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The Hôtel De Crillon In Paris Marries Design Steeped In Modernity With 18th-Century Architectural Roots

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Published Nov 20, 2019, 12:55pm EST. Updated Nov 20, 2019, 12:55pm EST



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In 2018, the historic luxury Hôtel de Crillon earned itself a spot in an exclusive French club. It won France's official ministerial "palace distinction" – one step higher than five star – a year after it had reopened following four years of renovations, thereby joining an elite circle of just a dozen Parisian hotels (such as Le Royal Monceau, La Réserve, Le Bristol, Le Meurice, the Four Seasons Hotel George V or the Park Hyatt Paris Vendôme) to hold this highly coveted title. To earn the award, it's not just about its location, prestigious heritage, famous guest list, outstanding cuisine, bigger rooms, more facilities and higher service standards, but also about the hotel's design and its efforts to spread the French *art de vivre* (art of living).



Grand Appartement suite PHOTO COURTESY OF ROSEWOOD HOTELS

Faced with increasingly stiff competition from neighbors the Mandarin Oriental, Shangri-La and The Peninsula piloted by Asian groups, the Hôtel de Crillon was under growing pressure to refurbish its fading interiors, just like the Plaza Athénée and the Ritz Paris before it. So the mythical establishment of the Place de la Concorde in Paris overlooking the Obelisk of Luxor – where it is said that Queen Marie Antoinette took piano lessons – announced in 2012 that it would close its doors, and owner Saudi Prince Mutaib bin Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud called on architect Richard Martinet and artistic director Aline Asmar d'Amman of Lebanon- and Paris-based agency Culture in Architecture to lead the top-to-bottom facelift, and Hong Kong's Rosewood Hotels & Resorts to manage it.



Brasserie d'Aumont designed by Tristan Auer PHOTO COURTESY OF TRISTAN AUER

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Rather than a straightforward restoration of the hotel housed in a historic building originally commissioned in 1754 by King Louis XV and former residence of the Duke de Crillon – whose landmark façade was designed by the Petit Trianon’s architect, Ange - Jacques Gabriel – d’Amman orchestrated a modernization where history is brought in line with the 21st century, and enlisted the help of four designers: Tristan Auer, Chahan Minassian, Cyril Vergniol and Karl Lagerfeld. The opulence remains but the feeling is entirely contemporary, and the eye is spellbound by bespoke furniture, objects and finishings crafted by legions of France’s best artisans – cabinetmakers, upholsterers, glassblowers and fabric manufacturers – who lent their savoir-faire in the creation of the princely jewel. Taking the stiffness and formality out of the traditional five-star experience, the Crillon feels more like a private home rather than a hotel, complete with fresh flowers by Djordje Varda (the florist behind Pippa Middleton’s nuptials) and interior fragrances by Parisian soapmaker and perfumer Buly.



A shoe shine area housing 1960’s Aston Martin seats that reference French decorator Tristan Auer’s passion for cars
PHOTO COURTESY OF TRISTAN AUER

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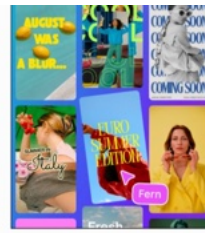
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Known for designing furniture, residences and hotels like Paris’ Les Bains and Cotton House on Mustique Island, Auer transformed the former reception into a peaceful haven with concierge area, and introduced a cigar lounge covered in papyrus leaves evoking cigar wrappers by their texture and color, a hairdresser’s featuring an alcove lined with peacock and black feathers à la Madame Pompadour, a men’s grooming salon helmed by La Barbière de Paris, France’s first female barber, a shoe shine area housing 1960’s Aston Martin seats that reference the decorator’s passion for cars, engraved mirrored glass lifts crafted by specialists

Arizio, a boudoir for tasting extremely rare spirits in the brown and auburn tones of cognacs and Armagnacs topped with a star-studded, fireworks-motif domed ceiling created by French artisans in gold leaf, palladium leaf and acrylic paint, and the casual Brasserie d’Aumont with woven rattan seats and an undulating rosewood bar. He even breathed new life into the hotel’s 1973 Citroën DS courtesy car in luminous and chic Parisian gray, and launched a new bespoke haute couture car “tailoring” business personalizing vehicles from A to Z.

