



# **A Corner in the Marais: Memoir of a Paris Neighborhood**

*Alex Karmel*

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## **A Corner in the Marais: Memoir of a Paris Neighborhood** Alex Karmel

or anyone who loves Paris and the mysterious allure of old houses, this charming, personal and informed memoir makes for perfect reading. In a knowledgeable, literate style that conveys (and makes contagious) Karmel's love of his subject, *A Corner in the Marais* traces the architectural and social development of the City of Lights, from its origins as a Roman settlement, through major redevelopments brought about by Henry IV and Baron Haussmann, through the recent, and sensitive, renovation and restoration of its old neighborhoods.

The story begins with Karmel and his French wife fulfilling a long-standing dream: buying an apartment in the Marais, Paris's celebrated historic district, the site of some of city's oldest and most picturesque buildings. It soon becomes clear that their new home, which has witnessed six centuries of Parisian life, provides not only a refuge but a fresh and lively vantage point from which to view the city's history, revealing information that will surprise even the most confirmed Francophile.

The book concludes with a "walking tour" of Marais, in which the principal buildings are discussed with brisk authority. Although Karmel takes pains to fill in historical lacunae from town records, he never loses sight of the fascinating human details whether royal squabbles, commercial transactions, or family chicanery that have played their role in shaping Paris as we now know it.

Illustrated with photographs and period engravings, *A Corner in the Marais* is ideal reading for anyone who loves exploring the hidden byways of vieux Paris and experiencing history from a personal and singularly engaging viewpoint.

"Karmel illuminates shadows of French history, architecture, even character and theater with a novelist's knack for detail and an architect's eye for stories in stone."

The New York Times

## **A Corner in the Marais: Memoir of a Paris Neighborhood Details**

Date : Published March 1st 2003 by David R. Godine Publisher (first published March 4th 2002)

ISBN : 9781567921984

Author : Alex Karmel

Format : Paperback 149 pages

Genre : Cultural, France, Autobiography, Memoir, Travel, Nonfiction, History

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# **From Reader Review A Corner in the Marais: Memoir of a Paris Neighborhood for online ebook**

## **Suzanne says**

Great book about the history of one neighborhood in Paris and the centuries of history in its development.

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## **David says**

I found this interesting and informative. I do love Paris, and have a soft spot for this neighborhood. I do note that the author can get bogged down in details that don't perhaps end up evoking as much as he seems to think, but perhaps he's trying to be a bit more academic than I would prefer. Regardless, it's still a good one for those interested in the place.

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## **Laurie says**

I thought the premise was very interesting.

Trace the history of Paris through one house in one district. From Medieval Times to current day it's quite interesting to see how the city grew, laws developed, the architecture was altered, and the neighborhood expanded and contracted. The social events and simple ideas of how meals were prepared and clothes were watched were very enjoyable. The detailed chapter on the auction sale of the property was rather tedious. It was nice to read Karmel's research through the eyes of the structures.

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## **Angela says**

Another book of a decade or more ago that still sits proudly on my bookshelf. I just adored it. Please read if you plan on being in Paris for any length of time.

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## **Victoria Miller says**

"Le Marais is the closest you will get to the feel of medieval Paris and has more pre-revolutionary buildings and streets left intact than any other area in Paris. " This book informs one of pretty much anything one could want to know about this area of Paris and its amazing history. Alex Karmel gives a rich account of the personal experience of living there, interwoven with wonderful and very detailed accounts of the history and architecture of this ancient neighborhood. The book is peppered with some nice black and white photographs. I will probably read it again at some point, and the next read will be accompanied by wine, croissants, and macaroons..... A must read for any serious Francophile.

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### **Kate Cronin says**

The book traces the architectural and social development of the City of Lights, from its origins as a Roman settlement, through major redevelopments brought about by Henry IV and Baron Haussmann, through the recent, and sensitive, renovation and restoration of its old neighborhoods. We stayed in the Marais, and it helps to know the area but anyone interested in Paris and architecture would find this book a fun read.

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### **Heather Mckay says**

If you are looking for a book in the style of 'A Year in Provence', this is not the book for you. This is more of a ( in iTunes lingo ) 'Deep Cuts' book for the Francophile. Karmel and his French wife bought a flat in the Marais, and he details the history of the house itself as well as the area and a fair bit of French history is thrown in the mix as well. The struggles of setting up the house are not the point of the book, although that would make interesting reading. His digging deep to see when the first home was constructed on the site of his flat, and what 'it' saw through history was.

