



Paris Like An Heiress

By Leah Walker

If loving Paris is wrong, then I don't want to be right. A mere mention of the French capital and I am Walter Mitty soaking up the scene on Saint-Germain-des-Prés. Shoulder-to-shoulder, I sit at a sidewalk café drinking Bordeaux, while second-hand smoke pervades my lungs. I stroll along Haussmann's grand boulevards with my head on a swivel, not wanting to miss a single bakery, butters, boutique or flower box.

I may be from Texas, but an oil heiress I certainly am not. However, during my recent trips to the City of Light, I gladly stepped into that role. Paris provides plenty of opportunities for those looking to exercise their AmEx Centurion cards, and in the name of research, I did my best to adopt that mentality. Chauffeured cars, private guides, luxury hotels, exclusive experiences and gourmet

meals all helped mimic what a trip to Paris must be like for the average Russian billionaire's daughter. The private jet and haute couture souvenirs, however, were tragically missing.

Paris is a place that evokes strong emotions. Love or loathe, it's arguably the most glamorous city in the world. Here, quality is revered, whether in fashion, food, wine, jewelry, art or accommodations. This is not only demonstrated in the number of famous French design houses, but also in the amount of Michelin-starred restaurants and luxury hotels in the city. Currently, there are about 85 eateries that have earned at least one star from Michelin, as well as over fifty five-star hotels. Even with three of its best hotels--Hôtel de Crillon, Ritz Paris and Hôtel Plaza Athénée--closed for renovations until later in 2014,

visitors demanding the best are still spoiled for choice.

Hôtel Fouquet's Barrière

Simply being on the corner of Champs-Élysées and Avenue George V brings with it a certain cache. And even with the flagship Louis Vuitton store as a neighbor, Hôtel Fouquet's Barrière holds its own as a beacon of luxury.

Although the hotel didn't open until 2006, the legendary Fouquet's Restaurant has been around since 1899. Since the 1930s, Fouquet's has been closely associated with the French film industry, hosting nominee luncheons and after-ceremony dinners in conjunction with the César Awards, France's version of the Oscars. A classic Parisian brasserie, Fouquet's remains true to its glamorous roots and has influenced the design and feel of the hotel.

To be fair, I was smitten with Fouquet's before I even stepped foot on to the red carpeted entrance. Just after my reservation

was confirmed, a two-page questionnaire requesting my favorites appeared in my inbox. Prior to arrival, the butler team curates the suite according to my preferences--bedding, chocolate, refreshments, flower color, newspaper and music--basically everything short of tissue brand. The butler even takes care of the pesky tasks of packing and unpacking. Personalization such as this is new to me, though certainly commonplace for an heiress. Fouquet's is a modern throwback, if such a thing exists. Seemingly oxymoronic, it's a young hotel with a rich history. Famed French designer, Jacques Garcia, took the Paris palace hotel mold and broke it with Fouquet's. Geometric shapes pair beautifully with upholstered, curved walls. Carrara marble floors gleam, while the massive mirrors reflect light from Murano glass chandeliers. Oversize, quilted sofas form a golden wave along the walls that are filled with black and white photos of screen legends. For me, Fouquet's public space is reminiscent of the Auntie Mame penthouse. I half expected to see Rosalind Russell descending the

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staircase in one of her glamorous getups.

Hôtel Fouquet's Barrière has all the amenities that this pretend heiress expects from a luxury Parisian property—opulent spa, Michelin-starred restaurant, lovely linens, exquisite room furnishings, state-of-the-art technology and an accommodating staff. So what sets Fouquet's apart from its equally fabulous counterparts? It's their commitment to the environment.

Having been awarded Condé Nast Traveler's coveted World Savers Award in 2013 and certified Leading Green, Fouquet's provides guests electric bicycles, a charging station for electric vehicles, a hybrid limo and will even request hybrid taxis. Reducing their carbon footprint is a priority and extends into every aspect of the hotel—LED lights, fair-trade or locally sourced organic produce, organic linens and recycling are just a few notable efforts. Fouquet's even serves its guests an eco-friendly Champagne called Pop Earth.

