The Paris Flea Market

The Paris Saint-Ouen Flea Markets are open to the public all year round, on Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays, including Bank Holidays, from 9.30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Thursday and Fridays mornings are reserved for trade professionals.

In the years between 1880 and 1900, the visitor who left Paris via the Porte de Clignancourt would travel past the hovels of the rag-and-bone men and the makeshift market stalls and inns set up in the middle of the fields and market gardens. It was against this colourful background, along the "passageway" which separated the capital from the town of Saint-Ouen, that the Flea Market set up home.

The history of the Flea Market goes back several centuries. It is inseparable from the history of the rag-and-bone men, who were to be found in the shadow of the so-called "fortifs", or fortifications. Known variously as "biffins", "chiftires", "crocheteurs" (pickers) or, more poetically, "pêcheurs de lune" (moon fishermen), the rag-and-bone men travelled through the city by night, searching for old objects that had been thrown out with the rubbish, which they would then resell at the local markets. Because they were often associated with the inhabitants of the "Cour des Miracles", an area of Paris frequented by beggars and thieves, the rag-and-bone men were driven out of the city by the new city authorities towards the end of the 19th century. They therefore formed small groups and pursued their activities on the other side of the fortifs, near the city gates of Montreuil, Vanves, Kremlin Bicêtre and Clignancourt. Gradually, a number of the craftier of these "moon fishermen" were able to become, in a sense, self-employed bric-a-brac traders. Soon, these traders decided to group together, and it was not long before the people of Paris came to wonder at the displays of miscellaneous objects spread out on the ground just beyond the gate at Clignancourt. As time went by, the number of curious visitors steadily grew, as did the number of traders. It became fashionable, for the genteel population of collectors in their Sunday best, to come and hunt for bargains among the bric-a-brac. The Flea Market was born...The FIRST MARKET around 1920, shortly after the Great War,
Romain Vernaison, who owned 9,000m² of land between the avenue Michelet, the rue des Rosiers and the rue Voltaire, decided to set up a whole series of pre-fabricated huts to be rented to the bric-a-brac dealers and the rag-and-bone men of the area. The first marketplace was born... Some time later, a certain Malik, reputed to be an Albanian prince, bought up an old restaurant called A Picolo in the rue Jules Vallès. Taking his cue from Romain Vernaison, he transformed the building into a marketplace with around a hundred stalls, which soon came to be known as the Malik Market. The market was, and remains, the place to come for second-hand clothes, old uniforms, helmets, cameras and so on. By 1925, the fortifications had been almost completely demolished. Not wishing to leave Saint-Ouen, a group of traders soon took over the Champ des Rosiers and set up a third marketplace, the Biron Market. Two rows of around two hundred stalls running the length of an alley which stretches as far as the avenue Michelet before looping back, in the shape of a hairpin. The Biron market quickly became the more "distinguished" market. It is here that one might find top quality old furniture, gilt wood, glassworks and porcelain, for example. The Flea Market was extended yet further in 1938, when the Jules Vallès market was opened. After the Liberation, the opening days were set: Saturday, Sunday and Monday. Local shops were bought up by antiques dealers, bric-a-brac merchants or craftsmen who wanted to have an outlet near an organised market. As the years went by, the sector continued to grow, and other marketplaces were created, making up the mosaic of the world-renowned antiques market we know and love today...

**The FLEA Market TODAY**

The Paris Saint-Ouen Flea Market celebrated its centenary in 1985. Covering 7 hectares, it is the world’s largest antiques market. Every weekend, between 120,000 and 150,000 visitors from the world over come in hopes of finding a rare and treasured object. The market has become one of the highlights of Paris for locals or tourists who wish simply to stroll around to search for a particular object, or just for the pleasure of looking around.

