



Front Office

by Elizabeth Kozlowski

Spend a night in the world's most luxurious and expensive hotel suite

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Imagine floating in the air 700 feet above midtown Manhattan in New York City. Now imagine turning around in a full circle, taking in all the sights the Big Apple has to offer from Central Park, west to the Hudson River, down to the Empire State Building and around to the East River. Now picture being encased in a 4,300 square foot bubble surrounded by 25-foot high, floor to ceiling windows and a marble floor underfoot.

This places one on the top floor of the city's tallest hotel, the five-star, five-diamond Four Seasons Hotel New York, in the world's most expensive suite, the Ty Warner Penthouse. Ty Warner, to whom we owe our gratitude for the existence of Beanie Babies, purchased the hotel in 1999 (six years after its inception). The Penthouse is the culmination of seven years of collaboration between Warner and world-renowned architects I.M. Pei (the building's original architect) and Peter Marino. The renovation cost a cool \$50 million.

Previous to the renovation, the Penthouse was called the Presidential Suite. It still occupied the entire floor but had a much less impressive décor. There are two Presidential Suites now and they are both located on the floor below the Penthouse.

Being in the Penthouse not only makes one feel on top of the world but, literally, one is. Sweeping 360-degree views of the city aside, the suite was constructed with only the finest materials from all over the world, customized and refined by the finest artisans, then shipped to the hotel. Throughout the rooms, Chinese onyx, French lacquer, South African granite, and Thai silk can be found, to name just a few.

Reaching the Penthouse requires key access in the guest elevator from the lobby, which opens up right in the middle of the suite. Once the elevator is keyed off for the Penthouse, it makes no other stops on its way up.

The suite is split into nine different rooms. The living room, library, master bedroom, master bathroom, and spa are the five main rooms. The master bedroom faces north, the library faces south, the master bathroom and spa face east, and the living room faces west. The four smaller rooms – the powder room, breakfast room, Zen room, and dressing room – are dotted in between throughout the suite.

When the Penthouse is occupied, it can be very intense. It takes a lot to impress guests who are spending a considerable sum of money and, especially for that suite, the hotel is not prepared to let someone walk away disappointed. Therefore, a personal butler is appointed for guests of the Penthouse, who coordinates all of their movements. They contact him directly via cell phone for everything they need or want. He books appointments, meals, and coordinates housekeeping service when they leave.

A real sight to see is when the butler calls for the suite to receive housekeeping service. It is pandemonium as an army of people flock up to the suite to service it as quickly as possible before the guest returns. There are two room attendants on pager that must be prepared to run up to the suite at a moment's notice. A housekeeping manager goes with them as well as a room service manager or two to replenish the fruit amenities, restock the minibar, and remove any dirty plates or glasses. Any laundry left lying around is taken to valet laundry to be dry-cleaned and any shoes left out are shined. Engineering is also called if there are any issues such as burnt out light bulbs.

Even though the suite is worth eight credits toward a housekeeper's daily productivity standard, servicing it is about both speed and quality; so the more people that help, the better. The room usually is completed within 45 minutes.





From the guest's perspective, it's almost like little fairies came while they were gone and cleaned up everything perfectly without a trace that they were ever there.

However, maintenance of the suite occurs on a daily basis, not just when occupied. Everyday the suite must be walked by a housekeeping manager to ensure everything is in place. This is important because although unauthorized access to the suite is very unlikely (Security must provide access to the suite – even housekeeping managers aren't allowed to sign out the key for it!), one never knows when the unexpected might occur such as a leak from the ceiling or one of the balcony doors blowing open on a rainy, windy day. Any issues found are immediately reported.

Ty Warner's assistant, who has an office in the hotel, works very closely with the suite, as it is so important to Mr. Warner. The suite always has to be set as he likes it, with very detailed specifications down to how the phone cord should be placed. Whenever Mr. Warner visits New York, he stays in the suite unless it is already occupied. Therefore, it always must be in tip-top shape. Once a week, a housekeeping manager will work with a room attendant in the suite to dust and touch up everything.

So what is it really like to spend a night in the most expensive accommodation in the world...?

Making a left turn after the elevator door opens, you are in the living room area. The white walls are hand-lacquered with mother of pearl stripes running throughout. These walls were assembled in Italy, then taken apart to be shipped to New York for the hand-lacquered finish, then installed in the suite. After turning on the fireplace, you sit to admire the chandelier hanging above the dining table to the left. It is a four-foot chandelier of cut glass that was handcrafted in Britain and looks like someone dropped a windowpane then swept up the shards to make this light fixture. The sunlight from outside shines off of it brilliantly, and upon nightfall there are 120 fiber optic lights within it that will take over for the sun. You turn on the plasma TV using the portable touch panel to watch your favorite Italian soccer team play, then the news in China.



