

Musée YVES SAINT LAURENT Paris



SAINT LAURENT

rive gauche

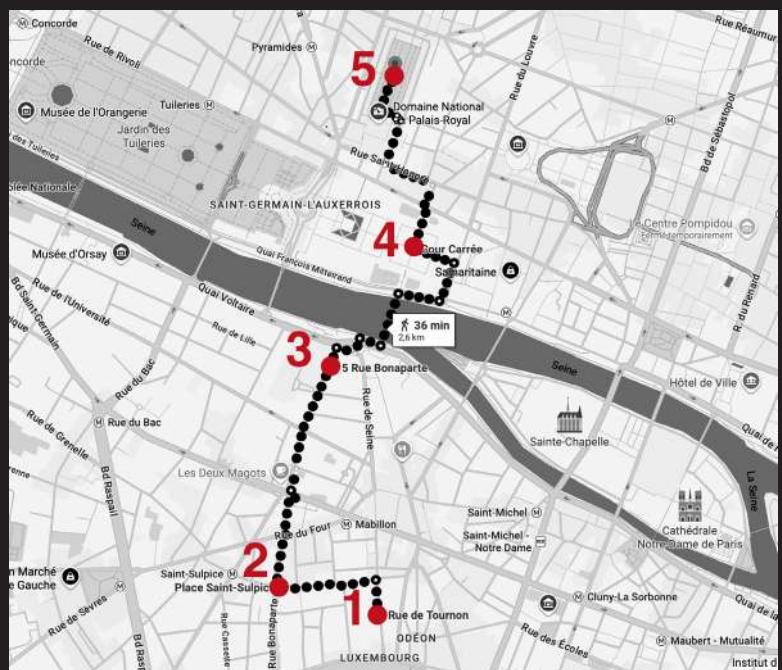
On September 19 and 20, to mark the 60th anniversary of the launch of SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche* and on the occasion of the European Heritage Days, the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris—currently closed for renovation—is offering a guided walk through the heart of Paris.

Immerse yourself in the history of SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche*, a venture that revolutionized fashion. On September 26, 1966, Yves Saint Laurent opened his first ready-to-wear boutique at 21 Rue de Tournon, in Paris's 6th arrondissement. It was more than

just a new address; it was the realization of a vision: ready-to-wear created with the same exacting standards and attention to detail as haute couture.

From Rue de Tournon and Rue Bonaparte to the Cour Carrée of the Louvre—where the SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche* runway shows were held—follow in the footsteps of Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé. This out-of-the-ordinary tour will reveal the iconic locations, inspirations and behind-the-scenes moments of a journey that profoundly shaped the history of fashion.

1. Rue de Tournon
2. Place Saint Sulpice
3. 5 Rue Bonaparte
4. Cour Carrée of the Louvre
5. The Palais Royal



Haute couture and ready-to-wear

D i s t i n g u i s h i n g b e t w e e n t w o f a s h i o n i n d u s t r i e s

To better understand the revolution launched by Yves Saint Laurent with the opening of his SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche* boutiques beginning in 1966, it is necessary to understand the difference between the two approaches to garment creation: haute couture and ready-to-wear.

Haute couture is based on the creation of unique, entirely made-to-measure pieces, crafted by hand in the workshops of the fashion house in Paris. Ready-to-wear, by contrast, is characterized by larger-scale production, manufactured in industrial series in factories.

At first glance, these two ways of conceiving and producing clothing may seem irreconcilable. Yet several great couturiers (Christian Dior, Carven...) had already ventured into ready-to-wear collections in the 1950s. This "couturiers' ready-to-wear" benefited from the prestige of haute couture while taking advantage of broader distribution.

Yves Saint Laurent was nevertheless the first, with SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche*, to achieve such resounding commercial success: within twenty years, 150 stores had opened around the world.

As with haute couture, Yves Saint Laurent designed the ready-to-wear collections and had the prototypes produced in the workshops of the fashion house. Production was then largely handled at the Angers-based factories of the C. Mendès company. Finally, the garments were distributed and sold through the *rive gauche* boutiques, celebrating, in the couturier's words, "a certain way of living rather than a certain way of dressing." (interview with Yves Saint Laurent, Dim Dam Dom, March 10, 1968).

