

Bonhams

1793

Issue 33



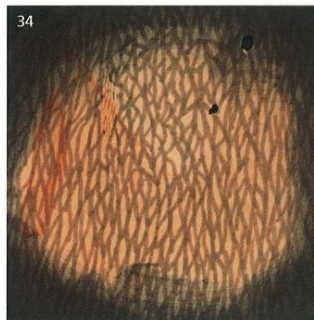
Front Cover:
Luca Carlevarij (1663-1730)
The Piazzetta, Venice, looking towards
the Punta della Dogana
Estimate: £400,000 - 600,000
(\$650,000 - 960,000)
See page 30

Above: A fine Imperial rare pale
green jade carving of Buddha
18th century
17.3cm (6¾in) high
Estimate: £140,000 - 70,000
(HK\$500,000 - 870,000)

Sale: In Pursuit of Excellence:
An English Private Collection
of Fine Jade Carvings
New Bond Street
Thursday 8 November at 10am



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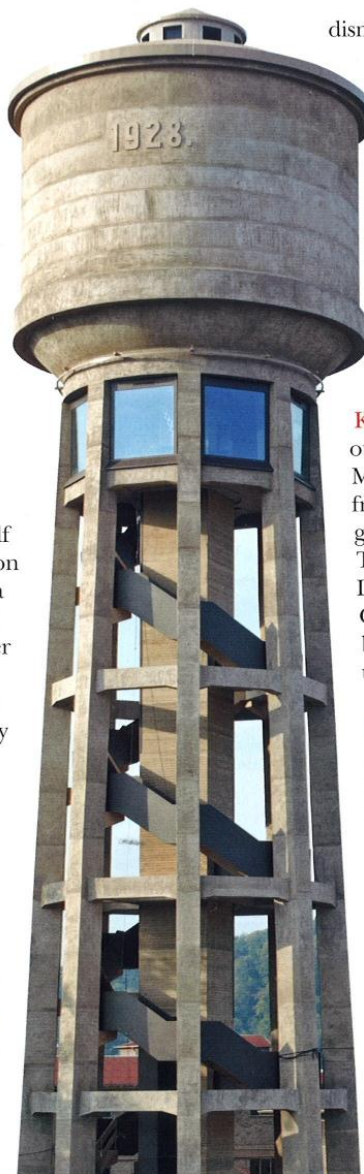
We were map in hand and lost trying to find **Um Plateau**, the place to eat in Luxembourg, when a buttery-haired middle-aged man asked if he could help. Actually, he did more than that: he took us to the door of the restaurant. It was only when we read the card he'd proffered that we realised we'd been escorted to our destination by the Director of Tourism himself. But then, as he said, this is a small world.

In one afternoon of sightseeing, we'd walked round the city walls, seen most of the major galleries, and had a sighting of Mr Luxembourg and perhaps a member of the royal family.

Luxembourg is often overlooked, and for good reason. It's squeezed between France, Germany and Belgium – which swallowed half the territory as a result of the Treaty of London in 1839. All that's left of the Grand Duchy is a mere 998 square miles of land – which could fit into Wales eight times. It is, however, rather rich. (There are statistics that claim Luxembourg has the highest GDP per capita in the world.) It also explains why the country has been punching above its weight in opening new art museums and renovating disused spaces.

At the heart of Luxembourg City – which retains a faintly Ruritanian air – stood the fortress which gave the place its sobriquet 'the Gibraltar of the North'. Although it was

“When we read his card we realised we'd been escorted to the restaurant by the Director of Tourism”



dismantled in 1867, the remaining walls, turrets and casements dominate the skyline. One of its outposts, **Fort Thüngen**, now houses a museum explaining the fortress and how it shaped Luxembourg. Although it charts the weep-makingly numerous times the city changed hands, it's one of those museums that brings a subject alive through ingenious audiovisuals combined with well-chosen historical exhibits. Behind it is I.M. Pei's **Modern Art Museum**, aka Mudam. Pei was given a free hand to choose his site, and he settled on a plot between the fortress and the

Kirchberg, Luxembourg's banking district, an outcrop of shiny, mirror-plated towers. Mudam's building itself is the star, particularly from the interior, where the light-filled galleries show contemporary art to perfection. The snag is that until this century, Luxembourg had no modern art collection. On my visit there were a few desultory works by Blinky Palermo, Daniel Buren and the ubiquitous Warhol. Great café, though.

