside the city, where "the steam of cesspools and the smoke

from chimneys will not rob the plants of their morning dew," according to a contemporary. The plot had two hills, and from the higher one (the Grand Labyrinth, with the gazebo), seventeenth-century Parisians could see the spot where the Bièvre, the lost river that now flows underground, joined the Seine.

The idea for the garden had been proposed



by Jean Hérouard, a botanist who was also the king's doctor. He'd seen a similar garden in Montpellier and wanted Paris to have one that would grow "all sorts of medicinal herbs for those who need them, even for the instruction of students at the University of Medicine." Thus, from the very beginning, the garden had a teaching function, a mission it still retains today.

By the time the garden opened in 1640, Guy La Brosse, who had succeeded Hérouard as the king's "premier médecin," became its first director. This tradition continued for decades—the "premier médecin du roi" supervised the garden until 1718; in 1738 the word "medicinal" was dropped from the title and the garden became simply the Jardin du Roi.

Royal or not, the garden was always open to the public, thanks to La Brosse, who thought its beneficial herbs should be available to the king's subjects as well. Those plants numbered some 1,800 by the time the garden opened. La Brosse took enormous pride in his garden; in an

early published description of it, he referred to older medicinal gardens in Padua, Genoa and Florence, claiming that "they only have the advantage of time, not of beauty, size, situation, nor of quality and diversity of plants. There is no garden to equal this in all of Europe..."

La Brosse did not ignore the garden's educational aspect, planning from the outset that botany and chemistry would be taught here. This provoked a major controversy: the powerful Sorbonne wanted to absorb the garden into the university, but the king overruled the opposition and the garden remained independent, becoming a teaching establishment with professors appointed by the crown.

Even today one of the garden's most interesting spots is an outdoor classroom called the Ecole de Botanique, and this historic heart of the garden is the perfect place to start a visit. First you'll need to find a free map at the information desk in the Grande Galerie d'Evolution, or, if you're starting from the other side, at the Accueil just inside the Quai St-Bernard entrance.

One of the first things you'll notice is that the garden is undergoing renovations. Aging watering systems are being replaced and avenues of trees replanted. But most of it remains open, enough to show that it's much more than a simple "garden of plants."

The Ecole de Botanique, a garden with some 4,000 varieties, lives up to its name as a school of botany. From its inception, this has been an outdoor teaching laboratory. The arrangement is systematic, with plants laid out according to botanical families and ecosystems. Informative labels give scientific and common names, place of origin and a symbol telling whether it's an annual or perennial, shrub or tree. One section is for "useful" plants, those that are cultivated for economic, culinary or—back to the beginning—medicinal use.

The labels are reminders of the important work done here on plant classification. In fact, while the Ecole de Botanique has existed since the garden's creation, it (continued on page 7)

é People ask me all the time: Who reads Paris Notes? My standard response is a sorry attempt at humor. Well, I say, to tell you the truth, I don't know either of our readers, which is usually good for a faint laugh. What I am really trying to do is cover up the fact that I don't have a very good answer. Over the years, I just haven't been able to put my finger on precisely who reads Paris Notes. You cover such a wide range of demographics and perspectives that I don't feel comfortable with any kind of generalization. My informal polling (many years of telephone and e-mail exchanges) tells me you're both older and younger, wealthy and not so wealthy, highly educated and not, male and female. You swing neither conservative nor liberal. You are both frequent and occasional travelers. And so on.

I can only come up with one commonality that you share, and I've given you a name for it: twayip, which stands for "two weeks a year in Paris." You twayips may have lots of things going on in your lives, but, come hell or high water, you're going to get to Paris for two weeks a year (usually, once in the spring and once in the fall). This is regardless of strikes, globe-trotting viruses, riots, poor exchange rates, terrorist threats or wars. Among other things, twayips go to Paris for a fix of their favorite pot-au-feu, to catch up on the latest exhibitions, to take French classes or to just sit in a café and people watch. Twayips usually stay in the same hotel every year, although many have switched to renting apartments. Twayips love off-the-beaten-track experiences and they've been to every corner of Paris. Most twayips have made French friends and they pride themselves on their knowledge of French history and culture. Vive le twayip!

—Mark Eversman, Editor
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- It is one of the best and biggest **wine collections** in the city. It includes Pétrus, Mouton-Rothschild, Château Margaux and Château-Lafitte, to name a few. It belongs not to La Tour d'Argent or Taillevent, but to the Hôtel de Ville (City Hall), and it resides in a wine cellar underneath City Hall. Wines from this collection are used for City Hall's many official receptions (and some not so official), but times have changed. Parisians are drinking less wine and budgets are tightening. At City Hall, wine consumption for receptions declined forty-six percent between 2000 and 2004. At a reception for 350 people in 2003, City Hall spent 50E per person on wine; the following year, it scaled back to 17E. So, City Hall has decided to auction off the majority of its wine collection in October, and much of the wine has increased in value—considerably. It estimates that the collection could be worth as much as one million euros. Another reason for the sale is a bit more disconcerting. A big flood comes to Paris every 100 years. The last one was in 1910. Should the big flood come the wine cellar, being so close to the Seine, would quickly be inundated.

- French Minister of Tourism Léon Bertrand recently revealed France's **tourism results** for 2005. France, with seventy-five million foreign visitors in 2005, remained far and away the most visited country in the world—by over twenty million visitors. However, the total number was up just a half of one percent over 2004. Both Japanese and American visitors were up 5.5 percent, while non-French European visitors were down 1.5 percent. Bertrand also noted that 50,000 Chinese visited France each month in 2005. If you read between the lines of a French Government Tourist Office report, the tourist office is particularly excited about this number.

