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SWEET DREAMS IN PARIS

BY MARY WINSTON NICKLIN

Blame Woody Allen for filling up all the summer flights to France. His latest movie, *Midnight in Paris*, is so adoringly smitten with the city that *Variety* says "you half expect to see the Paris tourism office listed among its backers." For clients dreaming of a glorious romp through the city that's

launched a thousand flicks (and books and songs), here are some splendid new accommodation picks.

A Princely Palace

For their first hotel in Europe, Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts went the perfectionist route. They hired designer Pierre-Yves Rochon, whose artistic eye has transformed

some of the finest hotels in the world, to doll up the interiors of a historical palace in the 16th arrondissement. The Hong Kong-based group had scored a prime piece of real estate in the City of Light: the former residence of Prince Roland Bonaparte (yes, a close relation to *that* Bonaparte) just across the Seine from the Eiffel Tower.

To put things in perspective: You can't get



much closer to the monument than parks imaginations around the world. From your roost in the penthouse Panoramic Suite, all of Paris is at your feet—a visual montage sure to inspire even the most jaded of travelers. Below, boats ply the Seine's currents in front of the Jean Nouvel-designed Musée du Quai Branly. Other city landmarks rise above the rooftops: the Grand Palais, the Pantheon, the Notre Dame cathedral. In the distance, the otherworldly dome of Sacré-Coeur gleams from the top of Montmartre.

Since it debuted in December 2010, **The Shangri-La Hotel Paris** (www.shangri-la.com/en/property/paris/shangrila) has hit the headlines. After a no-expense-spared restoration that lasted four years, the palace embraces its imperial heritage with frescoed ceilings, monumental fireplaces and a grand, gilded staircase. The lobby showcases five different kinds of marble, and the prince's

insignia, the bee, is found in glittering mosaics and the cornices of columns.

In dressing the hotel's museum-quality spaces, Rochon pored through the city's archives. He chose custom-made fabrics, furnishings, and even bath fixtures as a mark of respect to the palace's original architecture. The result is a sublime mélange of the Empire style and Asian artistry—the spirit of Shangri-La manifest in the Chinese vases, Chinoiserie screens, and, of course, graceful service for which the brand is known around the world. Head Concierge Tony Le Goff (concierge.slpr@shangri-la.com; 011-33-1-5367-1966) leads a stellar team with connections all over town.

Business travelers and bon vivants alike will revel in the opulent guest experience. L'Abeille, newly opened in March, has won the hearts of the city's exacting restaurant critics, who are now champing at the bit to get a taste of authentic Cantonese cuisine at Shangri-La's signature Shang Palace (slated to debut this summer). The bar, evoking a tented Napoleonic camp, serves couture cocktails, including four different versions of the Pink Lady. Like a mini-Versailles, the meeting and banquet rooms are some of the most sumptuous we've seen in Europe. Even the cupcake collection elicits a "wow." (We savored one made with pure Carupano Venezuelan chocolate, wasabi and sesame.)

Booking Tips: All 81 rooms, including 27 suites, come with espresso machines, free Wi-Fi, and marble bathrooms with heated floors, Bulgari White Tea toiletries, and separate tubs and showers. Nearly half of the rooms have a private balcony. The three signature suites are dazzling. The aforementioned Panoramic

Suite boasts unobstructed city views from floor-to-ceiling windows in the living room, bedroom, and bathroom—not to mention the expansive furnished terrace. The sleek Suite Chaillot has a wraparound terrace and a private bar. Most Magnificent: the Suite Impérial, occupying the prince's sprawling private apartment, though it faces the avenue d'Iéna and not the Eiffel Tower. Contact Annabelle Gamelin (annabelle.gamelin@shangri-la.com; 011-33-1-5367-1931), senior sales manager, for VIP bookings.

Note: The wellbeing space and indoor pool will open at the end of 2011.

A Chic Chateau

The story goes something like this. Hotel owner walks into a bar. Well, in this case: a secret restaurant (and favorite of the Parisian in crowd) sequestered behind an unmarked door in the Marais. So taken with the eclectic interiors at Derrière—labeled "cluttered chic" and "funky" in the press—said hotelier sets out on a quest to track down the designer. Bambi Sloan is then commissioned to redo the **Saint James Paris** (www.saint-james-paris.com), the city's only chateau-hotel. The Franco-American designer shacks up in the chateau where she does everything from draw sketches to invent cabochon-printed carpet in her on-site office. Two years later, the curtain goes up on her project and it lands a 10-page spread in *Elle Décoration*.