The permanent collection of the **National Museum of History and Art** isn't up to much either (there's a Turner watercolour that looks as if it was caught in a downpour, and some prehistoric pots), but this winter there's a wonderful exhibition of silver belonging to the ruling family, which has come out of the vaults to mark the marriage of Prince Guillaume, the heir to the Grand Duchy, to Belgian Countess Stéphanie de Lannoy.

My favourite, however, has to be the **Luxembourg City History Museum**, which contains a wonderfully self-critical look at the nation. There's a whole room devoted to Luxembourg's woeful football team –

When in Luxembourg...

Where to stay

The preserved nature of Luxembourg City's centre lends itself to boutique hotels, rather than big chain monstrosities. One of the premier places to stay is **Le Place d'Armes** (18 Place d'Armes, L-1136 Luxembourg; +352 27 47 37; hotel-leplacedarmes.com, pictured below), a Relais et Chateaux hotel that overlooks the main city square of the same name. Constructed from eight or so 18th-century houses, it boasts an engagingly quaint atmosphere, but up-to-date service. It is also well-positioned for the Saturday flea market that takes place on its doorstep. (Antique linen napkins a mere £3.) **Le Royal** (12 Boulevard Royal, 2449 Luxembourg; +352 241 6161; www.leroyal.com/luxembourg) is probably the choice for the corporate visitor. It has 200 rooms and all the facilities, and is set on one of the main boulevards overlooking the cavernous park that acts as the city's moat. But if I was here on business, I'd be more inclined to choose **Parc Beaux-Arts Hotel Luxembourg** (1 Rue Sigefroi, L-2536 Luxembourg; +352 26 86 76 1; www.parcbeauxarts.lu), which faces the National Museum of Art. It has good wi-fi, and all the financial newspapers in the breakfast room, and the suites are light and airy. The only drawback is that it can be noisy on a Friday night.



Where to eat

With 13 starred restaurants – a total of 16 Michelin stars shared out between them – Luxembourg can claim to have the most stars per capita of any city in the world. The top three are **Mosconi**, **Clairfontaine** and **Bouquet Garni**. Mosconi, a two-star Italian restaurant set in the Grund, the lower part of Luxembourg, has picturesque views along the river, and is reached by a public lift. If eating Italian in what has been regarded as a region of France is counterintuitive, then try **Clairfontaine** or **Bouquet Garni**, both of which are French – the latter is the more traditional. My favourite has not yet been decorated with a Michelin star. This is **Um Plateau**, which has a very inventive menu, and on good (or bad) nights, the atmosphere of a nightclub. **L.B.**



Far left: National Museum of Art
Left: Mudam, I.M. Pei's Modern Art
Museum; Bottom: Waassertuerm in
Dudelange, a new photography gallery

Above: The faintly Ruritanian
church of St John the Baptist
Below: Fort Thüngen,
now converted into a museum

the town went wild when they lost 'only' 3-0 to Germany – as well as an indictment about how Qatar is the latest of the country's invaders (it bought Banque Internationale Luxembourg), and an attack on the country's education system. Again, it is the building that is of interest: set in the old part of the city, it is a collection of buildings dug out of the rock with a panoramic view of the vertiginous capital from the top storey.

The most recent space to be unveiled is the **Waassertuerm** in Dudelange, an old steel town outside Luxembourg City. It is also one of the most spectacular spaces I've seen for a long time. The circular gallery, nearly 50m above ground, is set at the top of an industrial water tower which, with the adjacent 19th century pumping station or **Pomhouse**, forms two new galleries dedicated to photography for the Centre National de l'Audiovisuel (CNA). The tower, a work of art in its own right, has been made the permanent home of Edward Steichen's exhibition *The Bitter Years 1935-1941*. Steichen, who was born in Luxembourg, curated the show about the dustbowl depression for the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1962, and donated more than 200 images by photographers including Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange. This is an instance in which a wonderful collection has been united with a perfect building. It's more than worth the detour.

Linda Bredin is Editor of Bonhams Magazine.

