

Paris, 30 September 2024

Press release

Prix Versailles 2024: The World's Most Beautiful Passenger Stations

The Prix Versailles is unveiling the World's Most Beautiful Passenger Stations List 2024: six recently opened or renovated train and metro stations that simultaneously serve creativity, the reflection of local heritage and ecological efficiency, and that leave extraordinary imprints on their environments.

They will all be competing for three 2024 World Titles – Prix Versailles, Interior and Exterior – whose laureates will be announced at UNESCO Headquarters on 2 December 2024.

The architecture of passenger stations is enjoying great renewed interest, thanks in part to their contribution to intelligent sustainable development, as related by Jérôme Gouadain, Secretary General of the Prix Versailles:

“Passenger stations are once again an essential component of our living environment. They fulfil the role of gateway to a geographic area and, in many instances, serve as public spaces within that area. They encapsulate urban life, facilitate mobility and promote eco-friendly public transport. Building beautiful passenger stations is an investment that could not be more current or beneficial to our societies.”



PRIX VERSAILLES

WORLD'S MOST BEAUTIFUL PASSENGER STATIONS LIST 2024

Schafbergbahn Station

St. Wolfgang, Austria

Bell Station

Melbourne, Australia

Beijing Station

Beijing, China

Toulouse Matabiau Station

Toulouse, France

Chiaia Metro Station

Naples, Italy

Grand Central Madison

New York, United States

*The Laureates are listed in the alphabetical order of the countries they represent
(based on their two-letter ISO 3166 country codes).*



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PRESENTATION OF THE LAUREATES

Schafbergbahn Station

St. Wolfgang, Austria

The Schafbergbahn, which has been in service since 1893, is Austria's steepest steam-powered cog railway. It runs 5.85 kilometres from St. Wolfgang in the valley to the top of Schafberg Mountain, which stands at an elevation of 1,783 metres and boasts breathtaking 360° views.

The trip is a bucolic journey that takes 35 minutes each way.

The experience begins and ends at the same station (at an elevation of 542 metres) whose original structure was reinterpreted and revitalised by the firm dunkelschwarz.

The public areas – the lobby and ticket office, gift shop, restaurant, etc. – occupy a bright concourse looking out over Lake Wolfgang and the mountains, while an outdoor terrace gives passengers the chance to experience the elements.

The “industrial” vocabulary of the atmospheric material pays homage to history. At the same time, the building’s design and the use of warm wood offer all the modern conveniences in terms of services and comfort.

A “pleasure railway station” – or ErlebnisQuartier – with powerful charms.



© Albrecht Imanuel Schnabel



© Albrecht Imanuel Schnabel



© Albrecht Imanuel Schnabel

Bell Station

Melbourne, Australia

In the sprawling expanses of Australia, level crossings become a boundary, if not a scar, when cities catch up with history. This was the case of Melbourne, where a vast urban design and landscape plan was launched.

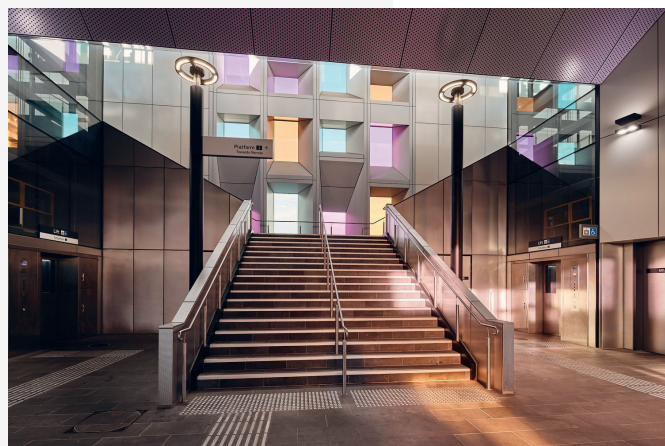
Born of the talent and imagination of the Wood Marsh studio, Bell, in Preston, is part of a new generation of elevated railway stations.

It stands out for its concrete façade – a nod to the heritage-listed housing ringed the site – and a three-dimensional pattern representing the roofscape of the city of Darebin.

