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# LEADING LIGHTS

WE CHECK IN TO THE BEST NEW HOTELS IN PARIS, FROM PRESIDENTIAL CRASHPADS TO POST-OFFICE CONVERSIONS.  
INTRODUCTION BY STEVE KING





PHOTOGRAPHS: SOPHIA VAN DEN HOEK/@UN\_FOLD\_ED

For a long time I kept a secret guiltily. Not a guilty secret but a secret I felt guilty about keeping. The secret was the Hôtel Henri IV, overlooking the raked-gravel paradise that is the Place Dauphine on the Ile de la Cité. It was cheap and shabby but inexpressibly glamorous – a remnant of an elegantly careworn Paris that has, in the course of my own lifetime, been either polished beyond recognition or dissolved in a fast-flowing, irresistible current of money. The Henri IV was sold some years ago. Maybe I shouldn't feel guilty about having kept it a secret. Simply spreading the word wouldn't have been enough to save it. And in truth it was probably never quite as squishily ripe with promise as I remember it to have been. Yet isn't that the point about hotels in Paris? The good ones are more than the sum of their parts, even when the parts are heavenly. The really curious thing is that, however many Henri IVs the city loses, it always seems, year after year, to gain even more of them. The Paris hotel scene is like some endlessly absorbent miracle sponge, and the latest crop is exceptional. The Cheval Blanc has an ambition to rival any of the great palace hotels, while Le Grand Contrôle at Versailles is in an actual palace (both have been reviewed before on these pages). The thrilling new Saint James, with interiors by maximalist *du jour* Laura Gonzalez, is the city's first officially designated château-hotel. But not all strive for opulence, or to ape the manners of the Meurice, the Ritz or the Bristol. The likes of Madame Réve, Château Voltaire and Hôtel Rochechouart build on the sort of witty, unstuffy, urbane alternative to the palace hotel that was suggested in recent years by innovative French outfits such as the Experimental Group (Le Grand Pigalle, Hôtel des Grands Boulevards) and Evok (the Nolinski, the Brach). Many are breathing new life into unloved post offices, motels and department stores. There's a particular chemistry involved, one that has to do with the often unexpected but pleasing combination of disparate elements. I happened to mention all of this to Sylvain Ercoli, managing director of the new Bulgari Paris – a man who, having previously managed Claridge's, the Martinez and the George V, has seen it all. 'Old charm with new energy,' he said, summing it up to perfection.



BEST FOR YOGIC BALANCE

## HOY PARIS

Palo santo burns in every corner of this 22-bedroom hotel, banishing negative vibes on the upper end of rue des Martyrs in the 9th arrondissement, where Pigalle bumps into Montmartre. Hoy not only means 'today' in Spanish, but also stands for Home of Yoga. Franco-Mexican owner Charlotte Gomez de Orozco, a certified teacher, has created a Japanese-influenced *wabi sabi* sanctuary of slate greys and mints, where the air is purified and the minibar has been replaced by a ballet bar with instructions for pre-sleep and post-waking stretches.

For all the artwork featuring yogic poses, and the reminders to breathe on lift doors, Hoy nonetheless feels like an indulgent sanctuary, where the little details have been thought of: the ceramic iPhone speaker stations, the old-school telephones with circular dials, the gorgeous slouchy kimonos, a collaboration with French brand Pausania and yours to keep for €55. The hot yoga studio from local collective Yuj offers residents a discounted rate of €25 for classes under special Japanese infrared light. In the lobby, florist Chiaki Kokami runs flower-arranging classes, another Japanese touch in a hotel where the water is carbonated with *binchō-tan* charcoal. The plant-based Mesa restaurant is a surprising joy, with dishes such as carrot lox, a take on the smoked-salmon version from the minds of Lauren Lovatt and Carolina Rodriguez, of the Plant Academy London. There are also sweet chia puddings with fruit compote and almond-butter-stuffed purple corn pancakes. As with so much in this impeccably curated space, there's pleasure to be had in living purposefully.

SARA LIEBERMAN *Doubles from about £150; hoyparis.com*

BEST FOR CHATEAU GRANDEUR

## SAINT JAMES PARIS

If ever there were a reason to camp out in the elegant but sleepy 16th arrondissement, it's for this property, Paris's only officially designated château-hotel. Occupying what was once the site of the city's first hot-air balloon landing field, this neoclassical former home of President Adolphe Thiers became the site of the Thiers Foundation, a school and academic residence, in 1892. In the 1980s, the space was transformed into the Saint James Club of Paris, a London-style private hangout.

