

Leading the Past

*“The Savoy is always
up-to-date and, if
possible, a little ahead.”*

Rupert D'Oyly Carte,
Company Chairman, 1930

SAVOY

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Back in 1246, a stretch of land between the Strand and the Thames was presented by Henry III to Peter, Count of Savoy, uncle and consort to the King's wife. That same year, Peter built his Savoy Palace on the river, and the name has been associated with the place ever since.

Over 600 years later, impresario Richard D'Oyly Carte chose the location for a new theatre to stage the famous operettas written by his friends Gilbert and Sullivan. He decided to call his new building the Savoy Theatre, and the productions were known henceforth as the Savoy Operas.

Gilbert and Sullivan were huge on both sides of the Atlantic, and D'Oyly Carte spent a lot of time producing their shows in America. This meant he could stay in some of the newest and best hotels, which impressed him so much with their amazing new technologies that he decided to build his own hotel back in London.

The new Savoy on the river took five years to build and opened on August 6, 1889. It caused a sensation.

This, the first true luxury hotel in Britain, was also the first to be lit by electricity. It had the first electric lifts, known as 'ascending rooms'. Guest rooms were connected by speaking tube to the valet, maid and floor waiter – and to other parts of the hotel including the American Bar.

The Savoy later became the first hotel to provide most of its rooms with private bathrooms en suite. The 'Savoy bathroom' became famous for its cascading shower and quick filling bath.

D'Oyly Carte tempted the well-known hotel manager César Ritz to join his new wonder hotel. Ritz was delighted by the perfectly-appointed facilities and great potential at The Savoy. He brought in Auguste Escoffier, leading 'celebrity chef' of his day, to run the kitchens.

Ritz and Escoffier simply revolutionised the face of the British hotel business. Ritz knew many society women from the fashionable Continental hotels he managed and persuaded them to come to The Savoy for dinner. In the early years, Savoy guests included Sarah Bernhardt and Dame Nellie Melba, for whom Escoffier famously created Melba Toast when she was on a diet, and Pêches Melba when she was not.

Artists Whistler and Monet both used views from Savoy windows in their work. Oscar Wilde stayed, with his friend Lord Alfred Douglas. The Prince of Wales himself and his coterie were frequent visitors. By 1904 the hotel was such a hit that the blocks on the Strand were added, designed by Thomas Collcutt, and the American Bar and Savoy Grill moved into this new part of the hotel.

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4 After the sobering interlude of the Great War, The Savoy gradually began to find itself again, always looking for the latest styles and fashions that would draw the fêted and famous. The likes of Noel Coward, George Gershwin, George Bernard Shaw and H G Wells frequented the restaurants and American Bar.

Art deco, jazz and The Savoy were made for each other. The new style was introduced, and the iconic stainless-steel sign over Savoy Court erected in 1929. Top jazz musicians from America came to play, and a hydraulic system installed to raise the dance-floor and turn it into a stage for cabaret acts. Epitomising all the fun and flamboyance of the art deco jazz age, the famous *Savoy Cocktail Book* was published in 1930.

The stars loved The Savoy. England's own Vivien Leigh was first introduced to her future husband Laurence Olivier in the hotel's front hall. From America came Hollywood greats such as Al Jolson, Errol Flynn and Katharine Hepburn. From France, Josephine Baker and Coco Chanel. Winston Churchill frequently lunched with his cabinet at the hotel during the Second World War, and he attended his dining club dinners at The Savoy as often as possible, until his death in 1965.

Once peace was declared, The Savoy quickly regained its air of glamour and luxury. Princess Elizabeth was first seen with Prince Philip of Greece in public at a Savoy reception. When the Princess became the Queen a few years later, The Savoy threw quite the largest and most lavish Coronation Ball in London.

The new Elizabethan age saw a new generation of actors, film stars and politicians at The Savoy. Among the most glamorous: Elizabeth Taylor, Sophia Loren and Marilyn Monroe. The Savoy swung into the 1960s with guests ranging from the Beatles and Bob Dylan to Louis Armstrong, Marlon Brando and Jane Fonda.

A number of refurbishments were undertaken as the century came to a close, the last completed just in time for the great Savoy party that celebrated the new Millennium. On December 2007 began the most extensive of restorations, which would re-launch The Savoy in 2009 with all the flair and opulence of old.

