

PURE



PARIS

One of the French capital's 'palace' hotels, Le Bristol Paris is an icon. General manager Leah Marshall explains how this five-star *grande dame* continues to surprise and delight in equal measure

Interviews — Harriet Hirschler

Quintessentially. *Hi Leah. How does it feel to be open again?*

Leah Marshall. It's a pure joy. With so many Parisians coming and going at the hotel there's always a nice buzz in the public areas, and that of course just makes us all very happy.

Q. *What rooms offer the best view?*

LM. The Suite 1925, named after the year Le Bristol Paris opened as a hotel, and beautifully redone by our interior designer Countess Douglas, a member of the Oetker family [who own the hotel]. She was with her father when he bought the hotel in 1978 and was very involved in its renovation then, as well as installing the garden (a unique feature among other Parisian palaces, because

it's so big). Suite 1925 is a little pearl with a wonderful library, cosy living space, spacious bedroom and the best walk-in closet. Plus a great view of the Eiffel Tower!

Q. *Are there any secret places in the hotels we should check out?*

LM. We'd need to accompany you, but we're very proud of our workshops 'backstage'. Over a year ago, our Michelin-starred chef, Eric Frechon, came upon Roland Feuillas, a gentleman who was passionate about the importance of eating good bread. Eric believes that so much starts with a good loaf of bread – so now we bake our own loaves at the hotel. We had to install our own flour mill backstage – something that was the start of us opening other workshops.

The next step was hiring a brilliant young chocolate chef, and now we have our own chocolate factory, too. We also redid the wine cellars so that special guests can have a tour and a little sampling.

Q. *What are the most unusual requests your concierge has had?*

LM. One that springs to mind was when a family was leaving us to go to Portugal. They had two young children and the mother was panicking, because she didn't have enough of the baby formula she normally buys in France. They were already in Faro and it was 9pm. The concierge gets a call, saying they need to have this baby formula from France by early morning at the latest. Our concierge made contact with someone in Nice, who



purchased the formula from a pharmacy, got on a plane at dawn and flew personally to Portugal to deliver it. And they're still very good guests of ours today.

Q. They must have been very grateful...

LM. Yes! But we have so many opportunities with our concierge – and again, they are very good at sharing a request when they know it's not going to be the easiest. We also have Bernard Neveu, our sommelier, who always has fabulous ideas. For example, this one couple were celebrating their 25th anniversary – they're wine aficionados – and they were able to fly to a vineyard in Burgundy by helicopter with Bernard. It's so exclusive that nobody can go unless they have those established connections and relationships that we have developed over the years. So we're able to do some very special things.

Q. Which celebrities have visited?

LM. There've been so many! But one that comes to mind is David Beckham. We had the pleasure of having David for a six-month stretch when he was at Paris St-Germain football club. He, of course, was at the hotel for much of the season on his own. We had the pleasure of having the whole family – Victoria and the children – when they could visit. He just became such an extension of us. Always so kind and so gracious.

Q. And you have your very own famous furry resident – Fa-Raon the cat?

LM. Right, who by the way is going to be celebrating his 10th birthday in May. The Burma breed is amazing. They're just so docile, and they're not a risk or concern for those with allergies. However, we're very

careful not to encourage Fa-Raon to visit the room or suite of a guest with any particular allergies. Because he does tend to go up and visit, or even stay over, with guests.

Q. Does he have a favourite room?

LM. He doesn't have one designated room, but he knows those guests who happen to be keen on cats. And he'll follow them into the lift.

Q. We're at the bar, what should we order?

LM. The 'old fashioned' – our most requested. We have the most brilliant team of mixologists, who are young, dynamic, with lots of personality. And every season, instead of using the traditional bourbon or whiskey, they'll do their own take on the cocktail: maybe this winter they'll create it with tequila. They're also always thrilled to conjure up a bespoke cocktail for a guest if they know what their favourite spirit is.

Q. What's the secret to good service?

LM. Personalised attention and consistency. It's no good being great on one occasion, you have to be great and attentive; sincere and natural, on every occasion – with every single guest. I always say that everyone who comes through the front doors is a VIP. We tend to talk a lot about proximity and being curious, and so you ask questions – when appropriate, of course. Because the more you know about a guest, the better it is.

Q. How should I feel when I step in Le Paris Bristol for the first time?

LM. Anyone who comes through the front doors, be it a Parisian regular, or those coming for their first visit, will feel good as soon as they walk in because there's a

positive energy in the hotel. We like to say there's soul at Le Bristol. We want everybody to be really well taken care of.

If you'd like to find out more about booking a stay at Le Bristol Paris, please visit quintessentiallytravel.com or email info@quintessentiallytravel.com

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A suite view of the Eiffel Tower; The rooftop swimming pool;

OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP
The hotel lobby; Le Bristol Paris's iconic façade



Inside the palace

A family affair: In 1923, Hippolyte Jammet purchased the townhouse with plans to transform it into a luxury hotel. In 1978, the Jammet family wrote to the Oetker family, who owned the Hotel du Cap-Eden-Roc in Cap d'Antibes, about their potential interest in purchasing the hotel. Now the Oetkers own three hotels in France – the third being the Château Saint-Martin in Venice.

