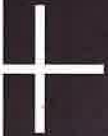


LUXURY LONDON

WINTER 2020
£8.00

MAGAZINE



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ON SAVING PUBS AND
FEEDING KEY WORKERS

WES ANDERSON

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LOOK FOR YOUR HOME

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“We have to remain committed to making a change”



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01

THE PROPERTY

Waldorf Astoria New York

A \$1BILLION REFURBISHMENT OF
MANHATTAN'S MOST CELEBRATED HOTEL
MEANS YOU'LL SOON BE ABLE TO LIVE
THERE PERMANENTLY

Words: Ellen Millard

“**T**he greatest of them all” was how esteemed hotelier Conrad Hilton described the Waldorf Astoria, the palatial New York hotel that occupies an entire block in Midtown Manhattan. It was, after all, the Waldorf Astoria that arguably created the template for luxury hotels as we know them today, being, as it was, the first to offer room service, operate a reservation-only restaurant, and come up with the concept of a rooftop ‘happy hour’.

Waldorf Astoria opened in 1931 to much fanfare as the largest and tallest hotel in the world. President Herbert Hoover even delivered a congratulatory message live on the radio from the White House. He was such a fan that he moved in three years later, and almost every president since has chosen the Waldorf as their base when in New York (Donald Trump bucking the trend).

Other visitors of note included HM The Queen, Sir Winston Churchill and songwriter Cole Porter, >







There are 126 apartment layouts to choose from, ranging from studio apartments to two spectacular penthouse suites located at the top of the hotel's towers

► who lived at the Waldorf for almost 30 years, penning some of his most famous jingles on a Steinway & Son's piano gifted to him by the hotel. When Porter died in 1964, his apartment was taken over by Frank Sinatra, who rented the space for the princely sum of \$1m a year.

Having shut its doors in 2017, Waldorf Astoria is now being completely overhauled in a \$1billion restoration project that will see 1,400 former guest rooms transformed into 375 condominium residences and 375 hotel suites. When I visited in March 2020, a couple of weeks before the city was forced into lockdown, the traditional New York din of taxi horns was for once drowned out by a crescendo of heavy machinery coming from within the hotel's walls.

Taking up an entire block between 49th and 50th Street, the Waldorf Astoria sits on the Midtown Manhattan stretch of Park Avenue, within walking distance of Grand Central Station, Times Square and the Rockefeller Centre. So tall is its Art Deco façade, that's it's hard to gauge just

how large the building is without stepping into the middle of the street.

Considering the building's size, the scale of the project is daunting – and with its exterior and interior formally protected under New York's Landmarks Preservation Law, the Waldorf Astoria is a property all the more difficult to refurbish.

Developer Daijia US and architect Skidmore, Owings & Merrill are undoing a number of insensitive alterations from the past, including replacing more than 5,000 windows with original profiles and colours, colour-matching original 'Waldorf Grey' bricks, and structurally reinforcing a number of terraces so as to provide access to them for the first time.

The space within the 'Towers of Waldorf Astoria' will be turned into private homes located above the hotel and designed by interiors mogul Jean-Louis Deniot. The building was effectively a construction site when I visited, but a one-bedroom show



Designed by Jean-Louis Denoit, The Towers of Waldorf Astoria's private amenities will feature a large wellness facility, complete with its own treatment rooms, gym and a spectacular 25m swimming pool overlooking Park Avenue.

apartment, with a marble reception area, provided an impression of what to expect. Each residence will feature solid custom-panelled doors and be fitted with bespoke antique hardware. Bathrooms will feature custom cabinets manufactured by Molenti&C and vanities topped with polished marble. While there will be bespoke elements throughout each apartment, the general design is fixed — so yours will be a quartzite countertop kitchen whether you want one or not.

There will be 126 floorplans to choose from, ranging from studio apartments to two spectacular penthouse suites located at the top of the hotel's towers – with prices starting from \$1.7m and rising to

\$18.5m for a four-bedroom apartment.

It's a big price to own a comparatively small slice of New York real estate, with the majority of properties being just one- and two-bedroom apartments — but the developers are banking on its roster of residents-only amenities making up for the lack of space.

There will be a 20,000 sq ft spa, with its own sauna, steam rooms and treatment rooms; a fitness centre overlooking a 25m swimming pool and outdoor terrace; two bars; a billiards room, a games room; a theatre; a children's playroom and a library.

The restoration is a massive undertaking, and it's proving time-consuming; the original 2020 reopening date had already been pushed back by a year, and thanks to the pandemic the developers are now projecting a 2022 launch instead. But they aren't in any rush.

"The greatest of them all" is a lot to live up to, after all. ■

The Towers of Waldorf Astoria Residences start from \$1.7m, with occupancy expected in 2022, waldorftowers.nyc

