

Lighting Up the Night

BY GARY ZUERCHER

The Glow of Paris captures all 35 of the French capital's bridges in striking black-and-white photographs.

I WAS SHOOTING one night in Paris and greatly overexposed a photo of the famous Pont Alexandre III. As so often happens in art, a mistake became a precursor to something positive, as the resulting photo was stunning; the luminosity just took my breath away. I then decided to photograph all 35 of the Paris bridges—at night. I made a second mistake when I estimated it would take a year to complete the project. In reality, it took five years for the photography and another year for the historical research and writing.

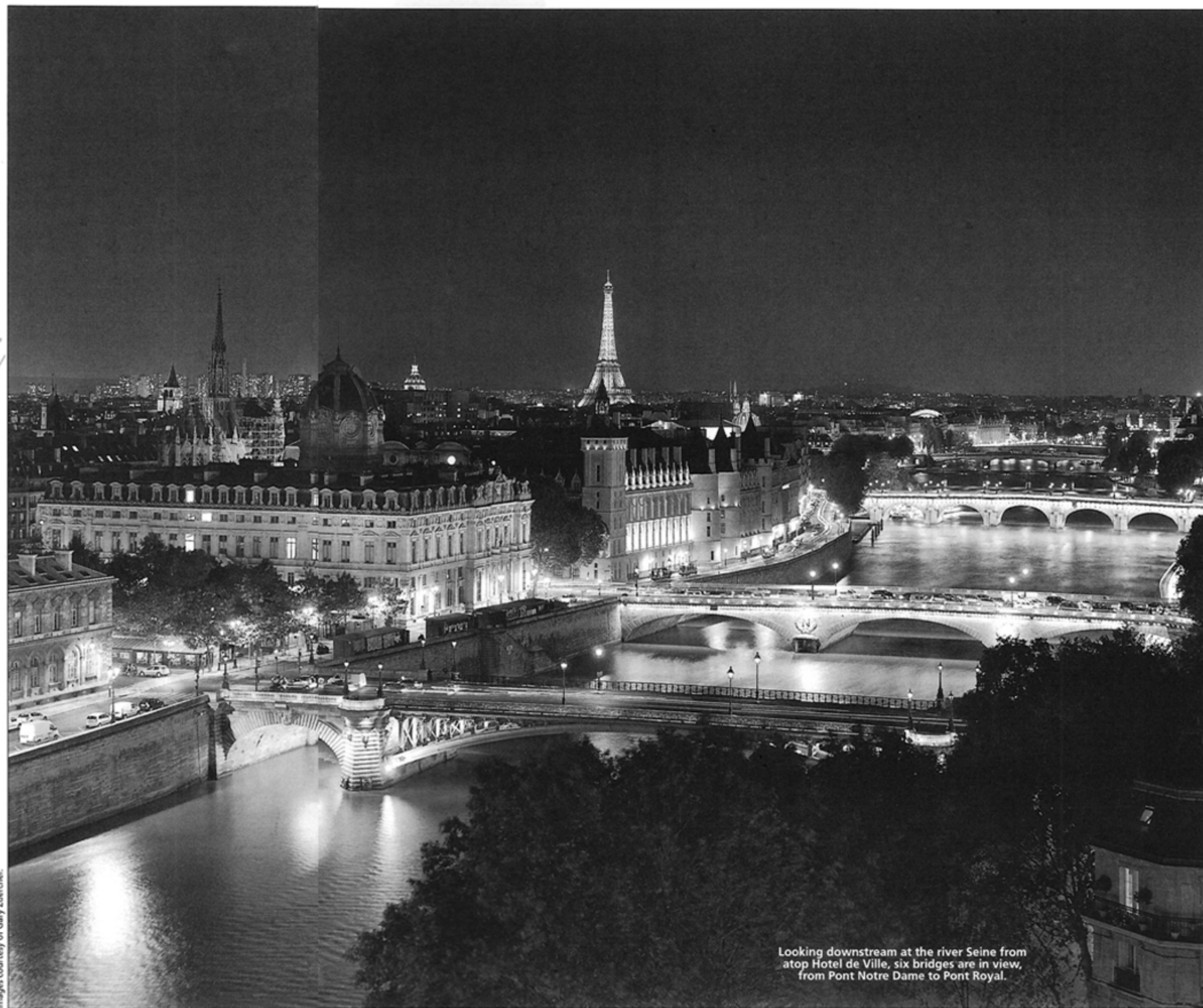
I split my time between Paris and Washington, D.C. My love for Paris began in Mexico, in the Cancun airport terminal, where I met a beautiful young French girl named Dominique. We sat together on the plane to Mexico City; I went on to business meetings in Guadalajara. That evening, after my return to Mexico City, we met for drinks. A month later we met for dinner in Paris, at the Plaza Athénée, and from there our time together blossomed. Dominique became my wife and the reason I have spent such a large portion of my life in Paris.

