

# AMBITION & OPPORTUNITY

The finest hotels in the United States and Canada celebrate an energy and immediacy born of their unique origins. Unlike Europe, the only criteria for entry into any establishment was personal wealth. Self-made men were applauded. However humble an individual's past, it was their current status that opened doors in the New World, including those to the finest hotel rooms. For the bulk of America's new citizens, advantage handed down by birthright was a constraint they had been keen to leave behind.



REST ROOM

THE WALDORF

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# CHAPTER 8

# NEW YORK

## POWER AND PROMINENCE

Nothing quite compares with flying into New York City. Manhattan Island – what a skyline! There may be cities around the world with taller buildings, but no other metropolis can claim to have been the first to rise up and embrace the sky with such enthusiasm. Between 1890 and 1930, midtown Manhattan rose like a beacon to the world. It is difficult to imagine that for most of the eighteenth century, Boston, Charleston and Philadelphia competed with New York for primacy as the key East Coast port. However, New York dominated after the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, which shipped goods and people from as far away as Buffalo on the Niagara River. Considered the greatest technological feat of its day, the canal led to a dramatic increase in farming and trade – all of it passing through the port of New York.



RIGHT: Viscount William Waldorf Astor, seen here with Lady Nancy Astor, built the Waldorf Hotel as the result of a bitter feud with his aunt.

By the 1830s, New York was ready for a first-class hotel. Architect Isaiah Rogers had designed Boston's Tremont for his client John Jacob Astor, a recently retired trader, who ultimately became the first to be called 'America's richest man.'

Rogers' designs for Astor House (1836) took up an entire Broadway block in lower Manhattan between Barclay and Vesey Streets, which was then the centre of the city. It was considered New York's first luxury hotel: 309 rooms with individual locks to ensure privacy, running water in every bed chamber, 17 basement bathrooms, privies on upper floors, segregated dining and drawing rooms for ladies and gentlemen, as well as many parlours on the ground floor and suites on the floor above. A trend-setting hostelry when it opened in 1836, it featured shops at street level and also originated the free bar lunch.

Astor House was immediately popular with the wealthy, famous and powerful, including Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, Sam Houston and Charles Dickens. Davy Crockett was one of the hotel's first guests. The celebrity guest list also gave rise to the historic first-ever reporting, in the *New York Herald*, of a hotel's social comings and goings.

## ENEMY NUMBER ONE – FIRE

Late in the Civil War (1861-5), Confederate rebels conceived an audacious plan to strike at the heart of New York by simultaneously setting alight more than a dozen leading hotels, with the intention of reducing the entire city to ashes. On the night of 27 November 1864, fires were successfully started in upper rooms at Astor House, the St Nicholas, Fifth Avenue Hotel, Metropolitan Hotel, The United States Hotel, and others. Fortunately the police were already aware of the plot and hotel managements were ready and waiting. Though fires were started in all these hotels, they were quickly brought under control. The potential catastrophe was averted.

Whether modest or grand, all American hotels of this era faced a singular enemy: fire. Most began as accidents in the guest rooms or in the kitchen, as early hotels used open fires for heating the rooms and gas lighting after dark. Some were deliberately lit. Until building materials changed from timber to stone, steel and concrete and fire safety regulations were introduced, many hotels went up in flames including Palmer House, Chicago; The Palace Hotel, San Francisco; The Congress Hotel on Cape May and the Sherry-Netherland in 1927.

Headlines called it 'The Best Show of the Season in New York City.' The new Sherry-Netherland Hotel became a blazing beacon for miles as the scaffolding above the 32nd story completely burned. It was the first real skyscraper fire that thousands of New Yorkers had ever witnessed.

## BIG CITY MEETS WILD WEST

Much went on in the early New York hotels, as they catered to a diverse social mix. The Clarendon Hotel opened in 1846 and was financed by John Jacob Astor's son, William Backhouse Astor. It was here that Peter Cooper and Cyrus Field met in 1854 with other investors to raise money for the trans-Atlantic telegraph cable. The Grand Central Hotel, on Broadway and West 3rd Street, was the scene of unrestrained passion on 6 January 1872 when Edward Stokes shot financier Jim Fisk, his rival for the affections of singer Josie Mansfield. A film was made about this scandalous event called *The Toast of New York* (1937), starring Cary Grant.

The Glenham Hotel opened in 1862 on Broadway and East 22nd Street. It was here on 2 April 1882, that the son of Commodore Vanderbilt, Cornelius Jr, shot himself after a night of excessive drinking and gambling. As the city grew north, Gilsey House (1869) opened on the corner of 29th and Broadway. Guests included American financier and philanthropist Jim Brady, and Mark Twain. Gilsey House was the first hotel in New York with a telephone and was only a stroll to Delmonico's, one of the most celebrated restaurants of the day.

Between 1880 and 1900, Manhattan's population grew by 500% to 3.5 million. The city boundaries continued to push north, especially after Central Park was completed in 1873, and the grid of streets on either side opened up for development.

## THE EXTRAORDINARY ASTORS

The story of New York hotels of this era is in many ways that of the Astor family. When patriarch John Jacob Astor died in 1842 he had accumulated US\$20 million – in those days the equivalent of one fifteenth of America's entire wealth. His son, William Backhouse, took charge of the real estate business, doubling the family fortune. Soon after, a family squabble broke out between William Backhouse Astor's son, William Waldorf Astor and Caroline Webster Schermerhorn Astor – his Aunt Lina.

After William Backhouse died, the two enemy combatants found themselves inhabiting adjacent



brownstones on Fifth Avenue. It particularly irked the status-obsessed William Waldorf, now he was official head of the Astor family, that his wife was not considered *the* Mrs Astor of New York.

That his aunt would not release her grip was a gross breach of protocol so far as her nephew was concerned. He decided, partly in revenge, to raze his father's home and construct what he intended to be the finest hotel in New York – to be called the Waldorf. If anything were to infuriate Aunt Lina, it would surely be several years of noisy construction, followed by an invasion of low-lives into this most sacrosanct of New York's residential enclaves.

Caroline Astor upped the ante. She relocated uptown, instructing her own son – John Jacob Astor IV – to build an even bigger hotel on her block. It was to be called the Astoria and Aunt Lina's motivation was direct competition.

## THE GILDED AGE

The term Gilded Age, coined in part by Mark Twain, is an ironic take on what could have been a Golden Age but for its pretentious elitism. This period, following the Civil War and the post-Reconstruction era saw unprecedented expansion paralleled by gauche displays of new wealth.

The New York hotels built in this era including the Chelsea and the first Waldorf–Astoria were characterised by an opulence hitherto unimagined. Moving from land purchasing to property development, the Astor family dominated this market for several decades.

Other super-rich families including the Vanderbilts, Fricks, Goulds and Stuyvesant-Fish, represented the pinnacle of the elite clientele served by these superb hotels: their financial achievements transformed into high social status and manifested in phenomenal spending power.



## An Artists' Enclave THE CHELSEA HOTEL

The only significant hotel to survive from downtown Manhattan and the Gilded Age is the Chelsea Hotel. Built in 1883 on 23rd Street between 7th and 8th Avenue, it was the tallest building in New York City until 1902. After failing as a residential co-operative, the Chelsea was reconfigured in 1905 into a sober and respectable hotel. Up until 2007, it was managed by the indefatigable Stanley Bard for 48 years.

The building that now houses the Hotel Chelsea was a private apartment co-operative in 1883. At the time it was in the centre of New York's theatre district. However, within a few years the combination of economic woes and the relocation of the theatres effectively bankrupted the Chelsea.

In April 1912, the Chelsea was one of several New York hotels to take in survivors from the sinking of the *Titanic*, who had arrived in New York on the ship *Caparhia*. Those from steerage were directed to Hotel Riverview on Jane Street, while

first-class passengers recuperated at the Chelsea and the Waldorf=Astoria.

The Chelsea remains one of New York's most remarkable landmarks, with a reputation resting largely on the extent to which its management has tolerated and indeed embraced many promising unknowns who went on to spectacular careers. Art from many former tenants hangs on the walls, much of it in lieu of rent.

