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THE WESTIN ST. FRANCIS MEANS SAN FRANCISCO ... SINCE 1904
“Meet Me At The St. Francis” - A Time-Honored Refrain

The Westin St. Francis is an integral part of San Francisco’s dynamic history. In the early 20th century, Charles T. Crocker and his affluent circle of friends decided that San Francisco needed a hotel that reflected the city’s emerging worldly importance. Their vision was to make San Francisco the “Paris of the West” and their stunning Union Square hotel would be the flagship. After studying all of Europe’s grand hotels, from those in Berlin, Vienna, and Monaco to Claridge’s in London and The Ritz in Paris, construction on the “St. Francis” began in 1902 by Architects Faville and Bliss. Two years and \$2.5 million later, on March 21, 1904, The Westin St. Francis opened its doors to the eagerly awaiting public, elevating innovation and opulence to an entirely new echelon in San Francisco.

As soon as the “St. Francis” opened its doors, it instantaneously became the center of San Francisco’s social, theatrical and business life, and its preeminence still continues today. The spacious 6,000 square-foot lobby is one of the busiest rendezvous locations in the country. For more than a century, countless guests of international prominence have graced the hotel, from royalty and political figures, to motion picture and theatrical luminaries and literati. Emperor Akihito of Japan and his father Emperor Hirohito (posthumously known as Showa), Queen Elizabeth II, King Juan Carlos of Spain, the Shah of Iran, General Douglas MacArthur and every U.S. President since McKinley have been guests at the hotel. Ethel Barrymore’s pet chimpanzee was looked after without question by the staff, President Nixon’s midnight Oreos craving was graciously fulfilled, and when Anna Held demanded her daily bath in 30 gallons of milk, she got it.

Heads of state are traditionally honored during their stays with the unfurling of their national flag at the Union Square entrance. In fact, unprecedented, on March 2, 1983, the hotel proudly flew the Stars and Stripes alongside the Union Jack when former United States President Ronald Reagan played host to Queen Elizabeth II.

Like its colorful guests, The Westin St. Francis has a very rich and vibrant history. Just two years after its grand opening, the hotel experienced the ravages of The Great 1906 San Francisco Earthquake. Luckily, the structure of hotel withstood the quake, but the great fire that followed destroyed its interior. Like the city itself, it was restored virtually from its own ashes in the undamaged shell. In the interim, a temporary building was constructed and opened on Union Square around the Dewey Monument a mere 40 days after the conflagration. Then in November 1907, The Westin St. Francis gloriously reopened its doors with 450 guestrooms. In commemoration, the great Magneta clock, the first master clock introduced to the West, and was installed in its place of honor in the lobby. Since then, San Francisco society has been meeting “under the clock” for more than a century.

In 1908, a third wing of the hotel was opened, and further additions followed, making The Westin St. Francis the largest hotel on the Pacific Coast at that time. One of the largest additions was the Post Street wing, which opened in 1913. Designed to fulfill the high demand for live-in apartments at the hotel, the Post Street wing was added to primarily house permanent guests. Throughout the years, there were many famous San Francisco families that lived in the Post Street wing, including the Magnins (Maryanne and her son Grover), the Schwabachers, The Rice Family, The Koshlands and The Zellerbachs. Most of the apartments had letters rather than numbers, noting the difference between a permanent guest’s room and a visitor.

In 1938, another time-honored tradition was instilled at The Westin St. Francis – coin washing. For more than seventy years, the hotel has operated the world’s only silver coin cleaning operation as a special amenity for its guests. This custom began when the hotel’s general manager insisted that the silver coins, the currency of the day, be cleaned to keep the ladies’ white gloves from getting dirty. Periodically, the change is collected, washed and polished in a silver-burnishing machine, rinsed off and dried under hot lights, then carried back to the front desk. Today, taxi drivers and cashiers in San Francisco know that if they receive mint-clean money, it’s probably from The Westin St. Francis.

In 1969, construction began on the grand 32-story Tower Building. Opening two years later in 1971, the Tower Building, designed by San Francisco-based William L. Pereira Associates, doubled the hotel’s capacity from 600 to 1195 guestrooms and added banquet space, meeting facilities and an 11,000 square foot ballroom that could accommodate 1500 guests for receptions. Still today, the Tower Building remains as one of the tallest structures on Union Square.

In 1994, the hotel underwent a \$65 million, five-year restoration project that included guestroom and facade restoration programs; the completion of Alexandra’s and Victor’s, spectacular private party venues on the 32nd floor; and the addition of the St. Francis Health Club featuring Cybex fitness equipment and the latest in spa services.

In 2002, as part of the on-going renovation of The Westin St. Francis, the New York design firm Alexandra Champalimaud & Associates renovated The Grand Ballroom, The Italian Room, created the Tower Salons (meeting rooms), added Caruso’s in the Tower Lobby (a casual spot featuring a bar menu, wines by the glass, cocktails and specialty coffee drinks) and redesigned the Tower Building guestrooms into Grandview rooms, adding Westin’s famous Heavenly Beds™ and Heavenly Baths™ and Internet access.

Celebrating its centennial in 2004, The Westin St. Francis underwent additional changes. The lobby of Main Building was completely transformed by renowned California designer Barbara Barry and welcomed the addition of award-winning Chef Michael Mina's signature restaurant, Michael Mina. Barry's timeless, naturally elegant interior added a warm and welcoming ambiance with pale celadon, parchment and toasty brown tones and gold Murano lighting accents.

In late 2007, The Westin St. Francis launched a \$40 million restoration project. Anticipated for completion in Spring 2009, this is the largest renovation the hotel has undertaken since the reconstruction after The Great 1906 San Francisco Earthquake. Highlights include: a \$6 million soft-goods transformation of the Main Building guestrooms and common areas by San Francisco-based designer Kevin Joyce; a redesign of the Main Building Lobby including the return of the Great Magneta clock and the addition of celebrated chef Michael Mina's Clock Bar, all by renowned design visionary David Rockwell of Rockwell Group; a complete renovation of the California and Elizabethan function space, State and Chairman's Specialty Suites and the six luxurious Specialty Suites located on the 31st floor of the Tower Building; and the addition of Eno, a wine, chocolate and cheese bar set to open in Fall 2008.

Throughout every restoration project, considerable care is taken to reflect the original beauty of The Westin St. Francis' travertine marble, oak columns, gilded ceilings, crystal chandeliers and the three magnificent murals in the Tower Lobby. In the year 2008, the hotel's luster is as bright as ever reflecting the 20th century romantic grandeur it has witnessed.

About The Westin St. Francis

Opened more than a century ago on March 21, 1904, The Westin St. Francis still today maintains its preeminence as San Francisco's center of social, theatrical and business life. Renowned for luxury accommodations and excellent service, The Westin St. Francis continues to preserve its rich history and elegance while enhancing the guest experience with fresh, innovative concepts. The only hotel located on San Francisco's famous Union Square, The Westin St. Francis is just steps from world class shopping, dining, theatres and art galleries. For reservations and more information, call (415) 397-7000, toll free (800) 917-7458 or visit www.westinstitfrancis.com.

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