



Self-guided walking tour of
the Waldorf-Astoria's Interiors
Schultze & Weaver, architects.
1929-31



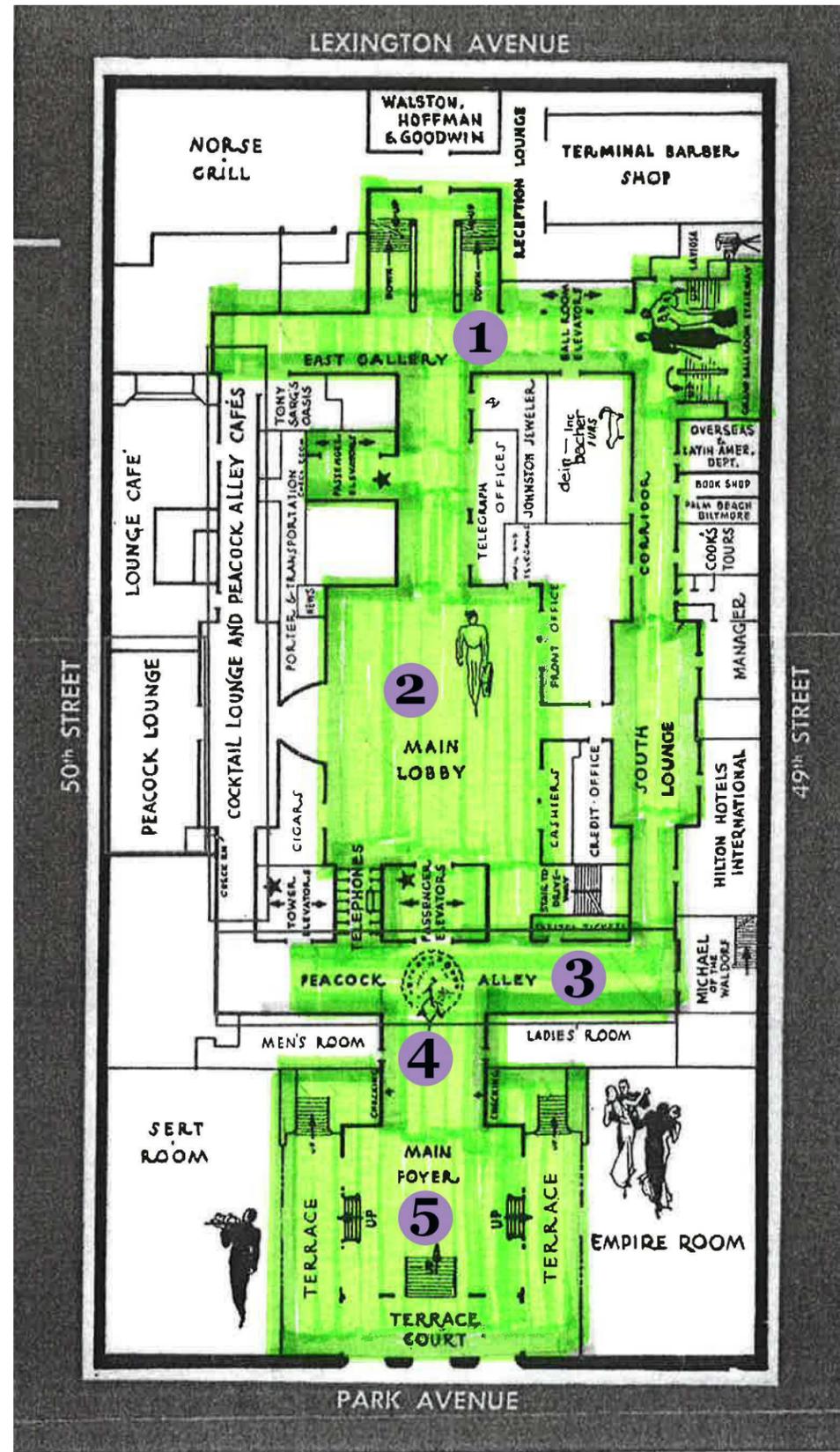
#SaveTheWaldorf!



The expert interior designers who consulted on the Waldorf interiors were given one strict parameter for the design of all the hotel's interior spaces, including all public spaces, corridors, guest rooms, and residential spaces in the towers: "Stereotyped standardization or anything approaching hotel atmosphere should be entirely excluded."

As was typical of American Art Deco interiors, designers utilized furniture and decorative arts of historic styles to add a feeling of residential comfort laced with family heirlooms. As you explore the Waldorf's Art Deco spaces (or as they were called during the period, Modern Classical spaces), you experience a blending of modern architectural elements with neo-classical furniture, Roman and Greek inspired pilasters, Louis XV and XVI inspired ornamentation, classical sculpture, friezes, and much more.

