

ASK

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Years

WELCOME TO MADRID'S PUERTA AMERICA, THE OPEN QUEST FOR FREEDOM!

Images courtesy of Rafael Vargas



When 19 extraordinary talents collaborate in a product in which the only condition is utmost freedom, the result is simply beyond words...

And so that is how Madrid's most remarkable hotel; Silken Puerta America, came to life. The poem "Freedom" or Liberte for the French poet, Paul Eluard, was the designers' guide to inspiration and so each designer treated every floor and public space like an open palette to create. The colorful facade of the hotel that was Jean Nouvel's creation literally spoke of freedom; reciting Eluard's words in different languages. The hotel building's 150 degree layout made its form unconventionally proud and yet simple. And this simplicity is reflected inwards through the distribution of spaces put to plan by SGA studio, the structural firm that brought Puerta America into reality.

Against the hotel you see the park designed by B+B uk landscape firm which hosts a 5 meter-high red sickle sculpture of Oscar Niemeyer who is the modernism master responsible for the urbanism and construction of Brasilia, the capital of Brazil.

As we tour the hotel you shall see, or not see, that the lighting system is based on the concept of involving minimum visibility of the light sources (mostly in hallways). Lightscape designer, Arnold Chan, had implemented this concept for an even higher goal, which is to let light give maximum rendering to the textures while having minimum intrusion to the architecture and interiors. The variety of the lighting systems used in the different floors was made as per each floor's separate design identity.



