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A Manhattan Hotel Is Made Over, and a Reporter Wanders Back in Time

Building Blocks

By DAVID W. DUNLAP APRIL 27, 2016



The renovation of the InterContinental New York Barclay hotel, at Lexington Avenue and 48th Street, included the installation of two new ballrooms on the second floor, and a 4,500-square-foot suite and terrace on the roof. Pablo Enriquez for The New York Times

Birds have come back to the Barclay.

The [InterContinental New York Barclay](#), at Lexington Avenue and 48th Street, is to reopen on Friday after a 20-month, \$180 million renovation. The biggest new feature is *not* the eight brass warbler silhouettes perched on branches encircling the hotel's central revolving door on 48th Street.

But it is the feature closest to my heart. The Barclay is among the very first New York City buildings I ever wrote about, in a career largely given to writing about New York City buildings.

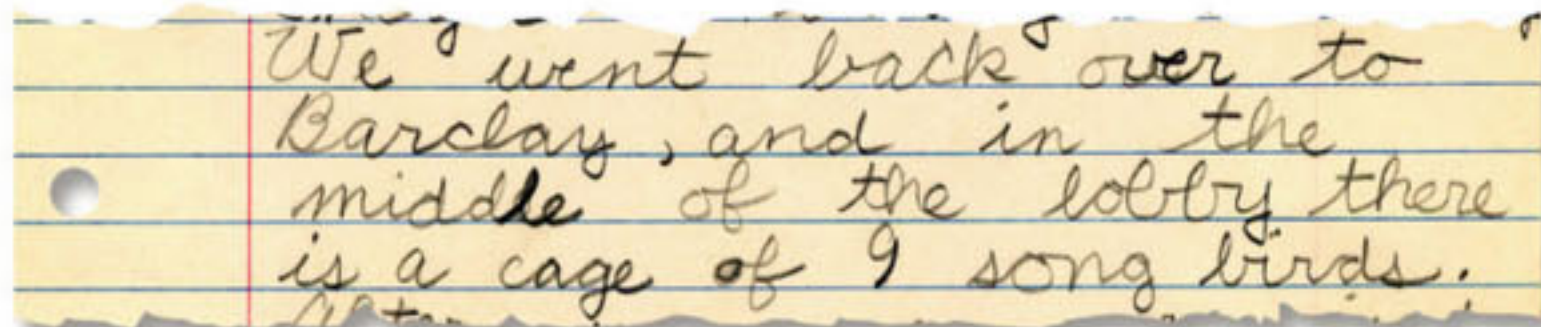


Eight brass warbler silhouettes were added to the hotel's central revolving door, a homage to a cage of songbirds that once sat in the lobby. Pablo Enriquez for The New York Times

"In the middle of the lobby there is a cage of 9 song birds," I [reported to my fourth-grade class](#) at the Francis W. Parker School in Chicago on Feb. 24, 1962, after returning from a visit to Manhattan with my mother.

Though the cage was removed in 1995, the newly installed brass likenesses are intended as a homage, [Hervé Houdré](#), the general manager, said.

Bird motifs can be found throughout the renovated hotel. More important, so can new windows, in all 704 rooms and suites.