**The VERNAISON MARKET**

For a while, perhaps, Vernaison may have felt threatened by the emergence of new, more richly furnished markets which made the older market look a little rundown and disorganized. Yet today, it represents just what visitors come to see when looking for authenticity. Vernaison is regarded by some as the cheapest market. The dealers have much lower rents to pay than in the neighboring markets, which allows them to be involved in jumble sales or so-called Chatou-style fairs. This has enabled them to remain faithful to the original bric-a-brac tradition. Most of the customers are from the general public, though the professionals are not forgotten, making the market welcoming and attractive, oblivious to the siren calls of the latest fashion. It is, of course, the best way never to go out of fashion! A few years ago Vernaison changed its legal status, going from a common rent-based system, when it used to belong to property developers, to a system of joint-owned plots. The result has been that the traders, having become in effect the proud owners of the market, are ready to invest even more time and energy than beforehand. Real estate interests have joined forces with commercial interests, and the quality of Vernaison has improved as a result..
You can still find everything here, from the modest to the superb. Most pieces are originals, often in need of restoration, but not always. Vernaison is a patch of countryside in the city, a veritable bric-a-brac heaven. No need here to be ashamed of being a casual bargain hunter, because the traders will always welcome you with open arms. It is a real maze of alleyways, some of which are covered, others open to the elements, many of which are dead ends. The whole place, including the wonderful little stalls, is covered in Virginia creeper. The nearby restaurant chez Louisette (located at 136 avenue Michelet) is an absolute must, because of its friendly atmosphere where you can enjoy post-war songs.

**ANTICA MARKET**

Miniature market, with a wonderful selection of objects in a hushed atmosphere. It is an elegant gallery that lies alongside the Vernaison Market. There are only a dozen or so stands here, inviting you to discover their beautiful objects, tapestries, ornaments, Art Deco, Napoleon III.
BIRON MARKET

In 1925, the authorities pressurised traders who had set up in the "zone" to leave. Seventy antiques dealers therefore decided to create a union of Seine Saint-Denis bric-a-brac traders, and set up a united company. They set their heart on a plot of land measuring some 7,300 m² called the "Field of Roses", belonging to a Parisian goldsmith. The Biron Market was born, though at this stage it went by the name of the "Saint-Ouen Bric-a-Brac Fair". The style and the spirit of the "Beautiful Flea Market" were different from the surrounding markets, and the traders were determined to be seen as the best. Right from the outset, they made every effort to sell only the most sought after antiques. The objects were to be shown in their full beauty and restored with the greatest care, unlike the markets neighbor and great rival, the Vernaison Market, whose chief objective was to sell goods in working order. The great and good of the time, such as Colette, André Breton and many others, could often be seen in amongst the visitors to the market.

Even today, Biron is what one might like to call the upmarket market, where members of the international high society come to discover the passion of the two hundred and twenty dealers who work here. The main aisle is full of luxury goods and gilt objects, but one must not miss the second aisle, which is a little more intimate and where the conviviality of the dealers will show you another side to the market, where hunting for quality antiques is a real pleasure.

On Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays, the 220 antiques dealers on the Biron Market will only be too pleased to show the quality of the goods on offer.

On Friday mornings, the market is open to fellow professionals, in order to show them, before anybody else, the latest objects that will sell like hot cakes over the weekend.

This market is a veritable treasure-trove with its paintings and other objects signed by their creators. The market is a favorite with professionals from both France and abroad. Whether you are an interior decorator, a theatre or cinema star, a politician or simply an art lover, you are certain to find your heart's delight here.

85 rue des Rosiers
DAUPHINE MARKET

The Dauphine Market was inaugurated in December 1991. Where previously there was a labyrinth of narrow dark alleyways with their ramshackle little shops, stands the majestic Dauphine, like a flagship standing proud over the fleet formed by the eleven other antiques markets which make up the Saint-Ouen Flea Market. The architecture of the Dauphine takes its inspiration from the prestigious Baltard Pavilion. Its 6,000 m² of floor space holds around 180 antiques and bric-a-brac merchants. After only ten years of existence, the Dauphine has already established itself as quite an act to follow. The image of Dauphine is one of a market with a huge diversity and profusion of genuine antiques, all approved as such by experts, where the visitor is sure to find something original: from a Renaissance period dresser to the rarest texts from the Torah, not to mention the collections of saucy corsets and underwear or the thousands of rare books, the 18th century gilt wood pieces or inspired decorative pieces from the 1930s and 40s, Vintage or industrial art. This enormous market space is organized around a central square, where palm trees cast their shade over the fountain where visitors can take a break from their hunt for that special, unique object. The stalls are set on two floors, and the maze of alleyways offer a wealth of surprises. Take a tour around the Dauphine Market

