



Fairmont Magazine

VOL. 11 NO. 2

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# The Creators

Meet the minds behind luxurious  
hotel designs in BARCELONA,  
LONDON and NEW YORK CITY





By [Natasha Mekhail](#) Photos by [Hubert Kang](#)

# THE Creators

What goes into designing an unforgettable hotel? We set out to find the answer, visiting three of Fairmont’s most renowned properties and meeting with the top hospitality designers who were tasked with giving them new life. In each case, the creator had the challenge of refurbishing a longstanding and cherished local landmark – and employing the delicacy needed to bring the hotel into the future while paying homage to its past. As we discovered, the hotels’ renewals were much more than the aggregate of their color palettes, materials, furniture and finishes. Along with their refreshed look, these three icons received something even more important: a brand new story to tell.



PIERRE-YVES ROCHON

THE SAVOY, A FAIRMONT  
MANAGED HOTEL, LONDON

ALEXANDRA CHAMPALIMAUD

THE PLAZA, A FAIRMONT  
MANAGED HOTEL, NEW YORK CITY

TERRY MCGILLICUDDY

FAIRMONT REY JUAN  
CARLOS I, BARCELONA

PHOTOS: JUDITH GARDNER/HAMPTON PRODUCER, JANE JONES/ASSISTANT PHOTOGRAPHER  
BRANDON HARRISON/TESTA FENELL HAIR, MAKEUP & WARDROBE, GLESS MEIER, ROBERTA GILLO, LUCY VIGUET



## Watch the Interview

Join us in conversation with Terry McGillicuddy of Richmond International from the Corner Suite at Fairmont Rey Juan Carlos I, Barcelona. [fairmont.com/creators](https://fairmont.com/creators)

# BARCELONA Terry McGillicuddy

A soaring atrium takes on a new level of intimacy in the reinvention of Fairmont Rey Juan Carlos I.

The concrete and glass exterior of Fairmont Rey Juan Carlos I, Barcelona.



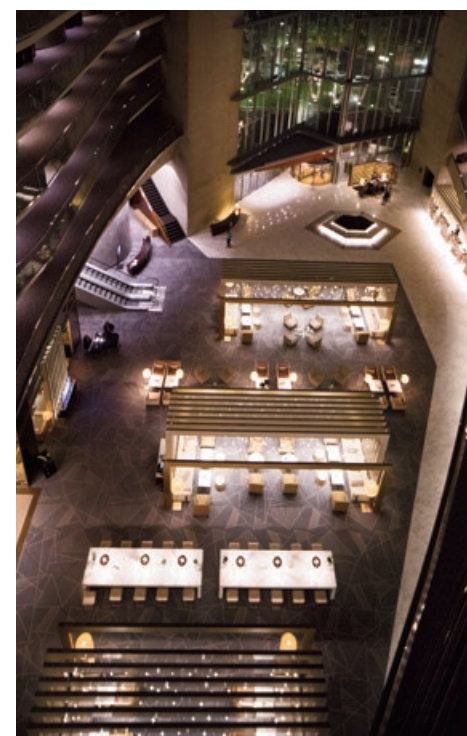
The lobby of Barcelona's Fairmont Rey Juan Carlos I is the very definition of breathtaking.

At one end lies a 15-story wall of windows drawing in endless sunlight and the green hues of the property's gardens. From the other end rises a correspondingly lofty elevator shaft, out of which the hotel's balconied floors encircle the towering atrium. Having this much open space to play with is a rare luxury for a hotel designer, but as Terry McGillicuddy puts it, before the 2016 refurbishment, the initial wow factor was tempered by a lack of coziness in the lobby lounge. "The brief was to create a bright and lively atrium reflecting Barcelona's local plazas and bar culture," says McGillicuddy, director of London-based hospitality design firm Richmond International. "We sought to put this vast space on a more personal, human scale."

Built for the Olympic Games in 1992 by prominent Catalan architect Carlos Ferrater, Fairmont Rey Juan Carlos I makes a dramatic statement

with its exterior's modernist angularity and juxtaposed facade of glass and concrete. "The architect had created something quite unique and dynamic externally that just didn't seem to have any of the life and character that was outside," McGillicuddy explains.

The design solution was to introduce a series of "portals." These slatted archways divide the larger space into several smaller and more intimate gathering places – ideal for lingering over a drink or sharing plates of tapas. Meanwhile, glittering materials such as cascades of pendant lighting, metal accents and white marble tabletops lend the new space a lightness and effervescence that's as much the essence of Barcelona as a sparkling glass of cava. "This was the objective," he says. "To give the hotel a soul, a place within the city it's in."



"The bar represents the busy, fashionable lifestyle that is the Barcelona vibe. Sophisticated, but not pompous. It's quite relaxed."

The new portal structures, along with their atmospheric lighting, give the lobby a distinct ambiance for day (above) and for night (left).





BARCELONA **Terry McGillicuddy**

Terry McGillicuddy scrolls through early hotel mockups with *Fairmont Magazine* editor-in-chief Natasha Mekhail.

