



## Café Sitting is a Full-Time Job

by Jill Butler

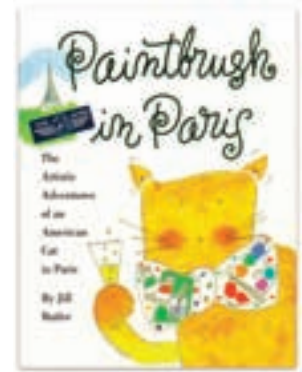
I started everyday in the corner café, not just any café, but rather the famous Salon du Thé, Ladurée, on the rue Royale, numéro 16.\*

First priority was un double express et un croissant aux amandes. Next came the reading of the newspaper, not just one, but three: the International Herald Tribune, The International Edition of the Wall Street Journal, and Le Figaro. For survival at a dinner party or social conversation, it is imperative to be on top of the news both in France and in the US. I had a lot to learn.

Having moved from New York City, I'd taken up the habit of eating breakfast out. It seemed the perfect way to connect with the still somewhat sleepy world, to see people, to be alone, but not lonely. I could ease into my work as the caffeine did its job.



I wrote my first book, *Paintbrush in Paris*, sitting in Ladurée. I went daily for nearly 14 years. Paintbrush was my American cat that immigrated with me. He was my English-speaking friend and voice in telling our story of moving to Paris through this first illustrated book. The day came, a year and half later, when the first copies of *Paintbrush in Paris* arrived. I held my breath and slowly let it out as I read it through. It wasn't embarrassing!



The next morning, I tucked a copy into my bag and headed out for breakfast. I shared it with Anick, my usual serveuse, and she shared it with the manager, Monique.

By a convergence of the stars, the new owners of Ladurée, Francis Holder, and his son, David, were sitting next to me at one of those miniature tables ~ meaning we were practically sitting elbow to elbow. So, *Paintbrush in Paris* was again shared by Monique, but this time with the Holders. Mr. Holder Senior \*\* turned to me and said, "Charmant, Madame, bravo!" He asked me who I was, what I was doing in Paris and suggested I should illustrate something for the salon.

Heart pounding, I spontaneously proposed a series of postcards that could be sold to other Ladurée and postcard enthusiasts like myself. He took to the idea and immediately passed me and the idea to his son, David, with whom I negotiated our agreement. I was then introduced to their design and interiors director. With the details of our project concluded, it was time to begin.



I love to draw food but this felt like an exam. Being a self-taught artist, I hoped I would pass the test. On Monday morning, I was "installed" upstairs in the newly renovated, smoke-free dining room and for three intense mornings silver trays filled with "samples" of every patisserie, Viennoiserie, et dessert was placed before me ~ to draw!

After making preliminary sketches, I choose to work with two illustrative styles: one a cut paper style (the façade and coffees) and the second a more classic pen and ink watercolor style (the map, macaroons, Viennoiseries and pastries) as well as a mix of both (the salon interior). Things like capturing the whipped cream or the layers of a mille feuilles were tricky as were les macarons, Ladurée's signature product.

The cherubs painted on the ceiling of the ground floor room alone are worth the visit. If you look closely you can see they are baking the bread by the rays of the sun. I choose to use the cherubs throughout the series of six cards. They also appear in the Ladurée logo. Eventually, every drawing was checked by the design director for accuracy and the text was bien regardé for spelling errors and inaccuracies. The last look was with David and the printer, and off to press it went.

I smiled when I saw customers discovering the cards as they paid à la caisse. The enthusiastic mid-westerner that I am wanted to jump up and introduce myself ~ but I contained myself with being happy that they were being purchased.

For sure now, I knew that café sitting was ~ if not a full-time job ~ it was a job!