

Place des Vosges

Paris, France

Photographs by Alan Ward 1985, 1991-1993, 2009, 2023

Notes on the Making of the Photographs

I made many trips to Paris in the 1980s and 1990s and was consistently drawn to the beauty and simplicity of Place des Vosges, the oldest planned square in the city. Located in the Marais district straddling the 3rd and 4th arrondissements of Paris, it is a symmetrical design with four quadrants framed by buildings with a repetition of facades and broad arcades on each side. Place des Vosges is the focus of *le marais* (the marsh), which retains its name from the medieval period when the city expanded northward on reclaimed land on the right bank.

Once the site of a royal residence before the Louvre, Henry IV envisioned the square as both a living and working environment. Silk and linen workers would live on the upper levels, produce their goods in workshops on the middle floors, and sell them at ground level. Completed in 1612 after his death, the square-shaped space is 140m by 140m and framed by what appears to be three-story buildings, however the large sloping roofs help to diminish the scale and accommodate another one to two levels (4,5,16-18). The height of buildings in relation to the space seems just right to define the square, which is spacious in the context of the narrow and winding medieval streets of the Marais. The *Pavillon de Reine* (Queen's Pavilion), centered on the north end of the square (17), and the *Pavillon de Roi* (King's Pavilion) centered on the south end (5), have an added floor and heightened arches where you enter Place des Vosges. It is a refinement and adjustment to the massing to give orientation and hierarchy to the consistent architectural frame around the square.

A painting from 1709 shows the square without trees. Four parterres with conical evergreens surround a central statue of Louis XIII on horseback, while carriage drives are at the perimeter of the space. The square now has mature horse-chestnut trees at the center, reducing the visibility of the equestrian statue (6,7). Each corner has clipped linden trees in an L-shaped pattern (2-5), leaving openings where paths converge toward the statue on each side. In contrast to the surrounding paved streets and walks under the arcades, the square is a field of crushed stone or lawn giving a softer feel and a more porous ground plane for the trees (14-21).

I photographed Place des Vosges with 2 ¼" X 6 ½" panoramic camera early morning in summer 2009 before the square came to life in order to show the structure and order of the design. The square empty of people emphasizes the details of the design rather than its use. The views are framed to show the architectural context, the corresponding grid of trees, and layout of benches and fountains. The trees in each quadrant seem to define a ceiling overhead, and open to views of the *Pavillon de Reine* and *Pavillon de Roi*. A few images included were taken in 1985 with a 35mm Leica, a small inconspicuous camera, ideal for candid photography (13-18). These were done so long ago they appear as historic images as compared to similar views done in 2023 (19-21). While the fashions have changed, people are using the space as they have for centuries. After a restoration in the 1960s of the Marais, Place des Vosges remains intact as an urban square that has endured for over four hundred years.

List of Photographs

1. Arched entry at Pavillon de Reine (Queens Pavilion), ca. 1991
2. Early morning view of southwest quadrant, 2009
3. Early morning view of southeast quadrant, 2009
4. View north of southwest and northwest quadrants, 2009
5. Southwest quadrant and *Pavillon de Roi*, (King's Pavilion), 2009
6. View southwest of base of the statue of Louis XIII, 2009
7. View north of the equestrian statue of Louis XIII, ca. 1991
8. View of southeast quadrant, 2009
9. View south under trees in northeast quadrant, 2009
10. *Pavillon de la Reine* hotel on north side, ca. 1991
11. Arcade on north side at Rue de Bearn, 2009
12. West Arcade, 2023
13. Café on the north side, ca. 1991
14. View west in northeast quadrant, 1985
15. View southwest in southeast quadrant, 1985
16. View southwest in northeast quadrant, 1985
17. View north of *Pavillon de Reine* (Queens Pavilion), 1985
18. Midday use of the square, 1985
19. View southwest in in northeast quadrant, 2023
20. Midday in northeast quadrant, 2023
21. Midday in southeast quadrant, 2023











































Notes

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