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**Opening Extract from...**

# Paris Revealed

The Secret Life of a City

Written by Stephen Clarke

Published by Black Swan

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# PARIS

## REVEALED



The **SECRET LIFE**  
of a **CITY**

**STEPHEN CLARKE**



**BLACK SWAN**

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To the Crimée Crew, and especially N, for revealing so much that is good about Paris.

To M, *bon vol.*

Paris is a bit like an ocean. It's a great place to live if you're a shark. There's loads of fresh seafood, and if anyone annoys you, you just bite them in half. You might not be loved by everyone, but you'll be left in peace to enjoy yourself.

If you're human, though, you spend your time floating on the surface, buffeted by the waves, preyed on by the sharks.

So the thing to do is evolve into a shark as quickly as you can.

(From *A Year in the Merde*)

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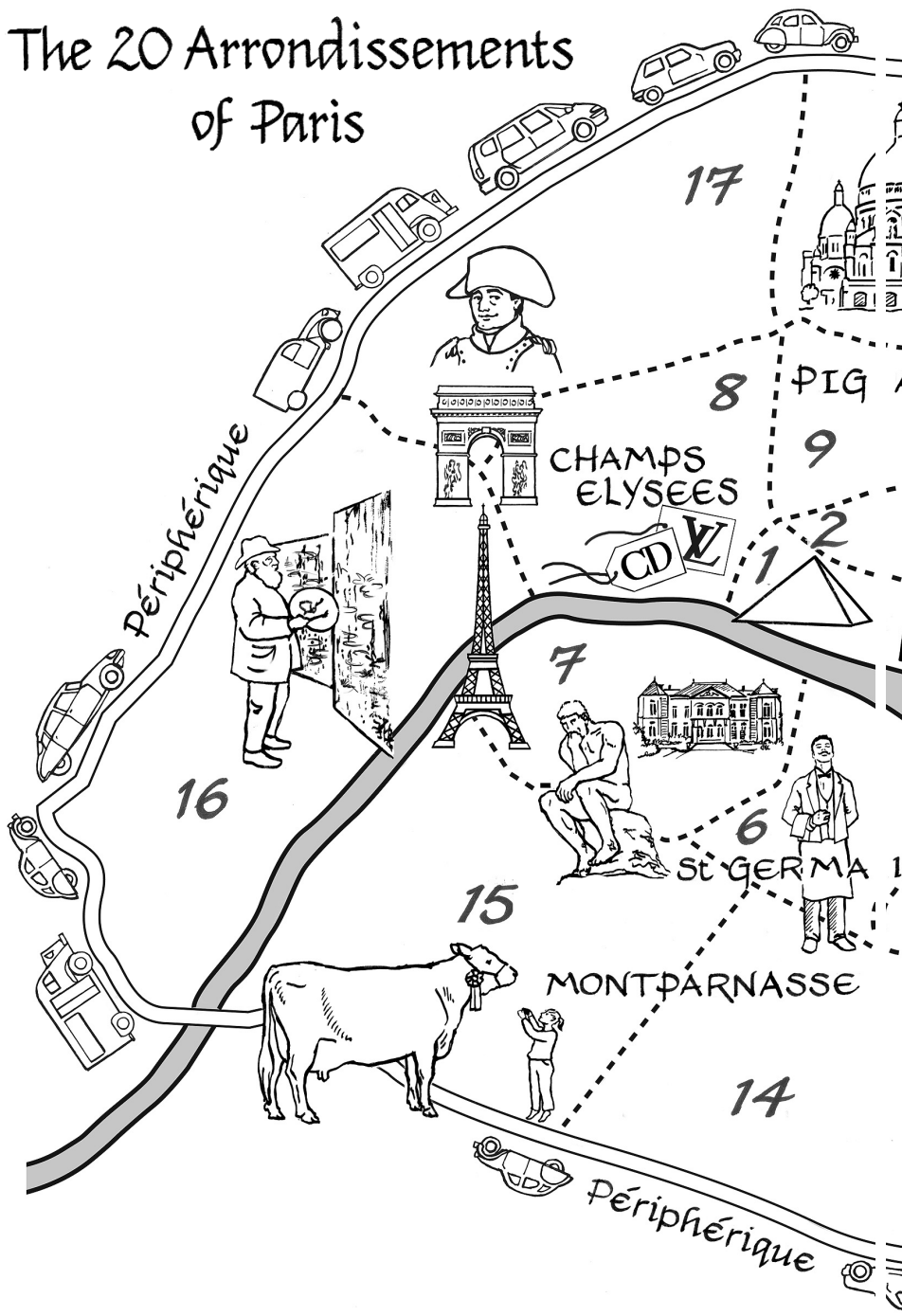
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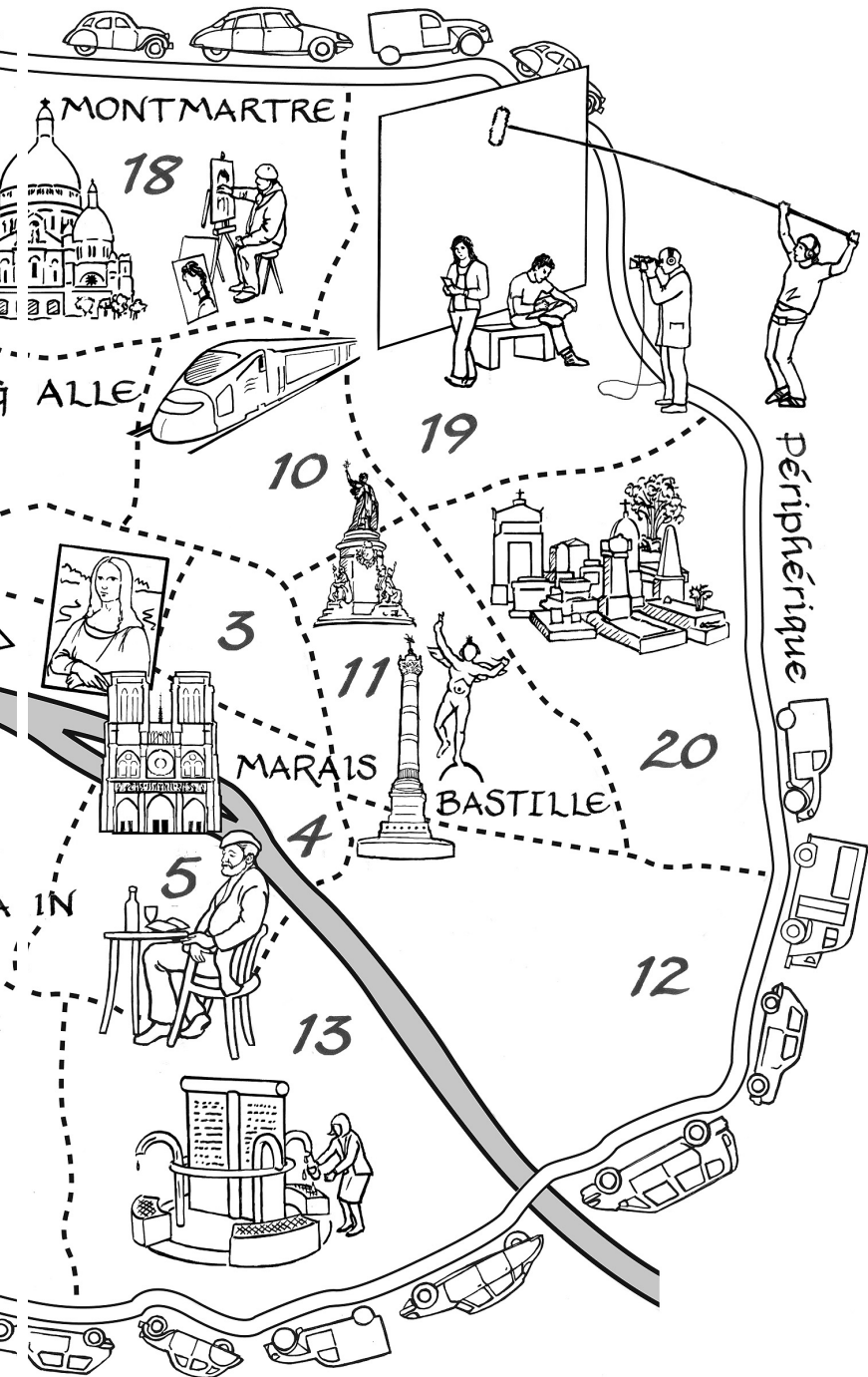
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# FOREWORD

PARIS IS like the world's most famous screen goddess. We've lost count of all the movies she's starred in – from romantic comedies and historical dramas to thrillers and even cartoons – and we feel as if we know everything about her thanks to all the photos, books, songs and glossy magazine covers that keep her constantly in the public eye.

But of course we don't know *everything*.

She's had many famous lovers, she's taken quite a few knocks in her long history, and like all true divas, she does her best to keep her private life very private. There are things that she needs us to know, and others she would prefer to sweep under her expensive carpet.

This book, however, is designed to reveal her secrets.

The idea is not to turn anyone off the city – on the contrary, I hope that Paris will become a real, fully rounded personality rather than the glitzy, romanticized image that is often projected at us by her fans and her backroom staff. After all, you don't truly fall in love with someone until you know what makes them tick.

