



Those of us who had travelled on the 8.32 Eurostar on Thursday the 17th of September were met at the Gare du Nord by Michael Barker holding a large cardboard sign in the best traditions of meeters and greeters at any large travel interconnection. After a wash and brush up at our hotel, we met with others of the party who had travelled independently, and set off with Michael into the bustle of the city. After a 10-minute walk via a covered market to a small traditional bistro, the true French experience started with an excellent, leisurely three-course lunch. A metro ride and a short walk then took us to our first stained glass: the Galeries Lafayette. Its ground floor interior looks like any up-market department store, but go up a couple of storeys and you emerge into a great circular space surrounded by three tiers of wrought iron balustraded galleries capped with a stupendous wrought iron and glass dome built in 1912 by Jaques Grüber. Coloured glass is used in restrained fashion, but the effect is staggering because of the sheer size of the structure. Stencilled, painted details and elaborately moulded and gilded plaster on the galleries adding to the breath-taking interior. Another short walk away was the Banque Société Générale designed by Jaques Hermant and made by Jaques Galland (1906–11), with another great glazed dome over the main banking hall, its colours more sombre in keeping with the dignified nature of the business conducted there, but the expanse of glass is no less impressive for that, as are the mosaic floors by Gentil & Bourdet. In the basement is another extraordinary sight: the massive door to the vaults, installed in 1912 – about 9 feet in diameter and 2 feet thick, weighing 18 tonnes, with a wealth of wheels, levers, sprockets and interlocking bits and pieces visible in its construction – a work of art in its own right.

Next we were led through the grand Haussmann boulevards surrounding the Opera, a neo-Baroque building designed by Charles Garnier, built between 1861 and 1874 (amazing lamp standards outside), and numerous side streets with more interesting quirky buildings. We took in Art Nouveau facades with extraordinarily convoluted and grotesque ceramic work on the walls and balconies, others with beautiful ironwork, classically inspired sculptures and detailing, with Michael giving us a constant stream of information about who had been born, lived, worked or died in the streets we walked down.



The afternoon culminated with a visit to the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, in the northern part of the Louvre. Here we spread out, many gravitating towards the art deco galleries with a wealth of interior designs, furnishings, glass, ceramics and metal. Others headed for the exhibition of work by the influential couturier Madeline Vionnet. Whichever period of the decorative arts interests you, you will find something here. Finally, our evening meal was at Brasserie Julien in rue de Fauberg St-Denis, designed in 1902 by Edouard Fournier. Although quite a trek, when we arrived we all drew breath at the interior. Almost completely mirrored, it was finished off with stunning ceramic wall panels by Louis Trézel from Mucha designs, and typical Art Nouveau styled coat hooks and light fittings, leaded glass skylights and intricate plasterwork.

FRIDAY Our first visit was to Nôtre-Dame du Raincy, about 8 miles north-east of central Paris, built in 1922 by Auguste Perret. The symmetrical frontage is immediately and obviously 'modern' in appearance: concrete pierced with repetitive geometric openings reaching from about 8 feet from the ground up to the roofs and up the central tower. This in no way prepares you for the interior, with shallow arcades of the high concrete roof floating above walls of glass on a handful of slender columns. The glass, designed by Maurice Denis and made by Marguerite Huré, is an extraordinary mosaic of light and colour set in a delicate geometric concrete matrix repeated in every bay. The individual panels are only a foot or so across but there must be thousands of them – fairly simple leaded designs but repeated many times with changes of colour and subtle variations in the designs. The only jarring notes were the figurative leaded panels in each bay, stylistically completely different from the rest of the glass and, to me at least, not very well drawn or executed and seemingly inserted as an unhappy afterthought. There is a small chapel under the east end of the church with much more conventional, but pleasant, leaded windows with heraldic shields in them and simple geometric glazing for the backgrounds.

Back in central Paris, we next visited Au Printemps department store, with a very attractive leaded window on one of the upper floors, which forms part of a war memorial, and another stunning glazed dome, 16 metres high, by Émile Brière in 1923. This dome incorporates much more coloured glass than the nearby Galeries Lafayette, and is of a more complex construction with a multi-faceted structure. We did not have much time to study it in detail, though, as it now forms the roof of a very busy restaurant.