21 rue de Tournon

A boutique as manifesto

A SYMBOLIC OPENING

In September 1966, at 21 Rue de Tournon, in the 6th arrondissement of Paris, Yves Saint Laurent opened the first SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche* boutique, a revolutionary event in the world of fashion: ready-to-wear clothing, designed by a grand couturier, was now available to the general public, not as a secondary variation of an haute couture collection, but as a line in its own right, a true creation. On the site of a former bakery, the

interior architect and designer Isabelle Hebey created a boutique that expressed through its architecture, furnishings, colors and layout a new aesthetic, at once radical, joyful and deeply anchored in the bohemian and intellectual spirit of the Parisian Left Bank. The choice of location, on a quiet street lined with bookstores, framers and antique dealers, a stone's throw from the Senate and the Luxembourg Gardens, was anything but trivial. It was a political gesture, deliberately distancing the boutique from the Right Bank's gilded Golden Triangle.



A STYLISTIC AND SOCIAL MANIFESTO

With his SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche* line, the couturier challenged the elitism of haute couture. He championed accessible, ready-to-wear clothing, designed for all women, particularly students and young working people. “What I’d really love to become is a Prisunic,” he declared—referring to a large French retail chain known for its unique blend of affordable style and practical design—while tackling, head on, on the paradox of a democratized luxury, which rejected elitism in favor of accessibility. The price points were carefully studied (250 to 750 francs), the sizes standardized, the clothing cut simply but perfectly. Catherine Deneuve, “godmother” of the boutique’s launch, summed up the general astonishment:

“Here we found, available on hangers, everything that was considered luxury on the Right Bank.”

Fashion editors rushed to photograph the boutique’s clothing worn on the street, capturing in everyday settings the shock of a revolution in progress. More than a business, the boutique became a “laboratory of attitudes”, a place of instant metamorphosis, where silhouettes were freely composed using sweaters, tuxedos, skirts

and accessories, forming a modular, young and casual wardrobe.

THE ABCS OF LIBERTY

SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche* not only offered clothing, but another idea of what defines a woman: she was now liberated, active, urban and free from the shackles of coded haute couture elegance. For his revolutionary ready-to-wear line, Yves Saint Laurent designed garments to live with, to leave the shop with immediately, without ceremony, to be worn to express rather than represent oneself, and to live life to the fullest. The line was targeted at women who had neither the desire nor means for haute couture, women whose existence—modern, vibrant, engaged—called for a new syntax of style.

“Haute couture lands on the Left Bank.”, — *Elle* magazine headline (*Elle France*, September, 1966). “Paris: Saint Laurent turns left, crosses the river and, everybody—watch out!” — *Vogue*

In this “fashion Drugstore,” open until late at night, shopping became free from constraints, in short, fun. More than a commercial venture, the boutique encapsulated a utopian street-vibe, where Niki de Saint Phalle’s *Nana* sculptures rubbed shoulders with Olivier Mourgue’s purple benches and Isamu Noguchi’s lamps and steel furniture. The boutique’s décor and styling embraced the zeitgeist: brutalist, pop, conceptual, welcoming. 21 Rue de Tournon became, both physically and symbolically, a laboratory devoted to Yves Saint Laurent’s concept of modernity, a space that served as a manifesto for a liberated fashion, worn on the street like a standard.





Boutique interior. Unknown photographer © All rights reserved



Boutique interior. Unknown photographer © All rights reserved

LES BOUTIQUES DE VOGUE *(Suite)*



à Toulouse...

1, place Wilson. Pardessus à chevrons pour Madame Pierre Jonquères d'Oriola.



à Genève...

51, rue du Rhône. Marina Doria devant le choix des ceintures...



à Saint-Tropez...

41, rue Gambetta. La comtesse Charles de Rohan Chabot avec l'écharpe à succès.



à Paris...