And there is a lot to love. I've lived here most of my adult life and I'm still discovering seductive new eccentricities and eye-opening facts.

Make no mistake – Paris has got where she is today because she has genuine star quality. And, unlike most movie stars, this becomes more obvious when you see her close up. She even looks great first thing in the morning with no make-up and the sleep still in her eyes. Which is not bad for a 2,000-year-old.

Stephen Clarke, Paris, January 2011



'Welcome to Paris, you annoying tourist.' In fact, most Parisian waiters are very polite, much to the annoyance of visitors hoping to go home with anecdotes about grumpy service.

# 1

## PARISIANS

*Dieu a inventé le Parisien pour que les étrangers ne puissent rien comprendre aux Français.*

(God invented Parisians so that foreigners wouldn't understand the French.)

ALEXANDRE DUMAS THE YOUNGER,  
NINETEENTH-CENTURY WRITER

### Paris is full of Parisians

PARISIANS HAVE a terrible reputation for being self-centred, rude and aggressive, and the worst thing is that they're actually proud of it. A few years ago, the daily newspaper *Le Parisien* made a series of commercials that were shown in cinemas. As the paper is the local version of the national *Aujourd'hui*, the ads were obviously aimed at Parisians themselves.

One of the films shows a pair of lost Japanese tourists begging for help from a middle-aged Parisian man. He stares blankly at them as they point at their map and valiantly try to pronounce 'Eiffel'. Then, when the penny drops, he points them back along the way they came, and they thank him as if he'd just saved their lives. He goes off in the other direction, turns the street corner, and there, looming large, is the tower. The Parisian deliberately sent the

tourists the wrong way. Cue the punchline, *Le Parisien, il vaut mieux l'avoir en journal* – The Parisian, it's better to have it as a newspaper.

Another ad shows a respectable-looking man peeing against the outside of a public toilet. He zips up, walks away and smiles innocently at a woman whose shopping bag is standing in the rivulet of urine he's just created.

Then there's the one in which a guy strides quickly to a supermarket checkout, cutting in front of the little old lady with her meagre supply of groceries. He has been waiting in line for a few seconds when his wife turns up pushing a huge, overloaded trolley. The Parisian shrugs to the horrified old lady as if to say, well I did get here first. Cue the punchline.

And the funniest thing was that every time I saw one of these ads in a Parisian cinema, it got a huge laugh. I was astonished – it was as though the *New York Times* had put together a campaign saying that the paper was like its readers – thick and opinionated.

But Parisians don't mind the insult at all. On the contrary, they love to think of themselves as anti-social pushers-in, always trying to get one over on anyone gullible enough to fall for their tricks.

They even enjoyed the ad that went too far. In this one, a tall, chic Parisian businessman is seen leaving a café. He grudgingly accepts a business card from a small, subservient type who is leaving with him (from his grovelling demeanour, the little guy has to be a *provincial*). The Parisian goes to his flashy 4WD, reverses and hits a parked car. He's been seen by everyone sitting at the café terrace. He gets out to inspect the damage – his car is fine but he has dented the other car – and has a brainwave. He takes the little guy's business card out of his breast pocket, holds it up to show everyone what an honest fellow he is, and slips it under the windscreen wipers. The little loser is going to take the blame. One up for the totally amoral, treacherous Parisian, and the city's movie-goers cheered.

## Who actually likes the *Parisiens*?

A survey in early 2010 by *Marianne*, a national news magazine, asked its readers what they thought of Parisians, and the answer was a typically French contradiction.

Overall, provincials had a *bonne opinion* of the capital-dwellers, recognizing that they were sophisticated, well-educated and trendy – while also showering them with insults.

The survey found that Parisians were seen as arrogant, aggressive, stressed, snobbish and self-obsessed, as well as being much less generous, tolerant, light-hearted and welcoming than people from the provinces.

But was the *Marianne* survey accurate, or just a reflection of the clichés bandied about in the media (including those *Le Parisien* newspaper ads)?

Parisians certainly think of themselves as a race apart, probably because the city is separated from its suburbs not only by its postcodes, which all start with ‘75’, but also by physical barriers. The *boulevard périphérique*, the ring road that encircles Paris, is lined for much of its length with high-rise *HLMs* – *habitations à loyer modéré* (low-cost housing) – the modern version of the old city ramparts. And even though the walls have long disappeared, the twenty *arrondissements* comprising Paris itself are still referred to as *intra muros* – inside the walls. No wonder Parisians are considered snobbish – they’re using a medieval term to distinguish themselves from anyone unfortunate enough to live outside the *périph*’ (the abbreviation commonly used by the locals).

