



## THE SWEET LIFE IN PARIS

Ever since Pierre Hermé's audacious flavour pairings ushered in a new era in French desserts, Paris has proved fertile ground for a new generation of creative pastry chefs eager to make their mark, writes **Jennifer Ladonne**



**T**he Paris-based magazine *L'Express* has called this the “golden age of pâtisserie,” a claim underscored by the ever-growing number of pastry shops popping up all over the city. Whether veterans of a Michelin-starred kitchen or young mavericks striking out on their own, there is a new generation bringing to the art an unprecedented versatility. Along with imaginative riffs on individual tarts, cakes and macarons, pastry makers are offering their own take on everything from the humble madeleine to parfaits, cookies, marshmallows, pralines, chocolates, ice cream, *viennoiseries* (breakfast pastries), bread and savoury pastries.

Here's a selection of stellar bakeries offering all the proof you need that there's never been a better time to have a sweet tooth in Paris.

### PAIN DE SUCRE

These days, you won't see many pastry stars working the counter, but Didier Mathray is an exception; a quiet, modest presence, in contrast to the extravagant pastries he's been creating with his partner Nathalie Robert since 2004, when they opened their flagship a block from the Centre Pompidou. The shop overflows with delights, from small, heart-shaped cakes in rich chocolate or moist lemon dripping with citrus juice to cases of exquisite individual pastries, fruit tarts and cakes, each more gorgeous than the last. At the *boulangerie* next door you can grab a loaf of matcha bread, a *pâté en crouste* (country *pâté* baked in a

buttery puff pastry), or a gourmet sandwich. Indoor and outdoor seating allows you to enjoy your pastry with a cup of tea or coffee on the premises.

**TRY IT:** A speciality of the house, the Rosemary is creamy, jellied rhubarb on a savoury, rosemary-infused *sablé* topped with vanilla cream and a sprig of rosemary. Unexpectedly delicious.

### BONTEMPS

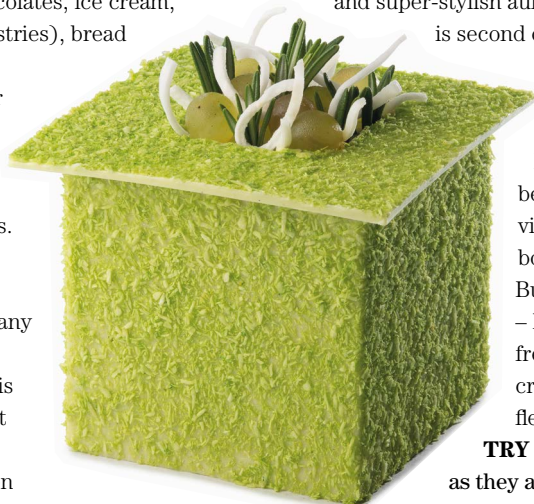
This captivating boutique specialises in the *sablé*, a melt-in-your-mouth butter biscuit deceptively hard to make at home. Like the prettiest pantry of a cherished and super-stylish aunt, Bontemp's vintage charm is second only to their deliciously

original pastries with a homey touch: Bundt cakes, fruit tarts and a piquant lemon pound cake, all beautifully displayed on raised vintage cake plates lining the boutique's sky-blue shelves. But the real stars are the *sablés* – lightly flavoured or filled with fresh fruit and ethereally light cream, in bite-size or full-fledged tarts.

**TRY IT:** The tarts are as beautiful as they are delicious, but a box of six mini *sablés* in flavours like Menton lemon, bergamot, passion fruit, orange flower or pistachio makes a gorgeous gift or gourmet snack.

