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ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

The Waldorf Astoria's Most Famous Guests *From Nikola Tesla to Marilyn Monroe to Angelina Jolie, the historic NYC hotel has seen plenty of star power*

By: Charlotte Collins
Impressions: 4,945,783



The Waldorf Astoria has been undergoing renovations since 2017. Photo: Bloomberg/Getty Images

The Waldorf Astoria has earned its reputation as a hot scene for society's elite over the course of a hundred-plus years operating in New York City, with icons from Queen Elizabeth II to Elizabeth Taylor enjoying stays at the midtown Manhattan fixture. The establishment claims that all of the US presidents from Herbert Hoover to Barack Obama have spent a night at in its presidential suite, rock band The Who reportedly earned a lifetime ban following a debauched 1968 visit (though they must've gotten back in the hotel's good graces at some point, later performing at the 1990 Rock & Roll Hall of Fame Induction ceremony at the Waldorf), and Paris Hilton lived there throughout her childhood in the '80s and '90s.

Originating as side-by-side establishments founded by rival members of the same family, cousins John Jacob Astor IV and William Waldorf Astor joined forces to create the Waldorf Astoria in 1897. In addition to merging names, they connected the two

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German Renaissance–style buildings with a 300-foot marble corridor known as Peacock Alley. The hotel was forced to relocate from its spot on swanky Fifth Avenue when both wings were razed to make way for the Empire State Building, reopening two years later in 1931 on nearby Park Avenue. Designed by architecture firm Schultze and Weaver, the 47-story new build was constructed in the Art Deco style and was known as the largest luxury hotel in the world at the time. President Hoover offered his early approval via radio broadcast from the White House, describing the debut as “an event in the advancement of hotels,” and declaring it “an exhibition of courage and confidence to the whole nation.”

Hoover wouldn't be the only big name to award the hotel a seal of approval; the Waldorf Astoria counted enough celebrity regulars in its guestbook that several suites would go on to be named for the prominent cultural figure who had stayed there, including the likes of Cole Porter and the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. In 2017, the hotel shut down for large-scale renovations and is currently projected to reopen in late 2024. The architecture teams at Skidmore, Owings & Merrill; alongside Building Conservation Associates, Inc; and Higgins Quasebarth & Partners LLC are charged with reimagining the landmark establishment, with plans to update its interiors and offer luxury condominiums starting from \$1.8 million—a price tag fit for the hallowed halls once walked by Marilyn Monroe and Frank Sinatra. Read about the biggest names to have checked in at the Waldorf Astoria below.

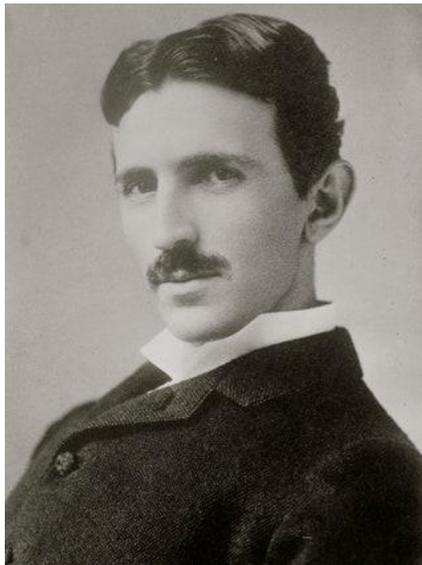


Photo: Napoleon Sarony/Buyenlarge/Getty Images

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Nikola Tesla

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Inventor Nikola Tesla was a resident at the hotel's original location during the Gilded Age. He reportedly paid an overdue bill to the Waldorf with what he claimed was a model for a "death beam," a weapon he aimed to provide to the US government for defense purposes. According to History.com, the hotel was later granted Tesla's laboratory Wardenclyffe to serve as partial payment for the eccentric engineer's debts.



Photo: Underwood Archives/Getty Images

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Winston Churchill

In 1931, Churchill was stateside on the lecture tour circuit and checked into the Waldorf Astoria. He was hit by a taxi crossing Fifth Avenue, residing at the Waldorf for two weeks following the accident to recuperate before departing.

