“Displacement, Despair, & a Longing for Like Minds”: the Salon in History & Today: a guide to materials

This guide was created for an art project, The Ephemerist’s Salon, by Susan E. King with Abbie Harris, Barbara Hausman, Christina Lovin, and Laura Mentor, which was performed on April 3, 2012 as part of the Little/Gaines Artist Series at the University of Kentucky. The title quote comes from Susan King in a conversation about the human need for an atmosphere, such as that which a salon provides, where ideas can be freely discussed and creativity encouraged. This guide was compiled by Abbie Harris, Branch Librarian at Madison County Public Library in Berea, KY, for The Ephemerist’s Salon project. It is by no means a comprehensive bibliography, but offers a variety of sources for someone who would like to begin to learn about salons in history or today.

Library of Congress Subject Headings:
- Salons
- Intellectual Life--History
- Conversation
- Discussion

Also look for individual names of Salon organizers, i.e. Natalie Barney, Peggy Guggenheim, Louise Labe, Mabel Dodge Luhan, Ottoline Morrell, Elena Pavlovna, Gertrude Stein, Florine Stettheimer, Salka Viertel, Vanessa Woolf, Mayy Ziyadah, etc.

Books: There have been hundreds of books written on this topic. This list is a very small sample of them.

History and Biography:

Affairs of the Mind: The Salon in Europe and America from the 18th to the 20th Century, edited by Peter Quennell (New Republic Books, 1980)

The Age of Conversation by Benedetta Craveri (New York Review Books, 2005)

Among the Bohemians: Experiments in Living 1900-1939 by Virginia Nicholson (Harper Perennial, 2005)  From the book jacket: Virginia Nicholson -- the granddaughter of painter Vanessa Bell and the great-niece of Virginia Woolf -- explores the subversive, eccentric, and flamboyant artistic community of the early twentieth century in this "wonderfully researched and colorful composite portrait of an enigmatic world whose members, because they lived by no rules, are difficult to characterize" (San Francisco Chronicle).
The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas by Gertrude Stein (1932) "... The record of nearly thirty years of life in a fantastically changing Paris and else where -- a life passed in the most stimulating and important society."-- Louis Bromfield

Bloomsbury and France: Art and Friends by Mary Ann Caws and Sarah Bird Wright (Oxford University Press, 2000) “This richly illustrated volume documents the influence of all things French on the lives and work of some of the major figures in the Bloomsbury group...Relying heavily on memoirs, diaries, and letters [the authors] provide a detailed account of the group's activities on the other side of the channel [and] argue that, despite differences in language and cultural heritage, Bloomsbury's encounter with French artists and intellectuals...’resulted in a remarkable reshaping of their aesthetic and literary ideals.” Reviewed by William Gargan, Brooklyn College Library, CUNY

Bloomsbury Group by Frances Spalding (National Portrait Gallery, 2010) From the book jacket: This book explores the impact of Bloomsbury personalities on each other, as well as their legacy to the twenty-first century. Author Frances Spalding demonstrates how this network of artists, lovers and patrons recorded one another obsessively in both words and images... [Spalding] includes previously unpublished photographs from the albums of the...influential hostess and patron of the arts, Lady Ottoline Morrell.

Bloomsbury Recalled by Quentin Bell (Columbia University Press, 1996) This is Bell’s memoir of the Bloomsbury group.

Charleston: A Bloomsbury House and Garden by Quentin Bell, Virginia Nicholson, and Alen MacWeeney (Frances Lincoln, 2004) From the book jacket: Set in the heart of the Sussex Downs, Charleston Farmhouse is the most important remaining example of Bloomsbury decorative style, created by the painters Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant. Quentin Bell...and his daughter Virginia Nicholson, tell the story of this unique house, linking it with some of the leading cultural figures who were invited there...