As for my favorite photograph, look no further than "Six Bridges," which captures much of the city, including the river Seine with the Eiffel Tower in the background. It was the most difficult to take., I needed a location

scout, whom I told that I wanted to shoot from the top of the Church of San Gervais. My scout went to get approval but, because that is where the nuns sleep, no men are allowed to go there at night. However, within a few hours, I received the okay to work from the top of City Hall. I had to rent mountain climbing equipment and shoes, and we had to go out from the second floor and climb up the building. It was a real adventure getting up there, and then I shot there for many hours that night.

Pont Saint-Michel, meanwhile, is a well-known bridge connecting Île de la Cité with the left bank of the river. It was on, and adjacent to, Pont Saint-Michel that the Paris Massacre occurred. The events of Oct. 17, 1961, took place during the Algerian War. It started with a protest march, with about 30,000 demonstrating for Algerian independence and the lifting of a curfew instituted by the prefect of police, Maurice Papon, the same man that, in 1998, was convicted of crimes against humanity for his participation in the deportation of more than 1,600 Jews to concentration camps during World War II.

The protest was planned to take place in three sectors of the city: Place de l'Étoile, Place de la République, and Place Saint-Michel next to the bridge. Police rounded up



Looking downstream at the river Seine from atop Hotel de Ville, six bridges are in view, from Pont Notre Dame to Pont Royal.

Images courtesy of Gary Zuercher.

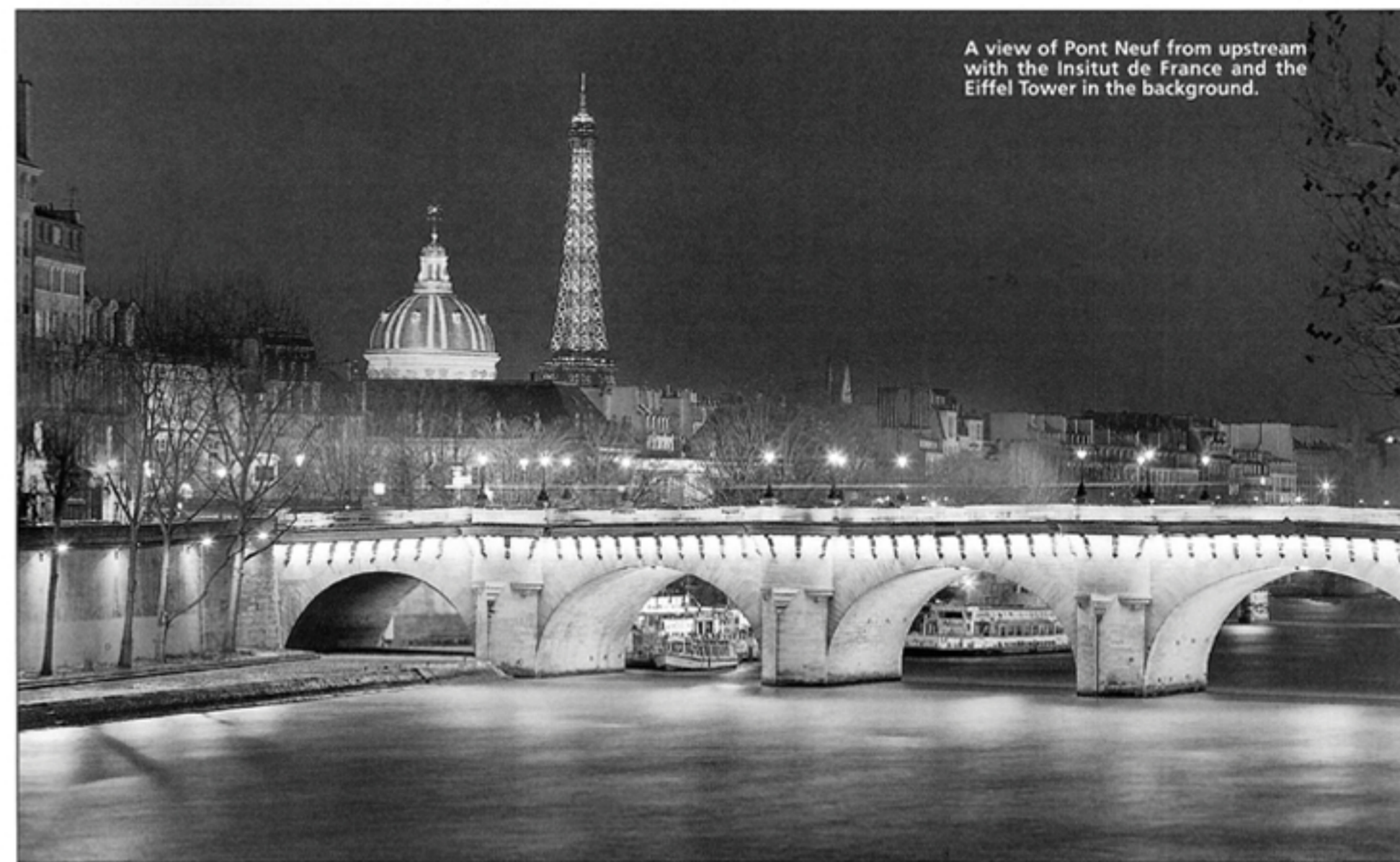
Pont Neuf is the oldest bridge in Paris, inaugurated in 1607 by King Henri IV. *Neuf* means "new," thus the oldest bridge is named the New Bridge. It spans the downstream tip of Île de la Cité and connects the island to the left and right banks of the Seine. **Inset:** Three of the 381 mascarons that adorn Pont Neuf.



