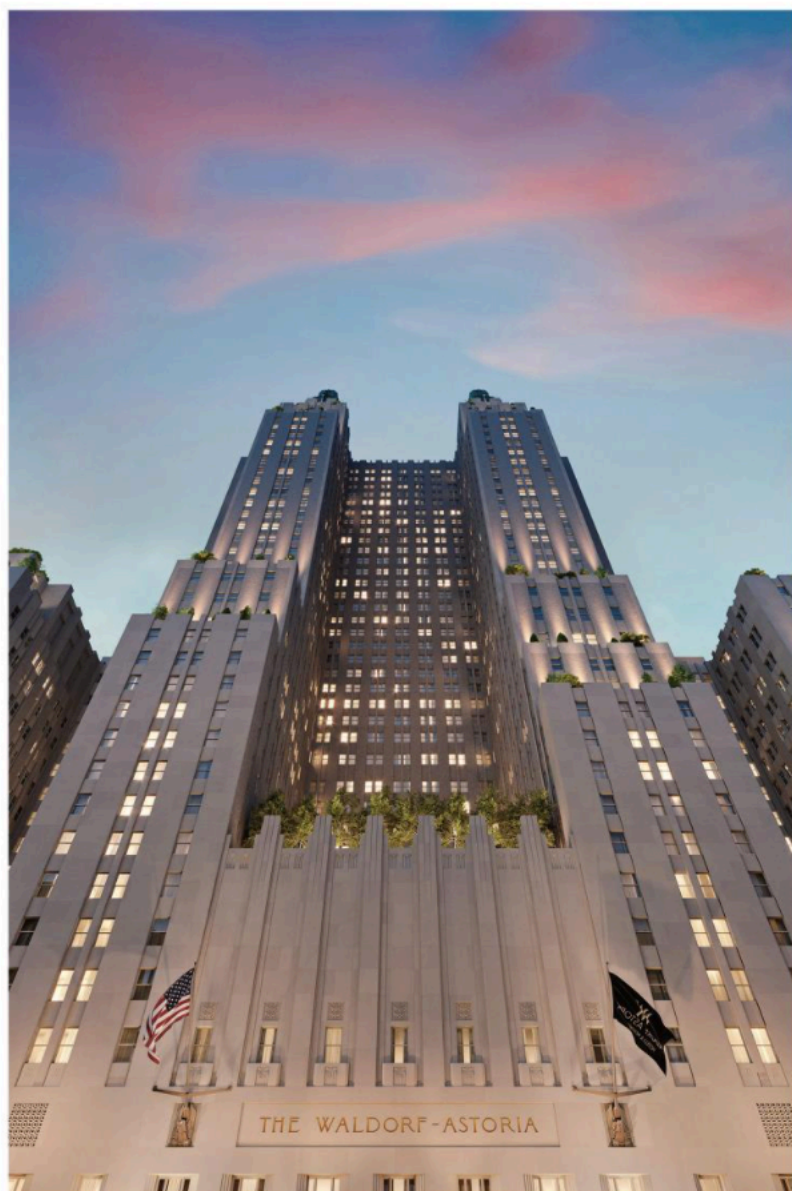


HEART OF THE BIG APPLE

Illustrious interior designers Jean-Louis Deniot and Pierre-Yves Rochon on their parts in revitalising an icon of New York



New York's 'unofficial palace', the deliciously Art Deco Waldorf Astoria New York is being renovated. *Commercial Interior Design* meets the men spearheading the interiors of the project, which will see the block reborn as 375 condominium residences and the 375-key Waldorf Astoria New York hotel, with Rochon behind the hotel's interiors and Deniot taking care of the residences.

Please tell us some background about the Waldorf Astoria New York project and how the partnership came about?

Pierre-Yves Rochon: I've loved this hotel for a long time, especially its size and proportions, the beautiful American 1930s design, and of course its location on Park Avenue. When my wife and I visited 35 years ago, I said to her that I would be very happy if one day I could work on the interiors of this project, and 35 years later, here I am.

The ownership group knew of our work on other iconic, historic hotels such as the Four Seasons George V Paris and the Savoy in London. They asked what our vision might be to re-imagine the hotel, and we participated in a design competition so they could visualise the potential. In the end, they felt inspired by our design the sense of luxury and our visions for bringing the standards of the hotel to contemporary hospitality and design.