After lunch we went to a small cul de sac of 1930s buildings in Square de Vergennes, near Vaugirard metro station, to the workshop / showroom of master glassmaker Louis Barrillet, with a light, airy interior designed by renowned avant-garde architect Robert Mallet-Stevens. In the staircase windows, extensive use of a wide range of textured clear glass is combined with black opalescent and white, making the design clearly legible from the outside as well in, with added interest from mirrored glass added unobtrusively. Its abstract motifs and stylized figures start above the door and extend the full height of the four-storey building. Inside on the top floor is another, much smaller example, this time painted in a broad style using black paint and red for flesh, depicting female figures.

From here a 10-minute walk took us to the extraordinary church building of Nôtre-Dame de L'Arche D'Alliance in rue d'Alleray. Built in 1998 by Architecture-Studio, it is a rich brown cube surrounded by an airy external skeleton of lightweight metal bars, which echo the squareness of the building. On close examination the smooth brown composite surface of the walls can be seen to be printed all over with the densely packed text of a prayer to the Virgin Mary. Inside the building is again dark brown, an open space rising three floors to the roof and illuminated principally with the light coming from the two large windows high on the north and south walls (photo above). Made by Martial Rayasse in 2001 they are bold figurative pieces in strong colours (photo left). Each is about 20 ft high by 20 ft wide; they are very powerful and idiosyncratic. Galleries around the inside of the church allow you to get right up to the glass and examine it in detail. It includes the use of etched flashed and painted glass, and an intriguing pixelated style which suggests that they may have been drawn on a computer, maybe using a graphic pad, and then enlarged to full size before being translated into glass. With the size of the windows and the distance from the floor the technique works very well. For a virtual tour of the building visit www.ndarche.org.

Our next visit was by bus to St Christophe de Javel, on the rue de la Convention, a concrete-framed church of 1926–33 by Charles-Henri Besnard. A slender minaret-like tower rises from one corner of the building, which externally is a bit of a mixed bag of styles, many parts of it looking more like an office building than a church. Looking through the door the first impression is of a fairly dark building but once inside it is a different story. Leaded glass panels in concrete traceries are set high up in the walls at clerestory height. The sun was blazing through these on the left-hand side and casting a rich golden glow onto the opposite walls, illuminating the wall paintings that completely filled the arcaded spaces below the windows. An elaborately pierced concrete screen, echoing the much larger one outside over the main entrance, leads into a side chapel with a window by Jean-Louis Rousselet made in 2004 which immediately draws the eye (photo below). Seven narrow round-headed openings above the altar are filled with strong colours in an abstract design. The glass, bonded in many layers without leads or concrete, gives the effect of tissue paper collages with all the colours overlapping and combining to give an effect unlike any other, but immensely richer. The chapel also houses an interesting little altar, and elsewhere are mosaics and sculptures, including a strong figure of St Christopher carrying the Christ child. Small windows in a completely different style by the side entrance doors are interesting for their use of cut lead overlays instead of paint to define details.



Our organized tour ended here for the day, and four of us decided to head across town to the Palais du Luxembourg south of the river to see the Tiffany exhibition (on until 17 January 2010). This was a real feast for the eyes, including several iconic pieces such as the wisteria lampshade and peacock feather lustre vases. The work ranged from windows, through screens, paintings and drawings, to lamps, vases, bowls and mosaic panels. There were no barriers between us and the window panels so it was possible to examine his draped and heavily textured glass at very close quarters, marvel at the way the light interacted with its folds, and take pity on whoever had faced the task of cutting and leading it! The only disappointment was that all the extensive text was in French with no translations. We enjoyed animated discussions about the foiled panels, which made clever use of overlays of glass on top of more detailed areas and tried to select the one item we would each take home with us – but failing miserably. Several slender volumes of the exhibition were on sale in the shop, again only in French, but with excellent photographs.

SATURDAY On another gloriously warm sunny day, we set off on foot to visit the church of St Vincent de Paul, 5 minutes' walk from our hotel. Built in a classical style in 1844, it contains a typical half dome behind the altar with interesting mosaics by Labouret (1952) and windows by Charles-Laurent Maréchal, which reminded me slightly of some of Evett's work in style.

Our major trip for the day was by train to the small outlying town of St Germain-en-Laye about 25 km WNW. The large church here is built in a neoclassical style and has 20C stained glass by the Mauméjean Frères. As we had arrived about 20 minutes ahead of a wedding party we had a quick scamper around the church and snatched photographs of the glass: richly coloured and heavily painted figurative windows with a very distinctive drawing style and unusual use of colour in some of the figure work.