Multi-coloured glass windows filter the light, spreading a gentle yet invigorating atmosphere throughout the concourse. In a blend of culture and preparedness, a public amphitheatre doubles as a flood basin.

Part of Greater Melbourne, this project was by no means short on ambition, whether in terms of inclusivity or ecology, as evidenced by the many lawns and strips of native plants surrounding the entrances.

This amazing structure is helping to breathe new life into the urban landscape by flawlessly embodying the concept of intelligent sustainability.



© Peter Bennetts



© Peter Bennetts



© Peter Bennetts

Beijing Station

Beijing, China

In 1959, a decade after the People's Republic of China was founded, the Beijing Station was built. At the time, the country had a population of around 670 million people, whence the gargantuan scale of the building for the times. The station's architecture employed the traditional Chinese style although, in a context of scarceness, the architects and craftsmen had to make do with the limited resources at their disposal.

The interior renovation, orchestrated by WIT Design & Research, offers a chance to rediscover the depth and finesse of the skills of a people writing their own history, with each outer wall a work of art in glass.

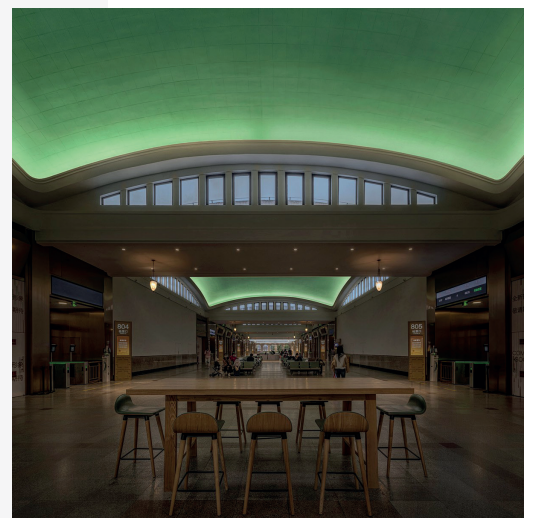
In one of the waiting rooms, the leather seats are even the same green as the originals in the 1950s, coming full circle with a nostalgic touch.

More surprising though is the fact that, once the facilities and amenities were brought up to date, the original monumental spaces proved to be perfectly sized for the capital city of a country whose population has doubled.

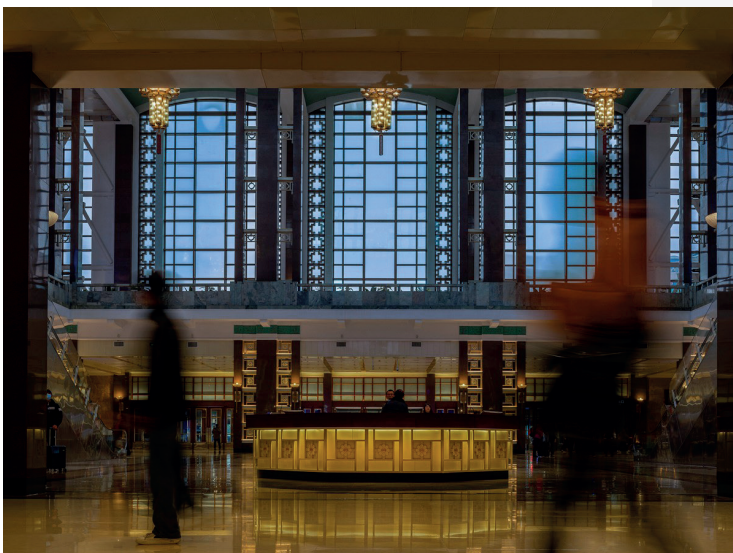
A real gem.



© Simon & Topia



© Simon & Topia



© Simon & Topia

Toulouse Matabiau Station

Toulouse, France



© SNCF Gares & Connexions / Emmanuel Grimault



© AREP / Sébastien Sindeu

In 1905, the architect Marius Toudoire explained that Toulouse Matabiau Station, which he created, took the form of a new “palace”. Over a century later, the contemporary architects at AREP had to comb through the archives, diving into the station’s many metamorphoses, before they were able to locate any images of what is now a listed building.

