

March 3, 2022

Nypost.com

NEW YORK POST

The Waldorf Astoria gets a White House-backed 'Presidential Library'

By Shivani Vora

Impressions: 14,996,788



All booked up: The Waldorf has hosted numerous presidents including JFK and Herbert Hoover (inset). Now, it's getting a White House Historical Association-backed rotating reading library. Bettmann Archive; Noë & Associates / The Boundary;

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The White House is coming to the Waldorf.

For most of the 20th century, the Waldorf Astoria Hotel was the presidential home away from home in New York. Since opening in 1931 on Park Avenue, the property has hosted every US president from Herbert Hoover to Barack Obama, most as guests and a handful as long-term renters.

Now, the hotel — which is in the midst of a sweeping residential conversion dubbed the Towers of the Waldorf Astoria — is partnering with the White House Historical Association, a nonprofit founded by first lady and frequent Waldorf Astoria guest Jacqueline Kennedy in 1961 to preserve the White House's history.

The association will create a presidential library in the storied building set to debut next summer.

Exclusively for the enjoyment of condo owners, the irony here is that this is a perk which presidents who stay at the hotel won't be able to enjoy — at least, not technically.

Just like the rest of the 50,000 square feet of private residential amenities, the handsome library room is being designed by the internationally renowned Jean-Louis Deniot.



The historic hotel is also getting a bar for its condo residents.Noë & Associates / The Boundary

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Overlooking 49th Street and the Chrysler Building, the space has grey and cream tones with gold finishes. A circular grey- and cream-toned marble table and a long grey couch are the centerpiece to the room while shelves run along the walls.

The five-seat backlit granite bar framed by a geometric mobile chandelier is a key element — but first, to the tomes.

Stewart McLaurin, the president of the White House Historical Association, says that the collection will span more than 500 books and will be continuously updated with new titles.



Commanders in chic: Presidents George W. Bush and France's Jacques Chirac powwowed at the Waldorf in 2006. Olivier Douliery/ABACAUSA.COM

"We're not going to be biased to one president and will represent them all," he said. "We will also have our group's inventory of books that we have published over the years"

The latter includes "Designing Camelot: The Kennedy White House Restoration," detailing the first lady's renovation of The White House from 1961 to 1963, and reads dedicated to the wine, china and music of the famed mansion.

Other parts of the collection will have biographies of presidents and first ladies from George and Martha Washington to Joe and Jill Biden and histories during their times in office.

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Ronald Reagan met with Margaret Thatcher at the hotel in 1985. AFP/Mike Sargent

“Washington’s Iron Butterfly” is an example. Written by Bess Clements Abell, the social secretary during the Johnson administration, it talks about the state dinners and other glamorous parties she organized. “Forty-two Years in the White House” — written by Ike Hoover, the chief usher of the White House for the aforementioned timespan — will also be included.

Beyond the books, McLaurin says that the library will serve as a mini museum of sorts, with objects on display such as replicas of china used in the White House and bookends that replicate architectural elements of its exterior.

What’s a great read without a cocktail or glass of wine in hand? To that end, the aforementioned bar will serve tipples that presidents have imbibed during their time in office. The lineup will include bloody marys, favored by John F. Kennedy, French wine, a go-to for Thomas Jefferson, and mint juleps, a staple for Teddy Roosevelt. Teetotalers can order a Diet Coke, a favorite of both George W. Bush and Donald J. Trump.

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Jazz enthusiasts Bill Clinton and Lionel Hampton hung out at the Waldorf in 1996. AP Photo/Chris Kasson

The library will be part of the many attractive amenities offered at the Towers of the Waldorf Astoria — an 82-foot swimming pool in the former Starlight Roof ballroom, a winter garden with a bar and a theater with a live performance stage among the bunch.

Dan Tubb, the senior director of sales for the property, says that the aim of the library is to honor the history of the presidents who have stayed at the Waldorf.

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