

TRAVEL

A Guide to Julia Child's Paris

BY KEATON BELL

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Photo: Courtesy of Getty Images

When Julia Child moved to Paris in 1948, she didn't know a lick of French. For the then-36-year-old expat wasn't yet *the* Julia Child—the one who would go on to single-handedly bring French cuisine to the masses with her seminal cookbooks and cooking shows. The Pasadena native grew up with a family chef and barely knew how to scramble an egg. But when her husband Paul accepted a government job promoting French-American relations through the arts, Child packed her bags for Paris and never looked back.

“Surrounded by gorgeous food, wonderful restaurants, a kitchen at home—and an appreciative audience in my husband—I began to cook more and more,” Child wrote in her posthumously-released 2006 memoir, *My Life in France*. “I fell in love with French food—the tastes, the processes, the history, the endless variations, the rigorous discipline, the creativity, the wonderful people, the equipment, the rituals...”



Child shopping for produce, date unknown. Photo: Getty Images

Those years in Paris marked a crucial period of transformation for Child. She discovered a deep admiration for French cuisine, found her true calling as a chef at Le Cordon Bleu, and met future collaborators like the legendary cooking teacher Simone Beck. She may not have initially spoken the language or known any Parisians, but it didn't take long for the city to imprint on her as it has so many others.

“Those early years in France were among the best of my life,” Child wrote. “I had such fun that I could hardly stop moving long enough to catch my breath—I loved the people, the food, the lay of the land, the civilized atmosphere, and the generous pace of life.”

Child remains an indelible figure in the public's imagination, continuing to inspire a new generation of aspiring chefs and wannabe Francophiles. Meryl Streep earned an Oscar

nom playing Child in 2009's *Julie & Julia*, an adaptation of *My Life in France* centered around her pre-fame years in Paris. The English actress Sarah Lancashire currently plays Child in the Max original series *Julia*, which picks up where *Julie & Julia* left off with the publication of 1961's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, Child's wildly influential first cookbook. Regardless of how you first encountered Child—via Streep and Lancashire's interpretations, reruns of *The French Chef*, or that infamous Saturday Night Live sketch—it's impossible not to fall for her charms.

I was 14 years old when I first watched *Julie & Julia* and discovered the magic of Child. I begged my mother to pick up the ingredients for boeuf bourguignon on our way home from the theater, and ran to my local bookstore the next day to buy a copy of *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. Living about as far from Paris as one can get—the Oklahoma suburbs—Child's words and recipes instilled a sense of worldly wonder that's stayed with me ever since. She taught me that it was okay to fail as long as I took the utmost pleasure in what I was doing, and to never let that failure discourage one from trying again. I may have over-cooked and under-seasoned my first batch of boeuf bourguignon, but that only made my first successful attempt at the dish all the more exceptional.

“You never forget a beautiful thing that you have made,” Child wrote. “Even after you eat it, it stays with you—always!”

So when, after fifteen years of daydreaming, the time came for me to visit Paris for the first time this past winter, I figured there was no better tour guide for my trip than Child herself. While the Paris of today may not be identical to the Paris that Child encountered in 1948, many of her old haunts remain untouched by modernity. With my battered copy of *My Life in France*, the first season of *Julia* queued up, and a sense of *joie de vivre*, I set out to explore Paris through Julia's eyes.

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Hotel Pont Royal



Photo: Courtesy of Keaton Bell

Julia and Paul Child arrived in Paris on November 3, 1948, and immediately set up (temporary) residence at the famed Pont Royal. Located in the 7th arrondissement, the luxury hotel instantly immerses guests in the history of its storied past. The mahogany-lined Bar Signature became the first cocktail bar to open in Paris between the two World

Wars, becoming a hub for some of the foremost cultural icons of the twentieth century: Ernest Hemingway, the Fitzgeralds, Simone de Beauvoir, and Child. Order an Upside-Down martini—Child’s favorite—and settle into one of the leather club chairs for the full experience.

Address: 5-7 rue de Montalembert, 75007 Paris, France

Les Deux Magots

One of the first meals the Childs had in Paris was at this famed café, where they each ordered a cafe complete—a classic French breakfast of coffee and a baguette served with butter, jam, and honey. “Paul was amused to see nothing had changed since his last visit back in 1928,” Child wrote of Les Deux Magots. “The seats inside were still covered with orange plush, the brass light fixtures were still unpolished, and the waiters – and probably the dust balls in the corner – were the same.” The upholstery and waitstaff may have been updated, but the café still retains many of its classical flourishes—including those unpolished brass fixtures. As one of the more tourist-heavy cafés in Paris thanks to its history—Pablo Picasso and Albert Camus were regulars—you can probably expect a lengthy wait at peak hours. But if you can manage to sneak a table outside, you’ll be treated to a classic Parisian cafe experience.

Address: 6 Place Saint-Germain des Prés, 75006 Paris, France



Julia and Paul Child's longtime home



Photo: Courtesy of Keaton Bell

After residing at the Pont Royal for a little over a month, the Childs relocated to a classic Parisian building just a few blocks away. “It had a gray cement facade, a grand front door about eight feet high, a small interior courtyard, and an open-topped cage elevator,” Child wrote. “It was large, centrally located, and a bit weird.” Saying “81 Rue de l’Universite” proved to be a bit of a mouthful for Child, and so her beloved “Roo de Loo” was born. The couple resided on the second and third floors of the hotel-turned-residence, and it was here that Child first nurtured her love of cooking, perfected dishes that she learned at Le Cordon Bleu, and tested out many of the recipes that would end up in her first cookbook. “Roo de Loo” has become something of a pilgrimage site for Child devotees over the years, with many paying their respects by leaving a stick of butter on the front stoop. Afterwards, you can stroll the boulevard where Child used to buy pastries and produce, with many storefronts from her time in the neighborhood still in operation.

