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HOTEL DESIGN, DEVELOPMENT & ARCHITECTURE

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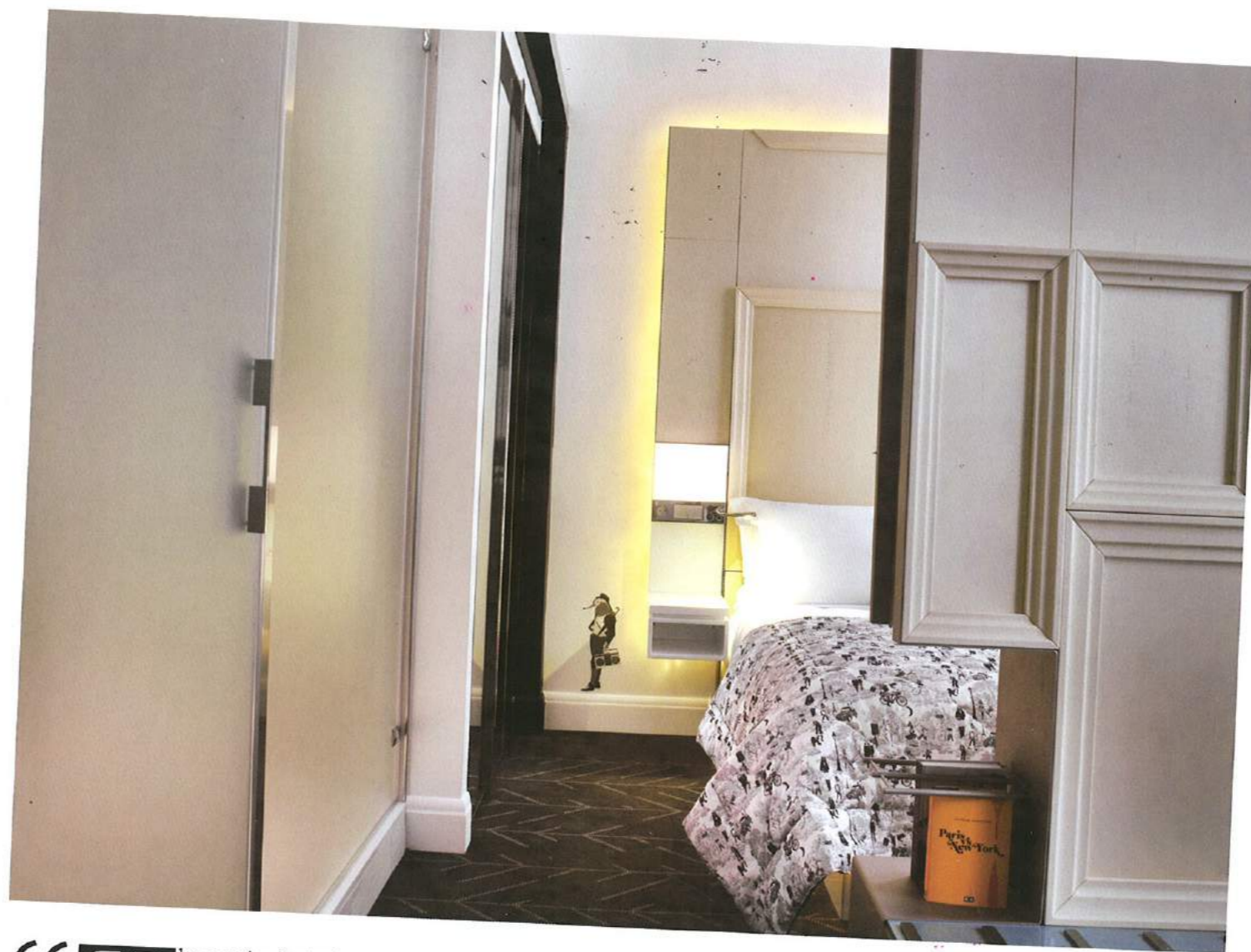


**CONSERVATORIUM**  
HARMONIOUS DESIGN  
FROM PIERO LISSONI

**PUBLIC CHICAGO**  
IAN SCHRAGER MEETS  
THE AMBASSADORS

**W - PARIS OPÉRA**  
ROCKWELL GROUP IGNITE  
THE CITY OF LIGHT

KELLY HOPPEN • Z HOTELS • NEW YORK LOCATION REPORT • ALOFT - EXCEL LONDON



“The question I asked myself was how do we bring the glamour of the opera into this building?” says Diego Gronda, Creative and Managing Director of Madrid-based Rockwell Group Europe. W’s fifth European address had to combine “the energy of New York with the sophistication of the French capital” but also respect the wedge-shaped 1870s Haussmannian building, a former bank, whose façades, entrance hall, period fireplaces and (some) rooms are listed, and, above all, the presence of its mighty neighbour, the Palais Garnier, one of Paris’s iconic monuments, across the street. As Eva Ziegler, W Global Brand Leader, who works with the external designers to establish a distinct ▶

## W Paris-Opéra *Paris*

Words: Natasha Edwards Photography: Courtesy of Starwood Hotels & Resorts

Rockwell Group Europe has created a hotel which combines the restoration of an historic Haussmann building with contemporary interiors based around the central design concept of ‘The Spark’.



► design narrative for each location, puts it: "We aim to be a leader in our category in terms of design but with all the globalisation of hotel brands, we don't want cookie-cutter design."

