

TRIP TO PARIS OCTOBER 2010

THURSDAY The official start of the tour was lunch, as last year, at the old-fashioned bistro: L'Enchotte – excellent as before and again a very civilized start to the tour – and even better for being only a few doors from our hotel. We went by bus from the restaurant to our first destination, which was interesting as we could look at the street scenery as we went along, but the traffic was totally bonkers (bus lane, what bus lane?) and we ended up being about three quarters of an hour late for our first destination in the Avenue Marceau: Saint-Pierre-De-Chaillot, designed by Émile Bois and constructed 1932–8, with gigantic sculpture by Henri Bouchard, glass by Mauméjean and murals by Nicolas Untersteller. The very pared down architectural style is enhanced by large scale painted fresco. Much of the stained glass is in intense bite-sized chunks. In the apse ends the small windows are jewel boxes of the richest colours, achieved by the thick glass being faceted, painted and fired to give a depth and brilliance which sings out against the dark stone surround. It looks like dalle de verre, but is in fact leaded. Elsewhere the coloured glass is set into geometric concrete frameworks that are outlined on the inside with gilded mosaic tesserae, which delineate the geometry of the building when the glass is dark.

Our next planned stop, the American Episcopal Cathedral in Avenue Georges V, was closed due to the security situation; Michael was extremely hacked off and threatened to write to anyone and everyone to protest against the overly cautious attitude of the cathedral authorities. Next was La Ferme Marbeuf, a fashionable Art Nouveau restaurant of 1898 by Émile Hutré and Louis Majorelle, to have a quick look at the glass canopy ceiling painted with grape vines, backlit glass panels on the walls interspersed with ceramic tile panels (by Jules Wielhorski) – check out the interior at www.fermettemarbeuf.com. On our way to our next stop on the Champs Élysées we passed the Relais Plaza Restaurant, which Michael said was well worth seeing but which was also closed. Nothing daunted we followed him into the adjacent Athénée hotel and through a series of corridors into the restaurant, which has a simple but elegant wood panelled interior and a large figurative window of decorative textured and sand-blasted glass, not highly coloured but very pleasing of its kind. Likewise, it had not been possible to arrange the advertised visit to the interior of the Théâtre Des Champs-Élysées (1911-13 by Auguste Perret). We did, however, get into a side entrance to gain some idea of the beautifully elegant staircase design, and of course we could see the beautiful dynamic carved panels on the exterior by Bourdelle. We were luckier at the former Lalique house (1902) in Cours Albert, with its original glass doors – the showroom, studio and residence for René Lalique who probably designed much of it himself. We were let into the hall, hands up close on the glass – no colour but fabulous cast textures, geometric motifs and natural forms both cast into slabs for the street doors and carved in low relief on the stonework façade and continued on the wrought iron balconies.

Lastly, at the Ladorée bar/tearoom at 13 rue Lincoln/75 Avenue des Champs-Élysées, there was recent stained-glass by Roxane Rodriguez, executed by Ateliers Duchemin – a pretty weird kind of pseudofuturistic décor in this place, pretty weird glass too – copper-foiled network in fairly lurid, almost fluorescent glass colours, pink/purple/blue backlit panels (photo below). This is supposedly a foretaste of tomorrow's visit to the workshops – we looked at each other and thought 'um, not sure about that'.

FRIDAY The first visit was the Ateliers Duchemin at 14 Avenue Georges Lafenestre. Which of us can resist the temptation to poke around someone else's studio? Not us! Giles made us very welcome and talked us through several commissions which they have been involved in, showing us glass samples, photographs and explaining the techniques and processes that they used. They had also been kind enough to supply us with copies of a 34-page paperback book showing a wide range of their work, translated into English. Between our schoolroom French, Michael's interpretation and a common understanding of what we all talking about we managed to communicate very well. The studio works in collaboration with artists in many different styles and we had the opportunity to look at a selection of sample panels and trial pieces and work in progress, including complex painted enamelled restoration being carried out by the studio artist. Communication was not a problem here as she came from Manchester! We visited the showroom around the corner from the workshop and were most interested to come across a sample box from Wissmach, containing many of the white textured cathedral glasses which we have seen so much of in various locations around Paris. There was a much wider range than I have ever come across at an English glass suppliers', and someday I intend to send for a full sample set to see what exactly is available.