The hotel came about a decade later, with the decor handled by legendary designer Andrée Putman. Since then, it's undergone two other radical transformations, most recently by Laura Gonzalez, whose affection for mixing antiques with modern furnishings has turned it into a romantic Parisian abode once again. Soaring volumes, decorative frescoes and contemporary nods to old-world elegance abound, from the grand entrance to the library bar. That extends upstairs to 50 bedrooms and suites done up with nature-inspired wallpaper, custom-designed carpets, stunning chinoiseries and a warm palette of earthy greens, mustards and terracottas, alongside a mish-mash of motifs and Pierre Frey fabrics. Chef Julien Dumas plays exclusively with seasonal ingredients (sourced largely from the hotel's organic garden) for an inventive menu at Bellefeuille restaurant, kitted out like a winter garden. The most notable change comes one floor down with the addition of a three-room Guerlain spa, inspired by Greco-Roman thermal baths. It all seems decidedly more château than hotel, and entirely unlike any other getaway in Paris. LINDSEY TRAMUTA *Doubles from about £410; saint-james-paris.com*





BEST FOR LA DOLCE PARIS

## BULGARI HOTEL PARIS

Think of this quietly decadent hotel on avenue George V as a portal, or possibly even a break in the space-time continuum – one that can spirit you from Paris to Rome in the time it takes to order a croissant. Between the Gio Ponti artwork, plush Maxalto furniture and even the dozen signature Italian pastries on offer, there's more than a hint of the *bel paese* suffused into this high-polish Parisian hideaway. Close to Le Bristol and the Plaza Athénée on the so-called Golden Triangle, it's the sort of place where patrons in Prada glasses might convene for an aperitivo at the backlit onyx bar to discuss the latest show at the Palais de Tokyo while nibbling on plump Castelvetrano olives and crumbly focaccia rings. Swiss businessmen swim morning laps in a semi-Olympic pool glimmering with malachite and gold mosaics. There's a certain pristine perfection to the place, which was a decade in the making. Italian architectural firm Antonio Citterio Patricia Viel led the renovation of a Seventies post office, extending the window openings over two floors – a nod to the Renaissance palaces designed by Andrea Palladio – and constructing the façade with the same pale ashlar masonry as Paris's most recognisable monuments, including the Louvre and the Trocadéro. The food and drink, developed by science-driven chef Niko Romito and former Ritz mixologist Leonardo Zanini, is precise but unfussy – expect luscious spaghetti *e pomodoro* preceded by fizzy tequila cocktails. The Bulgari feels like a crisply sumptuous cocoon; a slice of high-fashion Italy that somehow fits just right into one of the world's great hotel quarters. BETSY BLUMENTHAL  
*Doubles from about £1,170; bulgarihotels.com*

BEST FOR VELVETEEN GLAMOUR

## MONSIEUR GEORGE

George Washington never went to Paris. The farthest he ever got from home was a short visit to Barbados. Yet the Parisians held him in sufficiently high esteem to erect two fine statues in his honour and to name a street after him, each of them in a notably posh part of the capital. Now the street dubbed rue Washington in his memory has a hotel in a converted townhouse at number 17 that bears his name too: Monsieur George, a delicious bite-sized *macaron* of a place. Credit for the hotel's deliciousness must go to its interior designer, Anouska Hempel, a woman of many talents and exceptional energy. Among her claims to fame is nothing less than the invention of the boutique hotel – an era-defining phenomenon that sprang into existence when she opened Blakes in London in 1978. Blakes was full of mirrors, velvet and exotic flourishes suggestive of a well-travelled, sophisticated, possibly rather decadent way of life. And so is Monsieur George. The mirrors, the velvet and the exotic flourishes are very much in evidence – and it is testament to the enduring strength of the Hempel aesthetic that it all still works so nicely, that it all still seems so fun and fresh, sexy and chic. The rooms at Monsieur George, let it be said, are not large. Rather compact. Ask, therefore, for one of the suites, either the Marly, in the courtyard to the rear, a sort of miniature mews house with the bedroom upstairs and lots of clever partitions and screens; or the Franklin, on the sixth floor, an utterly unexpected white-on-white affair beneath the eaves, an essay in monochrome minimalism, more monastic than presidential – and only the more delightful for it. SK *Doubles from about £325; monsieurgeorge.com*