What were the challenges and opportunities with this project and renovation of historic spaces generally?

Jean-Louis Deniot: I took inspiration from the historical interior of the Waldorf Astoria, created in the 1930's, which was inspired by European style and standards – it is almost Art Deco, yet echoes Louis XVI style. The Waldorf Astoria was extremely French, to the extent that they installed French

chandeliers, French neo-classical furnishing and so on, but there was a paradox within this inspiration; the Louis XVI period was set in the 1770's, more than 160 years before construction of the Waldorf Astoria in New York had even begun.

Pierre Yves-Rochon: The biggest challenge, of course, was to respect the spirit and heritage of the building while bringing new life to the hotel. We wanted to elevate the character of the Waldorf and bring new excitement for today's guests - similar to the way it moved people when it first opened.

My vision for the historic renovation, in the public spaces and the hotel rooms, was twofold. In the hotel, we removed a number of rooms to make way for the residences, and so we were able to redesign all of the room configurations. One of the most luxurious features of Waldorf Astoria New York is the space. The new hotel guestrooms will be 600 square feet or larger, and the new suites will be anywhere from 900 square feet to almost 2,400 square feet. The second is the design of the rooms, we wanted to make the hotel suites feel like residential apartments, so that when you are in your room - it feels like your own home, with a beautiful entrance, a walk-in dressing room and a spacious bathroom like no other. The style of the rooms will be classic and elegant, to reflect the hotel in its prime. We did not want to destroy the spirit of the Waldorf Astoria, we wanted to respect its iconic and historic status. What we have created in the hotel is far more like a private apartment on Park Avenue for future guests, than any other typical hotel room.

In terms of the public spaces, we understand our responsibility for this project because we know how loved the Waldorf Astoria in New York is around the world, and locally. For me, I see it as my duty to create a design that pays homage to its history. We worked with the architects Skidmore, Owings & Merrill to keep as much as we can of the past, for example we will work to give the famous ballroom a new lease on life, and the clock in Peacock Alley will remain as an iconic element to the entrance on both Park Avenue and Lexington Avenue.

How has the approach changed towards renovating historic interiors?

Jean-Louis Denoit: When renovating communal spaces particularly, it is

essential that you are playing with the design to ensure they retain their historic essence but equally deliver the contemporary guests desire for versatility. A fantastic example is The Dining Room, a very chic, grand room that originally had a very awkward architecture because not all of the windows were symmetrical. In order to create balance within the space I played with the horizontal elements as playing with the verticality would mean that this imbalance would be exemplified. I played with reflective surfaces at eye level so that when you're having dinner you have the impression of the infinite... There is always something beyond.

Pierre Yves-Rochon: We try to focus designing with respect and authenticity while doing everything we can to make the experience better than it was before. Sometimes this can be more important to consider than what a space used to be and trying too much to hold onto the past. We can change the function of a particular room to make it more useful and impactful for today's guests, and still honour the



original spirit and design character. It is important never to forget history, but we should view it through a modern, more forward-thinking lens.

What's your favourite part of The Towers of the Waldorf Astoria in New York?

Jean-Louis Denoit: It really was a dream to work on The Towers of the Waldorf Astoria and be part of such a major renovation for New York, as the building is part of the city's heritage. It is such an iconic hotel, which has welcomed the world's most glamorous guests from Queen Elizabeth II to Marilyn Monroe. The building itself had so many unique stories - one of my favourite was the original retractable skylight in the former ballroom. When I saw it I was instantly inspired to create something that had never existed before at the Waldorf Astoria: a swimming pool.

I wanted to bring a slight feminine note so my first starting point was a 1930's art deco Japanese Kimono. I used the abstract flower of the kimono as an inspiration for the ceiling grill design, as well as the floor mosaic around the pool, in order to introduce an Asian Art Deco flavour. I created the sets of columns clad with fluted Raku ceramics - a Japanese enameled tiling technique - and designed all the content to give the impression that you are in a pool area but it almost feels as though you are in a ballroom, as though you are swimming in it.

What is gorgeous is that when you are swimming during the day you have the



JEAN-LOUIS DENOIT
Interior designer for the 375
luxury residences



PIERRE YVES ROCHON
Creating contemporary
interiors for the hotel