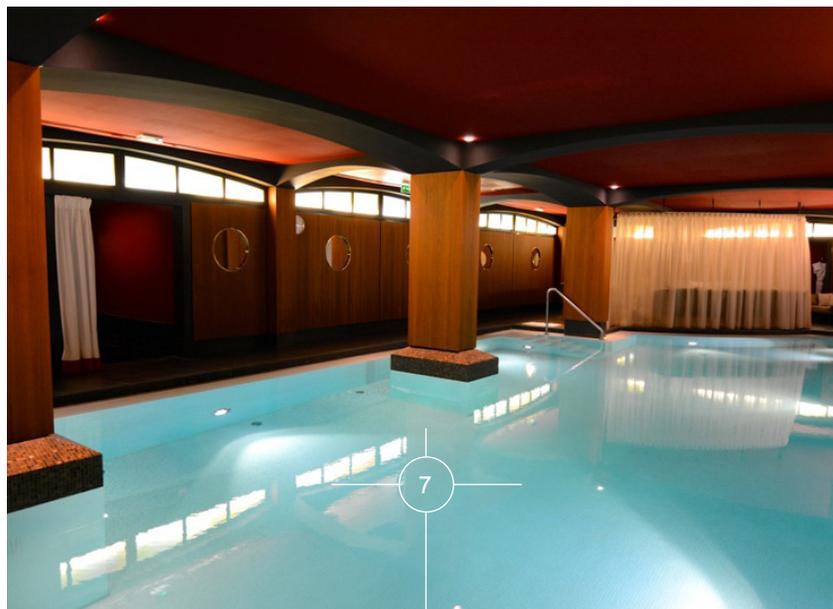
So to Fouquet's for their dignified luxury vision, I raise my Baccarat Champagne flute and say, "Santé."

Mandarin Oriental, Paris

My first experience with Mandarin Oriental, Paris occurred nearly a year before I became a guest. Shopping along rue Saint-Honoré, I had my nose firmly planted against the Chloé window. Lost in lust for the latest collection, my daydream was rudely interrupted by shrieks. The source of this commotion came from the front of Mandarin Oriental, where a hundred screaming preteens waved Canadian flags and held signs professing their love for Justin Bieber.

Take away the legion of Beliebers, and the stylish Art Deco façade of Mandarin Oriental doesn't scream for attention, instead opting for understated elegance. Flanked by designer boutiques, the golden-framed entrance discreetly displays the hotel group's signature fan, a symbol of luxury recognizable around the world.

Though intimate and impeccable, the marble, silk and velvet-drenched lobby is overshadowed by the interior, open-air garden. Yes, in a city renowned for its cost per square foot, Mandarin Oriental has carved out a green space squarely



in the middle of the hotel. For me, this fanciful and zen-like space is the crown jewel in the Mandarin Oriental's tiara. Certainly unlike anything I've seen in a city hotel, the tree-laden, butterfly-filled garden is ideal for a leisurely café latte or pre-dinner cocktail. The best table is found inside of the massive, whimsical birdcage—quite literally in the catbird seat.

Considering the sleek interior, it's difficult to imagine that since the 16th century, the building has served as a monastery, theater, royal riding school and office space, before opening in 2011 as one of Mandarin Oriental's few European locations. The hotel has hints of its Asian lineage, but the design is unmistakably influenced by Paris' Art Deco period and its glamorous location between the Tuileries Gardens and Place Vendôme.

No expense was spared in designing the public space of the hotel, but it's what's behind the elevator door that's truly remarkable. Seriously, thoughts of sequestering myself à la Howard Hughes crossed my mind more than once.

Rooms have a romantic and feminine feel, though not in a Laura Ashley floral-explosion-sort of way. Instead, it's the sensual artwork, clean-lined furnishings and sophisticated jewel tone palate of pink, purple and orange, which provide this feeling of femininity.

Mandarin Oriental encapsulates everything I didn't know I liked in a Parisian five-star hotel. My vision of what modern luxury looks like has since been redefined: haute couture with an avant-garde attitude, quite like the fashion filling the windows along rue Saint-Honoré. How apropos.

