



## *A nod to* **NOBILITY**

Paris might be the world capital of romance, but its other obsessions are art and intellectualism. **Fleur Kinson** looks at a stylish, self-assured city where affairs of the heart mix seamlessly with the life of the mind »

**1** Shoe and Eiffel tower, for Stern, 1974. (© Frank Horvat)

**2** Courtesy Fahey/Klein Gallery, Los Angeles. On the Seine. Bubble series for Harper's Bazaar, 1963. In the 1960s Melvin Sokolsky made a name for himself with a Surrealist style of fashion photography. His famous series showed models levitating over the Seine at Pont Neuf in specially made Plexiglas bubbles. (© Melvin Sokolsky)

## FRANCE



1 Montmartre seen from the roof of the Galeries Lafayette, 1981. (© Jean Claude Gautrand)

2 The demolition of Baltard's Les Halles buildings, 1971. A last record of the demolition of Baltard's Halles, which had been the heart of Paris since the 19th century. (© Jean Claude Gautrand)

3 Merry-go-round in the Jardin des Tuileries, 1950. (© Izis Bidermanas)

4 Lovers on the banks of the Seine, 1949. (© Izis Bidermanas)

5 Idling on the Vert-Galant, the tip of the Île de la Cité, looking out to Pont des Arts, 1948. (© Izis Bidermanas)

**N**o one could ever accuse Paris of having an inferiority complex. Philosophy may be the city's favourite sport, but the questions posed rarely seem to include "Are we good enough?" Paris is a proud place, justifiably confident in its achievements and its global significance. It may no longer be the world's biggest city, as it was for about 300 years. It may no longer contain the world's tallest building, as the Eiffel Tower, incredibly, once was. And the city's native language is certainly no longer the default international tongue as it was before English permanently trounced all competition. But do the Parisians care? *Bof!* They simply do a Gallic shrug and turn their attention back to their delectable dinner, their gorgeously dressed dining companions and their clever conversation.

Parisians know what an unquestionably fine city they and their forebears have created. Paris is "one of the most noble ornaments of the world." Montaigne described it thus in the 16th century, and his words still ring true today. More than twelve million visitors come every year to sigh over Paris's romantic and cultural delights, to roam its atmospheric streets and relish its especially excellent museums (one of them, the Louvre, remains by far the most visited art gallery in the world).

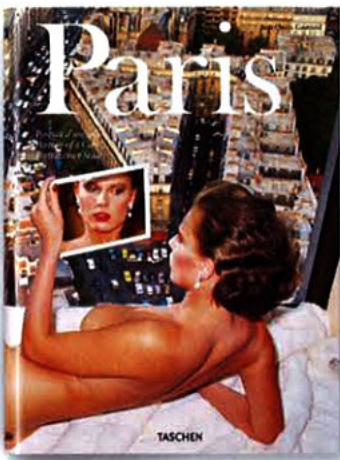
A city with a very distinctive look and feel, Paris announces its pride and importance with haughty architecture, grand boulevards and formal gardens. Meanwhile, its intimate nooks and its countless cafés speak eloquently of community and of personal comfort. It's a heady mix of the bold and the delicate, the strident and the reassuring.



And it's so easy to see all of it on foot. At just eight miles wide, you could cross the whole city in a couple of hours if you wished. But don't take a quick, direct route. More than most big cities, Paris rewards the aimless wanderer. Strollers here enjoy low-rise buildings crouched under watery light, punctuated by wide river-vistas. They can relish the shift of neighbourhoods from elegant to arty, teeming to secretive. They can admire the often egregiously stylish outfits of passing Parisians ("How can a whole city have good taste?" an exasperated American friend once asked me.) And they can marvel at the astonishing public displays of affection. Young or old, Parisians think nothing of standing on a crowded pavement tenderly holding their lover's face in their »

1 One of the most spectacular accidents of the age occurred at the Montparnasse railway station: a train from Granville, travelling at somewhere between 40 and 60 kph, was unable to stop: it careered through the buffers, off the platform and through the building

2 Church of Sainte-Anne de la Maison Blanche, 1976



### An age-old love affair

A city built on two millennia of history, Paris is entering the third century of its love story with photography. It was on the banks of the Seine that Niépce and Daguerre officially gave birth to this new art that has flourished ever since, developing a distinctive language and becoming a vital tool of knowledge.

*Paris, Portrait of a City* leads us through what Goethe described as a "universal city where every step upon a bridge or a square recalls a great past, where a fragment of history is unrolled at the corner of every street". The history of Paris is recounted in photographs ranging from Daguerre's early incunabula to the most recent images – an almost complete record of over a century and a half of transformations and a vast panorama spanning more than 600 pages and 500 photographs.

This book brings together the past and the present, the monumental and the everyday, objects and people. Images captured by the most illustrious photographers – Daguerre, Marville, Atget, Lartigue, Brassai, Kertész, Ronis, Doisneau, Cartier-Bresson and many more – but also by many unknown photographers, attempt to bottle just a little of that "Parisian air", something of that particular poetry given out by the stones and inhabitants of a constantly changing city that has inspired untold numbers of writers and artists over the ages.



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hands, raptly gazing into each other's eyes before finally plunging in for an epic kiss. It's like a piece of street theatre, laid on everywhere round the city to boost urban morale.

Such is Paris's gift for beauty and romance that it manages to achieve both in some pretty unlikely places. Take the Métro, for example. Underground railways can be a charmless necessity in many cities. But in Paris you might enter the Métro beneath one of Hector Guimard's sinuously elegant Art Nouveau portals, and descend to one of many stations individualistically decked out with unusual lamps or artworks or futuristic sliding panels or some other distinctive detail.

And then you might board one of the many trains that roll along on rubber wheels – much quieter and smoother than the screeching steel of other cities. Or take Père Lachaise Cemetery. A graveyard is an unlikely leisure-destination, but Père Lachaise is perhaps the most beautiful graveyard in the Western world. A vast, teeming sculpture garden peppered with famous names (Proust, Molière, Oscar Wilde, Jim Morrison, Maria Callas), Père Lachaise shows that Paris can render even death somehow gorgeous.

Parisians know that it takes brains to keep things this beautiful. The city has a long and illustrious association with thought and education. (The 'light' in its famous monicker 'The City of Light' refers to 'enlightenment', and not to some quality of sunshine or late-night neon glow.) A world epicentre of learning for hundreds of years, Paris has today more than 600,000 scholars beaver away at its several dozen institutions of higher education. That's the largest concentration of students anywhere in Europe. In Paris, thinking is sexy. This city absolutely adores intellectuals, philosophers, writers and artists. (No wonder so many famous ones spent formative time here, a fact most recently honoured in Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris*.) And if the intellectuals are lovers too, even better. Passionate eggheads Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir were so admired that when Sartre died 50,000 Parisians lined the streets to honour his passing coffin. Love and brains: it's the perfect Paris combination. Passion and detachment, hot emotion and cool contemplation. So when you visit this noble ornament, make sure you bring a throbbing heart and a sharp, enquiring mind. □