some of the demonstrators and beat them back into Metro stations, while others were shot or drowned after being thrown into the

river from Pont Saint-Michel. The incidents went virtually unreported at the time. The next day, the police reported two deaths.

In the years that followed, the numbers of those who died varied, depending on who was doing the telling. Historians put the figure



A view of Pont Neuf from upstream with the Institut de France and the Eiffel Tower in the background.

What's Old Is New Again

"... Pont Neuf (New Bridge) ... actually is the oldest of the ... bridges that today cross the Seine in Paris."

Ironically named Pont Neuf (New Bridge), this actually is the oldest of the 35 bridges that today cross the Seine in Paris. It first was planned in 1556 during the reign of Henry II. His successor, Henry III, laid the cornerstone in 1578. Work was interrupted by his assassination in 1589 and subsequently was restarted and completed in 1607 under the reign of Henry IV.

Pont Neuf is located at the western tip of the Île de la Cité and was the first bridge to connect the right bank with the left bank by way of the Île. It is separated in two parts; the larger section has seven semicircular arches linking the right bank to Île de la Cité, while the smaller section has five semicircular arches linking Île de la Cité to the left bank.

Like most of the bridges built at that time, Pont Neuf was, in fact, a series of smaller, individual, single-arch bridges connected on top

by a common passageway that created one, longer, single span, measuring 781 feet from the right bank to the left bank; it is the third longest of the 35 Paris bridges. It was the first bridge to be built without houses. During construction, Henry IV visited the work himself, crossing onto the span via wooden planks that were connected to piers. He was warned that some workers had fallen to their deaths from the planks: "Ah, but they weren't kings," he supposedly replied.

The bridge continued in its original state until 1848, when six of the arches on the section toward the right bank were restored. Since then, various improvements and modifications have been made. A major restoration was begun in 1994 and completed in 2007, the year of its 400th anniversary. The original character of Pont Neuf remains intact.

Pont Neuf was classified as a Monument Historique in 1889 and as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1991.