BEST FOR CITY INSIDERS

## CHATEAU VOLTAIRE

When I first moved to Paris to study, aged 19, I lived on rue Saint-Roch – a 1st arrondissement street which was then largely unloved and little visited, except for financiers, a few tourists and the odd fashionista drawn to the church that hosted Yves Saint Laurent’s funeral. So there was a certain buzz when the corner townhouse at number 55 was unveiled during Paris Fashion Week as a new hotel owned by Thierry Gillier, co-founder of cult fashion label Zadig & Voltaire. What was once the brand’s showroom has been transformed into a timelessly chic bolthole by in-demand architectural duo Festen (also behind Hôtel Rochechouart) and Franck Durand, the creative director married to ex-*Vogue Paris* editor Emmanuelle Alt. The prevailing sense is of undone elegance; almost of being in Gillier’s home, with his art collection including a Picasso in the suite that was his private quarters. Like many great Paris hotels, there’s an in-house pet – in this case the GM’s French bulldog, Bobby. Spaces here seem to be for locals as much as hotel guests: the low-lit, baroque-style La Coquille d’Or bar, with its scallop lights that are subtly echoed throughout the property; the inviting living room; and the understated Brasserie l’Emil, an almost rustic setting for oysters or *steak bleu*, with its tiled walls and marble bar. The 32 rooms – the smallest at 226 square feet – are like smart little apartments, with dusty-pink velvet sofas, bean-to-cup coffee machines and white bathrooms. Nothing here feels forced, which partly explains why it is already a key address for Parisian insiders. And on the rue Saint-Roch, of all places. SHIVANI ASHOKA *Doubles from about £375; chateauvoltaire.com*

BEST FOR CHIC WHIMSY

## LA DEMEURE MONTAIGNE

It takes a certain level of confidence to arrive in Paris’s Golden Triangle, among the Chanel boutiques and urban palaces such as the Four Seasons and Hôtel Plaza Athénée. La Demeure Montaigne – a newcomer from the Frontenac Group that has three hotels nearby – does so with sly whimsy. There are feather-flower chandeliers, jungle wallpaper and ginkgo-patterned carpets throughout the 93-bedroom address. Soft jazz and the delicate scent of powder filters up from the subterranean spa – a future-forward draw, with its quartz-walled pool, hot baths, steam room and cabins with heated tables for massages using marine-based Thalgo products. Back upstairs, a Carrara marble hall leads to a stately billiards room that exudes cosy chic, with its fireplace, circular granite bar and Pop Art portrait of French philosopher Michel de Montaigne. The restaurant, L’Envolée (‘Flight’), is in a dramatic glass atrium, above which soars a bird mobile by sculptor François Lavrat – a sort of metaphorical challenge to chef Grégory Réjou, who sharpened his knives alongside Alain Sanderens at the nearby Plaza Athénée; for dessert try the candied clementine and poached pear with tonka-bean cream. For all the sense of a hush-hush retreat, there are landmark views – in apartment 605 and suite 608, king-sized beds face wrought-iron balconies with views of the Eiffel Tower. There’s a floral femininity to most rooms, with reliefs of birds and fauna, and TVs are discreetly positioned behind dressers or ornate wall mirrors – all of which suits the overriding feeling of discovering a hidden treasure. SL *Doubles from about £340; lademeuremontaigne.com*