## New Lines

“The portal structures in the atrium are the focal point of the design,” says McGillicuddy. “They create more intimate spaces within the lobby. By introducing what is almost a ceiling, it puts you on a human scale rather than sitting in a huge vast void. You feel like you’re in a room, but actually, you’re not in a room. We also introduced various different seating elements – low tables, lounge tables and cocktail tables – so you can get a mix of people in groupings, and it becomes a very social hub.”



## SPARKLING SERVICE

“The client really wanted to involve the Barcelona food and beverage culture of eating tapas and drinking sparkling wine. The materials we introduced – the mirrors, the metalwork, the polished stone – are there to bring a bit of glamour and sophistication to the space. The bar represents the busy, fashionable lifestyle that is the Barcelona vibe. Sophisticated, but not pompous. It’s quite relaxed.”



## REDEFINED ARCHITECTURE

“The original atrium interior was dark, heavy and monumental. The most dominant thing you felt were the floors, which I associated with a skeleton: a rib cage of floors and a spine where the elevators go up. This was something we needed to address by putting in lighter visual materials. The surface finishes were adjusted to give a brighter feel to the overall space, making the atrium feel more inviting.”



## LOUNGE LIGHTING

“The addition of the level of lighting within the lounge and bar areas is an attraction and also creates a mood. These drops of light with the sparkle of glass and metalwork feel like little shining diamonds. You can turn them down and make it very comfortable, or lift them up and make it very bright. It provides a visual focus when you walk into the space.”

## Cool Escape

“The introduction of a simple water feature at the entrance to the atrium provides coolness on arrival from the heat outside and delivers a quiet distraction from the noisy acoustics of this large space. It’s surrounded by some patterned, textured tiles – replicas of some of the Barcelona pavements, which were inspired by Gaudí, if not designed originally by him. The water provides an offset to the hard surfaces. It just calms things down.”





# NEW YORK CITY Alexandra Champalimaud

The Plaza's Legacy Suites get a contemporary upgrade with a chic Upper East Side apartment feel.



## Watch the Interview

Join us in conversation with Alexandra Champalimaud of Champalimaud Design from a Legacy Suite at The Plaza, A Fairmont Managed Hotel. [fairmont.com/creators](https://www.fairmont.com/creators)



With its prestigious 5th Avenue address and imposing facade, The Plaza is a symbol of New York elegance.

“The whole world knows about The Plaza. It’s famous everywhere,” says Alexandra Champalimaud.

Her eponymous New York-based design firm was commissioned to undertake the refurbishment of the 29 Legacy Suites, which debuted in June 2015.

The glamorous guest rooms are as much a part of the 110-year-old hotel’s DNA as its famous fictional resident, Eloise, and its address at the edge of Central Park. In fact, it was to that urban oasis that Champalimaud turned for inspiration. Not only do the suites face the park, their great door-like windows (grandfathered in from a time before hotel safety codes prevented such liberalities) also open out over its verdant splendor.

“The focal point is the view,” she says. “We’ve made sure that the windows stay clear of too much curtaining so the rooms feel bathed in light.” The decor, too, reflects the park in patterns of vegetation on the floor coverings, in small paintings of flowers and in the hidden botanical motifs on the underside of lampshades.

She also sought to turn the previously European-influenced suites into spaces that better represented modern Manhattan. “We brought a New York attitude to the renovation,” she says. “The idea was to make the experience entirely residential, something akin to a beautiful, sophisticated apartment on the Upper East Side.”

Champalimaud achieved that feel by, in her words, “making the suites take themselves a little less seriously.” She brought in smaller furniture pieces to encourage freedom of movement; she took the formality out of the rooms’ artwork, replacing classic oil paintings with contemporary photographs of New York City Ballet costumes; and she creatively freshened up formerly stuffy staples, like the rooms’ heavy light fixtures and gilded headboards.

“When I walk into these suites now, I am overjoyed,” she says. “They’re not pretentious, but they’re glamorous. They’re essentially New York and The Plaza.” —



The view of Central Park informed the color palette and inspired the botanical motifs found throughout the suite.



“The focal point is the view. We’ve made sure that the windows stay clear of too much curtaining so the rooms feel bathed in light.”



## SOURCES OF REFLECTION

“The materials, the fabrics and the surfaces are all a great study in reflection: the velvets, the antique mirrors on the coffee table and the carpet, with the bit of silk it has, provide a sheen. These small, superficial surface reflections cause a levity in the room that one may not be entirely aware of, but the overall perception makes the space feel happy and light.”



Alexandra Champalimaud discusses the Legacy Suites’ design on camera with *Fairmont Magazine*.



## GILDED THROWBACK

“Those of us who have known The Plaza over the years will remember the very strong, dominant headboard that existed in the previous rooms,” says Champalimaud. “We kept it, but we changed its attitude. We’ve maintained the beautiful gilding, which is so very much The Plaza, but we’ve added a beautiful pale blue leather. It went from a heavy, very adorned, take-me-very-seriously piece to something that is fresh and much more hip.”



## Tints from Nature

“It was important to keep the color palette light and fresh, yet classical. The tones we’ve used – creams, grays, blues, pale yellows and golds – reflect the outdoors and particularly Central Park. The pale yellow is related to the rays of the sun, blue-gray to the outdoors and the sky. All of these colors in some way connote the experience of walking in the park.”