After freshening up in the powder room, which is laden with tiger's eye semi-precious stone, you step out onto the balcony in its vestibule to catch a glimpse of the Empire State Building. This is only one of eight balconies throughout the suite that are at the corner of each cardinal and ordinal direction.

You head into the library to check your email on the Mac computer at the desk then call a colleague in London to discuss a business deal. The glossy walls are a deep caramel color. They were assembled in Italy, sent to France for the many-layered lacquer finish to be applied by artisans, then off to the hotel. The built-in bookcases are flanked by bronze vine and leaf sculptures climbing up the wall. As the sun sets on the city, you play a few notes on the Bosendorfer grand piano.

The masseuse has arrived for your 80-minute massage. On your way over to the spa, you pass the Zen room with its limestone floor and backdrop of moss green semi-precious granite from South Africa on which there is a cascading waterfall.

The spa's walls, floors and furniture are made from walnut, fromosia, and sycamore woods. The screen of bamboo trees completes the relaxing atmosphere.

The massage has you feeling too relaxed however, so you decide to take a quick run on the treadmill to wake up a bit. You don't have much time, though, because the butler, who is available to you 24/7, has reserved a table for two at the Michelin 1-star restaurant L'Atelier, downstairs in the lobby. They are fully committed tonight but there is always a table for the guest of the Penthouse. The butler asked if you'd prefer to have the food served on one of your balconies but it's a little too chilly out for you tonight so you decline that offer.

It's time to get cleaned up and ready for dinner. Although the bathtub looks alluring with its view of Central Park and chromo therapy lights within, a shower will be quicker. But you still don't miss out on anything because the all-glass shower allows a 360-degree view. The rain showerhead pours down water upon you as if you were caught in the middle of a storm and there are also six body jets on the wall. As if this weren't enough, the shower also has fiber-optic lighting and aromatherapy options as well.



The radiantly heated bathroom floor is made of hand-selected golden honey-colored Chinese onyx, as are the walls and ceiling. The double sinks, lit from below with LED lights, and countertop are carved from a single block of rock crystal. Even more luxurious is the toilet, which has a heated seat that automatically opens as you approach it. There is a button for everything the toilet can do: open, close, flush and, well, yes, a bidet feature with several, ahem, options.

Stepping into the dressing room to get dressed, the patchwork cow skin rug feels so soft below your feet. The oversized closet space is much more than what you needed for only a one-night stay. The full-length mirror helps you make sure you look your best before you head downstairs for dinner. For after dinner, you have tickets to see a Broadway show. Your Rolls Royce is waiting outside to take you. In the Penthouse, a Rolls Royce or Maybach is always available to take you where you need to go at a moment's notice.

Upon returning from your night out, turndown has already been done in the suite. The soft glow of the bedside lamps and low-volume music invite you to lie in the Thai silk canopy bed on the newly purchased mattress from Sweden filled with horsehair. Before you do, you look through the brass telescope to gaze at the stars in the sky. The walls, which were constructed in Italy, were then sent to France for straw marquetry. Straw marquetry is a rare craft mastered by only a handful of artists. It involves applying hundreds of thousands of straw pieces to the wall by hand after they have been soaked, split and ironed into strips.

When you wake up in the morning, you open the drapes right from bed using the bedside electronic button and find yourself gazing upon the most gorgeous panoramic view of Central Park. Room service delivers breakfast for you and sets it up in the breakfast room. The floor is made of French travertine and the service bar area is covered in semi-precious blue calcite. As you sit and eat, you think to yourself “I don’t ever want to leave”.

But, although you find it hard to part from the suite, it is time to check out. You head to the front desk to settle your bill. The total? The all-inclusive, non-negotiable price is \$34,000. ✧

(Elizabeth Kozlowski is the assistant housekeeping manager at the Four Season Hotel New York. The Four Seasons Hotel New York has earned the coveted AAA Five-Diamond Award for Lodgings for 14 consecutive years. The property is a 52-story luxury hotel containing 368 oversized guestrooms and suites each ranging from 500 sq. ft. to 4,300 sq. ft. E-mail: elizabeth.kozlowski@fourseasons.com.)