- Free at last. Free at last. Paris is now officially a "No Fee to Pee Zone." As of February, using one of Paris' 420 "**sanisettes**" (automated public facilities) is now free—it used to cost about fifty cents. And if that isn't good enough news, the City is going ahead with its plans to replace all of the existing sanisettes (tall and brown, they look like oval rolls of corrugated cardboard and their automatic doors are known to malfunction) as soon as next year. A private company actually services the sanisettes, which tally about 2.4 million "entrées" per year. Now that the sanisettes are free, the City expects that their usage will double; it is obligated to pay a fifteen-cent fee to the service company for every usage over the average yearly number. While the City views the sanisettes as a necessary service for the

general public, it had another more benevolent interest in freeing them up. Deputy Mayor Denis Baupin put it this way: "It is a true advance in the struggle against exclusion. In the future, homeless people will no longer have difficulties with relieving themselves." Now, if you could just find one when you needed it.

- If your morning coffee doesn't sufficiently get you revving, we have a suggestion. Go to www.parisnotes.com, click Free Downloads and then find our "**Quick Tour**" video offering. This eight-minute video, called "C'Etait un Rendez-Vous," is a driver's-eye view from a Ferrari driving up to 140mph on the streets of Paris. It starts at the Porte Dauphine, goes down the Champs-Élysées, across the Place de la Concorde, past the Louvre and the Opéra, up to Pigalle and finishes in front of Sacré-Cœur. The film is shot at dawn and many red lights are run. In short, it is an adrenaline-inducing "cinéma vérité" joy ride that you won't believe is real. But it is. The film was shot in 1976 (some of the details are sketchy because of the film's cult status) by famed French film director Claude Lelouch ("A Man and a Woman"). The story goes that after Lelouch screened the film, he was immediately arrested. The driver, according to the director, was a Formula 1 race car driver, whose identity has never been confirmed. Be sure and watch it until the final scene; there's actually a romantic twist. Buckle up!

- Work recently began on the final phase of rehabilitation to the oldest bridge in Paris (built between 1578 and 1607), ironically called the **Pont Neuf**. The work, arch by arch (twelve in all), stone by stone, has been going on for twelve years. Cost: \$42 million. The work should be completed by the end of the year in time for the much-loved bridge's 400th anniversary in 2007.

- Paris was abuzz in February with the release of the latest **Michelin Guide Rouge** for 2006, in which there were very few Paris changes. Nobody was surprised that Joël Robuchon received a second star (or "macaron") for his La Table and a first star for his other Paris establishment, L'Atelier; nor was much said about three-star chef Pierre Gagnaire receiving a first star for his latest venture, Gaya. What was a surprise, and to most a disappointment, was the demotion from two stars to one for the famous La Tour d'Argent (demoted from three to two in 1996). Because very little has changed at La Tour in the last ten years, Paris critics were wondering who had really changed, the restaurant or the Michelin Guide.

• PARIS •
B I T E S
By Rosa Jackson

It took courage for an out-of-town chef to take over this Paris institution, where the great French literary prizes have traditionally been awarded

P
B As a restaurant critic I try to keep my distance from chefs. I too easily fall prey to their Gallic charm, and once I have taken a liking to someone my objectivity collapses like a soufflé out of the oven. Meeting chefs also reminds me of how hard they work, and my respect for their dedication makes it more difficult for me to criticize the results. At the same time, I think occasional contact is essential to help me understand where they are coming from—and where French cuisine is going.

That's why I interviewed Christian Constant for the March issue of Paris Notes, and it's also why I recently spent two days in Le Havre at the Omnivore Food Festival (OFF), organized by the pair who coined the term "la jeune cuisine" (see last month's Bites for a full explanation of this phenomenon). The first edition of this festival brought together big names—think Ferran Adrià, Alain Ducasse, Pierre Hermé and Michel Bras—and young talents from all over France for cooking demonstrations and café confidences, informal panels in which chefs such as Ducasse spoke of their careers and answered questions.

The industrial city of Le Havre can't be considered a hot tourist destination, having been rebuilt after heavy bombing during World War II. However, Les Docks Océane proved an ideal venue for this event with a big concert hall for demonstrations and a more intimate 100-seat room for the café confidences. As an audience member, I discovered how chefs keep poultry breasts so moist (by poaching them in a vacuum pack before frying them), where Pierre Hermé buys his rose essence (from an Indian épicerie in the 9th arrondissement) and what makes Pascal Barbot of the Paris restaurant Astrance so unique (his brain works differently than other people's). Though I didn't meet Ferran Adrià, I understood why he is considered one of the world's greatest chefs: no matter how creative, he never loses sight of flavor.

I was also fascinated to watch a demonstration by Antoine Westermann and Antony Clémot, the pair behind the Ile St-Louis restaurant Mon Vieil Ami and, more recently, the legendary Paris restaurant **Drouant**. Westermann runs one of Alsace's best restaurants, the Buerehiesel, and during his demonstration I learned that it was Alain Ducasse who encouraged him to open a Paris restaurant. From the beginning, Mon Vieil Ami succeeded in being perfectly Parisian and yet unique—neither a bistro nor a formal restaurant, it's what Westermann terms an "auberge," or inn. Clémot, who

ran Mon Vieil Ami for the first three years, was not a chef but an "aubergiste," which meant that he spent much of his time in the dining room.

Westermann puts so much faith in his young protégés that he made the decision to buy Drouant largely because Clémot was available to head the restaurant (he has put another young chef from Buerehiesel in charge of Mon Vieil Ami). It took courage for an out-of-town chef to take over this Paris institution, where the great French literary prizes have traditionally been awarded—yet Westermann was aware that Drouant started out as a modern (for the time) Alsatian brasserie in 1880. With its fresh oyster platters and buzzing atmosphere, it quickly drew a clientele of artists and intellectuals such as Daudet, Renoir, Rodin and Pissarro. Though the literati have always remained loyal to Drouant, the restaurant had fallen out of step with the times in recent years.

I had eaten at the new, improved Drouant before going to the OFF, so I was curious to hear Westermann describe his concept. "When I was young I thought that the hors d'oeuvres trolley was a wonderful thing," he said. "The definition of hors d'oeuvres is eating 'in order and out of order,' and what I want is for the customer to feel free." On the stage, Clémot whipped up a series of vegetable hors d'oeuvres just as they would be presented at Mon Vieil Ami, on square plates or in white porcelain cups, as Westermann waxed poetic about the multicolored carrots and beets of Paris-area market gardener Joël Thiébault (a source of inspiration for many a chef at the festival).