## HIDDEN BOTANICALS

“One of the pieces we had the most fun creating was the refurbishment of an old gilded light fixture that we had to keep for all sorts of reasons – but in doing so, we turned it into one of my favorite pieces in the whole suite. We created a custom lampshade with a glorious botanical-patterned lining on the inside. When the light goes on, that pattern comes to life and it becomes central to the decor.”



## DECONSTRUCTED CHANDELIER

“To me, the pieces that make the single biggest difference are the chandeliers, because they are, at the same time, brilliantly classic and superbly modern. They essentially take the traditional language of faceted crystal and redefine it with very light small pendants, loosely put together. They are just so fresh in their attitude and work so beautifully in these suites, that, without a doubt, they are my favorite item.”





## Watch the Interview

Join us in conversation with Pierre-Yves Rochon of PYR Design from the Royal Suite at The Savoy, A Fairmont Managed Hotel.  
[fairmont.com/creators](https://fairmont.com/creators)

# LONDON Pierre-Yves Rochon

London's restored icon on the Strand, The Savoy, pulls off British pomp and ceremony in the most modern of ways.



“Edwardian and the 1930s: Do you know many hotels around the world that have these *two* strong identities?”

Pierre-Yves Rochon in the Beaufort Bar, one of his favorite spaces in the refurbished hotel, which sits on the north bank of the Thames.



The Savoy's airy lobby is conspicuously free of a reception desk. Staff perform check-ins in a discreet, adjoining drawing room.

In London there is no other hotel that holds as much English cultural capital as The Savoy, A Fairmont Managed Hotel. It's where Winston Churchill met with his dining club every other Thursday; a young Princess Elizabeth first appeared with her then-husband-to-be, Prince Philip of Greece; and The Beatles famously ordered porridge and pea sandwiches from the restaurant. When the hotel closed in 2007 for a three-year renovation, the task of reinventing the crown jewel of the Strand fell to renowned designer Pierre-Yves Rochon – a man on whom the irony of a Frenchman designing a hotel that epitomized English luxury was not lost. “When I began, my main concern was, of course, to respect the hotel,” he explains. “And change-wise, to be as British as I could.”

Rochon, whose firm, PYR, is based in Paris with offices in Chicago, was selected on precedent. His hotel restorations in France and elsewhere demonstrate a visionary ability to reflect history through a modern lens. His keen sense of color, arrangement and finish effectively give his spaces a charming antique character without ever feeling old-fashioned.

In short, he convincingly sweeps you to another era – whether or not that era actually existed.

In the pre-renovation Savoy, Rochon had two period influences to work with: classical Edwardian and 1930s Art Deco. The mix of these styles is represented throughout the hotel, from the elegant guest rooms overlooking the Thames to the glamorous black-and-gold Beaufort Bar.

“Do you know many hotels around the world that have these *two* strong identities?” he says. “I decided to keep them and design around them.”

And how were the reviews of the Frenchman's work? Let's just say that when Rochon toured the finished property with Prince Charles, the Royal exclaimed that if his grandmother were still here today, she would have been very pleased to come back to The Savoy. “That was, for me, a nice thing to receive,” says Rochon. —





## LACQUERED LIFTS

“One of the elements from the previous design that surprised me was the elevator cab,” says Rochon. “The hotel has three elevator cabs completely lacquered in Chinese design. One is red, one is blue and gold, and one is a deep green. It’s very unusual to find this level of ornamentation in a hotel elevator. I was so impressed that we decided to keep them. Even today, they are in very good condition.”



## REFRESHED FRIEZE

“When I’m doing a renovation on a historic hotel, my responsibility is to not destroy its past but to bring it into the future. One of the elements I wanted to keep was the Greek-inspired frieze in the lobby, called “An Idyll of a Golden Age.” It had been painted very dark and was very dull. To refresh it, we painted the background a light celadon green – a very British color – that brings back the life to this golden age.”

## Tearoom Transformed

“It was important to me to preserve the tradition of high tea at The Savoy, but when I first walked into the Thames Foyer, I found it huge and without life unless the room was full. So I decided to put a gazebo in the middle. It creates smaller corners, so you never feel alone. The gazebo has many possibilities. You can have a piano player, you can do performances. I really think the Thames Foyer is the heart of The Savoy.”



## COLONIAL INFLUENCES

“To reach the high tea, you must pass through the Upper Thames Foyer. That area before had no identity. And where does tea come from? From India and from China. So we put these countries’ designs – the fabric of the wall coverings, the paintings, the elephants – alongside English furniture to tell a story of England’s colonial history.”



Pierre-Yves Rochon being interviewed in The Savoy’s Royal Suite.

## Touch of the Thames

“One of the focal points of the renovation of The Savoy is the Lalique fountain at the entrance of the hotel. It was a big fight for me to impose this crystal fountain, only because it was quite expensive. Why the Lalique fountain? First, it represents the hotel’s 1930s aesthetic, and second, we are next to the river, so why not have fish coming from the River Thames made out of crystal?”