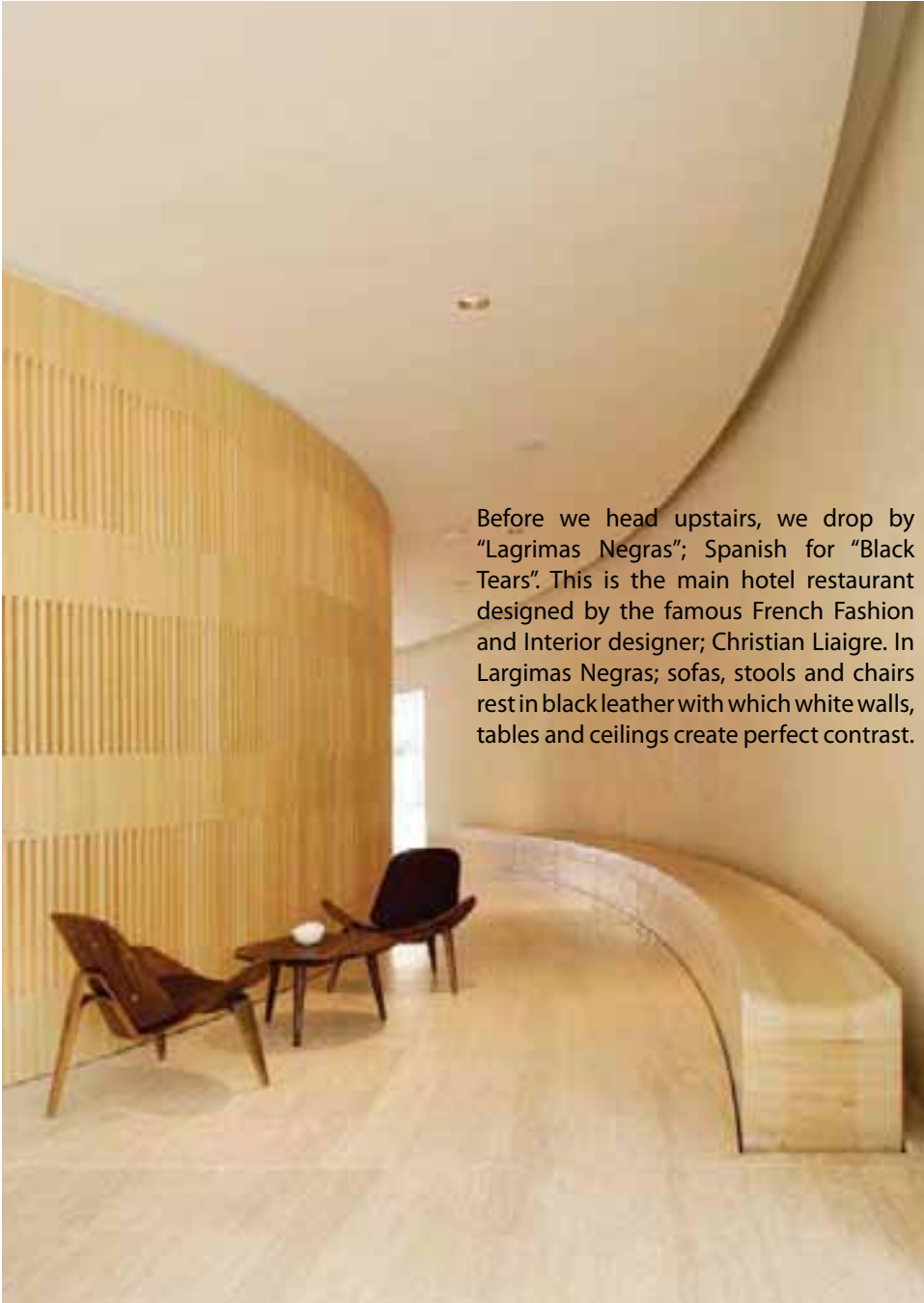


So now you got the picture, let's get inside!

We are now heading to park the cars in the hotel parking lot. Against all your expectations, it is neither dull nor dark; for Spanish architect Teresa Sapey based its design on graphics and color that evacuate freedom and self-expression in a space of fun. You are not to be lost for the direction towards which you should head; as an illustrated running man, a child and a dog and a pointed wrist direct you on the walls. The graphics are composed of Spanish typography reading "freedom to look, freedom to listen, freedom to express..."

We leave the parking to register at the reception desk; which is only a groove in a curved wooden panel; emphasizing the continuity of space in the hotel reception lobby. The wooden simple design, which John Pawson has created for this space, becomes only a shield hiding the mysterious floors on the schedule of our trip ahead.





Before we head upstairs, we drop by “Lagrimas Negras”; Spanish for “Black Tears”. This is the main hotel restaurant designed by the famous French Fashion and Interior designer; Christian Liaigre. In Lagrimas Negras; sofas, stools and chairs rest in black leather with which white walls, tables and ceilings create perfect contrast.

Neutrality is emphasized with a huge whole-wall mirror; adding spaciousness, stone floors as well as a backlit bar decorated in abstract floral motifs.

Still on the ground floor, we find Marc Newson’s American-style bar, which gained a magnified height through 400 Aluminum beams, arranged vertically with only five centimeters in between. The bar itself is a whole Carrara marble piece matching the gray marble floors and the white leather seating; for which the tables were designed to have inner light. The neutrality of color adds vastness in this space too and the continuity of space is emphasized through the all-glass wall leading to the outdoor terrace, which allows the indoor bar space to virtually breathe through.

Now we take the elevators up towards the hotel rooms. And like any hotel; all the floors boast the same layout and yet in each floor we’ll go through a different adventure seeing variable reasons to



admire. The spaces you are about to see are not a mystery because modern technologies have enabled such a lift in the world of architectural and interior design. The use of LG Hi-Macs which are acrylic surfaces usually used for kitchen counter tops or office desks and characterized with the optimum flexibility of formation through responding to heat energy; were used to enhance fluidity, continuity, seamlessness, softness and inevitably: beauty! Additionally, the collaboration of talented artists, designers and engineers made these spaces enjoyable, comfortable and technically possible.





Floor 1: By Zaha Hadid:

The lobby feels like some piece from outer space with a ceiling light approaching your sight through its descended height in a form looking like some fictional lightning vortex! As you enter the hallway, you recognize your room through the light of the room number; made possible by installing LED light in the room doors. "DO NOT DISTURB", "need repairing", "tidy up the room" or "breakfast please" appear through light too; representing the messages guests send to the room service through their doors. The bedroom itself is a monochromatic black or white space where the furniture



virtually emerges from the walls. And the bathroom, which is white, black, or orange; has the tub melting into the sink and a Stefano Giovannoni-designed curved toilet matching the theme and an unconventional waste basket exclusively designed for this space. The whole first floor is a homogeneous fluid area; a basic characteristic and trademark of Zaha Hadid's designs.