So how does this work in real life? During my lunch at Drouant a few weeks after it opened, the dining room was a festival of well-cut black suits with men outnumbering women about five to one (my friend Paule and I tipped the scale slightly). Much as I adore the décor by Pascal Desprez at Mon Vieil Ami, which has the timeless class of a Chanel suit, I felt less enthusiastic about the custard-colored tablecloths, walls and curtains at Drouant. And hadn't I seen similar metallic banquettes somewhere before? Ah yes, at Senderens. Even the pale wood floor seems at odds with the rest of the room, which Desprez describes as a modern take on art deco. Still, the splendid Ruhlmann staircase remains and the overall effect is sleek and bright.

We tested the waiter's flexibility by ordering two sets of starters (all the starters come in sets of four), then a shared main course and a single dessert. Though he initially discouraged us from sharing a main course, it arrived neatly divided

between two plates—and we had more than enough to eat. In fact, unless you are ravenous the best (and most economical) approach would probably be to skip the starters and take only a main course at lunch, since each main comes with four vegetable side dishes. A full three-course meal here costs about 70E without drinks, considerably more than at Mon Vieil Ami.

I hesitated over the French classics revisited (I can't resist a good oeuf mayonnaise) before ordering the "four corners of the world" series of starters. These consisted of a convincing "Thai-style beef salad" in a sweet and spicy sauce, Moroccan-inspired seared tuna with preserved lemon, a Mediterranean puff pastry tart with red mullet, and spiced, roasted sots l'y laisse (the part of the chicken known as the "oyster"). Paule, overcoming an aversion to beets, had a medley of Thiébault vegetables that included two-toned beets à la grecque (with lemon and olive oil), a terrine of confit vegetables, white bean salad with sweet red pepper, and a tartare of finely diced vegetables prepared with the same ingredients as a steak tartare (minus the meat).

We passed the dishes around the table, nibbling contentedly if not ecstatically—but maybe I'm a tiny bit blasé, having grown used to a fridge filled with Thiébault vegetables thanks to his delivery service Le Haut du Panier. Our main course, pork belly, was beautifully cooked with crisp skin and melting layers of meat and fat. Again, the side dishes made the rounds and, thanks to the OFF, I now have the recipe for his stewed multicolored carrots with honey, spices and guinea fowl jus. The chocolate desserts proved slightly underwhelming, except for the intriguing lemon and chocolate "satin," but we might have been better off ordering "les grands classiques" as Westermann shares my passion for baba au rhum. I probably wouldn't rush back to Drouant the way I would to Mon Vieil Ami, but if you're wondering where to eat on a weekend this would be a great alternative to a traditional brasserie—and he even serves an hors d'oeuvres-style brunch on Saturdays and Sundays from 12-2pm for 20E.

•Drouant: 16-18 Place Gaillon, 2nd. Tel: 1-49-24-02-15. Site: www.drouant.com.

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MAMVP MAKEOVER

A more modern Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris reopens

Not every visitor to Paris makes a beeline for the Louvre to photograph "Mona Lisa." Many even balk at the wrangling crowds impeding access to the Musée d'Orsay's impressive Impressionists. Truth be told, plenty of art addicts appreciate the star-studded offerings in other, less-trafficked museums around the capital. One such venue is the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (MAMVP, 11 Ave du Président-Wilson, 16th, www.mam.paris.fr), which reopened in early February after more than two years of renovations. Its stunning if quirky permanent collection encapsulates the unique role the City of Light has played in the history of modern and contemporary art.

The splendid art deco edifice housing the MAMVP was erected as part of the 1937 World's Fair. That celebrated homage to "arts and technologies in modern life" attracted over thirty-one million people to the capital. The MAMVP is composed of two wings flanking a courtyard and connected via a peristyle; the eastern annex was destined for the City's modern art collection and the western extension for the State's. (After numerous incarnations, the latter is now the Palais de Tokyo, a contemporary art space covered by yours truly in these pages last April.) In 1940, the Germans requisitioned the complex, which had lain fallow since the end of the fair. The MAMVP did not officially open to the public until 1961, under the auspices of novelist and maverick statesman André Malraux, France's first Minister for Cultural Affairs. The museum was modernized during the 1970s and 1990s to accommodate the progressively larger public that availed itself of the blockbuster program of temporary exhibitions. As the millennium approached, however, and security became a growing concern, the MAMVP fell victim to its own success. Crowds swelled too often and onsite measures to ensure the safety of both individuals and the some 8,000 artworks in the collection proved woefully inadequate. After receiving a reprimand from the Prefecture of Police in 1998, City Hall decided to take action.

Despite the fifteen-million-euro price tag, the renovations at the MAMVP might best be described as a strategic makeover rather than a top-to-bottom overhaul. Most of these cosmetic changes lie beyond the public's purview. Those familiar with the museum prior to its closure will be reunited with the same spacious interior. Among other things, architects have reinforced the building's structural integrity, augmenting its resistance to fire; they also have subtly repartitioned the 19,000-square-meter space and installed smoke ventilation and alarm systems. The monumental, sculpted metal doors punctuating the entrance have been restored. Walls and ceilings have been whitewashed, while floors have been dressed in institutional gray paint or

indoor-outdoor carpeting (miserably dull choices, in my opinion). Unassuming but inventive new signage directs visitors throughout.

As you approach the MAMVP, the first noticeable change is a pesky metal detector, annoying in that its placement immediately inside the entryway and within close proximity of one of the ticket counters precipitates congestion. Once past the security brigade, you can collect yourself in the vast hall before beginning your visit; its pared-down appearance and lofty dimensions have been made more welcoming by streams of natural light that flood through windows. Large-scale temporary exhibitions fill the ground-floor galleries. (The Pierre Bonnard retrospective mounted for the reopening has proven to be a crowd pleaser.) The second



floor hosts more modest, rotating shows focused specifically on contemporary art.