This sense of geographical uniqueness does seem a bit exaggerated, though. After all, a commuter who lives, say, 10 kilometres from Notre-Dame is still going to be pretty Parisian, even if he or she does live on the ‘wrong’ side of the *périph*’.

And commuting and working are at the root of the Parisians’ famous aggression. That man pushing past you on the *métro*, or

snarling at you when you ask directions in the street, probably got up at six that morning, wedged himself into a suburban train and/or a *métro* carriage, stood for forty minutes with his nose in someone else's armpit while the carriage jerked his spine out of shape, and then got told by his boss that his workload was being doubled because a colleague has been given three months' sick leave by an indulgent doctor. He's not going to smile at you if you can't find your way to the Sacré Coeur.

So, *oui*, Parisians and their suburban cousins are aggressive and stressed, but no more than the inhabitants of any big commuter city. And they seem intimidating only because they know how the city works, and therefore get impatient with people who don't – the tourists and provincials. To Parisians, cohabiting with outsiders is like going fishing with someone who has never baited a hook before. Surely *everyone* knows you're not supposed to throw the fishing rod in the water with the hook and line? No? Well, then they must be really, really stupid.

This uncomprehending impatience explains why Parisian drivers' fists seem to be permanently jammed on their hooter, and why waiters (who more often than not give perfect service, despite seeming to ignore you) can get irritable with their customers. Many diners, especially the non-French and non-Parisians, are mere part-timers in the restaurant game, and the waiters are old hands. They're simply expressing frustration at being forced to share their territory with untrained beginners.

In short, the Parisians' apparent unfriendliness is not a deliberate attempt to insult outsiders. It's just a symptom of their wish to get on with their lives.

On the other hand, the accusations of snobbishness and self-obsession are entirely justified, because right from birth, a sense of their city's greatness is hammered into Parisians' heads with a gold Chanel mallet.

Paris is undeniably the centre of the French-speaking universe.



It's only a slightly skewed interpretation on the part of some Parisians to see the city as the centre of the universe, full stop. The top dogs of pretty well every prestigious French institution – cultural, economic and political – have to be based in Paris to stay close to the centralized action, so the *crème de la crème* are always going to be here, and, being Parisian, will always think that their own particular brand of *crème* is the creamiest.

And their snobbishness is not only inflicted on outsiders – Parisians weave a tangled web of snobbery amongst themselves. For example, those in the posher *arrondissements* will look down on their less chic counterparts with a mixture of scorn and pity. Try telling someone from the ultra-snooty 7th on the Left Bank that you live on the other side of the river in, say, the 20th, and a polite grimace will come across their face as though you'd just confessed to an infestation of headlice. And it works both ways – a TV cameraman living in the northern media ghetto of the 19th will think of a blazer-wearing 16th *arrondissement* banker over in the southwest of the city as a slug-like, brainless slave of philistine capitalism. Meanwhile, someone with a loft in a pleasantly gentrified part of the 11th, but near to a poor neighbourhood, will see themselves as an urban pioneer, living much closer to the edge than a person whose apartment is 500 metres to the south.

The rules of Parisian snobbery are as complex as a 3-D chess game played on twenty boards at once, despite the fact that the city is a rough circle of only about 10 kilometres in diameter. The key thing being, of course, that if you don't live inside the circle, you're totally out of the game.

This is not to say that Parisians don't have their chinks of self-doubt. They can, for example, feel inferior to New Yorkers, San Franciscans, Londoners and the Milanese – in short, to anyone with their own superiority complex. And Parisians are scared of, and therefore a little overawed by, the poorer *banlieusards*, believing that anyone who can survive life in an ugly apartment block more

than a kilometre from a cinema or decent restaurant deserves *le respect*. And the success of French rap, as well as mainstream films like *Neuilly Sa Mère* and *Tout Ce Qui Brille* (in which young Arab *banlieusards* make fun of absurdly stereotyped snobbish Parisians), have proved that Paris is losing ground in the trendiness stakes – the irony being that as soon as a *banlieusard* rapper or film star becomes famous, they move *intra muros* and turn into typical *Parisiens*.

## ***Parisien-spotting***

Paris's twenty *arrondissements* contain some 2.2 million people, who can be as different as Champagne and absinthe and yet still remain quintessentially Parisian.

There are as many types of Parisians as there are fish on a coral reef. But what makes them all Parisian, apart from simple geography, is the way they interact. Like the fish, they have to negotiate their way around the reef. The small fry have to steer clear of the sharks; the shrimps have to watch how they cross the open spaces in case a crab runs them over; and for all his or her bright colours, even the most beautiful individual will never outshine the reef itself.

