

THOMAS JONGLEZ



SECRET PARIS



JONGLEZ PUBLISHING

SECRETS OF THE BIBLIOTHÈQUE ① NATIONALE DE FRANCE

Spectacular, little-known rooms

58, rue de Richelieu

01 53 79 59 59 – bnf.fr

Guided tours for individuals: Registration required, call 01 53 79 49 49

or email visites@bnf.fr

Closed Sunday, Monday, holidays and 1–8 September

The Salle Labrouste is reserved for researchers but can be seen through the doors from Monday to Saturday 10am–6pm

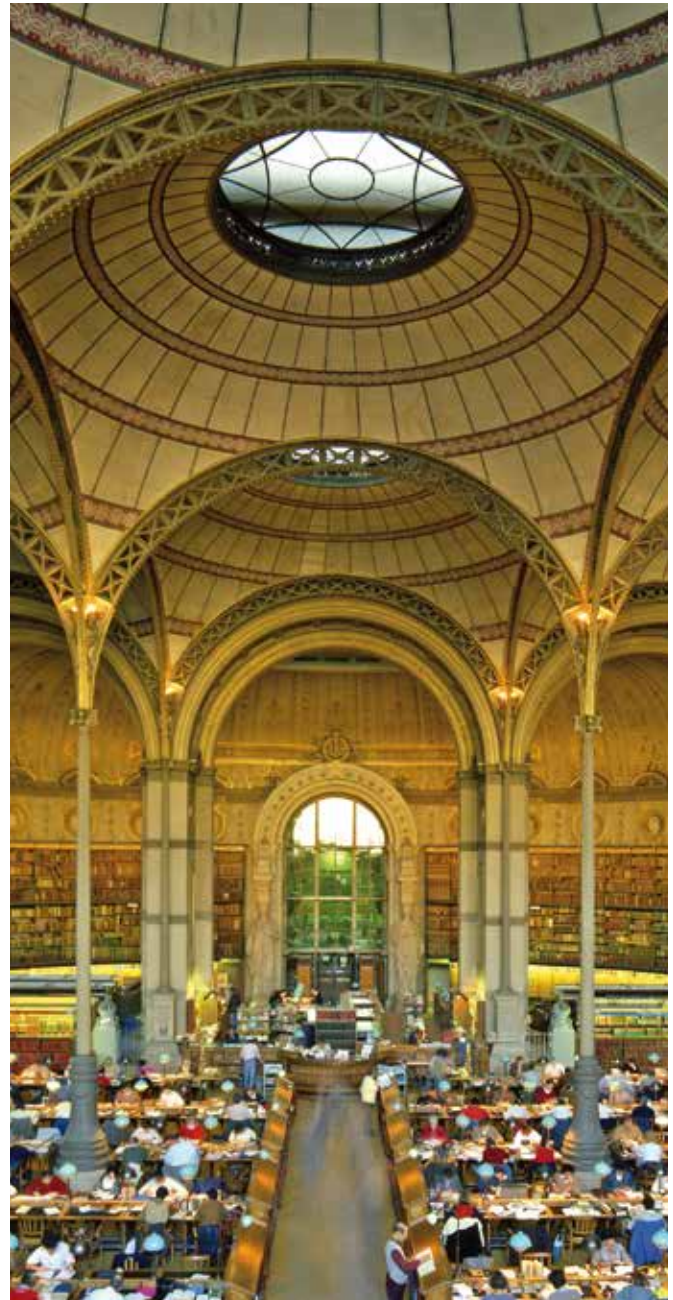
Metro: Pyramides, Bourse or Palais-Royal-Musée du Louvre

Although the temporary exhibitions put on by the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Musée des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques are well known to Parisians, less well known is a fascinating guided tour on the first Tuesday of each month that covers some of the rooms normally reserved for researchers or those with accreditation.

The famous Labrouste reading room is impressive with its 16 slim cast-iron pillars 10-metres-high supporting nine cupolas of translucent enamelled tiles. At the back of the room, an enormous glazed bay leads to the central stacks. Although empty since the printed material was transferred to the Bibliothèque François-Mitterrand, the place is still redolent with the smell of books. During the tour, visitors can admire the rooms of the Département des Arts du Spectacle, including the Rotunda, a newly renovated showcase for the most beautiful artefacts in the department's collection. Also, the light wooden decor and sleek furnishings of the new reading room provide an unexpected hint of modernity.

Short covered walk for rainy days

The lack of pavements until the 19th century was the main reason for the vogue for covered passageways from the Revolution to the Second Empire: when it rained the streets quickly became a sea of mud. The construction of passages dealt with this problem: you could stroll around and keep dry. Astute Parisians can still take advantage of them today if they forget their umbrellas. From the Louvre you can get to rue de Provence and rue Cadet via Palais-Royal, rue des Colonnes (covered) and the passages of Panoramas, Jouffroy and Verdeau, almost completely sheltered from the rain. The Passage des Panoramas, No. 47, is home to Maison Stern (printer and engraver), a very attractive shop unchanged since 1830.