The rooms to this day have a fantastic 'period feel' and the hotel is still crowded with creative

and unconventional people. Unfortunately the rock-bottom tariffs are something of the past as nostalgia groupies happily pay top dollar for an opportunity to soak up a little of the hotel's celebrity aura. The future of the hotel, which has recently undergone a controversial change of management, is uncertain.

ABOVE: Dylan Thomas, New York City, 1950.



## THE CHELSEA RESIDENTS

By the 1950s the Hotel Chelsea had become the place to stay for any ambitious artist arriving in New York. Actors, writers, artists and musicians, many of them long-term residents: Sarah Bernhardt, Lillian Russell, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Cartier-Bresson, Mary McCarthy, Brendan Behan, Vladimir Nabokov, William Burroughs, Claes Oldenburg, Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, Virgil Thomson, Robert Mapplethorpe, Patti Smith, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Jack Kerouac, Joni Mitchell, Milos Forman, Allen Ginsburg, Nico and others of the Warhol Factory crowd and Jim Morrison. The great Irish author of *Under Milkwood*, Dylan Thomas, fell into a coma in one of the Chelsea's rooms, having returned a few days earlier from a record drinking binge of eighteen scotches. A few extra beers over the next few days did not help.

Thomas Wolfe wrote *Look Homeward Angel*, William Burroughs wrote *Naked Lunch* and Arthur C. Clarke wrote *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Leonard Cohen penned 'Chelsea Hotel No 2'; Andy Warhol filmed *Chelsea Girls*; and some of *9½ Weeks* was also filmed at the Chelsea.

Musicians, writers, rock groups and painters got to know each other waiting for the elevator. Parties were regularly organised in their rooms, and they

were always visiting each other. After marrying at a secret ceremony, Bob Dylan and his wife Sarah moved into apartment 211 at the Chelsea in 1965. Leonard Cohen and a gang of Warhol cohorts were already familiar faces at the front desk. During the day Dylan worked on his next album *Blonde on Blonde* which includes his haunting masterpiece, 'Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands' which was directly influenced by his feeling for Sarah. *Blonde on Blonde*, released in 1966, can also be said to have been 'born' of the Chelsea Hotel's nurturing environment. Punk anti-hero, Sid Vicious, fatally stabbed his girlfriend Nancy Spungen in their Chelsea room in 1978 before dying of a drug overdose not long after.

ABOVE LEFT: *Bob Dylan and wife Sarah.*

ABOVE RIGHT: *Sid Vicious on stage with his American girlfriend Nancy Spungen, 1978.*

RIGHT: *Art surrounds the front desk of the Hotel Chelsea, much of it created by residents and guests of*





## New York's Unofficial Palace THE WALDORF=ASTORIA

The arrival of the triumph we know as the Waldorf=Astoria coincided with the point in history when late nineteenth century grand hotels were at their most opulent. When the first hotel was pulled down and replaced on that site by the Empire State Building, an entirely new Waldorf=Astoria was built uptown. It seems New York would always be synonymous with a Waldorf=Astoria.

### THE ORIGINAL WALDORF

William Astor took an interest in the initial stages of the creation of the Waldorf Hotel (1893), together with his financial adviser, Abner Bartlett. Their first task was to find the right person to run the hotel. Their selection was George C Boldt, known to Astor as the proprietor of the impeccably managed Hotel Bellevue in Philadelphia. Boldt accepted the position of Proprietor and General Manager, while Astor maintained ownership of the land and building.

The architect was Henry Janeway Hardenbergh, one of New York's most respected specialists in large buildings. He initially attracted serious

attention with his Dakota Apartments (1880–4) on Central Park West (where John Lennon was living when he was shot). His other New York hotels include the Astoria (1897); The Manhattan (1897); Hotel Martinique (1897–1911); and ultimately his great Beaux Arts masterpiece – the Plaza – which opened to great fanfare in 1907.

The final key appointment was Oscar Tschirky as maître d'hôtel. Oscar had made a name for himself at Delmonico's, but became even more famous for his customer service at the Waldorf. Indeed, the reputations of both the hotel and Oscar himself became inextricably entwined.

### WALDORF MOVES TO ENGLAND

In the summer of 1891, New Yorkers began to see the steel framework of the Waldorf structure rise above the skyline. With the project under way, snobbish William Waldorf Astor left New York with his family to relocate permanently in London. He had made his mark on the city of New York and, so far as Aunt Lina was concerned, the point had been made.

## MORE THAN JUST A PLACE TO STAY

The effects of the Waldorf's presence in the city ricocheted through the entire top end of the hospitality industry. Many of those loyal to other establishments were tempted to try the new Waldorf and a new mix of people from all walks of New York life were drawn together to create the Waldorf's diverse clientele. In fact, the hotel set about changing the way New Yorkers themselves lived. Extending beyond the traditional offerings of bed and board, large public rooms were created on the lower floors for the specific use of locals.

For the first time, New York's most important women had, courtesy of the Palm Room, their own place to meet. With facilities such as a grand ballroom and private dining rooms for hire, some saw an opportunity to knock Caroline Astor off her perch. It is said that Mrs Stuyvesant Fish set about her campaign with particular relish!

Meanwhile, 'Oscar of the Waldorf', as he came to be known, presided over these merged empires of hospitality and the culinary arts with a gracious air of sophisticated insouciance. By the end of 1896, just before the Astoria opened, the Waldorf had become the smartest hotel in America.

## CREATING THE ASTORIA (1897)

Cousins, John Jacob Astor IV and William Waldorf Astor didn't like each other, but they were convinced by Bartlett and Boldt that both had much to gain by joining forces. This strategy brought architect Hardenbergh back to build Aunt Lina's Astoria.

At 17 stories, the Astoria stood 65 metres tall. The combined hotels offered a total of 1000 rooms and 750 bathrooms, a 91 metre marble ground-floor corridor, a ballroom ceiling 15 metres high, and a Palm Garden Dining Room beneath a glazed dome and moulded plasterwork ceiling. Together, the combined Waldorf=Astoria offered 40 public rooms for the use of locals.

The two hotels could easily be separated from each other if there were any further family squabbles. The Waldorf=Astoria never faced such a challenge and was permanently joined, as it transpired, by a celebrated corridor known as Peacock Alley. It is claimed that up to 25,000 people a day took advantage of this thoroughfare to show off their fashions or admire the finery of others.

## AN UNUSUAL MIX OF GUESTS

Social life at the Waldorf=Astoria hit a peak in 1897 when the Bradley-Martin Ball – fancy dress on the theme of Louis XV at Versailles – spilt over from the Waldorf into sections of the yet to be officially opened Astoria. There was some criticism of the lavishness of this occasion. Mrs Bradley-Martin announced that the reason she had given the ball was to provide work for dressmakers, florists and caterers. If there were any further complaints, she threatened to relocate to London. Not long after, she did.



## OPENING NIGHT

The Waldorf officially opened on 14 March 1893. With Boldt, his wife Louise and Oscar standing together at the door to greet each guest, the Waldorf's renowned 'house style' was born: there would always be a personal touch and scrupulous attention to individual needs. The evening was conceived as a charity fundraiser, and Mrs Alva Vanderbilt proved herself to be a formidable new arrival on New York's social scene by donating the music – the New York Symphony Orchestra. Its sweet harmonies did not go unnoticed. Nor did Mrs Vanderbilt's sharp eye miss the eighteen-carat gold-plated bathroom fixtures in the private suites: "You don't have to clean them, you know," she tartly declared.

LEFT: *The dining room in the Waldorf=Astoria, 1902.*

ABOVE: *At the Waldorf Hotel in New York in 1921, this guest surprised everyone by opening her trunk to reveal her two pet dogs.*



## DIVORCE AND DROWNING

John Jacob Astor IV of the Astoria was a man of many interests. He wrote science fiction, patented several inventions and served as an officer in Cuba during the Spanish-American War. Astor divorced his wife Ava and in 1911, at the age of 47, married a pretty and well-bred 18-year-old, Madeleine Talmadge Force. Such a scandal erupted that the pair escaped New York for an extended honeymoon in Europe and Egypt.

