

THE NEW YORK PALACE

PRESS RELEASE

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OLD WORLD ELEGANCE MEETS NEW YORK LUXURY

The Story of The Villard Mansion and The New York Palace

More than a century ago in 1882, Henry Villard, one of the nation's most prominent financiers, commissioned McKim, Mead & White, the outstanding architectural firm spearheaded by Stanford White, to create a residence of singular style. In keeping with the times, The Villard Mansion was conceived in the neo-Italian Renaissance tradition, after the Palazzo della Cancellaria in Rome.

Today, the mansion's stunning interiors stand as a living tribute to the Gilded Age. Recognized by architectural historians as one of the most beautiful rooms to be preserved from the period, Stanford White originally designed The Madison Room as a triple drawing room in 1891. The room is notable for its light green marble walls, pillars and huge fireplaces at both ends of the room, and the romantic murals by P.V. Galland. Bronze doré moldings frame an ornately decorated coffered ceiling, while intricate mosaics, gilded capitals and stained glass windows add to the opulence.

The dramatic two-story Renaissance-style Gold Room, the most famous of The Villard Mansion rooms, was not decorated when the mansion was built. Instead it was completed at a later date by Stanford White. The room is almost entirely gold, with gilt ceilings, walls and wainscoting. Since the room was originally intended to serve as a music room, Mr. White designed an elaborate suspended balcony at the room's north end as a performance stage for musicians. A narrow stairway hidden behind the wall paneling provides the ascension to the balcony. Wall panels are richly adorned with images of musical instruments and garlands of foliage in low relief. High above the north and south arches are two John La Farge lunette paintings entitled "Art" and "Music," that serve as dramatic focal points in the elaborate space. A series of lovely leaded glass windows above the wainscot on the east side of the room, also credited to La Farge, permit natural light to enter.

Stanford White created the Drawing Room, which also faces Madison Avenue in the residence's south wing, along with the Madison Room. Its elegant, old-world ambiance is reflected in carved-walnut, coffered ceilings and walls accented with gold ormolu. Nineteenth-century oil portraits hang on the walls and Italian marble fireplaces flank both sides of the entrance. The original gilt chandeliers still add a sparkling accent to the room's decor. McKim, Mead & White created the cozy Library from two smaller rooms during extensive remodeling in 1910-11. The focal point of the book-lined, carved paneled room is the barrel-vaulted ceiling decorated with rosettes and shields bearing the colophons of famous publishers of the day.

In the mid-Seventies, the Archdiocese of New York, owners of the land, cleared the way for hotel development. This enabled the famous residence to be accessible once again to lovers of art and architecture. To bridge the architectural gap between the landmark and the new hotel that would be joined to it, Emery Roth & Sons, P.C. designed a monolithic tower of dark bronze, reflective glass and anodized aluminum that recedes from - rather than overpowers - the rosy-hued Villard Mansion. The modern tower integrates with its environment as it mirrors the surrounding cityscape.

When the hotel opened in 1980 as The Helmsley Palace, The Villard Mansion had been restored in preparation for a role as hotel public space. To return The Villard Mansion to its original grandeur, experienced artisans and craftsmen documented measurements and made detailed interior drawings of every room. Just as in an archaeological dig or historic reconstruction, floorboards were individually removed and labeled to enable exact repositioning after repair. All interior sections had to be re-laid in precisely the same pattern and positioned to reproduce the landmark-protected interiors. During excavation and reconstruction, carvings, railings, decorative plasterwork, paintings, chandeliers, stained glass, hardware and fragile artifacts were carefully crated and warehoused. Castings were made of fragile ornamental plaster on ceilings and walls in case of vibration damage or the desire to recreate a design in another part of the hotel. The documents can be found in The Library of Congress archives.

The Courtyard, the original Madison Avenue carriage entrance of The Villard Mansion, was redesigned during the restoration to incorporate motifs from the flooring of several 15th-century Italian cathedrals. The Renaissance designs were carried out in pink; rose and black marble set into striated jade-green and rose granite.

Today, pedestrians enter The Courtyard through tall iron gates as a Florentine lantern shines its welcoming light from above. Supplemental low-level illumination and four antique Florentine lanterns set the courtyard aglow with gentle light.

Beyond The Courtyard and the graceful arches of the cloister facade is the two-story marble lobby. The bi-level lobby visually unites The Villard Mansion with the Tower in a manner so harmonious it is impossible to detect the point of fusion.

A grand staircase leads up from the lower lobby to the Madison Avenue entrance, creating a grand foyer leading to the oval Villard Ballroom and The Reid Salon. The upper lobby features a magnificent restored red Verona marble fireplace that was originally for the mansion designed by Augustus Saint-Gaudens. One of his best-known works, the fireplace is adorned with carved figures of Joy, Hospitality and Moderation above the mantel; working fountains with playful marble dolphins are set in niches at each side. Another famous Saint-Gaudens work is a rectangular, zodiac clock designed as part of the marble in the mansion's ornate staircase.

The Villard Mansion today stands proud as the grand entranceway to The New York Palace. The landmarked interiors are available for unforgettable weddings and special occasions and revered as New York City's most sought after private event space.

With 909 guestrooms, The Palace is known for unparalleled splendor, spectacular views, sumptuous rooms and exquisite service. Located in the heart of Manhattan -- across the street from St. Patrick's Cathedral and only steps from Rockefeller Center -- The New York Palace gracefully blends the landmark Villard Mansion with a contemporary 55-story tower that stands at 50th & Madison Avenue.