



## One hotel, one story

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# Hotel Cour du Corbeau: the former coaching inn turned four star hotel

Hotel MGallery Cour du Corbeau's wooden balustrades and typical Alsatian timbered façade catches the eyes of passersby and quite enchants its guests. This hotel located right in the center of Strasbourg boasts a rich and unique past as well as a string of famous guests. From coaching inn to glassworks, this exceptional destination is steeped in history and anecdotes.

This historical mansion and haven of peace is tucked away in the narrow cobbled lanes of Strasbourg's old city center, just a stone's throw from Notre-Dame Cathedral. It can be reached by crossing the Place Corbeau and passing through a porch. However, don't be fooled by its name as there are no ravens ("corbeau" in French) here, just the occasional pigeon cooing in the courtyard. The Hotel MGallery Cour du Corbeau is something of a legend. "The origin of the hotel's name isn't very clear," explains **Anne Gerber**, the General Manager. "Apparently, either it comes from the word 'rappen' meaning 'black horse' in German, which got distorted over the years into 'raben' or raven, or it comes from the old butchers' hall located close by on the shores of the Île de Strasbourg. In the olden days flocks of ravens swirled around that building."

### An impressive wooden balustrade

From the courtyard, visitors instantly notice the balustrade which is a genuine masterpiece of skill and technicality. The immense wooden structure is over ten meters high and adorns the hotel's outer walls. "It dates back to 1528, and is perfectly preserved in its original form". With original wooden walkways on both floors, this balustrade, which is unique in France, is used by the hotel's guests. "Several rooms have direct access to it to the delight of our guests who go out to take the air on it at sunrise or sunset", laughs **Anne Gerber**. With its time-worn patina, the majestic balustrade is proof of a bygone era, but it's not the only one, since the hotel's turret is crowned with a large stone statue of a raven, in an amusing reference to its name.



### Steeped in history

While visitors seeking an exceptional experience are not disappointed, the hotel's staff is equally enchanted by the surroundings. "My colleagues are unanimous," confides Anne Gerber. "It's a magical place." The building can be traced back to 1306 and is one of the last hotels built exclusively from wood. "The breakfast room is located in the old stables and when the renovations took place in 2009, workers uncovered the horses' old water troughs!" The rooms' bright red doors are also no accident: The restorer working on the project found pigment traces of the original color and discovered that during the Renaissance, the inn's paints were made with...oxblood!

### Surprises and questions

The hotel has 57 spacious rooms and suites decorated in a revisited 16th century style that ensures all modern comforts. The rooms boast "romantic interiors" with classical furnishings, for example Louis XV armchairs upholstered in modern mauve, pink and grey fabrics. Some rooms with sloping ceilings have timeless charm. "Many of our guests are curious about the building's history and also want to know about its former owners," observes **Anne Gerber**. To answer their questions fully, all of the hotel's employees have received a lesson about the key moments in the building's history. "Telling the story of Cour du Corbeau is part of providing an efficient and memorable welcome and thus fulfilling the MGallery collection's promise."

### Famous guests

The building, which has a tumultuous history, started out as a coaching inn between the 16th and 17th centuries, providing shelter for

hundreds of cavaliers and their mounts. It was closed in 1854 and transformed into a glassworks. During World War II, when the Nazis ordered the workers to dismount the stained glass windows in Strasbourg's cathedral, they disobeyed and packed false replica windows to be sent to Germany. "Legend has it that Mozart stayed here and even that Emperor Frederick the Great of Prussia resided here under an assumed name to spy on the French army but had to flee as soon as his cover was blown." Apparently, the Maréchal de Turenne and the King of Poland also took lodgings at the inn.

#### A challenging building

Cour du Corbeau was declared a listed historical monument in 1930, and it is definitely no ordinary building. Its narrow corridors and various different levels, mean housekeepers cannot use cleaning carts. It also has very few pantries and because of its many staircases, employees practically require arduous physical training. "Actually, before we recruit we ask candidates if they are sporty and fit", laughs **Anne Gerber**. "Honestly, employees mustn't be afraid of investing all their energy when working here." However, as the saying goes: "there's no reward without effort," and the sunbathed stone courtyard provides an idyllic setting for a pause under the old chestnut tree. There is one compulsory condition to becoming a member of the Cour du Corbeau team: to be and appear happy. "Our top priority is to please. We ask all our staff for a big smile and a very positive attitude," comments **Anne Gerber**.



#### A prime attraction

Ever since it opened on May 1, 2009, the building has attracted curious visitors who sometimes even come right up to its iron gates. "This ancient residence with a soul" features in the Guide Michelin as one of Strasbourg's "must see" attractions alongside the Cathedral and Cour du Corbeau.

#### A haven of peace

Nonetheless, this hotel in the heart of the city's historic center is a refuge for guests and personnel alike. "It's very peaceful here and we're protected from everything all year round. The Cour du Corbeau is a sanctuary." In the summer, the balustrade is decked with brightly colored geraniums and at night the lantern light reflects on the wood carvings, just as it must have in the cavaliers' days.

Recently, an old legend came to light about a lace-maker who worked for the Shah of Iran. Though it is impossible to verify, it is now part and parcel of the history of this coaching inn turned four star hotel. "Every day I feel as if I'm in another century!" concludes **Anne Gerber**. "Who could turn down a journey like that?"



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