Genuine Pieces
The youth and enthusiasm of the Dauphine Market have not blinded it to the danger that the art market constantly faces. The international market is being flooded with an ever-increasing number of fakes. Dauphine strives to ensure authenticity. It is for this reason that a tireless team of renowned experts works with the dealers on a daily basis in order to hunt down and eliminate the forgeries. Buyers are entitled to an expert's evaluation at any time. This obsession for authenticity should, eventually, lead to a quality charter being set up for all the markets which form the Saint-Ouen Flea Market.

Two floors of Antiques
The visitor cannot help but be fascinated by the splendid objects on offer in the chic boutiques on the ground floor, with their wonderful 18th and 19th century pieces, and yet the eye is irresistibly drawn towards the gigantic metal structure above. On the upper level, the charm of the bric-a-brac merchants of yesteryear reigns supreme. The sunlight streams through the glass roof, and the traders have created a hushed atmosphere redolent of days gone by. There are steps, escalators and lifts throughout the marketplace to take you up a level. Do not miss the bird's eye view over the fountain and its tree-lined square.

Bookshop Square
The best bookshops on Brassens Square wasted no time in setting up here in 1995, when the "Bookshop Square", an area entirely given over to ancient books, was opened. Around twenty specialists are on hand to guide you into the magical world of words and pictures. There is one free spirit that has escaped from this well known area and is still to be found on the ground floor, presenting certainly the most risqué books and photos anywhere in the whole Flea Market. Do not miss Bookshop Square. An escalator takes you straight there, from 134 rue des Rosiers.
The JULES VALLES MARKET

The living legend of the Flea market
It has been said, and rightly so, that this market has remained faithful to the original spirit of the Flea Market, and it is true that there is a certain authenticity about these two covered aisles that can only be reached at one end, at 7 rue Jules Vallés. You are unlikely to come across an antiques dealer here, unless he/she is on the look out for new goods. The market contains 120 stands and is open very early on Thursday and Friday mornings, but unfortunately only for trade professionals. At the weekend, only the dealers who observe the good old Flea Market traditions are open, and the general public can come and admire their passion for their work. It is these dealers who are behind the resurgence of this market, which is fast overtaking others in the Flea Market. They do not want to feel isolated from the rue des Rosiers, and will not be forgotten easily.

Jules Vallès has retained a traditional spirit. Here you will find a number of specialties and some often unusual objects, posters, antique weapons, bronzes, books or records, not forgetting the military uniforms and a host of other things. The market, with its no-frills stands, is entirely without pretension, looking more like attic space than anything else. Recently, the market got a lick of paint but the style has remained unaffected. Definitely worth a detour.

Rue Jules Vallés

THE PASSAGE

One of the most recent areas, with 1,000 m2 of floor space, has a very appropriate name. It forms the link between the rue Jules Vallès and the rue Lecuyer, a lengthy stroll for the visitor between antique furniture and objects on either side, covering all the ages right up to the end of the last century. There are many unusual ornaments, paintings, chairs and other curiosities for the lovers of bric-a-brac and antiques. Both professional interior decorators and amateurs come to visit the alley. You will also find contemporary objects here, which some traders refer to as "new", complaining that this type of merchandise goes against the spirit of the Flea Market.

But every taste should be accounted for, because it takes all sorts to make the world go round!
Like the other Saint-Ouen markets, Le Passage is open from Saturday to Monday for the general public, while on Thursday and Friday mornings, it is for professionals only. The rest of the time, the traders are off in the search of the goods they will display in their stands for future customers.

27 rue Lecuyer

**L’ENTREPOT**

1990, on a stretch of what had previously been wasteland at 80 rue des Rosiers, saw the opening of l’entrepôt, instantly recognizable at the time by its metallic structure in the shape of an airplane, which recently became the property of a rich Texan collector, because at the Flea Market, everything is always for sale!

