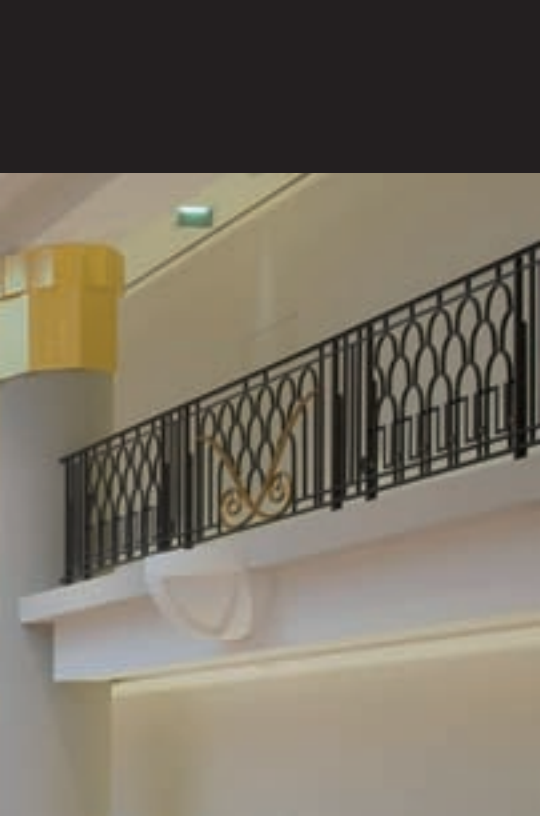
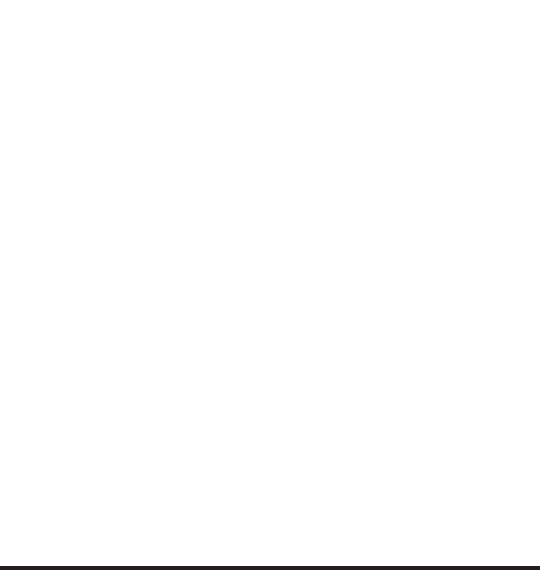


AU NATUREL

Hermès Rive Gauche

RDAI





Pablo Picasso, Charles de Gaulle, Henri Matisse and Jean-Paul Sartre have all been guests. James Joyce penned part of his magnum opus *Ulysses* whilst staying there. During the early stages of WWII, many artists, musicians and refugees passed through its halls whilst fleeing the Nazi advance. After the Wehrmacht captured Paris, it became home to German military intelligence. Upon liberation, American and French forces used it as a repatriation centre for erstwhile prisoners-of-war and concentration camp returnees. And in the 1950s, its piano bar was one of the city's premier jazz venues, with Josephine Baker in residence. Yes, the Hotel Lutetia has a storied past.

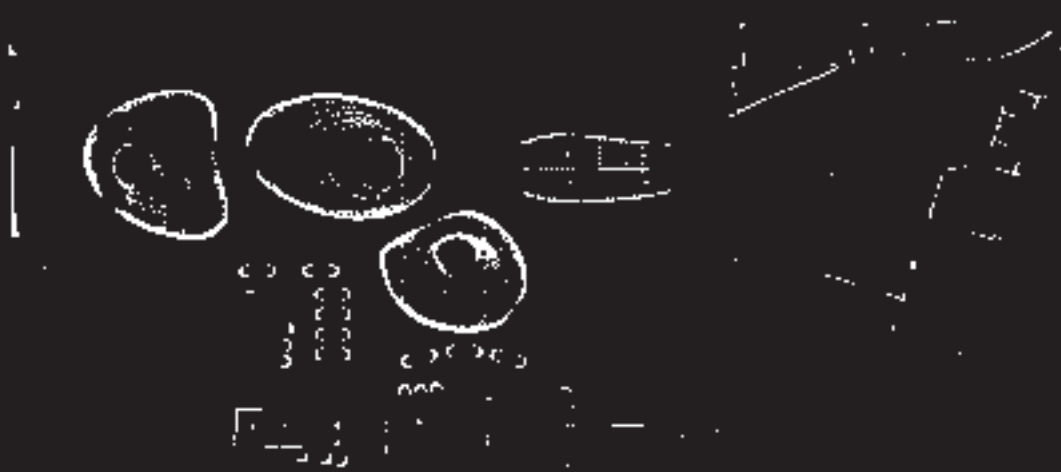
The swimming pool of this famous Art Deco hotel no longer houses bathing existentialists, painters and intelligence officers, having ceased aquatic operations in 1970. Today it is home to a Hermès boutique. RDAI is the firm responsible for the interior of the new Left Bank store. The Parisian design agency is no stranger to the Hermès brand, though, for it decks out the shops of the famed fashion house worldwide.

