

Restaurateurs  
Dimitri Pauli (*left*)  
and Gherardo  
Guarducci (*center*),  
with Loews Hotels  
& Resorts chairman  
Jonathan Tisch  
in front of an  
installation by  
Brooklyn artist  
Nina Helms, at the  
Loews Regency Hotel  
in New York City.



# PARK AVENUE COOL

With his massive overhaul of a New York classic—the Loews Regency Hotel—owner Jonathan Tisch is aiming to bring a little bit of downtown uptown. Can he pull it off?  
TINA GAUDOIN reports.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY WILLIAM WALDRON

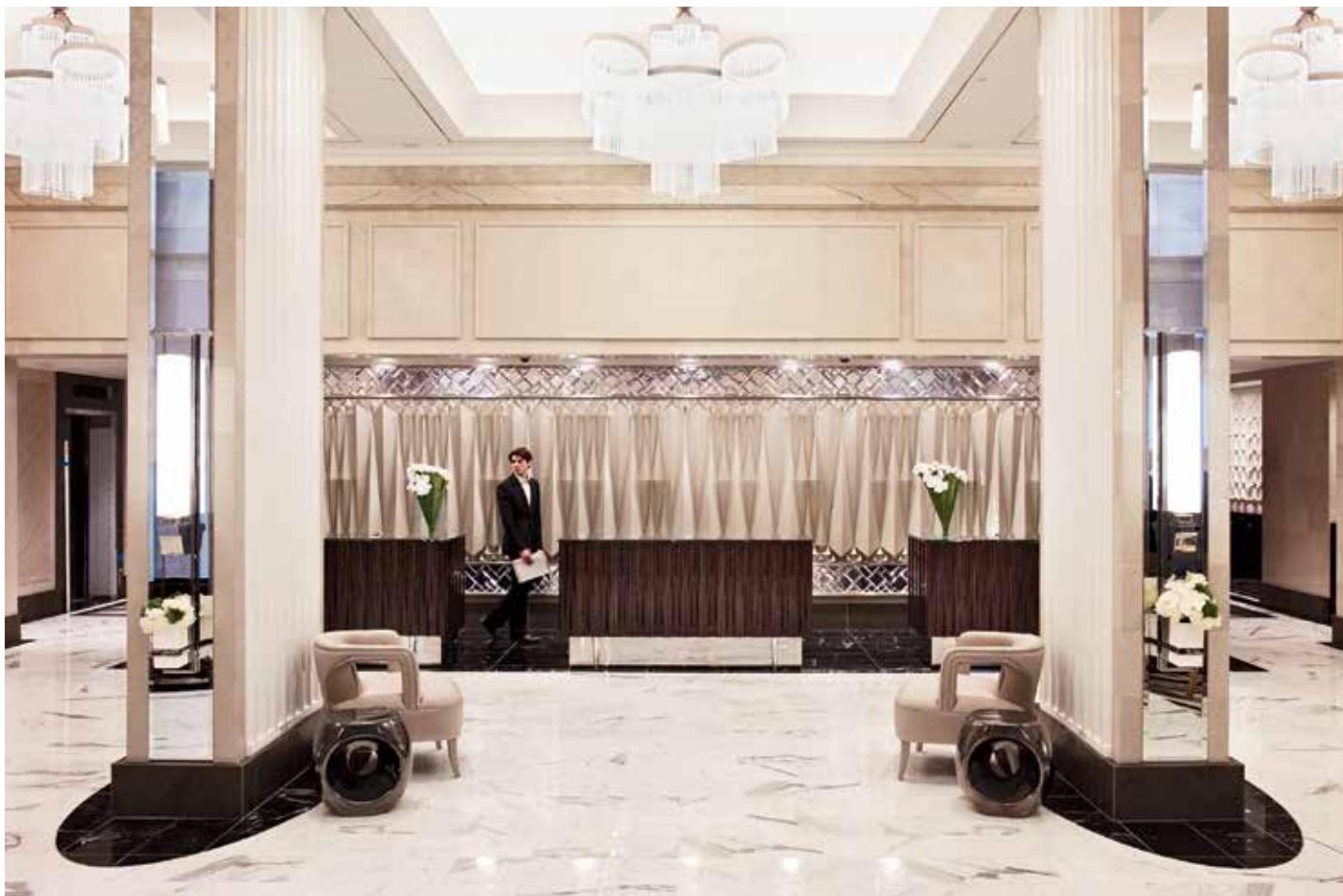


Jonathan Tisch, scion of one of America's most influential and wealthy families and chairman of Loews Hotels & Resorts, isn't sleeping well. "I wake up thinking about lampshades," he says with a laugh, "and then I go on to think about doorknobs." It's the renovation of the Loews Regency Hotel, an institution and his childhood residence (he was raised, Eloise-style, here), that's making him anxious. "First it was just the rooms that I thought needed some work, and then I realized the scope of what needed doing." It took a budget of \$100 million and a shutdown of the hotel for an entire year to get the job done.