46, av. Victor-Hugo. Les pantalons larges d'Albina du Boisroux

17 rue de Tournon

Fashion for liberated men



Detail of a collection board from the Fall/Winter 1969 SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche* collection.
© Yves Saint Laurent © Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent

Less often mentioned, but just as essential to the *rive gauche* legend, the launching of the first SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche* men's boutique, located at 17 rue de Tournon, is seen as an important milestone in the history of contemporary men's fashion. Adjacent to the women's boutique, it was one of only two Parisian boutiques exclusively dedicated to the house's men's line. A few other men's boutiques were opened in London, New York, Beverly Hills, Tokyo, Monte Carlo and Toulouse.

For Yves Saint Laurent, this ready-to-wear project went well beyond commercial diversification. As it was for women a few years earlier, it was a question of championing the liberation of bodies and styles, in reaction to the rigid uniforms that still constrained men at the time. In 1969, he confided to *Elle* magazine:

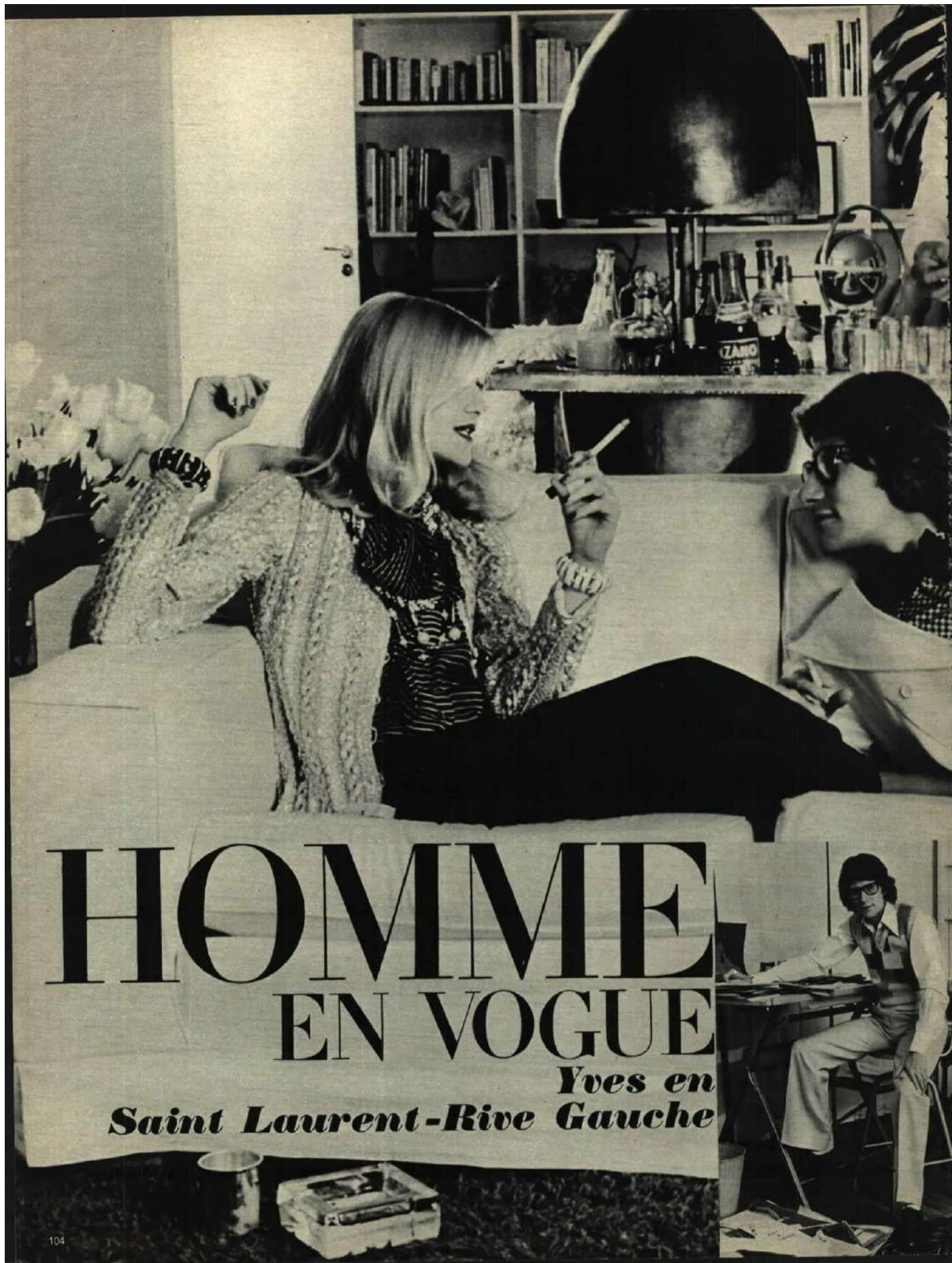
"What I would like is for men to free themselves from their shackles, as women have just done—they are so much more open, more modern than men."

