

How To Spend It In... Travel

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My favourite fonts in Paris – a typographical tour

Graphic designer Yorgo Tloupas explores the signs, signatures and inscriptions of the French capital

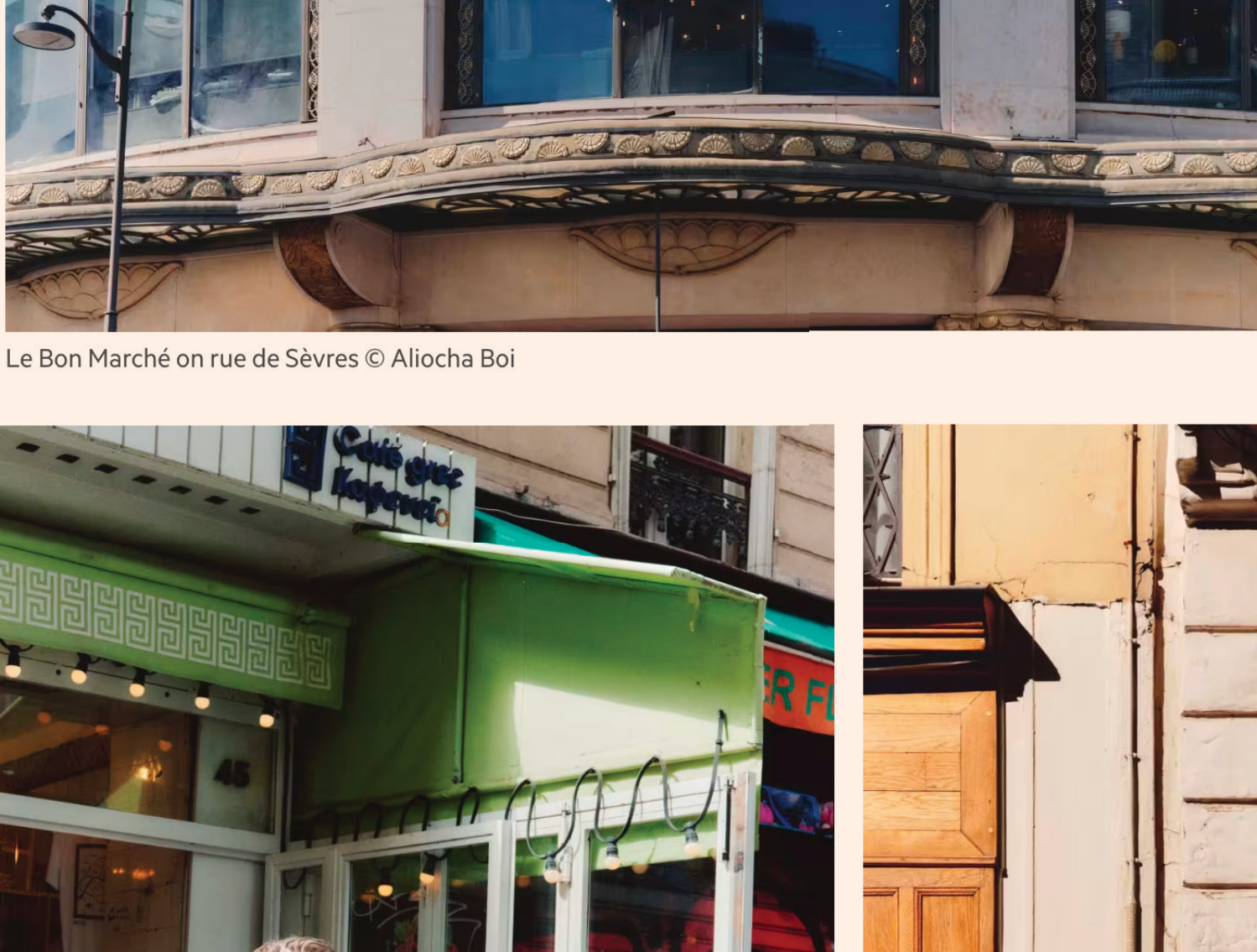
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Interview by **Marion Willingham**. Photography by Aliocha Boi