Early on, Pont Neuf became the most popular spot in the city. It was the center of a permanent fair, a meeting point for all the sophisticated—as well as vulgar—pleasures of the capital. At any moment, you could find street performers (acrobats, fire-eaters, and musicians), charlatans and quacks, as well as hustlers and pickpockets—and, of course, a lively trade in prostitution. Among the many businesses were several famous "tooth pullers." Small business flourished on the bridge, with secondhand booksellers and other itinerant merchants.

It was said of the bridge, "Qu'on était toujours sûr d'y rencontrer à n'importe quelle heure un moine, un cheval blanc et une putain." (You always are sure to meet, regardless of the hour,

a monk, a white horse, and a prostitute.) It also was said—by Paris policemen—that, if after watching for three days, the authorities failed to see their suspect cross the bridge, he already must have left Paris.

The central point of the bridge is called Place du Pont Neuf. Here, an imposing 14-foot bronze statue of Henry IV—sitting astride his horse, his head uncovered, wearing a full suit of armor, and holding the bridle with one hand and a truncheon with the other—can be found.

Marie de Médici, the wife of Henry IV, ordered the statue in 1605, before the assassination of the king in 1610. The statue that stands today was erected in 1818 under Louis XVIII, to replace the original destroyed by the revolutionaries in 1792. The new statue was cast from a mold that was made using a surviving cast of the original.

A special feature of Pont Neuf are its mascarons—381 grotesque, stone masks, some ferocious looking, others somewhat disturbing. Mascarons is an architectural term for an ornamental face whose function is to scare away evil spirits. These were employed widely between the 15th and 19th centuries. The mascarons are located on both sides of the bridge, upstream and downstream. Each is somewhat larger than an actual human head and each one is differ-

ent. Some are sticking their tongues out, others are grinning, while still others retain strange, frightening, or ridiculously twisted expressions on their faces. They can appear quite lifelike. According to some, they are caricatures of Henry IV's mistresses; others liken these devilish faces to the men he cuckolded.

Victims of weather and natural erosion over the centuries, the mascarons meticulously have been reconstructed and replaced from time to time. They were completely restored between 1852-55, and once again during the work performed on the bridge between 1994-2007. From the 1855 restoration, the Carnavalet Museum has conserved six of the original mascarons.

Between 1712-19, a large pump house was built on the bridge and decorated with an image of the Samaritan woman who drew water from the well for Jesus, as described in the Gospel of St. John. It operated from 1609-1813 and was known as La Samaritaine. After it was closed, a merchant named Ernest Cognacq erected a boutique on the site and gradually grew his business into what became, in 1869, the department store La Samaritaine.

The famous store, featured in many films, was well known for its rooftop café, which afforded excellent views of the city. The store, which had been operating at a loss since the

1970s, was closed in 2005 because the building did not meet safety codes. La Samaritaine still sits prominently at the right bank terminus of Pont Neuf.