Ascending the central staircase, you'll encounter an outsized room that opens off the mezzanine. On all three walls of this window-less, triangular gallery hangs Raoul Dufy's "Electricity Fairy," the world's largest painting. Consisting of 250 panels stacked ten meters high across 390 square meters, this leviathan was custom built for the 1937 World's Fair and installed here in 1964. A kitschy concoction rendered in the artist's signature saccharine hues, it recounts the history of electricity, commemorating the union of nature and technology. When asbestos was discovered lingering on and behind the panels and in the ceiling, experts mobilized, extracted the carcinogen and saved the one-of-a-kind creation, to the tune of 800,000E. As part of the reinauguration, curators also installed one of Nam June Paik's larger-than-life robotic personages in the middle of the room. It's made from the wooden shells of vintage televisions, and within these modern monitors broadcast a barrage of high-speed clips. Its placement honors the recently deceased pioneer of video art. The acrid colors of Paik's gyrating images animate the room, marvelously complementing the saturated

palette of "Electricity Fairy."

Directly below the Dufy extravaganza, on the lower mezzanine, is the Matisse Gallery. Here, curators have beautifully reinstalled two imposing oil studies, circa 1931-33, of Matisse's "The Dance," commissioned by the notorious American collector Dr. Albert Barnes for his mansion in Merion, Pennsylvania (now the Barnes Collection). The first, blues and grays accenting coarse charcoal lines, was only rediscovered in 1992. The other is a *joie de vivre* of curvaceous female nudes and faces: Daniel Buren's "Wall of Paintings" (1995-2006), twenty white canvases bedecked in thick, vivid stripes. With their opposing geometries, these drastically different works form a compelling pair. At the back of the gallery lies a much smaller room reserved for a revolving selection of artworks (Picabia, Kupka, Delaunay, Herbin, etc.) from the Henry-Thomas Collection. (A French couple donated this mother lode to the museum in the seventies and eighties.) Across from the Matisse Gallery, you'll find the refurbished restaurant-café and bookshop.

In addition to all the visual delights on the upper floors, the permanent collection awaits you in the basement. Cultivated in fits and starts over the years through private donations from collectors and artists or city-funded purchases, the MAMVP's reserves are a bit of a hodgepodge (in the best sense of that much maligned word). As director Suzanne Pagé admits, the collection "includes certain masterpieces, but it also has enormous holes." We are far from the encyclopedic survey of twentieth-century art on view at the Pompidou Center. But this is exactly why the MAMVP intrigues. Throughout its some two dozen galleries, you will encounter the work of numerous artists rarely visible anywhere else in Paris. Alongside jewels like a Picasso Blue Period painting, Fauve pieces by Matisse and Derain, Giacometti bronzes and two of Yves Klein's hypnotic blue fantasies are exhibited less familiar but similarly captivating achievements by the likes of André Lhote, Foujita, Martial Raysse, the Fluxus group, Simon Hantai as well as my personal favorites: weird and wacky Jean Fautrier and Chaim Soutine. Nearly half the newly hung permanent collection has been given over to contemporary art, from Boltanski, Richter and Thomas Schütte to Sarah Morris and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster. While French artists or foreign-born artists who have lived in Paris are the emphasis throughout, certain non-Gallic movements are also represented, among them Arte Povera (Italian) and the school of documentary photography that has flourished in Germany since the 1980s. The chronologically organized galleries are far less cluttered than they were before the renovations. Lighting is studied and diffuse, amplifying objects without being intrusive. All in all, the artworks are impeccably installed, and the architecture neither competes with nor undermines them.

The MAMVP is a thoroughly enjoyable institution with a distinct personality well worth getting to know. Thanks to its recent facelift, it is also now a markedly twenty-first-century museum.

—By Paul B. Franklin

Alexandra Sojfer Umbrellas

By Maisie Wilhelm

Alexandra Sojfer's delightful shop is not for the superstitious. Mounted on the walls and hanging from the ceilings are dozens of umbrellas and parasols, of all shapes and colors, propped open. As your eyes dance from one charming model to another, Madame Sojfer is quick to pounce on these unique umbrellas, whipping them open with a flourish, and twirling them in a jaunty pose. Bedecked in ribbons, lace or sparkling crystals, these umbrellas captivate. The demure parasols trimmed in lace are every little girl's fantasy. Bad luck shouldn't be this pretty, so when Madame Sojfer is asked if it isn't a problem to open all these umbrellas inside, she smiles knowingly and spreads her hand over the merchandise. "Mais, non," she says. "Not here."

Located down the street from Café de Flore, the modest shop is nestled in a quiet stretch of Boulevard St-Germain. Welded metal umbrellas project above a doorway that reads "Madeleine Gély," the "maison" Madame Sojfer took over in 2002. Next door is her eponymous atelier, where seamstresses work meticulously, cutting and fitting together the umbrellas that can take weeks to create. Prices start at 60E, which buys a colorful nylon hood with contrasting trim, a bright rubber handle and a frame of flexible wind-resistant spokes. "Our specialty," declares one of the attentive shopkeepers, "is double lining and reinforced supports," pointing out how a full lining firmly stabilizes the umbrella. "No one else does the work we do."

That may seem a high price for the lowest-end umbrella, but they are completely handmade. If you're willing to spend more, your options dramatically increase: you can have a changeable resin handle carved in animal shapes; curved bamboo handles; colorful nylon fabric with laser-cut patterns; fanciful striped and dotted taffetas; and two-toned umbrellas with inner linings of cheery floral patterns. Many models feature ruffles or

delicate lace trim like Victorian confections. The larger masculine models are mostly black and feature double button closures, sturdy reinforced joints and Malacca handles.

Some of the models—like the "ultra-luxe" mink-trimmed umbrella—are not merely protection from the rain but an extravagant fashion accessory.

For these whimsical styles, the prices easily reach into the hundreds: 850E for the fur-trimmed model or 550E for a large black umbrella dripping with Swarovski crystals that look like sparkling drops of rain. If you don't see what you're looking for, bespoke models are available, "but most people find something here they like," Madame Sojfer confesses, as she gestures to the rainbow of style and color options. Other features include slender metal handles that unscrew for easy packing or decorative metal rings to hold the umbrella closed. For custom orders, be prepared to wait two months.

