Time Out Paris

Updated annually
Written by local experts

'Time Out’s city guides are unsurpassable'
The Times
Shakespeare & Company

A Left Bank literary institution.

Despite the relentless march of the mammoth international book retailers, Paris is home to a healthy number of maverick booksellers. Of these, the most famous is Shakespeare & Company (see p249), once described by Henry Miller as 'a wonderland of books.'

The first Shakespeare & Company was founded in rue de l'Odeon in 1919 by Sylvia Beach, and rapidly became a literary hub. In 1922, Beach was the first to publish Joyce's Ulysses, before eventually being closed down during the German occupation in 1941. Ten years later, American Francophile George Whitman moved his extensive personal collection of European and American literature into a little shop on rue de la Bûcherie and opened his own literary den, in much the same vein as Beach's original. When Sylvia died in 1962, Whitman's store adopted the name Shakespeare & Company.

George Whitman is now in his nineties, and his daughter Sylvia (named after Beach, of course) has taken over the business, which continues to boast the best selection of English language books in the city, and hosts regular readings and workshops. Upstairs, the 'Tumbleweed Hotel' (every room crammed to the rafters with books) provides temporary lodgings for literary travelers, who can earn their keep by helping out in the shop.

In recent years Sylvia and her team have pulled off something of a coup by setting up the Shakespeare & Company Literary Festival (www.festivalandco.com). The biennial four-day event (next edition set for June 2010) is no small-time affair; at last count attracted over 5,000 visitors.

Paul Auster and Siri Hustvedt were the headliners in 2008, together with Jeanette Winterson, Alain de Botton, Jung Chang, Victoria Glendinning, Amélie Nothomb and Catherine Millet.

'We don't put them up in posh hotels, but they love to come,' Sylvia says. 'It's completely different from other literary festivals. Here we have a glass of wine in the bookshop and you glance round and see Paul Auster chatting to an unknown writer. They love that aspect of the festival, and of course, they love to come to Paris.'

Most of the readings and debates are held in a marquee in square René Viviani next to the store, with special events in locations such as the Hôtel de Ville.

Back in the shop, it's as if modern life left this place behind: books from floor to ceiling, a dusty piano, and Colette the dog. From his room above the shop, George can still be seen looking out of the window, keeping an eye on his old friends - many of them literary luminaries who might pop by to pick up a rare edition, chat with Sylvia or give a reading.

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Zef
15 rue Debellemere, 3rd (01.42.76.05.65/ www.zef.eu), M° St-Sébastien Froissant. Open 11am-7.30pm Mon-Sat. Credit AmEx, DC, MC, V, Map p409 L5.

Zef's designer is the daughter of fashion photographer Paolo Roversi. The trendy children's separates have a classic Italian look, in soft muted colours with adorable details like elbow patches on the jackets. Boots, sheepskin gloves and hats are part of the range.

Other locations: 32 rue de Richelieu, 1st (01.42.20.01.49), 58c rue des St-Pères, 6th (01.42.22.02.93) babies and toddlers (01.42.22.45.22).

Toys & books

Traditional toyshops abound, department stores (see p239) go overboard at Christmas. For children's books in English, try WH Smith (see p243) or Brentano's (see p242).

Arche de Noé
70 rue St-Louis-en-l'Ile, 4th (01.46.34.61.60). M° Pont Marie. Open 10.30am-7pm daily. Credit AmEx, MC, V, Map p409 K7.

' Noah's Ark' is a great place for Christmas shopping, with traditional wooden toys from eastern Europe, games, figurines and finger puppets.

Fnac Junior
19 rue Vaud, 6th (01.56.74.03.46/www.fnac.com/jeunesse). M° Vavin. Open 10am-7.30pm Mon-Sat. Credit AmEx, MC, V, Map p405 G8.

Fnac carries books, toys, DVDs, CDs and CD Rom for the under-12s. Storytelling and other activities (Wed, Sat) take place for three-year-olds and up.

Other locations: throughout the city.

★ Au Nain Bleu
5 bd Malesherbes, 8th (01.42.65.20.00/www.au nainbleu.com), M° Madeleine. Open 2-7pm Mon; 10am-7pm Tue-Sat. Credit AmEx, MC, V, Map p401 F4.

The city's best toyshop, decorated like a circus tent, draws crowds of wonder from children. Wooden doll's houses, pirate ships and gorgeous dolls are made to last more than one generation. Photo p242.

Robopolis
167 bd Beaumarchais, 3rd (01.44.78.01.18/ www.robopolis.com), M° Filles du Calvaire. Open 11am-1pm, 2-7pm Tue-Sat. Credit AmEx, MC, V, Map p409 L5.

This is the only store in France devoted entirely to our friends electric, and as such it attracts gummo lovers of all ages. It's as much a showroom as a shop, with displays including dancing humanoids, white iPads that sing and read, and even robotic vacuum cleaners. Models such as Roboreptile and Meccano's 'build-your-own' robot sit at the top of kids' (and big kids') Christmas lists.

Village Joué Club
3-5 bd des Italiens, 2nd (01.53.45.41.41/ www.joueclub.fr), M° Richelieu Drouot. Open 10am-8pm Mon-Sat. Credit AmEx, MC, V, Map p405 H4.

Village Joué Club, the largest toy store in Paris, is spread out on ground level and in around passage des Princes.

FASHION

All the world's big-name designers have their own-label stores in Paris. In addition to international fashion juggernauts Mango, H&M and Zara, the high street has its fair share of Gallic cheapies: think Etam, Jennyfer and Pinkie. The highest density is in the Forum des Halles (see p240), on nearby rue de Rivoli, between the metro stations of Châtelet and Louvre-Rivoli, and around Galeries Lafayette and Printemps.

Designer

A-poc
47 rue des Francs Bourgeois, 4th (01.44.54.07.09). M° Rambuteau or St-Paul. Open 11am-7pm Mon-Sat. Closed 3-5pm Sun. Credit AmEx, DC, MC, V, Map p409 L6.

Issey Miyake's lab-style boutique takes a highly conceptual approach to fashion. A alongside ready-to-wear corner La crois ensembles are rolls of wool jersey cut to sur mesure; Miyake's assistants will be happy to advise.

Miyake's original shop (3 pl des Vosges, 4th, 01.48.87.01.86) is now home to the creations of Naoki Takizawa, protege of the old master.

Azzedine Alaïa
7 rue de Moussy, 4th (01.42.72.19.19). M° Hôtel de Ville. Open 10am-7pm Mon-Sat. Credit AmEx, DC, MC, V, Map p409 K6.

Ringing the doorbell gains you entry to the factory-style showroom in the same building as Alaïa's headquarters and apartment, where the 72-year-old Tunisian creator continues to astonish with his originality. Stunning haute couture creations are in the back room, and sexy shoes bordering on fetish are scattered among the mannequins and rails.

Balenciaga
10 av George V, 8th (01.47.20.21.31/www. balenciaga.com), M° Alma Marceau or George V. Open 10am-7pm Mon-Sat. Credit AmEx, DC, MC, V, Map p400 D5.

With Nicolas Ghesquière at the helm, the Spanish fashion house is ahead of Japanese and Belgian designers in the hip stakes. Pinning fabrics contrast with dramatic cuts, producing a sophisticated urban style that the fashion haunt monde can't wait to slip into. Bags and shoes are also available.