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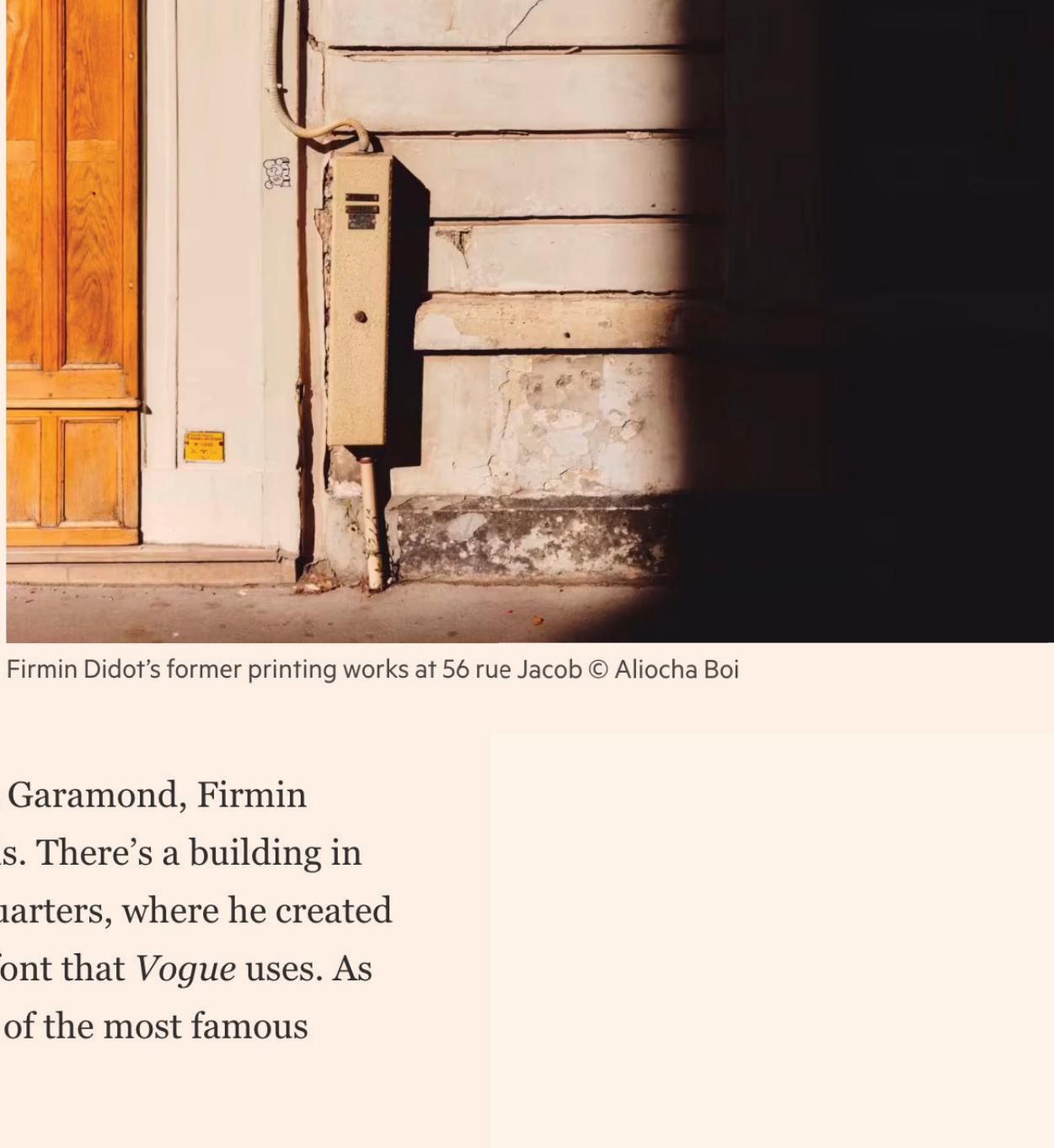
I was born in Paris, in a hospital that’s now an artists’ squat, but I grew up in the suburbs. I moved back when I was 17 to study, then lived in London for a decade before returning 15 years ago. When I was 17, I viewed Paris through the lens of skateboarding. On weekends you’d go to places you would not normally go, such as La Défense, the business district west of Paris, which would be kind of eerie because it would be literally empty. Now the scene has grown massively. Professional skateboarders from all around the world come to skate in Paris. Nyjah Huston, who finished third in the Paris Olympics, went to Skate Park Léon Cladel – it was as if Roger Federer walked onto a local tennis court and said, “Hey, I’m gonna play with you guys.”