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Photo: Bettmann
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Cole Porter

Composer and songwriter Cole Porter and his wife Linda Lee Thomas lived at the Waldorf Towers (the hotel's luxury suites meant for long-term stays) for years. His time at the establishment inspired the musician to name-drop it in a song, penning the lyrics "You're the top, you're a Waldorf salad," for his 1934 tune "You're the Top," from hit musical *Anything Goes*. The music legend's six-bedroom residence at the Towers's suite 33A housed his 1907 Steinway grand piano. A sacred artifact of the Waldorf Astoria's history, the hotel is restoring the instrument and will return it to the Clock Lobby upon reopening.

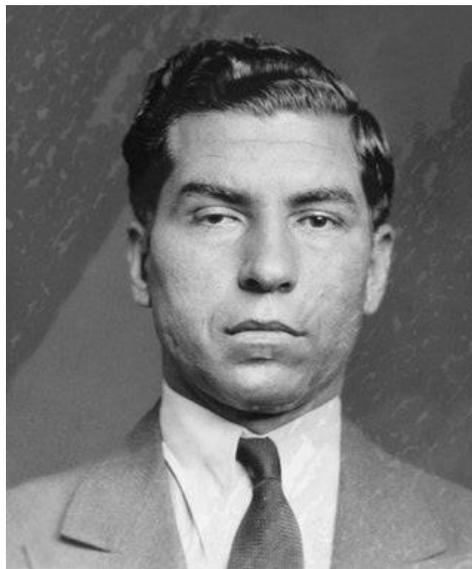


Photo: Bettmann
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Charles "Lucky" Luciano

Notorious Sicilian-born mob boss Lucky Luciano, widely considered the father of organized crime in the US, maintained a residence at the Waldorf in the 1930s. Per the hotel's archives, the Towers became a prominent part of a criminal trial against the mafia kingpin when staff members testified against Luciano in court.



Photo: Hulton Archive/Getty Images

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Herbert Hoover

The president counted the suite 31A as his primary post-presidency residence beginning in December of 1940 and remained so for the last 30 years of his life.



Photo: Nixon/Express/Getty Images

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Zsa Zsa Gabor

Actor and socialite Zsa Zsa Gabor was married to Waldorf owner and hotel mogul Conrad Hilton from 1942 to 1947. In her 1970 book, *How to Catch a*

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Man, How to Keep a Man, How to Get Rid of a Man, Zsa Zsa credits herself for Hilton's acquisition of the hotel. "I'm a compulsive buyer," Gabor wrote. "Anything beautiful I see I want. That's how we got the Waldorf Astoria. I told Conrad Hilton, 'I want the Waldorf,' and he bought it. The only problem was I divorced him before the escrow was finished."



Photo: Ron Galella/Getty Images

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Frank Sinatra

Frank Sinatra and wife Barbara rented the late Cole Porter's suite at the hotel following the musician's 1964 death. The couple paid a rate of \$1 million per year until they parted ways with the pad in 1987, engraving their names into the glass of the shower doors to commemorate their stay. They remained loyal to the Waldorf Astoria following the end of their primary residency there, staying at the Waldorf Towers when in the city.



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New York Daily News Archive/Getty Images

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Janet Leigh and Tony Curtis

The actors, parents to Oscar-winning actor Jamie Lee Curtis, checked into the honeymoon suite at the Waldorf following their June 1951 nuptials.



Photo: HUM Images/Universal Images Group via Getty Images

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General Douglas MacArthur

Army General Douglas MacArthur and his wife Jean spent the later years of their lives together in a residence at the Waldorf Towers. They moved in in 1952, and Jean continued staying in the 37th floor unit after her husband's 1964 death until her own passing in 2000.



Photo: Bettmann

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Jackie and John F. Kennedy

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Following their 1953 wedding in Newport, Rhode Island, then senator John F. Kennedy and wife Jackie Kennedy kicked off their honeymoon at the Waldorf Astoria. The newlyweds enjoyed an evening at the hotel before continuing on to Acapulco, Mexico.