While travelling, Madeleine became pregnant and, wanting the child born in the United States, they booked first-class on the maiden voyage of the RMS *Titanic*. Astor was the richest person on the ship. As the ship began to sink, some hours after hitting an iceberg, Astor helped his wife into a lifeboat, but was not permitted to join her. While the band played 'Nearer My God to Thee,' Astor reportedly stood back, asked for the life-boat number, lit a cigarette and tossed his gloves to Madeleine. His body was later retrieved, and buried at Trinity Church Cemetery, New York City.

## A NEW TEAM TAKES OVER

As New York continued to grow, the Waldorf=Astoria maintained its prestige but began to be trapped by its midtown location. The life of the city was moving ever further north and, by 1910, the magnificent Plaza Hotel (1907) – also designed by Hardenbergh on 59th Street – was enjoying the many advantages of its 'close-to-the-action' location.

The hotel then encountered a crisis much closer to home: the death, in 1916, of George Boldt. His son, George Jr, ran the hotel for the next three years, but he had little interest in the business. Fortunately Oscar was still presenting his 'face' to the public and Boldt's secretary, Augustus Nolle, provided some management back-up.

The original Waldorf=Astoria was ultimately demolished in 1929 to make way for the Empire State Building. Two years later, a new Waldorf=Astoria opened on Park Avenue at 50th Street. The architects were Leonard Schultze and S. Fullarton Weaver, leaders in a new form of so-called 'apartment hotel'. A combination of new forms of technology supporting the skyscraper format, and a major civic design project in the centre of Manhattan set the scene for a magnificent new interpretation of everything the name Waldorf=Astoria represented.

**2 CENTS**

EST. 1903

**THE NEW YORK HERALD**

NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK, FRIDAY, APRIL 19TH 1912

**SPECIAL TITANIC EDITION**

NO. 1111

# TITANIC HEARINGS TO BEGIN TO-DAY

Congressional inquiry opens at Waldorf-Astoria. Ismay served subpoena thwarting escape to London. Other survivors expected. Astor's widow too grieved to attend.

Ismay had report of ice in doomed liner's path. Source says he ordered Captain to "speed through"

New York, N.Y. -



**Ismay**

In an exclusive interview to the New York Herald, a Mrs. Emily B. Ryerson stated that J. Bruce Ismay, the managing director of the White Star Line, knew there were icebergs in Titanic's path on the night she sank. Ryerson said she met Ismay on deck of the Titanic late in the afternoon on Sunday. "He held something in his hand which he said was an ice report," said Ryerson. "I asked if he was going to report the ice so that we may slow down, and he replied 'No."



**The Doomed Liner as it Leaves South Hampton**

Crew and Passengers from officers to steerage to be called



Michigan Senator Appointed Chair of Subcommittee, Will Investigate Disaster.

WASHINGTON, D.C. -

Senator William Calderhead, in order to meet the wishes of his constituents, will investigate the disaster of the Titanic. He was contacted by the survivors of the ship, particularly the American crew, and invited to the United States. Calderhead made an investigation. Calderhead has also announced that he will investigate the disaster of the Titanic.

Lightoller's thrilling tale of survival revealed.

First Officer was nearly drowned twice.

## HARLEM'S WALDORF

The Hotel Theresa opened in 1913 at Seventh Avenue far uptown between 125 and 126 Streets. Such was its quality, it became known as the 'Waldorf=Astoria of Harlem'. An early example of desegregation in the American hotel industry, the Theresa opened its rooms to blacks in 1940. By now there were renowned black celebrities and the Theresa was frequented by Louis Armstrong, Sugar Ray Robinson, Lena Horne and Dinah Washington. Boxer Joe Louis celebrated his victories there.

In September 1960, Fidel Castro chose to relocate to the Hotel Theresa after refusing to pay a US\$10,000 bond at the Shelburne Hotel on Lexington Avenue. The deposit had been requested to cover any potential damage after

Castro arrived with an entourage of 90 people, 500 pieces of luggage, chickens and other produce. Castro was in New York for what was expected to be a very heated session of the United Nation's General Assembly. The 'Cuban Missile Crisis' was soon to follow.

On 20 September, the day after the Soviet Union leader Nikita Khrushchev arrived in New York for the same meeting, he visited Castro at the Theresa and later made a speech in support of Cuban interests on its stairs. Rioting broke out in the politically-divided crowd, complicated by scuffles between Russian security guards and police, some on horseback. Now known as Theresa Towers, the hotel closed its doors in 1966 was turned into office space in 1971, and designated an official city landmark in 1991.





# FOR A NEW CENTURY

## A Beaux Arts Skyline

New York led the world into the twentieth century with its passion for the bold and the new. In a reverse trend European hoteliers began travelling to New York to study the latest in hotel management and technology. Americans continued their raids on Europe in search of decorating and style ideas.

By the beginning of World War One, New York's skyline was dominated by buildings in the eclectic Beaux Arts style which perfectly reflected the Gilded Age. The Ecole des Beaux-Arts (School of Fine Arts) was in Paris, one of the world's major cities, and it emphasised the extraordinary urban environments of the past, such as Ancient Rome and Renaissance Paris. Beaux Arts emphasized grand, imposing structures only appropriate for a large city, and New York was becoming the perfect such city. Architect of the Waldorf=Astoria, Hardenbergh designed several more New York

hotels, all in the Beaux Arts style, including the Manhattan Hotel (1897), the Ansonia (1899), the Plaza (1907), and the Hotel Martinique (1911).

*ABOVE: The legendary Plaza Hotel, which opened in 1907 and hosted New York's elite for decades, closed as a hotel in April, 2005.*

*ABOVE RIGHT: The view West across Broadway at 72nd street to the Ansonia Hotel, designed by duBois and Graves and built in 1904.*

*RIGHT: The Manhattan Hotel.*





## Breaking New Ground THE ALGONQUIN

The Algonquin (1902), on West 44th between Fifth and Sixth Avenues, is one of the few great New York hotels in the Beaux Arts style to have survived with both looks and reputation reasonably intact. Designed by Goldwin Starritt, the Algonquin was particularly popular with well-to-do bachelors and actresses, a traditionally fertile social combination.

That there were wealthy male clients is not surprising, given the proximity of three of the city's most famous restaurants, Sherry's, Delmonico's and the Colony; and at least five of the city's most prestigious men's clubs. The Algonquin's theatrical clientele grew briskly after the Hippodrome opened in 1905, home to the leggy lasses of the Ziegfeld Follies.

### AN UNUSUAL CASE

Frank Case, legendary Algonquin manager (1907) and owner (1927) loved the company of artistic types. As he positioned the hotel at the centre of New York's literary and theatrical life, he attracted personalities like Booth Tarkington, Douglas Fairbanks, Sr, John Barrymore and HL Mencken, who called the Algonquin "the most comfortable

### CARAT JUICE

Dorothy Parker once said, "I love a martini; but two at the most. Three, I'm under the table; four, I'm under the host." In 2004, the Algonquin's general manager, Anthony Melchiorri, decided to offer a new item on the bar menu: the Martini on the Rock. This classic mix of Belvedere vodka and Martini&Rossi vermouth includes a diamond – approximate price tag US\$10,000!

Joe Imperato is one Algonquin customer to have risen to the challenge, proposing to Melissa Beck in December 2004 with a 1.85 carat square diamond worth US\$13,000. "She always wanted it to be a big event," he explained. The after-work crowd at the hotel's Blue Bar burst into applause as Beck graciously fished out the very special 'rock' in her martini with a toothpick.

hotel in America.” William Faulkner drafted his Nobel Prize for Literature acceptance speech at the Algonquin in 1950.

British actor, Basil Hallam, would go jogging after returning from each night’s performance: “He never knew he was the only man on Manhattan Island running up Fifth Avenue in his underwear at night.” The Algonquin also broke ground in making welcome the new phenomenon of ‘independent’ women, among them the early feminist writers Gertrude Stein and her girlfriend Alice B. Toklas, Simone de Beauvoir and Eudora Welty; as well as Helen Hayes, a Ziegfeld girl who went on to be one of the most acclaimed American actresses of her era.

Upon Case’s death in 1946, Ben Bodne acquired the hotel and proceeded with a careful and loving refurbishment, paying great attention to the preservation of the Edwardian style that guests cherished. A new multi-million dollar historical restoration, including hand-selected antique furniture, saw the Algonquin born yet again in 1998.