"The conventional thing in the 21st century is to go out and do the most outrageous thing in a historic building, but we think that W is about an experience," believes Gronda, who came up with The Spark, a wall of light that forms the hotel's centrepiece – perhaps thanks to that frequent misconception that the 'City of Light' epithet is about lighting (when it actually refers to the Enlightenment), but no matter. Although The Spark concept was there from the start, it involved a long design process, experimenting with various materials

and maquettes, including glass blocks and resin, before choosing the final structure that Gronda developed in collaboration with the "amazing people" from Frandsen Group in Denmark. Made from enamelled steel and Plexiglass in graphic black and white pixellated dot patterns, with programmable LED backlighting, the light can be altered in intensity, colour and tempo, according to the time or to suit a specific event, and to give the building a glow that will emanate to the exterior. "We wanted a mutating space, not a passive area," says Gronda. In fact, he toned down the initial concept: "We were afraid that all glass would be too overwhelming. We are not doing this for designers but for people coming to stay. We have to know when to ►

ABOVE: The Living Room features pale grey banquette seating with cushions in David Rockwell's new fabric range for Jim Thompson. A manga style artwork by Shobo Shobo adorns the mirror at the end of the room RIGHT: The Arola tapas restaurant, under two Michelin-star chef Sergi Arola, features flamenco red accents to the design

► step back, it's not a... How do you equate the... with a place that is also... The Spark's undulating dynamism and fluidity... Haussmannian lines and... problem of a complicated... a central feature that dis... and two small interior... impression of one unified... courtyard at the end of... been glazed over to creat... lifts.

Conceived as a molten... is painted red, while li... upholstery, that could... the red damasks and ve...



Room features pale  
upholstery with cushions in  
the fabric range for Jim  
Thompson artwork by Shobo  
Shobo at the end of the  
living room tapas restaurant,  
the star chef Sergi Arola,  
and accents to the design



► step back, it's not a monument to our ego. How do you equate the 'wow' of the design, with a place that is also welcoming."

The Spark's undulating form brings dynamism and fluidity to the classical Haussmannian lines and also resolved the problem of a complicated floor plan, creating a central feature that disguises the stairwell and two small interior courtyards to give the impression of one unified volume. A third courtyard at the end of the entrance hall has been glazed over to create an atrium for the lifts.

Conceived as a molten core, the stairwell is painted red, while lifts have buttoned red upholstery, that could equally well refer to the red damasks and velvets of Palais Garnier.

Grona continues the meltdown metaphor in references to the Haussmannian building: cornices fragment, while classic herringbone parquet is echoed in metal lines set into the black terrazzo floor downstairs and in grey bedroom carpets, where the pattern fizzles out towards the core – "it respects the chevron pattern of parquet but in a very contemporary way."

With cocktail culture at the heart of W's lifestyle approach and the ambition of attracting Parisians as well as visitors, The Spark plays a key role in creating different ambiances in the public spaces. In the W Living Room, pale-grey leather banquettes, sprinkled with eclectic cushions in Rockwell's recent fabric range for Jim Thompson, can

be arranged in different configurations, either isolated or as a communal space. Small bronze-coloured tables take up the cornice moulding motif – as do three metallic lacquered-wood reception desks across the entrance hall. In keeping with W's young fashion-music-design credo, there's a DJ booth inserted into The Spark and a manga-style wall drawing by Shobo Shobo (alias French artist/designer Mehdi Hercberg) on the end mirror. The bar, which can be entered through the lounge or by an independent street entrance, features a small island Champagne bar and enormous, sweeping Martini bar in shiny black resin. Armchairs and high bar seats in black buttoned leather with scarlet piping add drama but also suit ►



ABOVE LEFT: Room designs feature built-in desks, Louis XV style armchairs, open bathrooms with rectangular units combining basin and minibar, and theatrical black dressing tables ABOVE: Frandsen Lighting created "the Spark" – a central lighting feature around which the design concept is based

► the Napoléon III period.

On the mezzanine level, the Arola restaurant has been designed for Spanish executive chef Sergi Arola's contemporary take on tapas. Flamenco-style red rose motif fringed place settings could come out of a play by Lorca and agua potable ceramic plaques are modelled on Barcelona manhole covers.

With 91 rooms and suites in eight categories, the five floors of bedrooms follow the dominant black and white colour scheme, with blue, amber, red, green or cream accents in upholstery, curtains and bedcovers. Here The Spark treatment recurs but in a more discreet form: dressing corridor windows, as a long panel outside each door, and repeated in varying forms inside the rooms. The furnishings are surprisingly eclectic: panelled bedheads that disintegrate towards the spark; thick glass and steel built-in desks; low black leather sofas; revisited parquet carpet and wire

chandeliers; Louis XV style bergère armchairs where the decor has melted away on one arm. A large wooden wall element contains the TV, fold-down luggage rack and assorted niches for books or artworks. Some rooms feature open bathrooms, where a rectangular unit incorporating the basin and minibar provides the divider between bedroom and bathroom, while some suites have walk-in wardrobes and theatrical black dressing tables.

For the "Extreme Wow" suites occupying the prime corner spot, the original architecture is largely left to speak for itself, with floor to ceiling windows, period fireplace and panelled doors, but dressed up – one door conceals a voyeuristic view of the glass-sided shower, and the three-meter-diameter circular leather bed, occupying centre stage beneath the circular ceiling moulding, can be pulled apart with sofas on either side. "It's really a party room," concludes Gronda. ■

## EXPRESS CHECKOUT

W Paris Opéra  
4 rue Meyerbeer  
75009 Paris  
France  
Tel: +33 1 77 48 94 94  
[www.wparisopera.com](http://www.wparisopera.com)

91 rooms and suites  
Arola Restaurant  
Living Room bar  
Sweat gym  
+ Two meeting rooms

Owner / Developer: Meridia Capital  
Operator: W Hotels (Starwood Hotels & Resorts)  
Interior Design: Rockwell Group Europe