This boutique was a manifestation of this vision: it offered men a liberated, edgy, subtly transgressive elegance, inspired by couture but without the restraints imposed by conventions. Far from uniform garments, he designed a fluid wardrobe—fitted jackets, silk shirts, deftly-cut pants—which left the wearer room for individuality.

"I leave it to others to make boring clothing for boring people and boring circumstances. I am addressing liberated men, and what I am offering them is not a new "line," a new constraint, but rather freedom."

Yves Saint Laurent *Elle* (France), May 5, 1969

This SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche* men's boutique strongly reinforced the couturier's ready-to-wear mission: to bring beauty into everyday life, to affirm that style can be an act of liberation, regardless of gender.



Place Saint-Sulpice

The epicenter of Paris' Left Bank

SAINT LAURENT
rive gauche
FEMMES

6, place Saint-Sulpice - 75006 Paris - 43 29 43 00

*Chère Madame, Cher Monsieur,
Nous serions heureux de vous accueillir aux soldes
réservés à notre clientèle qui se dérouleront à partir
du Lundi 4 Janvier 1988. 14H*

Invitation to the sales at SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche*, 6 Place Saint-Sulpice
© Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent

AN INSTANT LANDMARK

SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche* was a resounding success. Boutiques sprang up all over the world: Lyon, Marseille, Rome, Madrid, Munich, Saint-Tropez, Brussels, Zurich, London, Milan, New York, among other cities.

In 1979, Yves Saint Laurent opened a second SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche* boutique in Paris' Left Bank at 6 Place Saint-Sulpice, in one of the chicest districts of the capital. Once again, the choice was calculated: between the renowned church's neoclassical façade, the fountains, the galleries, the bookstores and the café terraces, this square quickly becomes the center of gravity of a new femininity—more assured, more urban, more liberated.

After the revolutionary first SAINT LAURENT

rive gauche on the Rue de Tournon, the Place Saint-Sulpice boutique marked a new stage: that of consolidation, of influence, of the massive diffusion of an idea that had been fully embraced. Left Bank fashion was no longer an experimental manifesto; it had become the standard of a new chic: modern and everyday, without ever losing its transgressive power.

THE MIRROR OF AN ERA

This boutique, designed to be elegant, accessible and vibrant, welcomed regular customers and inspired passersby, who would come looking not for a uniform, but for something uplifting for the soul. And that's what SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche* would offer them. Every item sold, whether a tuxedo-inspired *smoking*, safari jacket, transparent blouse or flowing skirt, would become a statement of style, of attitude.

It was the mirror of an era: that of the 1980s, of hard-earned independence, of women entering the workforce, of desire without the need to justify or explain it. Through his ready-to-wear line, Yves Saint Laurent continued his intimate dialogue with the street, begun in the 1960s and fueled by an obsession: the breaking down of walls between luxury and everyday life.

