

The Business



Introducing the Super-Suite

COMPETITION TO ATTRACT PEOPLE LIKE YOU HAS RECENTLY MADE THE WORLD'S GREAT HOTELIERS PUSH THEIR MARQUEE OFFERINGS OVER THE TOP.

By Andrew Sessa Illustration by Israel G. Vargas

Guests returning to the most elite suite at Paris's Prince de Galles hotel last holiday season wouldn't have recognized their surroundings. During the preceding six months, the duplex had been stripped and reimagined, its decor entirely replaced with custom creations and fine art, its entry staircase grandly redone in black lacquer and bronze and its windows extended to create panoramic views of the Eiffel Tower and Sacré-Coeur.

The Art Deco landmark partnered with French crystal house Lalique and Berlin-based designer Patrick Hellmann to transform the three-bedroom space and create one of the city's most lavish getaways. And it embarked on the project somewhat out of necessity: In Paris's increasingly crowded luxury hotel market, the Prince de Galles, a member of Marriott's Luxury Collection, needs to stand out if it wants to succeed. It's counting on Lalique's cachet in China, Hellmann's popularity in Russia and

the hotel's contemporary Art Deco design, for which it is internationally known, to attract ultra-affluent guests from around the world.

The space—some 1,900 square feet on the hotel's highest floors plus a 1,050-square-foot terrace with 280-degree city views—now includes such knockout features as crystal wall panels and bedside lamps based on

“THE RETURN PER SQUARE FOOT ON THESE SUITES CAN BE 5 TO 100 TIMES WHAT’S GARNERED BY A REGULAR ROOM.”

Lalique's iconic Masque de Femme, a door with a golden mosaic in a herringbone pattern and bathrooms of dark Grigio Carnico marble, their crystal taps echoing the bubbled surface of Lalique's Mosi vases. It pushes the design envelope in every way and nudges the outlay to \$17,300.

The latest in a spate of new Parisian premium accommodations, the Suite Lalique by Patrick Hellmann is part of a rising trend in the French capital and worldwide: To keep up with ever-increasing competition, hotels must radically remaster and expand their penthouse suites—and create new ones—or face the consequences. And they are turning to in-demand designers and collaborations with need-no-introduction brands to do so.

The hotels hope these projects will help enhance their image and boost their bottom lines. The drive to do both has created something of an arms race in the luxury sector: Battling to outdo one another, hotels are creating an embarrassment of riches to impress the extraordinarily wealthy.

Hotels lavish attention—and budget—on these accommodations because they're a calling card. “They help define the hotel's personality and create a true unique selling point,” says Jack Ezon, founder and managing partner of Embark, a travel advisory that creates high-end bespoke trips.

They also have the potential to be cash cows. “The return per square foot on these suites can be 5 to 100 times what's garnered by a regular room,” Ezon continues. “Hotels that are looking to keep their average daily rates high bank on mega-suites to attract royals, oligarchs and other ultra-high-net-worth multi-generational families.”

Another part of the economic appeal: When such a suite is booked, so are a fleet of additional rooms to house the

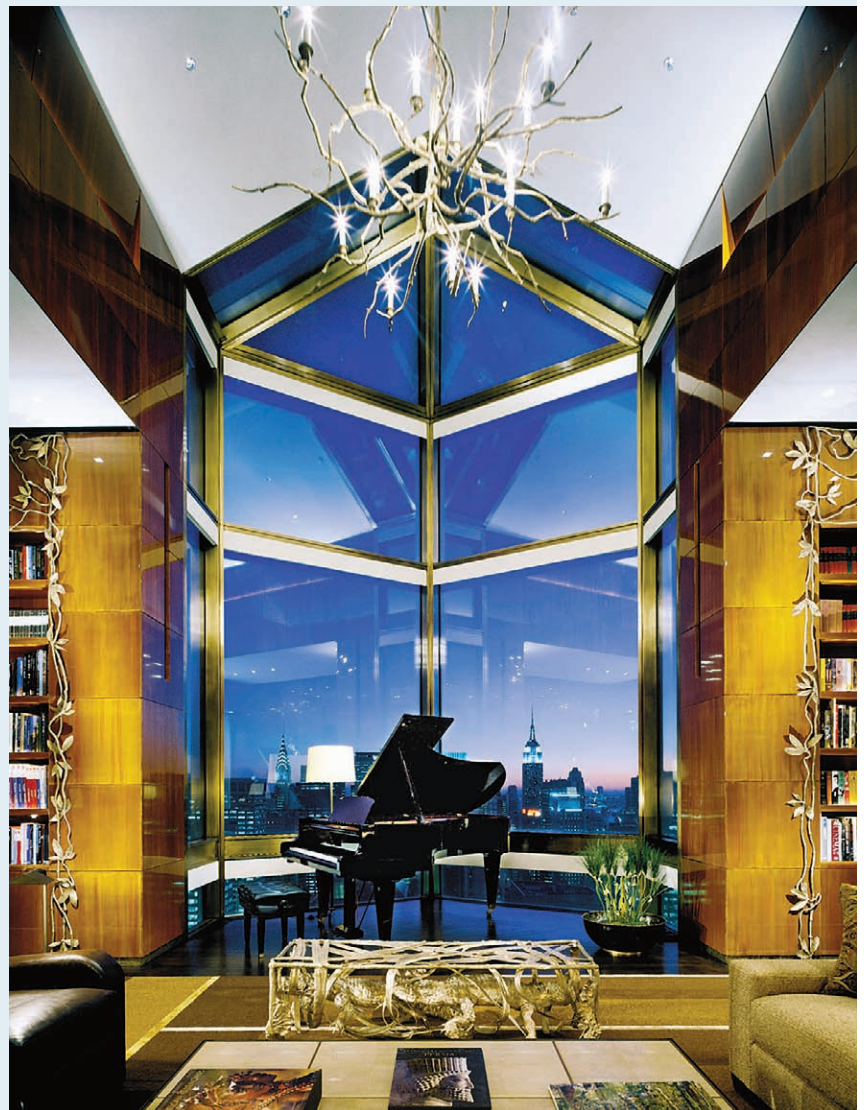
guest's entourage of security detail, assistants and other professional and personal staff. The largest recent party to book the Suite Lalique, for example—whose prominent guests have so far included a head of state—took nine rooms in addition to the suite itself.