The omnipresent Madame Sojfer was born into a family tradition of craftsmanship. She learned the trade from her mother, who inherited the passion of umbrella-making from her Hungarian father, a specialist in the sister art of handle-carving. Madame Sojfer started to work in the family business as a teenager. Eventually, she was taken under the wing of Madeleine Gély, owner of the oldest umbrella-making maison in Paris, founded in 1834. On display in the shop, a small, not-for-sale collection of the maison's own antique walking sticks is testimony to the family's legacy of exquisite craftsmanship. For sale are other elegant, modern canes, with rose-shaped handles carved from ivory, or glazed porcelain handles depicting a portrait, or a handle of a brass double-headed Janus.

•Alexandra Sojfer: 218 Blvd St-Germain, 7th. Tel: 1-42-22-17-02. Site: www.alexandrasojfer.fr.



▲ PARIS VISITS ▼

Le Rouvray Quilts

By Jennefer Penfold

On a quiet street in the 5th arrondissement is a colorful outpost of Americana. The Le Rouvray quilt shop is owned by American Diane de Obaldia, who first came to Paris in the sixties to work as a model. After falling in love with a Frenchman and moving to Normandy, she opened the original Le Rouvray in her new home. She sold French antiques and antique American quilts. But, before too long, Paris had become her best market, so she decided to move the shop there. American-style quilting had arrived in Paris.

The original Paris shop sold early-American antiques and antique quilts. A few antiques and many antique quilts remain, but Le Rouvray has evolved into a quilt-making shop, complete with fabric, supplies, kits and books, and an area for quilt-making classes. The large windows of the shop showcase an assortment of antique quilts, multi-hued fabrics, covered boxes and class samples. Step inside and you are greeted by a visual feast of color and texture.

De Obaldia's motto for Le Rouvray is: "Even if you don't speak French, we speak patchwork fluently!" In France, the American style of quilting is called "patchwork" because quilt sounds too much like kilt; French styles of quilting include "picque" and "boutis." American quilters should feel right at home here; Le Rouvray stocks many of the same fabrics that can be found in U.S. quilt shops. But the real attraction for American quilters is Le Rouvray's extensive stock of French fabrics, such as Toile de Jouy and fabrics from Provence.

In 2004, de Obaldia introduced a Le Rouvray line of textile designs called "Promenade." She explained that these are Franco-American fabrics: designed by an American but based on French designs. A second series of Le Rouvray textile designs, "Promenade II," came out in 2005. Be prepared to pay more than you are used to: quilting fabrics are expen-

sive in Paris, averaging \$22-\$31 per meter, compared to \$8-\$10 per yard for the same fabric in the U.S. Le Rouvray packages an assortment of kits, "fat quarter" and other cuts for those who just want a sample.

In 1994, the quilt book "Le Rouvray" (That Patchwork Place, publishers of The International Quilt Shop Series) was published, co-authored by de Obaldia, Marie-Christine Flocard and Cosabeth Parriaud. It is still available in French, but is hard to find new in English (although used copies can be found on Amazon). The book includes quilt patterns and other projects contributed by the entire staff of Le Rouvray (including a pattern of the shop's farm house logo, which can be downloaded at the Le Rouvray website).

Le Rouvray was the first quilt shop in France to offer quilt-making classes. Today the shop offers an extensive program of classes (listed on their website). While some of the classes meet for five or six consecutive weeks, many of them meet just once, which makes it possible for visitors to attend. You can register by e-mail or in person on your arrival in Paris.

While in Paris last fall, I was delighted to take an "appliqué" class taught by Le Rouvray's Cosabeth Parriaud. She taught the class in French and then translated for me (which she does for all English speakers who are taking classes). When she asked me to talk to the class about quilting in the U.S., I explained that quality fashion fabric shops are disappearing but quilt shops are proliferating, whereas in Paris it is the opposite. One of the French ladies noted that "yes, but you have Wal Mart!"

•Le Rouvray: 3 Rue de la Bûcherie, 5th. Tel: 1-43-25-00-45. Open: Tue-Sat 10am-6:30pm. E-mail: lerouvray@easycconnect.fr. Site: www.lerouvray.com.



RÉMI DOES IT AGAIN

The Pavillon de l'Ermitage—Rémi Rivière's second success story

I have long been a fan of Rémi Rivière—ever since I first met him at the opening of the Tour Jean sans Peur (2nd), in 1999. For years this architect and historian had dreamed of restoring the derelict fifteenth-century tower and opening it to the public, an achievement that took many years of persistence and hard work. In the process, he took the unusual step of creating a private organization, Les Amis de la tour Jean sans Peur, to help underwrite the huge costs of restoration and operation.

The results were extraordinary, and when I interviewed Rivière on opening day, he was understandably elated. Still, although he had just completed one demanding project, he was already contemplating his next, the Pavillon de l'Ermitage (the Hermitage)—a lovely but derelict eighteenth-century “folly,” or ornamental structure, in the 20th arrondissement.

Now, after more years of determination and hard work, the Pavillon de l'Ermitage is open to the public, and it is my pleasure to report that this is just as rewarding a destination as its predecessor. To begin with, the Ermitage is located in historic Charonne, formerly a village located outside Paris' eighteenth-century walls. Although the area's vast châteaux and country estates have long since disappeared, there are still enough charming old houses and churches here to make Charonne a destination worth exploring.

And then there is the Ermitage itself. Originally, it was part of the domain of Bagnolet, the estate of the Duchess of Orléans—the legitimized daughter of Louis XIV and Madame de Montespan, and the wife of Philippe d'Orléans (Régent of France during the minority of Louis XV). The duchess spared no expense on Bagnolet, remodeling the château and landscaping its enormous park. Sometime between 1723 and 1727, she built the Ermitage at the park's far edge, near the village of Charonne. Much like other “follies” of the period, the Ermitage lacked heat and was used only in fine weather. But despite its small size and limited function, it was designed elegantly, in what has become known as Regency style.

