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Waldorf Astoria's New Residences Elegantly Blend Past and Present

AD100 designer Jean-Louis Deniot subtly references the iconic hotel's Art Deco history for the Towers of the Waldorf

By **Elizabeth Fazzare**
Impressions: **1,270,989**



For a two-bedroom, two-bath model unit at the Towers of the Waldorf Astoria in New York, AD100 designer Jean-Louis Deniot designed custom furniture to fit the rooms' exact proportions. His goal, he says, was to achieve a space that "blurs the lines between past, future, and present." Image: Noe & Associates/The Boundary

Since 2017, New York's iconic Waldorf Astoria hotel has been closed for renovation, but when the Art Deco landmark reopens in 2022, fortunate folks will be able to check in permanently. Following its 2014 sale to a financial conglomerate now owned by the Chinese government and a scrupulous restoration of its landmarked interior and exterior by architecture firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill and interior designer Pierre-Yves Rochon, the 1931 hotel has been partially converted

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into condominiums, taking a page out of the book of another historic New York icon, the Plaza Hotel.

In the Towers of the Waldorf Astoria, AD100 designer Jean-Louis Deniot's French eye has guided the interiors for 375 new luxury residences and more than 50,000 square feet of dedicated amenities. The designer took inspiration from the hotel's Art Deco-era origin (when it was born as a composite of the previously separated Waldorf and Astoria hotels), added a touch of European streamlined modernism, and reinvented it all for present day. The result "blurs lines between past, present, and future," he says, with two-step molding, faceted taps and hardware, and sleek contemporary finishes within apartments where enfilades run the length and marble adds glam. Deniot walked AD PRO through a two-bedroom, two-bath model unit where his interior design (and staging) gives modern luxury a historic twist.



"Even if it's as big as a little pocket, a marble foyer gives a sense of arrival and a little more spacious feeling," says Deniot.

Image: Noe & Associates/The Boundary

AD PRO: How was your design influenced by the structure's historic envelope?

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Jean-Louis Deniot: The design was a continuation of the building's history, not a re-creation of it. It's an evolution; it's not a revolution. I had to find a way to give the Waldorf Astoria flavor without using the typical Waldorf Astoria symbolism. I wanted to give an impression of something Neo-Art Deco through contemporary shapes, ideas, finishes, and profiles. The model unit gives a canvas that has the personality of the Waldorf without being a pastiche. Inside, that personality can fade away to show potential residents that they could appropriate the space to their own needs and bring their own personality to their residence.

AD PRO: How did you translate that impression of Art Deco into a contemporary design?

JLD: During the Art Deco period, there were two schools: the traditionalists, with Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann, who designed in a style a little more ornate, and the continuation of the French Neoclassicism, where lines are thinner but it's still a little flowery. But that's not the angle I wanted to take. I wanted to do something slightly more Dutch, more conservative, more Gerrit Rietveld, which is from the same time but was more visionary, more sharp-angled, and more design-advanced. I designed in a contemporary blend of both schools: I used some of the geometric Constructivist shapes, but then I applied fine finishes on top.



Deniot designed the coffered ceilings with integrated recessed lighting and streamlined moldings that allude to the 1930s origin of the hotel.

Image: Noe & Associates/The Boundary

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AD PRO: So taking a more streamlined angle on Art Deco allowed you to transition the apartment design into the present?

JLD: Exactly. Playing with asymmetry and juxtaposing slightly more simplified shapes with more dynamic, futuristic pieces. I love when in my work, you don't know if it's part of the past, part of the present, or part of the future.

AD PRO: Do you feel your design blurs those timelines?

JLD: Yes, and in my mind it is justified because it makes reference to the historic, it feels fresh and current, and it feels timeless. I created some geometric profiles in the molding, casework, baseboards, and vanities to reflect that modernism. They've been created in a contemporary way but are reminiscent of Art Deco. And they give a nice blank palette for each owner and each interior designer to personalize it.

I've worked a lot in [real estate] developments in New York and most of the owners demolish an interior when they buy an apartment. Here, we were trying to give them a canvas that has a little bit of personality but is slightly unidentifiable, so that people could love it instantly and not feel the urge for major modifications. I don't like waste.



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"We designed the floor in a shape that is reminiscent of the W and the A of the Waldorf Astoria," says Deniot of the master bath, which features Carrara and Bardiglio Imperial tiles. "We tried not to make the marble in the bathroom too overpowering, because sometimes too much marble can feel like a tomb."

Image: Noe & Associates/The Boundary

AD PRO: I see some of that kind of streamlined sensibility, too, in the furniture choices.

Furniture-wise, all pieces were inspired by history but were redesigned in a slightly sleeker way. The curved shapes and the sense of geometry create a structure within the space.

The furniture has been chosen to create an apartment that is half sanctuary and half sex appeal. Some of the chairs, because of the rounded shape, feel like a fur cuff around a shoulder. And then the sofa invites you to lie on it in a sensual way, but if you want to just be lazy on your couch, you can do that too. So it's really a balance play.



Custom cabinetry manufactured by Molteni&C feature in the kitchen, which Deniot designed for entertaining.

Image: Noe & Associates/The Boundary

AD PRO: And most of the pieces you've used are custom?

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Absolutely. The idea is that you play with the space by choosing specific furniture and dimensioning every inch of it so it gives that impression of being more spacious. It's that fine tuning that makes it appealing to the buyer. The customization allows you to control and direct each and every proportion so that the furniture is a complement to the real estate.



An enfilade from the kitchen through to the guest bath creates the feeling of spaciousness within the apartment.

Image: Noe & Associates/The Boundary

AD PRO: How did you choose the wall coverings and the color palette?

There's never any basic paint; it's either slightly textured wallpaper or it's a stucco. In the living room it looks like a simple gray paint but makes the wall feel deeper; it makes the room feel larger. There are not many white surfaces, apart from the trimming. I like the idea that you don't remember the walls in the master bedroom. The

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job was for the apartment to be likable but also for the decoration to be forgettable, because we are here to sell real estate.



*A guest bath has a striped marble floor.
Image: Noe & Associates/The Boundary*

AD PRO: That's a good lesson for designing in any real estate project: If you can't remember the color of the wall in the bedroom, then a buyer can imagine whatever color they might want it to be.

In the amenities and in the rest of the building, I used much bolder and stronger decorating statements because I wanted to bring every owner on a trip, as a member of a great private club within the building.

Project Details

Name: The Towers of the Waldorf Astoria

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Design team: Jean-Louis Deniot (residential and amenities designer); Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (architect)

Location: New York City

Favorite part of the project: "The fact that I used proportions, shadow, silhouettes, and a variety of muted colors in order to compose the space as though a painting," says Deniot.

Biggest challenge: "The challenge was to infuse the new areas of the Waldorf Astoria residences with the preexisting hotel DNA—so giving the sense of the Waldorf while avoiding the duplication of the historical elements."

Most interesting thing on the project mood board: "A 1930s bronze and gold lamé dress by Coco Chanel, which I used as an inspiration to design the residences' bronze elevator doors."

Strangest source: "The strangest material component would be in the chandelier in the dining room. What's poetic about this piece is that the light bulbs of the chandelier are covered one by one with real dandelion flowers."

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