THE DODO RIDE

16

A prehistoric ride

The Jardin des Plantes

*Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday: from 1pm to the garden's closing time,
Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday: from 3pm to the garden's closing time*
Creator and owner: M. Samy Finkel



Set up in 1992 in the middle of the Jardin des Plantes, this 1930s-style carousel was specially conceived for this location on the theme of animals that have now vanished or are threatened by extinction. It thus gathers together members of rare or extinct species, such as the famous dodo from Mauritius, the Tasmanian wolf, the sivatherium (an elk-like precursor of the giraffe), and the triceratops (one of the last dinosaurs).

Although children are not always aware of the history of the animals they've climbed upon, they seem to be delighted to ride in a gondola carried by a panda, in the shell of a horned tortoise, or on the back of a Madagascar aepyornis (the biggest bird ever recorded).

NEARBY

Microclimate in the Alpine garden at the Jardin des Plantes

17

The Alpine garden at the Jardin des Plantes is an amazing place first conceived in the 1930s. Constructed 3 metres below the level of the rest of the botanical gardens, and thus protected from both heat and cold, by means of the interplay of rocks and irrigation it mimics the microclimates of several mountainous regions. Within a confined space, there are temperature differences of up to 20°C. The garden can thus take pride in over 2,000 different plant species, including the famous but rare edelweiss, all cohabiting in an area measuring less than 4,000 m².



Buffon's *gloriette* (gazebo), at the summit of the maze in the Jardin des Plantes, is the oldest metallic construction in France. Born in the town of Montbard, Buffon directed the famous foundry there, which produced the steel used to build these metal structures.

SECRETS OF THE ÉCOLE DES BEAUX-ARTS

24

All the magic of Paris

14, rue Bonaparte

01 47 03 50 74

beauxartsparis.fr

Metro: Saint Germain des Prés



Occupying 2 hectares of land in the very heart of the Saint-Germain-des-Prés area, the École des Beaux-Arts is one of those places that are an essential part of the magic of Paris. Some of the structures date back to the 17th century, and all around are works by the art students themselves, giving the place a uniquely romantic atmosphere. The oldest part of the art school is the chapel and connected buildings; these were built at the beginning of the 17th century for the monastery of the Petits Augustins friars and paid for by Queen Margot; the money was said to have been acquired dishonestly (*mal acquis*), hence the name of the nearby quai Malaquais.

When the chapel was deconsecrated in 1795, Alexandre Lenoir (1761–1839) used it to house a Musée des Monuments Français; when that closed in 1816, the building became part of the École des Beaux-Arts. Today, it houses various copies of works from the French and Italian Renaissance, including the *Gates of Paradise*, the original of which were produced by Ghiberti for the Baptistery of Florence Cathedral, and Xavier Sigalon's copy of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*.

The glazed courtyard (1832) was the inspiration for Labrouste's design for the Reading Room at the Bibliothèque Imperiale (now the Bibliothèque Richlieu, see page 36). The so-called Amphithéâtre d'Honneur – also known as the Award Amphitheatre – is famous for the Paul Delaroche painting *La Renommée distribuant des couronnes* (*Fame Distributing Crowns*).

The study hall, the exhibition space and the examination building are by the architect François Debret, whose work here was continued by his pupil and brother-in-law, Félix Duban; they were also responsible for the restoration of the entrance courtyard, the chapel courtyard and the magnificent cour des Mûriers (Mulberry Courtyard), an authentic Florentine-style cloister. The final extension to the École des Beaux-Arts came in 1883, with the purchase of the Hôtel de Chimary and its annexes at 15 and 17, quai Malaquais. Conveniently, the porter at the rue Bonaparte entrance often mistakes visitors for students, so you can inspect the magnificent cloister – just to the right of the entrance – without being disturbed.





NEARBY

◀ Chimney of the Eiffel Tower

③

RER: *Champ de Mars*

Tucked behind the western pier of the Eiffel Tower, few may have noticed a brick-built pillar surrounded by bushes. This dates from the work on the tower's foundations (1887) and was a chimney linked by a duct to the old machine room under the south pier.

Napoleon's real tombstone

④

Western façade of the Church of Les Invalides

Metro: *École Militaire*. RER: *Pont de l'Alma*

On the left-hand side of the Church of Les Invalides (when seen from its main entrance on rue de Tourville), hidden very discreetly at the foot of a tree and behind a small thicket, is Napoleon's real tombstone (now in three pieces).

The tombstone was brought back on board the boat *La Belle Poule* from Saint Helena in 1840, along with the remains (but not necessarily the ashes) of the emperor. The boat landed at Cherbourg on 30 November 1840. Six days later, the remains were taken on the steamboat *Normandie*, which then transferred its precious cargo to the *La Dorade* at the port of Valde-la-Haye near Rouen. The *La Dorade* travelled up the Seine as far as Courbevoie. From there the hearse progressed down the Champs-Élysées on its way to Les Invalides.

The white marble of the high altar of the Church of Saint-Paul-Saint-Louis, which was moved and rebuilt at the time of Louis-Philippe, consists of fragments of the emperor's tomb at Les Invalides.

