



Managed Like a Private House

An Interview with Norbert Henrot,
General Manager, Hotel Raphael, Paris



Raphael restaurant (left);
Hotel Raphael, Paris facade (above)

EDITORS' NOTE Norbert Henrot began his career with the 50-room Hotel Métropole Opéra and followed this with studies at a hotel management school in Paris. He later worked at the Hôtel Sofitel Paris Porte de Sèvres as a reception agent. From 1980 to 1982, he worked at the Hôtel de Crillon as Rooms Division Manager. In 1983, he worked at The Stafford London Hotel where he eventually served in a number of positions. In 1984, he returned to Hôtel de Crillon Paris as the Front Desk Manager. From 1989 to 1997, he was at Hotel Meurice as the Resident Manager and was promoted to General Manager, a position held from 1997 to 2004 when he joined the family of the Baverez Group as the General Manager of the Hotel Raphael.



Norbert Henrot

PROPERTY BRIEF Paris-based Hotel Raphael (www.hotel-raphael.com) is perfectly situated adjacent to the Champs-Élysées and the Arc de Triomphe, and is on the main route to the Trocadéro and the Eiffel Tower. The hotel boasts a magical blend of traditional modernity and welcoming simplicity and offers 38 suites, 52 rooms, a gourmet restaurant, six conference and banquet rooms, Bar Anglais, a fitness room, a business corner, concierge services, and free Wi-Fi in all rooms and public areas.

The paneling, woodwork, and paintings in the hotel have been here since its opening. Those paintings must be very valuable.

Yes, the paintings are all originals. The furniture was selected in 1925 by the grandfather of Véronique Valcke, director of the Regina Hotel Group that owns the hotel. It's still the only French five-star hotel run privately by a French family and you will find original paintings in the gallery that are very expensive. I'm confident we have good security since we also have an original Turner painting.

You are known to have the best concierge in Paris.

Lionel Lorans is the French National Clefs d'or President. He's very nice, and well-known by the customers and throughout the industry.

Are most of your guests from North America?

Forty percent of the customers are from North America because they love the French Parisian style of the hotel. They appreciate a hotel with original decoration, which is very important.

You have very cozy French decor, but in the bathrooms, you have new showers and a modern infrastructure.

Yes. We spent a lot of money to maintain the ambience of the hotel and to be a five-star with new norms.

We have also had to change the fire detection system. It's up to all the modern standards.

When we changed the cable for the fire detection system, we had to take out all of the molding in the corridors of the rooms. It was a good time to also upgrade the cable for the Internet and telephone and paint the corridors. The nature of the painting also required a special artist to do it properly.

So to take out a little cable, we had to break the molding and recreate it exactly. When you do that, the corridor by the bedroom is blocked so you cannot have customers inside.

So the cost was ten times more than what was initially expected.

Is it finished now?

It's finished now. But this year, we are going to work on the kitchen and the lift. It will be a real challenge because the cabin of the lift is from 1925 – it's the most beautiful cabin in Paris because of the wood paneling. So we will probably keep the cabin but put in a new motor and a new base.

The elevator is a museum piece.

It works perfectly, but we would like to improve the speed of the lift and change the door as well. We have to improve every year for the satisfaction of the customer.

You have a new chef.

Yes. Amandine Chaignot, who is very young – just 33 years old – started with us several months ago. She used to be the Sous Chef at The Crillon; she worked at Le Meurice and the Plaza Athénée with one of the chefs for Mr. Ducasse. She also attended the Ferrandi, a very special school for cooking in Paris.

Before becoming a chef, she was a pharmacy student because her parents own pharmacies. But she was not happy at that so

she decided to become a chef and she's a very good one. The restaurant has received very good reviews. The restaurant is full every evening and guests have to make a reservation to get a table. So she has had a very good start.

She also communicates well with the women who own the hotel.

We will improve the kitchen facilities this year. We completely renovated the restaurant with light decoration, new armchairs, new painting, and new carpeting. The restaurant now has a fantastic touch of modern decoration selected by Véronique Valcke.

The two women that own the hotel are mother and daughter and are very hands on.

That is very important to me. To have direct contact with the owner is very special because the owner operates the hotel and comes in every day. Often, they determine themselves if we need an extra item of decoration or if we need to change the curtains. If the housekeeper sees the need to change the decoration, carpeting or curtains, she can also speak directly to the owner. The hotel is managed like a private house, which is good for us and very good for the customer – you can see the difference.

What are the best times of the year to visit Paris and the hotel for tourists?

In the past, December was a good period to come because around Christmas, it was always quiet. But the hotel is now almost fully booked over the holidays because the decoration of Christmas is like that in New York – we have improved the decorations for Christmas in France and many people are coming to see the shops and the Champs-Élysées; it's a good time to come, as there are hotels that may have lessened their rates. We offer a special rate for low season. August is also a good period and July has become high season.

From the beginning of the Spring in April, we open the terrace as well and there are flowers everywhere.

You are referring to your beautiful rooftop terrace overlooking the Eiffel Tower?

Yes, and this year, Amandine Chaignot, our new chef, is going to work on something special to propose to the customers dining on the terrace. ●