

## DESIGN



Karen Warren / Staff photographer

A long hallway in the new Residences at La Colombe d'Or serves as an art gallery and a connector between the apartment building and mansion/hotel.

## RENOVATION

# Beaux-Arts style meets contemporary design

Revamped La Colombe d'Or and its apartment tower are new neighbors in walkable Montrose

By Diane Cowen  
STAFF WRITER

Eclectic Montrose has a glamorous new addition in The Residences at La Colombe d'Or, a high-rise apartment building that sits behind the storied mansion that once housed oilman/philanthropist Walter Fondren Sr. and his family.

The Beaux-Arts mansion, built in 1923 for the Fondrens, is nearing its 100th birthday. Operating most recently as a hotel and restaurant/bar – La Colombe d'Or and the upscale Cinq restaurant – with a separate Grand Salon event space behind it, the mansion got a \$10 million makeover while the contemporary 34-story residential tower went up behind it.

“It was very important to us to not dumb down either of them – not try to make them go together,” said interiors architect Lauren Rottet, comparing the new and old buildings that share a 2-acre lot. “So we used the (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston) as a great example. When Mies van der Rohe did his addition to the 1924 Beaux-Arts building, he just made it a gorgeous piece of architecture. Neither one was compromised.”

Rottet and her Rottet Studio were the interiors architects on both the mansion restoration and the residential tower. Houston-based Munoz + Albin handled the tower's architecture, and Hines developed the high-rise.

The mansion restoration touched every inch of the building – ceiling to floor. Paneling was stripped and restained or painted. Doors were refinished and their hinges stripped and replated. New lighting was brought in, and new furniture fills every room.

Except for a new doorway in a lounge connected to the first-floor bar, nothing in the floor plan changed. The rest of the first floor includes a welcoming lobby with a grand staircase, and a kitchen and dining room for its new Tonight and Tomorrow restaurant that strikes a much more casual tone than its upscale predecessor.

The mansion's five guest suites and an amenities room are on the second floor. Some 18 more hotel suites were included in the lower floors of the residential tower, and all feature original work from artists from around the world.

Real estate investor Steve Zim-



Eric Laignel / Rottet Studio

Artwork in the lobby of The Residences at La Colombe d'Or was created by Troy Stanley, who placed a stencil on the wall and then threw cement onto it.

merman, who has a strong affection for the south of France and its original La Colombe d'Or Hotel, wanted to create a similar experience in Houston when he bought the mansion from the Fondren family in 1979. (Walter Fondren Sr. was a co-founder of Humble Oil, an antecedent to ExxonMobil.)

Zimmerman, a New Orleans native and an avid art collector, later purchased an 18th-century French ballroom from the Mecom family and built another structure behind the mansion to house it: the Grand Salon, a venue for weddings and other events. It was torn down to make way for the residential tower, and its paneling, gilded mirrors, chandeliers and other components were sold to the Houston Oaks Country Club, which plans to use them in similar fashion.

In the mansion, the Zimmermans and Rottet hope they've contributed to the walkability of the neighborhood with a restaurant and bar casual enough that anyone can visit but luxurious enough that they'll want to sit

*Design continues on G7*



Karen Warren / Staff photographer

A new patio with a fireplace is a great spot to sit outdoors just off of the bar at La Colombe d'Or Hotel in Montrose.



## ZEST

## DESIGN

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and relax with a craft cocktail or a meal.

Rottet turned to the era of the home – America’s Roaring Twenties – and added a European flair.

Talking about the décor, from flooring to wall coverings and furniture, she referenced the era’s Parisian Cafe Society, artistic and literary talents gathering in Left Bank salons.

Walls in the hotel’s bar are covered in a green, black and white geometric print. The bar is topped with a dramatic green-black marble, and black leather chairs – some wrapped in a wood veneer – are scattered cozily around marble-topped tables. The front of the bar is covered in back-painted green glass.

An artful lounge nearby has a coffered ceiling and furniture in sumptuous fabrics. A custom Jan Kath rug at first appears as an abstract design, but on closer inspection you realize the words “sex, rugs and rock n roll” are written in row after row of yarn.

In the first-floor dining rooms, new tables and chairs represent the materials and styles of the 1920s, in cane-back chairs you can imagine working in a cozy French cafe.

The mansion’s five guest suites – they start at \$500 a night – are in spaces where the Fondren family actually slept. Each large bedroom has a sitting room; bathrooms are swathed in cool gray Carrara marble.

In one guest room, Rottet stopped in front of a footboard bench with a large swatch of Schumacher’s Jokhang Tiger fabric set in the middle. A designer on her staff fell in love with the fabric, which was priced way out of their budget. She bought just a little bit of it – enough to put a tiger in the center of this bench and then make four small throw pillows for the sitting room.

Across the street are nine mid-century bungalows that were already part of the property and were renovated, too. Gin Braver-



Karen Warren / Staff photographer

**The historical Fondren mansion, for years the La Colombe d’Or hotel, has a new neighbor, a 34-story apartment building.**



Mabry Campbell / Hines

**A residential unit in the high-rise apartment building offers a sweeping view of downtown.**

man of Gin Design Group worked her magic, mixing vintage and contemporary for a Bohemian Parisian apartment feel, since each has a bedroom and bath, living room, dining area and a small kitchen.

