The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations – also known variably as the Great Exhibition, the Crystal Palace Exhibition, or the World’s Fair – occurred in London during 1851. This established the standard for industrial and cultural exhibitions throughout Europe and the United States during the next century. It also inspired Napoleon III to organize his Exposition Universelle des produits de l’Agriculture, de l’Industrie, et des Beaux-Arts de Paris (translated as Universal Exhibition of Products of Agriculture, Industry, and Fine Arts of Paris) in 1855.

The Paris Exhibition was a catalyst for the creation of numerous related exhibits, attractions, and businesses in the neighborhoods surrounding the exhibition grounds along the Champs-Elysées. One of these was an innovative restaurant concept portrayed in the vintage advertising poster that is reproduced on a following page. The restaurant does not have a single name in the modern sense, but rather is identified by its style of service and its location.

A buffet-Américain (American buffet) was a place where one could eat or drink while standing. The phrase referred to the growing popularity of impromptu snacking in nineteenth century America, and represented a cross-cultural dining fad that complemented the themes of the Exposition Universelle.

This particular establishment resembled an integration of two concepts that are familiar today, a fast-casual bakery café and an Italian enoteca (wine
BUFFET-AMÉRICAIN
MAISON DU
LINGOT D’OR
BOULEVART MONTMARTRE 10. PASSAGE JOUFFROY 2. 4. 6.
VIANDES FROIDES PATISSERIE
Vins fins Français et Etrangers à la Bouteille et au Verre.
bar) with standing counters. The text at the bottom of the poster reads “VIANDES FROIDES PATIS-
SÉRIE” (cold meats and pastries) and “Vins fins 
Français et Etrangers à la Bouteille et au Verre” (fine 
wines from France and abroad by the bottle and the 
glass). The food aspects targeted passersby and a 
neighborhood business crowd by offering gourmet 
“sandwiches with ham, poultry wings, and galantine 
placed between two slices of tender bread slices” 
(Villemot, 1858). The beverage aspects appealed to 
the popular urban trend of people socializing over a 
large selection of wines and other alcoholic bever-
egages by the glass. One observer noted that the place 
served premium Allsopp beer “either bottled or on 
draught” (Sala, 1882).

This restaurant was located in the “MAISON 
DU LINGOT D’OR” (home of the gold ingot) in the 
Passage Jouffroy, which was a fashionable shopping 
arcade along the Boulevard Montmartre. The space 
had previously served as headquarters for a govern-
ment lottery, which awarded a gold bar valued at 
more than 400,000 francs.

The poster was created in the workshop of Jean 
Alexis Rouchon, who is regarded as a pioneer in 
commercial graphic design in France. He is par-
ticularly known for advertising posters of this type, 
several of which are included in the collection of the 
Bibliothèque nationale de France (National Library 
of France or BnF).

Although this buffet-Américain attracted some 
attention, the business eventually disappeared from 
the Paris restaurant scene. This Rouchon poster ex-
emplifies commercial art of the era, and also pro-
vides a glimpse of a short-lived dining concept that 
was ahead of its time.

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