Certain species of Parisian gather in certain *arrondissements*, and take on the characteristics of the neighbourhood as if trying to camouflage themselves. Of course, there are dozens of subtypes that will have to be left out to avoid turning this book into a sociological encyclopaedia, but here is a run-through of the main species of Parisian you will find in each of the *arrondissements*, and the best places to see them. And the good news is that you won't need a mask and snorkel to explore this particular coral reef.

## The 1st

So much of the nucleus of Paris is taken up by the Louvre, the Palais-Royal and shops that hardly anyone lives there, except around Châtelet and Les Halles, where you can get a loft with a balcony and exposed wooden beams much more cheaply than in the nearby Marais. Though not many people want to live in an area that attracts all the suburban *racaille* (the establishment's insulting name for young wasters) who come in from the northern *banlieues* on the RER (the suburban *métro*) and hang around Les Halles, chatting each other up and getting hassled by the police. If you want to spot weekday locals, especially civil servants from the nearby Ministry of Culture and the Conseil d'État (the state's legal department), sit on the terrace of Le Nemours, the café at the entrance to the Palais-Royal gardens, near the Comédie Française theatre.

## The 2nd

Until about fifteen years ago, this was an area of fascinating contrasts. The Sentier was still full of clothes workshops, while the newly pedestrianized area around the rue Montorgueil was attracting all sorts of intellectuals and their families, just metres away from the rue Saint-Denis, where prostitutes stood in every doorway. Now gentrification is almost complete – the Sentier is getting lofted up, rue Montorgueil has changed from a street market into a hipsters' food court where you can get mango sushi, and the prostitutes are being squeezed out. The only time you can see residents *en masse* is on a Sunday morning, when the buggy brigade come out to buy their baguette and grab a coffee before the sushi fans arrive. Local-watching is best outside any café on the rue Montorgueil at eleven o'clock on a Sunday morning.

## The 3rd

This comprises the northern half of the Marais, gentrified long enough ago to have achieved maturity. Its remarkably quiet medieval streets house art galleries (thanks to the Picasso Museum run-off effect), tasteful estate agencies, clothes shops and ultra-trendy restaurants, peopled by exactly the kind of staff – young and slightly snooty – that you'd expect. However, the shops and cafés in the rue de Bretagne are surprisingly down-to-earth, and mainly cater to the arty young things who can afford to live nearby. Spotting spot: the Café Charlot on the corner of rue Charlot and rue de Bretagne. The interior is a bit of an 'Old Paris' theme park, but locals don't care because the terrace is so sunny. It's packed every lunchtime with *fashionistas* from the area's showrooms. The same goes for the lunchtime foodstalls in the nearby hyper-hip Enfants Rouges market.

## The 4th

Forty years ago the heart of the Marais was a gloomy dump inhabited by people who had been there for ever. The *hôtels particuliers* (urban mansions) were soot-blackened and falling down. This was why the city felt free to unleash the wave of destruction that gave us Les Halles (in the 1st), the Centre Pompidou (known by Parisians as Beaubourg) and the hideous modern Quartier de l'Horloge.\* These days, post-gentrification, the Marais' surviving buildings are all spruced up and it's almost impossible to identify any residents, except perhaps for the second-home Americans on café terraces on a Sunday morning and the parents watching their toddlers play in the small public gardens. The area does attract some easily spotted Parisian groups, though – gays (along the rue des Archives, where I once heard a little girl ask her dad, 'Papa, why does that princess have a moustache?'), Jews

\* For more on the demolition, see Chapter 5.

(shabat in the rue des Rosiers is a veritable falafel-fest) and shoppers. Neither the Jews nor the gays follow the old-fashioned French Tuesday-to-Saturday shopping timetable, so the area buzzes all week long. Spotting spot: the falafel bars and bakeries on the rue des Rosiers, or Les Marronniers, the gay and straight brunch place at the bottom of the rue des Archives.

## The 5th

A large but subtly disguised proportion of Paris's old money is concentrated here. The Latin Quarter used to provide shelter for penniless writers like James Joyce and Samuel Beckett, but these days they couldn't afford to live there, except maybe above a *crêperie* in the rue Mouffetard. The residents of all but the tiny *chambres de bonne* (top-floor garrets) dress down so the taxman won't ask how much their apartment is worth, and these people's kids try to look sloppy so they won't get mugged by the youths who come into the area on phone-hunting trips. You see that dowdy-looking middle-aged woman with a baguette and a sprig of parsley poking out of the top of her beaten-up shopping bag? She's a property millionairess, and one day she'll leave her fortune to those schoolkids who are huddling around a café table making a coffee last for hours and smoking their cigarette as though it cost them all their pocket money (which it will do if Papa finds out they've been smoking). The locals shop for food in the rue Mouffetard, despite the heavy presence of tourists, and some of them sit in the sun at the place de la Contrescarpe, though they all retreat to their country houses in high tourist season.

