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Exclusive First Look Inside the Newly Refurbished Waldorf Astoria in New York

As the famed Park Avenue landmark prepares to once again welcome guests, designer Pierre-Yves Rochon and SOM architect Frank Mahan offer insight into the masterfully restored Basildon Room

By: Jill Sieracki

Impressions: 62,479



Basildon Room at the Waldorf Astoria in New York.

Photo: Courtesy of Waldorf Astoria New York

It's hard to imagine that it's been nearly a decade since the [Waldorf Astoria](#) in New York closed its doors, but it appears that the hotel's "sidewalk to spire" overhaul is nearing

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it's conclusion and visitors will once again be able to experience the grande dame of Park Avenue.

"I stayed at the hotel with my wife 30 or 35 years ago and I said then I would love to do a renovation of the Waldorf Astoria," says designer [Pierre-Yves Rochon](#), who crafted the suites and public spaces at the reimagined hotel alongside studio principal and senior design director Claire Mabon. "The Waldorf Astoria in New York is very special; it's a pure Thirties American design and I love this period."



Interior of the newly refurbished Basildon Room at the Waldorf Astoria in New York.

Photo: Courtesy of Waldorf Astoria New York

For its next generation, the architects at [Skidmore, Owings & Merrill \(SOM\)](#) reworked the skyscraper, taking the hotel from the original 1,400 keys to just 375 hotel suites starting at 600 square feet, plus [372 residences](#). "We had the freedom to design completely new rooms," Rochon tells Galerie. "On this part, I can be more contemporary and we designed the rooms for the future."

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Detail view of the restored murals within the roundels in the ceiling of the Basildon Room at the Waldorf Astoria.

Photo: Courtesy of Waldorf Astoria New York

But adding to the challenge, both the exterior and interior were New York landmarks, the interior being the fourth largest in the city spanning 60,000 square feet. “While there is careful, meticulous, loving restoration and preservation of that large interior landmark, another 96 percent of the building you can consider to be brand new,” says Frank Mahan, principal at SOM.

Diving into such a monumental undertaking, the team at SOM approached the project by researching the archival materials of the Waldorf Astoria’s original architects Schultze & Weaver, held at the Wolfsonian-Florida International University. Amongst the source material uncovered was an illustration and detailed notes of the original Basildon Room, an exquisite dining room from an 18th-century estate in England, named Basildon Park Manor, that architect Leonard Schultze purchased and shipped to New York to be installed in the building.

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The ornate chandelier inside the Basildon Room at the Waldorf Astoria is one of the few grandiose lighting moments in the hotel.

Photo: Courtesy of Waldorf Astoria New York



Looking up at the chandelier and restored ceiling details inside the Basildon Room at the Waldorf Astoria.

Photo: Courtesy of Waldorf Astoria New York

To bring the ornate details of the interior back to life, artisans peeled back the many shades of brown that covered the painted plaster ceilings to reveal its polychromatic roots, uncovering swaths of gold, green, and red. "It is an artisanal, incredibly

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painstaking process that all the plaster work is restored, replaced if it is damaged beyond repair, and then hand-painted," says Mahan.

Murals within the roundels were removed and restored off-site in a studio by mural conservator [ArtCare Conservation](#). "This was a really wonderful process of discovery and research," says Mahan. "It's been changed for so long, I think people will return to a space that they knew and be surprised. They'll see something brand new paradoxically because we restored it to what it was originally."



The original architects of the Waldorf Astoria purchased the Basildon Room from an 18th-century estate in England and shipped it to New York to be installed at the hotel.

Photo: Courtesy of Waldorf Astoria New York

The project's plaster contractor operated a shop onsite, creating molds to recreate segments that were beyond repair. Painting, gilding, and glazing work was done on the ceiling that is now also adapted for modern living. "It's very satisfying and it's humbling as well," says Mahan of the team's work on the project. "A building of this stature accumulates its own history of people's experiences over its lifetime so it's a big responsibility to do right by such a public landmark."

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