Photo: Ullstein Bild/Ullstein Bild via Getty Images

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Harry S. Truman

Truman was a regular at the Towers throughout his presidency and in the years following, according to *The New York Times*. "He'd come down around 7:15," an assistant bell captain on the hotel's staff told the *Times*. "The reporters would be waiting. He'd kid them about getting up so early, then say: 'Let's go, boys,' and they'd be off up Park Avenue."

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New York Daily News Archive/Getty Images
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Marilyn Monroe

In 1955, the blonde bombshell called suite 2728 home, a sublet from fellow actor Leonora Corbett. The icon reportedly paid \$1,000 a week for her three-room residence. She moved out later that same year.



Photo: Bettmann
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Rainier III and Grace Kelly of Monaco

Regarded as one of the most glamorous couples of their time, the Prince and Princess of Monaco celebrated their engagement at the hotel's Conrad Suite in January 1956.

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Photo: CBS Photo Archive/Getty Images

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Muhammad Ali

Muhammad Ali was a regular at the upscale establishment when he was in town and was said to be quite well-loved by its staff. The heavyweight champion appeared at a number of press conferences held at the hotel to promote his boxing matches.



Photo: Allan Tannenbaum/Getty Images

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Queen Elizabeth II

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The late Queen of England stopped by the Waldorf on her 1976 visit to New York City. She enjoyed a luncheon at the hotel's grand ballroom before retiring to suite 42R—on the very top floor, naturally—the hotel's Royal Suite. Legend has it that the original suite meant for Her Majesty became unavailable when a guest became ill, so the hotel quickly arranged the creation of a new Royal Suite to accommodate.



Photo: Bettmann
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Dwight D. Eisenhower

The 34th president resided in 700R with his wife Mamie from 1967 until his 1969 death. Although it was reported that Eisenhower had died at Walter Reed Hospital, some sources claimed he passed in 700R before his body was transported to Virginia.

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Photo: The Visualey Archive/Redferns/Getty
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The Who

Keith Moon, drummer for the English rock band The Who, had a documented affinity for cherry bombs and reportedly deployed one during a stop into the Waldorf. As music journalist Tony Fletcher wrote in his biography *Dear Boy: The Life of Keith Moon*, the establishment was “clearly unnerved at the prospect of letting The Who stay in their esteemed premises” and demanded cash upfront, which “proved to be less than forthcoming.” The band stood around waiting for the issue to be resolved until Moon “‘blew the door off the hinges and got my luggage,’ following which, The Who were promptly kicked out of, and banned from, New York’s illustrious Waldorf Astoria.”



Photo: Robert Mitra/WWD/Penske Media via Getty Images
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Elizabeth Taylor

The actress kept a suite, 28H, at the Waldorf for years in the 1980s.

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Photo: Circa Images/GHI/Universal History Archive/Universal Images Group via Getty Images
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Wallis, Duchess of Windsor, and Edward, Duke of Windsor
American royal-by-marriage Wallis Simpson and her husband, the Duke of Windsor, resided at the hotel's Towers for years. The Pennsylvania-born duchess reportedly heard talk of the Waldorf's Royal Suite designated for Queen Elizabeth's visit and felt it only fitting to demand 42R for herself and husband Edward VIII. Her room was painted a powder blue shade that went on to become known as Wallis Blue.



Photo: David LEFRANC/Getty Images
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The Hilton Family

Real Housewives of Beverly Hills star Kathy Hilton considers the hotel "part of our family," having worked there for several years in the late 1970s and early '80s and eventually going on to raise her four children, which include Nicky and Paris Hilton, at the establishment for nine years of their childhoods. The Waldorf (a Hilton property) was the site of many cherished memories for the clan,

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including Paris's christening party held at the Cole Porter Suite after her ceremony at nearby Saint Patrick's Cathedral.



Photo: L. Cohen

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Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt

The former Hollywood power couple moved into the Waldorf Towers in 2007, reportedly one of the first places they stayed together as a couple.

<https://www.architecturaldigest.com/gallery/the-waldorf-astorias-most-famous-guests>