### DOROTHY PARKER

The Colony restaurant’s popularity gained prominence after being ‘discovered’ by Mrs WK Vanderbilt. Yet a small group of not-yet-famous individuals also met here. Apparently, these

worthies made such nuisances of themselves by asking for meals at unheard of hours – breakfast at 11 pm, dinner at 2 am – that Gene Cavallero, the Colony’s owner, eventually froze them out, whereupon they moved their activities to the Algonquin. At the height of its fame, the group included magazine heavyweights, Harold Ross and Robert Benchley; columnists Franklin Pierce Adams and Heywood Broun; critic Alexander Woollcott; as well as playwrights George S Kaufman, Marc Connelly, Edna Ferber and Robert Sherwood.

Some of the group, including Dorothy Parker, initially met at *Vanity Fair*. The group’s almost daily lunches in the Algonquin’s Oak Room – characterised by sparring dialogue and droll asides – spanned a decade. The lunch legacy included the creation of many a memorable epigram and a new magazine, the *New Yorker*, founded by Harold Ross, conceived in part to capture this new form of scalpel-sharp repartee.

Though society columns referred to the group as the Algonquin Round Table, they called themselves the Vicious Circle. “By force of character,” observed drama critic Brooks Atkinson, “they changed the nature of American comedy and established the tastes of a new period in the arts and theatre.” One unlikely member of the group was Harpo Marx.

Famous as the Marx Brother who never spoke on screen, he was apparently a voluble contributor to Round Table discussions.

### GUESTS AT THE ALGONQUIN

The Algonquin Oak Room launched the careers of Harry Connick Jr., Diana Krall, Andrea Marcovicci, Michael Feinstein, Jane Monheit, Peter Cincotti and Jamie Cullum. Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe wrote *My Fair Lady* in Lerner’s suite. Famous for overseas guests including Noel Coward, Laurence Olivier, Jeremy Irons, Graham Greene, Tom Stoppard, Charles Laughton, Diana Rigg and Anthony Hopkins. Harold Ross secured funding for the *New Yorker* magazine from a fellow poker player in the hotel’s “Thanatopsis Pleasures and Inside Straight Club.” Algonquin honeymooners include Douglas Fairbanks and Orson Welles. Among other famous female visitors to the hotel was Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis.

BELOW LEFT: *French existentialist writer and feminist Simone de Beauvoir in 1947.*

BELOW RIGHT: *Dorothy Parker (1893–1967) reviews a draft copy of a manuscript at her home.*





## Distinguished Clientele THE ST. REGIS

The original Beaux Arts classic landmark, the St. Regis Hotel, was built in 1904 and financed by Colonel John Jacob Astor IV. It was designed with an art nouveau feel by John Townsend Trowbridge and Douglas Livingstone for an Upper East Side site on Fifth Avenue and 55th Street. Against the trend, John Jacob insisted on relatively small public rooms: “a subtle indication that the management did not want the crowds that milled in Peacock Alley at the Waldorf–Astoria or in the vast lobby of the Astor in Times Square.”

Astor wanted to create a hotel where gentlemen and their families could feel at home. He introduced such ‘modern’ conveniences such as telephones in every room, a fire alarm system, central heating and an air-cooling system. Mail chutes were installed on each floor, a newsworthy innovation at that time. One of the hotel’s other novel features was a special design ‘for the disposition of dust and refuse’ – one of the first central vacuum systems. All maids had to do was plug their vacuum cleaner’s hose into sockets situated throughout the hotel.

Throughout its 100 year history, the St. Regis Hotel has attracted the most glamorous, creative and intriguing personalities of each era. Some of

the most famous guests have included Marlene Dietrich, Salvador Dali and his wife Gala, and actress Gertrude Lawrence, who insisted that all her press appointments take place at the hotel. Colonel Serge Obolensky was associated with the St. Regis for many years and in the 1930s as manager, he refurbished the hotel. The Russian Prince who had been a page at the Czar’s court also married Alice Astor (daughter of John Jacob Astor). Today, the St. Regis is considered one of New York’s finest hotels and it remains one of the best preserved in the Beaux Arts style. The hotel, operated by Starwood, is the centrepiece of Starwood’s prestigious St. Regis brand.

*ABOVE: Polish-born cosmetics tycoon Helena Rubinstein (1870–1965) arranging flowers in her suite at the St. Regis Hotel, New York, 1945.*

*RIGHT: Colonel Serge Obolensky at the St. Regis Roof restaurant, which he created, New York, 1964.*





## The Ultimate Beaux Arts Hotel

# THE PLAZA

A hotel called the Plaza opened on Fifth Avenue at 59th Street in 1900. With increasing competition in the precinct, it was quickly replaced in 1907 by a bigger and better version. To quote one commentator of the day: “If there is another building anywhere that more fully achieves elegance, I don’t know where it is.”

After the building was purchased by Elad properties in 2002, the renowned ground-floor public rooms were under threat of demolition. After years of battle in the press and courts, Elad turned the bulk of the hotel’s best rooms into private apartments. However, the Oak Room, where Al Pacino takes Chris O’Donnell to dine in *Scent of a Woman* and the Grand Ballroom, where Truman Capote held his famous December 1966 Black & White Ball are to be preserved.

In the revamp, almost the entire contents of the hotel were sold including more than 5,000 dinner plates, 100,000 pieces of cutlery and 3,000 lamps. Even doors were for sale (for a mere US\$250).

### 100 YEARS OF OWNERSHIP

The Plaza was the dream of financier Bernhard Beinecke, hotelier Fred Sterry and Harry S Black, President of the Fuller Construction Company. In 1905, they purchased a 15-year-old hotel of the same name on the site at Central Park South and demolished it. Over the next 100 years The Plaza rose to become one of the most elegant Beaux Arts hotels in the world.

The Plaza was sold in 1943 to Conrad Hilton who did not build hotels but rather acquired them at cut price, post-Depression prices. The Plaza (which was not in the best state at the time) was bought for US\$7.4 million. Hilton retained control of the hotel until 1953 when he sold it to Park Fifty-Ninth Street Corporation, headed by Boston industrialist AM Sonnabend, for US\$15 million. Five years later, the hotel was sold to lawyer and realty investor Lawrence A Wein for US\$21 million.

In 1974 Western International Hotels (Westin) acquired the Plaza for US\$25 million. Donald Trump bought the Plaza for US\$407.5 million in 1988 and sold it for US\$325 million in 1995 to a partnership between Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and Millennium & Copthorne Hotels. The partnership sold it in 2004 to Manhattan developer Elad Properties for US\$675 million. Extensive renovations were begun in 2005 costing US\$400 million. The revamped Plaza has 282 suites and 182 private residences, designed by Versace. The fixtures and fittings include 24-carat gold plated sinks and accessories.



### THE PLAZA AT THE MOVIES

The Plaza featured notably in the original *Eloise* which aired live on Playhouse 90 in 1956, starring Evelyn Rudie who portrayed Eloise, the child who lived ‘on the top floor,’ with cameos by Conrad Hilton and Kay Thompson (the creator). The children’s book portrayed a precocious six-year-old Eloise, who lived in the Plaza Hotel with her long-suffering nanny, her dog Weenie, and her turtle Skipperdee.

The hotel was used as a central location in the 1959 Alfred Hitchcock classic thriller *North by Northwest*. Scenes were shot in the Fifty-ninth Street lobby, Oak Bar, and guest corridor. Since then The Plaza has been the film set for many movies including: *Barefoot in the Park* (1967), *Plaza Suite* (1971), *The Way We Were* (1973), *The Great Gatsby* (1974), *Arthur* (1981), *Crocodile Dundee* (1986), *Scent of a Woman* (1992), *Home Alone 2* (1992) in which Donald Trump played a cameo role, and *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993), to name a few.



## JAMES LAVENSON

James Lavenson was the President and CEO of the Plaza Hotel from 1972 to 1975. Unprofitable in the year before his assumption of the hotel's direction, the Plaza was profitable each year of Lavenson's tenure. Lavenson delivered a famous speech (the 'Strawberry Speech') which is still used by many hotel groups for their management training. In the speech he told of one day early in his career he got an inkling into the world of professional hotel staff. He walked through the lobby and heard the phone ring on the bell captain's desk. Seeing nobody at the desk, Lavenson picked up the phone, thinking to show his staff that no job was too demeaning for him, and said 'Bell captain's desk. May I help you?' The voice came on the other end. 'Pass it on, Lavenson's in the Lobby.'

