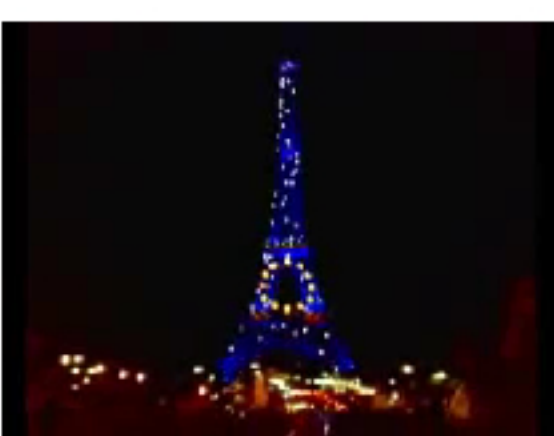


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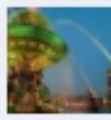
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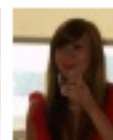
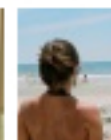
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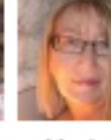





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parisian woman

Casey O'Brien Blondes

By Doni Belau



Casey in transit to Paris.

Casey O'Brien Blondes is our quintessential Parisian woman this week. An Irish Catholic girl born and raised in New Jersey and London, she has lived in and around Paris for the past 20-odd years. Her husband, [Jeffrey](#), had spent time in France and convinced her to move in the 1980s, so they picked up and went without a plan or a clue as to what they were going to do.

Three kids and many horses later, Casey spends most of her time at their country house—several hours from Paris, in the Loire Valley—but pops into town often to stay at their atelier in the 13th Arrondissement and catch up with her kids or the latest gallery exhibition. Casey recently finished her second book for Rizzoli, a beautiful coffee table book called *Parisian Hideaways*, which profiles some wonderful French-owned secret and discreet hotels (some so secret even we had not heard of them!). Her husband is an artist specializing in films on nature. When not researching hotels in Paris, Casey spends much of her time riding her horse in La Chasse à Courre, which is the French version of the fox hunt, with a stag instead of a fox.

How did an Irish Catholic girl from New Jersey end up living the country and city life in France?

Well, my husband convinced me over 20 years ago to move here; he'd lived in France and we moved with no plan whatsoever. And here we are 20+ years later with three kids, mostly grown and fully invested in French life. It hasn't always been easy, though, since we are both freelance. We discovered the Loire visiting a friend in Pontlevoy and bought a weekend cottage there in 1989, before moving to Orbigny in 1992.

Where is your apartment in Paris?

It's an atelier apartment in the 13th, which my husband uses for his art. He got it through Maison des Artistes, but it's more of an office since most of his work is created out of doors—but that's where we stay when we are in town. For the past nine months he had an installation up at the [Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature](#). It's a triptych of three of his 52-hour films, which are meditations on time, space and nature. Most of his work now is film related; previously he was a landscape painter. The next project he's doing is at the Bay of Fundy.

You live most of the time in the Loire Valley near Loches. What are your favorite activities there?

I ride and hunt on Tuesday or Saturday six months of the year, as does my husband. Tuesday is for the full-time country folks and Saturday for the weekenders. La Chasse à Courre is a strong tradition in Touraine, and hunters pass it on to their kids as we have. I also enjoy cooking and using organically grown produce from our garden, which is active 10 months a year. I am passionate about organic wines and locally grown food. For example, I'll buy three whole baby lambs and freeze them so I can have locally raised organic lamb to serve year-round.



Casey on the hunt.

You've written two books through Rizzoli, most recently [Parisian Hideaways](#), which profiles a number of different French-owned hotels in Paris that are discreet and very special. Can you describe this project as well as your other book, [French Country Hideaways](#)?

The first book profiles 30 private châteaux and manor properties hidden in the countryside that are chambres d'hôtes [rooms in private homes] and promote regional products. I was then asked to do something similar for Spain and Italy, which I declined, as I prefer to only write about what I really know and understand. For this most recent book I looked at over 200 small hotels in Paris, but my goal was to pick only hotels that no matter their style were authentically Parisian, had big rooms (for Paris) and were privately owned or managed, and then I grouped them by theme: historic, boudoir, contemporary art, etc.

What are some of your favorites from the book?

