



STAY

## American hotel story

Properties with narrative flair add tone to the travel experience

**H**otels open up the possibilities of the world, allow guests to channel a narrative the property is weaving. Europe pretty much invented the idea of vintage opulence—Ireland’s 19th-century Adare Manor has grounds the size of Central Park, for example—but in America, the allure of history can be built from pure gumption. The centerpiece of the new Aertson Midtown development in Nashville—home to

The Round Robin Bar at the Willard in Washington, D.C., features portraits of such guests as Walt Whitman, Alice Roosevelt Longworth and Presidents Wilson, Harding and Coolidge

Vanderbilt University—is the sophisticated Aertson Hotel, named after Jan Aertson, whose family name was changed to Vanderbilt in the 17th century. In Denver, Sage Hospitality works pop history at The Curtis—a disco-themed room features a mural of platform shoes—and incorporates movieland touches at The Halcyon: Guests aping Gregory Peck in *Roman Holiday* can borrow Piaggio scooters and Leica

cameras. Notorious history also works. At The Watergate Hotel, room 214—used in the Watergate break-in—is now the high-1970s Scandal Room. The Lotte New York Palace, formerly Leona Helmsley’s lair, serves Queen of Mean cocktails at the Trouble’s Trust bar.

Many luxury properties offer rich histories, and Fairmont Hotels & Resorts operates opulent landmarks such as its original namesake on San Francisco’s Nob Hill, Boston’s Fairmont Copley Plaza, and the mythic mother ship, The Plaza in New York. To walk into The Plaza, a 1907 faux French chateau designed by Henry Janeway Hardenbergh, is to be consumed by a whirling dervish of associations, from F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* to Kay Thompson’s *Eloise* books. The hotel’s legacy has kept on giving: Betsey Johnson created the Eloise Suite, and the Fitzgerald Suite was designed by Catherine Martin, who won an Oscar for her work on her husband Baz Luhrmann’s 2013 adaptation of the 1925 novel.

In Washington, D.C., the Willard InterContinental, with the adjacent Occidental Grill & Seafood, is a recently renovated 1901 Hardenbergh-designed monolith, whose bar was immortalized in a poem by Walt Whitman. The Darcy, a Curio



Above: The Scandal Room at The Watergate Hotel in Washington, D.C. Left: A whimsical narrative about the owner informs the design of The Darcy

Collection by Hilton property featuring Robert Wiedmaier’s excellent Siren restaurant, is history as artifice, with narrative conceits serving as design inspirations: In the hotel’s fanciful story, a Washington dandy, Mr. Darcy, returns home from England and opens an inn, with such luxuries as drink butlers serving The Double Darcy cocktail in guest rooms.

Also in D.C., the new Eaton Workshop hotel, the first property in a global brand, takes its narrative cues from such stories



IN THE DARCY’S FANCIFUL STORY,  
A DANDY RETURNS HOME FROM  
ENGLAND AND OPENS AN INN.

of social activism as the Women’s March. The forward-thinking message of owner Katherine Lo—the daughter of Lo Ka Shui, founder of Langham Hospitality Group—includes plans for TED-style podcasts, residencies for investigative journalists, and AJ Schnack’s video art installation casting a glance at the last 10 years of American elections. To attract the conscious-consumer set, Lo brought in local innovator Tim Ma of Kyrisan to create healthy fare for American Son restaurant, utilizing organic produce from the hotel’s rooftop garden. —TOM AUSTIN