Hotel Napoléon

Having recently earned its fifth star, Hotel Napoléon is steeped in both luxury and history dating back to the 1920s. Dubbed "The Palace" by Errol Flynn, Hotel Napoléon quickly became the place for Paris' high society and literary types to see and be seen.

Shortly after Hotel Napoléon's opening, wealthy Russian businessman, Alexandre Pavlovitch Kliaguine, was looking for the perfect wedding gift for his Parisian bride. Apparently, jewelry from Cartier or crystal from Lalique



wasn't quite right, so he purchased the Art Deco hotel for her to entertain society's elite. As one of the few luxury independents left in Paris, Hotel Napoléon has remained in the Kliaguine family, having been passed down from generation to generation.

The appropriately named Hotel Napoléon is located in the 8th arrondissement, where it's been keeping watch on the Arc de Triomphe for nearly a century. Before some of Paris' other notable luxury hotels even existed, Hotel Napoléon was making its mark on the city. Once inside the hotel, it's easy to envision a time when it was filled with luminaries like Ernest

Hemingway, Salvador Dalí, Ella Fitzgerald and John Steinbeck. Since I am certain that I was born in the wrong era, the idea of walking in their footsteps intrigued me.

Hotel Napoléon feels like a palais owned by your best friend's well-heeled father, if you're fortunate enough to know such a person. A refreshing change, the hotel didn't slap me in the face with its ostentatious furnishings, though upon closer inspection, the luxury details are quite apparent. Hotel Napoléon is comfortable, a place that reads like a lavish home rather than a luxury hotel. And considering many of the art pieces are gifts from the owners, as well

as loyal guests, that home-like feeling could be by design.

Classic in every sense of the word, Hotel Napoléon has retained the French charm of a bygone era and combined it with the modern conveniences expected by today's discriminating guests. None of the 102 rooms, half of which are suites, are identical. Though harmonious, they have varied layouts, color palates and décor. Decorated in the Directoire style, the hotel is covered in rich colors with golden accents, silk fabrics and stripes—lots of stripes. Museum-quality Napoleonic art is prevalent, but it's the painting collection of regal-looking dogs dressed in military garb that I remember and appreciate most. It just goes to show that luxury doesn't always have to equate to uptight.

Hotel Napoléon is further proof that a true classic never goes out of style.

Four Seasons George V, Paris

Approaching the historical entrance of Four Seasons George V makes me instantly throw my shoulders back and stand a bit taller. On any given night, the 244 rooms situated off the Champs-Élysées are filled with names ripped from the pages of Forbes and Vanity Fair. The front drive is littered with luxury--Bentleys and Bugattis mingle with Mercedes and Maybachs. Respectfully behind the fantasy cars are the autograph seekers, paparazzi and the just plain curious. Want to know who's a guest? Ask the people waiting on the sidewalk.

If there was ever such thing as a perfect first impression, George V is it. The chic staff clad in classic black and white exudes sophistication. The entire ground floor, with its gilt and crystal accents, ornate carpets and marble floors, looks as if it were plucked

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ALL PHOTOS BY LEAH WALKER.



directly from Sofia Coppola's version of Versailles. And like Coco Chanel's string of pearls, the innovative floral designs serve as a flawless finishing touch.

The two-starred Michelin restaurant, Le Cinq, ranks among my best dining experiences, having qualified on the cheese

selection alone. One of my favorite places in the city is Le Bar, but not just for its handcrafted cocktails. Oozing classic, Parisian elegance, Le Bar also offers great people watching opportunities. I slip onto a bar stool, order a Blurred Lines, nibble on the olives and get lost in the mahogany-drenched moment.

There's no telling whom I'll see or what I'll hear.

A night spent in the lowest tier room at Four Seasons is still better than most others in the city. But the Penthouse, with its two terraces overlooking the Eiffel Tower, well, that's the stuff of French fantasies.

For this temporary heiress, variety is the spice of life. And if Parisian luxury hotels were Ladurée macarons, I'd indulge in every flavor. Honestly, I've never considered myself particularly picky. Just like Winston Churchill, I'm easily satisfied with the best.

And Paris has plenty of that.

