

THE MARK

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Essentially NY

D World Style, culture, stars. The legend of The Mark, on the Upper East Side, can now be browsed through.

Can a hotel become part of a city? Yes, in New York (where else?). Truman Capote understood this before many others, and in his “village,” the Upper East Side, The Mark is in just the right spot: between Central Park and the Metropolitan Museum, with Madison Avenue and its shop windows within walking distance. This is where The Mark (Assouline) begins, not so much a book as a chronicle of an atmosphere that describes the hotel as an institution that has remained elegant without being dusty. Or, in the words of the owner, Izak Senbahar, “a place that has lived through a century and, instead of becoming a museum, has chosen to remain alive.”

If you ask him which moment in the hotel's history he describes best, Senbahar doesn't beat around the bush: “When we chose French designer Jacques Grange to reimagine the whole thing. He really managed to bring that clubhouse vibe typical of downtown energy uptown.”

Of course, we must also talk about history. The hotel was founded in 1927, at the height of the jazz age, when the Upper East Side was beginning to transform from a quiet residential neighborhood into the epicenter of Manhattan's elegant lifestyle.

Early accounts describe a hotel frequented by diplomats and Broadway actors: a discreet address in an era that was discovering the pleasures of urban luxury, with cocktails, radio, and the first cars parked in front of Madison Avenue. In the 1980s, after decades of ups and downs and with the neighborhood changing its face, the building returned to the spotlight: it was a period in which the city was rediscovering itself after years of crisis.

And the Upper East Side was seeking a new balance between classic elegance and modernity. Its rooms have hosted publishers, models, businessmen, and artists: the typical clientele of a New York that was once again hungry for style. Senbahar acquired it in the early 2000s and, a few years later, restored The Mark to the form we know today.

Then there is the inevitable chapter on the Met Gala. The book describes it as a phenomenon that shifted the media focus to the Upper East Side, transforming the hotel into the prologue to the event: dresses crossing the lobby, suites converted into ateliers, makeup artists and hairstylists everywhere.

And a red carpet that has become an event within the event. Yet when Senbahar defines the identity of his hotel, he always comes back to three concepts: location, tone, discipline. “The building that houses The Mark is, as you can imagine, a landmark with an incredible history behind it,” he says. “Just think, it's located on the edge of Central Park and in the heart of the city's most prestigious cultural institutions. Yet, and I want to emphasize this, it's not just about location: I like the idea that the address is culture, not just coordinates.”

If, in conclusion, we ask him how difficult it is to protect a historical identity without becoming prisoners of it, his answer is blunt, almost managerial: “It's simply a matter of discipline. We're obsessed with it.” That word holds the key to the contemporary Mark: the ability to be desirable without becoming a caricature. And who knows, in the end, perhaps that is what all historical places are: villages and showcases, homes and celebrations, refuges and catwalks.

