



PARIS FLEA MARKET WEEKLY

13 november 2020
#9

ASTIER DE VILLATTE

Behind the scenes of
"Ma vie aux Puces"
(My life at the Flea Market)



THE GUIDE

Genesis and anatomy
of a bestseller.



Ivan Pericoli and Benoît Astier de Villatte, founders of the house editing pretty things *Astier de Villatte*, have always been compulsive bargain hunters. Going to the Paris Flea Market is vital for them. Not a weekend without a foray, without a crush or a nice surprise carried back home. In 2018, they have published for the first time the guide *Ma vie aux Puces* ("My Life at the Flea Market"), a sensitive and personal guide to an ever-changing universe. Genesis and anatomy of a bestseller.

Since the beginnings of the Flea Market, its double life at the gates of Paris has intrigued and ignited the pens of many a writer. The flea-related bibliography is indeed abundant, but to date few or no guides have been devoted to the largest antiques market in the world. Versatile, elusive, the Flea Market is perpetually in motion. Nothing that was last Saturday will be next Sunday. Try writing a guide with that: barely published, already out of date. You might as well draw up an inventory of drafts and missed deals.

None of this has frightened the Astier de Villatte. Their guide "*Ma vie aux Puces*" strolls, searches, hunts through the maze of markets and streets. In the age of the digital and apps, their guide is a pure manifesto, a coquetry published in French and English that enchants their readers, even those who live far away.

Page after page, *Ma vie aux Puces* is an off-beat and intimate gospel, a treasure map anyone can use to hunt a unicorn.

***Ma vie aux Puces* is an offbeat and intimate gospel, a treasure map anyone can use to hunt a unicorn.**

Since we are at the Flea Market where we like to turn things over, we turned over *Ma vie aux Puces* to find out where-when-what-how. Inventory.

It all started in 2015 in the south of Paris, within the walls of the SAIG typographic printing house, which used to flourish and was then on the verge of bankruptcy. Specializing in art books, this family-owned company was then and still is in the hands of Mr. Huin, a strong character who remained in the time of the typographer and who used to hold the rights of Léo Malet!

A living treasure of sorts. Especially since the fellow is among the last ones in the profession still knowing how to compose books with lead letters. Machines emerging from another time, vernacular linotypes: for Ivan Pericoli and Benoît Astier de Villatte, the opportunity has to be seized.

The duo quickly acquired the printing press, reinforced Mr. Huin's passion for his profession, and in the process founded the **Astier de Villatte Editions**. After old-fashioned white porcelain, after candles, after colognes, paper. Seems logical when we know that they occupy two historic shops in Paris: one rue Saint-Honoré, known as **the Purple Monkey** (*Singe Violet*), a bygone color store that has remained empty for years, and the other rue de Tournon, a stone's throw from the Senate, former **Librairie**

Moderne, in its time a bastion of Surrealism, which sign, found during the renovations, has been offered by the duo to the famous Shakespeare & Co.* bookstore where their guides sell, in English of course and online at the moment, at an impressive pace... The Astier de Villatte use this fabulous tool to hand-print catalogs, packaging paper and cardboard, explanatory notes for their products, but also their famous diary at the end of which they deliver their best Parisian addresses. Which nobody read! Hence the idea of a guide...

Published in its first version in 2017 in French and English, *Ma vie à Paris* was printed in 3000 copies. Quickly followed by a substantial reprint, it is a bestseller also translated into Japanese. With three updated editions already, it is sold in an illustrated box with the second guide signed by Astier de Villatte: *Ma vie aux Puces*. Released in 2018, already updated, it cannot be sold separately **.

Also composed with lead letters, *Ma vie aux Puces* is printed on a puffy ivory-colored paper which ideally sustains the treading of lead. The chosen font is a Garamond designed by the great typographer Simoncini. Gilded on the edges in the workshop but very practical, *Ma Vie aux Puces* includes maps and detailed plans drawn by **Guillaume Vincent**, a graduate from La Cambre, the famous visual arts school in Brussels.

