IN DEFENSE OF GOOD TASTE
TOWN & COUNTRY
MARCH 2016

NO ONE PLAYS A RICH GIRL BETTER
LILY JAMES LOOKS PAST DOWNTON

HOW THE GRANDE DAME BECAME THE NEW IT GIRL

SOCIETY'S ODD COUPLE MYSTERY DEEPENS
T&C UNVEILS THE 8 MOST ELUSIVE STATUS SYMBOLS IN THE WORLD

WHO'S AN AMERICAN PSYCHO NOW?
BY BRETT EASTON ELLIS

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FRENCH Seduction

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE PARIS FOR PUTTING YOU IN THE MOOD. AND NEXT MONTH IS APRIL...

By Klara Glowczewska

The waiter wanted to know if I had liked it.
"Ça vous a plu, madame?"

What a beautiful question when spoken in French. In many restaurants the world over it's a frequent and conversation-interrupting irritant eliciting a perfunctory "Yes, thanks." But well timed and uttered in that most romantic and suggestive of languages, with a little tilt of the head, a soupçon of a smile, the interlocutor's lips ever so slightly pursed around the vowels, it is something else entirely. A half-hour into a solo degustation lunch at the three-Michelin-starred Epicure at the Bristol hotel in Paris, I had not been prompted to emote about the artistry of the preliminary procession of four or five amuse-bouches, and I appreciated the restraint. But when the question finally came, I thought it all the more charming for being, surely, ironic. A few minutes prior my plate had held three pieces of delicate pasta shaped into cigarlike tubes filled with black truffle, artichoke, and duck foie gras—a spécialité de la maison, I had been told. Now the plate looked as if I had licked it clean. (Which, truth be told, I had seriously contemplated doing.)

Did it please me? I looked the waiter square in the eye and answered with a degree of emotion I have not often mustered in a restaurant, and never for something that on the menu was called "macaroni" (a culinary understatement if ever there was one). "C'était incroyable. Merci."

Which is pretty much the feeling I have about Paris itself each time I visit: incredulous, astonished gratitude. For my being there once again, for the city being as I had remembered, imagined, and hoped, and for all the sensations even its most ordinary sights and sounds so effortlessly and predictably elicit. My pretext for traveling there last fall—as it happened, a few days before the November 13 attacks and again soon after—was to sample four newish hotels in four arrondissements and ogle some Eiffel Tower-view apartments available for vacation rental. (See "Where to Stay Now" for details.) But what I hoped for, in addition to travel intel, were those serendipitous slivers of experience that, like the little brushstrokes on Impressionist paintings, coalesce over time and at distance into the shape and flavor of a place. As always, Paris beautifully obliged.

In my tiny but decadently jewel-like room at the Hôtel Maison Souquet, in the still red-light but now also newly hipster-chic Pigalle district, steps from the Moulin Rouge, I fell asleep to the sounds of a long and pleasantly animated conversation between a man and a woman. I think of it still. It wafted up unintelligibly but in charming cadences from the courtyard below my window, far more intriguing in its mysteries—Who were they? What was going on between them?—than any of the "toys" on blatant display in the specialty stores lining...
DIVE RIGHT IN
From top: The spa at the Mandarin Oriental; Sebastien Gaudard’s stellar patisserie.

both sides of nearby Boulevard de Clichy.

Then there were the sweets. On a tip ("It’s wonderful! Don’t leave Paris without seeing it") I popped into the Sebastien Gaudard patisserie on Rue des Martyrs—and lingered for at least a half-hour, physically unable to tear myself away from the aromas, the decor (surely the Platonic ideal of a patisserie), and the musings of Parisians parsing the fine points of which gâteau to take home.

The spacious, pale modernity of the Mandarin Oriental was surprisingly exhilarating in a city of cramped hotel rooms, as was its location amid all the seductive shops of Rue Saint-Honoré. My most cherished takeaway was the sight, during an early morning run along nearby Rue de Rivoli and the Tuileries gardens, of the dawn sky already streaked vivid pink and the 19th-century street lanterns still shining (INSTAGRAM, @KARAGLONCZEWICZ).

On my last afternoon in Paris—I had returned briefly two weeks after the attacks to a somber city largely devoid of tourists—I took a taxi to France’s new pilgrimage site, the streets, cafés, and restaurants of the 10th and 11th arrondissements, around the Bataclan concert hall. "It begins here," my driver turned guide indicated as we passed the first makeshift flower- and photograph-strewn sidewalk memorial. "I bring people a lot." Later, on the way back to the Peninsula, where I was staying, we stopped at an outdoor food market, I needed to walk along displays of another kind. "Alors," I overheard a man near me say to his companion, "on a besoin d’un petit pain. Et quoi d’autre?" ("We need a small loaf of bread. And what else?") Un petit pain—what a charming phrase. The balm of the diminutive, intimate, convivial in the face of the enormity that happened here. It is indeed what one needs. «

Haunted HOUSES
TWO NEW NOVELS, BOTH EMOTIONALLY WRENCHING, CONSIDER THE DEBTS OWED TO THE GHOSTS OF OUR PAST.

The idea for Jung Yun’s fearless and thrilling debut novel grew out of an infamous 2007 home invasion in the affluent town of Cheshire, Connecticut. Shelter (Picador, $26) begins with the narrator, Kyung Cho, taking in his wealthy immigrant parents after they have been brutally attacked in their home. "I wanted to tell the story from the perspective of someone just outside of the crime," Yun says. "Maybe not the victim himself, but someone victimized in a different way." Or many different ways. The crime sets the novel in motion, but it’s Kyung’s reckoning with losses of all kinds that gives the story emotional and psychological weight. "I was attached to the idea of debt, both in the familial and financial sense," says the author, who sets the story during the financial crisis. "I’m obsessed with how people try to make themselves comfortable," at any cost. For many readers, Shelter will be an introduction to the particular and complex pressures that exist for first- and second-generation Korean-Americans (Yun’s family moved from Seoul to North Dakota when she was three), but the troubles of Kyung and his wife—struggling to hang on to their home and marriage—are familiar to anyone. As Kyung juggles lines of credit, other accounts come due: a legacy of family violence that he must face in order to find hope again. Evan James

The author of The Dream Life of Sultana returns with a compelling conceit.

The third novel from Russian émigré Olga Grushin, Forty Rooms (Marion Wood Books, $27) traces the entire life of its heroine through a surprisingly natural structure. Each chapter, from childhood to old age, takes place in a distinct room, such as the bathroom of her parents’ Moscow apartment or the entrance hall of the East Coast mansion where she ends her days as Mrs. Caldwell. The ill-fitting WASPy name suits the narrator, who trades her poetic ambitions for a life of ease and children, yet she catalogs her well-cushioned days with a poet’s acute and unforgiving eye. Kevin Conley