

A romantic Parisian night scene. A man and a woman are walking away from the camera on a wet, reflective street. The man is on the left, wearing a reddish-brown shirt and light-colored trousers. The woman is on the right, wearing a patterned dress and carrying a small bag. They are walking past a series of ornate, glowing street lamps that line the sidewalk. The wet pavement reflects the warm light of the lamps, creating a shimmering effect. The background is softly blurred, showing more lights and the silhouettes of trees, enhancing the atmospheric and nostalgic feel of the scene.

Midnight in Paris

Woody Allen pays homage to the City of Light, past and present, in his Oscar-winning film. **Alison Weeks** follows in the characters' footsteps

In 1964, a young stand-up comedian named Woody Allen performed a new routine in clubs across the US about a fictitious trip to Europe in the 1920s, in which he imagined himself mingling with the literary set of Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein and Scott Fitzgerald when they all lived in Paris. In the routine, Allen described how he critiqued Hemingway's first novel "and Hemingway punched me in the mouth". He then recounted different scenarios, each with the same result, before the gag ended with a neat twist.

He called the routine *Lost Generation* and while it sounds like an unlikely subject for a stand-up act, audiences loved it. Now, almost 50 years later, the old joke has taken on a new life in *Midnight in Paris*, Allen's light-hearted tale about a disillusioned American writer who stumbles back into 1920s Paris.

Midnight in Paris has been the writer-director's biggest box office hit to date, as well as a critical success, winning the Oscar for Best Original Screenplay at the 2012 Academy Awards. When asked about the original idea for the script, Allen admitted coming up with the title first and then building the story around it. He knew he wanted to make a film in Paris. "I wanted to show the city emotionally, the way I felt about it," Allen told a news conference at the 2011 Cannes Film Festival. "It didn't matter to me how real it was or what it reflected. I just wanted it to be the way I saw Paris. It was Paris through my eyes."

As it turns out, Paris through Allen's eyes is even

more delightful than the real thing. The film opens with an indulgent montage of city scenes, set to the dulcet sounds of a solo clarinet and, as the story unfolds, Allen takes us on a movable feast through the City of Light, both past and present. Using a time-travel device that is never fully explained (one can only imagine there is a *Back to the Future* style flux capacitor in the Peugeot used), he transports us to Paris in the Roaring Twenties.

However, the film begins at modern-day Giverny, north-west of the capital, in the gardens of Claude Monet, where we meet Gil Pender (Owen Wilson) and his fiancée Inez (Rachel McAdams), who are visiting France with her right-wing, anti-French parents. Fed up with modern life, Gil waxes poetic about giving up his career as a Hollywood screenwriter to move to Paris and write his novel.

In contrast to Gil's dreams of bohemian life, the film highlights some of the most bourgeois locations in Paris, including the luxurious Hôtel Le Bristol, where he and Inez are staying. Set among some of the most expensive shops in Paris, including Pierre Cardin and Hermès, this hotel in the 8th arrondissement has long been a favourite with celebrities. The dinner with Inez's parents takes place at an equally upscale venue, Le Grand Vefour, near the Palais-Royal, which once hosted the likes of Napoléon and Joséphine. Here we meet Inez's pseudo-intellectual friend Paul (Michael Sheen), who scoffs at Gil's idealistic view of 1920s Paris.

Picasso painting

Accompanied by Paul and his wife Carol (Nina Arianda), they tour the sites of Paris: Versailles, the Musée Rodin, where Paul contradicts the tour guide (Carla Bruni, wife of former French President Nicolas Sarkozy) about the sculptor's mistress, and the Musée de l'Orangerie, where Gil finally puts Paul in his place with his new-found, insider knowledge of a Pablo Picasso painting. Inez and her mother drag Gil on several shopping sprees around Paris and they contemplate buying some antique chairs at Philippe de Beauvais in Boulevard de Courcelles for €18,000. They also visit the Marché aux Puces de Saint-Ouen, where Gil hears a Cole Porter song on an old gramophone and first meets Gabrielle, a young Parisian who shares his taste in music.