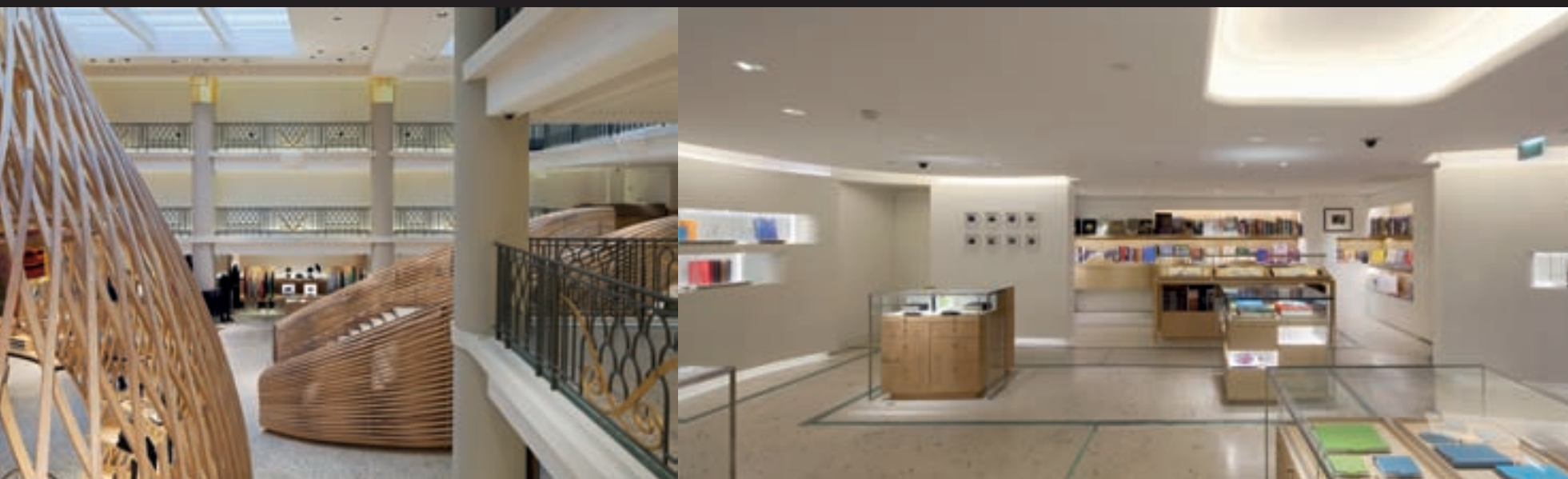




Supposedly inspired by the whale skeletons at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris, and by ships in bottles, the interior's centrepiece is an eye-catching collection of enormous wicker huts. Constructed from woven ash wood laths measuring 6 x 4cm each, the self-supporting structures rise to a height of 9m. Three huts house the Hermès collections, while a fourth lattice structure lines the staircase, guiding visitors to the three-storeyed boutique down to the bottom of what was the pool. In the evening, when lit from the inside by large chandeliers, the huts seemingly transform into giant lanterns.

Lighting is always crucial to an interior, especially so in a space as large as this. Not surprisingly, then, LED lighting strips have been strategically placed around the store and concealed in sections of the white plastered walls; and three large skylights bathe the pool area in natural light during the day. The skylights are themselves





illuminated at night to avoid a "black hole" effect. The floor, staircase and columns are lined with stoneware and glass-paste mosaic tiles in multiple hues – including shades of grey, light green, white and silver – that reflect light and contribute to the ambience of the place. The mosaic tiles were an original feature of the Art Deco swimming pool and serve as a reminder of the site's heritage.

This was partly a restoration project – the design team wanted to return the building to the splendour of its heyday – and partly a transformation project – as the brief involved changing the function of the space. RDAI has certainly retained the integrity of this listed historic building, while creating a decidedly left-field shopping experience in Paris' bohemian Left Bank district.

Gerard Depardieu, Catherine Deneuve, and Carla Bruni are known to frequent the grand old Hotel Lutetia. Whether or not they drop by its former swimming pool to pick up the odd scarf or Birkin is not known.