The residential tower, designed by architect Jorge Munoz, of Munoz + Albin, has 18 more hotel suites decorated in similar fashion but without the Beaux-Arts touches.

The two buildings couldn’t be more different, but the classic sensibilities of Rottet and Munoz allow the mansion and tower to coexist in harmony.

Though the architects love to talk about materials and elevations, the Zimmermans revel in

the broad canvas for displaying pieces from their vast collection of art.

Paintings occupy every wall in the mansion, and outdoor sculptures are viewed from every angle. Texas artists such as Dorothy Hood and Lucas Johnson are prominently displayed, but you’ll also find works by Arik Levy, Troy Stanley, Richard Anuszkiewicz Georges Barque, Dan Flavin and even a piece by Barbara Hines, the artist-wife of the late Gerald Hines, whose corporation developed the tower.

The tower’s exterior on the Montrose Boulevard side shows off a 45-foot mural, “Last Tango,” by French street artist Blek Le Rat.

From the lobby to mail room, the amenities floor and even finishes in individual units, the building feels more like a for-purchase condo building than rental apartments. Units range from 736 square feet to 3,110 square feet with 10 penthouses on the top two levels.

The 10th floor has a fitness center, a pool deck; a private dining room; and vast public spaces where you can co-work, watch TV or just sit and read. And the view spans from downtown to the Texas Medical Center with a sweet surprise in the shiny golden dome of the Chapel of St. Basil at the nearby University of St. Thomas.

Munoz sees deep meaning in a

primary material in the tower: limestone, an essential material in traditional French architecture and one that feels right at home in Texas, too. But he also is proud of what the project brings to the neighborhood.

“We all talk about walkable cities. We come from long experience working in Europe – 50 percent of our portfolio is in Europe – so the walkable idea is very much a part of our everyday life, with the exception of the COVID year,” Munoz said. “We are finally embracing that in Houston. Suddenly, it’s fashionable to sit outside in the sun in summer.”

[diane.cowen@chron.com](mailto:diane.cowen@chron.com)



La Colombe d’Or Hotel

**The nearby Garden Bungalows feel like Bohemian Parisian apartments.**



La Colombe d’Or Hotel

**The hotel’s bar was created to feel like part of 1920s Parisian cafe society.**



Hines

**The Residences at La Colombe d’Or include 18 luxury hotel suites.**

## SOCIETY DIARIES

## Houston Museum of Natural Science gala raises record \$2 million

By Amber Elliott  
STAFF WRITER

If you squinted, the “Tour the World 2021” gala at the Houston Museum of Natural Science almost looked like old times. The idea was to allow Houstonians to “travel” during a time when hopping on a plane is limited.

A steady line of cars wrapped around the Museum District destination. Some 250 guests emerged from the vehicles with a palpable pep in their step, which organizers had anticipated. From the valet line, masked volunteers took each eventgoer’s temperature with impressive expediency. Most arrivals never saw the infrared thermometer guns comin’.

Half a dozen socially distanced and contactless check-in stations at staggered, high-top tables lined the walkway to the party. By the time attendees reached a multi-story hot-air balloon, a recurring design motif in the Events Company’s décor scheme, the sounds of a shindig in full swing could be heard outside.

Quartets of Divisi String musicians performed on both sides of the Lillie and Roy Cullen Grand Entry Hall. Bright-red stickers encouraging patrons to remain 6 feet apart dotted the path.

“They’ve already raised \$2 million dollars” was overheard near the “globe” bar, an 8-foot-tall metal sphere encircled by fresh flowers.

Indeed, gala chairman **Bobbie Nau** had achieved the impossible.



Elizabeth and Alan Stein

Her fundraising achievement shattered all previous records, pandemic be damned.

A crowd trailed behind as she – impossible to miss in a chicly ensembled plaid, sequined skirt and lace blouse – passed through the Alfred C. Glassell Jr. Hall with its massive “Earth by Luke Jeram” orb. That’s also where five vintage automobiles, including a 1966 Shelby GT350 and 1973 De Tomaso Pantera, captivated silent-auction bidders.

Later, diners found their place cards at tables scattered throughout the Morian Hall of Paleontology or second-floor Paleontology Overlook and mezzanine. It’s a big advantage of entertaining in a museum – wide-open spaces to spread plenty.

Admittedly, the crowd was split 50/50 on whether to wear masks. The museum offered sequined face coverings and hand sanitizer on trays as often as



Denise Rhodes, from left, Pat Holmes and Vicki West



Stephanie and Frank Tsuru

hors d’oeuvres and champagne flutes were passed.

City Kitchen served a three-course dinner. The meal began with a much praised crab cake and brief remarks by HMNS president **Joel Bartsch**. In short, he reminded the audience that as a nonprofit organization, the museum is partially funded by the city of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance, receives no federal or state funding and relies heavily on donor support. Thankfully, his message was heard loud and clear – hence the \$2 million-plus raised.

The evening ended with brandy freezes and reduced, albeit spirited, dancing to Hybrid 7. Party favors included some seriously embellished masks, extra-large bottles of hand sanitizer and macarons for the road.

Just like old times – almost.

[amber.elliott@chron.com](mailto:amber.elliott@chron.com)



Chair Bobbie Nau, left, and Ellie Francisco



Jessica Roupe, left, and Andrea Kibbe