## THE PLAZA TRUMPETS DONALD TRUMP

Donald Trump has stated that ever since he got out of college he has had a list of the ten New York properties that he wanted to acquire... and that the Plaza Hotel was always number one on that list. In 1988 he bought the hotel for US\$407.5 million. In a full-page open letter he had published in the *New York Times*, Trump stated: "I haven't purchased a building, I have purchased a masterpiece – the Mona Lisa. For the first time in my life, I have

knowingly made a deal that was not economic – for I can never justify the price I paid, no matter how successful The Plaza becomes."

From the moment Trump took over the hotel, it was literally a hands-on job for Ivana, his first wife. She showed the staff how the rooms should be cleaned and she is remembered for her 'floorwalk', which would take anywhere from two to four hours. At the helm of banqueting, Ivana relished such lavishness on her guests that at the wedding of Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta-Jones in 2000, she organised a hundred violinists on the stairs leading to the Grand Ballroom to greet the guests. At the entrance to the reception was a carved ice mountain cascading with beluga caviar.

Trump's wedding to his second wife Marla Maples in 1993, which some called the 'wedding of the decade' also took place at The Plaza. There were 1,700 invited guests who enjoyed 10,000 shrimp, 2,000 racks of lamb and 10,000 squab breasts. In 1995, however, the Plaza made bigger headlines than Marla when Trump sold the hotel for a loss of US\$82.5 million.

*ABOVE: A foyer inside the Plaza Hotel, 2005.*

*RIGHT: American businessman Donald Trump kisses his new bride Marla Maples following their wedding ceremony at Trump Plaza hotel, New York City, 1993.*





# PARTY OF THE CENTURY

## Truman Capote's Black & White Ball

There's never been a party in New York quite like it. It is said that people left town because they weren't invited. Truman Capote's masked Black & White Ball was held at The Plaza Hotel in 1966. Ostensibly in honour of *Washington Post* proprietor Katharine Graham, it was also a device intended to allow Capote to bask in the immense success of his controversial book, *In Cold Blood*. The guest list, which included Candice Bergman, Lauren Bacall, Andy Warhol, Mr and Mrs Norman Mailer, Mia Farrow and Frank Sinatra, was so salubrious the event has come to be known as 'The Party of the Century.'





OPPOSITE ABOVE: *Andy Warhol arrives unmasked.*

OPPOSITE BELOW: *Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt arrives with a tiger on his arm, who happens to be his wife.*

TOP: *Truman Capote dances with an unidentified woman.*

ABOVE: *Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy arrives wearing a feathered mask; (right) Truman Capote arrives with Katherine Graham, the guest of honour.*



## The Roaring 20s THE NEW WALDORF=ASTORIA

By the 1920s, New York had firmly established itself as the financial and intellectual epicentre of America. It was a time of heightened optimism fuelled by an unprecedented surge of wealth. The radio and the automobile had ‘arrived’ and air travel was on the up. This ‘Flapper’ era was all about ideas, innovation, and wealth creation, none in short supply in New York City.

New hotels sprouted like mushrooms all over the booming metropolis – The Roosevelt, The Carlyle, The Warwick (Randolph Hearst’s gift to his mistress), The Barbizon, (a hotel for women only), The Ritz Towers, and the grand triumvirate of the Sherry-Netherland, The Pierre, and the new Waldorf=Astoria.

### THE PHOENIX RISES

The building, design, and location of the new Waldorf=Astoria presented a perfect example of a new era in hotel keeping. *Vanity Fair* at the time

declared, “It is far beyond anything attempted in the hotel world.” The ‘new’ Waldorf=Astoria was not so much a new hotel, as a re-interpretation of everything that the original hotel stood for.

The social life of New York, centred very much round the hotel scene, was shifting even further uptown. Lucius Boomer and his financial partners understood that they had to move towards their cash cow. Boomer had already streamlined the running of the original Waldorf=Astoria and was a master at recognising that efficiency was an essential ingredient in maintaining the important

appearance of an opulent establishment delivering personalised service. (Boomer became a rich man in his own right through the contacts he established at the Waldorf.)

Profits from the sale of the old hotel contributed to the building of a grand hotel determined to be bigger, brighter, and better than any other. The new hotel was fully financed in August 1929 ‘through bonds and common stock underwritten by a group of Wall Street banking houses.’ Although just three months shy of the Great Crash of 1929, construction of the hotel continued on regardless.

OPPOSITE: *Frank Sinatra, who sang with Guy Lombardo's band at the Starlight Room.*

RIGHT: *A ball in the Starlight Room.*

BELOW: *The lobby of the Waldorf=Astoria.*



## REINVENTING AN INSTITUTION

The 'biggest hotel in the world,' the 'unofficial palace of New York,' with its twin-peaked towers (dubbed 'the Waldorf towers') would dominate the skyline. The towers were to house permanent guests, in keeping with the new trend for providing apartment living as well as transient facilities.

The Waldorf=Astoria was to cost some US\$42 million and stand 47 stories high, spanning an entire block between 49th and 50th streets. Built above the Grand Central Terminal railway tracks, it had its own private siding so special guests could access the hotel from their private rail cars.

The rooms were designed to evoke the interiors of grand English and French homes. Interior decorators from Europe were employed and fabrics and furnishings were imported accordingly. This was in keeping with Boomer's idea that the atmosphere of the rooms should suggest 'home' rather than a standardised hotel room. The Presidential Suite on the 35th floor however, was exclusively the domain of early American design befitting the 'home-away-from-home' that it would provide to a succession of Presidents from Edgar Hoover through to George Bush II.

The function rooms were also a masterstroke of design – the ballroom, for example, was four storeys high. The ballroom and function rooms were segregated from the restaurants and nightclub, thus lending them an aura of exclusivity. The premier society function rooms had their entrance in fashionable Park Avenue whilst Lexington Avenue served as the entrance for the remainder. The famous Starlight Room on the eighteenth floor boasted a retractable roof opening to the stars above Manhattan. The Starlight Room soon became the symbol of glamour and sophistication during the nightclub era of the thirties and forties.

Cole Porter, who lived in a 10-room suite in the Towers, was a fixture for many years and shows were often broadcast 'live from the Starlight Room.'

Some of the features from the old hotel, like Peacock Alley, were transposed to the new building. The three-metre-high clock from the 1893 Chicago World Fair that dominated the previous hotel's foyer was given pride of place in the impressive new central lobby. The floor of the Park Avenue lobby featured an extraordinary mural by Louis Rigal called *The Wheel of Life* (carpeted over during the 'homogenous' era of the sixties and seventies and restored in the early eighties and late nineties).



## A SYMBOL OF CONFIDENCE

The official opening of the world's tallest and largest hotel took place in the middle of the Great Depression, on 1 October 1931. It was such a major national event that President Herbert Hoover delivered a radio broadcast that commended the project as an 'exhibition of courage and confidence to the whole nation.'

The new Waldorf=Astoria was to become the perfect stage on which the rich and powerful of the day could congregate and display their largesse. The new entrepreneurial financiers could mix with Generals, Presidents and Royalty – the Duke of Windsor lived there for a while after his abdication. As if toward a beacon, doyens of society and famous stars of stage and screen flocked to the new Waldorf=Astoria. The queen of New York society, Elsa Maxwell, held her annual 'April in Paris Ball' there, riding into the ballroom one year on an elephant.

This vast display of luxury and success could not however, mask the drastic effects of the Great Depression. Within two years of its opening The



### OSCAR OF THE WALDORF

There is probably no greater example of the best that American hotel service can provide than the man known as 'Oscar of the Waldorf.' Serving as maitre d'hotel at two Waldorfs from 1893 through to 1943, he is credited with inventing the Waldorf salad, Veal Oscar and Eggs Benedict. Oscar oversaw the introduction of

Waldorf=Astoria was bankrupt, but managed to stay open and maintain the illusion of great success with help from United States Government federal agencies. There was no way that this symbol of American success and second home to Presidents could appear to fail.

