



EYE

Paris' Grand Palais Completes Five-year Renovation

- Chanel's craftsmanship hub Le19M designed a monumental curtain for the expanded central section of the landmark building.

BY JOELLE DIDERICH

PARIS — The Grand Palais has fully reopened following the most comprehensive overhaul ever undertaken of the storied Paris landmark, built for the 1900 Universal Exhibition.

After unveiling the main nave of the glass-and-steel building last year, just in time for the 2024 Paris Olympic Games, officials on Thursday celebrated the completion of the five-year, 486 million euro renovation.

The project led by Paris-based studio Chatillon Architectes involved knocking down a partition wall separating the front and back of the building, increasing the spaces accessible to the public by 140 percent.

The central axis is modular, thanks to a monumental curtain designed and produced by Chanel, the exclusive private sponsor of the renovation, via its craftsmanship hub Le19M.

The mobile partition, which is 49 feet long and 26 feet high, is made up of nine sections and required 720 hours of work by the specialty ateliers, collaborating under the supervision of Studio MTX, the interior design department of embroidery workshop Montex.

"It's the first time MTX has coordinated all of the workshops at Le19M on a joint architecture project," said Mathieu Bassée, artistic director of Studio MTX.

The sides of the curtain are sewn with 70 ornamental strips, each representing a specific skill set. Lesage embroidered tweed with sequins and pearls, while Lemarié created a marquetry of feathers. Gold- and silversmith Goossens made hammered brass cherry blossoms, while hatmaker Maison Michel assembled sections of felt, grosgrain ribbon and raffia.

The color of the curtain was designed to match the signature grayish green of the building's ironwork.

"We did hundreds of color tests with and without light to ensure that it blended in as much as possible with all the shades

of green found in the buildings. We also worked on the transparency of the fabric in order not to block out the light coming from the nave," said Bassée.

Chanel resumed staging fashion shows at the Grand Palais last fall after a four-year break, and recently held a dinner at the venue's new restaurant, Le Grand Café, a soaring brasserie designed by Joseph Dirand with a terrace that looks across at the Petit Palais.

It will be joined by a mezzanine-level café, led by Michelin-starred chef Thierry Marx, named Réséda after the building's predominant hue.

The Chatillon team also added 40 elevators and lifts, alongside 30 staircases, to provide access to the labyrinth of modernized exhibition spaces on the upper floors.

"Get lost in the Grand Palais, because we keep getting lost here every day, so my guess is the same thing will happen to you," Grand Palais president Didier Fusillier said jokingly.

Since taking over 18 months ago, he has set about revamping the functioning of the venue, which has a surface area of 775,000 square feet and 20 galleries to fill.

Planned events range from marquee exhibitions staged in tandem with major museums, such as the Pompidou Center, the Louvre and the Musée d'Orsay, to large-scale concerts and popular initiatives, like a temporary ice rink.

The Pompidou Center, which is preparing to shutter for its own extensive, multiyear renovation, coproduced the "Niki de Saint Phalle, Jean Tinguely, Pontus Hultén" exhibition that opens to the public on Friday, as well as the "Art Brut" show on display on another floor.

There is also an exhibition on "Royal Tapestries" featuring 16 large-scale tapestries designed by Danish contemporary artists, coproduced by the Grand Palais with France's Manufactures Nationales and the Royal Danish Collection.

Laurent Le Bon, president of the



Pompidou Center, called it a “magical” moment of unity between institutions.

“There’s been a lot of talk about cultural policy lately. Our response is to be stronger together,” he said. “Despite the criticism, despite the diatribes, more than ever, the Pompidou Center is alive thanks to the genius of Didier Fusillier.”

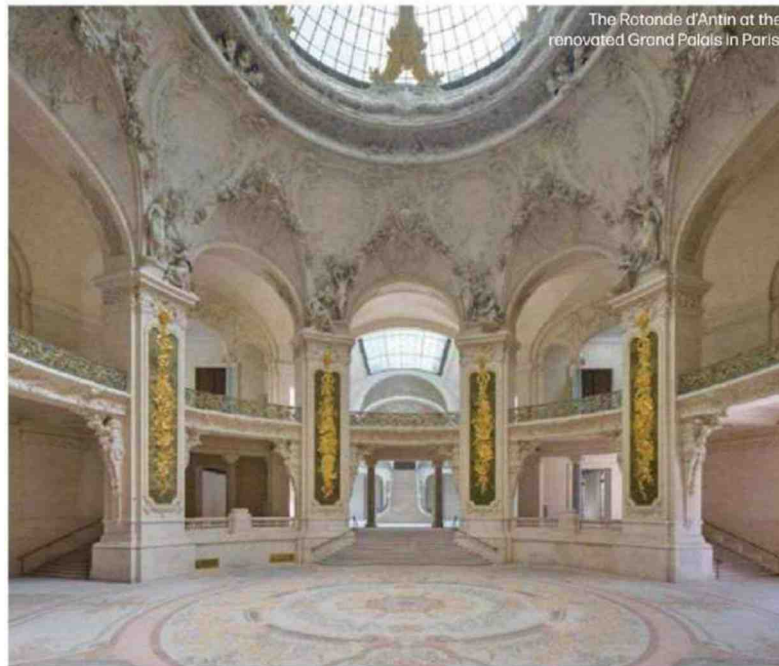
His pointed remarks underscored the uncertainty facing the Palais de la Découverte, the scientific museum previously sealed off by a non-original partition wall. Its removal restores an original sightline that had not been seen since 1937, revealing the splendor of the adjoining Palais d’Antin, with its Beaux-Arts architecture and vast mosaic floor.

A group of employees of Universcience, which runs the museum, clustered outside

on Thursday morning to draw attention to their petition demanding clarity about the fate of the institution, which housed a planetarium as well as another room dedicated to electricity.

Fusillier said that he had no intention of “ejecting” science from the building, but said it made no sense to have the Palais de la Découverte operate separately from the rest.

“I don’t understand why people want it to go back to how it was before, because it didn’t work. It was a catastrophe,” he said. “We want people to be able to see the building in its entirety because taxpayer money paid for this, after all, so I think they deserve to enjoy it.”



The Rotonde d’Antin at the renovated Grand Palais in Paris.



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