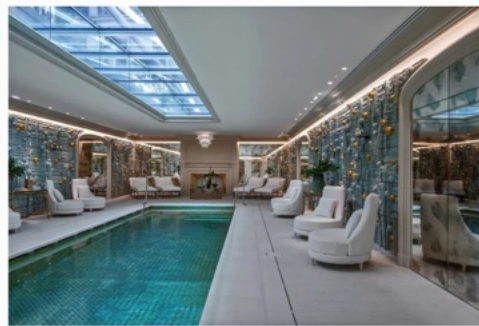
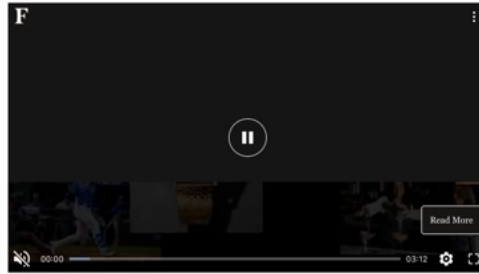


Les Ambassadeurs’ bar designed by Chahan Minassian
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While Auer injected a pure and refined yet warm esthetic, Minassian's signature use of rich, mineral and textured materials shone through in other areas. The extravagant, gold-hued, all mirrors, marble and frescoed Les Ambassadeurs bar mesmerizes with its cloudy blue sky-painted ceiling, chandelier composed of patinated and folded brass and bronze sheets suspended above a horseshoe-shaped bar, sofas in gray crushed velvet and tabletops inlaid with slices of agate. One Michelin-star restaurant L'Ecrin led by chef Boris Campanella features aged patinated mirrors, Murano glass sconces and furniture in gypsum and rock crystal hues. A magnificent, curving white Corian staircase and stucco corridor lead to the spa abounding with marble, Venetian plaster and mirrors in shades of cream, gold, aqua and turquoise conferring a seaside atmosphere. However, the pièce de résistance is the brand-new indoor linear swimming pool lined with 17,600 gold leaf, molten glass fish-scale mosaic tiles applied by hand that are surrounded by celadon ceramic sculptural walls punctuated by large gold-flecked pearls by American artist Peter Lane. Dug two stories underground, it is illuminated by natural light flooding in through a glass roof from the ground-level Gabriel courtyard designed by famed landscape architect Louis Benech.



The hotel spa in marble, Venetian plaster and mirrors in shades of cream, gold, aqua and turquoise features an indoor linear swimming pool lined with 17,600 gold leaf, molten glass fish-scale mosaic tiles applied by hand
PHOTO COURTESY OF ROSEWOOD HOTELS

Using 600 different materials (including 40 types of marble) decorated in a palette of greige, blue or brown, Vergniol updated the 124 guestrooms and suites with furniture like 1950's silk-upholstered armchairs, soft rugs and specially-curated board games and coffee table books to give a homely feeling. As Lagerfeld was an 18th-century decorative arts expert, he was particular apt in combining historical elements with a French *art de vivre* esthetic and was entrusted with decorating two Grands Appartements suites and an adjacent room that he devoted to his Birman mascot, Chouette, complete with black-and-white carpeting inspired by cat scratches. The suites showcase textured gray walls referencing the silvery light of Paris that are made up of nine layers of paint with touches of iridescent mother-of-pearl. He had personally chosen each crystal for the dining room chandelier, and original sinks from the Château de Versailles were placed in the powder room. Concerned with proportions and how guests would interact with the furniture, he custom-made a white couch in the living area to guarantee the ideal curvature for a woman's frame. Guests may even live like bohemian poets and painters, but in ultra-luxe, loft-like and romantic fashion, in the top-floor Ateliers d'Artistes suites combining a series of former maids' rooms beneath the hotel's mansard roof, now endowed with private balconies with views over Paris.



Top-floor Ateliers d'Artistes suite
PHOTO COURTESY OF ROSEWOOD HOTELS

As the Crillon's owner is an avid art collector, the entire hotel is filled with 1,000 original artworks from his collection, curated by London-based Fru Tholstrup: César's giant thumb in Baccarat crystal and British artist Kate McGwire's *Tussle* made from pheasant feathers resembling intertwining serpents throne in the lobby, Annie Morris' *Stack 9 Copper Blue* totem in pigmented metal, concrete, plaster and sand greets visitors at the entranceway, celebrated photographer Cecil Beaton's black-and-white prints of famous personalities such as Alberto Giacometti and Coco Chanel delight diners in the Brasserie d'Aumont, Nathanaël Le Berre's *L'Infini* hammered and polished brass sheet sculpture adorns the boudoir, Léopoldine Roux's dots of nail polish add color to old prints depicting royal scenes in the corridors, and an antique French tapestry has been retouched with playful embroideries by Bokja. In three listed heritage salons with six-meter high ceilings, oversized paintings commissioned from French artist Laurent

Grasso portray battle scenes imbued with the artist's language weaving science, history, mythology and supernatural phenomena. For guests desperately in search of the perfect Parisian palace that flawlessly combines art, high design and luxury, the Hôtel de Crillon is just the place for them.

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