Exiled in Paradise: German Refugee Artists and Intellectuals in America from the 1930s to the Present by Anthony Heilbut (University of California Press, 1997) From the book jacket: A brilliant look at the writers, artists, scientists, movie directors, and scholars--ranging from Bertolt Brecht to Albert Einstein, Hannah Arendt, Thomas Mann, and Fritz Lang--who fled Hitler's Germany and how they changed the very fabric of American culture. In a new postscript, Heilbut draws attention to the recent changes in reputation and image that have shaped the reception of the German exiles.

French Salons: High Society and Political Sociability from the Old Regime to the Revolution of 1848 by Steven Kale. (2004) From the book jacket: Among the most enduring of French cultural institutions, the salon, is among the most misunderstood. Seen primarily as a venue for apolitical social gatherings, the salon's influence is generally believed to have ended during the French Revolution. In French Salons, Steven Kale challenges conventional thinking about the salon. Drawing on an impressive range of primary sources, he offers a nuanced history of this institution from the eighteenth century through the Revolution of 1848 which emphasizes
continuity and evolution over disjuncture and highlights its shifting political character and relevance.

**Jewish Women and Their Salons: The Power of Conversation** by Emily D. Bilski and Emily Braun (Jewish Museum, 2005) From the book jacket: From their debut in Berlin in the 1780s to their emergence in 1930s California, Jewish women’s salons served as welcoming havens where all classes and creeds could openly debate art, music, literature, and politics. This fascinating book is the first to explore the history of these salons where remarkable women of intellect resolved that neither gender nor religion would impede their ability to bring about social change. Emily D. Bilski and Emily Braun examine the lives of more than a dozen Jewish salonières, charting the evolution of the salon over time and among cultures, in cities including Berlin, Vienna, Paris, London, New York, and Milan. They show how each woman uniquely adapted the salon to suit her own interests while maintaining the salon’s key characteristics of basic informality and a diversity of guests. Other distinguished contributors to the volume discuss in detail the Berlin salons of the 1800s; the salon in terms of Jewish acculturation and its relation to gender and music; and the relations of Marcel Proust, Oscar Wilde, and Gertrude Stein to the literary salon.


**Lily Briscoe's Chinese Eyes: Bloomsbury, Modernism, and China** by Patricia Laurence (University of South Carolina, 2003) From the book jacket: Laurence traces the romance of Julian Bell, nephew of Virginia Woolf, and Ling Shuhua, a Chinese writer and painter Bell met in China in 1935. Relying on a wide selection of previously unpublished writings, Patricia Laurence places Ling, often referred to as the Chinese Katherine Mansfield, squarely in the Bloomsbury constellation. Laurence expands her examination of Bell and Ling's relationship into a study of parallel literary communities--Bloomsbury in England and the Crescent Moon group in China, underscoring their reciprocal influences in the early part of the twentieth century.

**Mabel Dodge Luhan: New Woman, New Worlds** by Lois Palken Rudnik (University of New Mexico Press, 1987) From the book: She was "the most peculiar common denominator that society, literature, art and radical revolutionaries ever found in New York and Europe." So claimed a Chicago newspaper reporter in the 1920s of Mabel Dodge Luhan, who attracted leading literary and intellectual figures to her circle for over four decades. Not only was she mistress of a grand salon, an American Madame de Stael, she was also a leading symbol of the New Woman: sexually emancipated, self-determining, and in control of her destiny. In many ways, her life is the story of America's emergence from the Victorian age.

Lois Rudnick has written a unique and definitive biography that examines all aspects of Mabel Dodge Luhan's real and imagined lives, drawing on fictional portraits of Mabel, including those by D. H. Lawrence, Carl Van Vechten, and Gertrude Stein, as well as on Mabel's own voluminous memoirs, letters, and fiction. Rudnick not only assesses Mabel as muse to men of genius but also considers her seriously as a writer, activist, and spirit of the age.