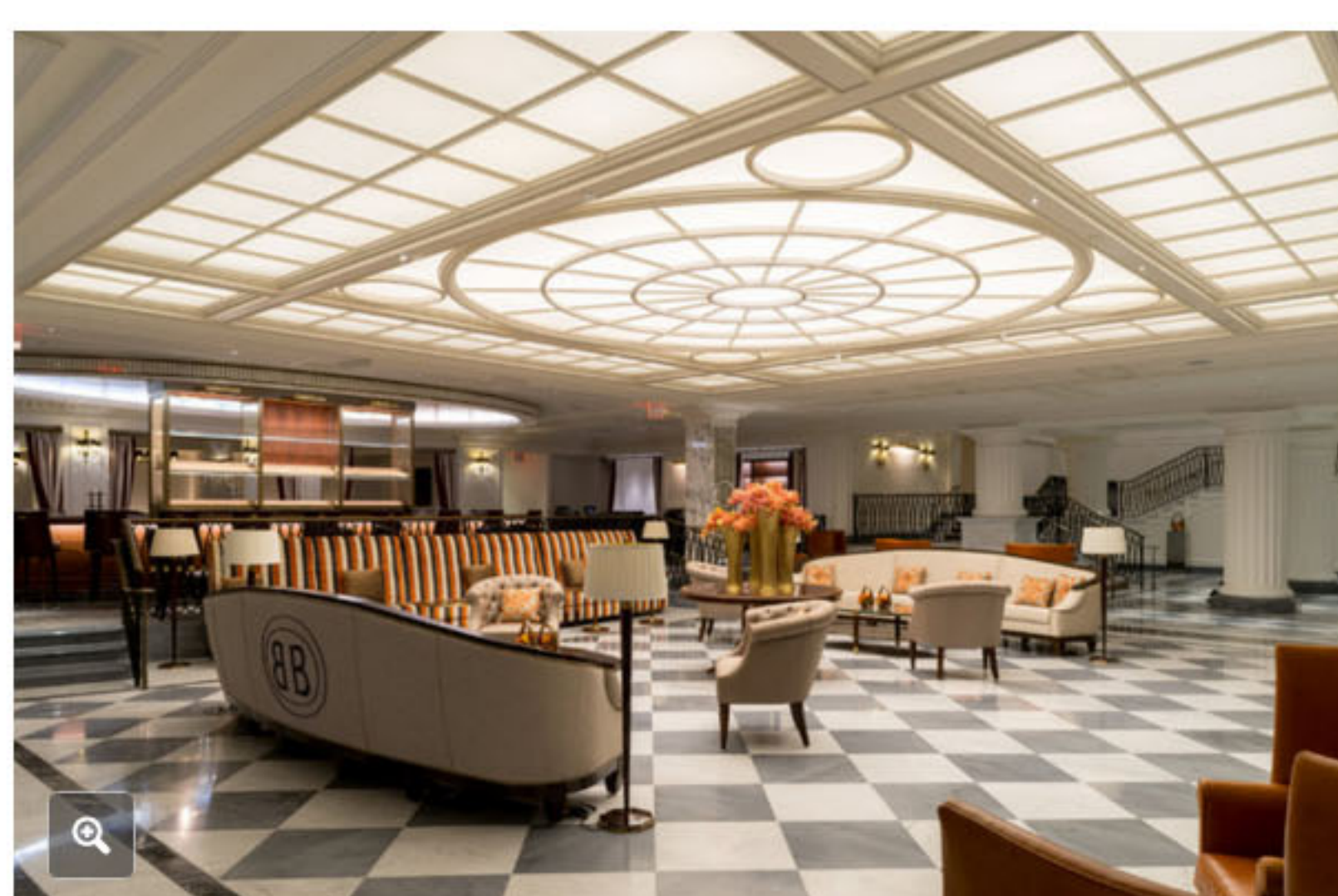


The reporter's [account to his fourth-grade class](#) of what he saw at the hotel during a trip he and his mother made to Manhattan from Chicago in 1962.

"In the city that never sleeps, you never slept at the Barclay," Mr. Houdré said, acknowledging one of the most common complaints from guests: street noise. The new windows have double panes, which eliminate the sound of all but the loudest passing sirens. Argon gas between the panes acts as a thermal insulator in both summer and winter.

The biggest changes to the hotel are the additions of two new ballrooms on the second floor, and a 4,500-square-foot suite and terrace on the roof, above the 14th floor.

Zoning rules limit how much floor area a building can have. To compensate for what was added, the architects consolidated the hotel's offices. They also removed part of the floor slab between the first and second floors, creating a two-story space in which a grand staircase was built.



The hotel's renovated lobby. A flat laylight replaced the domed one that had been in the ceiling but no longer fit because of the structural reinforcement needed to support a new ballroom that was installed on the building's second floor. Pablo Enriquez for The New York Times

Among the losses during the renovation was a lovely domed laylight in the lobby ceiling. It could no longer fit there because of all the added structural reinforcement needed to support the ballroom above.

A new, flat laylight has been installed in its place, with translucent panels that are illuminated from behind by LEDs. Ornamental embellishments, like the Barclay's recurring crossed-arrow motif, will be added later, said Les Faulk, the InterContinental company's design director.

[Stonehill & Taylor](#) were the overall architects on the project, working with [HOK](#) and the in-house IHG Design Studio.

