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73 DAYS IN PARIS



**73 DAYS IN PARIS – CAPTURING
THE HEART OF AN ICONIC CITY**

Bob Friday



73 DAYS IN PARIS

From mid-March to the end of May 2016, my wife Debbie and I acted on a long-held dream: we rented an apartment in Paris and did our best to pretend that, for 73 days at least, we were Parisians – our minimal French language skills notwithstanding.

For me, it was the chance of a lifetime to spend quality time in our favorite place, wandering narrow cobblestoned streets, hidden passageways and broad boulevards in search of the definitive images of this exceptional city.

But can there be anything more cliché than yet another set of photos from the world's most photographed ville? That depends on the photographer – and his or her point of view. For me, that point of view was shaped by an ongoing, abiding love for the artistic soul of the Parisians' DNA!

While on the surface Paris is still the Paris of postcards and travelogues, much is in transition here – a reflection of geopolitical movements and generational impatience with the status quo. And yet, it remains the eternal City of Light that beckons us to revel in – and whole-heartedly embrace – its rich history, culture, architecture, food, beauty, its arts and artists as well as its quirky, off-beat side.

What captivates me about photographing Paris is the bottomless cornucopia of opportunity. Give me an afternoon and one city block in any arrondissement and I'm thoroughly engrossed and entertained for the duration! Be it the Haussmanian architecture, dramatic cloud formations over the low-profile horizon or intricately arranged displays in the windows of the shops and patisseries, there's something cool to shoot with every step. But give me the whole of Paris and I'm a photographic cat set loose in a catnip factory!

Realtor, live show producer, creative director, environmental biologist, ad guy -- through all these vocational experiences, the one ever-present passion for **Bob Friday** has been photography.

From his earliest captures on an Instamatic to his whole-hearted embrace of the Fuji-X system, Bob has always been captivated and motivated by the art and act of photography -- and sharing the results.

His images have been published in travel journals and in promotional work worldwide.



At its heart, this is a society where arts – and artists of all creative stripes – are valued, revered, supported, debated, promoted and integral to the fiber and fabric of daily life. Our 73 days in Paris allowed us to dig into and participate in that special "la vie quotidienne artistique" – and the results, experientially and photographically, were truly soul-enriching.

