



The Library Hotel



# IN NEW YORK

by LEIGH CORT

“Life is all memory, except for the one present moment that goes by you so quickly you hardly catch it going.”  
—Tennessee Williams

As the airport taxi turned from Park Avenue onto East 54th Street in Manhattan, I caught myself smiling that I was finally going to stay at one of the most famous hotels in the world. Hotel Elysée, built in the 1920s, was known as the playground for the rich and famous. A home to writers, artists, movie stars and acknowledged “intellectuals.”

Playwright Tennessee Williams, who inspired my imagination with his brilliant words and plays for 50 years, considered the Elysée his home when in New York. I couldn’t wait to live the memory!

Frantic taxis, limousines, morning sounds and smells of the city preparing for the day were an exquisite contrast to the sense of calm that swept over my entrance into the lobby. I could feel its European style of elegant luxury in the furnishings, front desk attire and voices of many languages surrounding me. I entered the “lift” (elevator) and found my suite. Opening the door to a “grande dame” spacious suite reminded me of my past city apartments that I wished were half as splendid as #903.

It was early enough for me to join hotel guests in the Club Room for a bountiful breakfast buffet served by the most attentive hostesses who seemed genuinely glad to meet me. The Elysée, with only 100 rooms, is one of four boutique hotels known as the “Library Collection,” and is more than just a hotel. It feels like your home in the middle of pulsating Manhattan where

one could spend days languishing with a favorite book and sipping a latte. The Library Hotel, Casablanca and Hotel Giraffe all provide their guests with a similar repast — dressed in each property’s themed décor.

I chose a window sofa with a view of 54th Street, finished my fresh fruit and yogurt and realized I was anxious to explore the neighborhood. A peek next door into the famed Monkey Bar Restaurant would lure me back for lunch and late night cocktails. Learning how convenient the Elysée is to some of the most stylish shopping and dining, such as the Museum of Modern Art, St. Patrick’s Cathedral and Bloomingdales, I stepped out on the town.

Lunch at the Monkey Bar brought memories of the halcyon days of nightclubs and sophisticated soirees. They swept me back to illustrious landmarks that played a role in New York’s history from the Stork Club and El Morocco to Jimmy Weston’s and Bill’s Gay Nineties, all within steps from the Elysée and now a new hot spot for dining and cocktail. Lunch buzzed with gentlemen dressed in suits, the cool comfort of being indoors on a drizzly spring afternoon, a perfect formula for deal making.

Hotelier Henry Kallan and partners are celebrating the 20th anniversary of their distinctive Library Collection. They know how to please. In addition to the well thought out list of amenities that makes traveling a remarkable experience, each of the four hotels is paired with a restaurant that makes a smooth segue from lobby to lunch and dinner. Some also serve breakfast as does the Monkey Bar. For over the top pampering, each



establishment delivers room service, imparting a feeling of genuine comfort to hotel guests.

From Hotel Elysée's European glamour to contemporary cool, the boutique Library Hotel on Madison Avenue and 41st Street is a block away from the illustrious

New York City Public Library. Its possibly the only hotel in the world that names and organizes its 60 guest rooms according to the Dewey Decimal System and offers 6,000 books to peruse from floor to floor. I was captivated when taking a brief tour of the hotel; each of the pristine 10 stories represents a specific category from History, Math and Science, Literature (poetry,

mystery, fairy tales) and mine, Philosophy.

The open 14th floor is a reader's sanctuary (Writer's Den and Poetry Garden) during the day, while the Bookmarks Lounge couldn't be more crowded with cocktailers at night. The rooftop Manhattan view reminded me that I was in the center of the city (perhaps even a familiar scene from "Sex and the City"). What tickled me one morning when I hung the "please refresh my room" sign, it read "Please Dust Off My Books!"

Walk through the Library Hotel's lobby or out the front door on 41st Street to Madison and Vine, a restaurant with verve. An American bistro with wine bar, you can stop in for a quick bite and feel at home in the neighborhood.

The Library Hotel is a five-minute walk from historic Bryant Park, which is behind the 42nd Street Library. Discover a bustling scene of New Yorkers and visitors enjoying events and activities, snacking and a grand lawn for sunbathing and people-watching. Its history dates to the mid-1600s as a park that has had many lives. George Washington's troops raced across the site. It was a Potter's Field, a reservoir, Civil War encampment and was even closed through the 1920s as the



subway tunnels were constructed underground.

Today's park is a scenic landmark that offers weekly calendars of wonderful things to do: Jazz concerts, poetry readings, juggling, dance ensembles, pingpong tournaments and Pétanque (a French game of "boules" played in the park). And if you're traveling with a grandchild, don't miss having the fun I enjoyed with my little Zack on the Carousel. It's \$1 per ride and adults ride for free!

What could be more exciting than to stroll a few blocks further to the Theater District and enter the portals of one of the world's most famous show business restaurants? Sardi's continues the tradition begun 90 years ago as a very special restaurant and bar to rub elbows with actors and everyone connected to Broadway red carpet events. Lunch, pre- and post-theater dinner and late night supper are served by gentlemen who have seen it all — from Carol Channing and Zero Mostel to Bernadette Peters and Tom Hanks.