FROM HAUTE COUTURE TO EVERYDAY WEAR

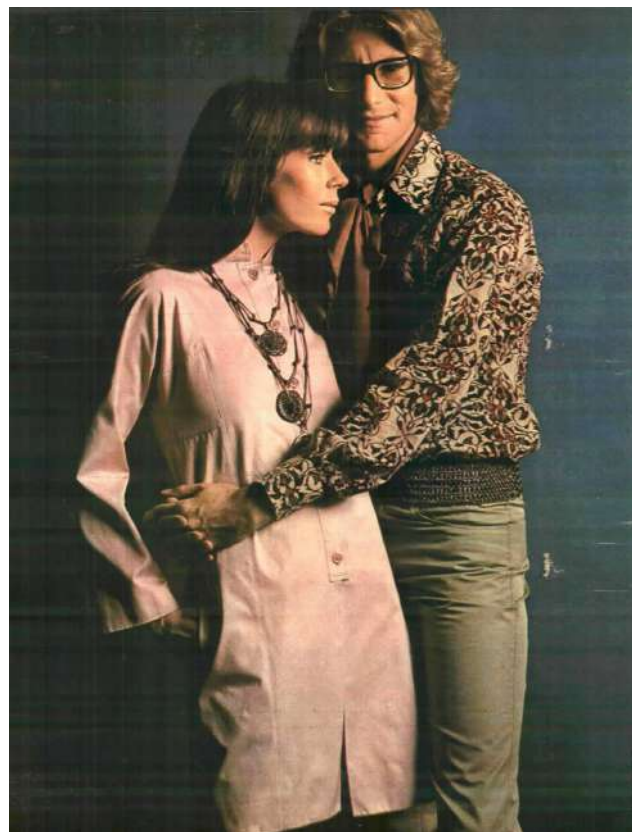
By choosing to champion ready-to-wear, Yves Saint Laurent symbolically broke ranks with classic haute couture. He downsized his couture shows—making them confidential, almost secret—to better devote himself to his true passion: fashion in motion.

As he modestly confided in 1971:

“I chose to show my idea of fashion through my ready-to-wear rather than through my haute couture. I think ready-to-wear expresses today’s fashion.”

The woman of the 1960s and 1970s was a woman in motion, able to move seamlessly and skillfully between the professional and domestic spheres. Ready-to-wear became a symbol of this increased mobility and dynamic way of life.

In the wake of 6 Place Saint-Sulpice, haute couture would become a fond memory. What



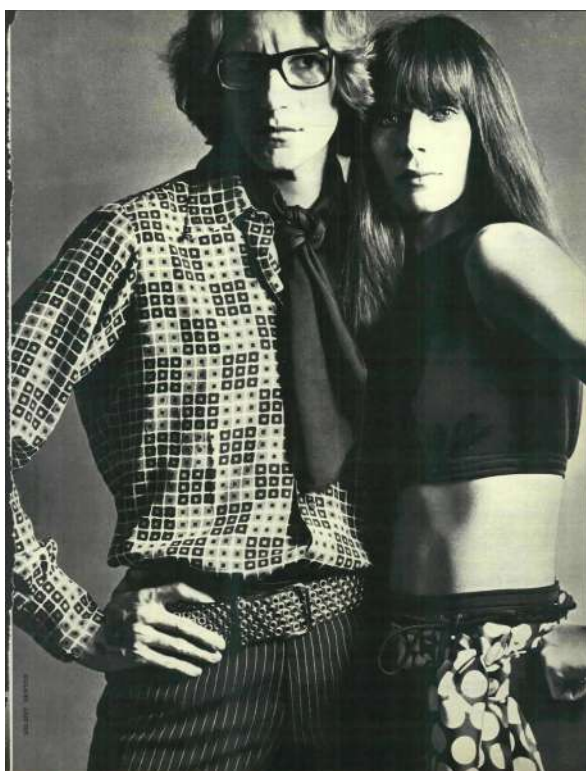
Yves Saint Laurent and his sister Brigitte Mathieu-Saint-Laurent
© Elle France / Helmut Newton

mattered from now on was the street: its apparitions, innuendoes and energy. That is where the couturier’s imagination would roam, in the footsteps of those he loved, and whom he dressed.