The Waldorf=Astoria did not in fact begin turning a profit until 1945. That was the same year that the movie, *Weekend at the Waldorf* starring



Ginger Rogers, Lana Turner, and Walter Pidgeon was released. By then, the Waldorf=Astoria had cemented itself as an American institution in the minds of a nation and its popularity has continued through to the present day.

## THE JEWEL IN HILTON'S CROWN

Conrad Hilton regarded the hotel as a potential jewel in his crown and became determined to purchase it. He finally realised his dream in 1949. With Hilton came the hotel's 'modernisation' during which time some of the most beautiful design features like the floor mosaic and rich wood panelling in the lobby were covered over. Thankfully the many original features have been restored and the hotel still stands proudly as a masterstroke of Art Deco design. In 1993 it was declared an official New York City landmark.

The most recent renovation costing US\$60 million took place in 1999. This included a renovation of the Starlight Room although it was decided not to restore the retractable roof.

The Waldorf=Astoria remains a part of the Hilton Hotels Corporation and now also boasts the notoriety of being home to the infamous Nicky and Paris during their formative years.

LEFT: Howard Hughes eating breakfast in his room at the Waldorf=Astoria.

room service to American hotels at the second Waldorf=Astoria and he became a cultural icon of hotel service.

His full name was Oscar Tschirky, but as he explained, 'Whenever people used to address me they invariably stumbled in front of that last name. People would stammer over it and then, exhausted, just gasp "Oscar".' He was born in Switzerland and immigrated to America during the first great wave of migration during the late 1800s.

In 1893 he was poached by George Boldt to become the *maitre d'hotel* of the Waldorf=Astoria. Oscar provided the fastidious Boldt with just one reference: a testimonial 10 pages long, containing the signatures of the most prominent New Yorkers of the day. Not yet 30, Oscar soon established himself as one the

most popular figures about town. His tips on service and cooking often made headline news.

Oscar became a superstar. So popular was he in the eyes of the public that when Lucius Boomer was overseeing the construction of the new Waldorf, Oscar was sent on a publicity tour of the country. He provided the perfect personal link between the old Waldorf and the new.

Oscar retired from the Waldorf in 1943, just two years before his death. The Library of Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration houses Oscar's amazing personal collection of some 10,000 menus, papers, and memorabilia from America and all over the world. The collection serves as an incredible testament to the history of dining for the 50 years that the wonderful Oscar held court at the Waldorf=Astoria.



## Uptown Society Sisters THE PIERRE & THE SHERRY

The new Waldorf=Astoria did not stand alone as the biggest and brightest of new hotels rising in the Manhattan skyline. Interestingly, two other significant hotels built in the neighborhood during the twenties, The Pierre, and the Sherry-Netherland, shared more than just their uptown location.

Schulze and Weaver, the architectural firm responsible for the design of the Waldorf=Astoria, also designed these two hotels and managed to lend each its own distinctive charm. Lucius Boomer of the Waldorf=Astoria partnered with Louis Sherry to build the Sherry-Netherland. Corsican-born Charles Pierre Casalasco once worked for Louis Sherry at the famed Sherry's restaurant until he had a falling-out over Sherry's banning of fashionable women from smoking in the dining room. He banded together with a group of Wall Street investors, including Walter Chrysler and Otto H. Kahn, to realise his long-held

dream of running an elegant and grand hotel. That hotel, built on the site of the famous Gerry family mansion became The Pierre.

Built in 1927, the thirty-eight stories Sherry-Netherland replaced the Netherland Hotel of 1892. Of course each new hotel had to be bigger than the last, and at forty-two stories high, the Pierre was built just two years later. In close proximity to one another, these new skyscraper hotels quickly became two of the most well recognised features of the Manhattan landscape.

If the Waldorf was the corporate giant then the Sherry and the Pierre were its society sisters.

Their foyers were intimate meeting places with an ambience that reflected the atmosphere of gracious Italian and French villas. The Pierre in keeping with the château-like mansion it replaced was modelled in the style of the Royal Chapel at Versailles. The Sherry-Netherland bore an Italian influence – designed in the Neo-Romanesque and Renaissance style – with a lobby built to resemble the Vatican Library.

*ABOVE: Actress Catherine Zeta-Jones attends a charity ball at The Pierre Hotel in 2005.*



## NEW WAYS OF LIVING

Both hotels came into existence during a fascinating period of economic transition in the ‘unofficial’ capital of the United States. The financiers behind both establishments realised that in order to maximise profits they had to create residences where the bulk of accommodation catered more to permanent clients than transient dwellers. The facilities geared toward the transient clientele with their small lobbies and tasteful parlours had to provide an intimate feeling of homeliness. This approach in many ways pre-empted the rise of the modern ‘boutique’ hotel.

The Sherry-Netherland was first advertised as “more than a place to live...a way of living.” An advertisement in 1927 declared, “This way of living combines the comfort of a private house with the freedom of a hotel suite. It is perfect for those families who move about with the social season, and who wish to maintain a pied-a-terre in New York without the economic waste of an all-year service staff.” At the Pierre, Charles Pierre wanted “to create an atmosphere of a private club or residence instead of the average hotel.” He invited French chef Auguste Escoffier to be the special guest chef for the opening. The motto of

the hotel was, “from this place hope beams.” Sadly Charles Pierre was never to fully realise his own dreams and hopes as two years after its opening the Pierre succumbed to the Great Depression. Pierre was forced to file for bankruptcy and he died the following year; many say, from a broken heart. In 1938 John Paul Getty purchased the hotel for the bargain price of US\$2.5 million and enjoyed the hotel’s heyday during and after the war when big bands played in the Club Pierrot and John Wayne sauntered through the foyer.

The Sherry and The Pierre still enjoy an unrivalled elegance. They are New York institutions and although both have changed hands several times over the years they remain two of the grandest dames in town.

## STRANGER THAN FICTION

In a tale worthy of a movie The Sherry-Netherland became the setting for one of New York’s most stylish robberies. Just three days after the New Year celebrations of 1972, at four in the morning as the night staff carried out their duties in the hushed foyer, a group of elegantly dressed men in tuxedos and patent leather shoes entered. They confronted the staff and tied them up. They ransacked 47 safety

deposit boxes the contents of which were said to be valued at some US\$4 million. It was a beautifully executed robbery carried out in suitable grand style and to this day remains unsolved.

## GODFATHER OF THE SHERRY

Director of *The Godfather* trilogy, Francis Ford Coppola lived at the Sherry-Netherland for several years with his family. In the mid-80s he was asked to participate in a three-part tribute to New York alongside Martin Scorsese and Woody Allen called *New York Stories*. Coppola decided to set his story at the Sherry. *Life Without Zoe* is the tale of a young girl growing up at the Sherry-Netherland. It is based on his own ‘Eloise’, daughter Sophia who is now a famous film director in her own right.

## THE PIERRE ROOF

A few months before The Pierre opened in late 1930 Charles Pierre led a group of New York debutantes swathed in fur stoles up forty-two flights of stairs to the still unfinished rooftop of his beloved 42-storey building. It was a blustery February day and perched on wooden planks in their high-heeled feet they watched on as one of the women drove a special and final gold rivet into the steel framework. By the end of that year the top two floors of The Pierre became one of the most glamorous nightclub, restaurant and ballroom venues of New York City. The space was affectionately known as the Pierre Roof and many a high society doyen would cool their expensive heels there on hot New York summer nights.

The penthouse of the Pierre boasted 360-degree views of New York City through twenty-foot high Palladian windows. The walls were decorated with large mirrors bearing etched palm trees. A large band shell where some of the best musicians of the day performed stood to one side. By 1973 the space was no longer in use and the mirrors gathered dust along with many an old piece of hotel furniture and bric-a-brac no longer in use. The New York Police Department however, did sometimes use the room, utilizing its uninterrupted views for an ideal lookout onto the streets below.

ABOVE: British model and actress Twiggy in her room at the Pierre Hotel, New York, December 1971.

OPPOSITE: The Pierre Rotunda.