The metal frames, the awnings and the mouldings were restored, the missing capitals were recreated out of fibrous plaster, and the monumental woodwork on the side facing the Canal du Midi were all directly inspired by the ones that were designed for the original station.

The challenge was then to glorify a historic building whilst bringing its accessibility and its passenger services up to date.

Inside, the choice of colours and materials adheres to the goal of understatedness, with a mirror polish reflecting travellers’ movements and lights from the shops enhancing the dynamics and the activity of the place.

The station’s resolutely modern architecture is characterised by precision and airiness.



© AREP / Sébastien Sindeu

Chiaia Metro Station

Naples, Italy



© Azienda Napoletana Mobilità SpA

In connection with Uberto Siola's architectural project, Peter Greenaway's artistic contribution extends throughout the new station, taking part in a mythological descent into the heart of the city. Each level is associated with a mythological deity and a colour.

A sculpture of Jupiter with 24 arms signals the entrance.

Below the surface, in shades of white and blue, is a well dedicated to Neptune, measuring 12 metres in diameter. Along the staircase spiralling downwards, passengers can read a verse by Ovid: *Est in aqua dulci non invidiosa voluptas* ("In pure water there is a pleasure begrudged by none").

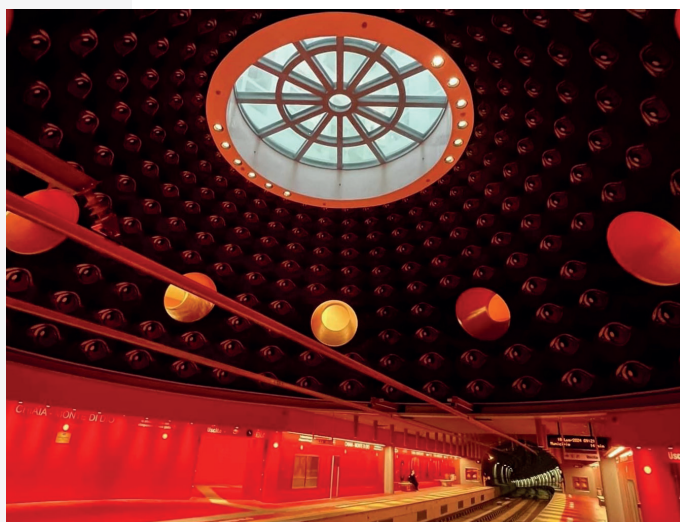
Farther underground is an area devoted to Ceres, organised in a square grid.

In this setting dominated by green, reproductions of statues from the Naples National Archaeological Museum's Farnese Collection are on display.

An ochre-coloured passageway dedicated to Proserpina leads to the last level, in Pompeian red, which is crowned by a steel dome with a circular skylight at the centre, allowing natural light to filter down to the platforms. 320 eyes represent the gaze of Pluto, King of the Underworld, staring out at adventurous travellers passing by.



© Azienda Napoletana Mobilità SpA



© Azienda Napoletana Mobilità SpA

Grand Central Madison

New York, United States

It's hard to imagine that, 43 metres below posh Park Avenue and more than 27 metres beneath Grand Central Terminal, you can find Grand Central Madison, the biggest expansion of the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) in a century and a major feat of engineering.

It was bold undertaking for a colossal project involving AECOM, that aimed to provide a smoother commute to Manhattan, namely by diverting traffic away from Penn Station.

While Grand Central Madison's architecture is, above all, an act of technical prowess, it also delivers a truly unexpected visitor experience. Moving along a wide concourse and a mezzanine that's as vast as it is bright, travellers gradually make their way into abysses papered with unique works of art, treating them to an extraordinary, magical journey.

The selection of pieces is spectacular, featuring commissioned digital art, Poetry in Motion exhibits on massive LED screens, a permanent photography display, live concerts and the latest technological systems.

Simultaneously understated, contemporary and artistic, what could be a better tribute to the trendy charms of the Big Apple?



© Metropolitan Transportation Authority



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