### YANN COUVREUR

Like couture, haute pâtisserie should make an impression. At Yann Couvreur the confections are not only meticulously executed, they're sensuous and sculptural. Take the fig tart: lustrous slices of fig »



**Clockwise from far left:** Vintage charm in the Marais at Bontemp's; Pain de Sucre, near the Pompidou Centre, is a cornucopia of delights; the vitrine at Bontemp's; as well as classic pâtisserie, the new generation is enticing customers with novel ideas



**Clockwise from above:**  
Meticulously prepared pâtisserie at Yann Couvreur; the new outlet in the Marais; the counter at Cyril Lignac; sublime combinations at Pâtisserie Nanan; Yukiko Sakka and Sophie Sauvage; Equinox, by Cyril Lignac

shimmying up a cream and *sablé* base. Or the millefeuille, combining shards of feathery *pâte feuilletée* buoyed aloft on puffs of Madagascar vanilla cream (seasonal versions offer fresh fruit or caramelised nuts). There are also éclairs, macarons, fruit tarts and a selection of buttery croissants, *chouquettes* and *chaussons aux pommes*. The pâtisserie and *salon de thé* in the 10th is the best place for lingering, but the newer shop in the Marais has seating overlooking the rue des Rosiers that's perfect for people watching.

**TRY IT:** The Merveille offers chocolate cream and meringue enrobed in velvety dark chocolate and flecked with chocolate and hazelnuts.

### CYRIL LIGNAC

This versatile chef's three restaurants (including Michelin-starred Le Quinzième), five pastry shops, two chocolate boutiques, 40 cookbooks, TV programmes and glamorous girlfriends have made him a household name in Paris. But for all the buzz, Lignac has tried to model his pâtisseries as neighbourhood go-to spots where you can get anything from an elegant pastry for a dinner party to your morning croissant. At the chocolate shop and café (25 rue Chanzy, 11th), across the street from the pâtisserie-

**"THE NEWER SHOP HAS SEATING OVERLOOKING THE RUE DES ROSIERS – PERFECT FOR PEOPLE WATCHING"**

boulangerie, you can relax with a book and a great cup of coffee or hot chocolate to accompany your chocolate flan, éclair, brownie, cake or cup of ice cream.

**TRY IT:** The pastries are elegant and yummy, but we loved his take on the brownie, perfumed with orange-blossom water and filled with orange blossom-infused walnuts and creamy caramel.

### PÂTISSERIE NANAN

You could easily walk right by this unpretentious little bakery, mistaking it for another one of rue Keller's eclectic boutiques or galleries. But the minimal décor is simply an unassuming backdrop for a line-up of gem-like pastries and choice *viennoiseries* created by Sophie Sauvage and Yukiko Sakka, the two pastry chefs who founded the bakery. The pairings are surprising but sublime: Pom, a lacquered green dome resting on a hazelnut biscuit is filled with tonka bean-



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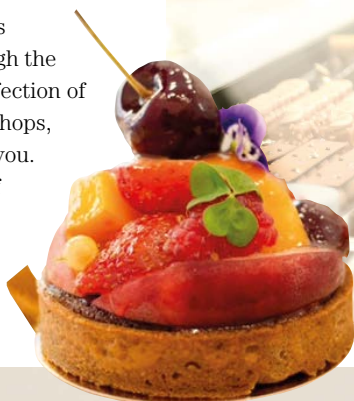
“BO PROFFERS THE  
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perfumed caramelised apple and the Mont Blanc passion, ethereal cream and tart passion fruit, is a gluten-free house speciality. Lightly glazed *chaussons aux prunes*, flaky croissants and pains au chocolat are also on the menu. A neighbourhood pastry shop to be sure, but one that absolutely merits a trip across town.

**TRY IT:** The vanilla chiffon cake – a favourite in Japan and a nod to pastry chef Yukiko Sakka’s roots – is as white as a cloud and just as light.