This biography will appeal not just to cultural historians but to any woman who has loved and lived with men who are artists and rebels. Both as a liberated woman and as a legend, Mabel Dodge Luhan embodies the cultural forces that shaped modern America.
Madame de Stael by Maria Fairweather (Carroll & Graf, 2004) From Publishers Weekly: "At Madame de Stael's this evening I meet the world," wrote early American statesman Gouverneur Morris. Fairweather's expansive biography of Germaine de Stael (1766--1817) rightly focuses on the salon as backdrop to French literary and political intrigues of the 18th and 19th centuries...Mme. de Staël's gatherings included the most brilliant politicians, writers and artists of her day... Fairweather digs deep into de Staël's past [to portray] a passionate woman...whose outspokenness pitted her against France's extreme factions...eventually...leading to her exile in Geneva. But this did not deter her from challenging France's leaders from afar or continuing her fruitful literary life.

Madame de Stael: The First Modern Woman by Francine du Plessix Gray (Atlas & Co., 2008) From Booklist: With art and efficiency, du Plessix Gray...tracks de Staël’s remarkable evolution over the course of a messy marriage of convenience, many conspicuous affairs, motherhood, exile, and a long, terrible battle of wills with Napoleon Bonaparte. Ruthless in her portrayals of de Staël at her most ludicrously theatrical and of de Staël’s colorful lovers and enemies, du Plessix Gray crisply analyzes de Staël’s pioneering books and commends her heroism during the Terror. Du Plessix Gray also suggests in this superbly incisive biography that this revolutionary and enormously influential humanist suffered from undiagnosed manic depression, making de Staël’s accomplishments all the more impressive. --Donna Seaman

The Magnificent Mrs. Tennant: The Adventurous Life of Gertrude Tennant, Victorian Grande-Dame by David Waller (Yale University Press, 2009) From the book jacket: Gertrude Tennant’s life was remarkable...for the influence she achieved as an unsurpassed London hostess. The salon she established when widowed in her early fifties attracted legions of celebrities...But as a woman in a male-dominated world, Mrs. Tennant has been remembered mainly as a footnote in the lives of eminent men. This book recovers the lost life of Gertrude Tennant, drawing on a treasure trove of recently discovered family papers...placing her not only at the heart of a multigenerational, matriarchal family epic but also at the center of European social, literary, and intellectual life for the best part of a century.

Paris Was a Woman: Portraits From the Left Bank by Andrea Weiss (Harper San Francisco, 1995) A rare profile of the female literati in Paris at the turn of the century, this "scrapbook" of their work--along with Weiss's lively commentary--highlights the political, social, and artistic lives of the renowned lesbian and bisexual Modernists, including Colette, Djuana Barnes, and Sylvia Beach. 150 photos. [See also the documentary by same name]

Peggy Guggenheim: A Collector's Album by Laurence Tacou-Rumney From the book jacket: Whether posing for Man Ray or Berenice Abbott; keeping company with James Joyce, Samuel Beckett or marrying Max Ernst; helping Jackson Pollock, Robert Motherwell or Mark Rothko to become major figures; Peggy Guggenheim had a lifetime of historic interludes with some of the most notable artists of the 20th century. Illustrated with both momentous and casual moments, here are the most private and revealing parts of Guggenheim's exceptional life.

The Spoken Word: The Bloomsbury Group (2 CD set with booklet, published by The British Library, 2009) A set of voice recordings of members of the Bloomsbury group, including
Virginia Woolf reading an extract from a radio talk on the importance of language, Frances Partridge speaking about the Group’s larger influence, William Plomer discussing the Group’s exclusivity, Elizabeth Bowen recalling Bloomsbury parties and Virginia Woolf’s antics, Grace Higgins describing daily life at Charleston, the Bloomsbury outpost in Sussex, and more.

