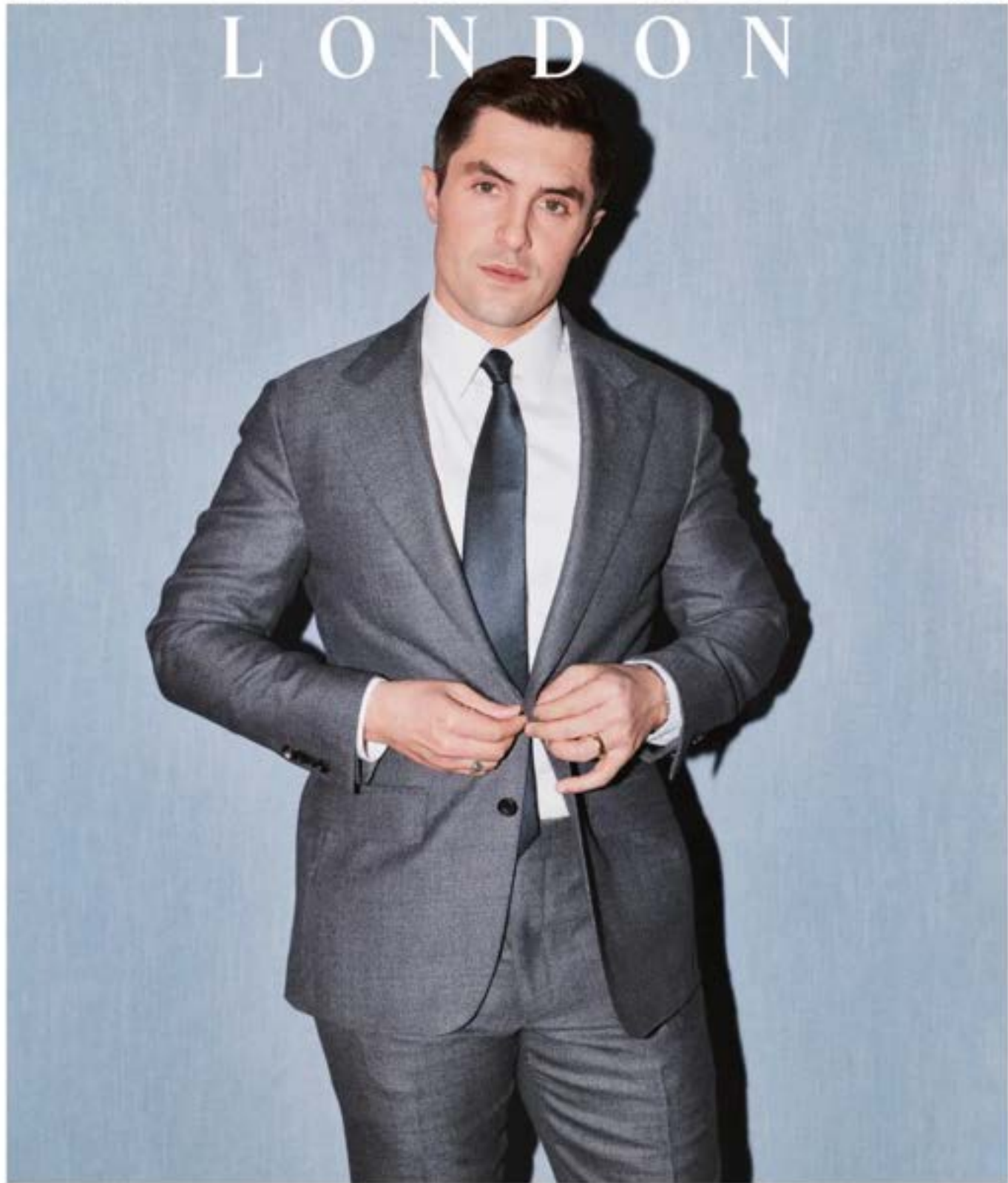


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WHERE THE MET GALA SLEEPS

As a new Assouline book goes behind the curtain of The Mark hotel, *Luxury London* looks at how the Manhattan institution became the unofficial pre-game headquarters for fashion's biggest night out

