

PIECES OF PARIS

Follow Petit Pixel as she wanders the streets of her hometown, Bendigo, photographing and writing about the people, places and food she finds along the way. You can read more on her blog www.petitpixeldesign.com



Three years ago I had a chance to spend a few days in Paris during autumn, one of my favourite times of the year in any city. Leaves crunching beneath boots; branches beginning to bare; leaving the afternoon chill at the door of a café; sitting by the window with a coffee in hand, watching trench coats and umbrellas pass me by. If I went looking for pieces of Paris in Bendigo, what would I find?

Passing by Mon Coeur at dusk is one of my favourite places to start. Their constantly reinvented window displays look especially stunning at this time of day, projecting a soft inviting glow on the pavement. I wish I lived nearby so I could walk by more often, as a drive-by glance does not do them justice. When a store cares this much about how they look on the outside, you just know the interior will be equally beautiful. I love how the layout includes different rooms with different looks, perfect for wandering without really running into anyone...made for exploring on a Saturday afternoon. Check and see if they have the jewellery that comes with little scrolls of French poetry, as they are just gorgeous. There is much to love, so much so that I have to ration my visits accordingly.

One of the best things about Mon Coeur is that while they sell actual original Parisian finds, they also stock many other items that complement the authentic look and feel without being overtly French. This means a wider range of pieces (and prices) to choose from, which can easily blend into your personal style. So, if you're looking for an actual antique French door; or some lovely stationery and stamps; scarves for soft layering or an oversized armchair to curl up in, make sure you stop by.

Now, we can't talk Paris without discussing macaroons; tasty little bites of meringue sandwiched either side of flavoured fillings; slightly crunchy on the outside; chewy beneath the surface and soft in the centre. When you've had a traditional macaroon, you are hooked, and deservedly so.

They have been riding a wave of popularity on the foodie scene in the past few years and as such are now more easily available. There are some suggestions that they may be pushed aside by the next big thing, but I hope they are here to stay as they are one of my favourite little sugar hits.

You can find them made in-house at Masons of Bendigo, Café Essence and sometimes The Dispensary. The Subtle Eye and Favourite

Flavours also have a good range to choose from. But keep an eye out at your favourite café; you are more than likely to find them nestled in the cake cabinet.

Speaking of macaroons, if you are in the Kyneton area you must stop in to Monsieur Pierre and sample their selection... traditionally made and just gorgeous. They have an amazing range of other delicious choices, including cheeses, and one of the best croque-monsieurs (like a cross between mustard influenced French toast and a cheese/ham toastie) I've had outside of Paris. But, if you're wanting to put together a cheese platter locally, be sure to check out the selections at Bendigo Wholefoods and Edwards Greengrocer and Deli.

Now, to complete my research I had to visit Bouchon, Bendigo's own French restaurant tucked away on High Street just past the fountain. In the car on the way, I was psyching myself up for ordering snails as my entrée. I've never had them before, and I wanted to be able to tell you I had a fully rounded French dining experience. I even Googled "how to eat a snail" so as not to repeat that restaurant scene in the movie *Pretty Woman*. But, when it came time to order, I couldn't bring myself to do it. I chickened out. Seeing the crème brûlée on the dessert menu was my downfall. I told myself that this would also count as part of the traditional experience, and let's face it, sugar is more my forte, oui?

So if escargot are your thing, be my guest, but switching to a dessert choice was 100 per cent worth it for me. Everyone knows the crisp caramelised top layer of a brûlée is the most important part, and this was amazing for the maximised crackability factor. Bouchon has a focus on sourcing locally, our meals were delicious, and our waiter enthusiastically discussed both the menu and Carlton's 2013 prospects with Luke...a friendly relaxed dining experience.

So, if you're craving a baguette for your bicycle basket, stop by The Good Loaf. Then take a detour via Bendigo Hat Shop for a cosy beret and finish with a coffee in hand, perusing the local produce at the Bendigo Community Farmers' Market. There are pieces of Paris right on our doorstep.

You will find more information and photos about the places mentioned on my blog at www.petitpixeldesign.com/bendigomag Design resources with thanks to One Little Bird Designs. ■

