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Where Parisians Go Out After the Sun Goes Down

By SETH SHERWOOD

WHEN evening settles over the Seine on Oct. 7, [Paris](#) will usher in its fifth annual Nuit Blanche festival, an all-night cultural extravaganza. In a host of neighborhoods — notably the Marais, the Goutte d'Or, Trocadero and Bercy — galleries, museums and public spaces will offer free exhibitions and special events lasting into the wee hours. For aesthetes and amateurs alike, the city's wide 19th-century boulevards and crooked medieval lanes will unfold myriad surprises, backlit by the moon and streetlamps.

But Paris's devotion to the nocturnal is scarcely a once-a-year phenomenon. On any night, in any season, all-night adventuring isn't just possible in Paris — it's de rigueur. At night, the City of Light unfurls a more prodigious, varied bounty of after-dark possibilities than just about any other place on earth. Fancy an aperitif in a gilded Old World hotel followed by a night at the opera? Facile. Dinner with “les beautiful people” before dancing at new V.I.P. nightclubs? Bien sûr. A late-night avant-garde art show and rock 'n' roll à la française? Pas de problème.

Like the seductive blackness of a Rorschach ink blot, a Parisian evening morphs effortlessly to every mood and indulges every fantasy. The only difficulty is choosing your trajectory in a nocturnal landscape that offers so many. Try one of the three below — the Classic, the Jet Set and the Alternative — or mix and match to create your own.

Classic Paris

A true Parisian evening should begin — must begin — with an aperitif, known to every French person as simply an apéro. Step into the 19th-century confines of L'Hôtel (13, rue des Beaux-Arts; 33-1-44-41-99-00) and order a kir royale (Champagne with syrup of cassis, peach or raspberry; 13 euros) amid the gilt columns, plush fabrics, bookshelves and thick rugs of the Empire-style bar. If you feel a surge of wit, you might be channeling the ghost of [Oscar Wilde](#), who died in the hotel in 1900.

For a beautifully illuminated tour of Paris monuments, take the 8 p.m. sightseeing trip with Paris Charms and Secrets (33-1-40-29-00-00; www.parischarmssecrets.com; 36 euros). Departing from the Place Vendôme and humming along on an electric bicycle, you'll be regaled with anecdotes from the English-speaking guides as you encounter the eerie glow of the St.-Sulpice church (famous from “The Da Vinci Code”), the radiant crystalline beauty of the [Louvre](#) pyramids and the glittering gold dome of Napoleon's tomb.

Built in the 1890's, the ornate bistro [Aux Lyonnais](#) (32, rue St.-Marc; 33-1-42-96-65-04) was bought in 2002 by [Alain Ducasse](#) and Thierry de la Brose. The pair has brought a stylish and sure-handed touch to Old World family cooking. From the wonderfully thick and crisply roasted poitrine of pig to the richly sweet mirabelle (a type of plum) soufflé, the dishes are robust and no-nonsense. A three-course meal for two, without wine, is about 90 euros (\$116 at \$1.29 to the euro).

The city's most refined musical spectacle awaits inside the colonnaded, gilded, carved, chiseled and statue-draped Opéra Garnier (Place de l'Opéra; 33-1-72-29-35-35; www.operadeparis.fr). Sitting in red velvet seats under the elaborate vaulted ceiling, painted by Marc Chagall, Parisians will soon take in [Mozart's](#) "Così Fan Tutte" (Oct. 23 to Nov. 8) and "Idomeneo" (Dec. 3 to 29). Seats are 7 to 160 euros.

Jet Set Paris

Fashion models may not be known for their huge appetites, but the buyers and designers who clothe them can't resist Kai (18, rue du Louvre; 33-1-40-15-01-99). A mascara-brush throw from the Carrousel du Louvre, the air-kissing hub of Paris fashion week, this subdued, of-the-moment Japanese restaurant is brightened by the flamboyant colors and asymmetrical garments of the clientele. Ditch the deep-fried mediocrity of the pork tonkatsu for the salad of maguro tuna and avocado, and ingest the rarefied air. A three-course meal for two, without drinks, runs about 120 euros.

