



## MIDTOWN BASKS IN LITERARY GLOW

### HOTEL Elysée

#### Bastion of Privacy... Home of Legends

In the annals of New York's literary life, few places can hold a candle to the **Hotel Elysée**. What other landmark can claim to have been home and hearth to literary luminaries as diverse as playwright extraordinaire **Tennessee Williams** and blockbuster novelist **Harold Robbins**? Or, for that matter, to have sheltered such undisputed talents as **James Michener**, **Leon Uris**, **Robert C. Ruark**, **James Clavell** and **Jimmy Breslin**?

Standing mid-block on East 54<sup>th</sup> Street, between Madison and Park Avenues, the **Hotel Elysée's** low-key graciousness could be the explanation for its popularity among writers. In addition to its amenities, one-of-a-kind guest rooms (some with terraces, solariums or kitchens) and beautiful appointments, the **Hotel Elysée** offers guests perhaps the most outstanding and desirable location in New York City. Situated on 54<sup>th</sup> Street, the **Elysée** is within walking distance of some of the world's best shopping, countless mid-town corporate headquarters, cultural attractions (such as the Museum of Modern Art) and many of the most popular restaurants in Manhattan.

The hotel's multi-lingual staff offers personalized assistance for every need including airline reservations, baby-sitting, sightseeing, current attraction tickets, business services and much more.

Rates at the **Hotel Elysée** are extremely equitable. Room rates start at \$325/\$475 per night, depending on the season, and include Continental breakfast each morning; coffee, tea, cookies and fruit all day long; and wine and hors d'oeuvres each weekday evening (Monday through Friday) from 5 to 8 PM. The **Elysée** also offers complimentary high-speed wireless internet as well as complimentary membership at the *New York Sports Club* for all guests during their stay.

The Swiss-born **Max Haering** originally conceived the **Elysée** in 1926 as a European-style hotel for the carriage trade. The concept of the hotel was to offer that same "discreet and uncompromising" personalized service.

Over the years, the **Elysée** has been home to baseball immortal **Joe DiMaggio**, prima ballerina **Dame Margot Fonteyn**, coloratura **Maria Callas**, pianists **Vladimir Horowitz** and **Jose Iturbi**, playwrights **Tennessee Williams**, **Ben Hecht**, **Charles McArthur**, and producer **Leland Hayward**. Also making their New York home at the **Elysée** were actors **Marlon Brando**, **Louis Calhern**, **John** and **Ethel Barrymore**, **Helen Hayes**, **Kay Francis**, **Johnny (Tarzan) Weissmuller**, **Ava Gardner**, **Herbert Marshall**, **Paul Douglas**, **Lillian** and **Dorothy Gish**, **Hume Cronyn** and **Jessica Tandy**, **Tallulah Bankhead**, **Sidney Poitier** and **James Caan**... as did such literary lights as **Mario Puzo**, **Mary McCarthy**, **Sidney Sheldon**, **Harold Robbins**, **James Clavell** and **Robert C. Ruark** - the latter becoming the hotel's self-appointed historian.



After the owner's death, his children eclectically designed each room so that no two were alike, each has its own unique and whimsical personality. In lieu of traditional numbers, the rooms were named to reflect their individual theme such as the "Sayonara" suite assigned to **Marlon Brando** after his starring role in *Teahouse of the August Moon*. **Tennessee Williams** lived at the Elysée for fifteen years and died in the "Sunset" suite.

Columnist **Jimmy Breslin**, who regards the Elysée as "a great hotel, a genuine New York landmark," succeeded Ruark as the hotel's unofficial chronicler. Upon **Tennessee Williams's** death at the Elysée in February 1983, Breslin recalled the story of a transient guest who called the front desk at 5:00 a.m. complaining that someone in the next suite was keeping her awake by typing all night. "They knew right away who the culprit was, but they couldn't very well ask Mr. Williams to stop playwriting. They simply moved the unhappy guest to another room." There are countless stories of **Tallulah Bankheads's** often outrageous antics, none of them apocryphal, however. For example, in November 1948, she celebrated **President Harry S. Truman's** stunning victory over **Thomas E. Dewey** by throwing a noisy party that ran non-stop for five days and nights.

But more than anything else, the Elysée is known for the **Monkey Bar**, its intimate piano bar just off the lobby. Opened in the depths of the Great Depression, it became known to the cognoscenti as "the place to go where jokes die," especially off-color jokes and double-entendre songs spun by such performers as **Johnny Payne** (1934-1944) and **Mel Martin** (1945-1983). Starting out as just another dimly lit hotel piano bar with mirrored paneling and encouraging early patrons to mimic one another ("*monkey see, monkey do*"), the tiny room was renamed in the early 1950s when the mirrors came down and were replaced by a wraparound hand-painted mural by caricaturist **Charlie Wala**. The mural depicts monkeys with decidedly human features riding elephants, crouching under a Christmas tree, and mixing up banana daiquiris for tough looking monkey-like customers. In successive years, other artists have added to the tableau, keeping the **Monkey Bar** as polished as it was in days gone by.

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