To ensure that each space was designed to exceed expectations, all furnishings and finishing details of the grand interior spaces and corridors were first vetted in an offsite loft on 45th Street. At this location, designers made sure that every detail would reflect the modern aesthetic to provide comfort for each hotel guest.



First Floor Public Spaces

1. East Gallery

One of the most quintessentially American elements of Art Deco residential spaces was the idea of concealed shelving and compartments as well as adaptable storage. As you can see in this corridor, all of the doors have been disguised by use of the same wood paneling as the walls.

2. Central Lobby

Although it isn't Deco the most recognizable focal point of the Central Lobby is a 4,000 pound bronze clock built by the Goldsmith's Company of London for the 1893 World Columbia Exposition in Chicago. The eight plaques depict presidents George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant, Andrew Jackson, Benjamin Harrison and Grover Cleveland, as well as Benjamin Franklin and Queen Victoria.

One of the largest decorative features in the Central Lobby is the carpeting, which is believed to be the largest hand-tufted rug ever woven in one location. Seventeenth century Persian Garden carpets known as a Kirmans were the inspiration for the floorcovering. The carpet, composed of over 12,600,000 knots, was hand tufted by thirty weavers in only ten months.

Since donating it to the Waldorf in 1939, Cole Porter's grand piano nicknamed "High Society" has been displayed and used several times in the Central Lobby.

3. Peacock Alley

Since this new Waldorf space was conceived during Prohibition, this space was utilized to create indoor storefronts reminiscent of the glass-roofed shops in Paris, rather than a central lobby bar. The name plays off the Waldorf's historic Peacock Alley, which was the corridor that connected the original Waldorf Hotel to the 1897 addition, the Astoria Hotel. The connection of the two hotels marked the birth of the Waldorf Astoria as well as when the Waldorf-Astoria became marked with a single hyphen, as recalled by a popular expression and song, Meet Me at the Hyphen.

4. Public Restrooms

Speaking primarily for the women's restroom, it is among the Waldorf's hidden gems along with the powder rooms in the corridor that connects Peacock Alley to the Park Avenue Lobby. From the fireplace and crystal chandelier in the powder room to the split-level plan that separates the personal dressing rooms, everything about the restrooms suggests the idea of a personal domestic environment rather than, "stereotyped standardization or anything approaching hotel atmosphere." Do explore the men's room, also!

5. Park Avenue Lobby

Though there are several other entrances to the hotel and The Tower, the Park Avenue entrance was intended to be the main foyer used to receive guests. Through the modern application of light colored marbles, terrazzo, and wall-coverings, as well as architectural elements such as columns and pilasters, the lobby masterfully interpreted Italian classicism with a specific interest in Pompeii.

The focal point of the lobby are a series of figurative murals by Louis Rigal as well as his floor mosaic. Upon the hotel's opening, the lobby featured a circular area rug designed by Rigal, which depicted the same allegory as the mosaic that replaced it. The murals located throughout the lobby work together to depict scenes of people hunting and gathering food, eating, drinking, and rejoicing. The Rigal mosaic depicts the story of life from birth to death. The larger than life figures show a family with their infant, youth and friendship, the struggles faced throughout life, domestic happiness, as well as old age and death.

THIRD FLOOR BALLROOMS



Third Floor Public Spaces

The third floor of the Waldorf was designed as an adaptable series of public rooms that could be comfortably combined and utilized by groups ranging from 10 to 6,000. Each space was designed to be visually unique and stunning in its own, while also creating a seamless flow from space to space when used in conjunction with one another.

6. Grand Ballroom

When the Waldorf opened, the Grand Ballroom was the largest space of its kind ever constructed at 35,000 square feet and when combined with the adjoining foyers the space can easily accommodate over 6,000 guests. The two tiers of private boxes depict Art Deco interpretations of classical bas-reliefs. Much of the other ornamentation throughout the space depicts many of the most recognizable Art Deco visuals: leaping gazelles, frozen fountains, and foliage. The metal and etched glass grillwork throughout the ballroom conceals pipes from a great Moller orchestral organ, one of the finest of its kind in the world. Perhaps foreseeing the Waldorf's important political future, the space was designed with the ability to broadcast speeches through the hotel sound system as well as to local broadcasting networks and globally. To give the hotel the ability to host car shows, there was originally an elevator that connected the ballroom to the street that would move the cars into the ballroom.

