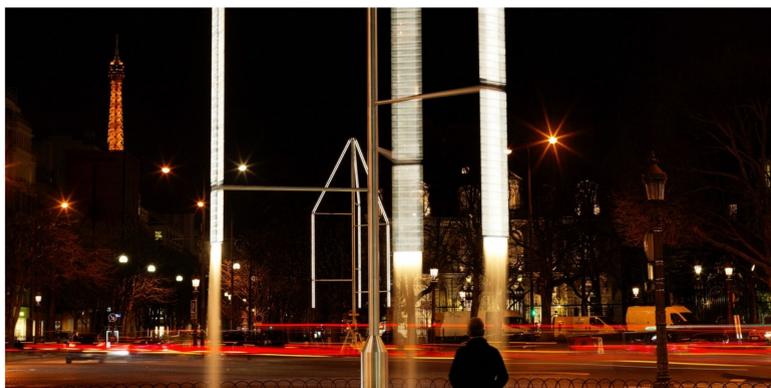


Champs-Élysées Fountains Bring a Crystal Wonderland to Paris

Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec unveiled their Swarovski crystal designs this week

By Gay Gassmann

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Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec's new Swarovski crystal fountains—seen in Paris by night.

Photo: Charles Petillon

Central Paris was abuzz this week with the appearance of six monumental fountains being installed midway between the Arc de Triomphe and the Place de la Concorde. On a roundabout called the Rond-Point des Champs-Élysées, Parisians and visitors were surprised by the appearance of six huge structures, over 42 feet high each, completely covered in crystals and flowing water. With over 3,060 pieces of crystal, these fountains, by French design duo Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec, will be officially inaugurated next week.

Originally created in the mid-19th century, these fountains had been redone a few times, once by Lalique in the 1930s and again by French designer Max Ingrand. They had, however, remained in a state of disrepair since 1998. Three years in development, these newly commissioned fountains are the first project of the Paris Foundation, a private nonprofit created in 2015 with the specific aim to restore and animate Parisian heritage.

The one of the fountains seen by day.

Photo: Claire Lavabre

The new fountains are technological wizardry in motion as none of the inner workings are visible from the exterior. The designers collaborated closely with Swarovski, with whom they have worked before, and ended up with a new type of crystal designed to be shock resistant, water friendly, light reflective, and able to withstand extreme weather conditions. “The most important factor is having a shared vision of the project, and a willingness to innovate and collaborate to reach that amazing final product,” Nadja Swarovski, member of the executive board and head of corporate communications and design services at Swarovski, tells AD PRO. “We are lucky to have a longstanding relationship with Ronan and Erwan, and they always push our engineers to the limits to create something truly innovative.”

In the end, this specific project took a significant amount of time. “Our master cutters and engineers worked for over a year to develop a bespoke crystal cut for the fountains, and to create a new patented component that allows us to install the crystal outdoors with water running through it,” Swarovski says. “The results are truly spectacular.”

When asked by AD PRO what the biggest challenge was from his point of view, Ronan Bouroullec responded, “How to find the right solution. This was not an easy location—it was a bit sad.” Each fountain has a central bronze mast that supports the crystal elements and cascading water. The fountains turn gently in rhythm with the street and foot traffic. And although typically Parisian fountains do not run during the winter months, the City of Paris has just announced that these fountains will remain on all year round.

At the press preview, Ronan was asked if he was a designer or an artist. He smiled and answered, “Designer? Artist? This was like a design project. This is a functional object, a light. We just looked to find the harmony in this location and to be a part of the historic continuation.”

Depending on the time of day, the light, and Mother Nature, these fountains are contributing to the Parisian landscape through an ever-changing display of urban poetry in motion. As Ronan feels, “This is a symbolic location for Parisians. A place of celebration and a place of expression.”

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