BEST FOR A YOUTHFUL BUZZ

## CHOUCHOU

Some hotels clearly set out to be places in which to gather as much as to sleep. At the Opera district's new Chouchou hotel, it's possible to miss the entrance entirely, drawn instead into Le Marché, a food market which doubles as a venue for DJs, live music and stand-up. On this visit, the space is buzzing with young Parisians packed onto trestle tables, ordering cheese and charcuterie plates or oysters for a euro a go from mock stalls with striped awnings. This is the 19th hotel from the Elegancia group, the brand behind smart addresses such as the Left Bank's floral-chic Hôtel des Grandes Ecoles and the sultry black Hotel Snob in Les Halles. But never has an outpost been so squarely aimed at locals as well as visitors. This is Paris, though, so the 63 reasonably priced bedrooms remain eminently grown-up: in L'Arrache Coeur (The Heartsnatcher) suite, named after the Boris Vian novel, there are blue-panelled walls, a forest-green sofa against a bookshelf wall (lots of Vian) and jazz LPs for the Grundig vinyl player. Slightly smaller junior suites are named after classic French songs, such as the pastel-pink La Vie En Rose, with views across copper chimney pots to the Palais Garnier opera house. Downstairs, the continental breakfasts are unfussily satisfying, though it's worth saving room to join the queue later at nearby patisserie Cédric Grolet, where the croissants are famous. This needn't feel sacrilegious: Chouchou isn't a place to be sequestered away from the city, but a place to be plugged into its rhythms. *TABITHA JOYCE Doubles from about £130; [chouchouhotel.com](http://chouchouhotel.com)*





BEST FOR THROWBACK THRILLS

## THE REMIX HOTEL

With so many Parisian hotels done in fiercely good taste, there's something refreshing about one with a loose Eighties theme and a colour scheme heavy on hot pink. It starts with the words 'Forever Young' on a rug beside the entrance, but goes further. The lyrics from the 1984 hit by German synth band Alphaville are woven into the design of two custom-made wallpapers; and when you pop a cassette into the USB-port-enabled boomboxes – there's one in every room – the Jay-Z version of the song comes on. Yes, this is that place – where green neon signs above beds implore guests to 'Scream', possibly into a retro bedside phone, which is just about doable given that soundproofing foam lines the walls.

Exiting the lift into the hallway feels like stepping into a scene from *Star Wars* or *Pac-Man*: ceilings and carpets are covered in a black-and-white-check pattern, while blinding white lights outline room doors. Then there are the artworks, including a Super Mario character made of Lego above a stack of Rubik's cubes that spell out R-E-M-I-X. Guests who are here to work can access nine hi-tech meeting rooms named Madonna, INXS, Elton, Freddie, Cyndi, Prince, Tina, Blondie and Bowie. Non-residents are invited to use the spaces, too, and communal areas on three floors are often booked for events. Channelling Van Halen's 'Hot for Teacher', there are even old-school lockers in which to leave any work accoutrements or luggage. There are pool and table-football tables, arcade games and a tile-walled restaurant that, slightly incongruously, serves American soul food inspired by Marvin Gaye. In this Remix, almost anything goes. SL

*Doubles from about £75; remix-hotel.com*

BEST FOR TWENTIES DECADENCE

## HOTEL ROCHECHOUART

Strolling through the Pigalle neighbourhood and into this eight-storey Art Deco relic, there's a distinct sense of a time when the Twenties roared. A late-night hotspot on boulevard Marguerite de Rochechouart, the hotel's Jazz Age incarnation drew in travelling artists, intellectuals and a smattering of stars. It's now part of Orso, a new collection of hotels run by industry veterans Louis and Anouk Solanet (also behind Hotel Wallace below), and the sultry theatrics of the era make a welcome comeback. The couple teamed up with Charlotte de Tonnac and Hugo Sauzay of Festen Architecture to revive the building's legacy with modern touches. Some of the finest original details were restored, from the Thirties blue mosaic floor in the restaurant to the marble staircase and glass lift. Upstairs, 106 rooms were given an autumnal, woody touch with shades of bronze, ochre and terracotta. Decorative details, from the burl-wood headboards to the curved armchairs and alabaster suspension lamps, thoughtfully whisk guests to another time. The Sacré-Coeur looms large from northern-facing bedroom windows (and in some cases, balconies) but is visible to all from the rooftop bar. On the ground floor, an old-world brasserie with plush banquettes serves up comforting Parisian classics, from chicken-liver pâté to roasted pork belly with crisp *frites* and the signature crêpe cake – a family recipe guests invariably try to coax out of the staff. Come spring, the experience will come full circle when the old Mikado club of the 1920s, one floor underground, returns as a speakeasy to begin a new chapter of Pigalle nightlife. LT *Doubles from about £160; [hotelrochechouart.com](http://hotelrochechouart.com)*



