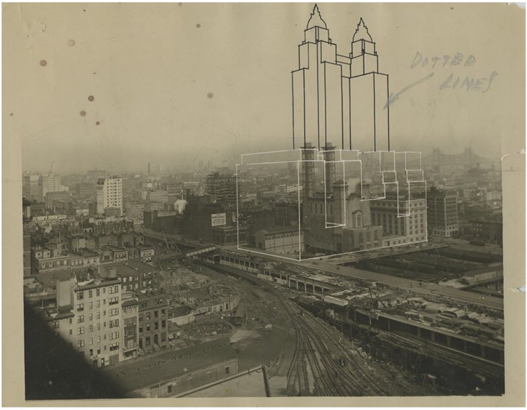
THE WALDORF-ASTORIA

explore the history of the waldorf astoria in new york and SOM's plans for its renaissance

architecture 485 shares connections: +3740

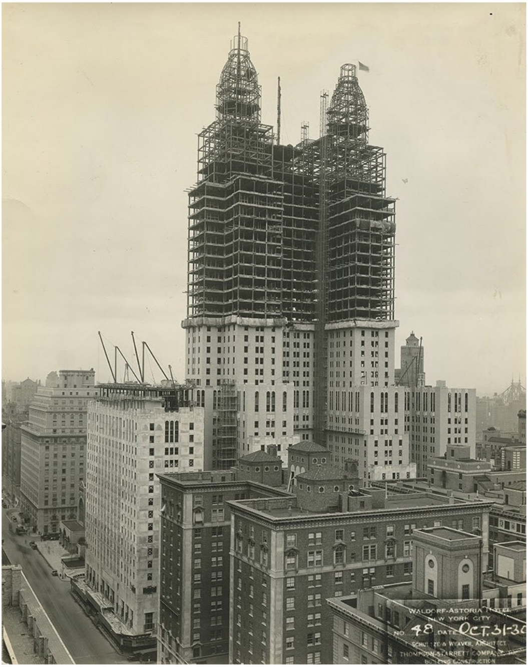
home to hollywood's elite, host to countless world leaders, and the site of famed cultural events and galas, the waldorf astoria has been a beacon of timeless new york glamour for nearly a century. to celebrate its 90th year of operations, the art deco landmark — originally completed by architecture firm schultze and weaver in 1931 — now offers potential buyers the first ever opportunity to own a residence within the towers of the waldorf astoria.

with architecture firm skidmore, owings & merrill (SOM) currently carrying out a major renovation of the building, we step inside the historic structure's famous bronze entryways and take a closer look at the plans to bring it into a new age.


DOTTED LINES

architectural sketch of the waldorf astoria | image © WANY archives
all images courtesy of the towers of the waldorf astoria

when the waldorf astoria opened on park avenue in 1931, it was the largest and tallest hotel in the world. from frank sinatra to ella fitzgerald, celebrities flocked to new york's 'unofficial palace' with the venue hosting events such as prince rainier III of monaco and grace kelly's engagement party, president john f. kennedy's birthday gala, and a special address by queen elizabeth II. the duke and duchess of windsor made the waldorf astoria their home after the duke abdicated the throne, and the hotel welcomed every U.S. president from herbert hoover to barack obama.

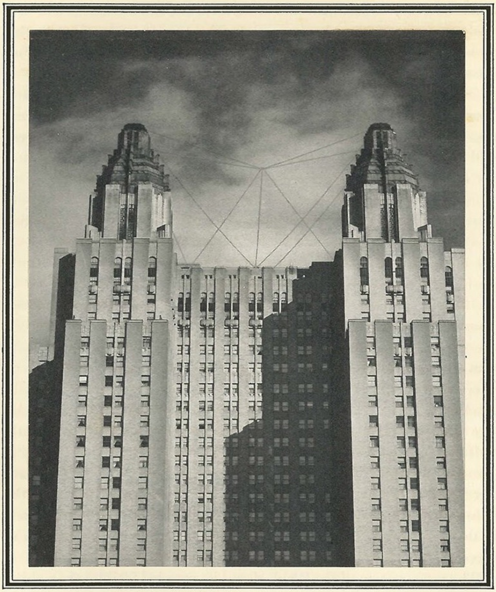

WALDORF-ASTORIA HOTEL
NEW YORK CITY
NO 48 DATE OCT.31-30
SCHULTZE & WEAVER, ARCHITECT
THOMPSON-STARRETT COMPANY, INC.
BUILDING CONSTRUCTION

the waldorf astoria under construction in 1930 | image © WANY archives

occupying a full city block, the limestone and brick building features stepped massing, emblematic of art deco architecture, and is crowned with a distinctive pair of towers. in 1993, the new york city landmarks preservation commission designated the exterior as a city landmark. two decades later, a series of its indoor public spaces — from the main lobby and the surrounding corridors to many of the spaces above — were landmarked as well.

the waldorf seen from park avenue | image © WANY archives

currently, the property is in the midst of an unprecedented $1 billion restoration, undertaken by architecture firm SOM. the project involves the conversion of 1,400 guest rooms into 375 condominium residences (starting at $1.8 million), and 375 luxury hotel suites. 100,000 square feet (9,290 sqm) of hotel amenities and 50,000 square feet (4,645 sqm) of private residential amenities will also be included. these range from health and wellness to entertaining and business spaces, including a pool, a state-of-the-art fitness center, private spas, and numerous entertaining spaces to support private functions.