Floor 2: By Norman Foster:

In this floor, Foster joins forces with his personal friend; the sculptor Eduardo Chillida, who offers Foster a palette of materials making his luxurious design



possibly carved into reality. First, the hallway walls of translucent back-lit glass indulge you between their curves; isolating you from the outside hectic city and inside the "perfect urban sanctuary" as Foster describes it. Penetrating the walls and getting into the rooms, you

are in an overflowing space where the bathroom and sleeping area connect through a long backlit onyx gem piece that encompasses the sinks. The zones are hardly isolated through a curved translucent wall and a matt glass door shielding the toilet.





Floor 3: By David Chipperfield:

Chipperfield's black-lacquered hallway with occasional yellow light pulls us inside its longitudinal depth as if we were traveling through a time tunnel. The mystery resolves when you enter your white-walled and brightly-lit room. With this whiteness, hand-cut black terra cotta tiles for the floors and benches create perfect contrast. A long slim desk connects with the terra cotta and is too slim to obscure the sight or overwhelm the space. It extends with the length of the bed and has the terra cotta tile dimensions but scaled up; thus all items create proportional beauty. The blue canopy suspended over the bed is a remarkable factor here; with its inclined form that lets it virtually shed over you while sleeping.





photo courtesy of -photodesigner-



photo courtesy of -photodesigner-

Floor 4: By **Plasma Studio:**
(Holger Koehne and Eva Castro)

Geometric stainless steel complex shapes form the virtual high tech cave that represents the 4th floor hallway. The bold design started with the designers' attempt to avoid the stereotype of a hotel; an attempt that ended into something far from the norm; which is the cornerstone of Plasma Studio's design concept which they successfully managed to juxtapose here. The hallway's forms are reflected in the lobby's volume sculpture that extends to become a bench and are also reflected inside the rooms where a bathroom is objectified through geometric glass walls and hosts a tub and sink that kind of unfold to form their voids.



Floor 5: By *Victorio & Lucchino*:

A centrally-tiled black web represents the lobby ground for the 5th floor on which two white marble sphinxes rest in pride along with a surrounding group of red velvet arm chairs. The hallways have long black carpets but warm beige walls; transitioning you to your warm authentic room. The art sensation overflows inside the room; especially through the non-

repeated trompe l'oeil on the wall behind the bed, which is a hand made artwork by the painter Sergio Cruz. The art and color that boasts from the 5th floor's rooms and the obvious care for detail come from the designers' diverse sense of art which they implement in fashion, jewelry and interiors.





Floor 6: By **Marc Newson:**

A red-lit seamlessly-carpeted lobby captures you and isolates you till you reach your room; which alternatively is a bright simple but color-energized space. Warm wooden floors and white walls or white curtains co-exist with a red lacquered wooden showcase and wall cladding that add much fun to the space. Black leather was chosen for the living set and the bedroom bed of which the headboard additionally serves as a light source. The bathroom is marked by its

one-piece Carrara marble walls; a material which the designer effectively utilized in his other designed space; the ground floor Marmo Bar. The bathroom set is in white; of which the tub is Newson's own design for Ideal Standard that rests against a totally transparent glass wall overlooking the bed. No element in Newson's designed room overwhelms the space on the stake of another; it's all just simple, comfortable and modern.

Floor 7: By Ron Arad:

Here the lobby walls curve around us and around the circular seating which is like the walls' offset. The ceiling descends like fluid setting spontaneous focus on the middle seating and the walls carry huge LCD screens, which, along with the whiteness of the space, give a distinct high tech impression. The rooms are the bubbled rounded forms characteristic of Arad; where a curved continuous wall divides the space without isolating any portion of it. The round provocative bed by the Italian design firm Capellini gained an LG Hi-Macs headboard that was beautifully fused with the curved wall. For optimum luxury, against the bed; a huge TV screen unfolds from the ceiling! And as for the bathroom elements; each has its own wall formation and all are reflected through an opposite continuous mirrored wall, distorted in case of the toilet.





