

Remembrances of Rooms Past

When in Rome

ONCE UPON A TIME, TUCKED AWAY IN THE GRAND HALLS OF THE GREEK AND ROMAN WING OF NEW YORK CITY'S METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, WAS A TECHNICOLOR OASIS WORTHY OF EMPEROR AUGUSTUS—DREAMED UP BY NONE OTHER THAN THE LEGENDARY DOROTHY DRAPER.

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The Fountain of the Muses by sculptor Carl Milles added to the room's sense of fantasy. In 1982, the pool was drained and the muses shipped off to South Carolina.

Standing in the current iteration of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Roman Court, it's hard to envision it as anything other than an impressive limestone-and-marble backdrop for the ancient art it holds. But from 1954 to 2003, the area all the way at the end of the McKim, Mead & White-designed classical wing served as the museum's main watering hole, and the restaurant was designed by Dorothy Draper, just one of the many boldfaced commercial projects the self-trained decorator completed in the Big Apple over her impressive forty-year career. Nicknamed "The Dorotheum" with some derision by the museum's then-director and conservative all-male board of directors, the soaring sky-lit room nevertheless

delighted the public, and the *New York Times* referred to it as "one of New York's most beautiful dining rooms." With her signature theatrical touches and saturated palette, Draper coated the walls, ceiling and column bases in a decadent blackberry hue. Banquettes and chairs popped in vibrant coral and electric aquamarine, and oversize birdcage chandeliers hovered overhead. Every detail was chosen to reduce the room's vast scale and make it more human. Eventually the pool was drained for more seating, the furniture was swapped out and only the fanciful lights from the original scheme remained, until the museum restaurant was relocated and the Court underwent a four-year restoration, reverting it back to a gallery.