Words by **Louise Elizabeth Jones**

FIRST DOWN IN the golden lift in 2025 was La La Anthony. The actress wore a black tailored jumpsuit with wide-leg trousers and a strapless corset courtesy of Off-White. Next to descend into the black-and-white marble lobby were film director Baz Luhrmann, in a monochrome suit by Miu Miu, and his wife Catherine Martin, wearing a dark gown with lace sleeves also by Miu Miu. Later attention-grabbing departures included Jaden Smith in Ozwald Boateng, Kylie Jenner in Ferragamo, Serena Williams in Moncler, and Doja Cat in Marc Jacobs (in 2024, the singer famously emerged wearing just a towel (designed by Vetements, all the same)).

This year, fans and paparazzi waiting outside Manhattan's The Mark on the first Monday in May might get a glimpse of Kim Kardashian, whose wet-look 2019 Thierry Mugler dress went down in the annals of Gala history. Or Victoria and David Beckham, whose eldest son and daughter-in-law are also hotel regulars. And they'll almost certainly see Anna Wintour, who, as chairwoman of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute Benefit evening – that's the MET Gala, in its abbreviated form – has decided who gets to attend the biggest night in fashion since 1995. In recent years, Wintour, editor of *Vogue* since 1988, and Global Chief Content Officer of Condé Nast since 2020, has made The Mark her unofficial pre-Gala dressing room.

For the past three decades, Wintour has overseen all aspects of the event. Approving every guest, managing the seating plan, collaborating on themes, handling the smallest of details to help raise funds for what, in 1929, became the world's first museum dedicated to contemporary art. One thing Wintour can't control, of course, is where Gala guests, their stylists, assistants and entourages, choose to check into on the day of the event. By virtue of New York geography, and some canny self-promotion on part of the hotel, that decision is almost made for them: The Mark.

The Mark's modern association with the MET Gala began in 2017, when owner Izak Senbahar had the shrewd idea of replacing the hotel's subtle entrance mat with a bright red carpet emblazoned with its logo. Since then, as the Gala has morphed into the most high-profile and talked-about moment on the fashion calendar – 'the Super Bowl of fashion,' as the late fashion journalist André Leon Talley had it – The Mark's entrance (or exit, in this case) has acted as a second runway, a warm-up act to the main event, an *amuse-bouche* to the meat and potatoes.

Today, the hotel broadcasts its own livestream of guests making the short distance to the line of waiting cars outside (it typically provides bedrooms for between 45 and 60 A-listers, any more and its two small elevators can't cope), while media outlets, including E! News, report on looks from a specially erected press podium. The Mark's red carpet is, reportedly, the single most-watched recurring hotel event in the world.

This year marks a century since The Mark's first iteration – originally known as Hyde Park Hotel – opened on the corner of Madison Avenue at 25 East 77th Street. To celebrate the occasion, and the 20th anniversary of the hotel's modern reinvention, Assouline has published a 200-page coffee table book that charts The Mark's rise to cultural institution and credits the man that made it happen – Izak Senbahar.

President of the Alexico Group – responsible for a number of new and refurbished high-rise residential buildings in Manhattan – Senbahar, we are told in the tome, was born in Istanbul and educated at a French lycée before attending the Catholic University of America, followed by NYU for his MBA. After building a real estate empire in the 1980s and '90s, Senbahar acquired The Mark in the early noughties and set to work achieving his dream – to create one of the world's truly great hotels. ▶

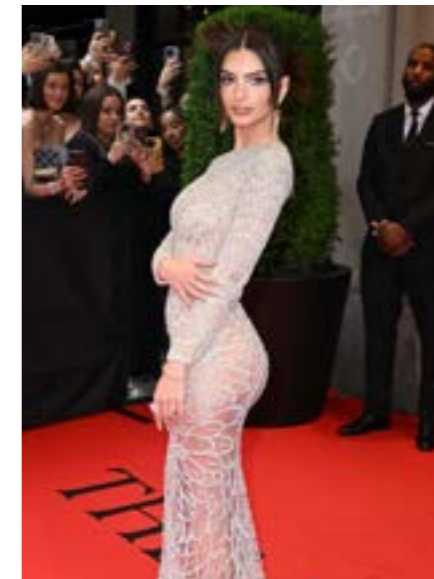




Attendees leaving The Mark for The MET Gala, clockwise from top left Cynthia Erivo, 2025; Matt Damon and Luciana Damon, 2024; Nicole Kidman, 2024; Sabrina Carpenter, 2025; from left, Sora Choi, Alex Consani, Adut Akech, Giovanna Battaglia Engelbert, 2025; Serena Williams, 2024