Le Bon Marché on rue de Sévres © Aliocha Boi



Yorgo Tloupas outside Yorgaki, his café in Pigalle © Aliocha Boi



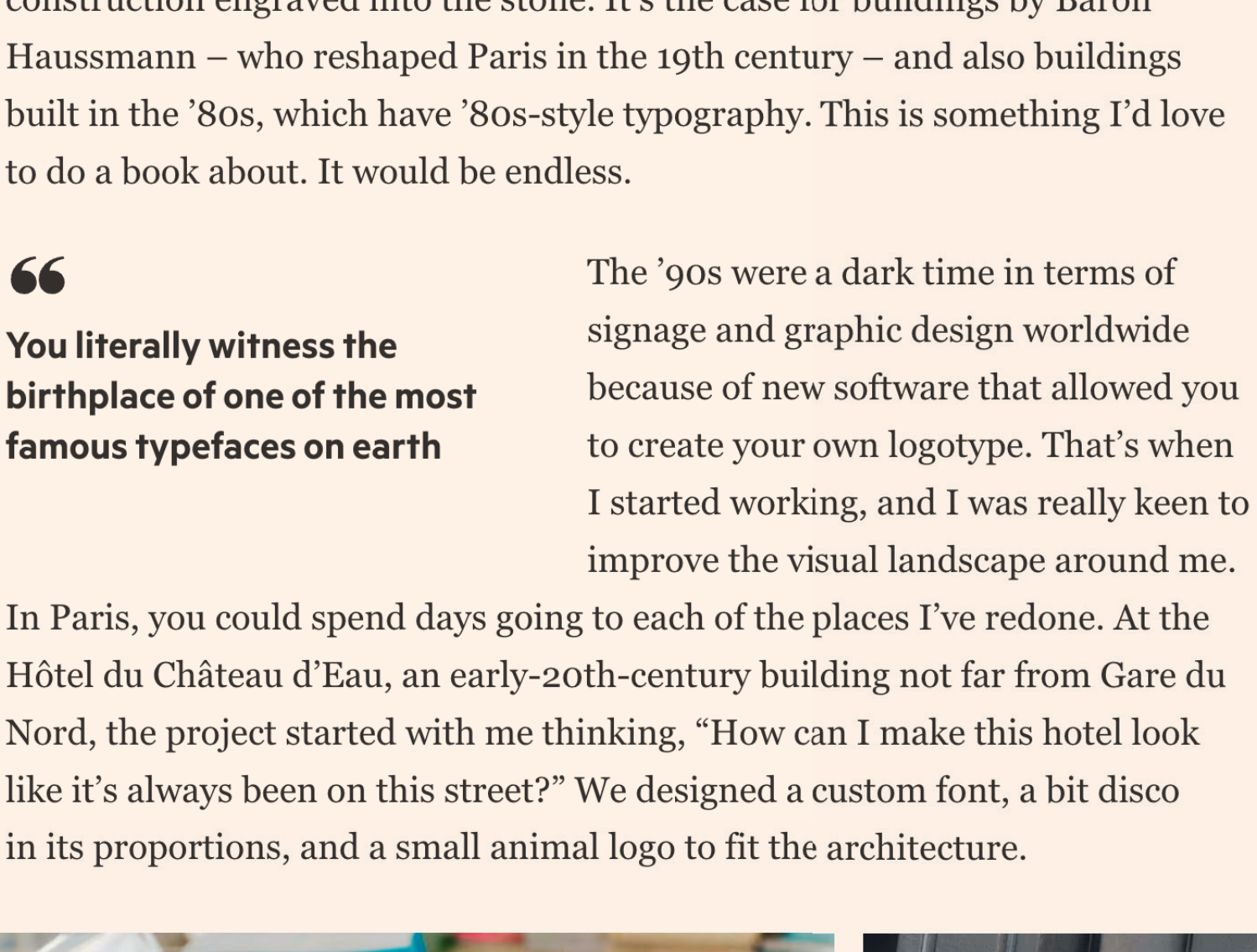
Firmin Didot’s former printing works at 56 rue Jacob © Aliocha Boi

There’s great typographic heritage in France – Claude Garamond, Firmin Didot, all those typographers lived and worked in Paris. There’s a building in the 6th arrondissement that used to be Didot’s headquarters, where he created the first modern typeface in the 18th century; it’s the font that *Vogue* uses. As you walk by you literally witness the birthplace of one of the most famous typefaces on earth.

