

# Charleston Mercury

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The newspaper with a cosmopolitan attitude

## Hôtels littéraires

By Martine P. Dulles & Frederick H. Dulles

Marcel Proust, Gustave Flaubert, Arthur Rimbaud, Stendhal, George Sand — you must recognize these names of major French writers. No, this article is not a book review, but an introduction to a unique cultural concept in France: *Les Hôtels Littéraires*.

An avid book reader and bibliophile, Monsieur Jacques Letertre decided to share his passion for French literature. He writes: “I created the Société des Hôtels Littéraires to share my love of books with thousands of guests I do not know, but who, and this I do know, are happy to come across an author or a book while visiting Paris ...”

The moment you cross the threshold of an *Hôtel Littéraire* (so far, there are six of them), you enter the world of the writer whose name you see, to whom a great tribute is paid. Each of the hôtels is located in a city where the writer was born or had strong connections.

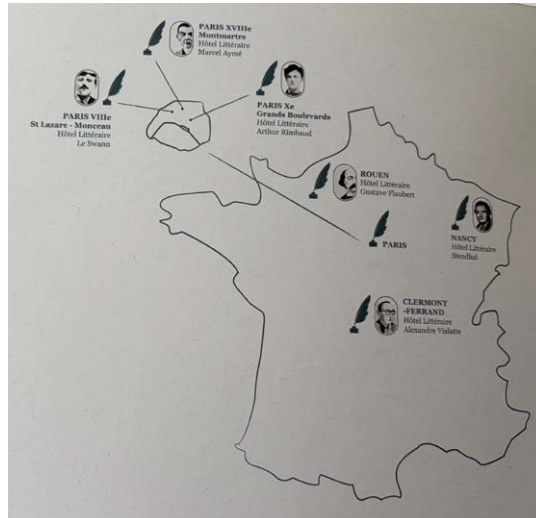
### Hôtel Littéraire Le Swann

The first *Hôtel Littéraire*, which opened in 2013, was named *Le Swann*, after the main character in *À la Recherche du Temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*, often referred to as just “*La Recherche*”). It is devoted, of course, to Marcel Proust (1871–1922). It is located in the 8th arrondissement of Paris, near the Gare Saint-Lazare, a neighborhood very familiar to the writer.

If the pattern is similar in all of the *Hôtels Littéraires*, the decoration in each is obviously unique as it relates to each named author.

In *Le Swann*'s hall, on the walls, you see paintings, photos and drawings related to Marcel Proust. The bookshelves are filled with hundreds of books written by the author (some rare editions) or relating to the author in French or other languages. Display cases hold memorabilia, rare manuscripts, and autographs.

In addition to the permanent decor, temporary exhibits are organized. Until this June 23, the topic in *Le Swann* is “Proust and the women in his life, muses and



PHOTOS BY MARTINE DULLES

The *Hôtels Littéraires*: at left, a map of the varied locations and themes and at right, guidebooks from each.

heroines.”

Conferences are held on a regular basis. This is where *La Société des Amis de Proust* meets and where scholars and writers present their latest books or publications about him.

The *Hôtel Le Swann* is in a six-floor building, and as soon as you get out of the elevator, you may read a quotation on the walls. Each floor is named after a part of Proust's life: Combray (where he used to spend Easter vacations at the home of his uncle and aunt); Balbec, the literary name of the sea resort known as Cabourg in Normandy, where he used to go in the summertime to cure his asthma; and Venice, a city he loved.

Each room is named after a character from *La Recherche*. Just to name a few: Charles Haas, who was the inspiration for the main character in *La Recherche*; Tante Léonie, his aunt who used to give him the famous *petite madeleine* cakes; Céleste Albaret, his faithful governess; Jacques Doucet, the well-known couturier of the Belle Époque; and many more, as there are 80 rooms.

In each room, on the bedside table, is a paperback copy of *La Recherche*, which is lent to you while you stay at the hôtel. There is also a copy of a very detailed brochure about the writer and the hôtel, which you may take home.

### Hôtel Gustave Flaubert

The second *Hôtel Littéraire* is a tribute to Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880). It was opened in 2015 and is located in the historical center of Rouen, in Normandy. Flaubert was born in this city. He wrote *Madame Bovary* and *Salammô*. Flaubert knew Marcel Proust, Guy de Maupassant and George Sand.

### Hôtel Alexandre Vialatte

The following year, 2016, the *Hôtel Alexandre Vialatte* opened in Clermont-Ferrand in the Auvergne region of France. Alexandre Vialatte was born in Haute-Vienne in 1901 and died in Paris in 1971. He is maybe not as well-known as a writer, although he was a journalist, a book critic and a translator. He wrote for the famous newspaper *La Montagne*, which covered and still covers the news of the center of France. His pieces were short but exuded a good sense of humor.

### Hôtel Marcel Aymé and Hôtel Arthur Rimbaud

Back in Paris: the *Hôtel Marcel Aymé* and the *Hôtel Arthur Rimbaud* opened in 2018 and 2019, respectively.

Marcel Aymé (1902–1967) wrote the famous play: *Le Passe-Muraille* (*The Walker Through Walls*).

For 40 years, he lived in the Montmartre quartier in the

18th arrondissement, where the Hôtel is located. Nearby is the famous *Le Passe-Muraille* sculpture by the actor and sculptor Jean Marais (1913–1998) as a tribute to the author, who is buried in the Cimetière Saint-Vincent in Montmartre.

The prodigious poet Arthur Rimbaud was born in Charleville, in the east of France, and came to Paris in 1870, invited by another famous poet, Paul Verlaine. The two poets had a tumultuous, passionate relationship. Rimbaud died at the age of 37 (1854–1891); Verlaine, also born in the east of France, lived from 1844 to 1896.

The *Hôtel Arthur Rimbaud* is located in the 10th arrondissement, near the Gare de l'Est, where trains come and go to the east of France. “The hotel is a symbol of departure and travel, and it seemed to us an ideal way to celebrate Rimbaud and his poetry,” to quote the hôtel's brochure. Each room is dedicated to a poem by Rimbaud, illustrated with an original watercolor by the artist Jean Aubertin.

### Hôtel Stendahl

The latest *Hôtel Littéraire* was inaugurated in 2024 in the beautiful city of the east of France, Nancy, and it is dedicated to Stendhal, born Henri Beyle (1783–1842).

Stendhal did not live in Nancy, but his “unfinished masterpiece, *Lucien Leuwen*, is set in the city of Nancy, which still has the merit of having a national opera house — we know Stendhal's passion for music, in particular Mozart and Rossini,” to quote Héléne Montjean from the hôtel's brochure.

Two of Stendhal's very well-known novels are: *Le Rouge et le Noir* (*The Red and the Black*) and *La Chartreuse de Parme* (*The Charterhouse of Parma*).

If you go to Nancy during the weekend of September 11–13, 2026, you can attend the famous *Salon du Livre*.

### Maison Littéraire George Sand

Sometime this fall 2026, *La Société des Hôtels Littéraires* will create its first *Maison Littéraire* in the heart of Bordeaux. This hôtel will be located near the cathedral in a 19th-century hôtel particulier and will be dedicated to the very famous writer George Sand, née Aurore Dupin (1804–1876).

For more information about *Les Hôtels Littéraires*, please visit [www.hotelslitteraires.fr](http://www.hotelslitteraires.fr) Bonnes lectures!

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