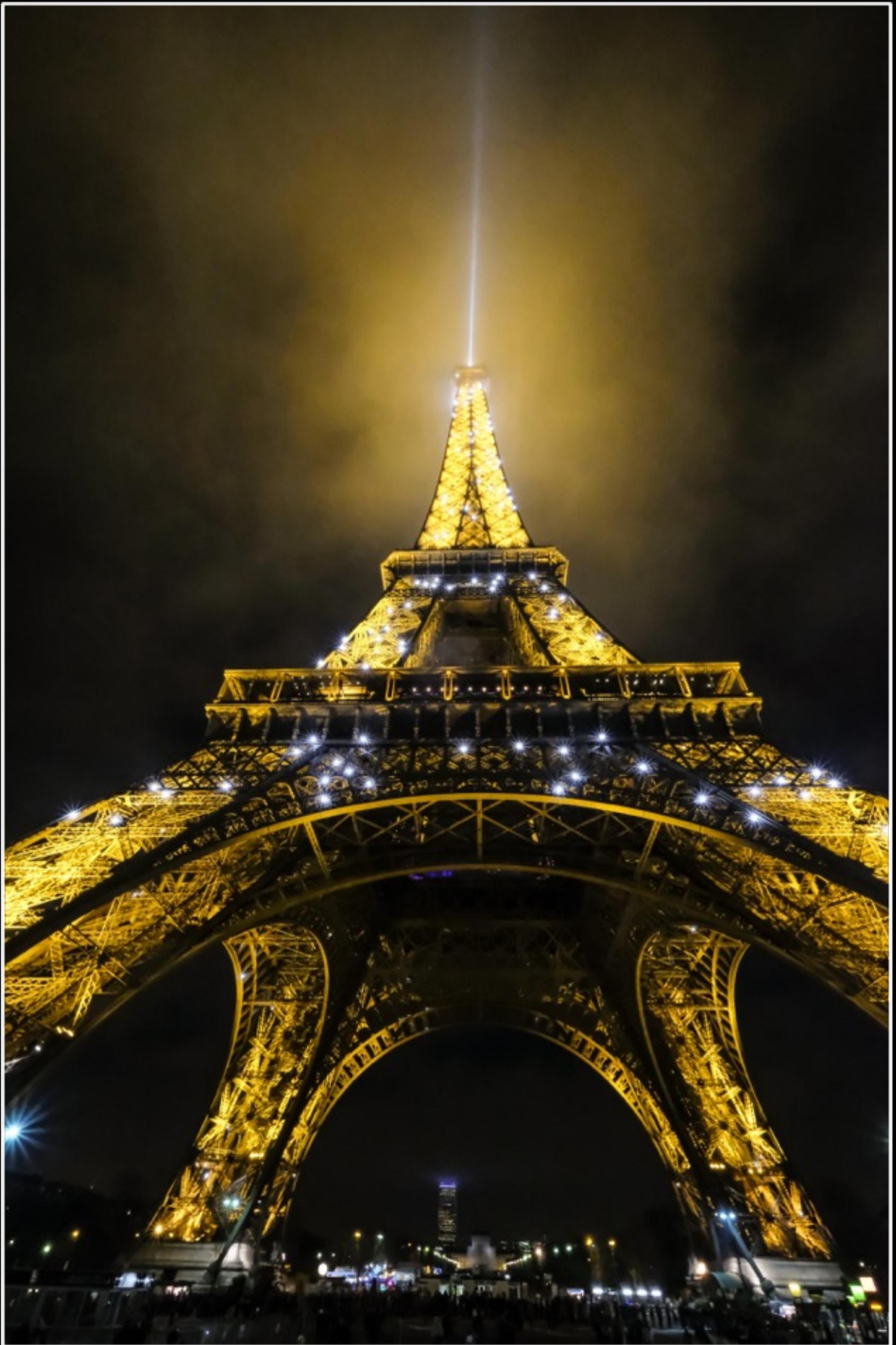
But how do you avoid being ensnared in the "greatest hits" postcard photo trap in a place where almost everything in view qualifies as stock image bait?

My solution is simple: let your artsy heart lead the way! Find the emotions of the scene in front of you and capture what makes your feelings resonate. Postcard settings need not yield postcard photos!

I'm not a compulsively meticulous technical photographer. Given the choice between photographic technical perfection or straight-to-the-heart emotional connection – laser-sharp pixels be damned! I'll err on the heart-felt side every time. Yes, I sweat the details and have the patience of Job to wait for the right light or perfect positioning of clouds or the ideal fall of a shadow. But my eye is connected to my artistic heart and that's what drives 99% of my shooting choices.

A classic example is the Tour Eiffel "Transformer" image. We've all seen a gazillion shots of this landmark – maybe the best-known in the world. Debbie and I have, at times, purposely avoided going near it just because it is such an iconic tourist cliché – and "it's been done!" And yet, when, on a bitterly cold evening this past December with a couple eager grandkids leading the way, we ventured onto the plaza beneath, there was something otherworldly, beautifully monstrous about the scale of the Tower, its internal glow against the dark winter skies and the ethereal white beam cutting straight up through the gathering mists. As the hourly magical twinkle light show began, I put the Fuji XF10-24mm lens on my x-Pro2 and found a position and framing that captured the overpowering magnetic appeal that we all were feeling.







Or consider "Le Dome du Panthéon." The Panthéon is, in my opinion, the finest work of art and architecture in all of Paris. Twice a church and once the site where Foucault hung his pendulum to prove that the Earth actually rotated, it is now the sacred final resting place of France's most revered heroes of art, science and governance. And it is layers upon layers of stunning. To me, it is an Escher print come to life – and that's the feeling I worked to capture in my image. Using an Acros B&W simulation with red filter and high grain lends a hand-drawn etching feel that allows those various layers to alternately pop forward, then recede and ultimately marry into a gorgeously synchronous canopy of dramatic grandeur. Where some see just another dome-ceilinged edifice, I feel tangible texture, movement and a sense of the honor it conveys on those who rest here.

Sometimes the feelings that drive my photography aren't of the moment but rather, works in progress, developed over an extended period of time.

