

Savvy Shopper: A Parisian Present...Pour Moi?

By Susan Spano

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WHEN the holidays roll around, I'm like a pig in truffles. Finally, I have an excuse to shop in Paris. The rest of the year -- with the possible exception of the winter and summer sales -- I just froth at the mouth at store windows.

That's because the exchange rate is a disadvantage to Americans. Then, too, prices are stratospheric even for the French, who value top-quality materials and workmanship. They buy judiciously and make their costly purchases last.

Paris is the quintessential place for splurges. Bargain hunting here is like leaving an artichoke heart on the plate.

But I've developed a strategy for holiday gift buying. I shop in choice stores -- that's the fun part -- but buy only the least expensive things in the showroom. All through the year, I ramble around Paris searching for such places. Below, I've listed the addresses of some favorite shops; several have other locations.

(To call the numbers below from the U.S., dial 011 [the international dialing code], 33 [the country code for France], 1 [the city code for Paris] and the local number. If calling within France, add a 01 before the number.)

Apparel

Autour du Monde: With three stores in the 3rd, 6th and 16th arrondissements, Autour du Monde retails casual, comfortable Bensimon clothing and accessories made in France of natural fabrics, sewed with transparent thread and inspired by military surplus. I love the cool, brushed-leather high-top sneakers, which are also available in some department and shoe stores. (54 Rue de Seine, 6th arrondissement; 43-54-64-47, www.autourdumonde.com.)

Chercheminippes: This string of shops sells gently used apparel and decor items. There are Chercheminippes for men, children, the home, women's ready-to-wear and couturier, featuring such labels as Dior, Gucci, Issey Miyake and Hermes. (Espace Femme Pret-a-Porter et Createurs, 102 Rue du ChercheMidi, 6th arrondissement; 45-44-97-96, www.chercheminippes.com.)

Espace Alma: New labels go on sale almost every week, discounted 30% to 90% from the suggested retail. One week, it may be Cachemire, Dona Louisa and Balmain; the next week, Hope Textile, Les Confuses d'Ozzei and Balenciaga. (181 Rue de l'Universite, 7th arrondissement; no phone; for a schedule and invitation, consult the store's French-only website, www.espacealma.com.)

Laurence Tavernier: Sleeping in something from Tavernier is a real treat, though the prices are high. His sleepwear is sold in five shops around Paris. The fabrics are dreamy and the styles classic: soft cotton milk-white and pastel nightgowns with a touch of lace; handsome pajamas and slippers for men in colors and patterns you don't find at department stores. (7 Rue du Pre-aux- Clercs, 7th arrondissement; 49-27-03-95, www.laurencetavernier.com.)

Petit Bateau: The French company known for its smartly packaged tees has about 20 shops in Paris, where the prices are somewhat lower than in the U.S. (24 Rue Cler, 7th arrondissement; 47-05-18- 51, www.petit-bateau.com.)

Cler'S: A shop with a wide selection of previous-season Petit Bateau clothing at cut-rate prices. (24 Rue Cler, 7th arrondissement; 45-55-17-27.)

Repetto: Founded in 1947 by the mother of dancer-choreographer Roland Petit, Repetto sells leotards, tights, tutus and slippers to the ballet corps of the Opera National de Paris. It also sells lovely flat street shoes and boots that are comfortable to wear and inimitably French. (22 Rue de la Paix, 2nd arrondissement; 44-71-83- 17, www.repetto.com.)

UPLA: This boutique near St.-Germain-des-Pres carries a collection of men's and women's accessories and clothing. Its practical, singularly styled handbags are its glory, made in canvas, leather and machine-washable synthetic. They come in graduated sizes, from clutch bag to carryall, have plenty of pockets, snap-in cosmetic pouches and secure grommet closings. (5 Rue St.-Benoit, 7th arrondissement; 40-15-10-75.)

Bargains

Monoprix: Monoprix, with superstores throughout the city, sells reasonably priced clothing, housewares, food and beauty products. A smart buy is Le Petit Marseillais soaps, as inexpensive in Paris as Dial is in the U.S. (21 Avenue de l'Opera; 42-61-78-08, 2nd arrondissement, www.monoprix.fr.)

Books

Librairie Ulysse: This vintage travel bookshop on Ile St. Louis is my favorite place for finding treasures between two covers. Only owner Catherine Domain, a member of the Societe des Explorateurs Francais, knows how to find the wonders in this crammed closet of a store: prewar Baedeker guides, old French travel magazines, maps of Tombouctou. (26 Rue St. Louis en l'Ile, 4th arrondissement; 43-25- 17-35, www.ulysses.fr.)

Cooking

Cordon Bleu: The renowned Cordon Bleu's Paris campus, way off the beaten tourist track in the 15th arrondissement, remains the heart of the cooking school that has taught some of the greatest French chefs their way around souffles and profiteroles. The school has a small boutique on the first floor that sells mustards, china, T- shirts, aprons and chef's

hats bearing the Cordon Bleu logo. An excellent gift for someone planning a trip to Paris is a daylong "Cooking With Friends" practicum, generally scheduled on Saturday and costing about \$150. (8 Rue Leon Delhomme, 15th arrondissement; 53-68-22-50, www.cordonbleu.edu.)