The objective of this area is to project you into a dream world of excessive proportions. The traders here specialize in out of the ordinary, outsized pieces. The advantage, however, is that there is ample loading room. The area is sufficiently large for each trader to exhibit classical pieces of extraordinary dimensions: monumental staircases, bookcases and woodwork from stately homes, not to mention a garden pavilion and a castle gate. Bric-a-brac and more traditional furniture are also accepted, of course. Some traders will not hesitate to show you around.

And yet, despite all this, there is still enough space for customers’ cars, vans or lorries. The goods here are more usually sold to professionals than amateurs, but amateur art lovers are very welcome, because it is by exploring the host of objects on display here that the ideas for the decoration or restoration of the future home of your dreams can come true.

80 rue des Rosiers
MALASSIS MARKET

The Malassis market, whose innovative architecture and vast dome have been a landmark at the entrance to the Paris Saint-Ouen flea market since 1989, has rapidly affirmed its presence and originality. Its partly-covered lanes are an invitation to take a stroll through time, to discover on the ground and the first floor artifacts dating from the eighteenth century to the latest designer goods.

Whether elegant spaces fitted out as galleries or small stands bursting with furniture and objects, the hundred or so merchants established at Malassis have created an entirely unique atmosphere at the flea market.

Check out the antique dealers, the numerous themed boutiques and those specialising in the twentieth century... the objects are sure to fascinate you.

The antique dealers
These antique dealers possess the art of finding the most unusual furniture or objects, restoring them and placing them in an environment they create according to the inspiration of the moment. They juxtapose waxed furniture or whose patina they have revived, fun items or those whose original function has been transformed into part of a charming baroque or neo-classical décor which sometimes includes more contemporary elements as well.

The thematic boutiques
Some antique dealers have a special affinity for a specific period and style, recreating a bygone era. Take for example the oriental stands, tableware, bistrot furniture, naval objects, a writer’s library or artist's studio, collectors of watches, toys, postcards, etc., pearly trimmings and jewellery, and so on. This market after Prévert's heart, full of the unexpected, is there to be discovered over and over again.

The twentieth century is well represented at Malassis Market
- Thirties and forties furniture with its spare lines and well-rounded volumes made of precious wood species
- pieces from the fifties which made brilliant use of new materials
- design furnishings from the seventies, the result of an intense creative effervescence

The visitor emerges from his stroll along the lanes somewhat bewildered, as if arriving from a journey – a fast, varied journey filled with beautiful encounters.

142 rue des Rosiers
This market is not open to the general public, and the forty or so traders who have set up their businesses in this former printing works in Saint-Ouen make no bones about it. There are huge signs up all around to dissuade all those who might wish to strike a bargain by buying a piece of furniture at “market price”. This is no place for messing around. The antiques trade has its own strict rules, and to make sure everything goes smoothly, there is no question of changing matters.

l'Usine is closed all day Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays, but is open every other day in order to take almost daily delivery of new consignments. Watching these deliveries is entertainment in itself, though it is a little too much at times for local residents who complain about the traffic jams caused by the comings and goings of lorries, arriving from all over France and heading off to the capitals, ports and airports of Europe. L'Usine is a veritable hub for exports

1 villa des Rosiers

Take a stroll through time. The days are long gone, when the first drops of rain turned the aisles of the Paul Bert market into a veritable quagmire. It was in the period between the two wars that Monsieur Louis Poré, the son of a market gardener, began to make a different use of the land he owned. First of all, he built an automobile garage (later to become the Serpette Market). In 1946, when he noticed the success and growth of the other markets, Vernaison, Biron, Vallès and Malik, Monsieur Louis Poré decided to strike a deal with the authorities in Saint-Ouen and the traders. It was a result of this agreement that the first stalls were built. Between 1953 and 1954, most of these wooden constructions were made more permanent, an indication that the owner had every intention of making his venture last.
The pugnacity of the traders and of the successive market owners enabled a market to be gradually built up in line with their requirements. With almost 220 stands stretched out along 7 aisles, Paul Bert is one of the major attractions of the Paris Saint-Ouen Flea Market.

