

travel &
recreation



Ooh la la —
C'est Magique

PHOTOGRAPHY BY Thomas Wilmer

A visit to the City of Light would be incomplete without a visit to C'est Magique—a magical dinner show at the famed Lido de Paris Cabaret. And for a suite-stay, the centrally located Parisian landmark, Hôtel Le Bristol, a first-class hostelry, rolls out the red carpet.

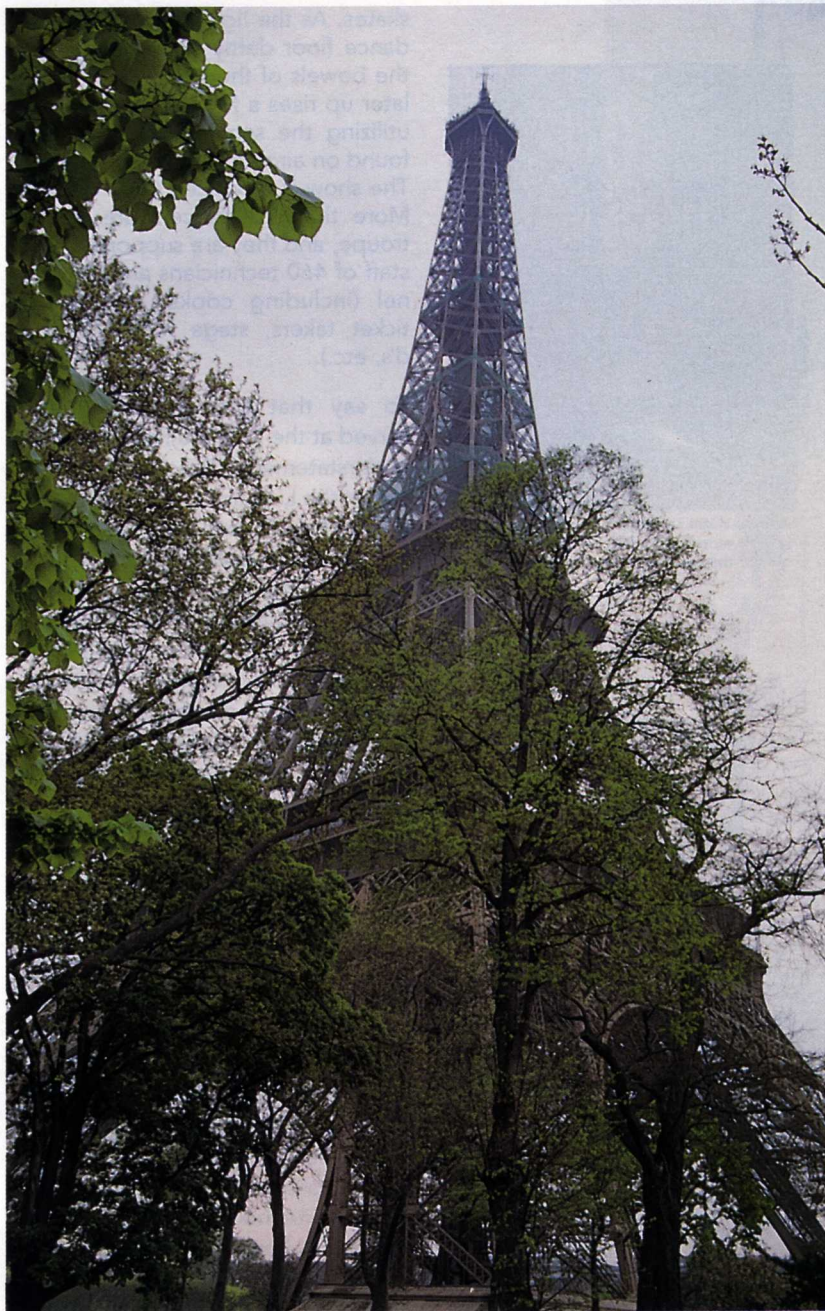
BY THOMAS WILMER

Yes, it's pure magic at the Lido Cabaret. Every evening, after the sun sets in the west, beyond the Arc de Triomphe, the curtains pull back and the lights come up on the stage of the famed Lido Cabaret. Once the music starts and the dancers make their dramatic entrance, there truly is a sense of magic in the air at Paris's renowned 1,200-seat dinner theater located on the bustling avenue des Champs-Élysées.

The Lido show retains a taste of the traditional elements of the classic Gay '90s Moulon Rouge, Can-Can girls and Toulouse Latrec's sensuous cabaret performers; but, the producers, directors and technicians have taken a Parisian tradition and propelled the art form into the 21st century through the application of cutting-edge, computer-generated technology.

From the moment the show begins, with an exotic enchantress springing up from a giant top-hat and dancers floating through space overhead, the audience's senses are repeatedly bombarded with impressive, dramatic and memorable sights, sounds and scenes.

Sets are changed so rapidly that one tableau seamlessly melds into the next with no apparent break in the flow. Throughout the course of each show, the troupe entertains on stage wearing a total of 700 fantastic costumes and 450 different pairs of shoes. An average of 15 costume changes per person are made dur-



Left: The pyramid at the Louvre; above: Majestic Eiffel Tower

ing each performance, twice nightly, 365 days — often done in less than 50 seconds.