Some of Paris’s main typographic landmarks are its street signs – the blue, green and white plaques with that specific shape and those fake rivets on the side. They’re in danger, though, because a lot of people are stealing them. Once they’ve been removed by some nefarious tourist, replacing them with the same typographic style is difficult. So they’re almost as good but not as good – it’s a real debate in Paris. The Métro signs are also quite interesting because there’s a mix; a bit of art nouveau, with those very exuberant typefaces from the early 20th century, and other styles such as stencil typography.



The sign for the Métro at Sévres – Babylone station © Aliocha Boi



Signage outside Le Rouquet brasserie © Aliocha Boi

Practically every building in Paris is signed by the architect who designed it. So if you look up, there’s going to be the name of the architect and the date of construction engraved in the stone. It’s the case for buildings by Baron Haussmann – who reshaped Paris in the 19th century – and also buildings built in the ‘80s, which have ‘80s-style typography. This is something I’d love to do a book about. It would be endless.

“You literally witness the birthplace of one of the most famous typefaces on earth”

The ‘90s were a dark time in terms of signage and graphic design worldwide because of new software that allowed you to create your own logotype. That’s when I started working, and I was really keen to improve the visual landscape around me.

In Paris, you could spend days going to each of the places I’ve redone. At the Hôtel du Château d’Eau, an early-20th-century building not far from Gare du Nord, the project started with me thinking, “How can I make this hotel look like it’s always been on this street?” We designed a custom font, a bit disco in its proportions, and a small animal logo to fit the architecture.