BEST FOR MOD-RETRO STYLE

## HOTEL WALLACE

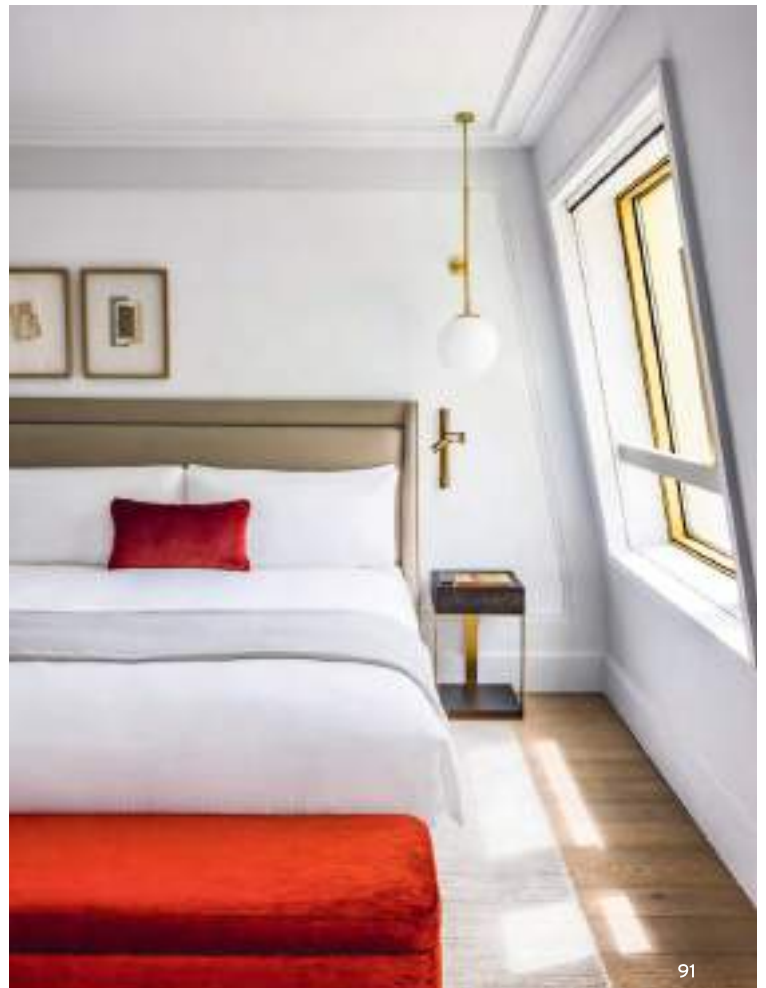
Despite being within eyeshot of the Eiffel Tower and the gilded dome of Napoleon's tomb, the 15th arrondissement in western Paris has always felt more like a neighbourhood than a destination per se. For the Wallace's owners, Louis and Anouk Solanet, that was part of the charm when they gave a coolly retro makeover to a derelict building which locals might vaguely recall was once a low-cost hotel. Now, it feels like the heart of a quietly hip village, in an area of little boutiques and specialist food stores. The Solanets maintained the original structure but added several floors and a leafy terrace accessible from the third floor, with a Nordic bath, outdoor sauna and classic view of Parisian rooftops. Among the 45 bedrooms, several on the first few floors have more of a motel vibe – small but comfortable, with windows looking onto an interior glass roof. The others, including the top-floor junior suite with a sizeable double balcony dotted with deckchairs and bedroom skylight, evoke the elegance of an Orient Express-style night car. Headboards and shelves are sleek, in lacquered and varnished wood, while brass reading lamps, fringed light fixtures and Kartell nightstands add to the retro vibe. Striped coral-and-white curtains lend a hint of Riviera colour, while the terrazzo floors and bathroom countertops are signatures of the interior designers, French-Italian duo Samantha Hauvette and Lucas Madani. There's no on-site restaurant, but the glass-covered cocktail bar has a menu of local nibbles selected by the team at cult rotating-chef restaurant Fulgurances. LT *Doubles from about £130; [hotelwallaceparis.com](http://hotelwallaceparis.com)*