It's a big ask to take a hotel so redolent of classic Manhattan glamour and bring it up to date without losing its soul in the process. Taylor and Burton stayed here, as did Princess Grace and Prince Rainier of Monaco. The term *power breakfast* was coined here, too. Tisch's late father, Preston Robert, who cofounded the hotel with his brother Laurence, began inviting city leaders to breakfast during the 1975 stock market crash in an attempt to inspire ideas for New York's regeneration. Almost 40 years later, his son—the self-appointed "soul" of the Regency brand—hired the best in the business to help in his own quest for renewal.

Meyer Davis Studio (Locanda Verde; the Dutch) designed the bar, spa, salon, and two specialty suites; Lauren Rottet from Rottet Studio (St. Regis Aspen; James Royal Palm in Miami Beach) worked on the guest rooms and the lobby. Gherardo Guarducci and Dimitri Pauli, partners in the Sant Ambroeu Hospitality Group, were brought in to handle the Regency Bar & Grill, room service, and a stand-alone take-out coffee shop. And celebrity hairstylist Julien Farel has his own lofty aerie with a state-of-the-art spa and fitness center. A men's grooming space will open later this year.

"We were always a cornerstone in this neighborhood, a vital point between the residential and central



The marble-and-limestone-clad lobby at the Loews Regency Hotel, on Park Avenue.

business areas of the city,” Tisch says. “We don’t want to lose any of our existing clientele. But we also want to attract a new crowd.” His inspiration for the grand-meets-informal fusion of the towering marble lobby and low-lit bar? The Ace Hotel. “When you go into their lobby, everyone is on a device, communicating, being seen and watching other people,” Tisch says. It’s all part of a bigger evolution of this well-heeled Upper East Side neighborhood, which has long been ripe for change. That is, if you can describe one of the city’s most expensive stretches of real estate as being in need of a jolt. With the revamped Barneys just around the corner and stylish hangouts like Il Mulino and the just-opened Rotisserie Georgette, the buzz is building.

If anywhere is going to draw the crowds new and old, it’s the Regency Bar & Grill, where the Sant Ambroeus team, together with chef Dan Silverman (Lever House; the Standard), are excited to “take a swing” at a different type of power breakfast. “The challenge for us is to bring the vibe from our downtown restaurants uptown,” Guarducci says. Meyer Davis rethought the look of the restaurant, using dark paneling, clever lighting, and subtle divisions to give the room a mix of privacy and visibility.

In the lobby and the guest rooms, Rottet worked with a warm-and-cool palette. The décor is simple but chic, with lavish attention to detailing—specially designed

Deco-inspired vanities in the bathrooms; stylized work spaces in highly polished marble. “I spend time in a hotel before I work on it, to capture the feeling,” Rottet says, “and here I am in this institution, and I think I hear singing in the lobby. I can’t quite believe it, so I go to investigate and find Richard Simmons in a tracksuit. This hotel really has a sense of humor.”

Rottet says her boss steered the renovation with a steady hand but a light touch. “I love working with Jonathan,” she continues. “He tells you immediately what he likes and what he doesn’t like.”

Another member of the Tisch family with firm views is John’s mother, Joan Tisch, who has been a resident of the hotel (in her own apartment) for 45 years. “Telling her she would have to move out temporarily was not what you might call a good conversation,” Tisch says, “but now she loves what we have done and she’s excited to come back.”

Tampering with history, no matter how successfully, was always going to have ramifications. “Removing the limestone that had graced the walls of the lobby for fifty years was painful,” Tisch acknowledges, both grimacing and smiling at the memory. “I had visions of my father and my late uncle shouting at me: ‘You did what?!’” +

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One of the hotel's Art Deco-inspired bathrooms. Clockwise from right: Ordering drinks at the lobby bar; a guest room; an art piece behind the front desk, by Rottet Studio.

