

A Temple for Night Life, Reborn

Les Bains, a legendary Paris hot spot, has been revived as a club, restaurant and hotel.

By CHRISTINE AJUDUA

PARIS — Perhaps only in Paris would a past-prime nightclub be brought back from dereliction. But to Parisians of a certain age, Les Bains Douches was not just any old boîte de nuit.

"Oh, there was no other nightclub," said André Sosaiva, 43, the graffiti artist and night life impresario behind the exclusive Le Baron clubs in Paris and around the world. "It was like a place of freedom. A temple for night culture. And it was cool."

There were other clubs in that golden age of Paris night life, but perhaps none of them were as era defining. Opened in 1978 on the site of a 19th-century bathhouse in the Third Arrondissement, Les Bains Douches made stars of its designer (Philippe Starck) and

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resident D.J. (David Guetta), who were unknown at the time. Joy Division recorded a live album in the basement, where Prince performed impromptu and Depeche Mode played years before selling out stadiums.

And then there was the crowd. Jean-Michel Basquiat, Yves Saint Laurent, Mick Jagger, Johnny Depp and Kate Moss were there, indeed. But it was really about the cross section of clubgoers and creatives, highbrow and low, glamorous and underground, big names and nobodies, all mingling by the mosaic tile pool.

"We would come with our runway make-up on and whatever beautiful couture things we put together," said Dianne Brill, a former model and "It Girl" of 1980s New York (Andy Warhol called her "Queen of the Night") who now has her own cosmetics line. "It was very, very glamorous, but it was not slick."

It is today: You will still find the face of Bacchus sculpted into its Haussmannian facade. The original David Roccheline frescoes and double-faced clock are still in the foyer. And the circa-1883 Futura graffiti, created while on tour with the Clash, now adorns a patio beside the restaurant, where Mr. Starck's black-and-white-checked dance floor has been fully restored.

But the new Les Bains (the "Douches" was dropped), which opened quietly this month after being closed for five years, is now a 38-room hotel, with a smaller club in



PHOTOGRAPHS BY GUY AROCH FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES; ARTIST AND MODEL FOR L'ESPOIR; AND GUY AROCH FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



the basement (the pool, a replica, sits behind a glass partition that slides up at night) and a restaurant that literally shines: The walls, undulating ceiling and stalactite-like pillars are swathed in a burgandy-red lacquer.

The restaurant made a dramatic back-drop for a star-studded Dior after-party during Paris Fashion Week in March, the first of several splashy prospecting events (Tommy Hilgier and Givenchy have hosted parties, too). And with plans for more parties in the coming weeks during the men's fashion and haute couture shows, Les Bains is already among the hottest spots in town.

Upstairs, the interior designer Tristan Auer (who is currently restoring the Hôtel de Crillon) has furnished the rooms with rust-red velvet sofas modeled after the one in Andy Warhol's Factory, and suites have

Top, a crowd in the revived Les Bains nightclub; above left, Jean-Pierre Marois, owner of Les Bains; above right, a woman in front of the club's pool during a recent party; below, revelers in the pool during the club's '90s heyday.



outdoor showers and private hammams.

"It's a fuller experience than it used to be because before it was only a restaurant and club," said Jean-Pierre Marois, the 51-year-old filmmaker whose family has owned the building since the 1960s. Having spent his formative years climbing the club's crowded front stoop to be assessed by the formidable doorman, Marie-Line, he is now the owner and the man behind the reinvention of Les Bains as a hotel and lifestyle brand.

When Les Bains Douches opened, "it was after birth control pills for the masses, and before AIDS," he said. "So it was like a unique window. People could be very promiscuous and careless. Our life is much more controlled now."

And in the past, if you were so inspired (or inebriated) to strip down to your under-

wear and jump into the pool, there was no risk of it ending up on Instagram. "I don't know how young people do it these days," said Elisabeth Rastner, an editor at the Berlin-based Zeit Magazin, which held a party at the nightclub in April. "There's iPhones everywhere, so how can you really forget yourself and dance the night away?"

Still, the revelry has returned with abandon. Funktion-One speakers help, with the music going until 5 a.m. most days. Recent weeks have featured up-and-coming live acts like the emerging French electro-pop duo My Dear and D.J. sets by artists like Nancy Whang of the Juan MacLean. On another night, the French producer Breakbot spontaneously took over the decks using whatever USB sticks were in his pocket. (Mr. Marois said that the anonymous members of Daft Punk were also in the audience, sans helmets.)

And with old regulars like Roman Polanski and Jean-Charles de Castelbajac coming back again, Les Bains has managed to retain its fashionable mix.

"My biggest goal is that Les Bains attracts really much the same crowd than before, which is people from all walks of life that are creative and inspired and inspiring," Mr. Marois said. "I think there is room to celebrate Raf Simons's new collection, and on the other end of the spectrum, I also want to have, you know, like underground dinners and parties for street artists or unknown musicians. To go from LVHM to an art student, and give them the same exposure."

Mr. Marois has assembled a notable team of "curators" to help with the task, including the local gallerist Jérôme Paschant (to organize art residencies) and the music director Lars Krueger (to advise on playlists and D.J.s). The bouncer Marie-Line, who is now in her 60s and is still blond and clad in black, has come out of retirement to "curate the crowd."

And Thomas Erber, known for his roving Cabinet de Curiosités, has tapped French labels big and small to create one-off items that "define the essence of the place." Among them: a Thierry Mugler dinner dress, a Melancholous smoking jacket and a white collared shirt by Pierre Mabès of Office Generale (who designed Serge Gainsbourg-esque suits and silk-knit ties for the male staffers).

They'll be sold across the street at La Boutique des Bains, a gallery-like shop that opens this week, alongside Aedie hoodies and Pierre Hardy sneakers embossed with the face of Bacchus. Look closely, and you'll see mermaids twisted into his beard. "We're honoring the heritage, but reinventing it," Mr. Marois said.