## The 6th

A lot like the 5th, except that the people here are more ostentatious, and the youngsters feel freer to show off their Lacoste polo shirts,

Rolexes and vintage Vespas. Look out for '80s throwbacks with knotted pullovers around their shoulders, and girls with the kind of free-flowing hair and perfect teeth you see only on billboards. This is also home to the most intellectual publishing houses, so cafés attract a concentration of loud pontificators, old guys sharing a drink with their pile of manuscript paper, and sophisticated smokers on the lookout for a woman who'll be impressed to know that she's meeting a part-time poet. Spotting spots: Les Éditeurs, the book-lined café at Odéon, where writers and publishers gather to talk loudly about book prizes. Also the café Bonaparte, on the corner of the rue Bonaparte and the place Saint-Germain des Prés. Here you can sit amongst lunching locals and watch the hyper-trendy and those with limitless expense accounts heading for La Société, the hot restaurant behind the discreet door diagonally right as you look out from the Bonaparte's façade.

## The 7th

Saying that you're moving to the 7th is a bit like admitting, 'Well, I've thought it over and I now realize that I do deserve that Rolls-Royce I've always wanted.' Either that or 'I've been made director of the Musée d'Orsay.' The people there are posh and they know it. To spot the poshest of the lot, go to La Grande Épicerie, the grocer's shop next to the Bon Marché department store, and look out for the kind of person who has to tell their friends, '*Naturellement*, I always buy my Earl Grey from La Grande Épicerie.' Another excellent spot is Le Concorde, at 239 boulevard Saint-Germain, the closest café to the Assemblée Nationale, the lower house of France's Parliament. Before debates, politicians huddle here to talk amongst themselves or dictate notes to their glamorous assistants, the sexiest politics students in the country.

## The 8th

The only Parisians who live here full-time are rich old ladies who wear a fur coat as soon as the temperature drops below 20 degrees centigrade, along with their ancient, ex-playboy husbands, and the newly very rich who need a large underground garage to park their 4WD BMW. Other than that, it's mostly offices, shops, theatres and fashion houses, with the Champs-Élysées running through the middle. I used to work in this part of town, and for me, the most fascinating people-watching was outside L'Avenue, the posh café on the corner of the rue François Premier and the avenue Montaigne. It is so essential to be seen there that in the middle of winter you will spot a full row of facelifts late-lunching outdoors on the terrace when everyone else is rushing back to their office to get out of the cold. If you actually want to sit in comfort and eat, wander up François Premier to L'Antenne, the café on the corner of the rue de la Trémoille. Here, office workers and media types from Europe 1 radio station gather at lunchtime for an unpretentious break from the daily grind.

## The 9th

Until very recently, the area between Pigalle and the Galeries Lafayette was where people moved when they couldn't decide which *arrondissement* they liked best. Nowadays it's going the same way as the 2nd. The internet is killing both the sex shops and the guitar shops, and the neighbourhood is becoming breathlessly trendy. Drab cafés are being made over as 'traditional bistros', where *carpaccio de boeuf* has replaced *jambon-beurre* (ham baguette) on the menu, to cater for the new clientele of artfully unshaven men, and women who use Ray-Bans to hold their hair in place. You can still see a few old-style occupants of the neighbourhood – sex-shop owners and ageing prostitutes – in the small cafés just south of the place Pigalle. But beware, if an underdressed girl in a foreign accent

comes up and says hello as soon as you enter a bar – you're in for a very expensive drink. To see the biggest concentration of trendy newbies, head for the Hôtel Amour's restaurant in the rue de Navarin.

## The 10th

This is a bit of a no-man's-land. Around the Gare du Nord and along the boulevard de Strasbourg, it's as sordid as it ever was, though the Sri Lankan community to the north of the station is now settling in and cleaning it up, and incidentally providing some of the best and cheapest ethnic food in the city. At Château d'Eau *métro*, touts for the African hairdressers hustle women to come and get their locks braided or straightened. Fifteen years ago, the canal zone in the east of the *arrondissement* was the hippest area in Paris, and it still attracts plenty of night-time revellers, either crowding into the laid-back restaurants and bars or sitting along the waterside, watching the drunks stumble into the murky water. My favourite spotting spots are the Sri Lankan cafés near La Chapelle *métro* station, where Tamils gather for an early dinner or after-work chat, or one of the bridges over the Canal Saint-Martin when the summer-evening picnics are in full swing. And just for a taste of the really seedy side of Paris, a quick dash over the Strasbourg–Saint-Denis crossroads will take you past cheap Chinese streetwalkers and all the lowlife that these cruelly exploited new immigrants attract.