It is a fairly thin book but rather chock full of history versus anecdotes. This book would best suit someone who has a good half dozen or so books about France under their belt. It would be a bore to people looking for cute places to visit while on holiday in Paris, or people wanting to read the adventures of creating a life there. The story is about things around his home, minimally about what happens in there, to his family.

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### **Scott says**

A quick, pleasant read about the Marais and Paris through the lens of the author researching the history of his Parisian apartment. Great for picking up some history and getting into a Frenchie state of mind before traveling there.

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### **Heather says**

A personal account of buying an apartment in a historic building in my favorite neighborhood of Paris. I was hoping to use the author's examples of primary source research in a course I was teaching, but they were few and far between. Still interesting, though.

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### **Marcy Heller says**

A wonderful trip through time and place, just a few blocks from my own corner in the Marais. A terrific little read answering many of the questions I've asked myself over the years.

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## Michael Smith says

The author notes in the Foreword that “what has always interested me most in history is not the lives of great men or the analysis of the social, political, and economic forces that determined the great events, but rather the attempt to recreate a sense of what it was like to be an ordinary person living in a given era.” Wow. A sentiment and a view of the past that is *exactly* after my own heart.

The author first saw Paris in the summer of 1949, as a Columbia undergraduate, and was immediately smitten. He felt he was “coming home” and for the next thirty-odd years he spent as much time there as possible. His second wife was Parisian herself and in the early 1980s, when they decided to relocate to France full-time, to a place in the country, they also decided to find a pied à terre in the city. What they came up with was a very small but recently renovated sixth-floor walk-up in a very old building in the quarter known as the Marais -- “the marsh” -- which was a run-down neighborhood at that time full of mostly-Jewish immigrants, but which had once been a middle-class district just inside the city wall (and which now has been rediscovered and includes some of the highest-priced residential property in Paris).

In Boston or Philadelphia, a home that dates from even 1700 is regarded with awe and is probably under the care of the local historical society. In most cases, it wouldn’t even be a private residence any longer but would have been turned into a museum. Karmel’s building, however, dates from at least the 1390s -- more than six centuries ago, during the Hundred Years War, and a century even before Columbus’s first voyage. When he finally discovered just how old it was, he began researching the history of the building, the block it was located on, and the Marais generally, and he presents his findings here in a very readable and entirely fascinating way. Most of the building’s history, of course, is anonymous, especially since most early records regarding fiefs and property rights were systematically destroyed during the Revolution -- but enough documents survived to cast light here and there. This is especially true of what appears to be an auction of the property for debt in the mid-17th century, which was carefully stage-managed by those concerned in order to establish solid title to the property. He explains, too, the legal convolutions necessary in France at that time, and what sort of records were created as a result, all of which should be of considerable use to anyone with an interest in European history of that period -- and his somewhat bemused attempts to untangle all the layers of familial relationships involved will interest genealogists. It isn’t a big book, less than 150 pages, but it’s easy to lose an afternoon in the story Karmel tells.

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## Tony says

This book is a mixed bag. Some parts are very interesting; other parts are tedious.

Nevertheless, anyone who plans to visit Paris should read this book before leaving. It contains a wealth of information about the Marais, its history and development. And for those who have already visited Paris, you should also read it. The book will make you want to return.

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## Nicky says

So far it's a bit dry, but since I'll be staying in this neighborhood next week I wanted to learn a bit more about it and this book came highly recommended.

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Edit: Never finished this book, couldn't trudge through it. Blah.

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### **Pauline says**

This book is for those who: a.) love reading history, b.) love Paris, and c.) love the left bank, the Marais and Paris in general. Some might find the history of this delightful neighborhood boring, but I started it before we went to Paris and finished it after we got back and really enjoyed it. We spent time in many of the areas covered in this book so I particularly enjoyed the reading and depth of this book--it was like going back for a walk through the Marais.

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### **Lois says**

This memoir celebrates the author's love for Paris and includes a very readable brief history of the city and its architecture. His particular focus is the Marais district, and he relates the long history of his apartment home, which he learns through his research has existed for six centuries. I found the book to be a very interesting description of one of my favorite sections of the city.

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