A sanctuary: During the French Resistance in Paris, Le Bristol was the only palace not occupied by the Nazis and became the home of the American Embassy and American nationals living in Paris. The Jammet family also hid a highly regarded Jewish architect in the hotel for three years. He went on to design the hotel's panoramic lift that takes guests from the first floor stairwell to the spa.

A palace: In 2011, Le Bristol Paris was the first hotel to be given 'palace' designation, regarded as even better than 'five-star'. This is marked by a plaque on the front door.



Jardin centre

We speak to Lady Arabella Lennox-Boyd, who was appointed to reimagine Le Bristol's private courtyard garden, a green oasis at the centre of the hotel.

Q. What inspired the design for the new courtyard?

Arabella Lennox-Boyd. I wanted to create a country feel in the city, combining formal and country-cottage elements. Formal topiary and hedges are contrasted with loose planting and flowing grasses.

Q. How will the garden change across the seasons?

AL-B. Each season will have subtle changes and surprises as plants grow and fade in succession. The colour of the prunus and other trees will show various shades of red, brown and yellow leaves in the autumn, and the evergreen hedges and topiary will take centre stage in the winter.

Q. Do you have a favourite tree, shrub and flower that we can find there?

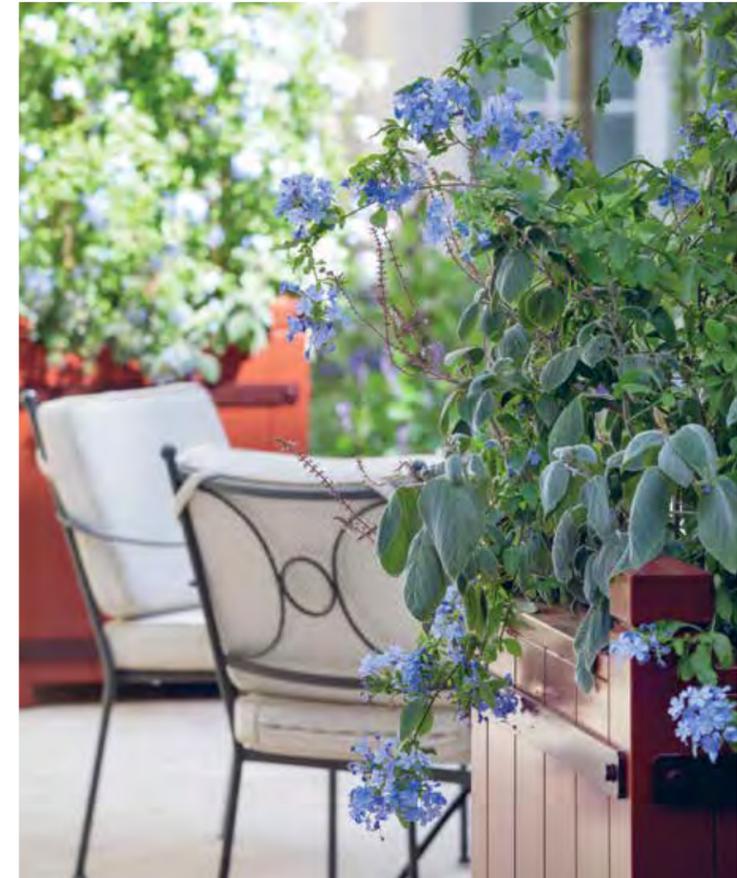
AL-B. The Japanese snowbell, *styrax japonicus*, is one of my favourite trees. Hebes give lovely structure and are good dome shapes throughout the year. For the summer, I love the dark blue plumbagos in the planters.

Q. How do you want people to feel when they sit in the garden?

AL-B. I hope the guests find a sense of respite and occasion – a dream-like quality that is memorable.

Q. Where is the best place to sit?

AL-B. In the summer, guests will enjoy sitting at the outdoor tables amongst the blue and burgundy beds in the main courtyard looking up to the upper garden, a sort of theatre set featuring topiary domes of *osmanthus x burkwoodii*, *fagus sylvatica* hedges and a pair of *cornus controversa* 'variegata' trees, chosen for their silver-marbled leaves and tiered branching habit.



Le Bristol Paris in numbers

16,000kg

Total weight of flour used in the hotel's own in-house flour mill per year.

14,000

Number of croissants and pains au chocolat baked per year.

five

Number of beehives on the roof of the hotel which produce the honey used at Eric Frechon's three-Michelin-starred restaurant Epicure.

5,000

Different flower varieties in the new look Jardin Français.

2011

The year Le Bristol Paris played a prominent role in *Midnight In Paris* by Woody Allen. Several scenes at the beginning of the film take place in the hotel lobby and subsequent scenes in the suites.

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The Jardin Français at Le Bristol Paris