Address: 81 Rue de l’Universite, 75007 Paris, France

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Address: 81 Rue de l’Université, 75007 Paris, France

Le B.H.V Marais



Photo: Courtesy of Keaton Bell

When the Childs settled into “Roo de Loo,” they set about redecorating with trips to Le Bazar de l’Hotel de Ville—known then simply as “Le B.H.V.” Filled with “aisle upon aisle of cheaply made merchandise,” Child stocked up on household essentials like dishpans, brooms, light bulbs, and a stove. The department store has been supplying Parisians with a variety of beauty and household goods for over 160 years, but Le B.H.V. Marais has fancied itself up a bit since Child’s day. It now boasts over 2,000 brands, including storefronts for luxury stalwarts like Gucci, Givenchy, and Moncler.

Address: 52 Rue de Rivoli, 75004 Paris, France

Le Grand Véfour



Photo: Courtesy of Keaton Bell

Dining at Le Grand Véfour is like stepping back in time. Discreetly tucked into an arcade of the Palais-Royal, the Michelin-starred restaurant is one of the oldest in Paris, having first opened its doors when Marie Antoinette was still queen. Under the régime of current head chef Guy Martin, the restaurant recently updated its menu from high gastronomy to more elegant bistro fare. But never fear: the crystal chandeliers, gilded glass mirrors, and quality of cooking are all very much intact. It's easy to see why Child cites the restaurant as her favorite in all of Paris in her memoir, recounting her and Paul's first meal there with mouth-watering detail. "The meal began with little shells made with sea scallops and mushrooms robed in a classically beautiful winy cream sauce, and then we had a wonderful duck dish, and cheeses, and a rich dessert, followed by coffee," she writes. "It was expensive but, as Paul said, 'You are so hypnotized by everything there that you feel grateful as you pay the bill.'"

Address: 17 Rue de Beaujolais, 75001 Paris, France

E. Dehillerin



Photo: Courtesy of Keaton Bell

Child was “thunderstruck” when she first encountered this 200-year-old restaurant-supply store—located near the Louvre—and always made a point to stop by whenever she found herself in the neighborhood. “Now our kitchen had enough knives to fill a pirate ship,” Child wrote of her frequent “raiding trips” to E. Dehillerin. “I had become a knife freak, a frying pan freak, a gadget freak—and especially a copper freak!” You could waste an entire afternoon just admiring the gleaming copper vessels on display: sauciers, sauté pans, stew pots, and so much more. There was no way the gorgeous turbot kettle I had my eye on would fit in my carry-on back home, but I did manage to snag some more practically-sized doodads, including a wooden fish spatula and some cannelle molds.

Address: 18-20 Rue Coquillière, 75001 Paris, France

Le Cordon Bleu



Photo: Courtesy of Keaton Bell

Tinkering in the kitchen and eating her way through Paris wasn't enough for Child. "Something was missing," she wrote. "I wanted to roll up my sleeves and dive into French cuisine. But how?" Enter Le Cordon Bleu, the oldest and most famous cooking school in Paris. Child attended an afternoon demonstration that turned into a year-long intensive study, changing the course of her life forever. As the sole woman studying alongside 11 American GIs, Child learned not just recipes, but the French tradition of extracting the

full, essential flavors from food. “I was in pure, flavorful heaven,” she wrote. “Because I had already established a good basic knowledge on my own, the classes acted as a catalyst for new ideas, and almost immediately my cooking improved.”

Child learned all manner of dishes during her time at Le Cordon Bleu, including roasted partridges, ratatouille, chocolate ice cream, and her beloved boeuf bourguignon. Alongside more advanced programs like the one Child completed, the school offers a range of demonstrations and workshops for curious chefs. On a rainy day in November, I stopped by the campus for a cooking demonstration from Executive Chef Éric Briffard, who has been the Culinary Arts Director at Le Cordon Bleu Paris Institute since 2016 and Head of the Institute since 2018. Flanked by several students who whisked and mixed with furor, the chef prepared *loup farci en croûte*—a freshly-caught sea bass that’s been deboned, stuffed with a creamy pistachio paste, baked in pastry dough, and served with a tangy Choron sauce. It was, to put it mildly, the most delicious thing I’ve ever tasted.



Photo: Courtesy of Keaton Bell

The second-best thing was at a cooking workshop the following day. Under the guidance of Chef Instructor Alexandra Didier, I prepared a fig leaf-roasted duck breast, pears, and figs with cassia bark. Even putting aside the sheer wonder of cooking at the same institute that uplifted Child, it was an enlightening and exhilarating experience in the kitchen. I wouldn't call myself a particularly daring cook, or even a good one at that. But somewhere between chopping up duck carcasses for the jus and pan-frying figs in honey and butter, I had convinced myself that all my problems would be solved if I moved to Paris and enrolled as a student. Julia said you never forget something beautiful you've made, and I can still taste this dish: the rich and flavorful jus, the duck seared to perfection. Spend two hours with a trained professional guiding you every minute step of the way, and you too may convince yourself you could be the next Julia Child.

Address: 15 Quai André Citroën, 75015 Paris, France

The first two seasons of Julia are streaming on Max now.