Making our way by tram and on foot, we arrived at our next destination a little further west: Saint-Antoine de Padoue (1933–5 by Léon Azéma), with glass by Barillet after Louis Poughéon. Its elegant,



slender, red brick tower soars into the sky with white concrete detailing adding to its graphic simplicity. The interior equally simple and elegant, a beautifully light serene space under a wide ribbed roof, exactly like the upturned hull of a boat. The plain white walls are punctuated with plain arched openings through which the light pours from simple geometries of concrete and delicately coloured glass. Stronger colour comes from circular windows set above each arch. Stylistically these windows are reminiscent of rather poor American style glass, where the leads are used to delineate the features of the figures – no painting as far as I can remember, and not my thing at all. On the other hand there is a set of Stations of the Cross (Raymond Delamarre), carved with a lovely tenderness from white limestone, which are well worth close study for the tight figurative composition.

Opposite is the enormous campus of the Cité-Universitaire – with buildings by many architects from traditional to avant-garde including Le Corbusier and its church of Saint-Ignace de Gentilly – and the Parc De Montsouris laid out by Alphand (1867) now surrounded by mainly Art Deco and modern villas and apartment blocks: a Cubist villa of 1927 by André Lurçat, a 1927 house by Auguste Perret for Braque, André Derain's self-designed house, a notable villa of 1929 by Louis Raymond Fischer and in the Square de Montsouris a studio-house for Amédée Ozenfant by his friend Le Corbusier. It was very rewarding to meander through the narrow winding side streets and take in the wealth of decorative detail on all of these properties: ceramic tiling, mosaics, ironwork, and so many variations of architectural styles from self consciously olde worlde rustic to extremely minimalist avant-garde, all together with no rhyme or reason to any of it.

In the rue Saint-Yves the Chapelle Saint-Yves (1926–8) by Georges Desvallières (one of the founders with Maurice Denis of the Art Sacré movement) was unfortunately closed when we arrived and no clue as to how to contact a custodian! A brief hiatus while we cast around for a way to gain access but with no luck, so we walked on. In the rue Marie-Rose, the Franciscan chapel of Saint Francois (1934–6), with its wonderfully articulated surfaces of red brick – most unusual in the generally white cityscape of Paris – was closed when we got there, so we had lunch a little earlier than planned. After lunch, over the road was St Pierre de Montrouge with stained glass of 1869 by Eugène-Stanislas Oudino. A largely Romanesque building, it contains much grisaille glass (by Gsell & Laurent), which contributes to the calm grey interior – not much colour, but peaceful.

Our next visit was the Mairie-Annexe 14e Arrondissement by Georges Sébille (1933) with reliefs by Raymond Delamarre, modernist glass by Barillet, and ironwork by Raymond Subes and Gilbert Poillerat. This building (actually the 1932–3 mayoral offices) was still in public use so we were able to just go in and wander around. As it turned out the glass which we had come to see was virtually invisible from the inside as blinds were drawn to provide blackout for a theatre or conference room. However the same glass photographed from the outside showed up very clearly as it consisted of clear textured/black/white/mirrored glass and was a dramatically simple figurative composition. Having looked at the exterior carefully, we then found other glass in a downstairs room which comprised a narrative scene from the history of the French judicial system, all in clear textured glass with very little (very simple) painted detail – which again whetted our appetites for the possibilities of using virtually no colour.

There then followed a complex route around the adjacent streets taking in a wealth of decorative detail on so many of the buildings, either done by or inhabited by many famous people too numerous to mention here – it is a great pity I cannot give you Michael's verbal commentary, with a fund of anecdotes and gossip about the people involved. Taking the Métro to La Motte Picquet/Grenelle, close to the south bank of the Seine in the 7th arrondissement, we arrived at the rue Duplex and the next destination. Saint-Léon, built in 1923 by Émile Brunet, has an Arts & Crafts feel and contains Barillet glass, stations of the cross by Henri Bouchard, ironwork by Raymond Subes and mosaics by Labouret. The church is a pleasant cream-coloured brick building with striking mosaic panels set into the walls and a slightly Middle Eastern feel to the dome and spire. Internally the architecture again has a slight Middle Eastern feel, due I think to the shape of the arches; the decorative brickwork is a tour de force and the interior surfaces are rich but restrained. The stained glass consists of powerfully drawn figurative windows, and a lot of strong geometrical designs, again in rich but restrained colours (photo above).