When Gil takes a solitary stroll around the Left Bank, he pauses on the steps of Saint-Étienne-du-Mont, which houses the shrine of Sainte Geneviève, the patron saint of Paris, as well as the tombs of the philosopher Blaise Pascal and playwright Jean Racine. From here, Gil is whisked away in a mysterious Peugeot to a party on Quai de Bourbon. He finally realises something is amiss when he is introduced to a couple named Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, and told that the person playing *Let's Do It* on the piano is Cole Porter himself.

As Gil starts to understand that his dream of seeing Paris in the 1920s has come true, we are introduced to a cavalcade of legendary figures, from Hemingway to Picasso, as well as the places they frequented. These include Bricktop's, the nightclub where Gil stands agape watching the dancer Josephine Baker. In the film, the

BELOW: The Polidor restaurant, where Gil (Owen Wilson) meets Ernest Hemingway in *Midnight in Paris*, and the launderette that features in the same sequence
PREVIOUS PAGE: Pont Alexandre III glistens in the rain



PHOTOGRAPHS: SONY PICTURES HOME ENTERTAINMENT; TIM WEEKS



club appears to be at 17 Rue Malebranche near the Jardins du Luxembourg (coincidentally a building which featured as Audrey Hepburn's home in the 1957 film *Love in the Afternoon*). Named after the African-American dancer and nightclub owner Ada 'Bricktop' Smith, the real Chez Bricktop was located at 73 and then 66 Rue Pigalle (now Rue Jean-Baptiste Pigalle).

Gil first meets Hemingway at one of his regular haunts, the Cr merie Restaurant Polidor in the Latin Quarter. In the film, the restaurant appears only in the

magical midnight hour and is replaced by a launderette during the day; in reality the Polidor is still at its original address on Rue Monsieur le Prince (the launderette used in the film is further down the street).

Hemingway takes Gil to visit another expat writer, Gertrude Stein, at her home at 27 Rue de Fleurus. Stein spent much of her adult life in Paris and although her house is not open to the public, a plaque commemorates her time there. It's here that Gil meets Picasso and his mistress Adriana (Marion Cotillard).

ABOVE: A trip to Versailles for (from left) Paul (Michael Sheen), Carol (Nina Arianda), Inez (Rachel McAdams) and Gil (Owen Wilson)

PARIS ON THE SILVER SCREEN

Although filmed entirely on a Hollywood backlot, *American in Paris* (1952), starring Gene Kelly and Leslie Caron, set the standard for a new genre of film. Here are some other classic movies about Americans in Paris:

***Funny Face* (1957)**

It doesn't get more elegant than Audrey Hepburn in Paris, unless it's Audrey Hepburn dancing with Fred Astaire in Paris. This classic musical features a number of landmarks including Le Caveau de la Huchette jazz cellar (where Hepburn dances, dressed in black).

***Everyone Says I Love You* (1996)**

Partially set in Paris, this all-star musical was Woody Allen's earlier go at filming in France. The finale features a classic scene with Allen and Goldie

Hawn dancing on Quai de la Tournelle beside the Seine.

***Before Sunset* (2004)**

A sequel to *Before Sunrise*, about an American tourist who meets a French girl on a train, *Before Sunset* picks up the story nine years on in Paris. Starting at the Shakespeare and Company bookstore, the couple (Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy) catch up while meandering through the streets of Paris. (See our interview with Delpy on page 74).

***2 Days in Paris* (2007)**

This biting romantic comedy about a New Yorker visiting



Paris with his French wife (Julie Delpy again) shows a more authentic side of Paris. Don't expect any clich  Tour Eiffel scenes, as most of the film was shot at grittier locations around the Gare du Nord.

***Julie and Julia* (2009)**


This comedy-drama features

food writer Julia Child's experiences at Le Cordon Bleu cookery school in the 1950s and offers beautiful scenes of retro Paris. Much of the filming took place on the Left Bank, including at the market on Rue Mouffetard where Julia (Meryl Streep, pictured above) declares that she must be French.

