

September 10, 2025

Thrillist



New York's Waldorf Astoria Is Back—and Better Than Ever

After a meticulous renovation, the Gilded Age landmark reclaims its place as the city's top hotel

By: Chris Dong

Impressions: 731,023



Courtesy Waldorf Astoria New York

After an eight-year renovation that cost a reported \$2 billion, you can once again walk through the stately bronze doors of the famed Waldorf Astoria. The hotel's Gilded Age glamour, now given a 21st century makeover, is compelling New Yorkers to do something they rarely do—walk unhurried, tilt their heads up, and look around with curiosity.

September 10, 2025

Thrillist

A History of Glitz and Grandeur

Since it first opened in 1893, the Waldorf Astoria has always been the place to see and be seen. The original hotel, located on what is now the site of the Empire State Building, was actually two properties: the Waldorf and the Astoria. They were connected by a 300-foot, marble-lined promenade called Peacock Alley, where guests and the rarefied elite of New York would display their finest attire.

The next era for the Waldorf Astoria helped set a blueprint for luxury hospitality. In 1931, the property moved to its current Midtown Manhattan location on Park Avenue between 49th and 50th streets. In doing so, it became the world's biggest (and tallest) hotel at the time, taking up an entire city block. It standardized hotel creature comforts, like electricity on every floor and private bathrooms, and invented the concept of around-the-clock room service.

Conrad Hilton, the founder of Hilton Hotels, believed the Waldorf Astoria was the "greatest of them all" and acquired the management rights in 1949. And in 2006, Hilton launched the Waldorf Astoria brand as a collection of luxury properties around the world, building on the prestige of the original.

Today, after a massive top-to-bottom refresh, the hotel is even more stunning than it was a century ago. During my two-night stay, I spent hours seated at a velvet banquette near the middle of the action in the new Peacock Alley Lounge, watching awed tourists and locals take it all in and imagining all the dignitaries, celebrities, and world leaders who strutted down the halls, toasted Champagne flutes, and slept in the plush suites over the years—everyone from Queen Elizabeth and John F. Kennedy to Marilyn Monroe and Muhammed Ali.

September 10, 2025

Thrillist



Original murals in the Silver Corridor were carefully restored. | Courtesy Waldorf Astoria New York

Masterful Design

In a city that reinvents itself every season, the new Waldorf shows how to carry the past forward. Skidmore, Owings & Merrill preserved and restored the landmarked building, blending original craft with contemporary sensibility. Interior designer Pierre-Yves Rochon brought a sense of cohesiveness to the interiors, which, by the 2000s, had become disjointed from a smattering of different renovations.

Anyone who strolls into the Waldorf will undoubtedly be drawn to Peacock Alley Lounge. In this new iteration, it's the beating heart of the hotel: a glamorous cocktail bar and salon that links the entrances and lobbies of Park and Lexington. There are portoro marble columns, decorative plasterwork, maple burl panels, and — at the center of everything — the prized 11-foot-tall clock commissioned by Queen Victoria for the 1893 World's Fair. Next to the Waldorf timepiece is another classic: the 1907 Steinway grand piano of legendary composer Cole Porter. He lived in the towers of the hotel, where he wrote some of the most beloved songs in American music history. It's not just a display piece — on most evenings, guests can enjoy live music.

Somewhat hidden away on the third floor, you'll find the Waldorf's crown jewel: its Grand Ballroom. The 1,500-person venue has played host to star-studded events, like the first-ever Tony Awards and some of the earliest Met Galas. Now, it has not only been meticulously restored to its original elegance, but it has state-of-the-art sound, lighting, and staging.

September 10, 2025

Thrillist

The Silver Corridor that leads into the Grand Ballroom was inspired by the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles and features gorgeous murals, mirrors, and metalwork that have been painstakingly returned to their original glory. In fact, the murals were originally commissioned for the first Waldorf Astoria and painted in 1897 by American impressionist artist Edward Emerson Simmons. Besides the clock, they're one of the few elements that were on display at the hotel's original location.



The Peacock Alley Lounge has a cocktail menu designed by mixologist Jeff Bell. | Courtesy Waldorf Astoria New York

Food and drink

If you don't want to drop an eye-popping \$1,500 for an overnight stay, there are three food and beverage options where you can experience the Waldorf's grandeur. At Peacock Alley, sip on creative cocktails from Jeff Bell, the esteemed mixologist behind the East Village speakeasy Please Don't Tell (PDT). Several were created for the hotel, including the Waldorf (a spin on a Manhattan, with rye, sweet vermouth, absinthe, and Angostura bitters) and the \$75 Reserve Rob Roy (made with Yamazaki Distiller's Edition Whiskey, Cocchi Vermouth di Torino, La Venaria Reale Riserva, and Benedictine).

Michael Anthony, the executive chef of Gramercy Tavern, is at the helm of the hotel's signature restaurant, Lex Yard. There, he gives a few Waldorf originals a new spin, including the hotel's eponymous salad, which he lightens up with a lemon aioli and a smattering of New York State cheddar, and red velvet cake, now a more delicate red velvet souffle tart. A showstopper is the \$53 lobster roll topped with an obscene

September 10, 2025

Thrillist

amount of truffle and caviar. (Many of the menu's smaller plates are available at Peacock Alley.)

On the Park Terrace, there's also a kaiseki Japanese restaurant, Yoshoku, from chef Ry Nitzkowski, who led the sushi bar at Zero Bond. The six-course menu is \$188 and features dishes such as halibut meunière and toro tartare with caviar. Overall, the hospitality and level of service are exactly what you'd expect from a place that helped usher in an era of pampering.



The Park Avenue One-Bedroom Suite has a separate living area. | Courtesy Waldorf Astoria New York

A Sophisticated Stay

Rooms at the Waldorf lean into muted Art Deco elegance, and the design is much more reserved than in the public areas. The lacquered woods, plush textiles, and a neutral color palette of grays and whites give them a residential feel. The designers shrank the room count drastically, from 1,400 keys to 375 (along with 372 luxe plush apartments that now occupy the upper floors), giving each significantly more space. (Rooms start at 570 square feet, enormous by Manhattan standards.)

Those with deep pockets will want to book the Waldorf Astoria Suite, which has a whopping 5,000 square feet and was designed to capture the feel of an 18th-century Parisian residence. There's a full kitchen, a dining room with seating for eight, a living room and piano — and it all can be connected with two adjoining rooms to create a four-bedroom private residence.

September 10, 2025

Thrillist

Whether you book a room or not, come for the clock, stay for the piano performance, and leave with the sense that you are briefly a part of New York's history.

<https://www.thrillist.com/travel/nation/new-york-waldorf-astoria-returns>