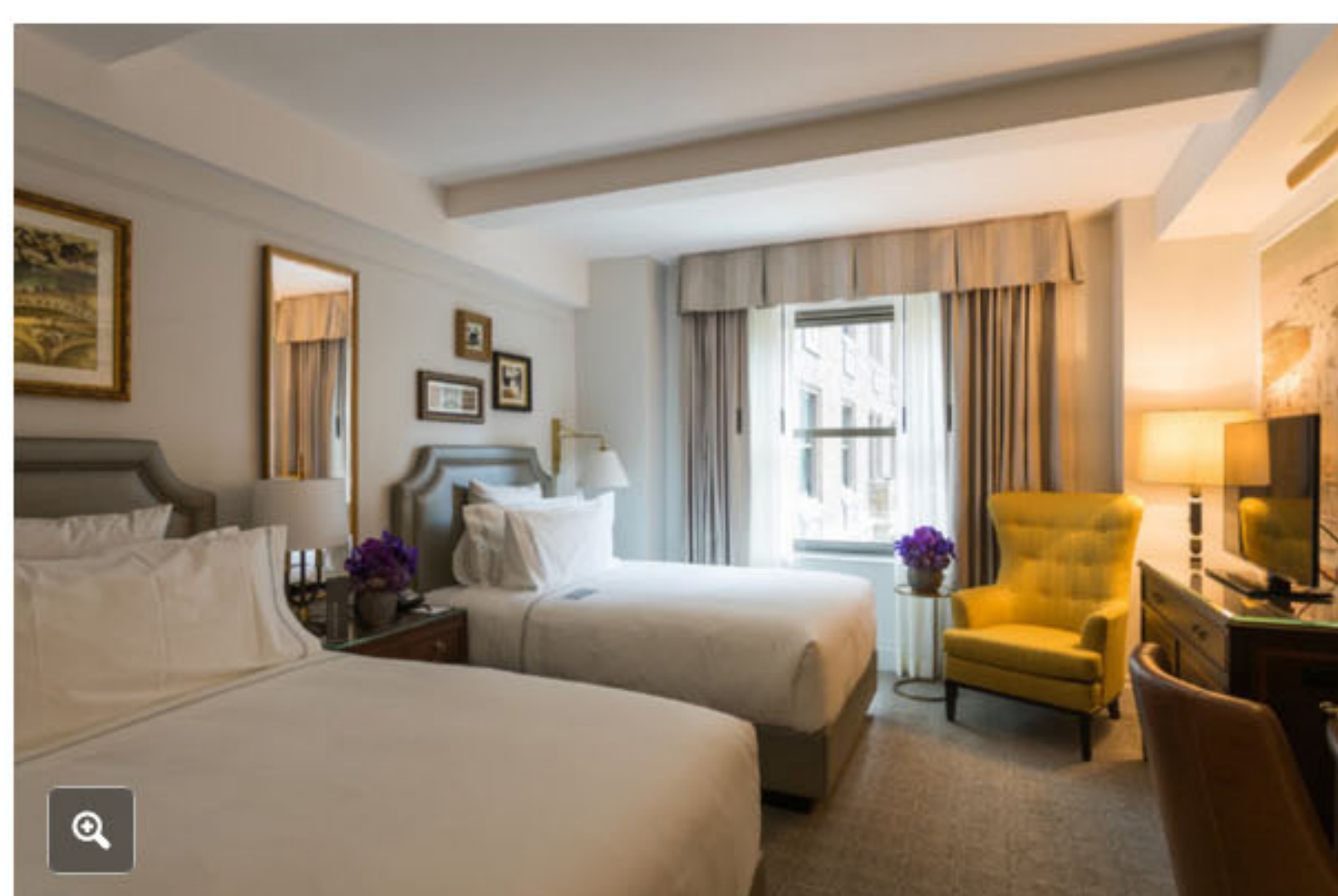


Room 1001, where the reporter and his mother stayed on their 1962 trip. The ride from Chicago on the Pennsylvania Railroad's Broadway Limited was a zippy 15 hours 30 minutes. Pablo Enriquez for The New York Times

Cross & Cross were the original architects of the Barclay, which opened in 1926, largely as a residential hotel. Among its more dazzling denizens was [Perle Mesta](#) — "the hostess with the mostest" — who [entertained at the Barclay](#) in its early days.

The Barclay was closely connected to Grand Central Terminal and the New York Central Railroad. There was once a ticket office in the lobby. And there is still a spiral stairway running between the hotel's ground floor and a train platform directly below. Who knows whether guests ever made use of those stairs to go to or from their trains?

I can tell you that my mother and I did not. For one thing, we arrived at the Pennsylvania Station. I still have the timetable for our train, the Pennsylvania Railroad's Broadway Limited (a zippy 15 hours 30 minutes from Chicago to New York), and the bill for our three-night stay in Room 1001.



A night in Room 1001 can cost from the high \$300s to \$700 a night today. It was somewhat cheaper 54 years ago. Pablo Enriquez for The New York Times

Mr. Houdré allowed me a glimpse of that room.

In the renovation, its palette was changed from buttery gold to a silvery gray. By squeezing the bedroom a bit, the bathroom has grown from 35 square feet to about 40 square feet. It still has a tub, an amenity sought by Japanese and other Asian guests, Mr. Houdré said.

Depending on the season, and on whether the United Nations General Assembly is in session, Room 1001 could cost anywhere from the high \$300s to \$700 a night, he said.

Unfailingly gracious, he invited me to spend reopening night in Room 1001. I explained that The New York Times prohibits its employees from accepting gifts that are more than "nominal in value."

I might have been in a different position 54 years ago. Room 1001 cost \$25.95 then.