A signature dish for decades, I suggest an appetizer of Canneloni au Gratin (French crepe filled with beef, veal and sweet sausage with sherry tomato cream sauce), Shrimp Sardi (sauteed

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Casablanca staircase



shrimp in garlic sauce) or my personal favorite Steak Tartar (prepared at your table). Don't forget dessert, a Boccone Dolce (a "sweet mouthful" of meringue, fresh strawberries, whipped cream and a touch of chocolate)!

Although the week's trip didn't allow for an overnight at the Hotel Casablanca on West 43rd Street, this member of the Library Collection was close enough to Shubert Alley for a quick peek. It's a charmer, exotic with reminiscences of the Humphrey Bogart film "Casablanca." What could be more appropriate than Rick's Cafe as the hotel's 24-hour refreshment and relaxation lounge! Amenities abound similarly to its sister properties, ranking it the No. 1 boutique hotel in New York City by members of TripAdvisor for many consecutive years. Its pedigree reaches back to the prior Hotel Metropole in the late 1800s (the first hotel in Manhattan that had running water in every room). Subsequently, for nearly a century, it was Hotel Rosoff sporting Rosoff's Restaurant, a Times Square landmark. Henry Kallan and interior designer Jorge Portero opened the Casablanca in 1996, a not-to-be-missed romantic hideaway only steps from Broadway.

With one hotel still awaiting my arrival, I couldn't wait to check into Hotel Giraffe on Park Avenue South and 26th Street. It is truly an urban oasis with a casual sophistication where guests from around the globe can feel comfortable. Poised unpretentiously in NoMad (north of Madison Square Park), an ideal location situated between midtown Manhattan and downtown, it's totally realistic to plan for a memorable day's walking adventure to myriad famous destinations: the Empire State Building, Madison Square Garden, Macy's, Jacob Javitz Center and even the United Nations. And for fit runners, it's only minutes to Wall Street, South Street Seaport, World Trade Center and the Statue of Liberty!

Choosing a balcony suite that was elegant and spacious enough for moving full-time into the city, the views of Park Avenue reminded me of why I love Manhattan. It's not just musical lyrics that continued to ring in my heart during the week like the 1925 Rodgers & Hart song "Manhattan" or "42nd Street" with

a long chorus line of tappers. Learning about the four hotels' history fascinated me. Hotel Giraffe is a reflection of the timeless gentle grace and beauty found in one of nature's beautiful animals. The NoMad neighborhood was inspired by the Art Moderne period during the 1920s and '30s, perfectly enlivened by an attentive caring staff.

A late night dinner? Of course its easy in the city. Walking through Giraffe's lobby and into Bread & Tulips restaurant, my daughter Sue and I were escorted downstairs into what seemed to be a private wine cellar. The atmosphere was warm and jubilant New York with a subtlety of rustic Italian. The name is what fascinates; Bread represents providing guests with a satisfying meal and Tulips represents the warm inviting atmosphere. Together, it's owner Riccardo Dardha's concept of modern hospitality. The wine and dinner didn't disappoint for a moment.

The menu deserved attention. Even to seasoned foodies, we stumbled upon dishes that at first seemed too avant garde or too mundane but they all made sense — especially as we raved about Roasted Farm Chicken that was named in the Top 10 dishes in Time Out Magazine. A light Baby Beet Salad with grapefruit, goat cheese and pistachio drizzled with pomegranate vinaigrette was a stunning ending. Once again the hotel's pairing with dining was executed with composure and ease.

Did I dare to leave my city in the morning? There is often a bittersweet sadness about good times coming to an end. Sleepily, I answered a personal voice calling my room for a wakeup announcement that prevails in all four hotels, a reassuring feeling that I would come back soon. Could I possibly be like Woody Allen in his 1979 movie "Manhattan"? He adored New York City and to him, no matter what the season was, it pulsed to the great tunes of George Gershwin. He romanticized it all out of proportion.

Perhaps so do I. Of course I'm smitten. And the Hotel Casablanca will be my first indulgence when I return to fall in love all over again.

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Hotel Elysee entrance

### BOBBY VAN'S STEAKHOUSE

Its 54th Street location is known for exquisite aged prime steaks, chops and seafood. Serving traditional American grill fare, the service is exceptional and the menu harkens back to power lunches and festive dinners. In a building once frequented by Frank Sinatra and the Rat Pack, there is a quintessential vibe of outstanding food and wine and only two blocks from the Hotel Elysée.

### BRASSERIE

Don't miss this dazzling reincarnation of New York's original 1959 Brasserie, an unexpected taste of classic French fare and ultramodern beauty. The cosmopolitan setting has been an iconic fixture in the Seagram building on East 53rd Street since 1959, a short and highly recommended stroll from the Hotel Elysée for exquisite late night desserts, Steak Frites and the Brasserie Burger. I always listen when Zagat points you in the direction of an "essential NYC experience."

### IRISH REPERTORY THEATER

For 25 years, this acclaimed little theatre on W. 22nd Street is the only year-round theater company in New York City devoted exclusively to bringing Irish and Irish-American works to the stage. Founded by Ciaran O'Reilly and Charlotte Moore in 1988, it opened its doors with Sean O'Casey's "The Plough and the Stars" on its Main Stage. Finding a permanent home in Chelsea on three renovated floors of a former warehouse, theater-goers can truly enjoy an intimate and outstanding production of award-winning drama and comedy. The smaller studio space with approximately 50 seats is the intimate W. Scott McClucas Studio. Here you can enjoy the company's engaging perspectives on the Irish and their contributions to the world of theater.