[The Raphael](#), which is the only palace hotel in Paris with less than 100 rooms. It has a fabulous rooftop garden bar and restaurant. It's a true Old World hotel, like going back in time. Like the rest of the hotels I picked for the book, it's a lesser-known hideaway that protects the privacy of its clients. Another hotel that I really love because of its location is [Saint Vincent](#) in the 7th. It's in a great location (on the border of the 6th) with a terrific breakfast. I'm also excited about the renovation of the [Pavillon de la Reine](#) in the Marais. You cannot beat the location on the Place des Vosges, and with the new decor it's delightful. An intriguing little contemporary hotel is [Le Placide](#) on rue St-Placide. The designer worked with Philippe Starck on hotels for years and has done this one with less drama but with a beautiful modern aesthetic.

Each hotelier in the book shares their favorite resources in that *quartier*. Once I told a friend of mine who is a photographer where Brad Pitt should stay. I can't give you the name of the hotel, but he stayed there for one week and was never photographed or found out.

A magical weekend destination from my first book is the [Priuré d'Orsan](#), a chambre d'hôte with medieval-style gardens, which provide fresh produce for their restaurant. It's not far from Bourges in southern Berry.

What's your ideal day in Paris?

I love the unknown Paris. I think people should spend more time in the 13th Arrondissement, especially the area around the [Bibliothèque Nationale de France](#), along the Seine, where the biggest urban renewal project since Haussmann is under way. The area is very vibrant around avenue de France, which is envisioned as a Champs-Élysées Rive Gauche. In front of the BNF there's a new swimming pool that floats in the Seine, named after [Josephine Baker](#), with a stretch of [Paris Plage](#) in the summer, and of course the pedestrian bridge is beautiful. There are great shows at the BNF, such as the [Indian miniatures show](#) on now and galleries around rue Louise Weiss—the area is very happening. The 13th is multicultural and because of that reminds me of New York. It's the anti-16th. So for my ideal day I'd start out in the 13th, pick up exotic ingredients and raw nuts I can't find in the country at the [Tang Frères](#) stores in Chinatown and go to a movie at the [MK2](#), which was designed by Paul Wilmot and has deluxe sofa seats. Then I'd get on my bike and ride along the Seine, visit my kids in the 6th and hang out with them in a café or the Luxembourg Gardens.

What's your favorite area for shopping?

The upper Marais in the 3rd—by Isabel Marant and rue de Poitou. I'd do a combo day there and visit art galleries and my favorite clothing shops. I am a fan of [Estelle Yomeda](#)'s beautifully crafted shoes and boots at 4, rue de Normandie.

For art lovers what do you recommend seeing?

Well, it depends on what's showing, but certainly the [Pompidou: "Elles"](#) is a very important and amazing show. [La Maison Rouge](#), down on the quai south of the Bastille, is a small private modern art museum that does shows of entire collections. If you are a member they give you access to tours all around town.

And what are your favorite restaurants?

I'm a real fan of organic wines, so I love small bistros that serve organic wines. For lunch I go to [La Garde Robe](#) for fresh simple food and good organic wines. [Racines](#) before it was sold was wonderful—I do miss the charismatic founder, but it's still worthwhile. For a special meal, I'd go to [Yam'Tcha](#), near Les Halles. Book well ahead.

Where do you like to travel in France and where do you summer?

Cap Ferret, where the beach reminds me of the Hamptons. It's beautiful and relaxed. Île d'Yeu is a gorgeous island with dramatic cliffs. I'm also partial to the islands off Brittany in the Gulf of Morbihan. Noirmoutier is authentically French and a good weekend destination because of the bridge.

Will you be writing another book set in France?

Yes, I am working on another, but being Irish Catholic and superstitious, I can't reveal any more info.

What's it like raising three children in France?

Even though we are American, France is our home. When you raise three kids here who are French, you become even more attached to your community. They go to the US each year, but after a week or two they really miss home. We have a son and two daughters. The youngest is at boarding school in Paris, the middle one is at the Atelier de Sèvres prepping for Beaux-Arts study and our son is out of university and working at a venture capital fund that does ethical investing.

If you had to leave Paris and your much-loved house in the country, what would you miss the most?

My horse and my husband, because they'll never leave!

INFO

La Garde Robe

41, rue de l'Arbre-Sec, in the 1st.
01 49 26 90 06.

Piscine Josephine Baker

Quai François Mauriac, in the 13th.
Open in summer.

Racines

8, Passage des Panoramas, in the 2nd.
01 40 13 06 41.

Tang Frères

48, ave d'Ivry, in the 13th.
01 45 70 80 00.

Yam'Tcha

4, rue Sauval, in the 1st.
01 40 26 08 07.

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