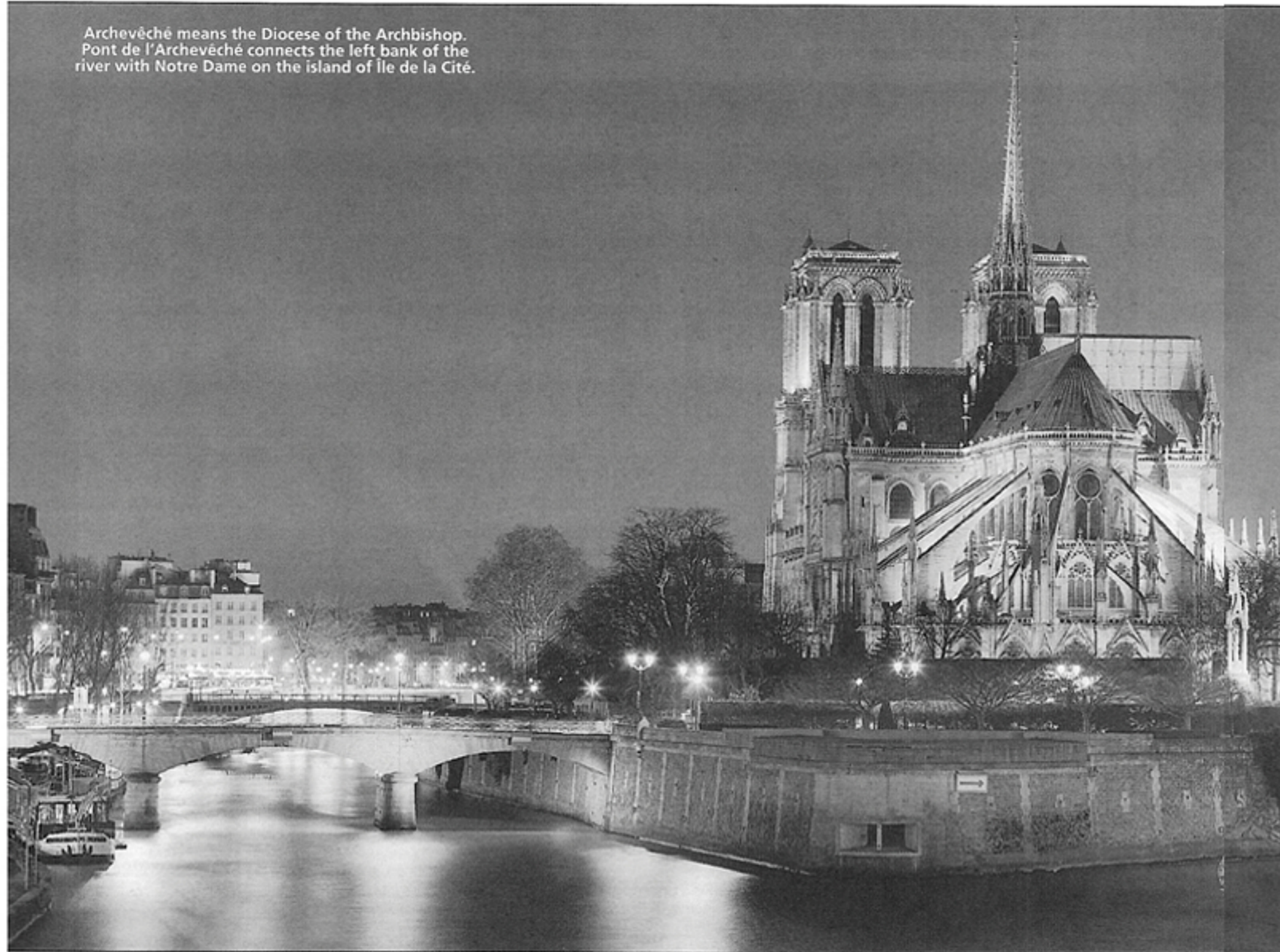
In 1607, the finished bridge barely grazed the western, downstream tip of Île de la Cité. Over the years, Île de la Cité has been extended and a park, Vert Galant, has been developed. Steps behind the statue of Henry IV lead down to it. The park is located 23 feet below the level of the bridge and is named in honor of Henry IV, who was known by this moniker "because of his numerous mistresses in spite of his advanced age."

Although only two-thirds of an acre, the park, or square, is popular with picnickers, lovers, families, and those who just want to relax and sit on a bench. It offers a beautiful view of the river downstream. The square is planted with a mixture of chestnut, yew, black walnut, maple, weeping willow, catalpa, locust, and ginkgo biloba trees.