BEHIND THE SCENES OF *MA VIE AUX PUCES*

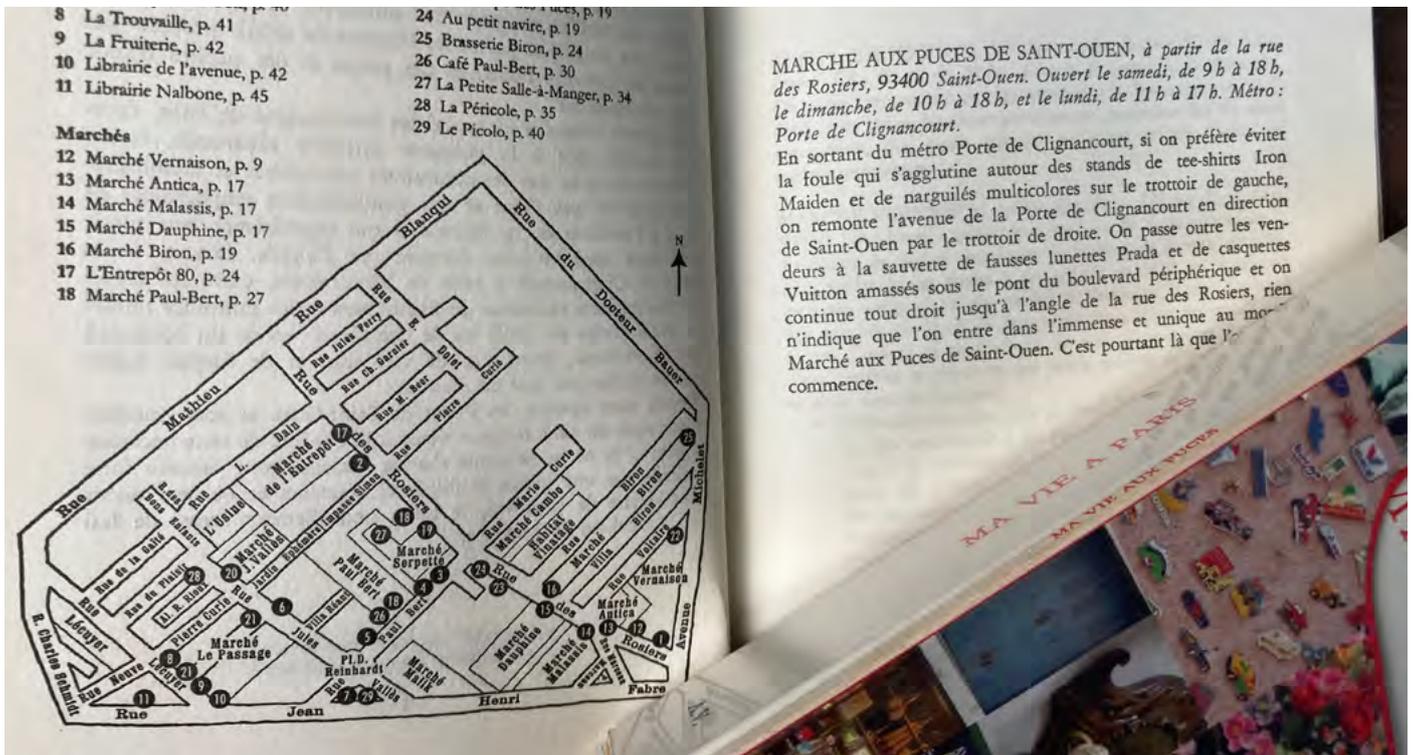


As for the texts, they are written in the evening, by the Astier de Villatte along with Victoire Rouis, an ex-sinologist met in Langues O' (the Oriental Languages Institute from the INALCO school in Paris) by Ivan Pericoli when he was studying Tibetan. Today, the lady, who shares her life with a member of the alternative rock group *La Souris Déglinguée* (LSD in short, literally *The Ramshackle Mouse*), holds a bouquiniste stall at the Châtelet. Printed paper, over and over again.

As for the rue Saint-Victor, address of the Astier de Villatte Editions in Paris, it is owned by a Mr. Gaignon, a flea market dealer from the Biron Market who recently retired. Irony and coincidence of urban geographies.

Subjective, moving, tender and benevolent, the editorial thread of *Ma vie aux Puces*, duly updated, is that of the gaze posed by the two authors on an incomparable world, a melting pot of incredible culture(s), a unique human assembly where everyone leads a life that could be the topic of a novel.

«*Market by market, street by street, better ordered than the Paris guide, didactic and methodical, Ma vie aux Puces holds the reader's hand, it accompanies him, whispers advice to neophytes, encourages him to move forward nose to the wind but with a sharp eye*» they comment, not without conceding that it is absolutely necessary they expand it, «*add addresses discovered at each new visit, tell more about the restaurants, without ever leaving on the sidewalk the men and the women we meet there. They are all real warriors!*».



The authors write down on paper their favorite dealers, their favorite repairers, writing between the lines all the good reasons to go to the Flea Market. As for its size and flexibility, it favors its use on the go.

All you have to do is buy it and take advantage of the spare time to read it, plan your day and set the milestones for your next trip to the Flea Market, when it reopens.

Also learn the ten commandments according to the Gospel of the Saint-Ouen bargain hunter, printed on the back cover. Impertinent examples: *one breathes there an air of freedom; we get lost there and yet we find ourselves back; it's more environmentally friendly to buy pretty second-hand furniture than to buy ugly new furniture designed by ecologists...*

This is what a guide is for and not to wedge an old wobbly piece of furniture or a creaking door ...

To the printed paper illustrated with photos by **Ricardo Bloch**, *Ma vie aux Puces* adds images from a charming short film, shot in 2018, to see and to re-watch by clicking on the link below, for a joyous musical and virtual stroll at the Flea Market with the Astier de Villatte, Ivan and Benoît for close friends.

Pierre Léonforte.



* In order to survive through the lockdown, the Shakespeare and Co. bookshop currently sells annual memberships on its website: <https://friendsofshakespeareandcompany.com/>

** *Ma vie à Paris* (always accompanied by *Ma vie aux Puces*) is sold online in English on the website www.astierdevillatte.com/mavieaparis (49 euros).



INFORMATIONS

PARIS/SAINT-OUEN FLEA MARKET

IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT CURRENT RESTRICTIONS, THE PARIS FLEA MARKET IS CLOSED DURING THE ONGOING NATIONAL LOCKDOWN.

GET IN TOUCH WITH THE PARIS/SAINT-OUEN FLEA MARKET:

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Instagram: [pucesdeparissaintouen](https://www.instagram.com/pucesdeparissaintouen)

Facebook: [pucesdeparissaintouen](https://www.facebook.com/pucesdeparissaintouen)

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