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**HAVENS | PARIS**

## **You'll Always Have Paris**

**By DEBORAH BALDWIN**

PARIS does funny things to people. Imagine, for example, crawling off an airplane, making your way across the city with a bad case of jet lag and waking up the next day to find that you are the new owner of some stranger's apartment in the 17th Arrondissement.

That would be where, exactly? And how much did it cost again?

"It happened so fast," said Deviyani Nautiyal, sounding surprised even several months later as she recounted a hunt that began at home, in front of a computer. "I can't believe we bought an apartment within four hours of landing."

She was on the phone in Rochester, Minn., where she and her husband, Sanjeev Sethi, a pathologist at the Mayo Clinic, normally live, an inconvenient 12 hours and two subway rides from their new second home.

It's hard to get figures on how many Americans leave Paris with a souvenir in the form of a French mortgage. But the number is "mushrooming," according to Cecil Jones, president of Just France Sales, a property finders' service for those who speak English. (Incidentally, the number of agencies like his is mushrooming, too.)

Lured by such services, low interest rates and hopes that investing in French real estate is a smart way to diversify — if the euro continues to strengthen — Americans are scouring parts of Paris they barely knew five years ago. Consider the 17th, where Ms. Nautiyal, a lawyer, and Dr. Sethi found their 635-square-foot, one-bedroom, 375,000-euro (about \$480,000) pied-à-terre in January. Indeed, you might consider it now, before the next wave of buyers spills over from the heavily touristed Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Arrondissements.

The 17th may have its funky stretches and seem a bit removed on the far Right Bank, but that's one reason it still has deals, making it the latest destination for Americans who long for a well-priced piece of Paris.

Not long ago some of the same people might have focused on Left Bank addresses like the Rue Cler, a lively market street in the Seventh Arrondissement not far from the Eiffel

Tower. Today there are so many Americans shopping on Rue Cler for their bread and French butter — and their second homes — that half the voices you hear have a familiar accent.

Ms. Nautiyal says that she sees the 17th as an antidote to "Leftitis," and financially, anyway, she is right: according to Paris Real Estate Finders, a search-and-buy service, which helped steer her and her husband across the Seine, the average asking price per square foot in the Rue Cler neighborhood topped \$1,050 in May, in contrast to an average asking price in the 17th of \$773. And the highly diverse 17th, at least for the moment, has far fewer people from back home.

It also has patches that are not so wonderful — the Avenue de Clichy comes to mind — and some that are elegant indeed. C. Randolph Fishburn, a lawyer in New York who frequently works in Paris, paid 1.1 million euros last year for a central-casting two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment on the stately Avenue de Wagram: 1,400 renovated square feet in a 19th-century building "across from the only 24-hour flower shop in Paris," he said. He added that the florist also stocks Champagne — presumably in case of emergencies. Mr. Fishburn said he "realized the market is undervalued and I could do this as investment and a euro hedge."

Closing costs were high but carrying costs — property taxes and maintenance fees — are not, and his mortgage rate is below 4 percent. That's lower than this season's high heels.

The 17th sits on the Right Bank like a big crooked wedge of pizza, its nose under the Arc de Triomphe and its crust overlapping the beltway that rims the western edge of the city. In the late 19th century, when Paris was expanding like a soufflé, the far-flung 17th was a getaway for the world-weary. Zola retreated there to write (and gave his heroine Nana, an actress turned rich-man's mistress, a 17th Arrondissement address). Impressionists lived and worked there too, recording the train stations rising to the east, their tracks strewn in fistfuls in the 17th. As developers piled in, large apartments rose up to accommodate bourgeois families and well-kept Nanas.

Today the arrondissement is a patchwork of neighborhoods plain, fancy and iffy. Grand avenues like Wagram emanate from the Place d'Étoile like spokes in a wheel, and just below the 17th's southern border, in the fashionable Eighth, sits the seductive Parc Monceau. At the eastern edge is the mildly gamy Place de Clichy, to the north the villagelike area called Batignolles. Hidden throughout are quiet streets, green spaces and bargains.

## The Scene

An infusion of young families is adding street life to some areas, and there's a pleasant

hum around the Place des Ternes, said François Thomazeau, co-author of "The Authentic Bistros of Paris" (The Little Bookroom). "It's — well, not trendy," he said of the 17th, "but interesting."

Think of it as the French equivalent of Murray Hill. But with more places to pause: the Square des Batignolles, for its benches, and bakeries like Laurent Connan (38, rue des Batignolles) and Franck Perotti (11, rue Flaubert), for their baguettes.