The highlights of the décor, then and now, are the original mural paintings (attributed to Jean Valade) of hermit saints—a subject that in turn gave the Ermitage its name. Three of these tall, slender murals miraculously remain in the vestibule and former gallery, painted in the soft dove colors called “grisaille.” Although Valade's hermits dwell in wilderness and desert, there is no harsh reality here. Rather, he has delicately depicted a charming and bucolic countryside, a welcoming rather than a forbidding retreat.

At their inception, Valade's murals represented the height of Rococo fashion. But styles change

rapidly, especially among the very rich. In 1761, Bagnolet's new owner, Louis-Philippe d'Orléans (the duchess' grandson), decided that the Ermitage needed updating in the new neoclassical style. A mural of the goddess Flore now presided over the northern salon, surrounded by wall-to-wall trompe-l'oeil—including a painted garden, Roman columns, false marbling and Cupids.

Louis-Philippe's mistress probably prompted this redecorating binge—after all, her birthday required a suitable commemoration. But despite his remarkable contribution to the Ermitage, Louis-Philippe did a poor job of keeping up the château as a whole. Finally, in 1769, he sold the entire estate to an enterprising duo (a clock-maker and a goldsmith), who proceeded to demolish the château, divide the land and sell it in lots.



During the subsequent two decades, the Pavillon de l'Ermitage changed hands several times, during which a series of owners turned the decorative little structure into a habitable house, complete with fireplaces. The Ermitage's new owners redesigned the rooms facing the park, enlarging one and piercing two additional windows in the other. They also renovated the attic, creating several bedrooms decorated with fashionable wallpaper inspired by the murals and mosaics of Pompeii and Herculaneum. The hermit paintings survived these renovations (although they had already suffered some indignities under Louis-Philippe's father, Louis the Pious, who is reported to have whitewashed over those portions he found offensive). The northern salon, with its remarkable collection of trompe-l'oeil, survived intact.

At last, shortly before the Revolution, the vastly altered Ermitage passed into the hands of Baron de Batz, known for his plots to save Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette from the guillotine. The baron carried out his political intrigues in the Ermitage, which was conveniently outside of, yet not far from, Paris. It was also conveniently surrounded by several remaining acres of parkland. When, one night in September 1793, some 200

guardsmen surrounded the Ermitage, they managed to arrest several of the plotters, but did not catch the baron, who fled through the park's shrubbery and escaped.

After the baron, the Ermitage passed through more hands, including a François Pomerel, who replaced the duchess' monogram on the front gate with his own initials, which remain there to this day. The Pomerel family kept the Ermitage until 1887, when they sold it to the Assistance Publique (the French authority that manages social services and state-owned hospitals), which built a home for the aged (l'hospice Debrousse) on the Ermitage's grounds. The Ermitage itself was turned over to the hospice director, who used the ground floor as offices and the upstairs as an apartment.

As the hospice expanded, the Ermitage was eventually abandoned. Fortunately, it had already been classified as a “monument historique,” which prevented its destruction. But even though it received necessary exterior repairs, its interior had deteriorated badly by 2001, when Rémi Rivière and the Association des Amis de l'Ermitage (Association of the Friends of the Hermitage) undertook to save it. Without any funding from city or state, Rivière and the association restored the Ermitage's interior sufficiently by 2005 to open it to the public.

One can only imagine the challenges that Rivière and the Amis de l'Ermitage had to overcome in order to restore and operate this “small jewel of Paris,” as he fondly calls it. (The Centre d'Action Sociale de la Ville de Paris, not the association, owns the building.) And yet it is clear that he has no regrets about the many years of hard work that he has devoted to the Pavillon de l'Ermitage. It is unique, he explains, and “très français.” Above all, he adds with a smile, it is “très, très charmant.”

And indeed, the Pavillon de l'Ermitage is extraordinarily charming. Visitors are now privileged to enter this long-padded vestige of the eighteenth century, learn from the accompanying texts (in French and English) and admire its rare beauty. Above all, they can gaze out the tall, arched windows into the small adjoining park and imagine what it must have been like to be a member of the French court in the early 1700s, attending the duchess at a party here on a fine summer day.

•Pavillon de l'Ermitage: 148 Rue de Bagnolet, 20th (enter from park). Tel: 1-40-24-15-95. Open: Fri, Sat, 2-5:30pm. Guided group tours available every day by appointment. Rental arrangements available for special occasions.

•Tour Jean sans Peur: 20 Rue Etienne-Marcel, 2nd. Tel: 1-40-26-20-28. Open: Wed-Sun, 1:30-6pm (April-Oct); Wed, Sat, Sun, 1:30-6pm (Nov-March). Site: www.tourjeansanspeur.com. E-mail: tjps@wanadoo.fr.

—By Mary McAuliffe

•Mary McAuliffe's “Paris Discovered: Explorations in the City of Light” will be published in Sept 2006 (www.parisdisc.com).

was totally reorganized as early as 1774, when Antoine-Laurent Jussieu replaced an earlier system in favor of Linnaeus' newly publicized binary nomenclature and the more natural classification system devised by Antoine-Laurent's uncle, Bernard de Jussieu.

By that time, the garden was in its glory days, under the direction of the remarkable Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon. Director for fifty years, from 1739 to 1788, the multi-talented Buffon extended the garden to the banks of the Seine, planted the great avenues of trees, created the labyrinth and started construction on the Amphithéâtre that you'll find on your map. Originally used for class lectures and Revolutionary meetings, the Amphithéâtre was later the scene of important discoveries made by chemist Gay-Lussac and others in the laboratories that adjoined it.

Buffon also continued the practice of sending naturalists abroad to collect new specimens. Guy Fagon, the garden's director until 1718, had seen the need to change the direction of research, sending collectors to the Antilles and the Levant armed with royal authority and, more important, letters of credit. Presented with a young coffee plant, Fagon had built the garden's first greenhouse to shelter it, and even before Buffon's day, the garden boasted pistachio trees, maples from Crete and that same cedar of Lebanon I ran past. Exotic trees remain one of the Jardin's greatest treasures; labels give the date of planting and, occasionally, the name of the scientist who planted it.