Afterward, head west. In the words of last year's Guide Zurban, one of the city's bibles of cool, the major night life news of 2005 was "the grand return of the Champs-Élysées" as a clubbing hot spot after years of touristy mediocrity. This year, the cachet of the city's most famous street is even greater.

If you're wondering where the St.-Tropez crowd goes when the leaves turn, hit the White Room, the Saturday-only, music-fueled, V.I.P. love-in atop the Maison Blanche restaurant (15, avenue Montaigne; 33-1-47-23-55-99). From 12:30 a.m., luxury cars roll up, and the well-heeled crowd pleads like babies to be let into the teeming white space. Inside, French TV personalities, socialites, gilded youth and industry barons dance to hip-hop and classic disco. No cover.

But no Paris night spot has created a bigger splash than Le Baron (6, avenue Marceau; 33-1-47-20-04-01). Tucked in a formerly louche "hostess bar," the two-year-old bar-club has kept the seedy 70's kitsch décor — red walls, red banquettes, mirror ball — and created a new Studio 54 for a clientele of indie-film stars, rock 'n' roll elite and the fashion world's edgier young personalities. If you're chummy with patrons like Bjork, Sofia Coppola or [Mick Jagger](#), try to enter with them: the velvet ropes practically have velvet ropes. No cover.

And if you're seized by a burning 11th-hour desire for a new [Marc Jacobs](#) handbag, never fear. Open

until 2 a.m., the ritzy Drugstore Publicis (133, avenue des Champs-Élysées; 33-1-44-43-79-00) addresses late-night fashion emergencies and other last-minute needs. Weave through the clothing boutique, newspaper kiosk, bookstore, pharmacy and gourmet deli, and walk out with a bottle of Château Talbot wine (42 euros), a Dinh Van gold necklace (1,100 euros) and that coveted Marc Jacobs accessory (385 euros).

Alternative Paris

Like way stations for avant-garde insomniacs, a host of Parisian spots beckon after hours with art, cinema and rock 'n' roll. Your late-night fix for wildly conceived conceptual art is satisfied at the four-year-old Palais de [Tokyo](#) (13, avenue du Président-Wilson; 33-1-47-23-38-86; www.palaisdetokyo.com; 6 euros), a stylishly converted Art Deco-era complex that claims to be the world's only art center to remain open until midnight (closed Mondays). Among the current exhibitions, "One Second One Year" (through Dec. 31) features odd devices and contraptions that self-activate — or don't — at intervals, continually creating and frustrating viewers' expectations.

For foie gras with the self-styled bohemians, cruise Canal St.-Martin. Once a shipping channel of warehouses and industrial buildings, the waterway and its quays have been transformed in recent years into the city's hottest hangouts for young artists, musicians and designers. Taken over and revamped last year, the 19th-century Hôtel du Nord (102, quai de Jemmapes; 33-1-40-40-78-78) has quickly become the quarter's most à la mode bar-restaurant. Within the film-noir décor — zinc bar, tile floor, velvet curtains — Paris's creative demimonde dines on slightly jazzed-up French classics (dorade royale with fig chutney; filet mignon of pork with black linguine) and a sublime moelleux au chocolat. A three-course dinner for two runs about 60 euros.

Along the canal, a digestif might mean taking in a show of video installations, dancing to electro-house music or perhaps simply pumping your fist vigorously to searing rock 'n' roll music — all of which are specialties of Le Point Ephémère (200, quai de Valmy; 33-1-40-34

-02-48; www.pointephemere.org). Housed in a vast industrial structure, the complex is a fun house and creative incubator for artists and musicians that encompasses a bar-nightclub (with frequent D.J.'s), an exhibition space (with rotating shows) and a concert area. If the music gets too loud, buy a pint of beer (5.50 euros), retire outside among the canalside quaffers and listen to them explain why their band is better than yours.

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