Floor 8: By Kathryn Findlay:

An intriguing maze-like seating rests amidst the lobby of the 8th floor in a form that is white, soft and curved; like melting hills of ice. It is surrounded by walls of fiber optic panels that will capture our movement and then project it as distorted images after some time! The hallway has flock wallpaper, which usually is just a wallpaper that has a

raised pattern, but here the pattern reacts to one's steps along the hallway length! Finally, you will recognize your room by the number projected on the floor through ceiling spotlights. The utmost technology implemented in this floor was made possible when Findlay cooperated with interactive systems designer Jason Burges. Their goal was to create a simple space that invites people into discovery.

And so inside your room, a white curtains unveils the bathroom of which only the toilet is isolated with a matt glass door. The bed is suspended from the ceiling of the all-white seamless space and above it is another suspended item; the TV. The headboard serves as a desk, whereas the foot of the bed is cushioned to be a cozy seating by the window.



Floor 9: By Richard Gluckman:

Gray fiber cement was chosen for the ceiling and walls of the lobby, hallway and even rooms of this floor; giving an overall formal look. The lighter factor is back-lit translucent glass used in portions of the lobby walls and as separators in the rooms. Gluckman's concept was the "box within a box"; the glass separator hosts niche boxes serving for different usages in the living space and the bedroom with the biggest niche designed for the TV. The bathroom is the biggest box of all; totally made out of glass except for one granite wall matching with the granite bathroom floor. Gluckman played with textures for reaching different sensations and also played with color in the translucent walls which are blue-lit in some rooms and yellow-lit in others.





Floor 10: By Arata Isozaki:

Minimalism, tranquility and well being; the aesthetics of Japanese culture, can all be sensed in Isozaki's design for the 10th floor; starting with the white marbled lobby walls and back-lit ceiling way to the dark tones of the hallway and room interiors. The room's walls and ceiling are of irregularly-textured dark stucco paint and the furnishings are of either black oak, red leather (in the cupboard) or dark stainless steel (in the TV mural). The floors are dark too and the light is only allowed through a fluorescent tube behind

the bed headboard and through the grooves of the shoji; which is a traditional Japanese architectural vocabulary item made of stained dark oak covered in light fabric. The bathroom also allows light into the bedroom through a semi transparent copper sheet placed between two glass surfaces. Light marble walls and fixtures of hinoki wood; known for its light tone, give the bathroom the utmost contrast with the dark room while both maintain there tranquility.

Floor 11: By **Mariscal and Salas:**

A colorful cactus sculpture stands on a stainless steel/iron platform amidst an orange carpet and is surrounded by a light green circular wall. Therefore the lobby designed by Javier Mariscal and Fernando Salas gives an impression of the color appreciation and care for pleasure which they have transmitted in their designed rooms. We are further introduced to art through the patterned walls of the hallway



that have illuminated glass cabinets carrying Mariscal's designed objects and then we step onto the room's variably-colored tiles. A cheerful largely-patterned floral and glossy cupboard stands against the bathroom's orange door. But Puerta America's bathrooms are not isolated, as you've seen, and so the bathroom overlooks the bedroom through a short patterned cabinet carrying the sink and a stand for the mirror (on the bathroom side) and the TV screen (on the bedroom side). The remarkable coconut chairs are a George Nelson design for Vitra and the patterned bed headboard rests against the façade which reveals Madrid as it is beautifully watched from an 11th floor.





Floor 12: By Jean Nouvel:

The dark hallways of the 12th floor with their mysterious red light lead to even more mysterious rooms. Nouvel installed ceiling and floor rails on which wall panels slide; letting you be the architect of your own space; expanding your bathroom if you wish or opening two zones towards each other. The transparent panels

carry unconventional photography art: expressionist photography by Araki and Abstract Photography by Fleischer. The common feature between their artworks is the presence of the human element and the dream-like outcome, which created the mysterious ambience of this space.





The Rooftop!

Now we're on the rooftop. So enjoy the swimming pool or, if you want, practice in the gym! If you have the heart for it, you might like to step on Jean Nouvel's semi-circular glass ground and look down to see the colors of his designed façade mix below your eyes. And now we'll have our coffee in B+B uk's designed terrace under its sloped ceiling which matches the protruding ceiling of the hotel entrance. As we have our coffee, we'll be overlooking Madrid's cityscape as it joins the skies; a view that you can now enjoy for as long as you wish because this is where our tour ends.

Iman El-Ashry