The merchandise, which often spills over the stands into the passageways, is usually presented "as is", which has always meant that Paul Bert is a favourite with sometimes rather scatty bargain hunters! It should come as no surprise, then, that some of the world’s most famous decorators come here regularly to unearth the most unlikely objects from this extraordinary jumble, which is constantly being added to. This market is always in line with the latest trends, and has certainly the most relaxed atmosphere of the Flea Markets. Do not be surprised to find yourself tagging along behind the luscious, sculptural figure of Sharon Stone, out for a day on the town with her Yankee friends, or other stars looking for inspiration to decorate their home in California or their loft in New York.

This open-air market surrounds the Serpette Market. The fate and the growth of the two markets are increasingly closely linked, thanks to exports. The new owners understood this very swiftly, and the legal entity SERPAUL has been created to run the two markets as one. Conditions mean that traders cannot afford to be absent from the market. Paul Bert is an inexhaustible source of wonder for casual visitors, and is often regarded as the leading market in terms of new decorative trends and fashions. Paul Bert has everything to awaken the bargain hunter that lies dormant within each of us. Around every corner lies the marvel you have always been looking for. Shop furnishings, Parisian bistro furniture, garden ornaments, decorative ornaments from the first half of the 20th century - they all share the floor with Renaissance objects, Primitive Art and so on

18 rue Paul Bert

MARKET ROSIER

A little Treasure

This little market, which is not to be confused with the street of the same name, contains around 10 stalls, which specialise in light fittings, Art Deco, Art Nouveau, glasswork and bronzes from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th. It is to be found at 3 rue Paul Bert. It was created in 1976 by a bric-a-brac trader who owned what was then a storage facility, which he turned into a lair for admirers and collectors of Gallé, Lalique or Daum.

The stalls here are mainly aimed at connoisseurs, often from Europe or Japan, but the traders are more than happy to inform curious visitors who wish simply to know more about the beautiful lithographs by Mucha, the lacquerware by Dunand or the furniture created by Majorelle
SERPETTE MARKET

Always a step ahead of fashion

At the beginning of the 1970s, bric-a-brac trader Alain Serpette bought up this former garage, which happened to have belonged to the first Citroen dealer in France, specializing in the famous front-wheel drive. The garage waved goodbye to the ghosts of the Citroen DS, and gradually transformed itself into an address reputed throughout the high society of Paris. Serpette was the son of a Flea market stallholder who had made his living from selling antique weaponry. He set up a series of concrete stalls, but 'forgot', much to the dismay of the local authorities, to apply for the necessary planning permission, which led to a series of titanic legal battles, not least because the Saint-Ouen town council took a dim view of this new extension to the Flea Market. No measures were taken, however, to prohibit the building work, and a total of 120 stalls were created. In 1983, the La Hénin bank, which already owned the market next to Serpette (Paul Bert), bought up this jewel in the crown of the Flea Market.

The 130 traders who work in Serpette Market are the ones to come to for a number of specialities, not only for fashionable goods, but also for art nouveau, up until the 1940s. Serpette is a market of the highest quality, a reputation that the merchants are extremely keen to conserve.

It is one of the trendiest places in Paris, and its car park and covered walkways make it a favourite on rainy days. It also benefits from the advantages of its big brother, Paul Bert, where the aisles are bathed in sunlight when the sky is blue.

This covered market is currently flourishing, particularly because of the strong export trade. The goods on offer are generally beautiful, sometimes at a price that is regarded by some as excessive. It has to be said, however, that the quality and conscientiousness of its many professionals can only be guaranteed by the best possible merchandise, and it is in this way that Serpette remains head and shoulders above the rest.

The connoisseurs who come to Serpette will find themselves in good company. It is a living dream for antiques lovers. Its dealers, who are generally young, are only too happy to discuss their latest finds with you, whether you are a potential buyer or not. Be careful, though, not to hesitate too long. It can be fatal. While you are mulling things over, another buyer, quicker and more determined than you, may swoop in to snatch up that "bargain" you had your eye on.

Because the goods on offer are renewed so frequently, Serpette is a market that is always at the forefront of things. The enthusiasm of the dealers, always on the look out to find that unique object at the bottom of the pile, draws professionals from around the world. Why not join them!