

ONLY IN PARIS

A search for unique things that you can buy only in Paris

We all know that Paris is a city of many charms. One of the city's most charming aspects, of course, is its wide array of specialty and artisanal shops and boutiques. These small establishments may offer handmade wares, simple but with a French twist, or, perhaps, more mass-produced items based on family secrets handed down over the years. Places to buy things that exist only in Paris abound but sometimes are elusive for visitors. These four shops fit the bill.

When Parisian Sophie Bastide opened **L'Écritoire** (61 Rue St-Martin, 4th) thirty years ago on a sleepy Right-Bank street she had no idea how fortuitous its location would become. Bastide's sales of old-fashioned fountain pens and colored inks skyrocketed when the Centre Pompidou opened just down the block. Suddenly, hundreds of people were visiting her shop every day. With her newfound success, she was able to expand her inventory to include fanciful cards and colorful envelopes of her own design, for which she is now well known.

Passersby, enticed by the calligraphic cards in her window, were lured into her shop in droves and were leaving with mounds of items. These included sacks of unique tools for craft projects (such as perforators that punch a narrow lattice through which you can thread a ribbon of another color paper), sticks of sealing wax and unusual seals, and squat glass pots of ink in a rainbow of colors—including “invisible” ink.

Over time, however, Bastide's self-designed colorful cards are what have become her best sellers. They come in five models, each with a different geometrical shape, which fold inwards like flower petals, and are held together in the center by a stamp. The cards are often used for birth or marriage announcements, and Bastide sells them in large packets of mix-and-match colors for this purpose. The popularity of Bastide's hand-designed cards caught the attention of other stores in France, such as Le Bon Marché, which occasionally stocks them, but the only place you can find them for sure is at L'Écritoire.

Across the Marais from L'Écritoire is a small shop called **Fabricant Celis** (72 Rue Vieille-du-Temple, 3rd). Here you'll find a limited but fascinating inventory of unique handmade sweaters, hats and mittens. But Fabricant Celis' specialty is, well, finger puppets. Pinned to the wall are hundreds of inventive puppets (6.90€) that will bring a smile to the face of any adult. They are irresistible to try on, as the store's owner, Roxana Pecquet, quickly encourages you to do.

Pecquet's imaginative themes are inspired by

the dolls in her children's bedroom. Safari puppets include giraffes whose necks extend beyond the height of a finger, elephants with floppy ears and lions with fringe manes. Sea creatures like blue sharks, mermaids with long braids, turtles and orcas swim across the shop's walls. Fairytale characters are the most popular: Goldilocks, Pinocchio, Snow White. Pecquet's favorite is the full cast (including costume changes) of Little Red Riding Hood: bespectacled grandmother, Little Red carrying her wicker basket, the wolf in overalls and, in another version, in Grandma's robe, bonneted, with glasses.

Pecquet, a Parisian of South American origin, learned knitting from her mother. Now she employs ten people to copy her prototypes. “It takes passion and patience, especially to capture



the facial expressions,” she says. The hand-knit puppets, made from machine-washable cotton and wool, are popular with children as well adults. Adults often buy in bulk to give puppets as party favors, while children want one of every character in the shop. Stock up because you can only get them in Paris.

Another woman who uses her hands to create unusual, one-of-a-kind “objets d'art” is Claude Jeantet. Jeantet works in a closet-sized shop called **Claude Jeantet** (10 Rue Thérèse, 1st), tucked away in a Japanese restaurant area near the Opéra Garnier. A soft-spoken woman with a sophisticated eye, she works by herself transforming cardboard—yes, cardboard—into decorative objects like picture and mirror frames, small boxes and little animals for children. Jeantet's expertise lies in her finesse with a razor and her intriguing designs. Her glue-drop-free cardboard objects are as fun to hold for their airy lightness as they are to look at.

A former architect, Jeantet's precision-oriented former work served her well when she got into working in crafts. She has made a name for herself in France for work she describes as

“cardboard carpentry.” Instead of working in large-scale wood or stone, she chose cardboard as a medium because, she says, “It was more interesting.” Nine years ago, Jeantet was creating do-it-yourself dollhouses, trains and mini-theaters for craft magazines. Designing those projects she honed her skills, and then went out on her own. After writing six books on crafts she opened her own shop, which is the only place you can buy her work.

Her stock includes reasonably priced do-it-yourself magazine boxes decorated to look like animals, nativity scenes and cuckoo clocks. These pack flat and will fit comfortably in your suitcase. She makes small decorative animals, jewelry boxes and frames of many sizes. And she will do larger custom-order frames and even furniture. An American recently ordered a rococo frame and it was ready to take home by the end of his trip.

Respite from maddening crowds of 6th arrondissement shoppers can be found in the calm haven of artisan **J. Pierre Heckmann's** unusual ivory store (57 Rue Bonaparte, 6th).

Heckmann, a jovial man in his seventies, is a fifth-generation carver, who was actually born in his shop. Now he works alongside his grown son, sculpting and repairing ivory. It is rare when passersby walk by his window without pausing to admire his exquisite Japanese netsuke, rosary beads, delicate earrings, miniature bible covers, baby rattles, envelope openers and antique miniature sailboats—all made of ivory.

Looking through the window of the shop, you can watch Heckmann's son as he repairs the likes of a nineteenth-century samurai sword with an ivory handle and other pieces of ivory in various stages of repair. It's mesmerizing to watch him in action. With his handful of metal tools,

he works from a well-worn wooden worktable illuminated by a curious lamp. The lamp's bulb shines through a glass globe full of blue liquid. Artificial light filtered through blue copper sulfate creates mock sunlight, which helps the carver see the fine grain of the ivory.

In 1913, when Heckmann's family moved from Dieppe to set up shop in Paris, they brought their Norman expertise with them. Dieppois sailors were famous for shipping ivory from the African coast, and carving it at home. Today Heckmann mostly does repairs: ivory jewelry, old crucifixes, small sculptures. The Washington Convention of 1978 allows him to sell ivory that has already been imported; the family's hidden stash provides him with literally tons of scraps. Heckmann, repairing a crucifix three centuries old for a Parisian client, picks through the pieces to find one he can turn into the Christ's missing finger. He saws and sands, the years of study and practice evident in his easy manner. “In the absence of light,” he warns, “ivory yellows. You must keep it out,” or do what you must with precious things—“wear it every day.” Another Paris original!

—By Maisie Wilhelm