### BOULANGERIE BO

At first glance a charming old-fashioned Paris *boulangerie*, Bo actually proffers the neighbourhood’s most daring and delicious pastries, *viennoiseries* and breads. Though the pastries do not possess the lacquered perfection of the creations found in many of the other shops, they are beautiful and their flavours grab you. One bite of the Paris-Brest’s rich clouds of hazelnut cream and tender choux pastry confirmed its status as one of the best in Paris. Do not leave without trying the brioche madeleine, tender *sablés* »





“SÉBASTIEN GAUDARD'S BEAUTIFUL TEAROOM JUST OFF THE TUILERIES GARDEN IS THE PERFECT DESTINATION FOR A LIGHT LUNCH”

luminous *tarte au citron* with puffs of meringue, fruit tarts with berries sourced directly from the grower, and individual cakes (baba au rhum, chestnut, raspberry, apple) that rely on texture and lightness, not just sweetness. His beautiful two-floor tearoom just off the Tuileries Garden is the perfect destination for a light lunch (salads, soups, small dishes) or a sinful pastry and a glass of champagne at teatime.

**TRY IT:** The Mont Blanc's lightly caramelised choux pastry, barely sweet whipped cream and candied chestnut purée raises this sometimes cloying classic to new heights. **FT**

**Above and right:** In the kitchens at Sébastien Gaudard; Yukiko Sakka and Sophie Sauvage's Boulangerie Bo

flecked with vanilla bean or a baguette rendered pitch black with cuttlefish ink and irresistibly perfumed with cumin.

**TRY IT:** Feuilles de Figuiier: a chocolate choux pastry éclair filled with vanilla cream and topped with a layer of fig marmalade, fresh glazed figs sprinkled with gold leaf and bright green fig leaves.

### SÉBASTIEN GAUDARD

Pâtissier, glacier, chocolatier, confiseur... Sébastien Gaudard opened his elegant, marble-clad rue des Martyrs boutique to the kind of reviews that instantly propelled him to stardom (it doesn't hurt that he's a dreamboat). His expert riffs on the classics include a



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## SALONS DE THÉ



Left to right: Jacques Genin; Ladurée on rue Bonaparte; Acide Macaron; Christophe Michalak

Though you can sit down at several of the pastry shops mentioned above, the addresses listed here offer both top-notch pastries (as well as chocolates, ice cream, etc) and a cozy place to spend time enjoying tea, lunch or a pastry at any time of day.

#### Jacques Genin

The master chocolatier-pâtissier displays his exquisite chocolates, featuring some of the city's more scintillating ganaches, caramels and fruit jellies, in his elegant tea salon in the Haut Marais. To the distress of Paris gourmands, Genin stopped

offering his pastries to go, but you can sit and imbibe one of his classic French desserts – considered among the best in Paris – made to order upstairs. The hot chocolate is divine.

- 133 rue de Turenne, 3rd

#### Ladurée

One of Paris's oldest and most famous pastry makers, and now a worldwide chain, Ladurée hardly needs an introduction. But buying a macaron from a department store kiosk or an airport vending cart is a vastly different experience from sitting down at the rue Royale flagship (opened

in 1856) near the Madeleine, or the sumptuous Napoleon III-style tearoom upstairs at the lovely rue Bonaparte boutique in Saint-Germain.

- 16 rue Royale, 1st
- 21 rue Bonaparte, 6th

#### Acide Macaron

This stylish tea salon is worth a trip to Batignolles for its stand-out macarons, pastries, ice cream and laid-back atmosphere. Several well-priced menus at lunch or brunch time offer a range of fresh gourmet sandwiches and salads plus a drink and dessert.

- 24 rue des Moines, 17th

#### Christophe Michalak

The hyper-talented Christophe Michalak strutted his stuff at the Plaza Athénée before striking out on his own with a pastry outlet in Saint-Germain, followed by another in the Marais, then a spacious café in the 10th, where you can choose a fresh sandwich or salad from the blackboard menu crowned by one of Michalak's glamorous pastries and a hot or cold drink. The chef also teaches master classes to budding pastry chefs in the behind-the-scenes kitchen.

- 60 rue du Faubourg Poissonnière, 10th