

T&C 50 NEW MODERN SWANS
TOWN & COUNTRY

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**WHO
RUNS
THE
WORLD?**

**THE SECRET
POWERS—AND
BOOMING
ECONOMY—OF
THE 21ST CENTURY
IT GIRL**

SISTINE
STALLONE

ELLA
RICHARDS

*PLUS: THE
FRIENDLY
BILLION
DOLLAR
SWINDLE*

*INSIDE
ITALY'S
MOST
WELCOMING
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[EXCLUSIVE]
**LINDA WELLS
BEAUTY
REPORT**

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OLYMPIA
OF GREECE

SUITE Success

A NEW BOOK
POSES THE
QUESTION: WHAT
CAN 24-HOUR
ROOM SERVICE
DO TO A MAN?

By Amor Towles
Photographs by Allison
Michael Orenstein



CHECK-IN

As soon as I enter the renovated Barclay Hotel in midtown Manhattan, I know where I am. Like its brethren around the world, the 90-year-old Barclay—once a discreet stopover for high society—has been updated as an oasis for the professional class. At the center of its marble-floored lobby is a sitting area with upholstered couches and leather chairs. To one side is an attentively manned check-in desk; to the other, a bar with an electrical outlet at every other stool. As I get my bearings, two dark-suited men descend from an investment conference on the second floor and exit onto East 48th Street without looking up from their phones.

For 20 years, as an investment professional, I too was an habitué of \$700-per-night hotels like the Barclay, and I came to value their quiet efficiency. For here was a lobby in which you could arrive from the airport (roller bag in tow), check in without navigating a crowd, pause in the smaller-than-average dining area for a better-than-average meal,



PRISONER'S JOURNAL
Amor Towles,
author of *A Gentleman in Moscow*, at the recently reopened Barclay Hotel.

then enjoy a good night's sleep before a day of meetings. Ernest Hemingway stayed at the Barclay when he was writing *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Even then, I suspect, he chose the hotel for the quiet it offered rather than a chance of carousal.



LOBBY ENCOUNTER

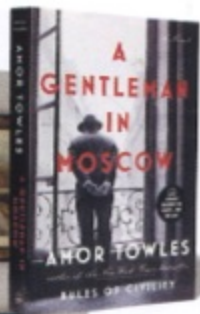
It was while crossing a similar lobby in 2009—at Le Richemond in Geneva—that I found myself thinking, "This is a lovely hotel. But what if you had to live in it for the rest of your life?" Upstairs in my room, I sketched an outline for a novel in which a Russian aristocrat is sentenced in 1922 to indefinite house arrest in

the luxurious Metropol Hotel, around the corner from the Kremlin. Four years later I hung up my hat as a financial professional, sat down at my desk, and began writing *A Gentleman in Moscow* (Viking, \$27).



SOCIAL LIFE

But while the idea for my novel sprang from the lobby of a refined contemporary hotel, it explores the exuberance of the grand hotels that thrived at the onset of the 20th century. The lobbies of the Metropol and its kin were not designed to be quiet or efficient. They were



labyrinthine spaces offering the cosmopolitan traveler multiple restaurants, cloistered bars, a coffee house and palm court, a barbershop,

a shoeshine, and an array of boutiques. In the lobby of these hotels you would hear not a peaceful hush but conversations in multiple languages, the triple chime of the bellhop's bell, and the occasional yap of a Pekingese. Rather than an oasis, the lobbies of the grand hotels were designed to be an extension of the city.



BAR SCENE

In the 1950s, when my father was at Princeton on scholarship, he and several classmates spent a summer traveling Europe on a shoestring. One night they forwent dinner in favor of a single drink at the bar of the Paris Ritz. As they sipped, an old Frenchman struck up a conversation. When he learned where they studied, he revealed that his son had gone to Princeton too but had been killed in the war. So moved did he become that when my father and his friends finished their allotted drink, he asked them to dinner.

As a onetime tower of a rolling bag, I came to appreciate hotels like the Barclay. But were I sentenced to house arrest, I would prefer a grand hotel of the Belle Époque, where life was more likely to barge through the door, strike up a conversation at the bar, and maybe even invite you to dinner. ☞