SATURDAY Arriving at Gare du Nord to catch the train to Epinay-sur-Seine, we encountered yet another problem: the RER was not running owing to engineering work so we had to get a packed shuttle bus. From the stop we walked through the quiet streets of this little town to the architecturally confused exterior of Notre Dame des Missions, containing stained glass by André Rinuy (executed by Barillet), Marguerite Huré, Pauline Peugniez and Bideau (also murals by Henri de Maistre, Peugniez, Charles Plessard and Georges Desvallières, and sculpture by Raymond Delamarre). Recently restored, the building by Paul Tournon was originally erected as part of the 1931 Exposition Coloniale at Vincennes, then dismantled and rebuilt in Epinay. I am not sure what the people here did to deserve it. The architect has rather thrown the whole design book at this building, including the oriental and exotic. (The ceramic façade is in the brique Huré process patented by Marguerite Huré, by Lorymi and Raymond Virac, the sculpture above of the Virgin and Infant Jesus by Roger de Villiers and the sculpture of the clock-tower by Carlo Sarrabezolles.) Each individual element was interesting in itself; however, the whole thing was a total mishmash. We were lucky to be able to go inside as it was undergoing major building work and the interior was almost entirely full of scaffolding. We could, however, study the great wall of glass surrounding the three sides of the east end of the church, which depicts the ministry in far-flung places (photo below) as well as a great figure of Christ with arms outstretched dominating the east window itself. The painting is very bold and the whole scheme is heavy, rich colours. There is a much simpler frieze of geometric plain glazing at roof level and a west window (almost invisible behind scaffolding) comprising small squares of coloured glass in a cement matrix making a contemporary equivalent of a rose window. Again though there was no coherence in terms of an overall glazing plan. It would be good to go back when the building work is finished as there are many more things to see there – we didn't take much notice of the pillars shrouded in thick polystyrene material, until someone suddenly spotted a carved hand poking out through a hole which had been cut to accommodate it. We then realised that there must be large carved figures concealed within and found other protruding body parts here and there – a bit surreal as we had absolutely no idea what figures they might belong to!



Returning to the centre of Paris to the 11th arrondissement, after a café lunch we made our way to St Jean Bosco in rue Alexandre Dumas. Started in 1933–7 by Démetrius Rotter (of Roumanian origin) and completed by his son René, it is one of the richest Art Deco churches in Paris with vivid stained glass, mosaics and altars by Charles Mauméjean, glass also by Antoine Bessac and Jean Gaudin, frescoes, ceramic detail, statues by Georges Serraz and Yvonne Parvillié, and wrought ironwork by Raymond Subes (entrance doors) and Paul Kiss (baptismal chapel). This is a tall narrow white concrete building with intricate pierced window detail. The soaring, richly decorated interior is almost overwhelming, with mosaics and painted panels on walls and coffered ceiling adding to the wealth of strong colour from the very many striking stained glass windows at every level. The sunlight pouring in threw further colour casts onto many surfaces and picked out the slender lines of gold tesserae inlaid into the edges of every internal buttress. Most of the interesting glass was at a higher level and we were allowed onto the balconies circling the building at first floor level to get a closer look – most of us makers want to get nose to nose with the glass if we can and we were not disappointed here. Each of the many small pierced openings in the concrete windows contained leaded panels; the windows must have taken forever to fix! The tall single lights contained dramatic stylized figures with geometric borders and cleverly designed lettering panels giving the name of each saint. The stairwell was glazed in strong blues and orange and we were intrigued by the vents inserted so discreetly in the leadwork that we almost missed them. The glass at the East end was quite disappointing, not so strong in terms of design and composition as the rest, and competing with difficulty with the awful crucifixion behind the altar.