Radio antenna system strung between the Waldorf's twin towers. This is part of the largest all-wave radio receiving system in the world.

radio antenna atop the waldorf astoria | image courtesy of the unofficial palace of new york

SOM was tasked with orchestrating the complex restoration, working alongside both designers and preservationists to respect the original design intent, while modernizing building systems. in approaching this landmark transformation, the team were aware of their role as custodians of its heritage and, as such, historical photos and floor plans guided the restoration — revealing details from the original design that had been lost over time. throughout, incredible care was given to restoring the hotel's unique artifacts, including the *spirit of achievement* statue that graces the park avenue entrance, the lady liberty clock in the lobby, and the piano of cole porter — one of the building's famous residents.

GRAND FINALE...Completed decorations for General Motors Show in the Grand Ballroom. This ballroom has been transformed into many guises to provide beautiful and appropriate surroundings for notable functions.

general motors show in the grand ballroom | image courtesy of behind the scenes at the waldorf astoria

'the renewed façade will bring back the splendor of the original design, with the bronze entrances and distinctive brickwork cleaned and restored,' **explains SOM.** *'before the restoration began, only one of the waldorf astoria's 5,400 windows was original to the building; now that window is serving as the basis for thousands of replacements, with about 900 new windows being expanded a full foot taller to bring in more natural light. mechanical systems are being removed from the setbacks, making way for new terraces with sweeping views of the city.'*

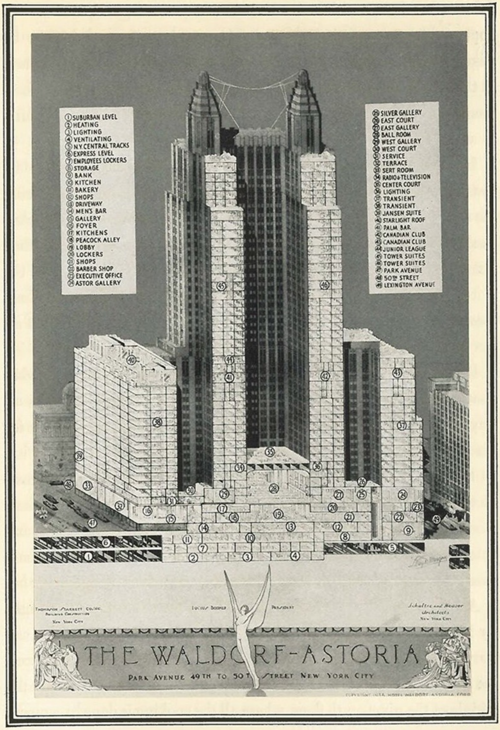
queen elizabeth II at the waldorf astoria in 1957 | image © WANY archives

for the grand ballroom, shown in new images below, the design team sought to return the space to its opening day splendor and the specifications originally intended by architects schultze & weaver. at the time of delivery, schultze & weaver's vision for the ballroom — a singular space with a luminous ceiling that floats above — couldn't be fully realized due to contemporary technological limitations. SOM's work finally brings to life the original architects' vision. this transformation will see design elements such as the central chandelier removed — a feature which was later added to provide supplemental lighting — to the reveal of the central ceiling medallion from 1931.

The Zeppelin Hindenburg (since destroyed) as it passed the twin towers of the Waldorf on May 20, 1936.

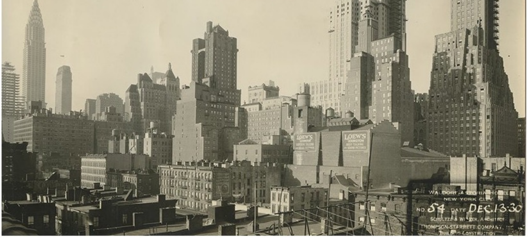
hindenburg passing the waldorf astoria | image courtesy of behind the scenes at the waldorf astoria

'throughout the landmarked interior spaces — from the lobbies and the long corridors to the conference rooms and ballrooms above — many of the finishes will be refurbished to their original condition, bringing back the aura of the hotel's storied past,' **the architects continue.** *'all of these spaces will be unified by soft, ambient lighting — once one of the hallmarks of the interior. when complete, the renovation and restoration will recapture the waldorf astoria's mythic grandeur. it will be at once completely new, while true to the legacy and spirit of one of new york's finest examples of art deco architecture.'* the renovation of the building, shown in more detail below, is scheduled to complete in 2023.


