

L'HÔTEL - PARIS

What a beautiful place to die. Fitting that Oscar Wilde saw his last days in this small hotel tucked away in the Saint Germain district. Its door, marked by a dangling metal ram's head, leads into a small cylindrical corridor that stretches skyward like a church ceiling or a miniature, neo-classical version of the Guggenheim in New York. But neither the piety of religion or the purity of modern art are quite comfortable in these corridors.

Around this rotunda, petit rooms are truly a dandy's chambers, as no element has been denied its aestheticism: leopard print carpets mimic ornately moulded ceilings and a chartreuse silk canopy owes its seduction to the Parisian light let in by large French windows (which sometimes allow a peek into the private life of residents from a neighboring building). On the fabric-covered wall of one chamber, a nineteenth-century equestrian print depicts a rider and horse shown from behind. Similar highlights are to be found in the Wildean hotel bar. Black pleated lampshades, heavy oil paintings, and mirrored liquor shelves welcome guest whose hands mould easily to the shape of champagne saucers. Unfortunately all this delight is slightly offset by inconsistencies in the hotel's service. While some of the staff perfectly complement the acute attention to detail evident in the hotel's interiors, others seem eerily blasé: a lovely massage accompanied by hallway noise and a perfectly mixed drink served with an odd quip from the bartender leave one hoping that these are rare missteps. As in the age of aestheticism, no one wants to be brought back down to life, when one is thinking it is art.^{BC}

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