*Sylvia Beach and the Lost Generation: A History of Literary Paris in the Twenties and Thirties* by Noel Riley Fitch (W. W. Norton & Company, 1985) In 1917, Sylvia Beach walked into a Paris bookshop, where she met Adrienne Monnier, the woman who would become her life companion. In 1919, Beach opened her own English-language bookshop and lending library, Shakespeare and Company, which would become the cynosure of an entire literary movement. Literary expatriates were drawn to her shop…but her most celebrated literary efforts are those she made on behalf of…James Joyce, undertaking the publication of *Ulysses*. Fitch uses Beach as the focal point for a fascinating portrait of an artistic community…From the intellectual salons at Natalie Barney's residence--of which "William Carlos Williams would recall only the lesbian women dancing together"--to the seemingly constant presence of Ezra Pound, Fitch's account solidifies the importance of the time and place he so vividly re-creates. --Ron Hogan

*Utopian Vistas: The Mabel Dodge Luhan House and the American Counterculture*, by Lois Palken Rudnik (University of New Mexico Press, 1998) From the book: Mabel Dodge Luhan, hostess and visionary, made Taos, New Mexico, a center for artists and utopians when she moved there in 1917 and began inviting friends to visit her. *Utopian Vistas* is a chronicle of the house Luhan built in Taos and the poets, painters, photographers, film-makers, writers, educators, and visionaries whose lives and works were affected by the house and its environs. Lois Rudnick weaves a complex tapestry depicting American countercultures in New Mexico from the 1920s to the 1990s. “Should be required reading for art historians, film historians, ex-Beats and hippies, their children and grandchildren, and anyone interested in the possibility of making an imperfect America perfect at last."--Karal Ann Marling

*Vanessa Bell* by Frances Spalding (Ticknor and Fields,1983) From the book jacket: Vanessa Bell was a central figure within the Bloomsbury Group and lent to it a stability and coherence it might otherwise have lacked. A talented artist, she held sway with her acuity, integrity and a sense of humour. Yet she remained inscrutable, glimpses of her life only appearing through her sister, Virginia Woolf. In this authorised biography, Spalding draws upon a mass of unpublished documents to reveal Vanessa Bell’s considerable achievements, in both her art and her increasingly unorthodox life.

*Virginia Woolf: A Biography* by Quentin Bell (Mariner Books, 1974) Probes the events of the English author's life paying special attention to her Bloomsbury milieu and her personal relationships.

*Wild Heart: A Life : Natalie Clifford Barney and the Decadence of Literary Paris* by Suzanne Rodriguez (Harper Perennial, 2003) Chronicles the scandalous adventures of Barney, a Victorian-era American heiress. When she moved to Paris in the early 1900s, she plunged into the city's literary scene, opening a famed Left Bank literary salon and engaging in a string of scandalous lesbian affairs... For the rest of her long and controversial life Natalie Barney was
revered by writers for her generous, eccentric spirit and reviled by high society for her sexual appetite. In the end, she served as an inspiration and came to know many of the greatest names of 20th century arts and letters.

**Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900-1940** by Shari Benstock (University of Texas Press, 1986) From Amazon.com: If you believe the usual literary histories, the early 20th-century modernist movement in English literature was, Gertrude Stein excepted, a movement of men. Benstock restores the roles of such remarkable women as Djuna Barnes, Jean Rhys, Sylvia Beach, and Janet Flanner in the history of the time, revealing what she calls the "underside of the cultural canvas." The book is thorough and wonderfully descriptive, offering both a literary history and a portrait of the lives of creative women. --Maria Dolan

Although it is fiction, this mystery graphic novel may be of interest to salon enthusiasts: **The Salon** by Nick Bertozzi (St. Martin's Griffin, 2007) A graphic novel set against the backdrop of turn-of-the-twentieth-century Paris offers a unique glimpse inside the world of the modernists as it follows the adventures of Georges Braque, Pablo Picasso, Gertrude and Leo Stein, Alice B. Toklas, Paul Gauguin, and Guillaume Apollinaire as they join forces to find a killer preying on avant-garde artists around the city.

**Periodicals and Articles:** Many of these articles can be accessed online through the Kentucky Virtual Library. Anyone with a library card from a Kentucky library (public or academic) can explore this incredible resource. For more information, ask your librarian!