“It’s like a beautiful boat. You don’t change the name if it’s still in the water” — Izak Senbahar, when considering whether to change The Mark’s name



Attendees leaving The Mark for The MET Gala, clockwise from top left Anna Wintour, 2024; Kim Kardashian, 2019; Emily Ratajkowski, 2024; Jeff Goldblum, 2025



“We demolished it down to the studs,” says Senbahar, in the book. He dug the basement down an extra 10 foot and raised the roof to accommodate a 26-foot high ceiling in the penthouse’s living room, allowing it to be transformed into a full-size grand ballroom. Today, The Mark’s modernist penthouse is one of the most in-demand in New York City. In 2024, Instagram hosted a Met Gala watch party in the 10,000 sq ft space.

One of the first questions Senbahar asked himself was whether he should rename the hotel. He decided against it. “It’s like a beautiful boat,” he is quoted as saying. “You don’t change the name if it’s still in the water.” Every other facet of the hotel, however, was pored over. In his bid to create a hotel that could stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the planet’s best, Senbahar’s first appointment was the famed French interior designer, Jacques Grange. With clients including Yves Saint Laurent, François Pinault, Karl Lagerfeld, Valentino and Princess Caroline of Monaco, Grange was one of the most in-demand residential decorators on the planet. Yet he had never worked on a hotel. Grange preserved the Art Deco bones of the building while infusing the space with a playful modernity.

The striking black-and-white-striped marble lobby, crisscrossed by A-listers in early May, was one of Grange’s masterstrokes.

Senbahar’s next recruit was Jean-Georges Vongerichten, who is to fine dining what Grange is to luxury interiors. Senbahar had one condition: “I like hotels that have junk food. I want pizzas and burgers.” “I can do anything you want,” said Vongerichten. Next on board was Frédéric Fekkai, the celebrity hairstylist and beauty entrepreneur, who closed all his other New York outposts to create an all-singing flagship at The Mark.

Fekkai was followed by French parfumeur Frédéric Malle, known as the ‘editor’ of fragrances. For The Mark, Malle created ‘Jurassic Flower’ – a fresh magnolia blossom layered with citrus and apricot, made in partnership with Carlos Benaim, widely considered to be America’s greatest living perfumer. Between them, Malle and Benaim created a signature scent that continues to act as a silent ambassador for the hotel.

The final piece of Senbahar’s puzzle was Ramon Mac-Crohon, the CEO of Paris-based Caviar Kaspia, famous for serving buttery baked potatoes with a dollop of caviar on top. “We spoke on the phone,” says Mac-Crohon. “I came to see him in New York, and it was done. We immediately appreciated each other. It was a dream space, a no-brainer, a marriage made in heaven. Immediately, it felt we were more than just business partners.”

Near to the entrance of The Mark is a space that was previously used for luggage storage. In 2010, Senbahar approached Prosper Assouline, the founder of the eponymous luxury publisher, about converting it into a bookshop. “Normally, real estate people are boring,” says Assouline, “but he was very precise, on a level that I didn’t expect. I was very impressed with this guy.”

In the book that Assouline ended up publishing on the hotel in which it now has a shop, there is a forward by Anna Wintour, who, you might argue, has done almost as much as anyone in transforming The Mark from an if-you-know hotel into an Upper East Side icon.

“Its staff are caretakers and stewards of the highest order – discreet, courteous, kind – whether you’re seeking shelter from a storm... or somewhere to gather before a grand night out on the first Monday in May,” she writes. “More than making it all work, they make magic happen, every day, right there on Seventy-Seventh Street.” ■

Rooms from approx. £590 per night, themarkhotel.com