7. Silver Corridor

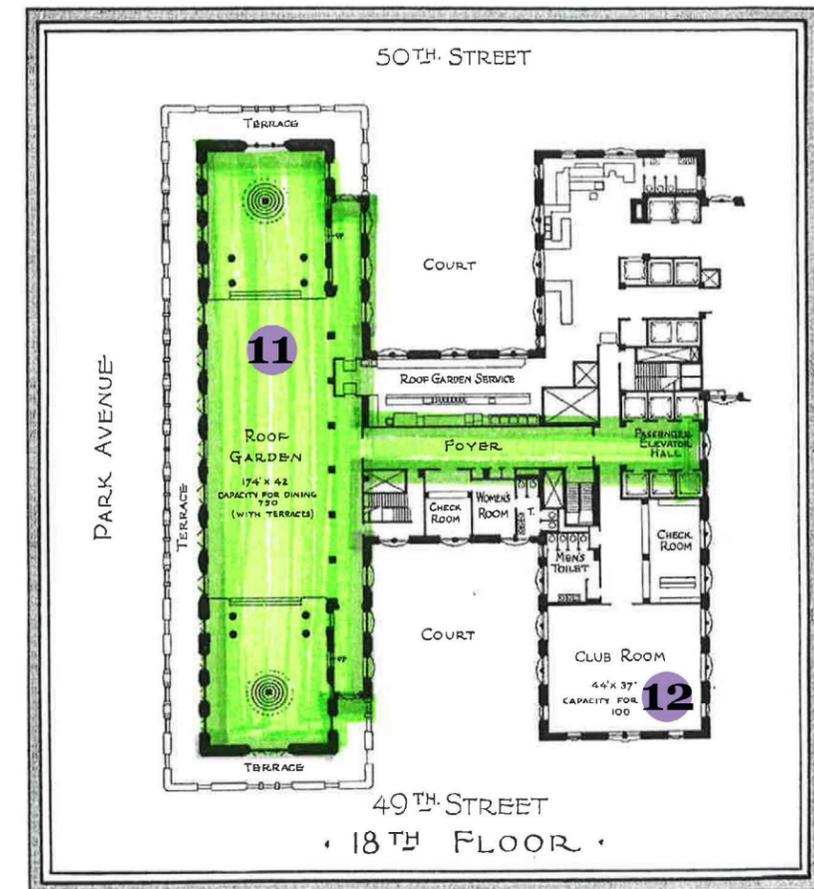
The Silver Corridor has largely been paralleled to the original Peacock Alley, both visually and functionally. Originally, Peacock Alley was where society women would display their latest fashions, jewels, accessories, and husbands. The large crystal chandeliers, archways, murals, and mirrored walls of the Silver Corridor make a polite nod to the rich social history of the Waldorf. The series of paintings hung between the arches originally hung in the Astoria hotel and were by the American artist, Edward Emerson Simmons.

8. Basildon Room

As one of the Waldorf's most visually unique rooms, the Basildon Room utilizes repurposed moldings, panelings, paintings and features from the eighteenth century salon from Basildon Park in Berkshire England. The elaborate ceiling moldings, marble mantel created by John Flaxman, and the paintings created by Angelica Kauffman are displayed in this room exactly as they were in the original salon.

9 & 10. Jade Room & Astor Gallery

The Jade room is largely used in conjunction with either the Basildon Room or in a suite set up with the Astor Gallery. The Astor Gallery was inspired by the Louis XVI style. The subdued Art Deco take on the elaborately ornamented style can mostly be seen in the twelve pink allegorical females, painted by Simmons, who was also responsible for murals in the NY Supreme Court. The females depict rhythm and dance.



Eighteenth Floor

11. Starlight Roof

This is still a remarkable space that utilizes a number of Art Deco interior design principles but it has been altered quite a bit from its original grandeur. While still spectacular, the space originally had a retractable roof that would open above the perforated ornamented screens. For much of the time that the roof was open, the terrace doors would also be open to create a very unique environment. The space also played host to over 1,700 square feet of murals created by the American painter, Victor White, which sadly, are no longer visible.

The Murals were described as “strongly imaginative and sophisticated studies of tropical scenes. Two media are employed: ‘silhouette’ mosaics, a new form of mosaic decoration for the central portion, and great panels of antique mirrored gold at the terraced ends. The ‘silhouette’ mosaics, representing tropical plants, flowers and birds, are worked in gold and silver on a background of yellow sand-colored plaster. In the ‘silhouette’ form, as developed by Mr. White, masses, which characterized older forms of mosaic work are discarded and significant outlines and details only are worked out in mosaic against a contrasting background of other material. In this way, literal representation and weight are replaced by imaginative suggestion and lightness particularly appropriate for interior decorative effect in a room of such gay, effervescent character as the Starlight Roof.

12. The Palm Bar

Unfortunately, the Palm Bar is a perfect example of why the wonderful public spaces of the Waldorf need to be Landmarked. Today, all that remains of this space are the sconces and a mantel with unique embellishments.