Abstract: ANYONE lamenting the dearth of Surrealist literary salons in New York has only to stop by the Oracle Club, a new members-only work space for artists and writers in Long Island City, Queens. Open since early December, the salon is the result of Jenna Gribbon and Julian Tepper -- a couple who live above the space and a painter and novelist, respectively -- having asked themselves, one morning in October, "What would be the most amazing scenario we could imagine for ourselves?" The three-room space includes a library, a living room and an art studio, all decorated by Ms. Gribbon and Mr. Tepper. "It's Salvador Dali's house meets Whistler's Peacock Room meets Coco Chanel's house meets Cocteau's Chapel."


'Make the World Your Salon': Poetry and Community at the Arensberg Apartment by Stephen Voyce, *Modernism/Modernity*; Nov. 2008, Vol. 15 Issue 4, p627-646. The article explores the relationship between the communal practices at the Arensberg salon and the aesthetic practices authors employ in their writing. It states that the salon influences the poetic experimentation and creates conditions for the poets and painters to explore writing techniques. The members of Arensberg salon, William Carlos Williams and Alfred Kreymborg, stated that the poets chose to
engage with the social circumstances that influenced their work in many ways and that there was no destined principle in guiding the members to join the salon.

*Microcosming the Nahah: Mayy Ziyādah's Salon as a Hybrid Space.* by Boutheina Khaldi, *Journal of Arabic Literature,* 2010, Vol. 41 Issue 3, p262-302. Abstract from author: This article delineates the actual role played by Mayy Ziyādah, not only as a salonnière, but also as an intellectual in her own right with a significant role in the Nahah in twentieth-century Egypt. I will demonstrate the intellectual climate of [her] salon, its capacity to bring together different factions and to emerge thereby as a microcosm of the Nahah, in its complexity and hybrid nature.

Abstract: Presents information on the salon women in the U.S.; Historical background of salons from the 17th to the 20th century; Contribution of Gertrude Stein to the establishment of salons

Abstract from author: London: There's a post-bubble revival under way, mixing homegrown culture, reclaimed buildings and vintage-clad traditionalists. In a city that once considered book talk to be gauche in the extreme, people currently speak of little else. Literary salons are sprouting all over: in sawdusty pubs, at clubs with rooftop pools, at art centers and in private drawing rooms. Many are closed to the public, but travelers can get a taste of highbrow London at a pair of popular gatherings.

*Salons and Beyond* by Stephanie Mills, *Utne Reader,* Mar/Apr 91, Issue 44, p68-77
Abstract: Discusses the origins and evolution of salons. Points in human history in which tribes banded together to create the precursors of the modern salon; Influence of women on setting the mood in Renaissance salons; Depiction of salons during the Enlightenment period in the book "Remembrance of Things Past," by Marcel Proust; Factors attributed to the decline of the salon as a phenomenon after World War II.

*Salons Through History* by John Berendt, *Esquire* November 1990

*The Charleston Magazine: Charleston, Bloomsbury and the Arts* Issue 1 Spring/Summer 1990 and others: This is a magazine dedicated to all aspects of the Bloomsbury group at Charleston. It was published in 24 volumes from 1990-2001 by the Lewes Charleston Trust.

**Material on Starting a Salon or Discussion Group:**

Abstract from author: This article tells the story of Community Earth Councils, an idea that was born more than twenty years ago when *Utne Reader* magazine urged readers to "revive the endangered art of conversation and start a revolution" in their living rooms by forming Utne salons. The Blue Man Group met and formed in an Utne Salon. A lot of marriages, businesses, and nonprofit initiatives got their start there too. Among these were Community Earth Councils, groups of older people, youth, and others that come together to address global environmental and social challenges at the local level. Today, these groups exist across the country as models of community and innovation.
**How to Start a Salon (or Jump Start One)** by Utne Reader, Jul/Aug 1993, Issue 58, p53.
Abstract: Gives advice on starting a neighborhood salon. Small core group making the initial decisions; Organizers; Energetic person with a strong ego; Other requirements; Whole-group communications; More.

Topics to get your conversations flowing.

