



WORLD WIDE WEAVE

## **La maille, c'est moi**

Regal renovation of the main entrance at the Palace of Versailles

**Few buildings in France embody the national identity of the "Grande Nation" as strongly as the Palace of Versailles, located south west of Paris. Its unmistakable stylistic pluralism reflects the eventful history of the glorious palace facilities of Louis XIV, which began life as a hunting lodge constructed in 1623. In 2003, the French state announced a €500 million renovation program to give the Palace of Versailles a new lease of life. A key focus of the master plan, referred to as *Grand Versailles*, was to renovate the Pavillon Dufour with a different route for visitors to follow. In 2011, French star architect Dominique Perrault won the international architecture competition. He was the only participant to dispense with any notion of a contemporary annexe in the Cour des Princes. Instead, he designed the much-needed constructional extension as a new subterranean cellar. On the first floor, he used a sculptural ceiling design made of golden metal mesh from GKD – GEBR. KUFFERATH AG (GKD), color-coordinated woven wall elements and golden pendant light fittings to blend in harmoniously with the historic opulence of the fairytale palace.**

In 1789, some 100 years after work began on converting the building from a hunting residence to a splendid palace, the French Revolution drew a line under the ongoing architectural extension of the Palace of Versailles and its gardens. The life's work of Louis XIV, the "Sun King", appeared doomed. Yet "Citizen King" Louis Philippe I prevented the impending demolition of the Palace by declaring it a national museum in 1830. 150 years later, the



Palace and its park areas were declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The master plan, entitled *Grand Versailles*, was launched in 2003 and is scheduled to run until 2020. Within the scope of this work, the historic buildings, their interiors and the gardens are all being restored in a step-by-step process, the technical infrastructure is being brought up to date and visitor management is being completely reorganized in terms of both content and functions. Alongside wheelchair access, modern services and offerings such as restaurant and hotel facilities, work has focused primarily on separating the entrance and exit, as well as on creation of a central entrance. The Pavillon Dufour, the construction of which began in the 18th century but has not yet been completed to this day, plays a key part here. As such, its south-facing façade on the Cour des Princes does not join up seamlessly with the old wing of the outer wall. Originally planned as a counterpart to the Pavillon Gabriel on the opposite side of the Cour Royale, this incompleteness creates a kind of asymmetry at the site. Based on the original design from 200 years ago, the two pavilions were to serve as two entrances – an idea that has only now been implemented by architect Perrault.

### **Golden canopy for the foyer**

With the renovation of the Pavillon Dufour, he created a modern, 2,700 square-meter reception area for the approximately six million individual visitors that come every year. Groups of visitors access the Palace through the second entrance in the Pavillon Gabriel. All visitors exit the museum through the Pavillon Dufour. A café and star-awarded restaurant, as well as a hotel on the second floor and an auditorium for 200 people under the roof also allow those not visiting the actual museum to get up close and personal with the historic building of Louis XIV. All work on these public areas is scheduled for completion in 2017. For the museum, Perrault's visitor flow



concept is based on a strict chronology of the individual rooms. From the Cour Royale, visitors walk through the Pavillon Dufour and into the Palace. A columned entrance hall guides them into the magnificently decorated foyer on the first floor of the pavilion. Perrault has converted this area into the opulent entrance to the Baroque world of the Palace of Versailles. To create the sense of space he was looking for, he had almost all internal walls in the area torn down and the floor levelled. As a tribute to "Sun King" Louis XIV and his famous Hall of Mirrors, the architect created a golden ceiling based on the design of Gaëlle Lauriot-Prévost that spans the entire foyer like a giant canopy, creating waves of varying size. While the historical model used mirrors that were angled to reflect the sunlight streaming through the windows, thereby playfully illuminating the golden décor, Perrault chose metallic mesh from GKD to boost the regal lustre. He selected Escale 5 x 1 aluminum mesh, which he had already used for a wide range of functions in many of his previous, highly successful projects. He also reinterpreted this mesh type for the Pavillon Dufour, having aluminum rods of varying lengths anodized in three different shades of gold and then inserted into the 5 mm wide and 1 mm thick spiraling golden flat wires in a random pattern. The overall look created by this – in some areas giving the appearance of frayed threads, while in others producing an effect reminiscent of devoré fabrics – lends the flexible metallic mesh a kind of plastic effect that has never been seen before. Wall hangings made of material designed the same way underline the subtle reference to the historic décor, which also served as inspiration for Gaëlle Lauriot-Prévost's interior design for the rest of the Pavillon Dufour. Golden pendant light fittings, made of multi-layer curved aluminum strips reminiscent of palm branches that also serve as a reference to the enormous chandeliers in the Palace, provide a glossy counterpoint to the silky-matt shimmer of the sweeping metallic mesh panels. The light they reflect creates a discreet dialog with the woven canopy. Belts made of



golden metal planks, embedded in the anthracite-colored floor and stretching from the neighboring outer wall all the way up to the ceiling, provide a strict linear response to the sumptuous curves of the ceiling decoration.

### **Architecture that disappears**

A staircase grants visitors access from the foyer to the newly created cellar vault, where they can find the cloakrooms, toilets, lockers and also the museum shop. This subterranean space allowed Perrault to go without an annexe, which in turn allowed the exterior of the building to remain virtually unchanged. This idea represents another interpretation of his guiding principle of "architecture that disappears". Other examples of this approach include the Berlin Velodrome or the campus at the Ewha Women's University in Seoul – both created to handle complex tasks while remaining hidden from the outside world. In Versailles, Perrault was able to use this philosophy to organize the masses of visitors, while also establishing a sense of modern comfort and convenience. Perrault's respect for the historic architecture culminates in an elongated stone stairway that visitors use to exit the building at the end of their tour and access the Cour des Princes outdoor area. Perrault had a trench dug along the entire old wing of the Palace for the construction work. Flanked by a wall made of tinted glass in a golden frame and light marble on the opposite side of the stairway, it rises gently up to the Cour des Princes. Panels of golden-anodized metallic mesh, draped like banners above the heads of the visitors, provide the area with a touch of regal elegance. The glazed wall also serves as a light shaft for the subterranean level. Discreetly illuminated floor coverings made of Escale mesh from GKD lend the diverted light the warm shimmer of natural sunlight in the space created within the double-glazed wall. With the renovation of the Pavillon Dufour, Perrault therefore succeeded in preserving "the pleasing asymmetry of the site without smoothing out history". With great respect for



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the constructed form, materials and colors, he created charismatic rooms that will allow exciting new chapters to be added to the glorious history of the Palace of Versailles. French President François Hollande was therefore keen to take the opportunity to personally open the new entrance to the Palace. When asked about the GKD metallic mesh used so intelligently by Perrault, he commented: "This must surely be the most artistic of all industrial products, or should I say the most industrial of all artworks?" This is the ultimate accolade for Perrault, who first came across this material at the start of the 1990s for the construction of the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, and for GKD, the world's leading technical weavers for architectural mesh.

*8.637 characters incl. spaces*

#### **GKD – GEBR. KUFFERATH AG**

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