



Peter Zumthor, Therme Vals, Switzerland, 1996. Photo: Nico Schärer. © Therme Vals



Ace Hotel Portland Lobby, 2007. Photo: Jeremy Pelley. © Ace Hotel Group

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Innovative Exhibition Explores the Hotel as Defining Structure of the Modern Age
***Grand Hotel: Redesigning Modern Life*, April 13 - September 15, 2013**

Vancouver, BC - Opening on April 13th, *Grand Hotel: Redesigning Modern Life* is a ground-breaking exhibition exploring the impact of the hotel as one of the pre-eminent architectural and social structures of our time. Conceived by independent curator and writer Jennifer M. Volland and created exclusively for the Vancouver Art Gallery, *Grand Hotel* challenges visitors to consider the ways that the hotel has both reflected and been an agent of social and cultural change throughout the modern era. The title of the exhibition is in part inspired by the 1932 Hollywood film *Grand Hotel*, in which lives of guests interweave during a brief hotel stay. The film depicts a thoroughly modern condition and demonstrates the potency of the hotel as both a real and symbolic nexus of human movement, interaction and ideas. More than six years in the making, the exhibition is a thought-provoking and dynamic presentation featuring noted hotels around the globe and throughout history.

“*Grand Hotel* is the latest example of the Gallery’s commitment to creating innovative exhibitions which foster new and dynamic understandings of visual culture,” said Gallery director Kathleen Bartels, “We’re very excited to be presenting this first-ever exhibition on the hotel as a defining architectural structure of the modern age, and proud that this project fills a considerable void in scholarship on this important subject.”

“This exhibition offers the idea of the hotel as a complex, multi-faceted form produced by diverse forces within modern culture, and convincingly demonstrates that the hotel itself has played a pivotal role in the redesigning of modern life,” said Gallery senior curator Bruce Grenville, “Today the hotel still maintains its status as a testing ground for social change, providing a space where conventions of gender, race and class can be willfully tested, reconfigured or abandoned, seemingly without penalty.”

Spanning two floors, the exhibition investigates the physical and psychological dimensions of the hotel using four main themes: Travel, Design, Social and Culture. The **Travel** section traces two important threads in the expanding network of the hotel. First, it examines the geopolitical motivations behind the travel and tourism industries, demonstrating how economics, imperialistic designs and international conflict have influenced where hotels are situated. Famously, Conrad Hilton of the eponymous hotel chain promised “World Peace

Through International Trade and Travel”, while promoting his hotel network as a bastion against communism in the mid-20th century. Other hotel chains served similar political purposes. Second, the section looks at the psychological aspects of travel, illustrating how the spread of hotels is linked to an intrinsic human desire for adventure, exploration and escape. This section also features numerous examples of hotels by revolutions in transportation including the Canadian Pacific hotels, the Holiday Inn chain, and today’s eco-tourism safaris.

Design is a fundamental presence in every aspect of a guest’s experience, and the hotel mediates this at every level of encounter. An attention to detail – from the smallest item on the bathroom shelf to the building and its context within the cityscape or landscape – is essential to its success. The **Design** section features ten models which exemplify game-changing moments in the architecture and design of hotels: Raffles, Singapore; Imperial Hotel, Tokyo; Waldorf Astoria, New York; Flamingo, Las Vegas; Istanbul Hilton; SAS Royal Copenhagen; Westin Bonaventure, Los Angeles; Therme Vals, VAls, Switzerland; Dolder Grand, Zurich; and Marina Bay Sands, Singapore. The objects selected for this section of the exhibition range from key cards and matchboxes to furniture and wall treatments. Arne Jacobsen’s design of the SAS Royal Hotel in Copenhagen is recognized as one of the most outstanding examples of hotel design still in existence. Every element of the hotel, from its sleek modernist exterior to its iconic ‘egg chair’ and eccentric cutlery, was designed by Jacobsen.

The exhibition’s **Social** section looks at race, class, and gender and asks how social rules have been challenged by and in hotels. Civil rights sit-ins during the sixties at San Francisco’s Sheraton Plaza Hotel, Langston Hughes’ searing parody of a Waldorf Astoria advertisement during the height of the Depression, and Katherine Hepburn’s groundbreaking stand in 1951 against Claridge’s restrictive policy on appropriate female attire in their hotel lobby - all of these are examples of the hotel’s centrality in shifting social norms. Through videos, photos, and archival objects, this section explores the concept of the hotel as a living organism, formed and defined by the stories of individuals throughout history.

Finally, the section on **Culture** presents the hotel as an active site of cultural production. From the Chelsea and Algonquin hotels in New York, the Chateau Marmont in Los Angeles, the Beat in Paris and the Imperial in Vienna to various Asian colonial establishments - the hotel has proven to be a fertile environment for the production of notable works of art, literature, music, film and poetry. In this section, the exhibition showcases a selection of iconic works of the modern age – Richard Wagner’s Tannhauser, William Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch*, Andy Warhol’s *Chelsea Girls*, Buck Henry’s screenplay for “The Graduate”, Bob Dylan’s “Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands” - these are all works which owe their very existence to the convivial atmosphere of hotel life. In the past decade, we have seen the emergence of a new type of hotel in which cultural production is consciously integrated into its design and day-to-day activities. The Lloyd Hotel in Amsterdam, the Ace Hotels in the US, the Michelberger in Berlin and the Waldorf in Vancouver, to name but a few, are designed to support and nurture cultural production.

Grand Hotel features a vast array of representations of the hotel - from archival photographs and advertising to the latest video, film and interactive display. The Vancouver Art Gallery is particularly grateful to The Keg Steakhouse and Bar for their generosity in supporting this important exhibition. The exhibition is accompanied by a richly illustrated 336-page catalogue published by Hatje Cantz Verlag in Germany.

[A media preview with curators Jennifer M. Volland and Bruce Grenville will take place on Thursday, April 11th at 9am in the Gallery. Media attending are requested to RSVP to Carolyn Jack.](#)

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Images and interviews are available upon request.

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