MUSES IN MOTION

The Saint-Sulpice boutique was also the scene of a nascent feminine mythology surrounding the couturier. There was, of course, Catherine Deneuve, whose idealized Left Bank silhouette—mysterious and distant, yet radiant—led Saint Laurent to refer to her as “the woman I was waiting for.” And there was Charlotte Rampling, Françoise Hardy, Françoise Giroud, Talitha Getty and all the real or even imagined women who embodied vibrant, fluid, liberated and paradoxical femininities. These were not static muses, but women on the move: adventurous, secretive, sensual. They wore Saint Laurent’s tuxedo-inspired *smokings* instead of ball gowns, revealed their breasts under his chiffon blouses, and would take to the streets with a regal air: queens disguised as passersby.

That liberated attitude, that demeanor unburdened by hierarchy, permeated the entire Left Bank aesthetic, by which a woman’s wardrobe could become a theater of sudden metamorphosis.



Yves Saint Laurent and his sister Brigitte Mathieu-Saint-Laurent
© Elle France / Helmut Newton



SAINT LAURENT
rive gauche

12 Place Saint Sulpice Paris 6^e 326 84 40

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YSL

The legendary logo



Logo for the House of Yves Saint Laurent, designed by the graphic artist Cassandre (1901–1968) for the founding of the couture house in 1961.
© Cassandre / Adagp, Paris, 2026 © Fondation Pierre Bergé–Yves Saint Laurent

In 1961, Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé commissioned the graphic designer Cassandre to design the couture house's logo.

Born in Ukraine to French parents, Adolphe Jean-Marie Mouron, who assumed the pseudonym Cassandre, was one of world's leading graphic designers working in advertising between the wars. His style, very synthetic and

geometric, had been very much in demand, as reflected in his work for Christian Dior.

For the House of Yves Saint Laurent, he imagined a monogram that was both elegant and modern, a reflection of the young couturier, whose three initials appear simply and elegantly intertwined.

5 Rue Bonaparte

Pierre Bergé's intellectual refuge

Located on the garden level of a Seventeenth-century building where the painter Édouard Manet was born, Pierre Bergé's apartment at 5 Rue Bonaparte housed his personal collection, clearly one assembled by an extraordinary, erudite man. Pierre Bergé

acquired the property in 1992. Literally a stone's throw from the Seine, this secluded address is part of the historic fabric of the Saint-Germain-des-Prés neighborhood, at the crossroads of the French literary, artistic and political worlds.



The garden, watercolor © Isabelle Rey

A MAJOR ARCHITECTURAL PROJECT

Significant renovation work at the apartment was entrusted to the architect and decorator François-Joseph Graf. The objective: to accentuate the seventeenth-century characteristics of the place while incorporating a subtle modernity. The ceiling was raised, the interior spaces opened, and outdoor light was brought into the rooms. A lush garden was created, including an orchid greenhouse, emphasizing the indoor-outdoor feel of the apartment and a dialogue between classic rigor and plant exuberance.

The entrance, designed as a vestibule with optical effects, was entirely lined with mirrors. It was guarded by four allegorical seventeenth-century polychrome wooden female busts representing the continents, an allegory at once encyclopedic and baroque. The entranceway led to a dining room featuring walls covered with eighteenth-century wallpaper with “chinoiserie” motifs that had belonged to Mona Bismarck, a leading figure of Parisian society and a patron of the decorative arts.

A PRIVATE MUSEUM

The main living room was dominated by an impressive painting: *Pierrot's Despair* by James Ensor. An exceptional collection revolved around this masterpiece: works by Ingres, Géricault, Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec, Manet, Vuillard, Picasso and Braque. The side tables teemed with art objects from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, creating a back-and-forth between painting and the decorative arts.

In the library, designed as a “chamber of scholarship,” original editions and rare manuscripts were kept. The leather-covered walls created a backdrop for a set of Limoges enamels, mainly acquired from the renowned antique dealers Nicolas and Alexis Kugel. The room included a portrait by Frans Hals, German objects from the seventeenth century—notably ivory models of towers—and a painted ceiling purchased from the Belgian antiques dealer Axel Vervoordt, who specializes in timeless atmospheres and old materials.