Tloupas browsing at Volume bookshop © Aliocha Boi

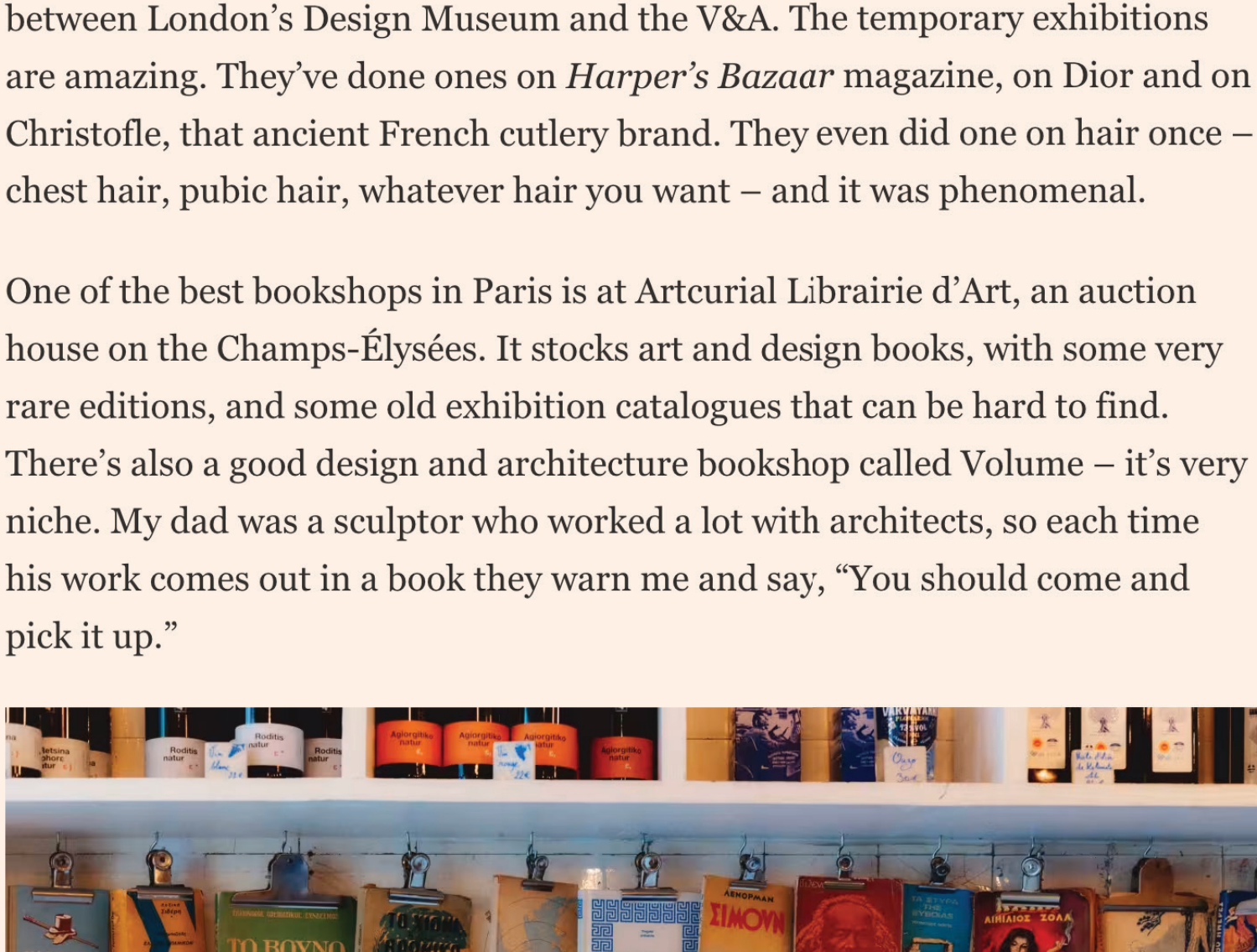


Tloupas outside Maison Gainsbourg, for which he designed the visual identity © Aliocha Boi

I also designed the visual identity for one of Paris’s newest museums, the former home of [Serge Gainsbourg](#). The logo is the profile of Gainsbourg and we created a custom typeface based on archives we found inside his house. All the handwritten signs are from his own handwriting that we scanned and adapted. The house is super-famous because it’s been covered in graffiti ever since Gainsbourg moved in there in 1969, and it’s the only street in Paris where graffiti is kind of authorised. There’s a constant renewal of stuff on the wall. I would also recommend [Galerie Patrick Seguin](#), the main mid-20th-century design gallery here. The project was done by the French architect Jean Nouvel, and it’s a great spot to experience Jean Prouvé, Charlotte Perriand and all those designers.



A garage at Paris-Cité University © Aliocha Boi



The entrance to Vaneau Métro station © Aliocha Boi

I’m a very faithful visitor to the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, which is somewhere between London’s Design Museum and the V&A. The temporary exhibitions are amazing. They’ve done ones on *Harper’s Bazaar* magazine, on Dior and on Christofle, that ancient French cutlery brand. They even did one on hair once – chest hair, pubic hair, whatever hair you want – and it was phenomenal.

One of the best bookshops in Paris is at Artcurial Librairie d’Art, an auction house on the Champs-Élysées. It stocks art and design books, with some very rare editions, and some old exhibition catalogues that can be hard to find. There’s also a good design and architecture bookshop called Volume – it’s very niche. My dad was a sculptor who worked a lot with architects, so each time his work comes out in a book they warn me and say, “You should come and pick it up.”



