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ForbesLife

MARCH 2010

Style & Design

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MAGICAL JEWELER**

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GOLDSMAN'S L.A.**

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ESCAPES

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Uptown has new energy, as two Madison Avenue stalwarts face off after major makeovers. At both the Mark Hotel, on 77th Street, and the Surrey, on 76th, brand-name designers and high-profile French chefs set out to create more contemporary vibes. But did they both get it right?



The Mark's eye-popping lobby (top right) is visible from the entrance on 77th Street (above). Right: The Surrey's new suites (top) are stylish yet sensible, and its bar (bottom) was inspired by a Chanel handbag.

THE MARK HOTEL

After three years and \$140 million, there are radical changes at this 83-year-old hotel, starting in the lobby, where the neo-Georgian aesthetic has given way to op art black-and-white floors, bright orange velvet armchairs, and design-statement furniture.

The reinvention was overseen by Jacques Grange, who commissioned furniture craftsmen such as Vladimir Kagan, Mattia Bonetti, and Paul Mathieu to produce pieces for the public areas. Guest rooms have custom Italian dressers and French sofas (in the suites) that are easy to appreciate as minimalist decor—but less easy to live with. My main complaint is that everything is small, and there's limited space to set things down. My room, a "Seventy Seven King" (\$1,050), had no desk, a table that was almost overwhelmed by a simple room service supper for two, and a chair that brought to mind a first-class airplane seat. The bed, however, was fabulous, and the tricked-out closets could have swallowed my entire wardrobe.

The new Mark was developed with the residential market in mind—the plan was 118 hotel rooms and 42 apartments, but now it's 150 rooms and 10 apartments—and my stay felt more like visiting a pied-à-terre than a pampering hotel. Service is exceptionally, even vanishingly, discreet. Staff were responsive, but there was none of the cosseting one typically encounters at hotels of this price.

The restaurant by Jean-Georges Vongerichten wasn't open at press time. I hope it's an improvement over the "room service by Jean-Georges," which seemed indistinguishable from any other room service—burger, club sandwich, penne with tomato—and merely adequate.

There's no spa, but there is a bustling Frédéric Fekkai salon and a gym with personal trainers from Sitara Fitness—what you'd expect at a place where looks and labels are paramount.

THE SURREY

The Surrey emerged from its 14-month, \$60+ million face-lift with a hip new look. Yet it remains elegant; the building's Beaux Arts bones still show. That's a tricky balancing act, but designer Lauren Rotter pulled it off. The gray-toned lobby seems sedate until you notice the Jerzy Holzer photos behind the frosted desk and the ornate armoire by the elevators graffitied with the word *infamiation*.

Rotter brought the same trad-mod mix to the 190 rooms, along with a gimlet eye for detail (such as prints of etchings discovered at Milan flea markets). Even the smallest room has two cushy armchairs, a big coffee table, and a nifty desk/vanity with a flip-up mirror. The beds, from Duxiana, are divine.

The Surrey operates strictly as a hotel, and just a month after opening, service was friendly, efficient, and sometimes gratifyingly fawning. The flourishes are smart, as when a room service waiter poured me a cup of coffee before setting up my breakfast.

The spa is a cocoon of five treatment rooms, each with its own shower so guests never face the indignity of using a locker room. More lively is Bar Pleiades, whose jazzy decor was inspired by a Chanel handbag. Café Boulud isn't new—it was the site of Daniel Boulud's first restaurant—but has been refreshed. My excellent dinner, from the oyster amuse-bouche to the madeleines, was a reminder that some luxuries don't need updating at all. —ANNECEL



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