PHOTOGRAPHS: LUDOVIC BALAY; CERRUTI DRAIME;  
JEROME GALLAND

BEST FOR REVIVALISTS

## KIMPTON ST HONORE PARIS

What is it with hotels and department stores in Paris? Within months of the Cheval Blanc appearing next door to the famous La Samaritaine last year, Kimpton's first French property opened in what was once the department store's luxury outpost on the storied boulevard des Capucines. Designed by La Samaritaine architect Frantz Jourdain in 1914, its Belle Epoque façade is still a showstopper, with its wrought-iron balconies and arched bay windows that once housed elaborate product displays. Inside, many of the original features remain: the imposing spiral staircase, balconies and monumental period lifts that have been restored but aren't in use. The scheme by local design darling Charles Zana is sympathetic to the history, and feels like a Parisian pied-à-terre meeting the Art Deco style of Thirties luxury hotels. There's a creamy elegance to the 149 bedrooms and suites, all parquet floors, Carrara marble and Chanel-inspired black-and-white curtains. If the design feels quintessentially French, from the Pierre Mesguich mosaics to archive-inspired Pierre Frey fabrics, there is also an American notion of convenience that's true to the Kimpton brand: yoga mats, portable phone chargers, even a little sex kit. But the most un-Parisian place of all is the 190-seat Montecito restaurant that channels insouciant Palm Springs, with its green-walled terrace, seaside colour scheme and Cali-Mex menu created by Paris-based food writer Carrie Solomon. With a modest but inviting pool and a spa from French cosmetics company Codage, there's a sense that this American brand has done right by a Parisian icon. LT  
*Doubles from about £375; kimptonsthonoreparis.com*





LOUX FEMME

BEST FOR NOSTALGIA

## HOTEL MADAME RÊVE

Post offices are – or at least used to be – inherently romantic places, and none more so than the central post office in Paris. Not only was it as vast and grand as any of the galleries in the nearby Louvre Museum, it was also open 24 hours a day. Its closure for renovation seven years ago was an inconvenience that over time became a matter of consternation to residents.

What would become of this beloved landmark? *Alors*. You should have seen the looks on faces of passers-by – the double-takes, the eyes widening in astonishment – when Madame Rêve, which occupies a substantial portion of the post-office building, opened this past autumn. A seductive honeyed glow emanates from the discreet corner entrance. Through the windows of its ground-floor café are visible a stupendous space of boiserie panels, acres of golden velvet, a forest of columns rising to 26ft-high ceilings. These tantalising hints of splendour are matched by the transcendent outlook from the hotel's top-storey restaurant, La Plume. The rooftop terrace, directly accessible from the restaurant, is an ideal place from which to survey a rapidly changing neighbourhood – one referred to as 'the New Golden Triangle'. And perhaps most marvellous of all, a smaller version of that much-missed old post office has reopened almost directly below. *SK Doubles from about £415; madamereve.com*



BEST FOR COMMUNITY SPIRIT

## BABEL

Stepping away from the bustling boulevard de Belleville in the 20th arrondissement and into this 31-bedroom hotel feels almost like walking into a souk in Marrakech, with glass lanterns, *tomette* tiles and tapestry-covered armchairs. Owner Joris Bruneel's dream was to honour the neighbourhood's rich multiculturalism. He employed prolific boutique-hotel designer Daphné Desjeux to take inspiration from the locale, as well as the Silk Road and the eponymous biblical fable in her rich aesthetic. He also wanted to involve the community – such as local street artist 13 Bis who did the clever Adam and Eve bathroom murals, while Franco-Afghan chef Clarie Feral Akram serves pesto babka topped with tahini in the excellent restaurant. Not only that, but the hotel works with the nearby town hall to help those in need of emergency housing for a few nights and, in a collaboration with the Refugee Food Festival, provides nine-month internships to chefs from war-torn countries. Saturday lunches, however, are all about the *mamans du quartier*, who come in to cook their own cuisine, be it Algerian couscous or Damascus *muhammara*. In the minimalist rooms, thoughtful details make up for missing mainstays such as robes and TVs. There are jars filled with tea or ground coffee from local roastery La Brûlerie de Jourdain. But the most clever touch is the framed photographs on the walls. 'We asked all our friends to send us the best pictures from their travels,' says Bruneel. There's one of his friend's kids in Kabul, and another featuring the manager's girlfriend in Bolivia's salt marshes. Babel is a rare thing – a new hotel with a tangible soul. SL Doubles from about £100; [babel-belleville.com](http://babel-belleville.com)

PHOTOGRAPHS: JEROME GALLAND; BENOIT LINERO

