FIFTH AVENUE
THE PLAZA HOTEL

History

The Site

» This was the home of the New York Skating Club. They were called the “fancy skaters” because they had their own private clubhouse.
» That was torn down to begin construction on the first Plaza Hotel here, in 1883. Ten years later there were two fancier hotels on the other side of Fifth Avenue. (That first Plaza was torn down in 1905.)

Construction

» According to the developer Fred Sterry, it was time for an “absolutely first-class hotel in every way.”
» Henry Hardenbergh was hired as the architect. He had a pretty good track record for luxury construction; he'd already made the Dakota apartments, and the Walorf, Astoria, and Willard hotels (and would go on to make the Copley Plaza Hotel in Boston).
» This building opened in 1907 after costing $12.5 million to make. It was the largest mortgage ever taken out on a hotel. (Financial troubles continue to plague the hotel to this day.)
» The old building was boxy, but this new structure looked like a magnificent French chateau, with its corner towers and deep mansard roofs.
» French marble was everywhere. Everything was custom made in France.
» It quickly became the “it” spot for the New York elite. The day it opened, the NY Times filled a whole page just describing the hotel.

Fun Facts

» When the hotel opened, a room cost $2.50 per night.
» The first man to sign the registry was Alfred G. Vanderbilt, who got to move in a week early so he could have his privacy. He signed the register as “Mr. & Mrs. Alfred G. Vanderbilt. And servant,” even though Mrs. Vanderbilt wasn’t there—they were having “issues.”
» Frank Gehry, one of the world’s most famous and influential architects, designed the...fitness center!
» You can still see the old coal shoots in the hotel’s basement.
» An Italian chef named Hector who had been living in Pennsylvania became the head chef here. He invented Pasta Primavera. When he started selling his own legendary tomato sauce, he spelled out his name on the label phonetically, as Boy-ar-dee because people found it difficult to pronounce Boyardi!
» Tommy Hilfiger’s apartment here is one of the most luxurious. It’s a two-floor space known as the “Dome Penthouse.” In 2013 he listed it for $80 million, and it never sold. In 2016 he listed it again, for $68.95 million. The purchaser must also pay about $9,000/month in taxes, and another $9,000/month for maintenance fees!
» Taxi owner Harry Allen revealed the city’s first motorized taxis on opening day of the hotel. The price for a cab back then? 30 cents.
» Breakfast in the Palm Court is elegant, but pricey. $18 for a fruit salad. $48 for the weekend buffet. $9 for a side of toast, $10 for a cup of coffee, and $12 for some orange juice. Afternoon champagne tea is $105 per person.
» Princess Elisabeth of Hungary was rejected from other hotels because of the pets she traveled with. But the Plaza was pet-friendly, so she checked in with 12 servants plus dogs, cats, an owl, guinea pig, alligator and a bear!
» The Plaza now offers “The Plaza Hotel Finishing Program” for people who want to learn class. $599 for a five-hour program! You learn everything from appropriate eye contact to how to decipher a restaurant’s wine list.

Popular Culture

» The Beatles stayed here during their US tour. Bob Dylan apparently introduced them to marijuana here.
» Frank Lloyd Wright lived here for 6 years, while making the Guggenheim.
» The Persian Room featured great singers, including Peggy Lee.
» Truman Capote held his infamous Black and White Ball here in 1966.
» In 2000 Michael Douglas married Catherine Zeta-Jones here.
» Featured in dozens of movies, including Crocodile Dundee, Bride Wars, North by Northwest, Arthur, The Sopranos, Sex & The City, and The Great Gatsby.
» Home Alone II, Lost in New York: Donald Trump (the hotel’s owner at the time) only permitted the crew to film in the hotel if he could appear in a scene (which he does). In another scene, Macaulay Culkin slides across the floor to flee the hotel staff. The hotel removed the carpeting for the scene, and Trump kept it that way.

Eloise

» Eloise is the fictional alter-ego of Kay Thompson, the author of four children’s books about a 6-year-old girl who lives at The Plaza. Kay actually lived at The Plaza, and said the books are based on her life. But another theory is that Eloise is based on the crazy behavior her goddaughter, Liza Minnelli.
» The hotel created a real tricycle garage in 1956 near the loading dock. It’s painted in red and white candy stripes, and guests can rent free tricycles for their children!
» A portrait of Eloise was hung in the lobby. But on Thanksgiving night in...
1960, the portrait vanished. That same night there was a huge college party in the hotel's ballroom. The portrait was never found, but a new one was made after Princess Grace of Monaco noticed it wasn’t in the hotel when she visited.

- There’s an Eloise Suite in the hotel complete with zebra-print carpeting, pink and white striped walls, and a chandelier with pink lights. There’s even a “Nanny Suite” available for parents, which comes with...a bottle of champagne.

Rooms & Rates

- Today about $1,000/night gets you a king bed and a butler on the floor.
- $3,500 for a two-bedroom suite
- The Fitzgerald Suite is decorated like The Great Gatsby.
- In the Edwardian suites you get a fainting couch at the end of the bed.
- All rooms come with 24-karat gold faucets.

The Royal Plaza Suite

- This is the most luxurious retreat in all of the hotel. Three bedrooms, three bathrooms, a hand-picked library, grand piano, formal dining room, state-of-the-art kitchen and sweeping views of 5th Avenue.
- Has its own private elevator.
- $30,000/night
- Inside the master bath is a secret panel that opens as an exit door for guests who need to make a quick (or discreet) escape to the outside world.
- It contains “a state-of-the-art kitchen is ideal for guests who travel with a personal chef” and its own elevator.

The Palm Court

- This is the tea room, and now also a cocktail bar in the evenings.
- Made of marble, with a lead-glass dome
- Arches with marble columns representing the four seasons, taken from an Old Italian palace.
- There used to be a section of the dining room that was reserved for permanent residents, each with their own personal table. They wouldn’t have to interact with the other guests.

The Oak Room

- This was the bar & restaurant for men.
- Oak Walls. Big tapestry by Aubusson made in France.
- George M. Cohan, the old Broadway star who has a statue in Times Square, drank here every day from 4pm to 7pm before his show.
- There’s a bronze plaque remembering him in his reserved booth.
- Conrad Hilton, who owned the hotel at the time, called it the Cohan Corner.

Grand Ballroom

- The Grand Ballroom (and Terrace Room) were where countless cocktail parties and galas and wedding receptions have been held.
- It had space for 500 people with an electric stage that could be raised or lowered.

The Green Tulip

- In 1971, The Plaza turned the Edwardian Room into a new restaurant-club called The Green Tulip.
- As 70s as you can get: hot pink and lime green walls and potted plants. After 10pm the space became a disco club.
- Didn’t end well. The plants all died. Scathing reviews in newspapers. Guests complained about the noise. Closed down a few years later.

Ownership History

- Conrad Hilton bought it in 1943 for $7.4 million + $6 million for renovations
- 1955: The Childs Company - $6.3 million
- 1988: Donald Trump purchased the hotel for $407.5 million. It was already looking old, but Trump called it his Mona Lisa. He spent $50 million renovating the place.
- Nine years later, they sold it for double the price: $674 million to El Ad Properties. Comes out to $838,000 per room, the highest price ever paid for a New York City hotel.
- Then they closed it for 3 years, and did a $400 million renovation.
- 2007: 100th birthday, with huge party & fireworks.
- In 2008 the renovated hotel opened with 282 rooms and 181 new condos. A studio started at $1.15 million, up to $42.4 million for a 6 bedroom apartment.