After we returned to Saint Francois, which had been closed the previous day. The wonderfully detailed red brick exterior leads into a simpler interior of red brick roof arches above white rendered walls, with glass by Pierre Villette after André Pierre. The side chapels and the east end house narrative stained glass in rich colours and bold painted detail whilst the 3-light aisle windows are glazed mostly with a simple plain glazing with one figurative panel in the centre light of each. The figures representing personae from St Francis' writings (brother Sun, sister Moon, etc.) are very modern: stylized and elegant drawing, with simple but very effective painting. The subtle muted tonal range of the glass used adds to the impact of these beautiful



panels, which are set in sympathetic plain glazed backgrounds. The more detailed east windows are also fairly simple in their treatment, with much unpainted glass using some lovely subtle sludgy colours (photos above and right).

Dinner was at Brasserie Mollard, designed by Edouard Niermans (1895). What a shambles! We got off at the wrong stop nowhere near the venue. After a long meander we reached this famous Art Nouveau restaurant – a fabulous interior with dazzling Italian mosaics, polychrome marble, Baccarat crystal and ceramic murals from Sarreguemines by Eugène-Martial Simas – just as well, as service was very slow and inefficient: one person was still waiting for his entrée when the rest of us had finished ours, so plenty of time to look around. Going back was another adventure: missing the last bus, we took the metro, emerging on an



unfamiliar street. Luckily Anne H either had absorbed the map before we set off or has an unerring sense of direction because she led us faultlessly back.

SUNDAY Departing from Gare de l'Est by bus, our first stop was Saint-Denis de la Chapelle et Sainte-Jeanne d'Arc – an ancient church of 1204 where Joan of Arc stopped to pray in 1429 – given a classical façade in 1757 and a new choir in 1895. To commemorate Joan's canonization in 1920, a new adjoining church was proposed of which only the massive uncompleted façade of 1933 by Georges Closson survives. After the war a more modest interior was created by Pierre Isnard and embellished in 1965 by vivid blue and yellow stained glass by the avant-garde Russian artist Léon Zack. The façade of the original church is very deceptive: a modest, grubby, neoclassical frontage that merges into the street. Inside is a small dark chapel with a single aisle and simple grisaille type windows. In the modern church dedicated to Ste Joan are slit windows along one wall, triangular windows at roof level and two walls of dalle de verre either side of the east end in an unusual colour palette of cool blue-grey and cream. An unfortunate contemporary font in the small baptistery resembles an outsized piece of bathroom sanitary ware. The vestibule leading back onto the street is a surprisingly large white space with over-sized gothic arches framing a great central dome pierced all round with clear glazed openings, it is almost big enough to be a church in its own right. Back on the street the façade of this part of the building is chunky and brutal, it looks as though it belongs more to a fortress than to a church.

Taking the Metro to Assemblée Nationale, we passed the National Parliament building (just another grand neoclassical building amongst many others) and walked through a network of narrow old streets, which appeared to be the cobblers' quarter judging by the number of shoe shops we passed. It was all very high-end stuff, with prices to match (€2000 was the highest I saw) – a shoe fetishist's paradise! Our destination, Sainte-Clothilde, was the first neo-Gothic church in Paris, designed by François-Christian Gau and on his death completed in 1857 by Théodore Ballu, with stained glass executed by Lusson and de Gsell. We arrived 5 minutes before mass so it was an extremely quick scamper around a very English-looking façade – and high narrow gothic interior with Victorian-style sentimentalized figures of saints.

After lunch and exploring around the Boulevard St Germain, we set off for the church of St Sulpice. This grand but staid neoclassical church has a wealth of architectural detail and idiosyncratic sculptural features (holy water stoups in the form of great clam shells supported on marble pedestals carved with very lifelike sea creatures, made by J B Pigalle) also various bits of contemporary work. The glass is uninspiring: plain glazing with static mid 19C figures conventionally posed. Our final stop was St-Germain-des-Près, reputedly the oldest church in Paris (with some early glass and 19C glass by Alfred Gerente after designs by Hippolyte Flandrin). Internally it is a somewhat gloomy mixture of Romanesque and Gothic architecture, but we had only a very short time in the interior and I confess that I have very little recollection of the glass or other interior details.

Here we took our leave of Michael and Graham, exhausted but happy after another stimulating and highly informative tour of a few of the many hundreds of treasures that Paris has to offer.

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