THE GLOBAL INTERIORS ISSUE

Axis-tilting new design

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The Bouroullec brothers have Paris in a spin with new crystal-clad fountains

In the summer of 1998, more than a million football fans descended upon the Avenue des Champs-Élysées to celebrate France’s World Cup victory, trashing six fountains in the process. More than 20 years later, six spectacular new ones are finally springing up in their place, created by French designers Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec.

The fountains, encircling the Rond-Point des Champs-Élysées, have a long history of decline and renewal. Civil engineer Jean-Charles Adolphe Alphand installed the six ground-level basins, each with a central fountain, or water jet, between 1858 and 1867. In 1932, the renowned glass designer René Lalique was commissioned to create illuminated glass fountains for the six basins. Stunning, but too fragile to last, these were replaced in 1958 with more durable glass fountains designed by Max Ingrand, but these also deteriorated over time, until they were finally trampled by the exultant throngs in 1998. Dry ever since, the six decrepit fountains became what Anne-Sylvie Schneider calls a ‘wart in the middle of the Champs-Élysées’.

Schneider, ex-head of communications for the City of Paris, is now president of the Fonds pour Paris – Paris Foundation, established in 2005 to finance public projects with private capital. Its board made the fountains its first priority, and chose the Bouroullec brothers to come up with a proposal, which was unanimously approved.

The new fountains are delicate yet robust enough to withstand another French World Cup victory – especially since the Bouroullecs chose to put the glass portion up in the air rather than at ground level. Each fountain has a central bronze mast 13m high, with...