Inside Yorgaki, Tloupas’s café in Pigalle © Aliocha Boi



Tloupas with a Greek coffee at Yorgaki © Aliocha Boi

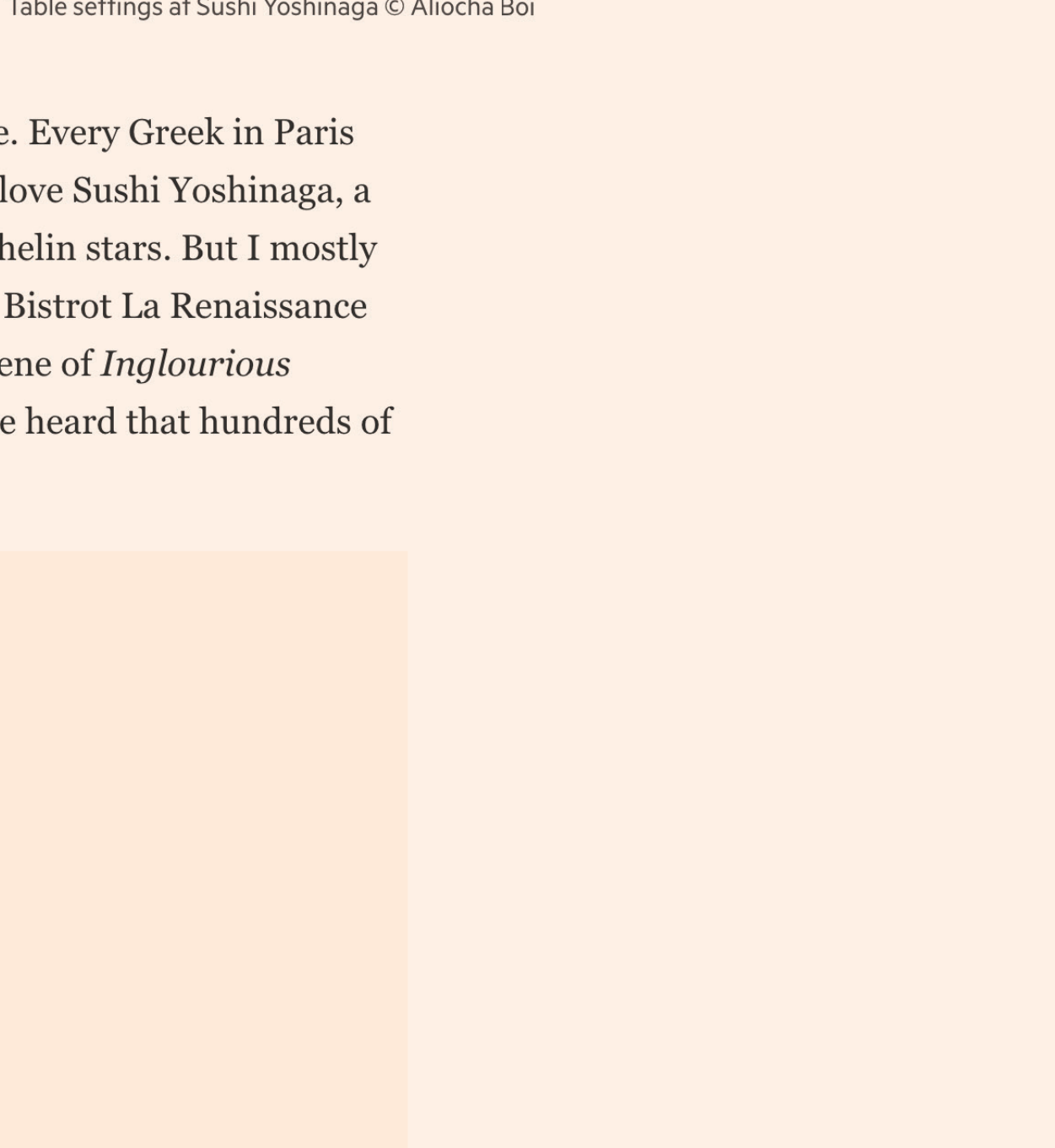


Table settings at Sushi Yoshinaga © Aliocha Boi

I can’t not recommend Yorgaki, my own café in Pigalle. Every Greek in Paris will come at some point for a Greek cold coffee. I also love Sushi Yoshinaga, a super-futuristic Japanese restaurant that has two Michelin stars. But I mostly go to local hangouts. There’s a bar on my street called Bistrot La Renaissance that hasn’t changed since the 1920s – they filmed a scene of *Inglourious Basterds* there. And of course Café de Flore, but you’ve heard that hundreds of times.

BARS, CAFÉS & RESTAURANTS

Bistrot La Renaissance [bistroflairenaissance.fr](#)

Café de Flore [cafedeflore.fr](#)

Sushi Yoshinaga [sushiyoshinaga.com](#)

Yorgaki [yorgaki.fr](#)

THINGS TO DO

Galerie Patrick Seguin [patrickseguin.com](#)

Maison Gainsbourg [maisongainsbourg.fr](#)

Musée des Arts Décoratifs [madparis.fr](#)

Skate Park Léon Cladel 1 rue Léon Cladel, 75002 Paris

SHOPPING

Artcurial Librairie d’Art [artcurial.com](#)

Volume [librairievolume.com](#)

WHERE TO STAY

Hôtel Château d’Eau [hotelchateaueau.com](#)