

The 7th arrondissement has become my Parisian neighborhood. Ten years ago the business demands on my time were minimized, allowing long, biannual trips to France. We alternate our time between Paris and the provinces, as they are so different and each has its own charm. The months of April and October have become our favorites, although we have found no really bad time. May is beautiful but rife with strikes, manifestations, and a plethora of holidays with their incumbent extensions, as the French are unsurpassed in "faisant le pont", which leads to havoc in trying to plan transportation, visits to exhibitions, museums, restaurants, ad nauseum.

Our first several trips were randomly scattered throughout the 1st, 5th, 6th, 7th and 13th Arrondissements, all of which we drank deeply from and still take the occasional sip from with each visit, but the 7th became more and more our drink of choice. We prefer the area of the 7th from the Invalides to the Champ de Mars because of the green, open spaces provided by the wide, tree-lined boulevards such as Blvd. de Breteuil, Ave. de la Bourdonnais, Bosquet, and the beautiful Esplanade, and of course the aforementioned Champ de Mars. This provides a feeling of sedate calm which is comforting to come back to each night after sampling the crowded, near-frenzy of the Latin Quarter with all of its delights, or the mobs around the Place du Tertre and Sacre Coeur with its incomparable view, or the traffic and congestion around the Place de la Concorde and the Champs Elysées. This is not to say that there are none of the requisite "bums" strategically stationed by the ATM machines, but my beggar-meter registers a far lower reading than in most neighborhoods. Don't mistake this part of the 7th for the area east of Invalides which is full of imposing former palaces that are now embassies and other government buildings . . . rather cold and impersonal. The part of the 7<sup>th</sup> where we stay in is still a little village: bustling with life and filled with markets, shops and restaurants.

We started our visits by staying in hotels: Lutetia, Colbert, Brighton, Ritz, Splendide, Bourdonnais, and lastly the Muguet, which was such a great value compared to the others that we became regulars there and were spoiled and taken under the wing of Catherine Pelletier, who is the second generation owner. Through the years we have become great friends with the Pelletier family and have had their beautiful daughters as our guests in Florida.

About four years ago we decided to try renting an apartment since our stays were for a minimum of two weeks. At first we tried a beautiful-but-sadly-neglected apartment on Ave. Segur, which was managed by a company for an obviously miserly owner. Next trip we rented a romantic loft on rue Champ de Mars with a drop-dead view of the Eiffel Tower . . . from the bed no less. The owners were very pleasant and accommodating, and we would still be there except it is a loft and the bathroom is downstairs. This was of little consequence to my wife, but if you are prostatically challenged, those nocturnal stair negotiations interfere with a good night's sleep.

Our next foray into apartment rental was a large, well-equipped spot at the foot of the rue Mouffetard-St. Medard area. The owners could not be any nicer. He is an American physician with two places to rent. The area was interesting with all necessities close by and metro and bus lines right in front, but we found ourselves missing the ambience we have come to love in "our" area of the 7th arrondissement.

At this point we discovered Paris Perfect and the rest is history. Let me try to describe the owners; Madelyn is an absolute dynamo; gracious, friendly to a fault; a "room brightener." She has travelled extensively; lived in Italy, California, France and presently London. She graduated from Stanford Business School, worked as an investment banker, but now seems to have found her calling—helping to remodel, out-dated apartments and using her skills in decorating to turn them into dazzlers. She constantly has a zillion projects going on in her fertile mind and this is where it is appropriate to introduce Philippe, her husband of 18 years. Philippe trained some 16-odd years to become a cardiovascular surgeon on a world-renowned team in Paris, but had the vision to change professions when the government changed the rules on compensation just after he finished his training. He is the organizer, negotiator, strong stable hand that complements Madelyn's inventiveness and cheerful, unflagging optimism. Philippe lived many years in this particular part

of the 7<sup>th</sup>; for over a decade, he and some local merchants played a nightly game of pinball in the local café' as a break from his medical studies. As a result, he knows the St. Dominique-Rapp-Bourdonnais neighborhood and knows most of the local merchants and their history, which gives him the upper hand in knowing when a desirable apartment might become available. They truly want to please their guests . . . Madelyn had proudly installed a marvelous (read expensive) Miele washing machine before our first visit, and I mentioned that a dryer would be nice for four-to-six week renters, even though the apt is small (just over 550 sq. ft). When we returned, voila, a new washer/dryer had been installed; I mentioned that the TV was a tad small to read the scrolling stock quotes from across the room . . . that SAME afternoon when we returned after one of our Parisian forays a much larger TV was in place . . . satellite, of course. For this price I expect quality bath towels, ironed bed linens, Delleherin equipped kitchen, but what can't be anticipated is the personal involvement of the owners in going out of their way to maximize your enjoyment. If Madelyn or Philippe isn't there, their manager lives close by and helps coordinate everything.