Next we walked through the town and down the hill to Le Prieuré (the priory) to see the home and studio of the artist and writer Maurice Denis (1870–1943), one of the founders of the Nabi movement (Hebrew for 'prophet') whose theories greatly influenced cubism, fauvism and abstract art. Now a museum and gallery, it also houses work by many other Nabi, symbolist and post-impressionist artists. The house has stained and leaded glass around every corner, including a charming pastoral scene by Albert Besnard with farm animals and wonderful poultry in a naturalistic setting. In the priory chapel is a complete scheme of décor by Denis, including wall paintings and glass designed by him and made by Marcel Poncet (1918–21). The figurative glass is heavily painted and richly coloured, somewhat alarmingly in some cases as with the figure of Christ in the east window crucifixion (above), who is mostly green with some purple, and with purple and blue sheep in the lower part! The garden studio is hemmed around with trees, but has large skylights flooding the building with natural light. It is now used as a store and workshop by the museum staff but it is possible to visualize what a marvellous creative space it must have been.

After lunch in St Germain and a browse of the shops or the flea market, there was an optional tour with Michael to another small town, Boulogne-Billancourt, just beyond the périphérique SW of Paris. Our first destination was the church of Ste Thérèse on the rue de l'Ancienne-Mairi. Built of red brick with white stone detailing in 1926 by Charles Bourdery, there are conventional leaded windows in a very contemporary style and a number of exquisite small circular dalle de verres windows in the main building and the lovely little crypt below, by Auguste Labouret. The whole church is full of many other beautiful art works, including mosaics, sculptures and bas-relief polychrome carvings in the church and on the capitals in the crypt (below and p.4 left).

From here we walked through the town to the Musée des Années Trente on the Avenue Andre-Morizet, which is rich in the decorative arts of the 1930s. Our visit was fairly short owing to an unplanned coffee break en route, and the museum closed about half an hour after we arrived, but the range and quality of the exhibits would suggest at least half a day on another occasion. As we still had a couple of hours before dinner, we took Michael up on his suggestion of visiting another church 'not far away'. After at least 20 minutes' brisk walking, amidst rueful mutterings and regrets amongst the ranks, we arrived at Ste Jeanne de Chantal in the Place de la Porte de St Cloud, having crossed over the périphérique on a footbridge.





Although the first stone was laid in 1933, the church was not actually finished until 1962 owing to war damage. Its interior is a beautiful and harmonious large white space dominated by a central dome pierced with openings all the way round which flood the space with light; the plain white walls and many arched openings reveal other spaces beyond, drawing you through further into the building. Abstract stained glass in the apse end is by J. le Chevalier (1954) and other, plain glazed, coloured windows in the apse let in light. Although the interior is very uncluttered there are sculptural pieces, carvings and plenty of other things to look at, including the impressive mural on the curved ceiling of the apse showing Christ crowning the Virgin Mary by René Dionnet (1951). I, for one, was very glad that we had seen this church.

Dinner on Saturday night was in the Art Deco restaurant opposite the Gare du Nord, the brasserie Le Terminus-Nord. More restrained than the Art Nouveau interior in which we had eaten on Thursday night it was still an impressive sight, fully mirrored again and with all the period detail you could wish for. Once again the food was excellent, accompanied by good wines. In appreciation of Michael's willingness to share his experience of Paris with us, and in gratitude for his patience and forbearance with our total inability to stay in a tight group (herding cats comes to mind), we had taken a collection and bought him three bottles of some very good hooch, which we presented to him before the meal.

SUNDAY In the morning, somewhat misty but still warm, we took the bus to Montmartre where our first port of call was the church of St Jean de Montmartre (1894–1907) by Anatole de Baudot, the first concrete framed church. Its brick exterior is embellished with areas of detailing using small glazed ceramic discs set as mosaic bands and panels to delineate windows and the doorway, by Alexander Bigot. The somewhat dark interior is of a delicate construction, with slender ribs supporting the ceiling and arcaded aisles, and delicate concrete balustrades to the galleries at triforium level. There are many rich mosaic panels and mosaic covered altars, and a range of stained glass. If you are looking for contemporary glass then you might find much of this to be fairly ordinary, dating as it does from beginning of the 20th century. The narrative scenes have nothing startling in terms of colour or drawing, but there are some good details to be seen with the binoculars. In the chapel are some more striking, richly coloured abstract lead lights by Jean Viller, 1981. During our visit we were surprised by the appearance of Keith Barley and Helen Whitaker (Barley Studio, York) in Paris for the weekend with a friend, who had arrived quite by chance at the same place and at the same time as our group. Small world!

