

FASHION & STYLE

In Paris, an Epicenter for the Smart Set

By DANA THOMAS MARCH 6, 2016

PARIS — The Sentier — a seedy, central neighborhood in the Second Arrondissement of Paris, sandwiched between the majestic Louvre and the medieval Marais — has long served as the city’s textile and garment manufacturing district. For centuries, its narrow cobblestone streets were lined with showrooms and workshops, and the clacking of sewing and weaving machines was heard in courtyards day and night.

Not any longer. Much of the neighborhood has been converted into a pedestrian-only zone, and now a host of stylish businesses are moving in, transforming the quartier into the latest open secret of the smart set.

The epicenter of this shift is Rue Bachaumont, a short, tree-lined street that connects the local market street Rue Montorgueil and the busy Rue Montmartre. Among the businesses that have opened or relocated there are the Hôtel Bachaumont, a hip boutique hotel and restaurant; Nose, an artisanal perfumery and beauty concept store; the Jalou Media Group, which publishes such glossy magazines as L’Officiel, Jalouse and L’Optimum; Eyeshow, a fashionable made-to-measure eyewear boutique; and as of next month, Christophe Robin, the celebrated French hair colorist responsible for the shimmering locks of Catherine Deneuve, Natalia Vodianova and Léa Seydoux — he will leave his posh, exclusive setup at the five-star Hôtel Meurice for something more modern and relaxed.

Mr. Robin discovered the street when he ran out of a perfume from Nose that had been a present from his partner. “You can only find it on the Rue Bachaumont,” his partner told him, so he hopped on his scooter one Saturday morning and headed to the shop.

“I fell in love,” he said. “I found the Paris of beautiful girls in heels, of shopping, terraces and pedestrians. It was divine.” He immediately started looking for a retail space.

“I’d been trapped in the Golden Triangle of Rue Royale, Rue Faubourg Saint-Honoré and Rue de Rivoli — this snobby luxury area — for far too long,” he said. “I wanted to rediscover the street and people.”

Rather than cater to V.I.P.s and celebrities who want their hair done in the utmost secrecy, as he has for years, Mr. Robin is turning more democratic. “I want 16-year-olds to 80-year-olds, mothers and daughters,” he said.

His new street-facing digs will include a 325-square-foot boutique selling his hair care products and a 1,782-square-foot salon that he dreamed up with the help of François Bosc, a French architect who specializes in the restoration of homes and mansions, and Mr. Robin’s friend, the fashion designer John Galliano.

“John lent me a book about Tony Duquette,” the lauded mid 20th-century Los Angeles-based interior and movie designer, Mr. Robin said. “And he helped with the colors to make it joyous. John is so good at that.”

The décor will be romantic, with a painted ceiling inspired by the early 20th-century Spanish muralist José María Sert and a sink shaped like a giant scallop shell, like that in Botticelli’s “The Birth of Venus,” for hair washes. “It will be hyper kitsch, like a 1950s American comedy,” Mr. Robin said. “I want customers to smile.”

He will offer color, cuts, blowouts, manicures — the works. Don’t know what you want? Come in and have a complimentary wash with his products and a consultation. “People say, ‘It won’t be luxury any more.’ But I don’t

care,” he said. “I’m excited to be on street near butchers and florists.”

The Art Deco-style Hôtel Bachaumont opened last year in what was a hotel when the nearby Les Halles was still the wholesale food market for Paris; most recently, the space was a radiology and X-ray center.

The hotel, owned by Samy Marciano, has 49 rooms, a sprawling bar and a terrace for use in the warmer months. Its restaurant menu was created with Grégory Marchand, the celebrated chef of the hot gastro-bistro, Frenchie.

Nose, at 20 Rue Bachaumont, opened in June 2012, kicking off the street’s revival.

The shop, conceived by three architects — including the Jean Nouvel assistant Samuel Nageotte — is high design, with soft-lit white walls, glass-front cabinets with amber bottles and a bar with vintage high-back stools where customers can sit to test scents. It set the aesthetic tone for other businesses, and in February, the French design blog Architectes-Paris named it one of the 10 most beautiful stores in the city.

“In the beginning, no one was walking on this street — it was dead zone,” the Nose founder and owner, Nicolas Cloutier, said. “Now you go outside for a few minutes, you see a lot of people. Because it’s a pedestrian street, you get fresh air and it’s calm.”

During a tour of the blocklong street, Mr. Robin pointed out a few of his other favorite addresses, like Les Ecuries, a hole-in-the-wall bar at No. 8 that, he said, “is a real hotspot,” and La Sultane de Saba, an Arabic-style hammam and day spa, next door.

Around the corner on Rue Mandar are Silk and Spice, an inviting Thai restaurant, and Jaipur Palace, a delicious Indian eatery. “This is really a center for ‘le fooding’”— the slow food movement, he said. “We will eat so well here.”

On Rue Greneta, a block over, is La Cave à Cocktail, which offers

takeout and delivery of mixed drinks. “It’s so dangerous,” Mr. Robin said with a laugh. “Can you imagine?”

“When I open,” he said, as we wound our way back to Rue Bachaumont, “I’m going to have a big party and invite the neighbors” — something rarely done in Paris.

“I’m returning to the Paris I fell in love with when I arrived here from the provinces in the 1980s,” he said. “It’s going to be great.”

Correction: March 7, 2016

An earlier version of this article misstated the owner of the Hôtel Bachaumont. It is Samy Marciano, not the Experimental Cocktail Club (although it does manage the hotel’s bar and restaurant.)

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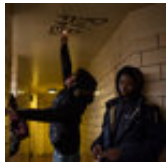
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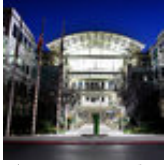
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