

Paris



## → PARISIAN SECRET

Unlike most other cities, the City of Light can indulge connoisseurs of almost every stripe: lovers of food, art, wine, fashion, architecture...and junk.

Junk? Well, we can use the term *objets d'art* if you wish. But let us be frank, *mes amis*. If you adore hunting for antiques but lack the funds for the shops on the Rue du Bac, there's only one recourse: the fabled **Marché aux Puces de St-Ouen** — better known simply as the Paris Flea Market. From a bishop's miter to matchbooks from the Normandie, it's all here.

Paris actually harbors several flea markets, but as insiders will tell you (actually, insiders *won't* tell you, but this incorrigible collector will), St-Ouen is the best, and the best hidden. You'll have to ride the No. 4 Metro all the way to the last stop, walk north along the gritty Clignancourt, and turn left on the Rue des Rosiers. Several antiques markets sprout from this narrow street; the most alluring lies behind an ivy-covered gate bearing the sign "Vernaison."

Beyond is a labyrinthine bazaar where it looks as

though Paris carelessly spilled millions of treasures from her handbag as she strode or staggered through the centuries: cocktail rings and perfume bottles, Lalique beads and Limoges saucers, table runners still redolent of ducal libraries. Ensnared inside their stalls, proprietors exhale blue cigarette smoke and fix you with stares. (A simple smile and a "Bonjour" will work wonders.)

True, serious decorators do shop St-Ouen, and they'll think nothing of hauling off that Erard burled-walnut grand piano for a client in Manhattan. But Vernaison abounds with treasures more modest — a marble mantle clock, say, or a 19th-century lithograph of the Luxembourg Gardens. Prices can be high, but persistence rewards the forager. On a recent visit, this writer spirited away an early 1900s thermometer in a gold-leafed frame (15€, \$19), some Belgian art-deco pottery (20€, \$25), and an old pressed-tin theater mascaron (70€, \$88). Finally, scan those canvases: A painting bought in the nearby Dauphine market in 1997 for \$260 later turned out to be a Cezanne worth nearly \$700,000.

— by ROBERT KLARA