

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 Boiardi!

- » 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.
- » 1995: Trump sold the hotel for \$325 million in 1995 to a partnership between Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and Millennium & Copthorne Hotels (Troy Richard Campbell).
- » 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.