One of the true joys of arriving in Paris near the end of winter was watching spring creep into a city that had grown weary of dark, gray skies and blustery, drizzly cold. As the sun began to reappear and temperatures rose from their bone-chilling depths, we saw tiny shoots poking up in the barren flower beds of les Jardins du Luxembourg and myriad buds appearing on cherry trees throughout the city, slowly at first and then with ever-increasing fervor. Within just a few weeks, the blooming of Paris was in full swing. Every day we could not wait to get out and see the latest displays. And then, one late afternoon, as we crossed Luxembourg Gardens, we noticed small flower beds filled with spectacular fringed tulips, deep violet-blue pansies and some little pink flowers whose name we couldn't find, all against a bed of new green.

To see this riot of color and beauty in plots that mere weeks before had been cold and lifeless filled us with an overwhelming joie de vivre. My photo is not of just some random patch of pretty flowers. No, this image testifies to the artistic dedication of the gardeners who work these public gardens, creating small but exquisite floral tapestries that fill winter's heart – and those of Parisians – with life's renewed spirit.







As most good street photographers can attest, the feelings that come from identifying and successfully capturing a great street scene are usually surprise and euphoria. That, beyond any doubt, describes my feelings with the incredible tableau at the Café de Flore. "Surprised" to discover, upon turning around after stepping out the door and onto the sidewalk in front of the Café, that this entirely outrageous cast of characters – whom earlier we had seen pass by individually as we grabbed a chocolat chaud inside – was now all assembled on the terrace. And "euphoric" because, in the space of 8 seconds, I was able to grab my stealth Fuji x100s, take frame #1 in the existing color setting, instantly switch to B&W (I don't post process B&W from color – I "see" scenes as color or B&W and shoot in camera) and grab two more frames just before the wedding couple departed frame and the scene evaporated. I knew I had something really special here and the feeling was absolute exhilaration. A once in a lifetime photograph.

One of my favorite ways to avoid the "postcard" syndrome is to look for wry incongruities in ordinary places. Like the image "American in Paris." A vintage, pristine Ford Mustang is not what one expects to see while tromping down the Blvd Ste-Germain but voici! Right along the curb of a sidewalk café terrace! A mundane every day Paris street scene becomes an out-of-place delight!

Same for the "Café Cinéma Scene" image – put an old Mercedes roadster in front of any café in Paris with a few good-looking folks and it's instant art, right?!!

And then there's "Heels Over Paris!" Sneakers over a wire? Sure, we've seen that a thousand times. But high heels? Now that's something I think you might only see in Paris! And this pair wasn't hanging just anywhere in Paris. Oh no. This was right in front of the Palais Garnier Opera House! "Mrs. Phantom! Found your shoes!" Arranging the heels with some fun visual alignment made for a truly unique capture of the iconic Palais Garnier.

CAFE DE FLORE











In "Wings Along the Seine" the beautiful black and white tree trunk, the white birds aloft and the dark winter Seine river would have made a nice enough composition. But then I noticed the foot of the man feeding the birds. "Nice" turned into poignantly ironic.

I also find that being observant of turns in the weather can make all the difference when shooting iconic locations. The image of Le Catedral de la Basilique du Sacre-Couer and the colorful dwellings of the Montmartre hillside below grew powerfully dramatic as a spring storm gathered its deep, dark, ominous skies in from the northwest behind the still sunlit foreground.