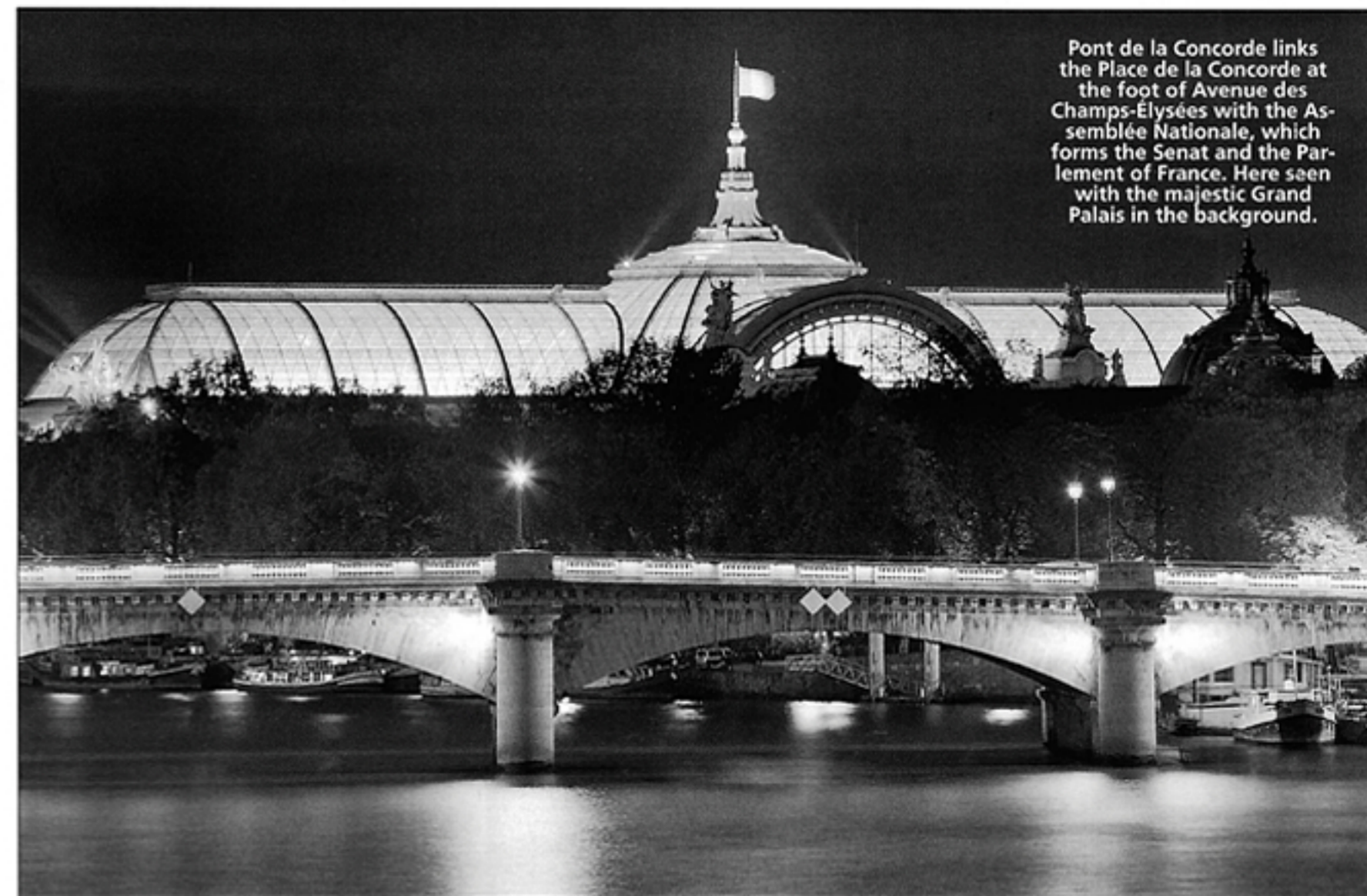
The renowned Robert Doisneau and Eugène Atget are known for photographing here, and a well-known shot taken by Doisneau aptly is named "Square du Vert-Galant."

On living in Paris, American Ambassador Benjamin Franklin famously wrote that one cannot understand "the Parisian character except in crossing the Pont Neuf."

Archevêché means the Diocese of the Archbishop. Pont de l'Archevêché connects the left bank of the river with Notre Dame on the island of Île de la Cité.



Pont du Carrousel links the left bank of the Seine to one of the most attractive entrances of the Louvre.

