

PILLOW TALK IN PARIS

Here's how a historic hotel, *The Ritz Paris* reinvented their prestige suites while keeping its soul intact. Elle Decor shares an exclusive look at two of their most iconic apartments

When the Grande Dame of Parisian hotels underwent a facelift, the most challenging task was refurbishing the 15 historic Prestige Suites, home of the Ritz Paris' most illustrious tenants: Coco Chanel, F. Scott Fitzgerald, César Ritz, Maria Callas, Prince de Galles, Ernest Hemingway, Charlie Chaplin, Chopin and Marcel Proust to name a few. In August 2012, the hotel closed doors for an ambitious renovation project lasting almost four years and setting the owners (Egyptian billionaire, Mohamed Al Fayed) back by a hefty sum of around US \$450 million. "I want the Ritz to remain the best hotel in the world!" he told Thierry Despont, the architect-designer hired for this monumental job. The hotel is a listed historic monument with a landmark facade. As a result, no modification could be made that failed to respect its architecture and majesty. Amongst the new additions to the prestige suites, bulletproof windows were installed on the first floor, whereas the Imperial, Chopin, and Windsor suites were restructured so that they could be combined into one vast apartment. Essentials like new plumbing, heating and cooling systems, high-speed Wi-Fi and telephones from which guests can control lights and temperature, soundproofing were all fitted discreetly without unduly affecting the traditional decor.

The elegant decor is unmistakably Chanel. In front of the ornate fireplace sits a suede sofa; a design based on Chanel's sofa from her Rue Cambon apartment. The table lamps are Giacometti and Jean-Michel Frank-inspired

SUITE COCO CHANEL

Perhaps the most fashionable woman in history and arguably in Paris chose the Ritz as her residence for over 30 years. Her suite overlooking Place Vendôme was naturally redone to suit her style. It was outfitted with personal effects and art that have been lovingly restored and displayed throughout this suite.

During renovations, a priceless masterpiece by French artist Charles Le Brun called *The Sacrifice of Polyxena* was discovered in her suite. The painting was ultimately sold at Christie's for \$1.88 million and now hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Keeping her signature colour scheme of white, black and beige alive the designers have maintained a contemporary look yet included exclusive items designed specifically for the Suite Coco Chanel.

This has been done as per her taste and style – Lacquered Coromandel screens, Goossens gilt-framed mirrors, table lamps and sconces that are Giacometti and Jean-Michel Frank inspired as well as never-seen-before archived pictures of Gabrielle Chanel at the Ritz Paris. A private wine cellar and three marble bathrooms are ensconced in this luxurious home away from home.

ABOVE Here you can see the Goossens table, photos of Chanel, and the ubiquitous, lacquered Coromandel screens gleaming with a rich patina. Never-seen-before archived pictures of Gabrielle Chanel at the Ritz Paris hang on the walls BELOW The main bedroom of the suite reflects her love for gilded mirrors

A vast living room that overlooks the Place Vendôme, the Suite Impériale is a true museum for lovers of the French "art de vivre." It is lavishly decorated in French art, bas-reliefs and 18th Century panelling, which is protected under the suite's historic monument status. Period furniture and classic artwork are unmistakable

SUITE IMPÉRIALE

Imagine a hotel suite so luxurious and steeped in history that the government has listed it as a registered historic monument! Welcome to The Suite Impériale at the Ritz Paris. Fit for kings and queens (Princess Diana stayed here) this is the ultimate in sybaritic pleasure — the most lavish of the 15 'Prestige Suites' with the heftiest price tag!

ABOVE The second bedroom of the Suite is done in the Louis XVI style, with a baldachin bed and columns BELOW The bathroom is fitted with wood and pink marble, without forgoing the signature gold swan fixtures and the peach-coloured bath linen. It overlooks the Vendôme gardens

The piece de resistance is the master bedroom which is a replica of Marie Antoinette's at Versailles, with a majestic baldachin bed draped in the finest silks and set behind a gilded balustrade.

The 335sqm suite on the first floor has three bedrooms, three bathrooms and one dining room. A bathroom, which was a former boudoir, is outfitted with wood and pink marble, without forgetting the signature gold swan fixtures. The space is dotted with artefacts like an amazing clock called 'Cartel à tête d'Apollon' and a pair of Louis XVI ormolu five-branch wall lights. No expense was spared with the period furniture and gilded marquetry in this mini palace, making any guest feel like royalty.

History buffs residing here might be interested in this nugget: In 1721, King Louis XV, all of 11 years, watched the parade of the Ottoman ambassador from the balcony of this suite as it offered unrivalled views of Place Vendôme, an event so magnificent, it saw camels walking down the streets of Paris! ♦ Fareeda Kanga Photographs courtesy Ritz Paris