## A PALACE IN THE SKY

Finally the owners of the hotel decided to convert the abandoned space into a private penthouse triplex. It was purchased in 1988 for US\$12 million by Australia's Lady Mary Fairfax. The wife of the late newspaper magnate Sir John Fairfax, she wanted to make a splash on New York society. She converted the two floors into a luxurious penthouse – 'a palace in the sky' – even importing an 18ft high limestone fireplace and mantle from an old French château. The walls were decorated with an impressive sprinkling of original Chagalls, a Rodin nude, and a ten-foot long crystal

chandelier that hung over the Grand Salon.

In 1993 she opened her opulently decorated penthouse apartment to a charity function for children with AIDS. There was no shortage of curious people wanting to ogle the splendour Lady Fairfax had created. In attendance were the king and Queen of Romania and Empress Farah, the widow of the Shah of Iran. Lady Fairfax's splash on New York society was short-lived and in 1999 she sold the penthouse to financial guru Martin Zweig and his wife. They converted the space into part-residence and part bizarre museum of American memorabilia. At the entry Zweig placed four

headless mannequins wearing the grey suits The Beatles wore during their 1963 tour of America. Other Rock'n'Roll and sporting memorabilia adorns the walls. The dress Marilyn Monroe wore in New York City in 1962 when she sang 'Happy Birthday Mr President' and a sheer bustier she owned are also in the collection.

The penthouse is currently on the market for a cool US\$70 million. More than just a grand palatial penthouse the space is an homage to a past era. As the sales pitch says "[it] is like buying a rare piece of art rather than an apartment. It's a thing of beauty that can't be replicated."





# CONRAD HILTON

## A New Style of Hotelier

The man who crossed the ‘great divide’ in the hotel business between the twenties and the present day is Conrad Hilton. The hotel business coursed through Hilton’s veins – he loved it, lived it, and built the Hilton Hotels Corporation into a vast and constantly evolving empire. He was a genius at understanding and capitalising on market needs.

Like so many great hoteliers and entrepreneurs Conrad Hilton came from relatively humble beginnings, but possessed a combination of visionary and financial genius peppered by a very healthy ego. His approach toward the management and operation of hotels and the standards he set continue to be copied in the hotel business throughout the world.

It is true that in terms of style and grandeur the Hilton Hotel chain does not represent the apex of world-class hostelry, but Conrad Hilton made up for this over the years by identifying the hotels that stood as the jewels in the crown of many a great city. He purchased these institutions when they were running at a loss, turning each one into a highly profitable and efficient enterprise. Examples

of this strategy include Steven’s and the Palmer House in Chicago, The Mayflower in Washington DC, the Plaza and Roosevelt in New York and of course the ultimate prestigious American hotel of Hilton’s day, New York’s Waldorf=Astoria. In his biography, *Be My Guest*, Hilton declared, “Nothing stood between me and the Waldorf.”

Conrad’s father August Hilton had several businesses in their hometown of Antonio in New Mexico including a small hotel operation connected to the family General Store. On returning from World War One, Conrad went to Cisco in Texas intending to buy a small bank. Instead he purchased a small hotel, often renting out the rooms in eight-hour shifts to the local oil field workers. There was no turning back; within

four years Hilton owned several hotels across the state. The first purpose-built hotel to bear the Hilton moniker, the Dallas Hilton, opened in 1925.

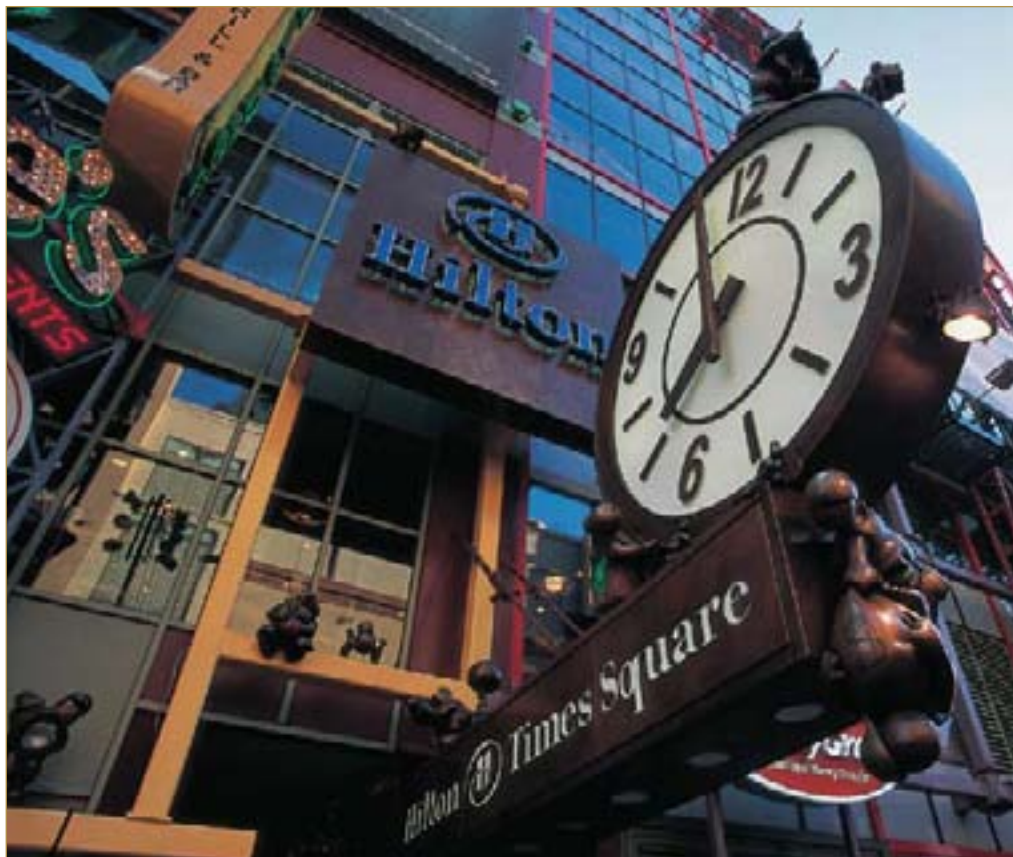
### INTERESTING TIMES

Those were interesting times for any enterprising entrepreneur. The volatile financial climate, which culminated in the stock market crash of 1929, then the Great Depression, only provided fuel for Hilton with which to forge an economic and efficient empire – the key to his success. He lost a few properties, but managed to bounce back, once again expanding his hotel ownership.

Hilton’s foray into New York City in 1943 with the Plaza and The Roosevelt established the Hilton Hotels Corporation as the first coast-to-coast hotel chain in the US. About the same time and in spite of the opinions of his fellow board members, Hilton began to buy Waldorf bonds. Since its opening in 1931 Conrad Hilton had carried a photo of the Waldorf=Astoria around in his pocket. He finally realised his long-held dream in 1949 by securing the lease of the Waldorf=Astoria. He achieved this by securing 68% of the hotel’s stock for US\$3 million. Hilton’s personal management philosophy, ‘Dig for Gold,’ which referred to the utilisation of hotel space in order to maximise profit, had no better example than the Hilton’s success with the grand old Waldorf. Within a year the hotel began to finally move out of the red and turn a profit.

The Waldorf=Astoria was the perfect stage for a powerbroker like Conrad Hilton. After all, he could rub shoulders with the most powerful politicians and financiers of the day. Through him the American delegation to the United Nations set up permanent residence at the Waldorf. This paved the way for Hilton to enter the political fray – foreign ambassadors, political leaders, and international celebrities became his personal friends. Hilton befriended President Dwight D. Eisenhower and the pair often played golf together (Eisenhower eventually took up residence at the hotel).

The Waldorf=Astoria was after all, ‘The White House’ of American hotels and Conrad Hilton was determined that he should become its ‘Mr President’ It would only be a matter of time before Hilton conquered the world through Hilton International.



## AN AMERICAN HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Conrad Hilton was above all a staunch supporter of God and Country and in the post World War Two climate he believed that America was well-positioned to save an embattled world. The Hilton Hotel's corporate motto reads, "World peace through International Trade and Travel." Hilton was instrumental in setting up the International Monetary Fund and the International Bank for Reconstruction. The Hilton international hotel chain would help the economies of poorer countries by utilising local labour and materials.