E. Dehillerin: Foodies far and wide know about this shop near Les Halles. It looks unpromising from the outside, more like a hardware store than a place where serious cooks would shop. But those who cross the threshold find themselves in a sacred culinary precinct, with all the gadgets and gizmos that help French chefs turn out perfect sauces and pastries: copper pots, madeleine molds, fish poachers and pepper shakers sized like Russian dolls from small to large. No more can be said than that Julia Child was addicted to E. Dehillerin. (18-20 Rue Coquilliere, 1st arrondissement; 42-36-53- 13, www.e-dehillerin.fr.)

Department stores

Galleries Lafayette and Printemps: These are the two big chains in Paris; their flagship stores near l'Opera have gala holiday windows. The top-floor brasserie at Printemps on Boulevard Haussmann has panoramic views. (Galleries Lafayette, 40 Boulevard Haussmann, 9th arrondissement; 42-82-34-56, www.gallerieslafayette.com; Printemps, 64 Boulevard Haussmann, 9th arrondissement; 42-82-50-00, www.printemps.com.)

Le Bon Marche: This large, upscale store on the Left Bank near the Sevres-Babylone Metro station has men's clothing on the first floor and women's on the second, including a strikingly seductive lingerie department. A bridge over the Rue du Bac connects the central part of the store to La Grande Epicerie, a huge gourmet- food market. (24 Rue de Sevres, 7th arrondissement; 44-39-80-00, www.lebonmarche.fr.)

Franck et Fils: This store is a like a smaller, more select Bon Marche, carpeted and quiet, where moneyed matrons from the 16th arrondissement shop for Easter hats. Handbags and lingerie are on the first floor; a pleasing cafe, perfume and women's designer boutiques are on the second. (80 Rue de Passy, 16th arrondissement; 44-14-38-00.)

Gifts

Le Medina: This market sells imported items from all over the Middle East: carpets, pottery, weavings, tagine dishes, lamps and embroidery. It's the next best thing to a souk. After shopping, have the \$10 meze sampler for lunch in the ground-floor restaurant at the institute. (At the Institut du Monde Arabe, 1 Rue des Fosses-St.- Bernard; 5th arrondissement, 40-51-38-38, www.imarabe.org.)

Deyrolle: I know of no store in the world like this. The first floor is a gardening shop with high-quality tools, aprons, panniers, books and prints. Upstairs is a sort of nature shop. If you have your heart set on it, you can buy a stuffed lion or gazelle. More portable and beautifully suited for framing are Deyrolle's preserved insects, butterflies and shells. (46 Rue du Bac, 7th arrondissement; 42-22-30-07, www.deyrolle.fr.)

Linens

Le Rideau de Paris: This small shop specializes in quilted Provencal bedspreads and coverlets, available in 150 solid colors and 250 patterns. The store also sells classic toile de Jouy fabrics, usually cotton or linen printed with vignettes from old French copperplates. (32 Rue du Bac, 7th arrondissement; 42-61-18- 56.)

D. Porthault: When Jackie Kennedy moved into the White House, she bought linen from this refined store. It's like a French linen museum, with prices for coverlets, cocktail napkins, tablecloths, sheets and nightgowns to match the tony address. Whenever I want to give someone a pretty Paris knickknack, I buy a Porthault handkerchief with the facade of Notre Dame Cathedral embroidered on it for about \$20. (50 Avenue Montaigne, 8th arrondissement; 47-20- 75-25, www.dporthault.fr.)

La Maison Ivre: This store sells table linen and crockery inspired by Provencal motifs but specially designed to make them unique. I once gave a friend a Maison Ivre tea towel that she decided was just too pretty to use in the kitchen. (38 Rue Jacob; 6th arrondissement, 42-60-01-85.)

Perfume, cosmetics and toiletries

Fragonard: The company, founded in 1926 in the French scent capital of Grasse, makes perfumes, eau de toilette, soaps, creams and cosmetics. In Paris, two Fragonard boutiques also sell beguiling gift items such as perfumed candles and embroidered cotton sacks perfect for fine washables. (196 Boulevard St.-Germain, 7th arrondissement; 42-84-12-12, www.fragonard.com.)

Diptyque: This small, select brand is known for its intriguing concoctions inspired by perfume from antiquity, 16th century potpourri and the scents of far-away places like Indian sandalwood, Greek fig leaf and Italian basil. The Diptyque boutique is on the Left Bank near the Latin Quarter. (34 Boulevard St.-Germain, 5th arrondissement; 43-26-77-44 www.diptyqueparis.com.)

Annick Goutal: Rose is the basis for 35 scents created by Annick Goutal and used in her perfumes, candles and cosmetics. There are six pretty Goutal boutiques in Paris. One of my favorite indulgences is divine-smelling Goutal soap, priced at about \$16 a bar. (14 Rue de Castiglione, 1st arrondissement; 42-60-52-82, www.annickgoutal.nl.)