Pull up to the pillared entrance and you'd be forgiven for thinking it a country estate. A courtyard fountain, manicured boxwoods... Could this really be Paris? (Yes, indeed, the Arc de Triomphe is 15 minutes away by foot.) But the inside is what really bewitches design

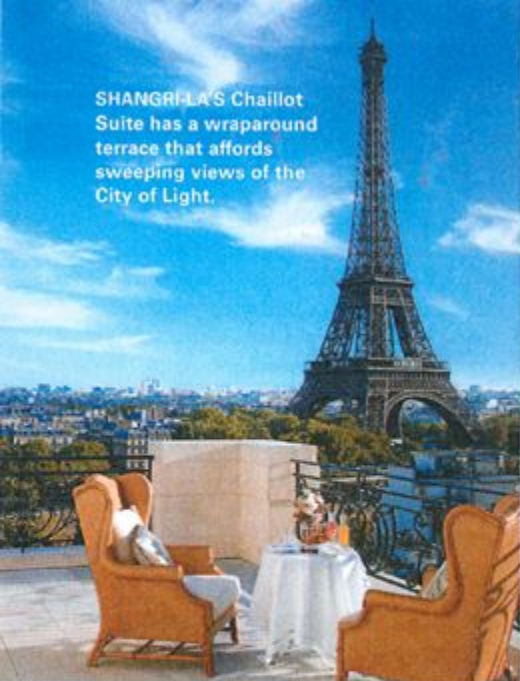


SHANGRI-LA'S Panoramic Suite (this photo) looks out over some of Paris' most famous landmarks.

SAINT JAMES PARIS' lobby (right) is the first of many visually stunning features that guests will encounter.



SHANGRI-LA'S Chaillot Suite has a wraparound terrace that affords sweeping views of the City of Light.



SAINT JAMES' Junior Suite exemplifies designer Bambi Sloan's flair for luxury, whimsy and joie de vivre.

ADVISOR INSIGHT:

Colombe McCarthy, director of the European division at **Destinations & Adventures International** in Beverly Hills, has endless insider tips about her native Paris. "I just went to Sola, a hot new restaurant that opened five months ago, and loved it—a great combination of Japanese and French techniques, and the young Japanese chef used to work at L'Astrance. Be sure to request downstairs when making your booking—a tatami room set in a beautiful vaulted cellar. Sola has great sake selections and they're planning to open a sake bar too."

McCarthy likes the **Hotel Gabriel** (www.gabrielparismarais.com), a "contemporary, cocooning" hideaway known for its NightCove sleep machine that was developed by a French professor who specializes in sleep disorders. "It is not in Le Marais as the website indicates, but in a really trendy neighborhood near the Canal St. Martin. Apparently, the NightCove works so well that after three nights many guests want to buy it. The Hotel Gabriel sells the machine and ships it for guests [1400 euros]."

For clients looking for a day trip outside the city, McCarthy suggests the **Chateau at Sceaux** (www.domaine-de-sceaux.fr/ledomaine) as an alternative to Versailles and Vaux Le Vicomte. "It's accessible by RER train, has amazing gardens and a great art collection, and of course, is nowhere near the same crowds as Versailles."

devotees. The lobby has been painted over in black and white, a graphic style emphasized by the bold red carpet tumbling down the grand staircase. In front of the fireplace, a double-sided Napoleon III-style canapé faces panther-print velvet armchairs and vintage seats Sloan found while trolling the famous flea markets. Marble floors are edged by Roman-style mosaics, and a crystal chandelier—Sloan calls it her "chaos of lights"—pours from the ceiling in a sparkling cascade.

Behind each door painted a nail-polish red, the chateau's 48 rooms are full of whimsy and riotous colors. More than a curator, Sloan designed each room individually with humor, flair and joie de vivre. Room No. 301 is decked out with blue and white Chinese porcelain; No. 406 is a turquoise tribute to designer Madeleine Castaing. The room Sloan calls the "John Steed" room channels a Magritte painting with lights made of bowler hats and walls swathed in silky dress shirt fabric. Of the 10 suites, No. 310 and No. 311 are the largest. (The "boudoir" category rooms are the smallest.) All rooms come with free Wi-Fi, iHome docking stations, and toiletries by renowned perfumery, Annick Goutal. For VIP bookings, contact Director of Sales and Marketing Nicolas Egloff (sales@saint-james-paris.com; 011-33-1-4405-8193). Note: Sloan will renovate the guest rooms on the last floor in fall.

The hotel's metamorphosis was so striking that its management considered changing its name. But the Saint James, also a private members club, is a Paris institution with a

proud history. So rather than sever ties with its past, the hotel celebrates its Gallic roots. Its book-lined library bar still channels the private gentlemen's club: all-wood paneling, coffee-leather armchairs and gilt-framed portraits. Back in the day, the first hot-air balloons took flight from the chateau's park, so wallpaper depicts 18th-century balloons, also found in the toile de Jouy wall coverings in guest room No. 306, and balloon-like light fixtures lead to the brand-new spa. On the hotel's lower level, your clients can get buffed and massaged with precious stones in the world's first hotel spa by Gemology.

In the garden, balloon-shaped arbors make a lovely setting for a mid-summer's evening aperitif, and the terrace is ideal for savoring Chef Cyrille Robert's menu selections (i.e., king crab wrapped in lettuce with wasabi ice cream, foie gras served with organic toast, tartare of Aubrac beef).

For clients looking to explore the city's famous restaurant scene, Christian Garot (concierge@saint-james-paris.com), a Clefts d'Or concierge who's been with the Saint James for over 20 years, is a wealth of information. Tip: For clients traveling in France by rental car, the Saint James is one of the few Parisian hotels with private parking. Guests can also take spins around town in the hotel's Smart car convertible. Or they could happily ensconce themselves in the chateau, just like the black cat named Pilou—often seen prancing across the bar or curled up on the grand piano—who has adopted the Saint James as his own royal realm. ■