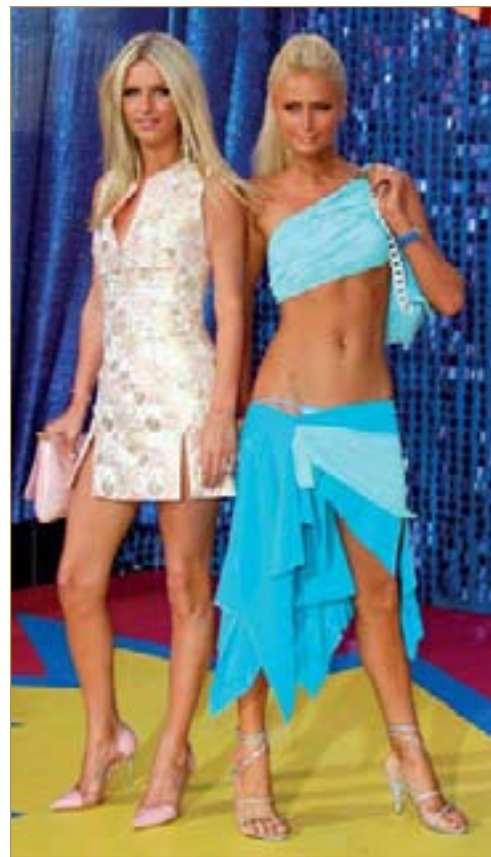
Conrad Hilton was a master of financial colonisation. The post-war world was on the move and travel was fast becoming commonplace. Hilton's personal vision was that new hotels would boost local economies whilst simultaneously providing American tourists with a safe and comfortable home-away-from-home. A 1963 *Town & Country* article referring to Hilton Hotels stated, "one can eat the food without dreading tomorrow, and there are no Old World bugs crawling around the minute the lights are off." Standardisation implied familiarity and accordingly most of the

Hilton chain consists of what could easily be described as 'McHotels'.

Hilton also established a luxury brand of the chain under the moniker of Conrad Hiltons – the Waldorf=Astoria being the first. In more recent times the Waldorf=Astoria has in itself become an über-brand of luxury hotels, meeting the current demands for exclusivity and opulence. The Hilton family has to this day maintained ownership of the Waldorf=Astoria; Barron Hilton finally bought the building and the land under it when he became Chairman upon his father's death in 1979.

The elder statesman of hotels finally checked out at the ripe old age of 92 leaving his vast fortune to the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. Although his son, Barron contested the will and won his lawsuit he still continues to run the Hilton empire in the spirit of his late and great father.

There is a commonly held belief that empires are established with the first generation, built and expanded further by the second, and frittered away by the third. The infamous Ricky Hilton, wife Kathy and children Paris, Nicky and Barron would appear to fit into that pattern and Conrad Hilton might well have turned in his grave several times over if he had witnessed their antics.



The current President and CEO of the Hilton Hotels Corporation is Stephen F. Bollenbach, the first non-Hilton to take the helm. The empire is so vast and tightly run that there seems little chance of its collapsing in the near future. Conrad Hilton's famous last words were reportedly, "Leave the shower curtain on the inside of the tub." Even as he drew his last breath, work came first.

OPPOSITE: *Conrad N. Hilton sitting behind a model of a new hotel, 1954.*

ABOVE LEFT: *The Hilton at Times Square.*

ABOVE RIGHT: *Nicky (left) and Paris Hilton, great grandchildren of Hilton-Hotel founder Conrad Hilton, arrive at the MTV Movie Awards.*



# IAN SCHRAGER

## The Harbinger of Hip

If Conrad Hilton was the one who modernised the hotel business, then Ian Schrager was the one who made it ultra-modern. From his origins in the nightclub business, he has become the ‘Harbinger of Hip’, making hotels again the place where the beautiful and the fashionable go to see and be seen, in spaces that exemplify 21st century sophistication and style.

Ian Schrager cut his teeth in the world of trends and hipness back in the seventies with Studio 54, the nightclub he established with his business partner, the late Steve Rubell. In hedonistic pre-AIDS Manhattan Studio 54 was the place to ogle, and be ogle at. Bianca Jagger, Andy Warhol, Jacqueline Kennedy, Michael Jackson, Truman Capote, Elizabeth Taylor, Salvador Dali and Richard Gere were just some of the regulars. Schrager’s friend Andy Warhol created the phrase “fifteen minutes of fame,” referring to the fact that in this age of Pop Culture practically anyone could achieve fame, no matter how brief or elusive. With his keen business sense Schrager knew how to capture this market that either desired their own fifteen minutes in the spotlight, or wanted to mix with those who were experiencing it. It was a brand new market that demanded comfort, style, and a sense of fashionable exclusivity.

Ian Schrager’s journey from nightclubs into hotels suffered a slight setback when he and partner Rubell were arrested and gaoled for tax

evasion back in 1979. They spent thirteen months behind bars and emerged even more determined to carry out a long-held plan to open fashionable hotels catering to their extended circle of stylish friends. It took almost four years for the pair to convince anyone to back them. They went against the grain by buying hotels in seemingly questionable areas, the first being an old fleapit called the Executive.

Schrager and Rubell were still renting out un-renovated rooms at what would evolve into Morgans at US\$44.95 a night as they fixed the hotel up. The first designer they enlisted was Paris-based Andree Putman. Schrager had been fastidiously studying the world of architecture and art, convinced that a combination of the two would attract the clientele he desired at his properties. On each subsequent project a circle of hip designers, architects and artists was enlisted to create small but highly stylised rooms and eye-catching lobbies and bars where people would want to gather.

Hotels would be places wherein the worlds of pop culture, fashion and commerce harmoniously blended in beautiful and desirable spaces. As Hollywood mogul and friend David Geffen once said of Schrager, “He knows how to make people feel as if they are staying at an exciting place.” After Morgans came the Paramount and the Royaltan in New York, followed by several other hotel properties in Los Angeles, San Francisco





and Miami. French designer Phillippe Starke was responsible for the look of many of these hotels but Schragger as always, has maintained a strong hand in the final design details.

The world of hotels is now awash with new copycat boutique chains (such as the the 'W' hotels of Starwood) and every beauty shop in every hotel had suddenly become a 'spa'. Jonathan Tisch, president of Loews hotels said, "Ian has really changed the hotel industry by showing us what design, excitement and hype can do for what has been a very staid business."

By the late nineties the Morgans Hotel Group was the largest hotel owner in New York and Schragger even managed on occasion to out-trump Trump in real-estate bidding wars.

Not even the most astute entrepreneurial hotelier, however, could have foreseen the events of 9/11 and the profound downturn it had on the hotel business. Schragger, like so many other New Yorkers, suffered as a result of 9/11 and in 2005 he left the Morgans Hotel Group to form the Ian Schragger Company. Like so many New York developers Schragger has now turned his attention to condominium complexes that offer not only ultimate style, but all the services of a five-star hotel. In 2006 the company opened the chic Gramercy Park Hotel and condominium complex in mid-town Manhattan. The former bohemian haunt of artists and rock stars is now a beautiful stylised space designed by artists Julian Schnabel. Karl Lagerfeld was one of the first to buy one of the condominiums. Schragger properties still attract

the hip and the fashionable as well as the corporate giants who wish to appear in touch with trends.

Knowing that his baby-boomer clientele are now aging and slowing down Schragger is looking to create spaces for a younger and faster crowd. Other hoteliers and developers will always be keeping a keen eye on whatever he does.

Donald Trump once said of Schragger, "He puts linoleum in the bathrooms and gets people to pay a high price. I've always liked using marble. (For his sake) I hope the public never tires of linoleum." Schragger moved on from linoleum years ago, the trick now for Schragger is to always keep one step ahead of the pack whilst catering to a crossover and very fickle market. Everything old is new again and no-one understands this better than Ian Schragger.

OPPOSITE ABOVE: *Ian Schragger in New York City at the Gramercy Park Hotel.*

OPPOSITE BELOW: *Studio 54 owners Ian Schragger (left) and Steve Rubell (right) attend a 'going-away' party at the popular disco in 1980, before commencing their sentences for tax evasion.*

LEFT & ABOVE: *Ashley and Mary-Kate Olseen at the Rose Bar at the Gramercy Park Hotel.*