“Travelers are spending a lot more on lodging these days, so we're seeing a big increase in luxury development,” says Matt Arrants, of hospitality consultancy Pinnacle Advisory Group. It bears out in the data. According to information gathered by the Global Business Travel Association and CWT (formerly Carlson Wagonlit Travel), average daily rates have steadily risen over the last six years, by as much as 3.7 percent in 2018 and 2019. And when new hotels enter a market, Arrants says, “existing properties definitely have to up their game. They know the consumer is going to be drawn to the shiny new object.”

“Suites are key for hotels here,” says Philippe Leboeuf, general manager of the

Mandarin Oriental Paris, which opened in 2011. He notes that competition has increased dramatically in his city: In the last decade, a Peninsula and Shangri-La have arrived, the Crillon and Le Meurice were majorly renovated, and a Bulgari and Cheval Blanc, from LVMH, will soon launch. “Creating more luxurious and spectacular suites is a way to differentiate,” Leboeuf says. To that end, last June his hotel debuted the four-bedroom, 4,600-square-foot Parisian Apartment suite, a \$35,300-a-night penthouse by sought-after French studio Gilles & Boissier.

Paris may be emblematic of this phenomenon, but there are plenty of other cities experiencing this change. In London—expected to add 8,000 hotel rooms this year, 10 percent of them luxury—the six-year-old Rosewood launched its three-bedroom, 2,700-square-foot, \$14,300-a-night Lincoln House this past fall in a former private event space. The project came



The vast Ty Warner Penthouse at the Four Seasons in Midtown Manhattan

about “to ensure we stay innovative and relevant,” says managing director Michael Bonsor, “and that we continue to exceed expectations.” Despite other similar spaces in the city—such as the 2,850-square-foot Royal Suite at the Savoy and the 4,850-square-foot Sterling Suite at the Langham—the Rosewood has recently had so many requests for large suites that it couldn’t keep up with demand.

In Boston—whose hotel boom will see the luxury-room count doubling—the city’s longstanding Boston Harbor Hotel (BHH) carved its new penthouse-floor John Adams Presidential Suite out of former event space too. The room opened months before the city’s Four Seasons One Dalton Street debuted. “We knew our existing top suite product just didn’t compete,” says general manager Stephen Johnston. The new 4,800-square-foot, \$15,000-a-night Adams suite—set under the hotel’s iconic rotunda, with a private elevator, a service kitchen and waterfront views through double-height glass walls—now very much does.

Manhattan, meanwhile, may well be the only city to give Paris a run for its money as the place *plus ultra* of this phenomenon. The arms race arguably began here a few years back, in Midtown, when the Four Seasons debuted the 4,300-square-foot, \$50,000-a-night one-bedroom Ty Warner Penthouse, designed in collaboration by Peter Marino, I. M. Pei and Ty Warner himself, the hotel’s billionaire owner. And now the Park Hyatt has a similarly priced, similarly sized super-suite: the three-bedroom, 59th-floor Manhattan Sky Suite, designed by Jeffrey Beers, with floor-to-ceiling windows and 360-degree views, plus an art collection that includes originals by the likes of Philip Guston and Sarah Sze.

Beyond abundant bedrooms, extensive square footage and high-touch furnishings, these suites also convey a certain home-away-from-home feeling. BHH, for its part, even turned to a firm with experience in both hospitality and residential interiors, Los Angeles’s SFA Design, which had created a house for the property’s owners. Not only did the hoteliers “want to have the best suite in town,” confirms SFA principal Rosie Feinberg, who led the project, but “they wanted to have the most residential one, too.”