By the time of Buffon's death in 1788 the garden contained over 6,000 plants, the most exotic housed in the orangerie and greenhouses. The study of these new varieties enabled researchers to revise their ideas about the plant kingdom, and these scientists, in turn, published works that extended this new knowledge to the general public. Lamarck's "Flore Française," published in 1778, was the first book that showed readers how to identify plants for themselves. It was truly the Age of Enlightenment.

The next growth spurt occurred during the Revolution, when the Jardin became the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, with seven departments: botany, chemistry, zoology, anatomy, anthropology, geology and mineralogy. When a government decree banned animal shows in Paris and ordered the seizure of all animals, some were killed and stuffed, becoming part of the zoology collection, while others became the first inhabitants of the new menagerie. Their ranks were soon swelled by the remnants of the royal menagerie at Versailles.

By 1795 the menagerie had its first elephant, and in 1827 the arrival of France's first giraffe set off a national frenzy. A gift to Restoration king Charles X from the Pasha of Egypt, the young giraffe crossed the Mediterranean by boat, disembarked in Marseille, then literally walked to Paris, accompanied by zoologist Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire. Traveling in short stages on a well-publicized route, the giraffe was met by ecstatic

crowds all along the way, and many a "Place de la Girafe" and "Rue de Girafe" still exist to mark her itinerary. Installed in the menagerie after being presented to the king, the giraffe was an unprecedented sensation, her image appearing on everything from wallpaper and plates to cigar cutters and ladies' coiffures.

Meanwhile, the Muséum's researchers were busily theorizing, publishing and disagreeing with each other. As early as 1800, more than fifty years before Darwin's "On the Origin of Species" was published, Lamarck (who invented the word "biology") was presenting his proto-evolutionary theory in his zoology lectures. He published that theory, dubbed "transformisme," in his 1809 "Philosophie Zoologique" and other works, but unfortunately was attacked by Cuvier, an advocate of "fixisme" who had become the Muséum's director in 1802. Cuvier refused to allow Lamarck access to collections that would have helped his research, and the frustrated Lamarck spent the last ten years of his life blind, dictating his final works to his daughter. You'll find a poignant reminder of this on the pedestal of his statue at the riverside end of the esplanade. A bas-relief shows his daughter with her hand on her father's shoulder, saying "Posterity will admire you—it will avenge you, my father."

The early nineteenth century was a brilliant time for the new Muséum. All of intellectual Europe entered passionately into the conflicts that pitted scientists like Lamarck and Saint-Hilaire against Cuvier. But scholarly pursuits were suspended in 1870, when Prussian armies besieged Paris and bombarded the museum's collections; during the siege the elephants and many other menagerie animals were sacrificed to feed starving Parisians.

By the end of the century scientific voyages were resumed, and the great buildings that give the Jardin its present appearance appeared: the Galerie de Zoologie, a masterpiece of metallic architecture, opened in 1889; the Paleontology Gallery in 1898. Old greenhouses were replaced by bigger and more efficient ones, and other research buildings gradually formed a border around the esplanade.

Inside these buildings today, you'll find the results of all that collecting and classifying. The Zoology Gallery, redesigned in the early 1990s, reopened in 1994 as the splendid Grande Galerie d'Évolution. In the soaring main gallery, a spectacular parade of animals marches triumphantly across the floor. Each one is a miracle of the taxidermist's art: the elephants and giraffes are there, but also antelopes and anteaters, camels, wolves and hippos large and small.

On the wrought-iron galleries that surround the atrium, you'll find undersea creatures, birds, butterflies, shells and insects. Here and there are whimsical touches: an elephant peering down a stairwell, a giraffe craning his neck down from the topmost gallery to survey the scene below. Endangered and extinct species inhabit a wonderful semi-dark room that also houses a clock made for Marie Antoinette—it startled me by chiming the hour just as it did in the Petit

Trianon in 1785. Some of the specimens here are stuffed; others, like the dodo that greets you at the entrance, are reproductions.

At right angles to the zoology building is the Mineralogy Gallery. Although its geology department is closed for renovation, the spectacular mineralogy section remains open. Giant crystals glow eerily in the center of a dark room lined with display cases, some exhibiting fluorescent stones under black light; downstairs, treasures from all over the world draw oohs and aahs from visitors. What I found most interesting (aside from the sizeable gold nugget found in Placer County, California) was the exhibit on the "droguier du roi." An ornate wooden display case holds items from the royal drug storehouse of the Louis XIV era, when minerals were prized, not only for their beauty and rarity, but also for their medicinal value. Glass jars hold salts and powders; other niches hold sections of geodes and other curiosities. In fact, the start of the mineralogy collection was the contents of the royal medicine cabinet, enriched by gemstones and artifacts like several tables inlaid with semi-precious stones.

The last great public gallery, devoted to paleontology and comparative anatomy, displays fossils and thousands of skeletons, arranged like a frightening army that completely fills the main floor. If you've ever wondered what the skeleton of a rhinoceros looks like, this is the place for you.

As for the living animals, they're confined to the menagerie, in spaces that seem too small for the larger inmates. No elephants or giraffes here—they've been moved to more spacious quarters at the Vincennes zoo, another department of today's Muséum. More interesting for its architecture than its animals, the menagerie holds over 200 mammals, 400 birds and 270 reptiles. The buildings range from fairy-tale cottages with thatched roofs to a 1937 Fauverie with handsome Art Deco details (closed, like many of the menagerie structures). In the aviary, overgrown vegetation nearly hides some of the cages. It's a place from another era, an old-fashioned zoological garden.

