

A GRANDE DAME'S GLAMOROUS RETURN

BY LINDEN WILSON
PHOTOGRAPHY STEVEN VISNEAU

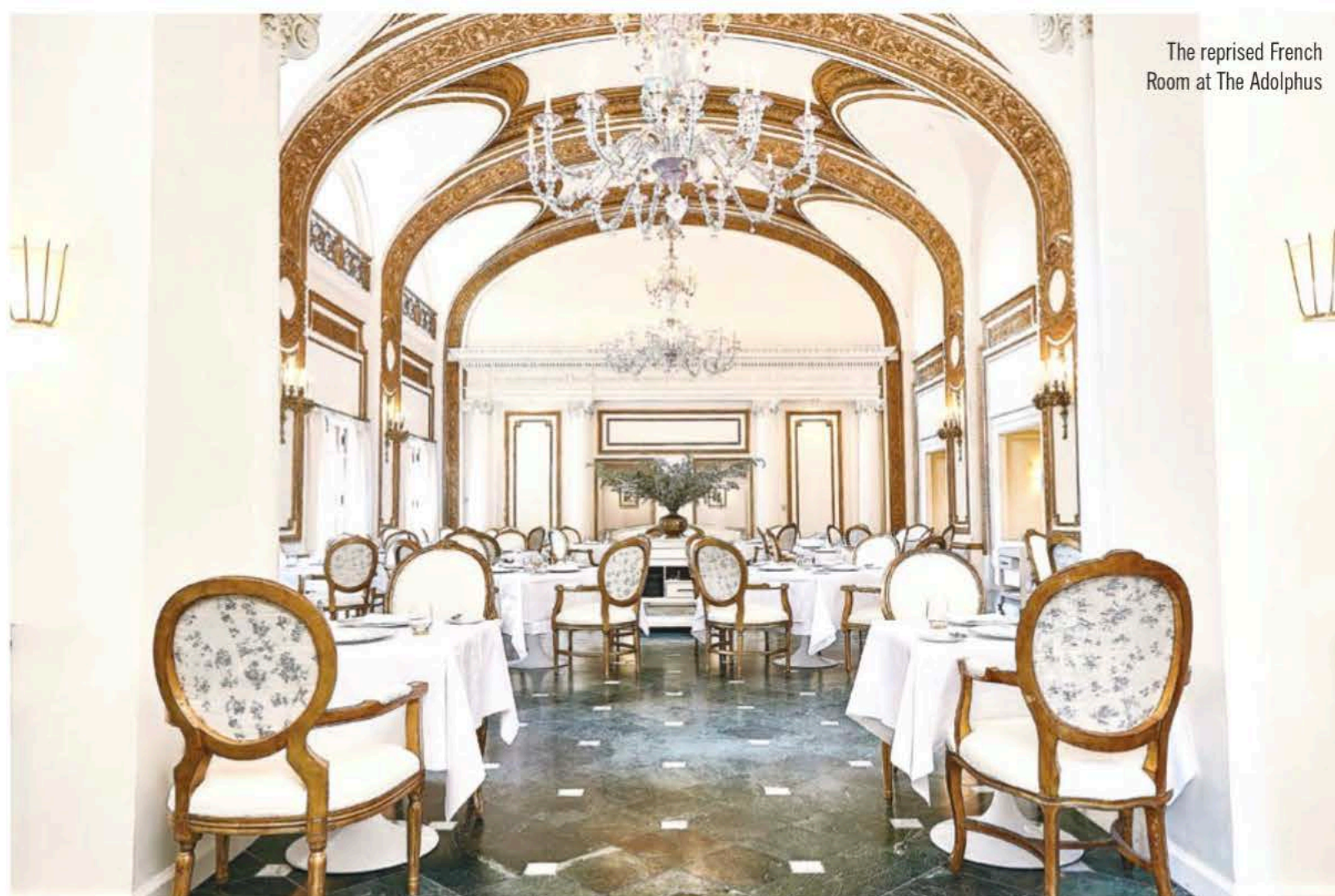
The notorious cherub murals installed in the '80s, the heavy burgundy fabric, the too-high chandeliers — gone, poof! The French Room at The Adolphus hotel is back — made over, sleeker, and tighter. The re-entrée of the revered restaurant, after an 18-month sabbatical, is the most talked-about makeover in recent memory, restored to vigor under the guidance of Swoon, the Studio's owner Samantha Reitmayer Sano and design principal Joslyn Taylor. "What drove us from the beginning was the architecture," Taylor says. "There are so few rooms in Dallas that are so ornately beautiful." Iconic buildings in France with architectural grandeur — the Louvre, Musée Rodin, the Ritz Paris hotel — served as inspiration.

Guided by photographs from The Adolphus' 1912 opening, the cherub murals — which were installed during the last renovation in the 1980s — have been replaced with white Venetian plaster. Hung too high in another redo, the twin Italian Murano glass chandeliers now sparkle lower to become the room's focal point, and the burgundy fabric that swathed dining-room chairs has been exchanged for Kravet ostrich and Jean de Merry watercolor silks. The French Room's marble floors remain, although Swoon has honed them to a softer finish. "The marble was a shiny green that looked very '80s," Taylor says. "The minute they honed a corner of the floor, we said, 'This is going to be killer.'"

Thankfully, the French Room remains a distinguished destination for haute cuisine. Fusing classic French cookery with the requisite pomp and polish, chef Michael Ehlert has created a seasonal three-course menu, 15-course experiential menu, and a seven-course tasting menu (which lists the seventh course only as "fairy dreams"). Noteworthy dishes range from chilled lobster salad Paul Bert and pheasant galantine to Bandera quail aux raisins and stuffed saddle of lamb for two, served with tomato-braised fennel and panisse.

Two new adjoining spaces, a salon and bar, were also designed by Swoon to complement the French Room. There's a cozy elegance to the French Room Bar, vis-a-vis New York City's Bemelmans Bar — a place you can tuck into for hours, Taylor says. The French Room Salon, flanked by a paneled wall with a marble floor uncovered during the revamp, has a 42-piece modern art collection curated by artist and Nasher Sculpture Center's Lucia Simek. Like the room itself, the collection creates a sense of discovery, showcasing the work of artists with strong Texas ties — Francisco Moreno, Bruce Lee Webb, Kristen Cochran, Allison V. Smith, Maxine Helfman, and Brandon Kennedy.

The French Room is open for dinner Tuesday through Saturday, 5 to 10 pm, and the French Room Bar serves cocktails Friday and Saturday until 1 am. Reservations are a must, *bien sûr*. *The French Room at The Adolphus*, 1321 Commerce St., 214.651.3615, thefrenchroom.com.



The reprised French Room at The Adolphus