Eternal Flame

Text by Nicola Clark

The ethereal floating cauldron of the 2024 Paris Olympics set a magical tone for the event that lingered in the air long after the crowds of elated athletes and spectators had dissipated. Its poetic symbolism lifted spirits worldwide — as well as countless camera lenses.

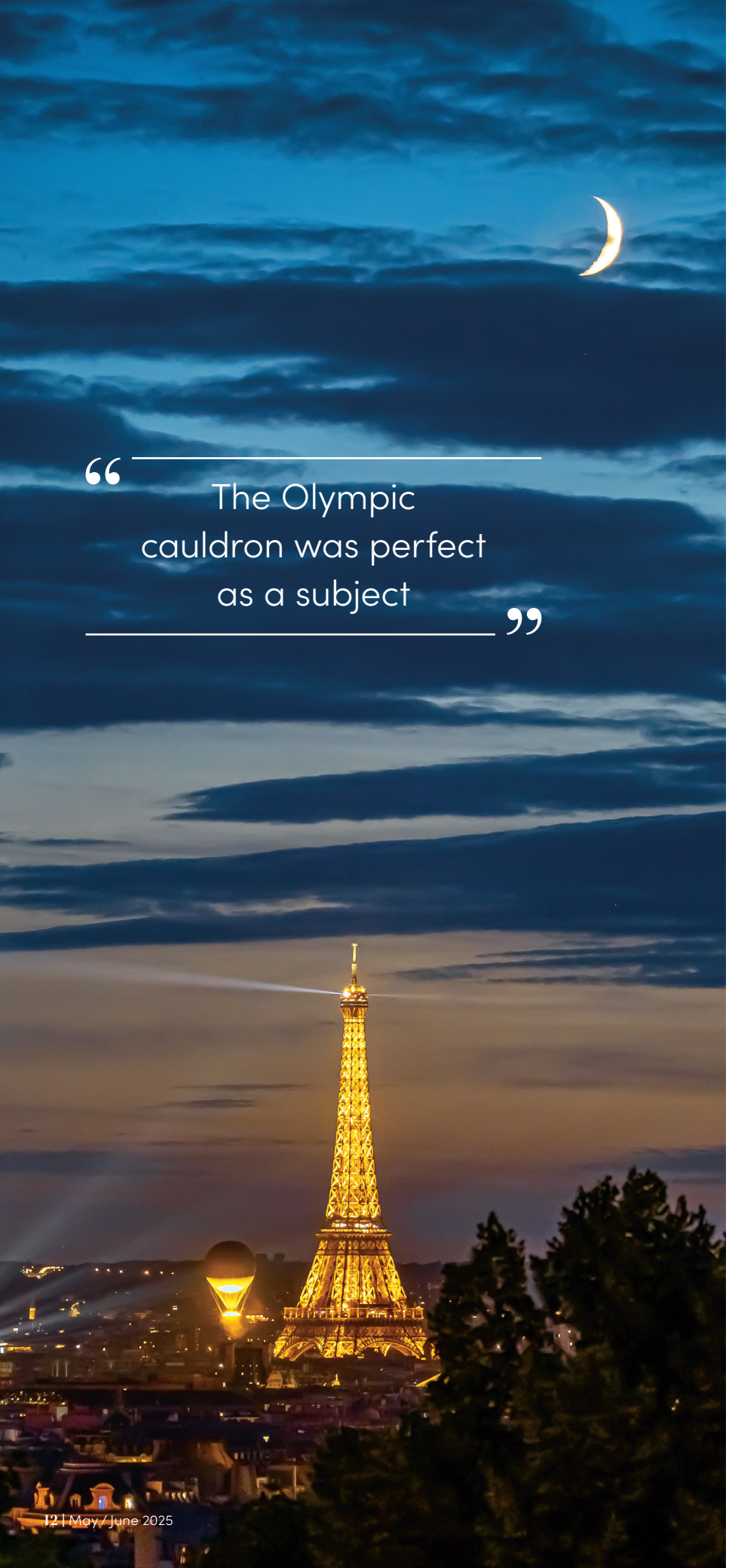




For everyone who had the privilege to witness it, the ritual lofting of *La Vasque* every evening of last summer's Olympic and Paralympic Games, was an unforgettable experience. As dusk approached, Parisians and visitors would fan out across the city to find new and creative vantage points from which to capture this gilded balloon with its billowing light, posting their digital souvenirs to their social media pages. The millions of resulting homages quickly transformed this unique object into an extraordinary happening — a work of collective performance art in which anyone could participate.

Designed by Mathieu Lehanneur, the cauldron featured a 7-meter (23-foot) wide aluminum ring suspended from a 30-meter (100-foot) tall helium-filled balloon made of metallic fabric, whose color and aspect would shift with the ever-changing evening light. Notably, its "flame" was a clever illusion, created by LED lights that illuminated a mist generated by dozens of water jets integrated into the ring. Tethered 60 meters (200 feet) above a platform in the middle of an ornamental pond in the Tuileries Gardens, its placement in view of so many well-known landmarks — including the Louvre, the Place de la Concorde, the Arc de Triomphe and the Eiffel Tower — guaranteed endless picture-perfect moments. For professional as well as casual photographers, it was simply impossible to resist.

"The Olympic cauldron was perfect" as a subject, says Logan Louboutin, a Paris-based photographer and graphic designer who posts as @imzefyr on Instagram. It brought a strong symbolic



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value, novelty and respect for the capital's beauty. Logan said he was on the lookout for unusual perspectives. "The rooftop of Montparnasse Tower and the Pompidou Center gave me new angles," he says.

Even before the Olympics wound down, fans of the flame were already clamoring for it to be made a permanent feature of the city. After all, several of the city's iconic landmarks — the Eiffel Tower, the Grand Palais, the Pont Alexandre III, the Palais de Chaillot, just to name a few — were originally intended to be ephemeral structures. As the months passed, whispers that it might make a return grew steadily louder.

Peter Turnley (@peterturnley) is an award-winning street photographer and journalist who has captured iconic images from all over the world. For him, the cauldron "is the closest thing to a reenactment of Woodstock I've ever witnessed," he wrote on Instagram. "At a moment when the world is too often troubled by divisiveness and conflict, this Paris moment … is all balm for the heart."

Many others agreed. "It would be nice if it stayed here a bit longer than just the duration of the Olympics," mused Marc Nouss (@marc_nouss) a travel photographer who captured several stunning images of the flame at the time.

Fortunately, the prayers of these besotted shutterbugs were not only heard, but answered. On June 23, *La Vasque* will rise again over the City of Light, delighting us with this nightly spectacle through September. The seasonal ritual is scheduled to repeat every year until 2028, when the Summer Olympics open in Los Angeles. If you're lucky enough to be in Paris to catch it, be sure to keep your camera phone charged and your eyes on the sky! ✳




“This Paris moment
is a balm
for the heart”





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