From here we crammed into the tiny electric Montmartrobus, which trundled around and upwards through the steep streets almost to the summit of the hill. Taking in other houses and local buildings on route we wended our way further upwards to the former abbey church of St Pierre de Montmartre, built in 1147 (the abbey was destroyed at the revolution). Having arrived just as mass was starting we had a very quick glance around and arranged to come back after lunch. The church has been heavily restored more than once, as one might expect of a building of this age, particularly in 1900–5 and again in 1988–9, and contains many

elements dating back to the 6th century or before (re-used from earlier buildings), but despite this the interior is very harmonious. It is what one would expect from a late Romanesque building, honey coloured stone with shallow pointed arches and simple vaulting, but the windows are definitely not as expected. Made by Max Ingrand in 1953 to replace previous plain windows, they are very striking, with rich colour, strong detailing and a very individual style of figure work which won't be to everyone's taste (photo near left). The windows which don't have human figures in them are very pleasing, with quirky touches and again a lovely strong use of colour. The altar and reading desk made in copper with enamelled detail by Jean-Pierre Froidevaux in 1977 are also worth close examination, as are the bronze doors made in 1980 by Tommaso Gismondi and given by him to the church. (On Wikipedia there is a link to a virtual tour of the interior, very well worth looking at.)

We had a couple of hours free to wander around the extremely crowded Place de Tertre with all its artists plying their trades, to find somewhere to eat and drink, or to go into the Basilica of Sacré Coeur, built next door to St Pierre. The design competition in 1879 for the building was won by Paul Abadie's Romanesque Byzantine style proposal, but the church was only consecrated in 1919 following various setbacks – including the First World War. During the Second World War shelling came very close to the basilica, destroying many of the windows, hence the installation of glass in the 1950s in addition to earlier work, all of it well worth seeing, although photography is not allowed. The guidebook has many good illustrations but none of the glass artists are named (!). The whole building is richly decorated and embellished, especially with mosaics, the one on the domed ceiling over the high altar being one of the largest in the world at 475 m². I found the visit slightly surreal. The main morning service was in progress but visitors were still allowed in, so that, as I stood off to one side looking at the interior, the nave was full of worshippers but there was an endless belt of sightseers four or five deep and nose to tail shuffling around the perimeter, the whisper of their feet on the stone floor and their murmuring voices a very odd counterpoint to the sermon being delivered by the priest. The view from the front of the basilica over the city is breathtaking and if you climb the stairs to the dome you can see for 50 kilometres on a clear day (so they say!).

Descending by bus to the city again we again had a choice of a free afternoon or accompanying Michael to Ste Odile church, on the Avenue Stéphane-Mallarmé, which boasts the tallest tower in the city. Completed in 1946, it was designed by Jacques Barge in a Deco-Byzantine style and entirely paid for by the Alsatian community of Paris. The church is built in fine decorative brickwork and full of exceptional art works in all materials, but the main attractions for us were the three large seven light windows in the south wall. Made by François Decorchement they immediately sparked animated debate and discussion due to their unusual appearance.

At first glance they appear to be conventional stained glass windows with heavy leading, but a second look shows them to be made of slab glass in a very delicate concrete matrix. A closer inspection shows that many of the slabs have angles in them impossible to cut so accurately, and that the colour of the whole thing is odd. The windows look as though they have been coloured in with felt pens, somewhat mottled and uneven, and often with many colours on single pieces of glass. From the outside it is possible to see that the individual pieces have been cast as they have a slightly uneven surface with evidence of bubbles. We had arrived at the conclusion, confirmed by the guide who had arrived while we were outside, that each piece had been individually cast, using frits for the colouring, then assembled and concrete poured in the usual way to produce the 2 ft square panels that made up the windows. As each of the three windows contains 62 of these panels the mind boggles at the amount of work involved in producing them. Elsewhere in the church is a fabulous mosaic altar by Labouret and Charles Mellerio, a copper reredos by Robert Barriot, stone carving at the entrance by Anne-Marie Roux Colas, and many other small items to delight the eye.

This was the end of the organized tour, which, thanks to Michael Barker's encyclopaedic knowledge, was both educational and entertaining. We saw a range of work in many media that was truly inspirational, and each of us will have a list of places to go back to at a future date.

Ann Sothoran, October 2009