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## Grand Palais Story

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### The rivet that saved the Grand Palais

#### Watch out!

A falling rivet in 1993 was the wake up call that things were not exactly right within and beneath the Grand Palais.

What happened during the past 12 years while the Grand Palais was closed to the public and why at one time it seemed to be constantly shrouded and framed by scaffolding. This is a continuing story. But there is hope because it is no longer sliding into the banks of the Seine river.

### Panel translations inside the Grand Palais

When I entered this edifice in January 2006, several panels (in French) and accompanying photos provided information about the cost of the renovations (between 2002 and 2007). They explained the [history](#) and events that led up to the current situation, and another panel summed up the edifice as a modern building in fewer words. These panels are not available every time the Grand Palais has an exhibit.

The [translations](#) are provided for your information along with photos also shown on these panels.

### Renovation costs of the Grand Palais

A panel appeared on the exterior of the Grand Palais explaining briefly the costs of the renovations of the Grand Palais:

"In June 1993, a rivet came loose on the metal frame of the nave, about 35 meters (114 feet) causing the closing in November of the Grand Palais.

The government decided that the time had come to make the necessary renovations of this exhibition building, classified on November 6, 2000 as a historical monument.

The work would be accomplished in two phases:

The first phase (2002 - 2004) treated the most urgent points: foundations of the nave, complete repairs to the metal frame of the nave and the elements related to the roof, ceiling and glass; and restoration of the Récipon quadrigas (horses pulling the chariot).

The second phase (2005 – 2007) treats the façade restoration, the stucco ceilings, sculptures in stone and metal, ceramic and mosaic decorations and interior components, wrought iron decorations, as well as completing work on the foundations.

The work is budgeted for 101 million euros (120 million dollars) – 72,3 million euros for the first phase and 29,06 million euros for the second phase."

### The Grand Palais - A modern building

Ever since the disappearance of the Crystal Palace in London, constructed for Universal Exposition of 1851, and destroyed by a fire during the 1930s, the Grand Palais is considered one of the largest glass paneled building in Europe: 15,000 square meters under one nave.

The actual restoration campaign has permitted the Grand Palais to once again find its original splendor and spaciousness under glass and steel, paying homage to light.

Hopefully one day, the national galleries of the Grand Palais, condemned to be "all electric" since the 1960s, will once again use natural lighting.

Criticized for a long time, the classical styling of the stone façades bears witness to the decency of the Third Republic, which worried that this vulgar umbrella of iron and glass would offend the Hôtel des Invalides.

The two baroque-inspired quadrigas were technically children of the century.

Without their armature of iron, without with its metallic, framed profile that anchors them to their pedestal of stone, the furious, galloping horse would defy the laws of gravity. Considerably lighter than bronze, these two groups still weigh 12 tonnes (13 short tons or 26, 455 pounds), not counting the pedestal....

### The doors once again open

One night in January 2006, while walking along the Champs Elysées, the nave of the Grand Palais was lit in

reds, lavenders, yellows, greens, etc. Under the big top's 15,000 square meters (161,458 square feet) was an amusement park and circus!

I visited the interior the next day and recorded the images within this immense cavern filled with amusement rides including two Ferris wheels, bumper cars, and was filled with the wafts of air filled with the scent of waffles and cotton candy.

During 2005, the doors of the Grand Palais were opened for special occasions such as "*les Journées du Patrimoine*" and a concert. The public could see just how far this once "beached whale" had come.

My last memory of the interior was of dusty, dirty greenhouse-type windows and dingy beams during a design show.

That would be my last Grand Palais exhibition. The Lartique exhibit in 1993 that I procrastinated in attending would be the last exhibition of any kind under the big top until 2005.

#### **Triumphant at last**

In the end a refined beauty awaits the public instead of a rubble heap. Six years and two phases of work will bring her back to full triumphant glory (2002 - 2007). I did read in the magazine *Nouve/Obs* that a third phase for security enhancement may once again temporarily close the doors in 2008.

One could say that the quadrigas that top the north and south points of the palace are appropriate. The four-horse chariots harnessed and driven by the maiden who keeps them from galloping away lives up to its originally-intended symbolism of triumph and victory..

The Grand Palais was headed for demolition. Procrastination took place among decision makers. This delay may have saved the Grand Palais.

The Grand Palais has survived two world wars, multiple changes in architectural styles and the abuse of exhibitions when hanging, heavy objects weakened its frame.

#### **Art exhibits since 1993**

The Grand Palais, built between 1897 and 1900, has always been devoted to the arts. From the beginning it was a "monument consecrated by the Republic to the glory of French art" (inscription on the front of the Grand Palais).

Even during its closure of the *grand nef* the Grand Palais has continued exhibiting art in two other locales. My imagery of the one is of cardboard cubicles.

The other is a series of galleries initiated in 1964 by André Malraux, the Culture minister. These galleries were intended to present prestigious, temporary, international art exhibitions.

As you continue to visit the other pages on this story, you will see that art takes many forms under this glass roof (The Paris home show (*Foire de Paris*), automobile show (*Salon de l'Auto - 1908*), air show (*Salon de l'aéronautique*), childrens' fair (*Salon de l'enfance*) or the home appliance fair (le Salon des arts ménagers) and everyone of them required construction of spectacular interiors and equestrian competitions (*Concours hippique au Grand Palais, 1938-1939.*)

Be sure to visit the Grand Palais, if not for a special event, during the Heritage Days (*Journées du Patrimoine*) September or White Nights (*Nuits Blanche*) in October). *Between September and the end of October 2005, 500,000 came to admire this renewed giant of glass and iron --le NouvelObs-Bernard Génès.*