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The chandeliers in the Grand Ballroom of the Palmer House are being cleaned as part of the $150 million renovation of the historic hotel.

Hotel's top brass waited 80 years for this cleaning

PALMER HOUSE | Grand Ballroom chandeliers will be back up by January's SoxFest

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When the chandeliers first went up, bathtub gin and speakeasies, hot jazz and flappers were all the rage.

Now, the 23 massive brass and crystal fixtures from France that have graced the Grand Ballroom of the historic downtown Palmer House have come down — for the first time in over 80 years.

A huge undertaking that's part of the $150 million renovation of the nation's longest continuously operating hotel, restoring the chandeliers has drawn an army of workers to the hotel, charged with restoring the intricate works — together weighing over 5 tons — in time for SoxFest, annually held in the ballroom at January's end.

"The thing I found really unusual is that every component no matter how tiny is marked, like M1, M2, M3, etc., almost like an erector set, which leads me to believe they were assembled here," said brass cleaner Sylvia Balouris.

A technician cleans a piece of brass from one of the chandeliers.
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On Tuesday, she was among dozens of employees with Lumenelle Inc. and Brook Electric — firms commissioned to do the work — who filled a hotel hallway turned chandelier workshop with humming and clanking, as they meticulously cleaned each chandelier's aged brass and more than 5,000 Czechoslovakian crystals, 10 of them over 10 feet tall.

It's the largest restoration project ever by the two firms, noted Beth Raymond, who oversees repair of crystals.

"We pull them down strand by strand, repair wiring, replace chipped crystals and clean them in a four-step process," Raymond said. "Each will be touched by hands at least five times."