**Salons: The Joy of Conversation** by Jaida n'ha Sandra (New Society Publishers, 2001) *Salons* offers a fascinating history of the salon and supplies all the tools readers need to join or start a group of their own. Variations on the salon theme are explored, from studious book clubs and book circles to creativity salons, and finally online saloning. A closing chapter looks at salons as bedrocks for activism and institutions for keeping social consciousness alive for the long-haul.

**Shall We Salon…Again?** by Leif Utne, Utne Reader (87500256), Jul/Aug 2002, Issue 112, p60
Abstract: Focuses on the emergence of salons for conversation in communities. Reasons for the popularity of salons; Number of salons in North America; Advantages of online salons.

**Socrates Cafe: A Fresh Taste of Philosophy** by Christopher Phillips (W. W. Norton & Company 2002) Christopher Phillips is a man on a mission: to revive the love of questions that Socrates inspired long ago in ancient Athens. "Like a Johnny Appleseed with a master's degree, Phillips has gallivanted back and forth across America, to cafés and coffee shops, senior centers, assisted-living complexes, prisons, libraries, day-care centers, elementary and high schools, and churches, forming lasting communities of inquiry" (Utne Reader). Phillips not only presents the fundamentals of philosophical thought, he also recalls what led him to start his itinerant program and re-creates some of the most invigorating sessions..."How to Start Your Own Socrates Café" guide included.


Abstract: This article focuses on salons, or discussion clubs, and their existence in New York City. The author has been part of many discussion clubs, but many of them have fell silent, leading the author to conclude that good talk is hard to come by. Salons, according to the author, should not include discussion of business. They should have a "dictator" who reminds members of meetings and collects dues, and a "conductor," who floats the topics of discussion.

Abstract: Describes the Socrates Cafe, a public salon that meets once a week to explore questions of philosophy. Meeting held by a group of people at an appointed time to discuss an agreed-upon topic; Number of salons in the U.S.; General guidelines during discussions.

**Films That Include Salons:**

**Georgia O'Keeffe** (2009 made for TV movie) Starring Joan Allen and Jeremy Irons; directed by Bob Balaban

**Midnight in Paris** (2011) Starring Owen Wilson, Rachel McAdams, Kathy Bates, Kurt Fuller, Mimi Kennedy; directed by Woody Allen

**The Moderns** (1988) Starring Keith Carradine, Linda Fiorentino; directed by Alan Rudolph

**Paris: The Luminous Years: Toward the Making of the Modern** (2010) directed by Perry Miller Adato

**Paris Was a Woman** (1995) Directed by Greta Schiller. In the early decades of the 20th century, Paris was the undisputed artistic capital of the world. Cultural titans Gertrude Stein, Colette, Djuna Barnes, painter Marie Laurencin, publishers and booksellers Sylvia Beach and Adrienne Monnier, and *New Yorker* journalist Janet Flanner (not to mention Ernest Hemingway, Pablo Picasso and James Joyce) were all part of the between-the-wars Left Bank inner circle. Utilizing groundbreaking research, newly-discovered home movies and intimate storytelling that intertwines interview with anecdote, this award-winning documentary re-creates the mood and flavor of a unique female artistic community who flocked to the City of Lights during its most magical era. This Edition features rare home movies of Stein, Alice B. Toklas and Picasso.

**Shadows in Paradise - Hitler's Exiles in Hollywood** (2008) starring James Conlon, Arnold Schoenberg; directed by Peter Rosen

**Websites:** Websites can be here today and gone the next, but as of April 2, 2012, these websites are up and contain information about salons—history, ideas about hosting them, etc. I cannot vouch for the quality of the sites, but they are a starting place for exploring salons online.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salon_(gathering)

www.publicconversations.org

http://www.socratescafe.mn.org/

http://www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/rschwartz/hist255s01/paris_homework/welcome_to_salons.html

http://lisztomania.wikidot.com/salonnieres

http://www.dailywriting.net/SalonBackground.htm

http://www.theworldcafe.com/about.html

http://conversationcircle.com