

# THE DORCHESTER UNVEILS THE OLIVER MESSEL SUITE; A RESTORATION OF CHARACTER AND CARE

*London July 2025 - The Dorchester will reopen the Oliver Messel Suite mid-November, following a detailed restoration of one of Britain's most singular hotel interiors.*

The revival has returned every element of the suite to its original 1953 brilliance. Led by **Hare & Humphreys**, specialists in restoration and conservation, the process called for over 2,000 hours of work and more than 2,750 sheets of 23.5-carat gold leaf, applied using traditional techniques.

First revealed in 1953 and created by stage designer Oliver Messel, the suite has been returned to life with

an exacting precision that honours its theatrical spirit, unapologetic craft and cultural importance.

The project reflects The Dorchester's continued commitment to celebrating places with depth and meaning. Led by some of the country's most skilled artisans and conservators, the work brings clarity and intention back to a suite long known for its playful elegance and layered design.







### A legacy of imagination and artistry

Oliver Messel was born in London in 1904 and became one of the most original stage designers of the 20th century. Known for his inventive work across ballet, opera and theatre, he later brought that same sense of wonder to interiors, shaping a more romantic, expressive approach to post-war design. The suite he created at The Dorchester in 1953 - a place, he said, he would have liked to live himself - remains the most complete and transformative expression of that vision.

Commissioned by then-owner Sir Robert McAlpine, the suite was imagined as a private escape where theatre,

beauty and craft could sit easily together. Silk-lined walls, gilded mouldings, chinoiserie mirrors and a show-stopping bed canopied in imperial yellow Ottoman silk gave the space a distinctive, dreamlike quality.

To mark its completion, Norman Parkinson was invited to photograph the interiors for a special design brochure, helping to establish the suite's visual legacy. The impact was lasting: a scale model of the original 1953 suite now forms part of the permanent collection at the V&A. This rare, institutional recognition of a hotel interior underscores the suite's place in British design history.







### A restoration rooted in purpose

Among the discoveries was a hand-painted mural on the domed ceiling between the corridor and drawing room. An arch of roses painted by Messel himself, long hidden beneath layers of paint, has now been carefully revealed and restored as a quiet gesture to the artist, and the spirit, behind the room.

The Special Projects team worked alongside historians, conservators and original records, including Parkinson's photographs, to ensure that every detail returned with accuracy and intention. Every choice made has been a continuation of the story that began in 1953 and told through surface, form and light.

The floral silk wallcoverings, originally selected by Messel, were reissued exclusively for the suite. Other fabrics include azalea-pink silks and a re-woven imperial yellow Ottoman cloth for the bed canopy.





At the same time, the suite has been discreetly updated to reflect today's way of life at The Dorchester. Contemporary elements have been integrated with precision and ease: a Bang & Olufsen television is concealed behind a retractable panel printed with a Messel illustration, preserving the atmosphere while quietly delivering modern comfort.



#### Future-proofing the past

In recognition of the suite's cultural and architectural significance, The Dorchester has introduced a dedicated care guide and staff training programme to support its long-term preservation. These measures reflect an ongoing commitment to treat the suite not only as a place for guests, but as a living archive of British design and craftsmanship.





### A new chapter at The Dorchester

The Messel Suite's return follows the hotel's most significant transformation in over thirty years, including the renovation of guest rooms, The Promenade and Vesper Bar.

With the suite restored to its full theatrical splendour, The Dorchester takes another step into its evolution.

**The story continues this November. The restoration of the Penthouse and Pavilion will follow in early 2026.**

### Hare & Humphreys

We are delighted to have been entrusted to work with The Dorchester Special Projects Team to deliver this most prestigious renovation. The Dorchester is a London landmark set in the heart of Mayfair with views over Hyde Park. As part of Dorchester Collection, it has welcomed the world's most discerning guests since its opening in 1931.

### Our specialist services

Our team of highly skilled painters, decorators, gilders and conservators can manage diverse projects, from restoring a listed building to creating bespoke finishes in contemporary interiors. We can provide a range of interior design finishes for example painting, graining, gilding, trompe l'oeil, polished plasters, wallpaper and embossed leather.

Come and see us at our newly refurbished workshop and studio where we can help you translate your ideas and projects into reality.

### Architectural Paint Research

This is a process whereby we can determine through examining various layers of the paint, the original decoration of an element in a room or building. It is an important tool to determine not just the colours, but also the paint used and date when each scheme was carried out. Using this method, we can also work out the dates a door or a window might have been installed by counting how many layers of paint have been added compared to the rest of the room. Should you need any help on defining your colour scheme or improving your decorative painting techniques, we would be delighted to help.

### Our plan for the future

2025 has begun with the appointment of new management with a dynamic vision and mandate to expand opportunities in the conservation & heritage sector as well as generate controlled growth whilst fully respecting and retaining the traditions and ethics of the company. Hare & Humphreys new MD Thomas Wallerand states that **"our founding principles of quality, fairness, integrity and a warm customer focussed service will remain implicit in all that we do as we grow our business, and our people without compromising customer satisfaction."**



### Contact

**Thomas Wallerand,**

Managing Director

Mobile: 07947313453

Hare & Humphreys Ltd

27 Kelso Place, Kensington, London, W8 5QG

+44 (0) 20 7833 8806

info@hare-humphreys.co.uk

www.hare-humphreys.co.uk