

# post modernist expression

PARIS ARCHITECTURE/DESIGN FIRM AXEL SCHOENERT PAYS *HOMMAGE* TO ART DECO VIA THEIR HOTEL GABRIEL

Words :: J. Lynn Fraser // Images :: Axel Schoenert Architectes Associés-ASAA



THE RENOVATION OF THE 1200m2 Hotel Gabriel. Situated in the heart of the oldest section of Paris, the Marais, ASAA modernizes Art Deco.

Architect and designer Axel Schoenert envisioned a boutique hotel that encapsulated “les années folles” or the crazy years of 1920s and 1930s Paris. “The client of a boutique hotel likes to come to it for the intimacy it confers and for living an experience,” Schoenert believes. “We thought that people will love to live in the Art Deco period, but that they would appreciate it better if they live it as a complete experience: for this we needed to create a surprising place.”

The ‘surprise’ is supplied by the philosophy behind the Hotel Gabriel’s combination of Art Deco ambiance and modern high tech materials. “Syncretism” or “home blending,” according to Schoenert, allowed the firm to “play with time and design until you find the perfect match, then you obtain your proper design and style.”

Hotel Gabriel’s public spaces are reminiscent of Paris café culture of the 1920s and 1930s. Their sleek ‘brocade’ wallpaper and etched glass room dividers, clean-lined banquettes, as well as dining spaces and furniture recall the

streamlined, linear beauty of 1930’s travel posters but with a post-modernist ‘wink’.

Art Deco design combined both organic and high tech materials such as aluminum and plastic, treating them as rare materials. At the Hotel Gabriel Corian®, created by Dupont, is used in the same manner. Usually treated as a surface for kitchen counters and backsplashes Corian® is a versatile material. It can be drilled, cut, or sculpted. In the Hotel an illuminated frieze, designed as an Art Deco leitmotif for the hotel, is created from Corian®. The material is also used in the hotel’s bathrooms creating a light-sculpted, minimalist feel.

Schoenert’s home blending philosophy is also found in the hotel’s 41 bedrooms where stone, luxe silk and wool Baldaquin linens, hand-made rugs, and ash wood are combined with LCD screens, I-pod stations, and LED lighting. The overall look is that of the 1930s ocean liners, pared down and luxurious.

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design for its uncluttered aspect, with the neutral but high quality material mixed with high technology." Schoenert graduated from a Technische Hochschule in Karlsruhe Germany. In his last year he studied in Chicago and worked at the Chicago firm of Fujikawa Johnson Gobel Architects, Inc. (formerly the Mies van Der Rohe agency).

"Axel Schoenert Architectes Associés is a really eclectic agency which deals with architecture both internal and external," notes Schoenert. The firm's projects include work on hotels, restaurants, office buildings, building and trade centres. ASAA's work on the façade of the Bull training centre in Massy France, made of a double skin of polished aluminium, was also influenced by 1930s design

of vintage Airstream vehicles. ASAA has employed high tech materials with historic buildings before. In their renovation of the famous Russian Tsum shopping centre the roof and interior of the Bolshoi theatre and other historic buildings were enclosed by a FTB inflatable membrane supported by a metal skeleton.

Light, transparency, high tech materials, and minimalist elements softened by the sensuality of wood, fabric and stone are the hallmarks of ASAA's design work and architectural projects. Axel Schoenert's *hommage* to Art Deco at the Hotel Gabriel is emblematic of the firm's technical finesse and whimsy creating a chic, uncluttered approach to design. 

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