



Clockwise from above: Charles Platiau/Reuters; François Guillot/AFP; Vinci/AP; Platiau/Reuters; Guillot/AFP; Vinci/AP



Left, the Hall of Mirrors; above, carved ornamentation; center, a restoration worker; top right and below, statues bearing unseen candelabras; right, the view overhead.



## New brilliancy in a Versailles bauble

By Maisie Wilhelm

**VERSAILLES, France** The Hall of Mirrors, considered the masterpiece of the Palace of Versailles, shines more resplendently than ever following renovations finished this week.

A portion of the hall, which has been under construction for 18 months, was unveiled to the public Tuesday, marking the close of the first stage of extensive renovations.

The luminous hall, erected to the glory of Louis XIV, is known for its 357 glass mirrors mounted directly opposite 17 arched windows that provide a view of the famous gardens. The Hall of Mirrors, or La Galerie des Glaces, stretches 73 meters, or 240 feet, long, 13 meters wide and more than 12 meters high.

The hall's impressive size is second only to its exquisite decorations. Six varieties of French, Italian and Belgian marble cover the walls, while gilded statues hold sparkling candelabras. Gilded wood carvings adorn the frames of 30 ceiling frescoes by Charles Le Brun, the king's head painter, or premier peintre du roi.

During the renovations, the hall remained

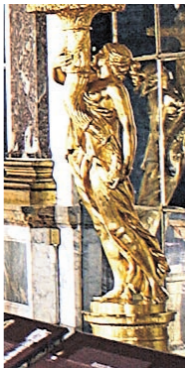
open to the four million visitors who go to Versailles annually. But dust and noise from skilled workers toiling away, as well as the eyesore of scaffolding, have been hidden from the public by temporary walls, providing an encased corridor through which visitors can walk. The corridor remains while the second stage of renovations is completed.

About 70 percent of the mirrors are the originals; antique mirrors from the stores of the Palace of the Senate were purchased as replacements.

The Hall of Mirrors, where the Treaty of Versailles was signed in 1919 to end World War I, has never undergone a comprehensive renovation until now.

The renovations, costing €12 million, or about \$14.2 million, are sponsored by Vinci, a private French construction company that was given permission to fund and organize the restoration by the Ministry of Culture.

Frédéric Didier, head architect of historic monuments, has worked closely with Vinci and the International Scientific Council. "We



reached a general harmony in the hall," he said. "It is a testimony to our history and heritage, and we have to pass it on and present it to the public."

Cracks and chips in the decorative plasterwork have been repaired; the parquet floor, in the famous "Versailles" design, has been replaced, and more than 1,000 square meters of painted surface have been painstakingly cleaned of dust and soot, all to reveal brightened colors in the frescoes. For some of the visitors, the lapis lazuli sky is heavenly to behold.

Katie Cooper, 30, of Australia, said:

"It's just amazing. They didn't skimp on anything. They've gone top notch. There's no point in taking photos because they don't do it justice."

More restoration work is to come, with the second stage beginning in February after the International Scientific Council meets again to determine that work is progressing properly. The entire restoration is scheduled to be completed by May 2007.

International Herald Tribune

## INTERNATIONAL TRAVELER | UPDATE

### PARIS Another airline tax

Parliament on Thursday approved a tax on plane tickets that is supposed to help developing countries, paving the way for the money to be applied starting in July.

It will add from €1 to €40, or from \$1.18 to \$47.20, to the price of tickets for flights leaving French airports, depending on the distance and the class of seat.

Airline industry groups opposed the measure, saying that it would add to the financial burdens of the sector and possibly lead to job losses.

President Jacques Chirac has pushed for the tax, which is expected to raise €200 million a year to fight AIDS and in support of other health programs, largely in African countries.

Algeria, Brazil, Britain, Chile and Norway have all publicly backed the idea and have indicated they might follow suit.

### LONDON Transit strike talks set

Union leaders representing London Underground workers said Thursday that they will hold talks with managers aimed at preventing a New Year's Eve strike. The negotiations will take place on Friday in the hope of avoiding a planned 24-hour walkout starting at noon on Dec. 31.

Members of a transport union announced the action, and another 24-hour walkout from Jan. 8 to 9, after members voted overwhelmingly for industrial action in a dispute about hours and staffing levels.

### SEATTLE Heavy holiday traffic

Expect more brake lights on American highways this holiday season and more passenger screening at airports.

