

Chef Cindy Wolf's appetite for Paris

Baltimore chef likes to visit in winter, when crowds are gone and holiday lights sparkle in the streets

By Stephanie Citron, Special to The Baltimore Sun



Where does a highly acclaimed Baltimore chef like to escape when she has the opportunity to temporarily hang up her apron? If you are Cindy Wolf, there's no better place than Paris.

As often as possible, Wolf sneaks away to "the world's best food city" to gain new inspiration for her Baltimore restaurants, Petit Louis Bistro, Pazo, Cinghiale and Charleston. She first visited Paris, briefly, in 1985 while on a backpacking trip. She returned for her honeymoon in 1994 and has been going back ever since.

What time of year do you like to visit?

I prefer January, when the crowds have dissipated. Sometimes it snows, which makes the city sparkle. The Christmas decorations are usually still up, especially on the trees on the Champs-Élysées; it's magical. I also like to visit in April — the beginning of the springtime and the flowers. The weather is lovely. When you get into May, the city gets very busy.

What inspires you most about Paris?

Absolutely everything! It is the most beautiful city I have ever visited. It has everything you could want. The architecture is stunning, the history is amazing. You can just walk forever; there are so many beautiful things to see — old churches, the Seine, the fountains. Also, Paris is one of the greatest food cities in the world. You can have an unbelievably good meal practically anywhere.

Where do you prefer to dine in Paris?

We like to go to Au Pied de Cochon just after we've arrived in Paris. There's nothing like having a steak and *frites* after traveling for a number of hours. We also love Benoit, a classic bistro where you can get wonderful salads and traditional French fare. It was recently taken over by Alain Ducasse, one of the world's most "starred" chefs.

Do you have a favorite place to go for a cheese plate?

Yes, Barthelemy. Its an amazing cheese shop and not to be missed.

What else do you like to do, foodwise?

The markets. I have three favorites. President Wilson is an incredible market near the Champs-Elysees. The breads, the meats, the produce and the presentation is just beautiful, beautiful, beautiful. We can learn so much from the French markets.

Another favorite is an organic market, Raspail, where the fish and the seafood is so amazingly fresh and high-quality.

What's really cool about the [Rue] Poncelet Market is that it's a food shopping area with actual food stores, which expand into the street when they do the market. There are fantastic seafood shops, butchers — don't be surprised when you enter into the shop that sells horse meat, that's in there too.

Do you purchase cookware in Paris?

Yes! E. Dehillerin. The shop is very old, with high ceilings and a rustic French atmosphere. There are all of these copper pans lining the walls, old skewers and wonderful old French cooking equipment. They are the best for copper pans, tureen molds and tools. Buy a copper pan lined with stainless steel rather than with tin.



What else do you do?

I get up early on Sunday morning when there isn't a lot of traffic and wander around. I like to be immersed in the culture, so I look for places where local people go. I also love the Opera. You just can't imagine how beautiful the building is, with all its detail. There's a Chagall on the ceiling of the theater! The Paris ballet and the opera are like nowhere else. And the museums! I love the [Musée] d'Orsay for the Impressionists. I sit and sketch in the main hall for hours and hours. The other is the [Musée] de l'Orangerie, it houses Monet's work that he specifically painted for that space — like "Water Lilies." In January, there's hardly anyone there, and you can actually sit in the middle of that space and look at the paintings as they should be seen.

Where do you like to stay?

I stay at the Balzac, a pretty boutique hotel, a block off the Champs-Elysees and near the Arc de Triomphe. In the morning, I walk down to Laduree for pastry. The best place to sit is at a high-top by the bar — it's where they display all of the pastries. I love to just take in the scent and sip their amazing coffee.

What destination is next on your list?

I haven't been to Austria since I backpacked across Europe in 1985. I would like to go back to Vienna and Salzburg. There's a small mountain range outside of Salzburg [and there is] Halstatt, just a little village where the lakes wrap around the mountains — it looks like the [scenery from] "The Sound of Music." You can also go through the salt mines. Also, I'd love to sample the pastries in Vienna and see the opera.

Is there an item you will not travel without?

My Bose noise-cancellation headphones. It allows me to sleep on an airplane. Also, I have downloaded a translator app on my iPhone.

Do you have any preferred travel guides?

People into food can't be without a Michelin Guide. I'm impressed with the Eyewitness Travel Guides and Pudlo Paris, a different perspective from Michelin. I also really like "The Authentic Bistros of Paris."

If you go

Getting there

Several airlines offer connecting service from Baltimore to Paris. There are daily nonstop flights from Dulles International into Paris' Charles de Gaulle Airport. Once you land, taxis are the most direct route into Paris but cost about \$70. Travelers can take the Metro/RER (about \$12) from inside the airport.

Lodging

Hotel Balzac, 6 rue Balzac, 01-44-35-18-00, hotelbalzac.com. Cindy Wolf's favorite is a luxurious boutique hotel in Paris' 8th arrondissement. All guest rooms have marble baths, oak floors and cozy sitting areas. Early-bird rates start at about \$330 per night for a superior double.

Caron de Beaumarchais, 12 rue Vieille-du-Temple, 4th arrondissement, 01-42-72-34-12, carondebeaumarchais.com. The antiques-filled, chandelier-lit guest rooms at the 18th-century Caron de Beaumarchais are one of the best budget secrets in Paris. Guests love the oversized soaking-tub bathrooms, W-Fi and proximity to Notre Dame. Doubles from \$200.

Dining

Au Pied de Cochon, 6 rue Coquillière, Les Halles 01-40-13-77-00 pieddecochon.com. Open daily since 1946, this 24-hour brasserie serves traditional French fare and is famed for its onion soup and meat dishes. Entrees start at \$35.

Benoit, 20 Rue Saint-Martin, 01-42-72-25-76, benoit-paris.com. Much of the original artwork still lines the walls in this classic (circa 1912) French eatery. Best is duck foie gras and pot-roasted hen.

Ladurée (Champs Elysées), 75 Avenue des Champs-Elysées, 33-1-40-75-08-75 laduree.fr. A scrumptious pastry shop and restaurant, famed for creating Paris' elegant double-decker macarons.

Markets

Marche President Wilson, Quartier de Chaillot, 16th arrondissement. Famous for beautiful breads, snails, fresh catch from Normandy and tableware vendors. Open Wednesday and Saturday.

Marche Raspail, Boulevard Raspail, 6th arrondissement. Paris' premier organic food market. Look for Fromagerie Philippe Gregoire, maker of delectable French goat cheese. Open Tuesday, Friday and Sunday.

Marche Poncelet, Monceau/Arc de Triomphe quartier, 17th arrondissement. On this market street are excellent fish stores, butchers and a prominent Viennese patisserie.

Don't miss

E. Dehillerin, 18-20 Rue Coquillière 33-1-42-36-53-13 e-dehillerin.fr/en/index.php. One of Paris' oldest and most respected cookery shops.

Fromagerie Barthelemy, Rue de Grenelle, 7th arrondissement, 01-42-22-82-24-51. Check out the famous raw milk Camembert, and the Vacherin (wintertime only).

Musée de l'Orangerie, Jardin Tuileries, 01-44-77-80-07, musee-orangerie.fr. Famous for housing works of Monet, this tiny museum also features works of other prominent French impressionists.

Paris Opera, Rue Scribe and Rue Auber, 9th arrondissement. 08-25-05-44-05, operadeparis.fr. It doesn't matter what you see here, the breathtaking Palais Garnier building rivals its spectacular performances. Tickets from \$12.

Information

For more information on visiting Paris, go to parisinfo.com.