

Why LA? Pourquoi Paris? An Artistic Pairing of Two Iconic Cities

Diane Ratican

Eric Giriat, Illustrator

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This tale of two cities effectively compares and contrasts the disparate cultures of ancient Paris and modern Los Angeles.

Diane Ratican compares the unique attractions of two popular metropolitan areas in *Why LA? Pourquoi Paris? An Artistic Pairing of Two Iconic Cities*. The fanciful illustrations of Eric Giriat and Nick Lu add visual excitement to her engaging narration.

This inspired tour of two cities is both a sophisticated travel guide and an informative coffee table book. A longtime resident of Los Angeles, Ratican's import business takes her frequently to Paris, where she now has a second home. Her familiarity and enthusiasm for both cities drive the book's narrative.

The text is structured around seven chapters that explore distinctive features of each city, such as landmarks and monuments, entertainment and culture, and sports and outdoor attractions. Colorful illustrations of these topics follow each chapter's narrative sections and appear on facing pages, captioned accordingly in English and French. The book concludes with Ratican's recommendations for restaurants, hotels, and shops in the two cities, including business types and addresses.

The author effectively compares and contrasts the disparate cultures of ancient Paris and modern Los Angeles, and the visual impact of Giriat and Lu's illustrations serve this end well. For example, the sharp angles of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, built in 1961, are boldly highlighted in yellow and green. In contrast, the Louvre, dating from 1793, depicts the classical domed structure in soft blues, with the modern glass pyramid blending discreetly in the foreground.

Ratican uses her knowledge of clothing trends to good effect in the chapter on fashion and shopping. Both cities rank among the world's top design centers. She notes that the casual culture of Southern California nurtures sportswear design, and LA's relaxed T-shirt with jeans style has fostered the area's production of exceptional denim. This modern focus on casual chic contrasts markedly with Paris, where fashion dates back three hundred years, and high fashion is considered an art form.

The text contains some French words, whose meaning can usually be inferred. If not, the author provides an accurate explanation. The book's effective mix of lively text, original art work, and generous white space reflects Ratican's design sense. The relaxed, conversational writing style successfully reflects her deep affection for Los Angeles and Paris. Bits of obscure information, such as the first Baskin-Robbins ice cream store starting in Glendale, an LA suburb, in 1953, add a unique touch. This book's thick matte pages and glossy cover give substance, as do well-chosen quotations from notable people, such as Oscar Wilde, Edith Wharton, Andy Warhol, and Audrey Hepburn.

Why LA? Pourquoi Paris? merits attention from those planning to visit either or both cities. Those who prefer to travel vicariously through the book's pages will delight in discovering the two metropolises' special qualities.

MARGARET CULLISON (September 4, 2014)

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