

ARCHITECTURE

# The Grand Palais Restoration Races Toward the Olympics

There's no shortage of sensationalized projects nearing their do-or-die completion date as the Paris 2024 Summer Olympic Games close in. But the restoration of the Grand Palais, arguably the grand dame of them all, was quietly metamorphosing in the background until now.

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Paris has embarked on a dizzying array of ambitious projects in the interest of putting its best foot forward when the 2024 Summer Olympic Games kick off in about two months. There's making the Seine swimmable—a dubious proposition by any stretch, yet one that Los Angeles 2028 is taking a cue from —along with 15-minute cities, a “green” Olympic Village, and Mathieu Lehanneur’s transformation of Musée d’Orsay’s clocktower into a romantic Airbnb. While these projects and more (like those outrageous anti-sex beds) have consumed the lion’s share of press around civic undertakings, Chatillon Architectes has embarked on an all-consuming restoration of the Grand Palais. At present, two shifts of around 900 workers are refurbishing the Beaux-Arts landmark to get its central nave in shape to host taekwondo and fencing.

Originally built in three years by a crew of just 1,500 and overseen by four architects for the 1900 World’s Fair, the scale and scope of the refurbishment now in the hands of François Chatillon is staggering. In a recent interview with the Financial Times, the architect shared that he’s working with no fewer than 50 companies and 200 subcontractors. As a result, even a seemingly simple task like choosing a shade of concrete for the nave’s floor took three months. The

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balconies and cantilevered concrete walkway, replacing walls and partitions added over the years with transparent glass panes, and restoring period details like the bronze adornments on the main nave's grand staircase.



It's little wonder that the project has been in the works since 2021. Even before it shuttered, the Grand Palais had cultivated a reputation for captivating gutsy, outside-the-box thinkers. [Anish Kapoor](#) and [Karl Lagerfeld](#) pushed the 188,000-square-foot dome's spatial boundaries with Kapoor's *Leviathan* sculpture and Lagerfeld's larger-than-life rocket for Chanel's Fall/Winter 2017 runway show). Upon its full completion in 2025, the fully restored Palais will welcome 60,000 plants in a sprawling landscape inspired by the neighboring Champs-Élysées gardens, and two of its galleries will host the collections of the Centre Pompidou while it undergoes refurbishment.

“The opportunity to redevelop an icon is amazing, but the Grand Palais feels like so much more,” Chatillon says. “It’s the opportunity to return a permanent public use to the building, to redevelop the surrounding grounds, to connect the building back with the city, and to adapt it for the Olympics and future generations. This is truly a once-in-a-lifetime project.”