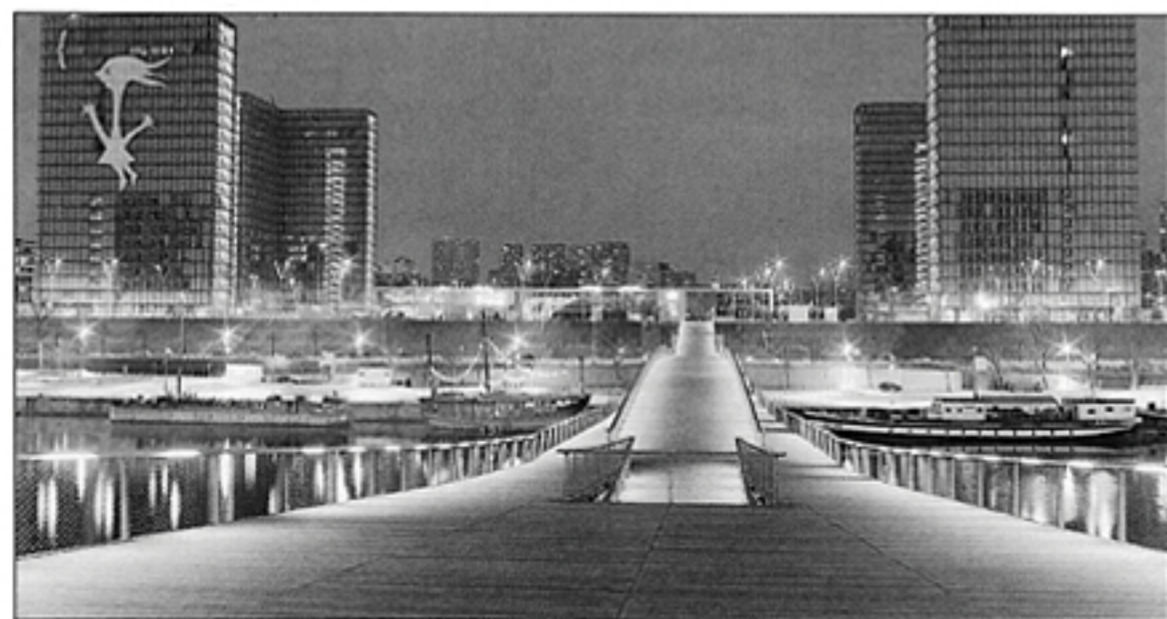


Pont de la Concorde links the Place de la Concorde at the foot of Avenue des Champs-Élysées with the Assemblée Nationale, which forms the Senat and the Parliament of France. Here seen with the majestic Grand Palais in the background.

at between 32 and 300. In 1998, the French government acknowledged that the massacre had occurred and that 40 people died in the melee. However, the exact number killed by the security forces remains a heavily debated issue. The most famous photograph of the events that day is a shot that shows a white banner draped across the Pont Saint-Michel, on which is written "Ici on noie les Algériens." ("Here we drown the Algerians.")

Forty years later, Paris Mayor Bertrand Delanoë placed a plaque on Pont Saint-Michel commemorating the date. It reads: "A la mémoire des nombreux Algériens tués lors de la sanglante répression de la manifestation pacifique du 17 octobre 1961." (In memory of the numerous Algerians killed during the bloody suppression of the peaceful demonstration on 17 October 1961).

As its name indicates, Petit Pont is the small-



Passerelle Simone de Beauvoir is a footbridge and is the newest bridge (2006) crossing the Seine, and the only bridge in Paris named in honor of a woman.

