



THE WALDORF ASTORIA INTERIORS

Through the modern application of light-colored marbles, terrazzo, and wall coverings, as well as architectural elements such as columns and pilasters, the Park Avenue Lobby is a masterful interpretation of Italian Classicism, with an emphasis on Pompeii. The Louis Rigal murals located throughout the lobby depict scenes of hunting and gathering food, feasting and rejoicing. The mosaic, also by Rigal, represents the stages of life through scenes of a family with an infant; youth and friendship; the struggles faced throughout life; domestic happiness; old age and death. All Photos: Meghan Weatherby

A CASE FOR PRESERVATION

BY MEGHAN WEATHERBY

On October 1, 1931, the year the Empire State Building was dedicated, the Waldorf Astoria reopened at its new location on Park Avenue, welcoming distinguished visitors with its Art Deco grandeur. Architects Schultze & Weaver had designed the Waldorf as the world's largest and tallest modern hotel, while maintaining its reputation for exclusive galas, conferences, and fundraisers for global leaders.

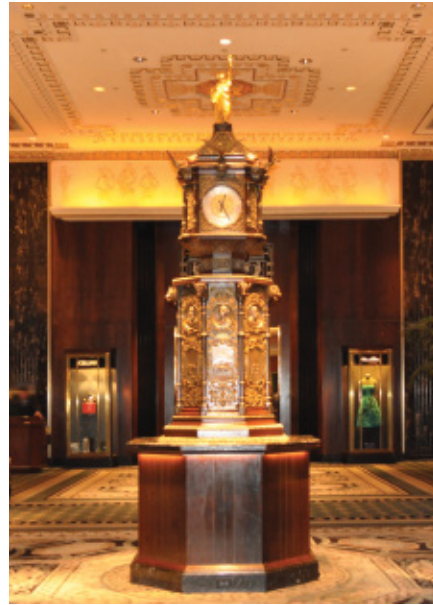
Over the past eighty-five years, the Waldorf has won recognition as an architectural masterpiece and one of the most culturally and politically significant commercial buildings in New York City. The Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) granted landmark status to the Waldorf's façade in 1993. It did not, however, protect the noteworthy interior spaces.

New Yorkers and preservation advocates everywhere were distressed when *The Wall Street Journal* reported in June 2016 that the hotel's new owner, Beijing-based Anbang Insurance Group Co., planned to "gut the hotel and convert as many as 1,100 rooms into private apartments." The Art Deco Society of New York has partnered with other preservation organizations, here and abroad, to urge the LPC to designate the Waldorf's public interior spaces as landmarks before they are destroyed.

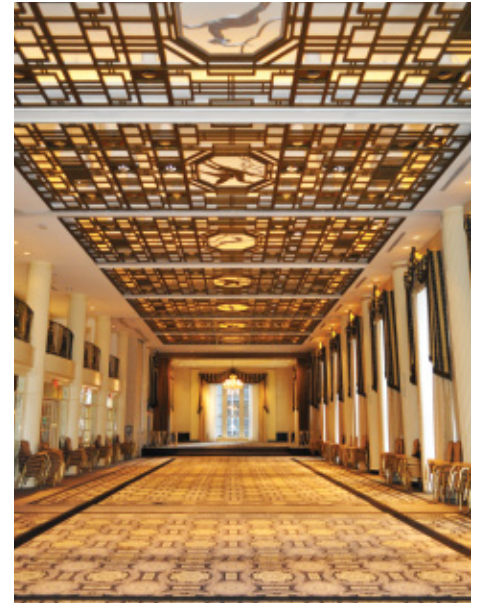
In mid-September, Anbang stated that it is "committed to working cooperatively and collaboratively with the Landmarks Preservation Commission to achieve an outcome that respects and reinvigorates the Waldorf Astoria for the next 100 years." In November, LPC commissioners unanimously voted to schedule a public hearing in 2017 to consider landmark designation of a number of celebrated interiors on the first three floors of the building. By granting landmark status to the Waldorf's interior spaces, the LPC would protect the fixtures and interior components of these areas, including murals, mosaics, decorative elements, elevator doors, and metalwork. ADSNY applauds this decision and is leading the campaign to preserve the hotel's original unified Art Deco aesthetic.



The Silver Corridor has been compared to the original Peacock Alley. The large crystal chandeliers, archways, murals, and mirrored walls are a nod to the rich social history of the Waldorf, while also refining classical elements to reflect clean-lined, modern taste. The series of paintings by American artist Edward Emerson Simmons displayed between the arches originally hung in the Astoria Hotel.



The Central Lobby combines the modern and the antique and adapts eclectic and historical design elements into the Art Deco style. It includes nickeled-bronze Art Deco ceiling ornamentation and a hand-tufted rug, with modernized seventeenth-century Persian Garden carpet motifs. The 4,000 pound bronze clock is from the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago.



While still spectacular, the Starlight Roof has lost its original retractable ceiling and the more than 1,700 feet of murals designed by Victor White that represented tropical plants, flowers, and birds in gold and silver tesserae against sand-colored plaster. Such losses underscore the critical need for Landmark designation. The Starlight Roof is not among the spaces marked by LPC for Landmark status.

When a global team of designers was assembled to create interiors for the upgraded Waldorf, they were given one strict guideline: "Stereotyped standardization or anything approaching hotel atmosphere should be entirely excluded." Today, these interiors still reflect a masterful balance of modernity and domesticity. The original designers reinterpreted and simplified classical design elements in the modern aesthetic, while incorporating antiques of various historic styles to create a comfortable environment for America's elite. Like much American Art Deco design, the hotel blends modern architectural elements with historicism.

The Art Deco Society of New York believes that the Waldorf Astoria must be preserved for both its architectural merit and its importance in the evolution of New York City as a center of world culture. At the opening of the new building in 1931, President Herbert Hoover explained that the hotel "carries great tradition in national hospitality . . . marks the measure of the nation's growth in power, in comfort and in artistry . . . [it is] an exhibition of courage and confidence to the whole nation." Being deprived of the Waldorf's important public interiors would be a blow to the architectural, political, and social history of New York City, and the global community of Art Deco lovers.



The Grand Ballroom was the largest space of its kind in 1931. When combined with the adjoining foyers, the 35,000 square-foot-space can easily accommodate over 6,000 guests. The two tiers of private boxes feature Art Deco interpretations of classical bas-reliefs. Other ornamentation in the space includes typical Art Deco motifs: leaping gazelles, frozen fountains, and stylized foliage.



Concealed shelving and compartments, as well as adaptable storage, were typical of American Art Deco residential spaces. As seen in the East Corridor, the doors have been disguised by the same wood paneling as the walls.



In the Astor Gallery, twelve pink allegorical female figures, portraying Rhythm and Dance, represent an Art Deco interpretation of the elaborately ornamented Louis XVI style.



The unique Basildon Room boasts features from an eighteenth-century salon at Basildon Park in Berkshire, England. It includes elaborate ceiling moldings, a marble mantel created by John Flaxman, and paintings by Angelica Kauffman.