



Waldorf Astoria Staffers Get Uniforms Designed by Nicholas Oakwell

The founder of NO Uniforms has worked on 50-plus hospitality projects around the globe.

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Door persons at the Waldorf Astoria will wear new uniforms. Photo Courtesy

Storied as the Waldorf Astoria's history is, **designer** Nicholas Oakwell wasn't interested in reimagining its past to create new uniforms for the hotel's reopening this summer.

Well aware that many know the Waldorf Astoria New York as one of the grand dame hotels from the past 100 years that is akin to Claridges in London, Badrutt's Palace in Saint Moritz and Raffles in Singapore, he nodded at the past aligned with Hilton's aim to make the New York City hotel a luxury flagship. Working with the Waldorf's managing director Luigi Romaniello, Oakwell said, "We wanted to make sure we weren't doing a pastiche to the past. We kept talking about the new history and who are the new customers."

Oakwell's spiffed-up uniforms will be worn by the door persons, bellboys, concierge, guest relations workers, servers in the brasserie, Peacock Alley and for in-room dining, as well as staffers in security, maintenance and banquet services. Functionality is always key so that the garments can be laundered well and hold up under the demands of the

wearer's job. But that doesn't necessarily equate to boring. The Peacock Alley employees will wear cotton velvet jackets with satin linings to make them easy to wash, but are also cool to wear. Female workers in the bar will have short sexy sequin dresses, which are washable and will spare them any "sweaty armpit stains," Oakwell said.

"As we all know, the new customers are becoming younger and younger, because wealth is moving down generationally. Instead of people in their 40s and 50s, younger people in their 20s and 30s are earning that same level of money. They're the ones who will be spending the money in these properties," he said.

Having worked on 50-plus hotel and hospitality projects over the past 25 years, the founder of NO Uniform understands the importance of functionality and chooses washable and dry cleanable fabrics that are sustainable and durable. To that point, some employees at the Rosewood in London have been wearing a uniform jacket that he designed eight years ago — as in the same garment.

Given the nature of his job, the **designer** can sustain his share of jet lag, having been in Singapore, London and New York in the past week or so. He will soon reverse that trek and add stops in Dubai and Qatar in the coming weeks.



Staffers at the Waldorf Astoria's Peacock Alley will wear velvet tuxedo blazers and sequin dresses by Nicholas Oakwell. Photo Courtesy Waldorf Astoria

As for whether the sequin dresses are expected to boost sales in the bar, Oakwell said, "The best experiences that we have when we go out to dine or to drink is when everything is in harmony. The service is great, the staff looks great, the music is great, the scent is great, the food and the drink are done very well, and your chair is comfortable. All of those bits and pieces are very important in creating an experience at a property. I always say to general managers or owners, you're like the conductor. You know how loud you need me to play and when you need me to come in. It's the same scenario with the scent of the room and the service."

Oakwell will also be giving guests at the Waldorf Astoria some razzle dazzle. Although the British designer put his signature **couture** house "in mothballs" in 2015, his clients kept knocking at his door so he continued to make gowns for them quietly. Now Oakwell is creating a collaborative line of gowns with the Waldorf that will feature styles that were inspired by women with ties to the hotel like the Astors, Marilyn Monroe and Rita Hayworth. "Each dress will have a story that explains how it was inspired by a lady of note," Oakwell said. The assortment will be sold in a pop-up store at the hotel for about three months.

The plan is to debut that collection during New York Fashion Week in September. Oakwell also expects to relaunch his **couture** house in Paris during haute couture. Asked about the Waldorf-related stories that he unearthed in his research, Oakwell cited how the hotel was the site of the first Met Gala and is said to be the only hotel that Queen Elizabeth II ever spent an overnight in. "When we open the pop-up store, there will be explanations for why a dress exists, why we chose that person and what their connection is to the Waldorf."

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