At last count they have built their holdings up to about 9 luxury apartments of varying size, all in the same neighborhood. The cost was more than we had ever paid in the past, but now we are hooked. We have stayed in the same apartment the last three trips, and have booked it for the next few visits. The apartment has seven full-length French doors and a wrap-around-the-corner balcony, furnished with two cafe tables which are ideal for enjoying a petite dejeuner or a particular libation in the evening. There is a view of the Eiffel Tower from all seven windows which is mesmerizing when it starts sparkling every hour after sundown from our fifth floor location.

The beauty of staying in the same area is getting to know the locals; the dry cleaner across the street (on rue St. Dominique) knows us by name; the butcher shop lady knows that we love her cucumber/cream salad and will fix it even out of season when we are there. Julian, the wine shop guy downstairs, invites us to taste new bottles of wine; Christian Constant of Michelin star fame, stops on the street and shakes hands as he goes from his Cafe Constant to his Violon d'Ingres; Laurent Martin from Le Florimond restaurant sends us postcards when he is on vacation. Ginette Boyer from Le Petite Tonneau stops to show us pictures of her vacation home in Normandy. The Pelletier family (Hotel Muguet) has us to dinner or takes us on little jaunts outside of Paris. My previously held image of the rude, haughty Parisian has been unalterably shattered. Imagine how nicely a George Clooney clone would be treated rather than a portly, balding 60-something-year-old that does unspeakable things to the French language.

Within a couple of hundred meters from our apartment there are three bakeries, three butcher shops, and excellent greengrocers. Not to mention florists, chocolatiers, traiteurs (Asian and otherwise), grocery stores and the always popular Rue Cler street market—with everything imaginable including Davoli and LeNotre with Fauchon just around the corner on Ave. de la Motte-Piquet. Restaurants abound of all price ranges, from Jules Verne, Violon d'Ingres, Arpege, Le Divellec on the starred end, to great value fixed-price places such as Le P'tit Troquet, Clos des Gourmets and Bistro de Breteuil. Then there are the bountiful cafes from Costes brothers' fashionista-type places right down to the working class, stand-at-the-counter joints. There is a wine bar, Le Sancerre, just up from us on Av. Rapp and a piano bar (Malone's) on Av. Bosquet near the Ecole Militaire. My wife assures me that the nail salons and coiffures are of excellent quality . . . one is staffed with a voiturier, if you are concerned about leaving your Bentley on the street. (I have discouraged her from using that one). St. Dominique has an abundance of small boutiques, including a label-removed (dégriffé) shop. There are two metro stops within a seven-minute walk, and across the street from the apartment are stops for the 42, 69, and 87 buses. The Ecole Militaire is a five-minute walk and it is a major transportation hub.

One of our favorite past-times is to take our basket and meander through the travelling street markets, and our very favorite one is on Avenue Saxe between the Place de Breteuil and Ecole Militaire, with the Eiffel Tower standing watch. This is where we buy most of our cheese, nuts,

fruits, olives, eggs, etc. In the fall there are displays of more species of mushrooms than I knew existed, along with fresh game: pheasants, hare, wild boar, etc. displayed in full gruesomnolence (you didn't know that is a word, but neither do Webster or LaRousse). In the spring the fat, white asparagus is irresistible. As I said, we buy most of our cheese there, but for the cheese connoisseurs our neighborhood has Marie-Anne Cantin and Androuet . . . good to know if Alain Ducasse may be dropping by for cocktails.

[www.Parisperfect.com](http://www.Parisperfect.com) is the URL and the apartment we have rented is named Champagne. We have inspected all of them and would gladly stay in any of them except perhaps the studio, which would be confining for six weeks, plus my wife would have to murder me in my sleep as she would be unable to escape the mellifluous sounds I emit while sleeping after a well-vinified repast.

There are many interesting neighborhoods in Paris as you can discover on your own or by reading Thirza Vallois' book, Around and About Paris. Each has its devotees and distinct personalities . . . I have grown comfortable with the 7th.