That meant making it unique, incorporating unusually large amounts of inlaid stone, for example, and hanging a 1,200-piece, eight-foot-long custom crystal chandelier from the living area’s glass ceiling. Framed Hermès scarves decorate the walls, along with original works from local artists. Boston’s ►

Out of Office with HENRIK FISKER

FOUNDER OF FISKER INC.



Henrik Fisker has been an innovator and disrupter in the field of transportation since graduating from ArtCenter College of Design in Switzerland more than three decades ago. The former president and CEO of BMW Designworks USA crafted the BMW Z8 before moving on to Aston Martin and envisioning the DB9 and V8 Vantage. But, arguably, he’s most recognized for the eponymous Fisker Automotive and the \$102,000 Karma hybrid sedan, a model that had its plug pulled in 2013 due to investment and supplier struggles (Karma has since been reborn as a new marque under different ownership).

Since then, the consummate entrepreneur has been busy collaborating on passion projects, including a 164-foot superyacht concept he designed with Benetti in 2016. His latest venture, however, is more proletarian: the Fisker Ocean, an all-electric SUV whose interior features materials made from recycled T-shirts, plastic bottles and fishing nets. Says Fisker: “This will be a real game changer—a sustainable and affordable luxury car.” VIJU MATHEW AND TIM CHAN

What is the one thing you have to do every day to stay sane?

I take time to work out. But first, a cup of hot water with lemon, to detox, and a great “homemade” coffee with Indian ghee butter and cinnamon.

What is your biggest annoyance at work?

Because of my nature as an automotive designer, I would say it’s not having enough time to sit and sketch new ideas at my drawing board.

How long should a meeting last?

There is no set time. It can be one minute or half an hour. But no matter what, it has to be focused and lead to a clear, decisive outcome for a meeting to be productive.

Do you prefer e-mail, phone, text or Slack?

I prefer in-person or WhatsApp messenger. But the rest is necessary, as the world continues to drive toward digitalization.

What would you tell your younger self?

Save the contact details of all the interesting and important people you meet along the way.

What was your first job, and what did you learn from it that influenced your career?

At BMW in Germany. The biggest thing I learned was that it’s better to ask for forgiveness later rather than permission up front. And this lesson came through a pretty big project. . . . It’s how the BMW Z8 came to life.

When and where do you do your best thinking?

Late at night, just before falling asleep; driving alone in my car; on the beach, doing beach cleanups with my family; and on hikes with my wife.

What’s one adjustment people can make in their lives to be more successful?

Focus on doing one thing at your work brilliantly, and keep learning to do that one thing even better.

How do you manage your e-mails?

I make sure to clear all of them out, every day. I try for short, one-line responses. No “meeting sessions” via e-mail—those are usually a waste of time.

What’s your typical daily commute?

A good 27 miles one way, which takes 45 to 55 minutes on LA freeways. Of course, it’s all-electric. It’s with this in mind that I believe private cars won’t disappear anytime soon.

What is your daily driver?

A 2012 Fisker Karma.

What’s on your desk?

Sketch paper and pencils. I don’t have a desktop computer. I do all my reading and answer e-mails on my tablet and phone.

What’s your ambition for next year?

Start production of our Fisker Ocean all-electric luxury SUV.

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best florist handles the fresh flowers and plants, both inside and on the 1,000-square-foot terrace. The space includes a kitchen for a personal chef or one brought in for dinners (along with a dedicated, private service elevator), a cozy cinema room and a separate wing suitable for children and their caregivers or other members of a guest's staff.

In another hallmark of this new generation of super-suites, the Adams's open floor plan echoes au courant residential design, creating a flowing space meant for entertaining as well as relaxing. At Rosewood London's Lincoln House, the flexible living, dining and entertainment area unfolds across a wing on the third floor of the hotel's landmarked 1914 Edwardian-style building. "It has the feel of a series of apartments that were brought together" to create a floor-through sense of space, says William Paley, who's a longtime associate of legendary designer Tony Chi and oversaw this suite.

It's not just the physical space that's getting bigger and bolder. The hotels are raising the stakes on included services and amenities, too. When you're operating in this stratosphere, butlers are all but de rigueur, so for guests of the Manhattan Sky Suite, Park



The Prince de Galles's Suite
Lalique by Patrick Hellmann

Hyatt added a personal chef, airport transfers via Blade helicopters and hour-long spa services for up to six people. In addition to airport transfers, the Prince de Galles's Suite Lalique comes with a personal assistant at your request 24/7 and, even more enjoyably, an on-call private bartender.

It may be the result of cutthroat competition, but this luxury-suite arms race ultimately produces something entirely pleasant, begetting what Prince

de Galles general manager Gerald Krischek calls "a transformational experience" for guests. The Suite Lalique offers them the ability to "live in this unique space in this great city" as if it's their own capacious and cossetting apartment, and perhaps its design might even inspire the renovation of a space within one of their homes or yachts. And it's that sort of experience—and creative spark of originality—that may ultimately be the greatest luxury money can buy. **K**

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