



French Evolution

An \$800 million restoration moves La Samaritaine into the future
while honoring the legendary department store's past

By Kasia Dietz

The restoration of the landmark Parisian store La Samaritaine had been 15 years and more than \$800 million in the making, and the retail center was all set to open last spring, just in time to mark the 150th anniversary of its original 1870 establishment.

Of course, even the best-laid plans are subject to the whims of a global pandemic, so that debut was delayed a bit further. In late June of this year, however, the famed department store at last reopened—and there's no question it was worth the wait.

The redesign of the newly christened La Samaritaine Paris Pont-Neuf, led by the luxury goods purveyor LVMH Group, was a staggering undertaking that involved 280 French companies, as well as the Japanese architectural firm SANAA. The

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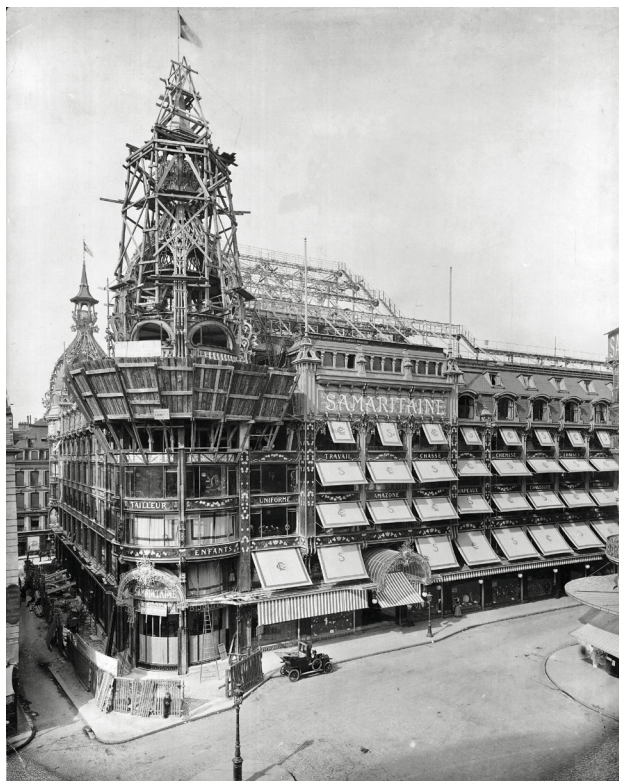
finished product is a block-long complex that houses a store offering more than 600 fashion brands and the most extensive beauty and wellness zone in Paris; a food court with 10 restaurants, cafés, and tearooms; and the five-star Cheval Blanc Paris hotel (opening in September), which will have 72 rooms and suites and a Dior spa. There are even 96 units of public housing and a day-care center.



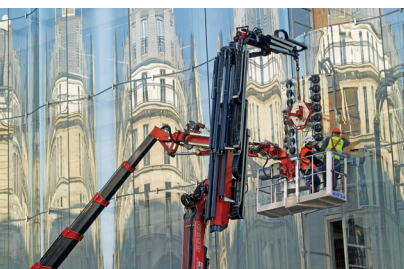
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More notable than the retail offerings, perhaps, is the care that went into restoring this architectural jewel, which is renowned for its Art Nouveau and Art Deco details. Historical monuments architect Jean-François Lagneau, who also renovated the reading room at the National Library of France, brought in artisans to spruce up heritage details such as the mosaic “Samaritaine” sign, the ceramic letters atop the building’s windows, and the gold leaf-covered mosaic tiles on the ground-floor pillars.



While safeguarding the past was paramount, the project also included modern additions, such as a SANAA-designed rippling-glass facade. “You see in this undulating facade the building on the other side, reflected,” says La Samaritaine chairman and CEO Jean-Jacques Guiony. “When you walk through, you see them move.” It’s almost as if the building bends time—keeping a foot in the past, but its eyes on the future.



Vladimir Vasiliev for La Samaritaine (interiors); Pierre-Olivier Deschamps for La Samaritaine (exteriors)