bouroullec brothers re-imagine champs-élysées fountains with swarovski crystals

Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec explain how they decided to work together with Swarovski to create a new sculptural fountain for the historic Champs-Élysées in Paris. The aim was to find a balance between the monumentality of the structure and the finesse of its composition, a delicate choreography of light and water.

'The best way to be sure that the result is a real enhancement of the public space is to work in partnership with companies such as Swarovski,' explains Ronan Bouroullec. 'When Swarovski contacted us with an interest to collaborate on the project, our first reaction was of course to accept!'

In 2015, Paris' city council decided to modernize the fountains to create a contemporary piece of urban art. The design team of Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec was chosen to lead the project, along with help from the company Swarovski.

The Champs-Élysées fountains date back to the 19th century and were made famous by the movie 'Casablanca'. In 1998, the advanced state of deterioration of the fountains led to the definitive shutdown of the water service and the structure was to be demolished in 2015.

However, these ornamental additionsinterests of the city of Paris works division (heritage, roadside & environment) and SACMO, who are the responsible party for the restoration of the fountains. In its place, the city of Paris and SACMO asked the city of Paris to find a new team of designers to lead a new project for the Champs-Élysées. This is the first project led by the foundation of some 35 landscape architects, designers and artists.

One of the fountains was demolished in 1854. In its place, six individual basins surrounding the roundabout were installed on the roadway. The new project reimagines the Champs-Élysées fountains with Swarovski crystals.

The Bouroullec Bros explain: 'Our aim was to blend into the urban landscape, to highlight as delicately as possible the view between place de la Concorde and the Louvre, while the precision of the ensemble results in a balance between the monumentality of the structure and the finesse of its composition.'

The geometry of the fountains was designed to align with the surrounding trees, while the precision of the ensemble allows for a delicate choreography of light and water.

Mast on which suspended branches support an ensemble of crystal chains. The water rises through the mast, before descending through the crystal to fall into the basin along the last four meters of the fountain. Each of the six fountains on the Champs-Élysées is responsible for the representation of six Swarovski crystals which are part of Swarovski’s product library.

A new patent was filed for this tailor-made crystal which is both light and delicate, yet ultra-resistant and of some 35 kgs. It proves to be 30% lighter than standard crystal.

Thanks to a silvering on the inside of the cylinders, the colors of the crystals can be enhanced, but also kept hidden. The crystal chains are fixed to the mast through a top plate, fixed to the top of the mast which is connected by double chains. All the crystals are then fixed to this top plate, hanging in the air and supported by the playful suspension system.

The fountains have a total of 35 Swarovski crystal chains, starting at a low level, while the crystal chains are progressively placed higher up in the structure. A notable feature of the ensembles is the enrichment effect of the crystals. The different colors, shades and sizes create different visual effects when the sun hits the water in the basin. The water plays the role of a mirror, revealing the different crystals that make up the ensemble.

The fountains are lit with white LEDs, which are integrated into the structure. The Bouroullec Bros explains: 'A solar panel on the structure feeds the system and the fountains are also fitted with rain sensors. These elements are essential to ensure their immortality.'

The fountains were officially inaugurated on the Champs-Élysées on March 22, 2019. The installation of the fountains is estimated to last until October 2019.

The fountains are also part of the Venice Biennale, under the title 'Design of the City' and is curated by the curatorial team of Paris Design Week. The Champs-Élysées fountains are a design project by Ronan & Erwan Bouroullec in collaboration with Swarovski.