While it's unfortunate that such a lovely and historic part of Paris as the Jardin des Plantes is largely overlooked by visitors, the upside is that it's a great place to escape the tourist crowd. Stroll here on a Sunday afternoon and you'll be surrounded by French families, sometimes three generations together, enjoying a tranquil walk, admiring the plants in the Ecole de Botanique, examining stuffed animals in the Gallery of Evolution or live ones in the menagerie, and buying "barbe à papa" (cotton candy) for the children. Join the leisurely throng and enjoy a piece of Paris history, miraculously preserved for centuries with all its charm intact.

•Jardin des Plantes: Entrances at Rue Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire and Quai St-Bernard, 5th. Tel: 1-40-79-56-01. Open: daily from 8am; closing time depends on season. Free. Entrance fee for museums and menagerie: 7E each. Site: www.mnhn.fr.

PICK OF THE MONTH

Dora Maar and Picasso

This expo shows ten years in the turbulent lives and work of the photographer Dora Maar and the painter Pablo Picasso. A passionate dialog of photos, drawings and paintings retraces the creation of Guernica and other works of that tragic period: from the Spanish Civil War to the Liberation of Paris. •Musée Picasso. Until May 23. Site: www.musee-picasso.fr.

ON THIS MONTH

Pierre Bonnard, 1867-1947

Well, it was certainly worth waiting two years for this. After an extensive renovation, the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris reopens with a splendid exposition of the work of Pierre Bonnard. Why Bonnard? Perhaps because he is so much more than he seems to be at first glance—just take your time and look closely. Here is not only a fine technique and a savvy flourish of the brush but also a sort of Proustian flashback of things we dreamed of. •Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (MAMVP). Until May 7. Site: www.mam.paris.fr.

Cézanne and Pissarro, 1865-1885

This exhibit displays the artistic relationship between Paul Cézanne and Camille Pissarro during their twenty-year friendship. •Musée d'Orsay. Until May 28. Site: www.musee-orsay.fr.

Henri Rousseau

The French "primitive" painter Le Douanier (i.e., the customs official) Rousseau is shown here: exotic jungle scenes with bold linear forms and bright colors take us into a scary dream world. •Grand Palais. Until June 19. Site: www.rmn.fr.

Ingres, 1780-1867

A luscious expo of eighty paintings and 104 drawings shows Ingres at his very best. Quite simply, stunning. •Musée du Louvre. Until May 15. Site: www.louvre.fr.

The Seine

A splendid photographic history of the Seine from Louis Daguerre's first photographs in 1836, via Eugène Atget, the Seeberger brothers, Izis, Robert

Doineau, Willy Ronis, Cartier-Bresson et al., to contemporary photographers Bruno Barbey and Michaël Kenna. •Musée de la Conciergerie. Until May 8. Site: www.monum.fr.

Brushes and Brooms

The amazing diversity of shapes and sizes of brushes and brooms is shown here: 2,000 examples from the beginning of the eighteenth century until the present show the evolution of form and function of the homely brush. •Bibliothèque Forney, 1 Rue du Figuier, 4th. Until May 6. Site: www.paris-bibliotheques.org.

Paris Cinema

This is Paris as presented by filmmakers, from the Lumière brothers and René Clair to Vincente Minnelli, Roman Polanski, Jean-Luc Godard, etc. Divided into six sections, this expo traces the history of cinema from silent films, the New Wave to the present. Film extracts, posters, photos, costumes and accessories are shown. •Hôtel de Ville, Salle Saint-Jean (enter by Rue de Lobau). Until June 30. Free.

Glass

The art and science of glass in first-century Rome. Lamps, bottles, dishes, tiles, jewelry and even green houses show the many ways in which glass was used in daily life. Rare examples of eyeglasses from Pompeii and lenses made for scientific purposes are also shown. •Cité des Sciences. Until Aug 27. Site: www.cite-sciences.fr.

Design

Hervé Van der Straeten is shown as more than just a designer of Dior perfume bottles: here he has the right stuff for creating original works of art. •Galerie Hervé Van der Straeten, 11 Rue Ferdinand-Duval, 4th. Until April 30. Free.

Chinese Erotica

Curious and fabulous, these dainty paintings are delightfully wicked. •Musée Cernuschi, 8th. Until May 7. Site: www.paris.fr/musees.

Palais de Tokyo

This is said to be a place of experimentation and innovation—open from noon to midnight, it offers expos, events, encounters, videos and music. The current exhibit shows the work of Wang Du, Kader

Attia, Barthélémy Togo and others. •Palais de Tokyo. Until May 7. Site: www.palaisdetokyo.com.

Baubles, Bangles and Beads

This is silly, but fun. It shows examples of the jeweler's exquisite art reduced to the ridiculous for rich, frivolous and vulgar women: a fine, but cruel portrait of American society (1930-1960), from the National Jewelry Institute of New York. All the "big" names are here: Van Cleef & Arpels, Tiffany, Harry Winston and Cartier. Magnificent and rather unsettling. •Musée Carnavalet. Until May 7. Site: www.carnavalet.paris.fr.

Paris and the Cinema

Filmmakers, film critics and academics will present Paris in avant-garde 1920s and New Wave cinema. Extracts from films and discussion. •Ecole du Louvre, 99 Rue de Rivoli, 1st. Fridays at 6:30pm. Until May 19. Free. Site: www.ecoledulouvre.fr.

Nordic Art

A surprising selection of works from the Malmö Konstmuseum presenting the best in contemporary Scandinavian art. •Centre Culturel Suédois, 11 Rue Payenne, 3rd. Until June 30. Free. Site: www.ccs.si.se.

30th Annual Paris Marathon

From the Champs-Élysées, east across the city and back, 42.195 kilometers. 35,000 runners expected. •April 9. 8:45am start. Site: www.parismarathon.com.

COMING SOON

Musée de l'Orangerie

After six years of renovations, the Orangerie will reopen in May (tentatively). Claude Monet's waterlilies and other treasures from the Impressionists to Picasso will be back on view under a beautiful new glass roof. •Site: www.musee-orangerie.fr.

New Musée du Quai Branly

The inauguration of the much-anticipated museum for the "primitive arts," the oddly named Musée du Quai Branly (designed by famed French architect Jean Nouvel), is promised for June 23. •Site: www.quaibranlı.fr.

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