It seems that every time Gil returns to the 1920s, he finds himself at yet another soirée. The party that appears to be somewhere in Montmartre was actually filmed at the Musée des Arts Forains, a collection of fairground art in Bercy in south-east Paris. The Surrealist wedding party, where Gil cleverly pitches the idea for *The Exterminating Angel* to its future director Luis Buñuel, was shot at Maison Deyrolle, a taxidermy museum on Rue du Bac in the 7th arrondissement.

Horse-drawn carriage

Gil also goes back to the Belle Époque era, visiting Maxim's restaurant in Rue Royale on the Right Bank and the Moulin Rouge in Montmartre where he meets the artists Toulouse-Lautrec, Paul Gauguin and Edgar Degas (who claim the real golden age was the Renaissance). He is taken there from Place Dauphine on the Île de la Cité by a horse-drawn carriage that had stopped in front of Restaurant Paul. This was a favourite haunt of film stars Yves Montand and Simone Signoret, who lived in an apartment above.

The ornate Pont Alexandre III provides the setting for the final sequence as Gil decides where his future lies. Allen seems to be suggesting that it is foolish to romanticise previous eras because people then were also looking for a golden age. Even so, his portrayal of bygone Paris is so enchanting that he seems to have created a golden age of his own. 

Midnight in Paris is available on DVD from Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, price \$19.99.

RIGHT: Gil and Inez in Monet's gardens at Giverny



FRANCOFILE

On the Woody Allen film trail in Paris

WHERE TO STAY

Hôtel Le Bristol

112 Rue du Faubourg
Saint-Honoré
75008 Paris
Doubles from €850.
Midnight in Paris
package from €1,090.
Tel: (Fr) 1 45 74 68 59
www.lebristolparis.com

Hôtel d'Angleterre

44 Rue Jacob
75006 Paris
Tel: (Fr) 1 42 60 34 72
www.hotel-dangleterre.com
Although not featured
in the film, this charming
hotel once hosted
Ernest Hemingway and
his wife in room 14.
Doubles from €184.

WHERE TO EAT

Crèmerie Restaurant Polidor

41 Rue Monsieur le
Prince, 75006 Paris
Tel: (Fr) 1 43 26 95 34
www.polidor.com
Menus from €24.

Le Grand Vefour

17 Rue de Beaujolais
75001 Paris
Tel: (Fr) 1 42 96 56 27
www.grand-vefour.com
Main courses from €80.

Maxim's de Paris

3 Rue Royale
75008 Paris
Tel: (Fr) 1 42 65 27 94
www.maxims-de-paris.com
Menus from €110.

114 Faubourg

Hôtel Le Bristol

Brasserie with lunch
menu for €52, main
courses from €28.

WHAT TO DO

Saint-Étienne-du-Mont

Rue de la Montagne-
Sainte-Geneviève
75005 Paris
Tel: (Fr) 1 43 54 11 79
www.saintetienne-dumont.fr

Maison Deyrolle

46 Rue du Bac
75007 Paris
Tel: (Fr) 1 42 22 30 07
www.deyrolle.com

Moulin Rouge

82 Boulevard de Clichy

75018 Paris
Tel: (Fr) 1 53 09 82 82
www.moulinrouge.fr

Musée Rodin

79 Rue de Varenne
75007 Paris
Tel: (Fr) 1 44 18 61 10
www.musee-rodin.fr

Marché Paul-Bert

Rue des Rosiers
93400 Saint-Ouen
Tel: (Fr) 8 05 69 62 96
www.paulbert.antiquites-en-france.com

Musée des Arts Forains

Pavillons de Bercy
53 Avenue des Terroirs
de France
Tel: (Fr) 1 43 40 16 22
www.arts-forains.com



TOURIST INFORMATION

Paris tourist office

25 Rue des Pyramides
75001 Paris
Tel: (Fr) 1 49 52 42 63
www.parisinfo.com

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