More than 51 million U.S. motorists are predicted to hit the roads this season, a 1.7 percent increase from last year, despite higher gas prices, according to the American Automobile Association.

Those who skip the roads in favor of flying will face stepped-up random screenings at airport checkpoints, a measure meant to dissuade terrorists.

### VIENNA No smoking in stations

Austria's train stations will outlaw cigarette smoking starting Jan. 1, the national railroad said Thursday.

Smoking will be banned at station entrances and on platforms, although many trains will continue to accommodate smokers with special cars where passengers are allowed to light up. Violators will be fined.

**KYOTO, Japan:** Heavy snowfalls blanketed large parts of Japan and South Korea on Thursday, leaving at least 13 people dead and snarling roads and airports in both countries.

**ATHENS:** Greece will invite international architects to design an underground extension for the National Archaeological Museum in Athens, adding halls to the cramped 19th-century building that houses the world's largest collection of Greek antiquities, the government said Thursday.

**TIRANA:** Albania will tell General Electric that it wants to drop an \$82-million project for a high-speed train linking the capital, the coast and the main airport because the project is "premature," Transport Minister Lulezim Basha said Thursday. The project would have put new trains on an upgraded rail link from Tirana to the port of Durrës on the Adriatic sea, with a spur to Rinas airport.

**BUDAPEST:** Unions at Budapest's international airport called off a planned two-hour strike on Thursday but said that they had reached only a temporary deal and that labor action had not been completely averted. The unions agreed to hold off on striking at least until Feb. 1 after Budapest Airport agreed not to lay off any workers until at least March 1.

### Traveler's forecast

High/low temperatures, in degrees Celsius and degrees Fahrenheit, and expected conditions.

**C**..... Clouds **Sh**..... Showers  
**F**..... Fog **S**..... Sun  
**H**..... Haze **Sn**..... Snow  
**I**..... Ice **SS**..... Snow showers  
**PC**..... Partly cloudy **T**..... Thunderstorms  
**R**..... Rain **W**..... Windy

	Friday		Saturday			
	°C	°F	°C	°F		
Abu Dhabi	28/16	82/61	S	29/16	84/61	S
Almaty	5/-4	41/25	Sh	6/-6	43/21	PC
Athens	9/0	48/32	Sh	8/1	46/34	Sh
Bangkok	28/17	82/63	PC	29/18	84/64	PC
Barcelona	14/9	57/48	S	16/9	61/48	S
Beijing	3/-4	37/25	S	6/-3	43/27	S
Belgrade	2/0	36/32	C	2/-1	36/30	C
Berlin	4/2	39/36	C	7/4	45/39	Sh
Boston	8/-1	46/30	PC	11/2	52/36	PC
Brussels	8/6	46/43	C	7/4	45/39	C
Buenos Aires	31/20	88/68	PC	31/17	88/63	S
Cairo	15/13	59/55	PC	16/11	61/52	PC
Chicago	2/-1	36/30	C	2/1	36/34	R
Frankfurt	4/2	39/36	Sh	5/3	41/37	C
Geneva	1/-2	34/28	C	1/-1	34/30	C
Hong Kong	17/12	63/54	S	19/14	66/57	S
Istanbul	4/-1	39/30	C	4/0	39/32	C
Jakarta	32/25	90/77	T	33/26	91/79	PC
Johannesburg	27/14	81/57	S	27/15	81/59	S
Karachi	26/14	79/57	S	27/14	81/57	S
Kiev	-4/-10	25/14	PC	-4/-10	25/14	SS
Lagos	30/24	86/75	T	33/24	91/75	PC
Lisbon	15/9	59/48	Sh	16/12	61/54	C
London	10/7	50/45	C	8/3	46/37	C
Los Angeles	24/12	75/54	PC	28/12	82/54	S
Madrid	10/1	50/34	S	9/3	48/37	PC
Manila	26/22	79/72	C	27/23	81/73	Sh
Mexico City	22/7	72/45	C	23/8	73/46	PC
Miami	23/13	73/55	S	25/16	77/61	PC
Moscow	-7/-11	19/12	SS	-6/-15	21/5	C
Mumbai	31/17	88/63	S	30/17	86/63	S
Nairobi	27/13	81/55	PC	28/14	82/57	S
New Delhi	22/8	72/46	S	22/7	72/45	PC
New York	9/0	48/32	PC	11/3	52/37	PC