① SUBURBAN LEVEL
② HEATING
③ LIGHTING
④ VENTILATING
⑤ N.Y. CENTRAL TRACKS
⑥ EXPRESS LEVEL
⑦ EMPLOYEES LOCKERS
⑧ STORAGE
⑨ BANK
⑩ KITCHEN
⑪ BAKERY
⑫ SHOPS
⑬ DRIVEWAY
⑭ MEN'S BAR
⑮ GALLERY
⑯ FOYER
⑰ KITCHENS
⑱ PEACOCK ALLEY
⑲ LOBBY
⑳ LOCKERS
㉑ SHOPS
㉒ BARBER SHOP
㉓ EXECUTIVE OFFICE
㉔ ASTOR GALLERY
㉕ SILVER GALLERY
㉖ EAST COURT
㉗ EAST GALLERY
㉘ BALL ROOM
㉙ WEST GALLERY
㉚ WEST COURT
㉛ SERVICE
㉜ TERRACE
㉝ SERT ROOM
㉞ RADIO & TELEVISION
㉟ CENTER COURT
㊱ LIGHTING
㊲ TRANSIENT
㊳ TRANSIENT
㊴ JANSEN SUITE
㊵ STARLIGHT ROOF
㊶ PALM BAR
㊷ CANADIAN CLUB
㊸ CANADIAN CLUB
㊹ JUNIOR LEAGUE
㊺ TOWER SUITES
㊻ TOWER SUITES
㊼ PARK AVENUE
㊽ 50TH STREET
㊾ LEXINGTON AVENUE
Thompson Starrett Co. Inc.
Building Construction
New York City
Lucius Boomer
President
Schultze and Weaver
Architects
New York City
THE WALDORF-ASTORIA
PARK AVENUE 49TH TO 50TH STREET NEW YORK CITY

An isometric drawing of the Waldorf, showing the interior of the hotel.

isometric illustration of the waldorf astoria | image courtesy of behind the scenes at the waldorf astoria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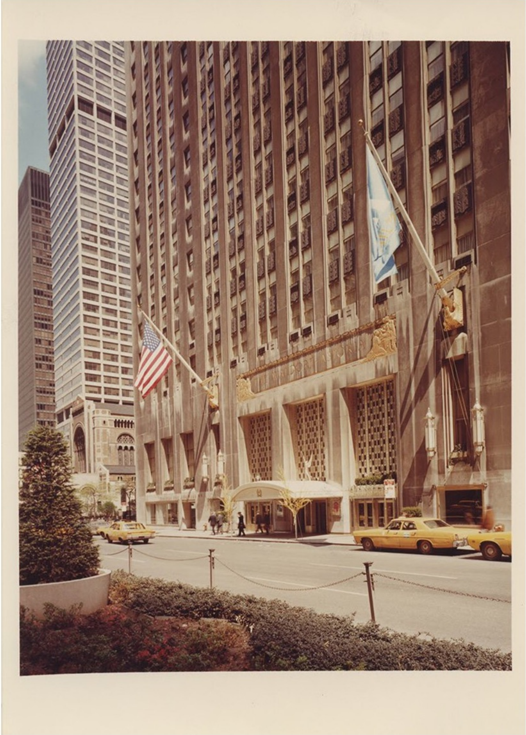
the waldorf astoria under construction in 1930 | image © WANY archives



the waldorf astoria park avenue entrance | image © WANY archives

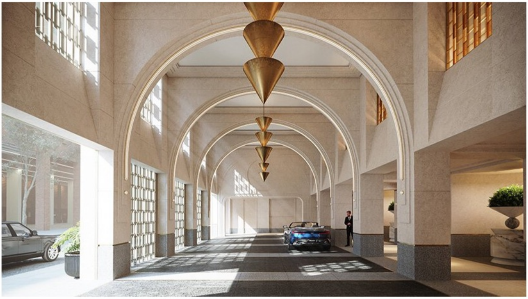
THE WALDORF-ASTORIA

the waldorf astoria park avenue entrance | image © WANY archives

rendering of the waldorf astoria on park avenue

THE WALDORF-ASTORIA

the entrance on park avenue



porte-cochère

the starlight pool

the winter garden

the grand ballroom

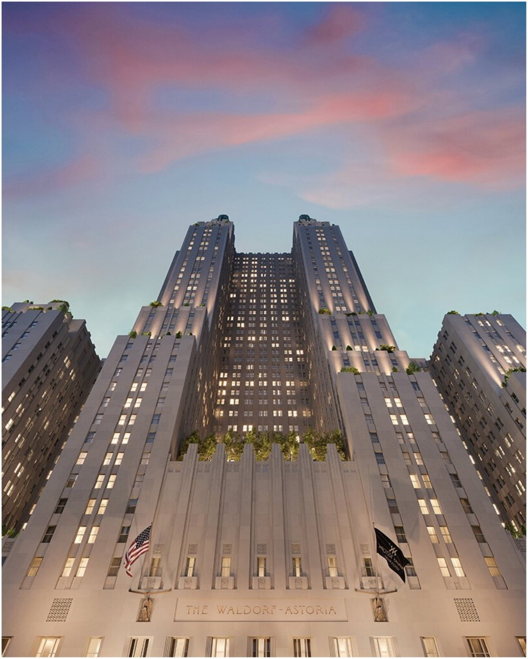
the grand ballroom

the grand salon

bathrooms offer sweeping city views

inside one of the residences at the towers of the waldorf astoria

the ‘locker lounge’



the exterior of the building on 49th street

philip stevens I designboom

jun 17, 2021