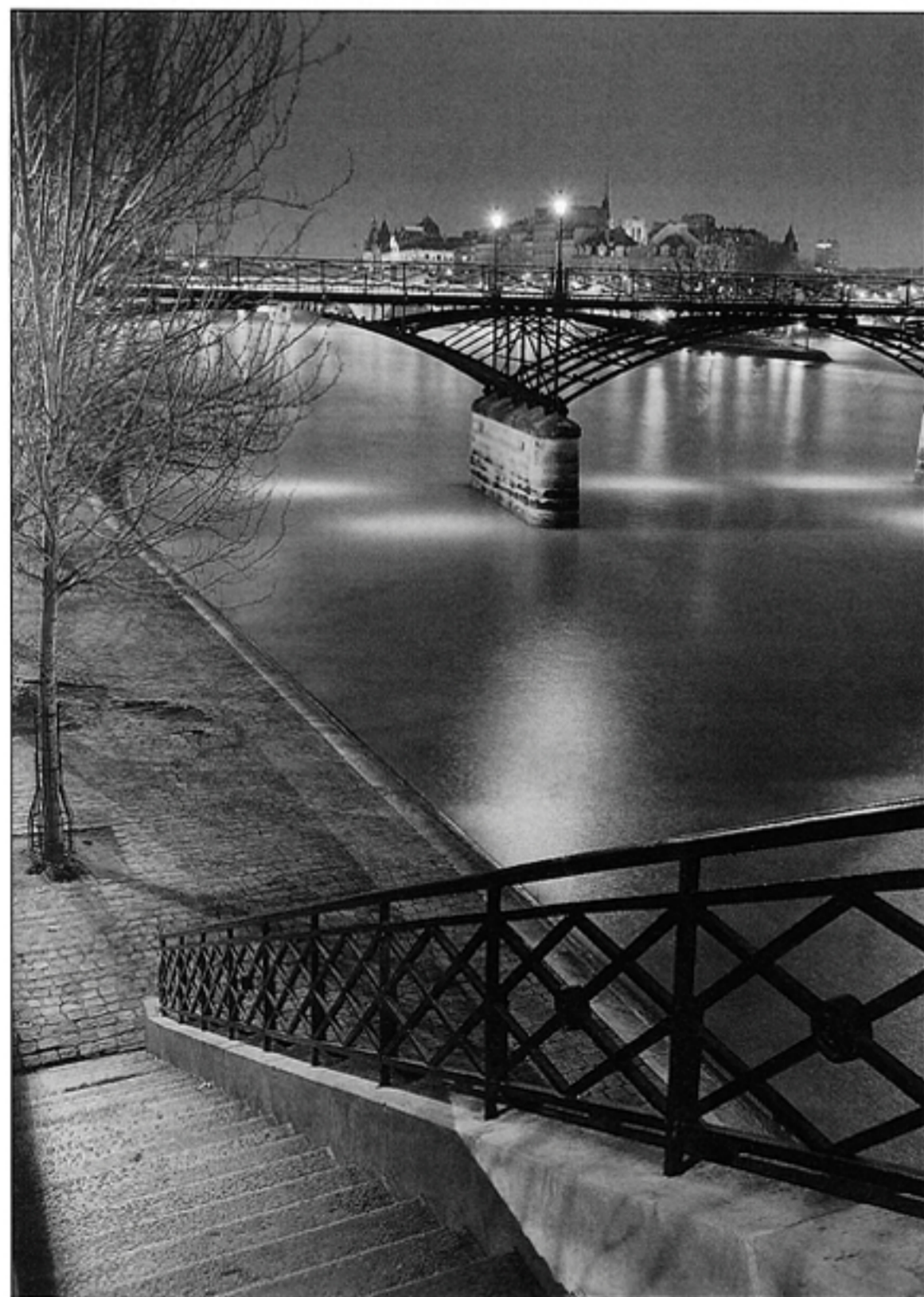
est bridge crossing the Seine. As reported by Edmond Jean François Barbier in his journal of April 27, 1718, fire destroyed the Petit Pont and all 22 buildings on it.

The story goes that a mother had lost her young son to a drowning in the river. She was told that if she placed a lit candle and a piece of bread into a wooden bowl and floated it on the river, it would stop at the location where her son's body could be found. Floating downstream, the candle came to rest against a boat overflowing with hay. The boat, moored at the quai de la Tournelle, caught fire. The other boats moored at the same port were loaded with wood, hay, and coal, and the port itself was rife with piles of wood. Fearing the fire would spread, the mooring rope was cut; the boat floated into the river and was carried downstream by the current. It became stuck

between the wooden supporting piles of Petit Pont. The bridge and buildings, also made largely of wood, quickly erupted into a spectacular fire that burned for more than eight hours; the embers smoldered for days.

In 1719, the destroyed bridge was replaced with a new Petit Pont. This time the bridge was built of stone, with three arches and two supporting piles in the river and—having learned a lesson—no buildings were erected. ★

Gary Zuercher, author of The Glow of Paris: The Bridges of Paris at Night, from which these articles are adapted, has provided photographic and film production services to companies and advertising agencies for more than 35 years. He also founded the WaveTek group of companies that pioneered the development of the waterpark industry.



Pont de Grenelle is a fairly modern bridge that passes across the downstream tip of Île des Cygnes (Island of Swans), connecting the two banks of the river. Here, with the Eiffel Tower in the background sits the Statue of Liberty, a one-fourth size replica of its sister statue in New York Harbor, both created by the famous sculptor Auguste Bartholdi.

Left: A passerelle (footbridge), Pont des Arts is considered by many to be the most romantic spot in Paris. It was built by Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte in the early 1800s.

Opposite page: Pont de la Concorde, here looking from the right bank to the left and to the building and entrance of the Assemblée Nationale.