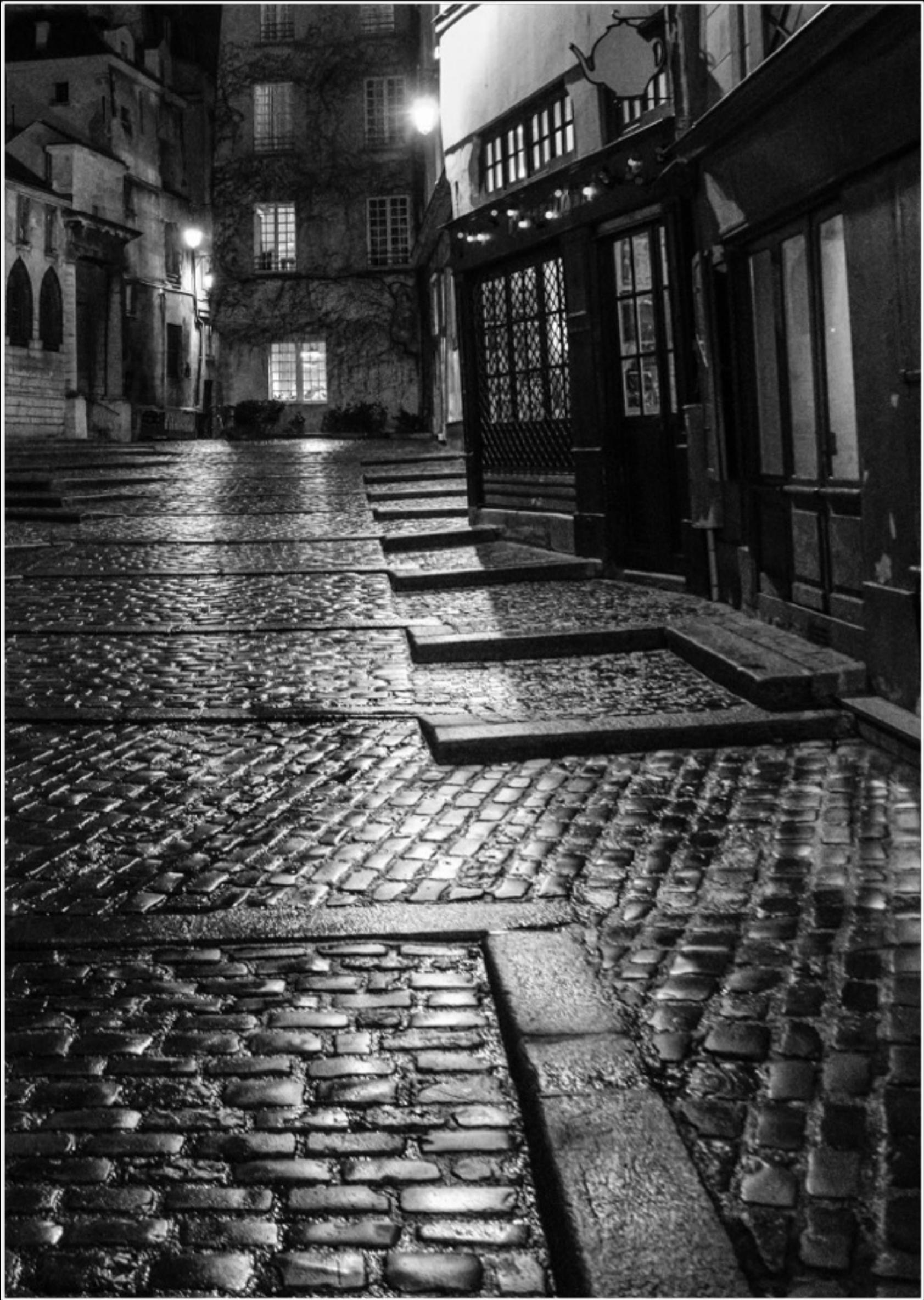
Being ever-mindful of your surroundings is crucial for turning an OK image into a keeper. I was captivated by the raindrops on the tables outside my afternoon libation stop. As I shot, I noticed a well-dressed gentleman – with parapluie outstretched – striding purposefully across the cobblestones just beyond the edge of my depth of field. I waited and grabbed three frames as he passed through the scene. Having just visited the René Magritte exhibition at Le Centre Pompidou, I knew that now, this shot of the iconic Paris café table had just found its plus difference!

As I wander the streets of Paris I find its artful core infuses and informs every step, every vista. Be it reflections of the Haussmann architecture in a Marais rain puddle, the full moon over a glistening alleyway, the glow of peonies in the window of a magasin des fleurs, the richness of a rooftop view from my apartment window, the aged patina of a worn door or the quintessential twilight view across the Seine, this is a place that rewards those who open their hearts – and vision – to the joie de vivre of this artistic city.

But the lessons of photographing Paris apply no matter where you might find yourself. There is art to be found everywhere. Some is classically beautiful. Some is gritty and intense. Some invites. And some repels. But, when you let art lead your eye and your heart, magic – and good photographs – can happen anywhere!

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