Vertical gardens

Created by the botanist Patrick Blanc, these vertical gardens have become a cult in Paris. The various examples of Blanc's work can now be seen at: Musée du Quai Branly, 7th arrondissement; the Marithé et François Girbaud boutique, 6th arrondissement (see our guide *Unusual Shopping in Paris*); the interior courtyard of the Hôtel Pershing-Hall, 8th arrondissement; the Fondation Cartier, 14th arrondissement.

Curiously, house numbers on quai d'Orsay begin with No. 33. This is because, in 1947, part of the quai was renamed after Anatole France. However, changing the address of the Foreign Ministry was out of the question, given that 'Quai d'Orsay' is as synonymous with French foreign affairs.

DEYROLLE

20

A veritable museum of the natural sciences

46, rue du Bac

01 42 22 30 07

deyrolle.com

Monday 10am–1pm and 2pm–7pm, Tuesday–Saturday 10am–7pm

Metro: Rue du Bac



© Deyrolle

A veritable museum that is more a cabinet of curiosities than a shop, Deyrolle is extraordinary as the last surviving taxidermy* business in Paris, and one of the very few remaining in France as a whole (see our guide *Unusual Shopping in Paris*).

Housed in this fine town mansion of the 7th arrondissement since 1888, the Deyrolle business was actually founded in 1831 as a result of Jean-Baptiste Deyrolle's passion for natural history. His first and principal client was the State: the colour plates and stuffed animals that adorned the lecture halls of natural science faculties came from his studio. Nowadays, the premises are a treasure trove for collectors, decorators and set designers, with Deyrolle offering an amazing display of stuffed animals (lions, elephants, zebras ...) and superb collections of insects, butterflies, fossils and minerals. Enthusiasts can also find originals or replicas of those famous teaching materials (plates, illustrations, etc). While the animals from all the continents of the world are available for purchase or hire, they do come at a price: a white rabbit costs €400, an immense Canadian elk €13,000, a magnificent golden pheasant or a coypu €480 ... and the famous tiger €30,000. If your budget is more limited, you can always go for a butterfly – from €5 to €300, depending upon rarity – or an unusually shaped coleopteran. You can also have your favourite pet stuffed; however, this service is not available for protected species or those that require special hunting permits.

For any further information, see Yves, the charming salesperson who has been running the place since 1990.

The telescopic streetlamps on the Pont du Carrousel

Designed and created by the ironsmith/sculptor Raymond Subes in 1938, the Art Deco streetlamps of the Pont du Carrousel (itself built in 1935) were finally installed in 1946. So as not to obstruct the view of the Louvre, they were designed with a very special feature: their height varied from daytime to night-time. When darkness fell, the lamps extended to their full height, from 12 metres to 22 metres, so that they could efficiently illuminate the entire bridge. Unfortunately, the lamps have not been working for some years now and are awaiting restoration by the city's public works department.

* Taxidermy: the art of preserving (stuffing) animals so that they maintain a lifelike appearance. From the Greek taxis (order, arrangement) and derma (skin).

CHURCH OF SAINT-ESPRIT

⑦

A replica of the famous Santa Sophia in Istanbul

186, avenue Daumesnil

01 44 75 77 70

Daily 9.30am–7pm

Metro: Daumesnil



Built in 1928-1935 to designs by the architect Paul Tournon, this church has a spectacular interior that cannot fail to impress. It is, in fact, a small-scale replica of the famous basilica of Haghia Sophia in Istanbul, with burgundy-red bricks facing a reinforced concrete structure built by François Hennebique.

At the time, the use of concrete was itself a demonstration of technical prowess – particularly in the creation of the cupola, whose height (33 metres) is a reference to Christ's age at his death. The crypt of the church measures 33 metres by 27 metres.

Over 70 artists worked on the decoration of the church, making it one of the most important examples of Christian religious art in the period between the two world wars. The church now figures in the supplementary register of listed buildings.



Other examples of Byzantine architecture in Paris

In the period between the two world wars, Cardinal Verdier launched a massive campaign to “re-Christianize” the area of Paris. The dozen or so churches which he commissioned were often inspired by Byzantine architecture, which at the time was considered the “Christian” style ‘par excellence’. Thus, along with the church of Saint-Esprit, there is the church of Sainte-Odile (2, avenue Stéphane Mallarmé, 17th arrondissement), the church of Sainte-Jeanne-de-Chantal (16th arrondissement) and the chapel of the Auxiliary Sisters (see page 115).

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Winemaking firefighters, a tree in a church, an inverted phallus at a well-known entrance, an atomic bomb shelter under Gare de l'Est, unsuspected traces of former brothels, the patron saint of motorists, royal monograms hidden in the Louvre courtyard, the presentation of Christ's crown of thorns, a prehistoric merry-go-round, a sundial designed by Dalí, war-wounded palm trees, bullet holes at the ministry, religious plants in a priest's garden, a mysterious monument to Freemasonry at the Champ-de-Mars, a solid gold sphere in parliament, a Chinese temple in a parking lot, the effect of the Bièvre river on Parisian geography, a blockhouse in the Bois de Boulogne ...

For those who thought they knew Paris well, the city is still teeming with unusual and secret places that are easily accessible.

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