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LE BRISTOL REBORN

After closing its doors in June of 2014, Le Bristol Beirut has been restored and renovated by architect, president and partner of GM Architects, Galal Mahmoud who shares insights on how he transformed this 65-year old Lebanese institution



“I have been visiting the hotel since my childhood and always remember being impressed by its grandeur and elegance”



1. What was your brief before starting the project and what needed to be done?

It took a lot of discussion and reflection to reach the brief stage as it is such a historical and cultural institution within Beirut. Also, for me personally, it was more complicated as I was so close to the project; the hotel is not only a key part of Beirut's history but also of mine! I had to think about if I could take on something so personal to me. I have been visiting the hotel since my childhood and always remember being impressed by its grandeur and elegance. Knowing how to capture this spirit took a lot of reflection and discussion. In addition, the deeper we looked beyond the surface, the more we realized just how big a project it would be. Structurally there were architectural corrections to be made before we could look at the interior design.

2. How did you address those needs?

We worked very closely with the team at the hotel and the owners, making sure we'd understood what they were looking for, also proposing our creative perspective and then making sure these two viewpoints crossed over. We also spent a lot of time looking through archives of the hotel in its glory days and picked out key moments in its history. We tried to identify what had made the hotel so legendary and how we could enhance this with a contemporary vibe.

3. What was the underlying theme of the redesign?

The lobby sets the tone for the rest of the hotel, representing a range of styles from the most important decades for the hotel, but also with classic and timeless overtones. For example we used a solid dark walnut desk for the reception desk together with old paintings from the hotel's collection. However contemporary lines link the space to the Beirut of today. The overall theme is that the hotel's history has arrived to a meeting point with the

present day. For the rooms we have picked out three themes which encapsulate what the hotel represents; they are 'Oriental', '60s' and 'Modern classic' giving guests a sense of escape.

4. How much of the original design has remained intact – what has involved and what's completely new?

We obviously tried to keep as many original features as possible; an example being the Damascene woodwork which dates from the 19th century. It was installed during the time of the hotel's construction in 1955 by Emile Tarazi. The chairs and sofas are original but have been re-upholstered in warm colors in homage to the romantic orientalism of that time. It is really a mix of half original style and half contemporary.

5. What is it about the hotel that's undeniably Galal?

Two major guiding forces of GM Architect's practice are restfulness and well-being. We used the warm colors and design, to create a soothing and relaxing environment.

Also, the mix of different cultural influences is always evident in the designs of GM Architects. This is partly because the firm is based in Lebanon, a country that has been a melting pot of different cultures throughout its history. In addition, my influences are really international. I have Egyptian parents, an English grandmother and many years spent travelling in other countries, notably France where I completed my architectural training. I take inspiration from all over the world. However, despite this, I like each project to be immersed in the local culture, using materials sourced from the local area and also supporting the work of designers and artists from the region. This was also true of Le Bristol project as we worked with some exciting Lebanese artists and designers such as Nada Debs.



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The renovation of Le Bristol Hotel was under the expert vision of Galal Mahmoud of GM Architects, with his partners Randa Chahine and Anwar El Haggi, as well as the project architect Nada Mallat.

1. The floor has a draughts-board motif in black and white
2. Walls are dressed in grey wood and white pearl tones
3. The walnut desk is an original feature of the hotel that has been upcycled
4. The furniture is upholstered in petrol blue and old rose colors



A classic Pleyel piano



The 'Oriental' room