"It is a very community-oriented place," said Janet Rotner, who lives with her husband, Philip, a lawyer, in Chicago and found their 17th Arrondissement apartment in a classified ad in *Le Figaro* six years ago. During visits, "we go to the markets, we do some cooking, we bring home food from the *traiteur*," she said, evoking a common fantasy among those who hole up in tiny hotel rooms and are forced to eat out three times a day.

One sign of the arrondissement's health is its concentration of baby carriages and renovation construction cranes, said Darrell Halverson, who runs Paris Real Estate Finders with his wife, Stephanie Freedman. Favorite hunting grounds include the area around the Square des Batignolles, "where the streets are narrower and you have the feeling of being in a village, anchored by the park," Mr. Halverson said.

### Pros

The 17th is calmer and less expensive than tourist-filled areas like the Marais and the fashionable Eighth. The Villiers Métro stop is served by two major lines, a big plus. Lively outdoor markets spring up at the Place de Lévis and on the Rue Poncelet and the Boulevard des Batignolles.

Parisian co-ops generally do not subject buyers to time-consuming scrutiny, and they generally tolerate the comings and goings of strangers, should one decide to make an apartment available to friends or to renters.

### Cons

It's easy to fall under the sway of the city and its boosters, some of whom flog Parisian properties as if they were a no-risk investment. The market is cooling off slightly and the euro, now trading at \$1.29, could get stronger — or weaker. Despite the assurances of some property agents, not all absentee owners have luck finding tourists to rent their apartments by the week, especially in the 17th. Carrying costs can be reasonable but inheritance taxes are high: some Americans arrange to have an heir's name on the deed.

The French do not have multiple listings, and many apartments are sold by owners, often through classified ads. Bargains go quickly. Sellers often take their kitchen appliances with

them, a French custom, and long-distance renovations can be awkward.

The Batignolles area is a hike from stations served by a single line. Taxis can be hard to flag after midnight.

### The Real Estate Market

Parisians, like New Yorkers, are enjoying a boom (or bulle, as some French economists say), zealously tracking prices with the help of a trade group, the Society of Notaires, which gives square-meter sales prices in dozens of neighborhoods in racing-form style. For the 12 months ending in December 2005, prices were up 11.4 percent over 2004 around the Place des Ternes, and 16.7 percent around Batignolles.

Americans often turn to bilingual services like Paris Real Estate Finders ([www.parisrealestatefinders.com](http://www.parisrealestatefinders.com)), which not only sift through the offerings but also help buyers find the requisite notaire, or lawyer, line up a mortgage and survive a French closing. Paris Real Estate Finders scours the classifieds and other sources to find listings placed by owners and real estate agents and charges its clients a percentage of the purchase price.

Just France ([www.justfrancesales.com](http://www.justfrancesales.com)), based in Berwyn, Pa., does this without charging a fee (it collects from the listing agent), and it also helps buyers rent out their apartments to tourists. French-owned services include My Home in Paris ([www.myhomeinparis.com](http://www.myhomeinparis.com)), and My Flat in Paris ([www.myflatinparis.com](http://www.myflatinparis.com)), which sells apartments as investments and leases them back for three years for use as corporate rentals.

Paris Real Estate Finders's advantage is its constantly updated database, which is cross-indexed in multiple ways and has hundreds of listings throughout the city, many in the 17th. Clients fill out a short questionnaire (walk-up or elevator? what price range?) and while still in the United States receive listings that meet their criteria. The system saves time for all involved: clients like Mr. Fishburn and Ms. Nautiyal snap up the first apartments they see.

Mr. Halverson, who helpfully translates square meters and euros into terms Americans can understand, has calculated that in 2005 buyers paid an average of \$726 a square foot in the 17th, in contrast to \$976 in the Sixth.

The most expensive arrondissement in 2005 was the Seventh, at \$992 a square foot, he said, and this spring the average asking price in the Seventh's select Gros Caillou quartier is, as noted around Rue Cler, even higher.

Once you get above \$1,000, he said, you may as well buy in New York.

Ms. Nautiyal, in Minnesota, said she and her husband had visited Paris together only once before they made the leap. They bought their apartment on his second trip to Paris (she had been there several times before).

"It was a big risk and a crazy decision," she acknowledged. But it was in Paris, she explained, away from their busy everyday lives, that they realized how much "we enjoy walking and talking, which we don't have a chance to do most of the time."

"We couldn't bear to leave the place," she said. And so if all goes as planned, she said, they will be back again in Paris in August.

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