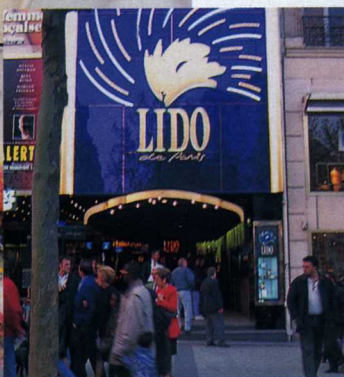
The production cost to stage the upgraded C'est Magique exceeded \$15 million and included a major remodel of the seating area. The lighting system (including lasers, mammoth-size, full-color video projections, and 17,000 lights) cost in excess of \$2 million. No expense was spared to secure the best available equipment. The video projector is the largest of its kind in the world. More than 60 loudspeakers, powered by 25 amplifiers, and an 8-track

stereo system are only two facets of a complex technical system that is master controlled by a super computer and 12 auxiliary computers.

One scene, featuring an incredible abundance of waterfalls and fountains, employs high-volume pumps that produce 60,000 gallons of cascading water per minute. Stage spectacles at Europe's largest and most extravagant cabaret nightclub include lasers, pyrotechnics, on-stage fountains, water cascades, a swimming pool and an ice rink. True wizardry is performed in the fourth tableau that features dancers gracefully gliding about the stage on ice



Above: Hôtel Le Bristol;
center: entrance to Lido de Paris;
below: the fountain at Les Halles



skates. As the lights dim, the entire dance floor deftly drops down into the bowels of the stage. A moment later up rises a full-size skating rink, utilizing the same elevator system found on aircraft carrier flight decks. The show is produced twice nightly. More than 70 dancers are in the troupe, and they are supported by a staff of 460 technicians and personnel (including cooks, carpenters, ticket takers, stage hands, maitre d's, etc.).

To say that the gourmet meals served at the Lido are first-class is an understatement. The culinary maestro at the Lido since 1997 is the legendary Paul Bocuse (regarded as the father of nouvelle cuisine and a leader in the revolution in French cooking during the 1970s). A staff of 50 culinary and pastry chefs creates a diverse array of menu offerings, while 80 maitre d's and waiters deftly serve up to 2,400 people per evening — on time and with a smile!

Bocuse has retooled the Lido menu to reflect the current trends in French and international cuisine, and in the process, established the Lido as a bona-fide gourmet dining destination. Gustatory offerings include Bayonne ham twirls stuffed with chevre, sea trout Charlotte and braised leeks with star aniseed butter, and Bresse free-range chicken with morel-flavored sauce and potato pancakes. Incredibly, the Lido is also the largest consumer of champagne in all Europe with more than 800 bottles of the bubbly consumed nightly.

The Lido is a symbolic and integral part of Parisian night life; yet, it is an international affair in many ways. A concerted effort was made to use primarily French costume supply firms, though there are Italian-crafted designer outfits among the 700 utilized in the show, along with an assortment of high-fashion shoes from Spain. The feathers, long associated with traditional Parisian cabarets, are now used only as accents and highlights.

Not only do the guests, and some of the equipment, come from all quarters of the globe, but also the dancers; eight are from the United States, including the two leads. Principal singer, Kate Vanderliet,

at first glance, appears very Continental, yet, she hails from Orinda, California.

C'est Magique is the 25th extravaganza production at the Lido, as the show has played under different themes for decades. Long regarded as one of Europe's premier cabarets, the Lido first opened in 1928 as the chic underground club, La Plage de Paris. It had a luxury spa, casino games, fashion shows, live jazz and water canals, complete with gondola rides (thus the genesis of the name Lido — as the setting was reflective of the famous Lido beach in Venice, Italy). La Plage subsequently moved to a new venue and evolved into a more traditional Parisian cabaret show. In 1946, shortly after the conclusion of WW II, the present incarnation of the famed Lido opened on the Champs-Elyees.

An evening at the Lido, with dinner, typically costs between \$145 and \$185 (U.S.) per person (including tax and gratuity). There are special seasonal performances, including a mid-week "show only" from \$85, a mid-winter matinee performance with lunch, and a Christmas fantasy show, specifically for children.

For further information and reservations contact Lido's representative: Mondotels, at (800) 227-4884 or write, The Lido, 116 bis avenue de Champs-Elyees, 75008 Paris, France; telephone: 001-33-4076-5610; Web site: www.lido.fr

AN AMERICAN IN PARIS — HÔTEL LE BRISTOL

As our cab wends its way down a labyrinth of narrow side streets lined with a seemingly never-ending array of ancient stone-fronted buildings, the sense of timelessness dominates the imagination. We draw close to our destination and cruise down the famed Parisian avenue of opulence, ru du Faubourg Saint-Honore — the home of shops with discreetly lettered names above their entryways: Lanvin, Hermes, Lapidus, Maxim's, Cardin, Yves St. Laurent, and the renowned Hôtel Le Bristol.

From the moment we step into the lobby of the Bristol, there is the definite sense of having entered a conspicuously distinguished environment. Deft accents such as the lobby's 23 Baccarat crystal chande-

