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A CURTIS MEDIA PUBLICATION



Exhibition Piece

Early in the 20th century, Spanish King Alfonso XIII assembled a group of investors to build Madrid's first grand hotel, a palace in the vein of the Ritzes in London and Paris. The group enlisted the man behind those hotels, César Ritz, to oversee the development of the Madrid property, which opened across from the city's Museo Nacional del Prado in 1910. Each of the hotel's guest rooms included a handwoven rug from the Royal Tapestry Factory, where artist Francisco de Goya, whose paintings figure prominently in the Prado's collections, worked as a pattern designer in the 18th century. But it was the Ritz's contemporary amenities—telephones on each floor, rooms with walk-in wardrobes that could accommodate steamer trunks—that immediately established the hotel as one of Europe's finest.

Present-day guests at the Hotel Ritz arrive with less-cumbersome luggage in tow, although they still enter the crystal, marble, and gilt circular lobby through the original revolving wooden door. Orient-Express Hotels, which purchased the Ritz in 2003, preserved the door, lobby, and other

traditional elements during the company's recent refurbishment of the property (updating them, of course, with modern comforts including warm air piped to the entryway during the winter). Orient-Express also retained such Ritz pastimes as English tea, a ceremony that King Alfonso and his queen, Victoria Eugenia (niece of Britain's Edward VII), introduced to Madrid society. Today, servers trained by the Ritz London's tea butler dispense custom blends every afternoon in the Lobby Bar.

At the Ritz's Goya Restaurant, Basque chef Jorge González has lightened and modernized the dinner menu, although he continues to serve such caloric old-world classics as Chateaubriand. Guests can enjoy their meals in an elegant dining room or on the Ritz's white marble terrace, which overlooks the garden's fountains, ponds, and pergolas. Upstairs, in the sitting rooms of the hotel's deluxe suites, picture windows afford views of the Prado, a kindred keeper of Spain's past.

Hotel Ritz, 800.237.1236, +34.91.701.67.67,
www.ritzmadrid.com

LOCATION

On Paseo del Prado, within walking distance of Retiro Park and the Reina Sofía, Thyssen-Bornemisza, and Prado museums.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Soundproof windows are a welcome feature in all of the 137 rooms and 30 suites, the latter of which include parlors or spacious sitting rooms.

FACILITIES

A fitness center and sauna, as well as five rooms for meetings and special events.

DINING

Contemporary Spanish and Mediterranean cuisine from chef Jorge González at Goya Restaurant.

CONCIERGE

RECOMMENDS

Tour the Prado after hours, when conditions are ideal for viewing the dark power of Francisco de Goya's later works or the play of light and shadow in Diego Velázquez's royal portraits.

RATES

From \$600 to \$5,700.