## The 11th

Bastille, formerly a furniture-making area, has become a big-brand shopping ghetto, but beyond the rue de la Roquette and the rue du Faubourg Saint-Antoine, this is still a lively, varied *arrondissement*, with gentrifiers living alongside Arab corner-shop owners and ordinary Parisians who will struggle if you ask them the way to Père



Lachaise cemetery in English. The Oberkampf area is still one of the best venues for bar-crawling, and attracts slightly rough-edged crowds from the late teens to forty-somethings practically every night of the year. For cooler, terrace-based people-watching, it's best to head for the Pause Café on the corner of the rue de Charonne and the rue Keller, in the area made famous (to other Parisians, at least) by the 1996 film *Chacun Cherche son Chat* (also released under the English title *When the Cat's Away*).

## The 12th

This is a far-flung *arrondissement* inhabited by a mix of middle-class people who wanted a cheaper alternative to the 11th, and poor edge-of-townners. The most interesting spots are the Coulée Verte ('green flow') gardens heading out from Bastille along the old railway track, and the hub of activity around the place d'Aligre. This is a densely packed Sunday market that makes your mouth water and your toes hurt, as you jostle to buy cheap food and get stomped on by the hurried locals. It's Paris at its democratic, people-watching best, with rich and poor vying elbow-to-elbow to get served, and stalls selling Spanish strawberries at suspiciously low prices just metres away from the old market hall where you can buy hand-picked, organic, individually boxed French varieties that cost as much per kilo as a second-hand Renault.

## The 13th

This is home to Paris's biggest and most Chinese Chinatown, with some startlingly authentic restaurants and a real colonial feel near the Porte de Choisy. It's also home to the Butte aux Cailles, the hilltop village of lanes and low-rise houses that is the southern Parisians' alternative to Montmartre. I used to think that the name 'Quails' Hill' was cutely rustic until I was told that *caille* was an old

word for prostitute. These days, there are no brothels, but you might see some Chinese masseuses taping their phone numbers to lampposts. In the evenings, the Butte is a young people's party zone, with student types bustling around in front of the bars and waiting patiently for a table at the incredibly popular Café Gladines, the cheap and cheerful Basque restaurant at 30 rue des Cinq Diamants.

## The 14th and 15th

As far as people-watching is concerned, these are of interest only to someone doing a PhD on the Parisian middle-class family. There is absolutely nothing wrong with Parisian middle-class families, it's just that they're not the world's most colourful tribe. One of the oases of liveliness is the huge traditional brasserie La Coupole, on the boulevard du Montparnasse, where Parisians usually outnumber tourists, and gather to eat mountains of seafood. If you tell the restaurant it's your birthday, the waiters will troop towards your table chanting, 'Ça, c'est Paris', and then they will crowd around you to sing 'Joyeux Anniversaire' while you squirm with embarrassment and try to avoid getting your nose burnt by the Roman candle on top of the birthday cake – which is a dummy, by the way.

## The 16th

This vast *arrondissement* is mostly a rather dull blend of *grand bourgeois* and tacky new money. In the daytime, the parks are crammed with immigrant nannies and the designer shops are full of desperate housewives. In the evening, they're all either at home or out for dinner in the 7th or the Bois de Boulogne. The deathly gentility is disturbed only on match days, when Paris Saint-Germain football fans swarm to the Parc des Princes for a session of racist chanting. Best place to spot locals in the wild is on the long

walk from the *métro* station La Muette to see the Impressionist paintings at the Musée Marmottan. The 16th is also the *arrondissement* that spawned what many people see as the archetypal Parisian *homme* – floppy hair, designer jeans, effortless charm, seen-it-all (but wouldn't be seen dead in the T-shirt) attitude – though he is more usually to be found bantering his way around the bars and restaurants of the 6th.

## The 17th

The 17th is so far away from everything that it's hard to imagine it's *intra muros*. Quite honestly, I have very little idea who lives here. There is an outburst of shopping activity at Ternes and a posh, 8th-style area around the Parc Monceau, with lots of lawyers' offices, but the only 17th people who have stuck in my mind are transvestites – for a short while, I lived near the Porte de Saint-Ouen, which was a cruising zone for men who like men dressed as ladies, and I once saw a kind of mini Rio carnival as three ten-foot-tall cross-dressers strutted flamboyantly towards their pick-up points.

## The 18th

Montmartre is home to Paris's artists and can-can dancers, and on a good day you will see Picasso out sketching with Van Gogh, and Toulouse-Lautrec hobbling after a petticoated lady, begging to paint her portrait. Or maybe not – in reality, Montmartre today is a village populated by Parisians rich enough to have bought houses with fantastic views before the prices went crazy, slightly unconventional middle-class professionals who enjoy walking up hills, and tourists in search of a good photo of the city's rooftops. Nearby Barbès, on the other hand, is a multi-generational logjam of people from every part of Africa that France ever managed to colonize. To observe *l'Afrique française*, just walk northwards along the

boulevard Barbès on a Saturday afternoon and you'll go all the way to Senegal. Those in search of more trendy people-watching usually head up the hill to the bars and cafés on the rue Lepic to recapture the feel of the movie *Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain*.

