

TRAVEL

Visit to Paris brings this drama to life

BY KEELY KALESKI WYGONIK
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Laura Raich has only been to Paris once, but she believes you could go there a dozen times and not see enough.

"It's absolutely beautiful," she said. "The streets were so tiny, and the people were delightful. They giggled a lot at the American women."

London used to be her favorite city, not anymore. Raich fell in love with Paris just like her father, Bob, who first visited the city in 1951. In December, Raich

founded in 1986, that's housed in a small cottage.

Comedian Steve Martin visited the bar frequented by Pablo Picasso and other artists, and wrote a play, *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*. It's a story about what might have happened if Pablo Picasso and Albert Einstein had met. The story takes place at Lapin Agile.

Picasso at the Lapin Agile

Who: St. Dunstan's Theatre Guild of Cranbrook, 400 Lone Pine Road, Bloomfield Hills
When: 2 p.m. Sunday, March 17, 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, March 22-23
Tickets: \$12 adults, \$10 students and seniors, call (248) 644-0527

Now playing at St. Dunstan's Theatre Guild, *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* was one of the things that made Laura's trip to Paris so interesting. Her father was designing the set for the show and wanted to see what the bar looked like. Kim was doing the props.

After seeing the place, Laura decided to try out for the play

and got the part of Germaine, whose original name, coincidentally, was Laura Gargallo. She was an artist model and one of Picasso's lovers. In the play Germaine is a waitress and the bar owner's girlfriend.

Romantic gift

John Irvine of Rochester Hills portrays Freddy, the bar owner, and took his wife, Krystyn, to Paris during the week of Valentine's Day. It was a Christmas present. Krystyn is also cast in the play and portrays Suzanne, another one of Picasso's love interests.

"I fell in love with Paris," said Krystyn. "It's so rich in history, and the architecture is beautiful."

Her favorite place was the Montmartre area. "It has a very quaint, Old World feel to it, because of all the hills," she said.

Visiting Lapin Agile "was great, a neat experience," said John. "There's something about being in that bar that made it

real, it's not a fictional place, it brought a reality to the show."

His advice to anyone considering a trip to Paris - "Go, and don't believe the stereotypes you hear about the French being rude. That's not the case. The French are very accepting, and the language barrier is not an issue, learn a few words. We picked up a few guidebooks from Borders and just winged it. We talked to friends who'd been there and were just adventurous."

John and his wife stayed at the Intercontinental Hotel, and made arrangements through a travel agent.

Birthday celebration

Bob Raich of Lathrup Village celebrated his 72nd birthday in Paris this December. A highlight was dinner at the Jules Verne Restaurant on the second floor of the Eiffel Tower. The reservations were made four months in advance of their trip. They ordered the fixed menu - 12 courses.

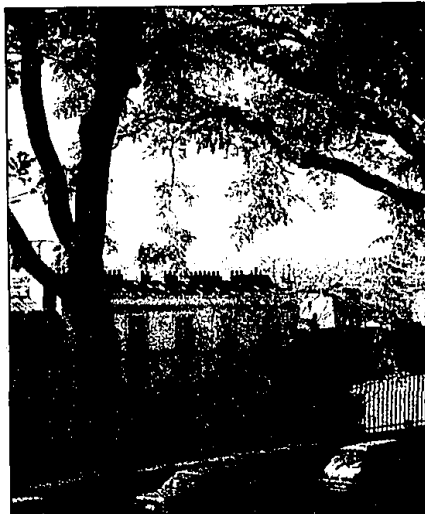
"The food was fabulous and the service impeccable," said Laura. "My dad is nuts about Paris. He made sure I saw all the famous sights. We stayed at the Le Jardin in the Opera Quarter. It was centrally located and came with breakfast."

Her favorite sights included the Louvre, Musee d'Orsay, Harry's Bar, Cafe de Flore, and the Opera House - Opera de Paris Garnier.

The lines were long at the Louvre, so she didn't see the Mona Lisa, but Laura did see an impressive textile exhibit of clothing from 2001 back to the 1400s.

"It was beautifully displayed, and they had tubles of fabric you could touch. It was quite stunning," she said. At Musee d'Orsay she saw two wall side pieces by Toulouse-Lautrec that were amazing. It was her favorite museum, and used to be a train station.

Harry's Bar was special because her dad had been there while he was in the service.



Paris landscape: In the distance you can see the Eiffel Tower. This is the view from the steps of Sacre-Coeur, a Catholic Church.

There's a University of Michigan flag on the wall.

Being in the play at St. Dunstan's brings back happy memories of Paris. "Every night I'm in the show I get to go back to Paris," said Laura. "It will be hard to say Au revoir."

Her father is planning another trip to Paris in April. "I love the architecture, the food and wine," he said. "I find the French refreshingly honest."

Visiting Lapin Agile helped him design the set for the show at St. Dunstan's. "It was great fun," he said. "I picked up many details."

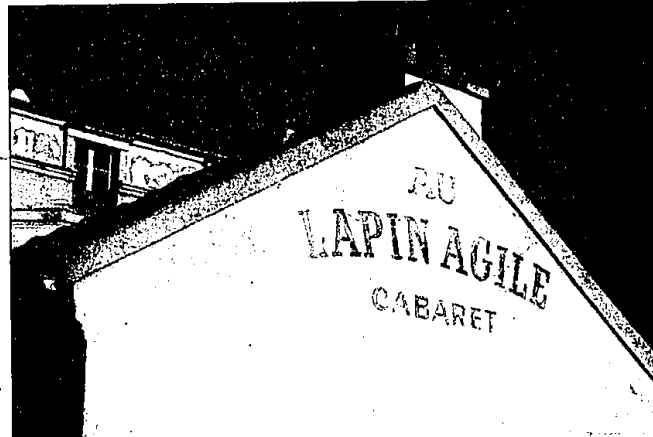
His advice to anyone planning a trip to France is, learn a little of the language. He took a class

at Oakland Community College.

"Go with a smile on your face, and change your money here. It's best to use credit cards, but take two and leave one in your hotel. You'll get the best exchange rate with a credit card."

"Be careful of pickpockets. The French hate it too. It's prevalent in Paris. Don't keep anything in your back pocket. Use the Metro - it's the only way to travel, and it doesn't take a long time to learn the system."

Laura recommends purchasing a copy of *Eyewitness Travel Guides to Paris* published by Dorling Kindersley, \$24.95. She found it helpful, and has purchased the book for friends who are planning to go to Paris.



Cottage: From the outside Lapin Agile looks like a rustic cottage. It's a well known nightspot that has a long history of being a gathering place for artists and writers.

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