The main salon, watercolor © Isabelle Rey

THE COMPLEMENTARY AND CONTRASTING SECOND FLOOR:

Pierre Bergé subsequently purchased the floor above the existing apartment and decorated it according to another aesthetic approach from the past. Once again entrusted to François-Joseph Graf, the spaces recalled the Empire and Restoration periods: gray walls, very high ceilings, sparse but carefully chosen furniture. A minimalist, but deeply Parisian atmosphere, summed up in the architect's words as "Very French, very Parisian."

The upstairs dining room showcased contemporary works, notably creations by Claude and François-Xavier Lalanne. The library on the first floor, whose windows give onto the Beaux-Arts of Paris, complements that on the garden level, offering a quasi-exhaustive documentation of Western art.

On display in the apartment's Music Room were two iconic bronze sculptures, representing a rabbit's head and a rat's head, from the Summer Palace of the Qianlong Emperor in Beijing.

SILVERWARE AND PRECIOUS OBJECTS

Among the most extraordinary objects was an exceptional collection of Hanoverian silverware—cups, pokals, fountains and goblets in silver and gilded silver—housed in a small living room designed as a jewelry box. The room also housed a collection of Venetian Renaissance enamels. Even rarer than those produced in Limoges, the collection testifies to Pierre Bergé's taste for exceptional, intensely symbolic objects crafted with technical precision.

A CONSUMMATE INTERIOR AT THE CROSSROADS OF CENTURIES

5 Rue Bonaparte cannot be described as a mere residence: it was an expertly designed and fully developed interior space, in the tradition of the residences of great humanists and collectors. A retreat as much as an exhibition gallery, it juxtaposed the language of art history with dialogues that exist between the centuries; it affirmed a coherent vision of one man's taste, anchored in French classicism, but open to expression.



The dining room, watercolor © Isabelle Rey



Cour carrée

Jean-luce Huré, Guy Marineau, Jacques Dubussy and François-Marie Banier were among the photographers who immortalized both Yves Saint Laurent's haute couture and ready-to-wear runway shows.

The entire fashion week was organized in the Cour Carrée of the Louvre. A detailed schedule with specific dates was provided to all fashion journalists to ensure that they did not miss a single show.

The Louvre Museum also served as the setting for several photographic campaigns for SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche*, including a shoot by Mario Sorrenti in 1998.



The Palais Royal

The Palais Royal served as the setting for several shoots for SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche* campaign catalogs.

While the image of Yves Saint Laurent ready-to-wear was shaped through fashion magazines, from 1979 to 1997 it was also conveyed through something produced by the fashion house for its boutiques: the campaign catalog. Around ten pages in length, these booklets promoted the most striking looks presented in each collection. For each catalog, the fashion house, with the assistance of the MAFIA agency (Maïmé Arnodin Fayolle International Associés), would commission a photoshoot designed to highlight the textiles and drive demande among an international clientele. François Lamy, Helmut Newton, David Seidner, Gian Paolo Barbieri, Arthur Elgort and Mario Testino were among the photographers who participated in these campaigns. For nearly twenty years, they used the ten or so full-page spreads allotted to

them to develop their individual visual worlds, sometimes pursuing a formal exploration of how the garments were presented, at other times creating dreamlike scenes. From the vivid colors of the 1980s to the cooler aesthetic of the late 1990s, these photographs reflected the changing approaches to fashion photography and the tastes of each era. Accompanied on the inside flaps of the covers by a mosaic of photographs taken during the runway shows, they sometimes extended beyond the catalogs to appear as standalone advertisements in the fashion press.

Gian Paolo Barbieri photographed the SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche* Fall/Winter 1986 collection in the gardens and colonnade of the Palais Royal; Arthur Elgort did the same for the SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche* Fall/Winter 1989 collection, while Martin Brading photographed the SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche* Men's Fall/Winter 1990 collection.



Violeta Sanchez in the advertising campaign catalog for the Fall/Winter 1986 SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche* collection © Gian Paolo Barbieri, courtesy of the Fondazione Gian Paolo Barbieri ETS

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