## The 19th

Belleville, with its cluster of big Chinese brasseries, is resisting change, but the rest is getting seriously hip, with artists' studios and film-production companies herding in. Above Belleville, the Jourdain area is a media ghetto, with about 50 per cent of the population working in TV, cinema or radio. These are the *bobos* (bourgeois Bohemians) – Parisians trying to pretend they're not. Their apparent lack of style is a style in itself and make no mistake – that rumpled shirt and ruffled hair were rumpled and ruffled by professionals. All of which means that the café terraces are crowded non-stop because these people don't work regular office hours. On sunny days, they all go to the Buttes-Chaumont park to try and picnic on the dangerously sloping lawns (downhill-rolling wine bottles and melons are a frequent hazard). Further northwest, the area around the canal basin, the Bassin de la Villette, is not yet inhabited by trendies, and is one of the last poor, mixed-race *quartiers* inside the city. Blacks, Chinese, Arabs, Orthodox and Sephardic Jews and low-income Whites co-exist in a zone that will be almost entirely lofted over in ten years' time. Spotting spots: the Buttes-Chaumont whenever it's sunny, and the Bar Ourcq on the southeastern (sunny) side of the Bassin de la Villette, where young Parisians gather for evening *pétanque* picnics.

## The 20th

Until recently considered as a distant cultural and social wasteland, it's now a great place for small live-music venues. Apart from that,

its location means that it is home to lots of scooter-riding *bobos* who can afford to send their kids to private schools in better areas, as well as vestiges of poor people who are hanging on in Paris but might be forced to cross over the *périph'* to the suburbs if their rents rise any further. Spot two different types of trendies on one stretch of the rue de Bagnolet – rock fans in the Flèche d'Or, an old railway station that has been turned into a cool music venue, and just opposite, much snappier dressers in the bars and restaurants of the Mama Shelter Hotel, which until recently used to be one of the city's ugliest multi-storey car parks.

## How to become a Parisian

The Russian-born French actor Sacha Guitry once said, 'Être parisien, ce n'est pas être né à Paris, c'est y renaître.' In other words, to be a Parisian you don't have to be born here, it's all about being *re-born*. People re-invent themselves when they arrive, or at the very least evolve so that they will fit in.

And the good news is that it's really not too difficult to become a Parisian. There are no painful tattoos or initiation ceremonies to go through, just a change of look and attitude. And most Parisians have had to undergo this acclimatization process, because a very large proportion of them weren't born that way. They came here from all over the world, including other parts of France, and have battled their way through the city's obstacle course of manners to arrive at the finishing post as fully fledged Parisians. Even I, who was terrified of driving in Paris for the first five years, am now capable of swerving, swearing and hooting with the best of them.

Appropriately, it took a non-Parisian writer to define the process of Parisianization (Parisians don't have time to do such a thing). In 1938, the Swiss writer Charles Ferdinand Ramuz

published a book called *Paris, Notes d'un Vaudois* (Vaud is a Swiss canton), in which he said that:

Paris still enjoys the privilege of showing everyone how things should be done. And everyone living there shares this privilege. They don't need to be born in Paris. All they have to do is be in Paris and conform to Paris. The city will exclude anyone who doesn't belong there, and who does nothing to look as though they want to belong – people who refuse to adapt their appearance, their gestures and their way of speaking, and who try to impose their habits on Paris, immediately become suspect.

This need to conform is why Paris never really changes. Unlike cities such as London and New York, where newcomers bring fresh influences, everyone arriving in Paris gets pushed through the same pasta mould and ends up as a length of typically Parisian spaghetti, intertwined with all the others in the tasty but rather over-rich sauce that the city throws over everything.

And adaptation is not just about clothing and ways of speaking. What you have to do to become a Parisian is get it into your head that you are the most important being in the universe. Other people might *think* they are important, and must be humoured, but they are wrong. The only truly important thing is you and your life. Everything you want to do (or rather, *need* to do) is urgent and of vital importance, and you are therefore (regrettably) obliged to ignore the wishes of the other, lesser, beings, including your fellow Parisians. If anyone tries to stop you, you are perfectly entitled to get annoyed at them because they are just being ignorant.

And it works – as soon as you start acting like a Parisian, you will be accepted as one. Before you have completed the process, however, there is one vital skill that you have to develop as a survival tool . . .