



Guillmard entrance to Pigalle Metro Station. Photo courtesy of Phillip Thornton.

On the Art Nouveau Trail in Paris

by Zita Thornton



The Art Nouveau interior of a bar by the Gare du Nord. Photos courtesy of Zita Thornton.



Wrought iron railings on a Parisian balcony display the Art Nouveau design. Photo courtesy of Phillip Thornton.



The Moulin Rouge symbol of the Belle Epoque lifestyle which embraced the Art Nouveau style. Photo courtesy of Phillip Thornton.

At the end of the nineteenth century, life in Paris had been transformed. After years of war and strife and the terrible siege of Paris, La Belle Epoque, the beautiful life, followed the signing of the peace treaty in 1871. Now the emphasis was on enjoying life. The posters of Toulouse Lautrec immortalised the ethos of the age. They showed the singers and dancers of the cafes and cabaret clubs of Montmartre, a favourite haunt of writers and artists. The famous nightclub, The Moulin Rouge became the symbol of the Parisian zest for living.

It was into this lifestyle that craftsmen, inspired by le style Anglais, from Liberty, brought their 'new art'. Named Art Nouveau, after a Parisian gallery, which opened in 1895, it influenced architecture and the decorative arts. The Paris exhibition of 1900 became a showcase for Art Nouveau style.

The image of long-limbed girls, hair streaming, arms outstretched, embodied the freedom of the age. Its elegant, undulating lines took inspiration from the female form and the natural world. There was much use of light reflecting glass and wrought iron, which could be worked in unbroken lines. Art Nouveau designers considered everything from the building itself to the items within.

A walk through Paris today reveals many examples. None is more prominent than the entrances to the Metro stations. Designed by Hector Guillmard in 1891, the amber lamps suspended from entwined, metal branches, the fan like, glass canopies and even the 'Metropolitain' lettering, reflect the Art Nouveau style to its limits and display Guillmard's attention to detail and his love of stained glass and metalwork. Whilst he kept to iron, enamelled steel and glass for the new railway system, his house on Avenue Mozart displays an elegant fantasy of natural forms in the stonework and the furniture within.

Unfortunately, not all of Guillmard's masterpieces have survived. The Humbert de Romans concert hall, with its stained glass domed roof, supported by steel ribs, was destroyed seven years after it was made. However, there are still many examples of Art Nouveau by Guillmard, Sauvage, who designed the Café de Paris, and others, all over Paris. Walk around Montmartre and look up at the wrought iron leaves entwined in the railings of balconies. Wander through the streets and take a drink from the drinking fountains held up by graceful ladies in flowing gowns. From the most humble bar to the famous restaurants such as Maxim's, there is evidence of the Art Nouveau style. There are huge buildings, such as the department store Galleries Lafayette, whose coloured glass and wrought iron dome can be seen from every floor. One of the best examples is at 29 Avenue Rapp. This prize winning building was designed by Jules Lavrotte in 1901.

The attention is first caught by a fabulous doorway. Its polished wood is carved into flowing lines, embellished with metal peacocks. Curved windows contain fluid wrought iron grilles. The door handle is a

magnificent lizard. To fully appreciate the rest of the building you need to cross the road for a better view. You will see tier upon tier of Art Nouveau designs, sculpted into the stonework. Balconies are supported by flower buds or the heads of oxen. Windows are curved, pillars hold up a series of carved arches.

Elsewhere, the glass roofs of the Grand and Petit Palais sparkle when lit up at night. The entrance to L'Abesses Metro is a fine and original example of Guilmard's work and opposite, the church of St Jean L'Evangeliste displays unusual brick and mosaic work.

The original Gare D'Orsay, built in 1900 has been converted into the Musee D'Orsay and offers the chance to appreciate Art Nouveau architecture as well as the furniture, ceramics and glassware displayed within its galleries. Designer Gae Aulenti has kept many of the original Art Nouveau features from the old station, including the station clock set into glass arches, which reflect the light from the Seine flowing alongside. She has maintained the impression of a railway station and the stream of visitors adds to the idea of voyagers embarking on a journey.

Art Nouveau was an international phenomenon which lasted for just two decades but which is now one of the most popular collecting areas. Prime examples by the top designers are prohibitively expensive, but new techniques of mass production at the time resulted in the style being widely used for everything from cash registers to coal scuttles. Many of these more affordable examples can be found at antique fairs here and in France.

Embodying the sentiment of the age Art Nouveau had huge artistic impact. Where better to have a taste of this than on the streets of Paris? The 16th arrondissement have many fine examples of Guilmard buildings, all within walking distance of each other:

- Rue La Fontaine Nos. 14, 17, 19, 21 and 60
- Rue Agar Nos. 8 and 10
- Rue Gros No. 43
- Rue Francois-Millet No. 11
- 3 Square Jasmin
- Rue Henri-Heine 18
- Avenue Mozart 120 and 122
- Rue Boileau 34
- 1 Rue Molitor
- Rue Chardon-Lagache 41
- 8 Villa de la Reunion
- Avenue de Versailles 142
- Boulevard Exelmans 39
- Ecole du Sacre Coeur, 9 Avenue de la Frieliere

Café's and restaurants offer the opportunity for refreshment with an Art Nouveau décor:

- Maxims 3 Rue Royale.
- Bistro de la Gare 73 Avenue des Champs Elysee
- Restaurant Julien 16 Rue du Faubourg- St-Denis
- Pharamond 24 Rue de la Grande Tuanderie
- Benoit 20 Rue St Martin
- Chartier 7 Rue de Faubourg Montmartre.



25 Avenue Rapp won an award for its designer Jules Lavrotte in 1901. Photo courtesy of Zita Thornton.



Art Nouveau interior of Musée d'Orsay, formerly Gare du Nord, showing original station clock. Photo courtesy of Zita Thornton.



The Art Nouveau interior of the Gare du Nord has been transformed into Musée d'Orsay. Photo courtesy of Zita Thornton.



Art Nouveau bed incorporating side tables on display at Musée d'Orsay. Photo courtesy of Zita Thornton.



The door handle fashioned as a lizard reflects the natural inspiration for Art Nouveau. Photo courtesy of Zita Thornton.



Doorway of 25 Avenue Rapp. Photo courtesy of Zita Thornton.