

# SACRÉ BLEU! —Paris

**Preface**

There's a revolution brewing in Paris. Fortunately it has rather less to do with guilottines and rather more to do with langoustines: the city's bistros have been getting a makeover. As have the menus – forget the seafood and have a burger instead.

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Last year, Joseph Dirand's brasserie Monsieur Bleu opened in Palais de Tokyo. With its gold-plated brass bar, frosted oblong art deco wall lights and vintage Lalique bas-reliefs, at first glimpse it is very much part of the Parisian vernacular. However, look a bit closer and you'll spot rectangular light fittings hanging where gilt chandeliers should be. "Like giant lanterns, they fill up the space and disperse a warm, sexy light," says Dirand.

Then you scan the menu: it's chicken burgers and tacos not steak-frites or *soupe à l'oignon*. All in all, Monsieur Bleu is a whole new take on the traditional French bistro – and it's just one of a new spate of bistros reinventing the Parisian staple as the city reasserts its position on the international culinary and design landscape.

Across town is Restaurant Éclectique, opened earlier this year and designed by Tom Dixon. It's designed with an industrial flavour that's become the *ordre du jour* in the restaurants of New York and London in recent years. Dixon believes renewed appreciation of the neighbourhood's unrefined 1970s buildings is a sign of the times. Accordingly, his design revisits Le Corbusier's *béton brut* – the industrial functionalism of raw concrete.

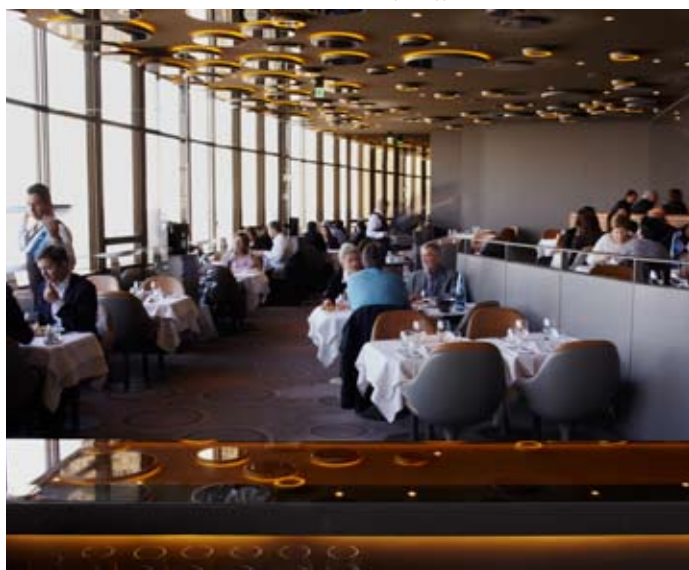
In the centre of the semi-circular restaurant, a massive honeycomb of Dixon's trademark amber lights hangs from a bare concrete ceiling. Along the centre



of the bistro, a double-sided tan-leather banquette is punctuated with chrome bell lamps and paired with Dixon's veined marble "rock" tables and aubergine Verner Pantone 1958 cone chairs.

"The brasserie has survived because it is so easy to use with its expert formula of a short menu of broadly appealing dishes," says Dixon, whose dose of English eccentricity adds to the eclectic flavour. "I wanted a mash-up of a Seventies-disco Paris plus a bit of British hardware."

Where Restaurant Éclectique has a slight 1970s twist, architect and designer Noé Duchaufour-Lawrance has aimed to bring a dinosaur dating from said decade bang up to date. The Frenchman was charged with the renovation of Le Ciel de Paris, located at the top of the 210m tall Tour Montparnasse and dating



- 01 Maison Bleu's chandelier-free interior
- 02 Architect Joseph Dirand
- 03 Chicken burgers are on the menu at Maison Bleu
- 04 Maison Bleu wall light
- 05 Tom Dixon's amber lights in Éclectique
- 06 Maison Bleu shuns typical bistro decor
- 07 Éclectique has a 1970s vibe
- 08 Entrance to Éclectique
- 09 Le Ciel de Paris
- 10 Designer Noé Duchaufour-Lawrance

back to 1973. "Despite having the best views in the city, it was like an old casino: sombre and marred by window joinery," says Duchaufour-Lawrance. "The principle concept is the use of halo ceiling mirrors to create a sense of fluidity."

These UFO-like orbs of shiny pewter in three sizes emit a warm bronze glow. Furnishings have the same organic, sensual form: mustard leather fauteuils bound in grey resin and a galley bar made from cast iron. The extraterrestrial ceiling of Le Ciel de Paris isn't to everyone's taste but it beats gilded mirrors and *trompe l'oeil*. "Until now, Paris dining has been dominated by big institutions or little intimate restaurants of zero architectural interest," says Duchaufour-Lawrance. "A new wave has arrived from the US with more focus on the product."

Dirand says Parisians are happily swallowing the new bistro culture that he and his cohorts have created. "Some tradition must stay," he says. "A brasserie, no matter how modern, must remain a place of social mixing, whether you are a student in your sneakers or a lawyer in a suit." — (M)

## Café culture

It's not just the bistro that's having a spruce up. The Parisian café scene is also being transformed with the infiltration of seriously technical espresso bars-cum-roasters – and some great architecture. It shows that the French food-and-drinks industry is reconnecting with the rest of the world.

**01**  
**Café Coutume**  
Stainless steel, square white tiles, grid lighting, industrial plastic curtains and chemistry beakers set the espresso laboratory mood of this café (pictured below, middle). Cut Architectures tore down the false ceiling and walls to bare intricate plaster mouldings, crafted doors and a verrière glass roof. The lab benches sport coffee-making contraptions from Japanese siphons to a La Marzocco Strada. [coutumecafe.com](http://coutumecafe.com)

**02**  
**Café Kitsuné**  
Café Kitsuné (below) has standing and sipping room only under the Palais

Royal arcades, which has raised some eyebrows with the sidewalk-seat-friendly locals. Conceived by fashion duo Gildas Loaëc and Masaya Kuroki, the menu is equally minimalist: espresso and cookies *à bar* in true Italian style. [kitsune.fr](http://kitsune.fr)

**03**  
**Ten Belles**  
Ristretto in content and form, Ten Belles (below and bottom) near Canal Saint Martin has a purist classroom allure: raw timber French doors, lofty ceiling, white walls, mini mezzanine and folding wooden chairs. [tenbelles.com](http://tenbelles.com)

**04**  
**Télescope Café**  
Whitewashed ceiling beams and fading parquet floors infuse an airy transparency to Télescope Café. Tucked behind a retro beige and glass façade, the miniscule parlour's large oak comptoir is flanked by a sprinkling of *guéridon* bistro tables, overhung with contemporary chrome and Victorian light fixtures. Great coffee, too. [telescopecafe.com](http://telescopecafe.com)