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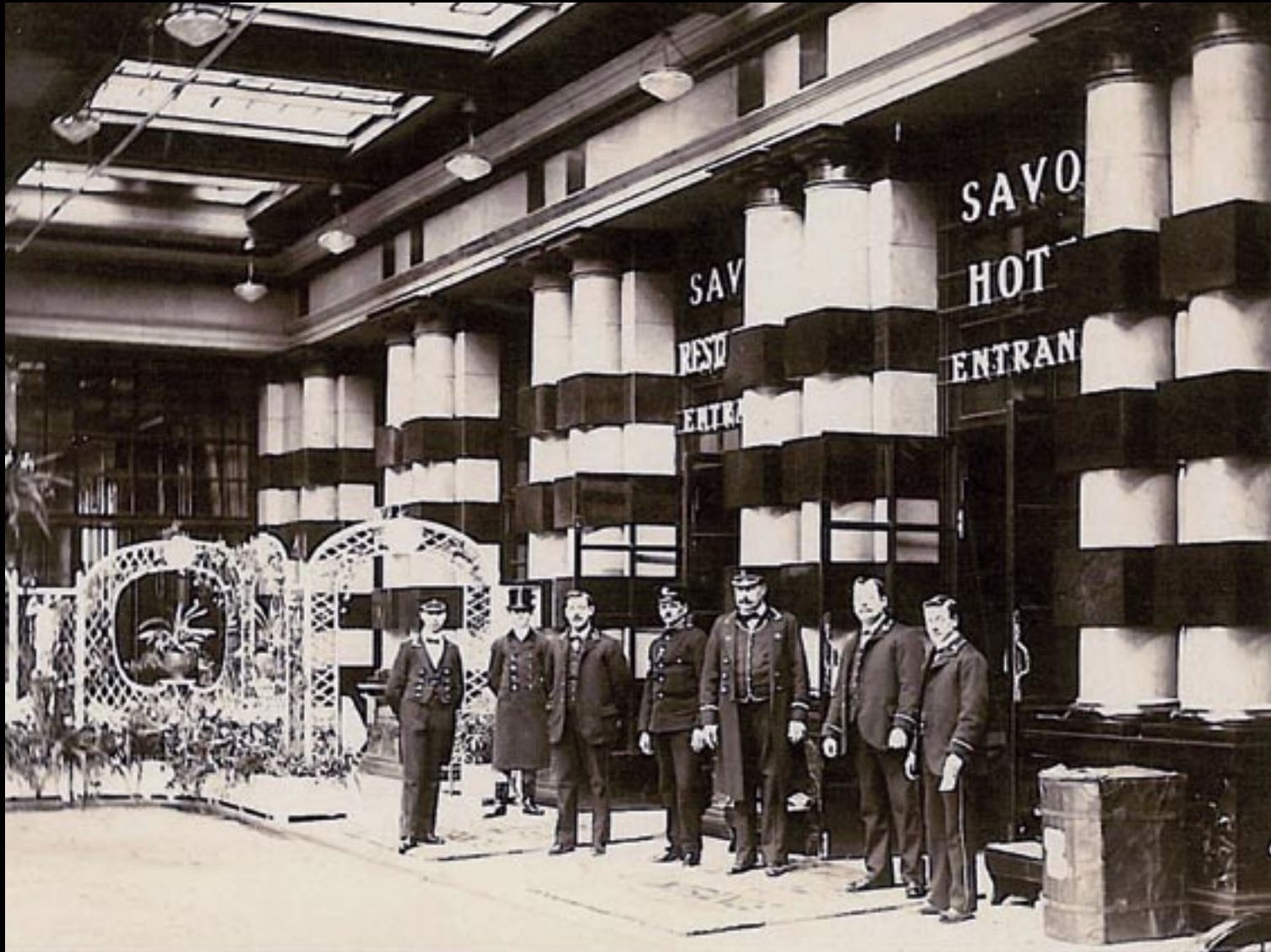
'The new Savoy on the river took five years to build and opened on August 6, 1889. It caused a sensation.'



Top. Richard D'Oyly Carte made his fortune producing Gilbert and Sullivan operettas. He first built the Savoy Theatre followed by London's most luxurious adjacent hotel.

Above. Swiss hotelier César Ritz was recruited to be the manager of The Savoy. He went on to open the Hôtel Ritz in Paris and The Ritz in London.

'By 1904 the hotel was such a hit that blocks on the Strand and a new main entrance were added.'



Left. Staff stand outside the new Savoy Court entrance in 1904.

Above. A 'red lift' and liftman. When it opened, The Savoy was the first hotel with lifts in London.



'Between them, Ritz and Escoffier revolutionised the face of the British hotel business.'



Top. Auguste Escoffier, leading 'celebrity chef' of his day, was brought in to run the kitchens.

Above. A menu from 1914

Left. Ritz made the River Restaurant appeal to ladies, with pink tablecloths, soft lighting and background music.

'Art deco, jazz and The Savoy were made for each other.'



Above. Lifts were luxuriously refurbished in exuberant art deco style.

Left. McKnight Kauffer, 'the Picasso of advertising design', created The Savoy monogram in 1934.

Right. The famous stainless-steel sign over the courtyard was designed by Sir Howard Robertson and erected in 1929.



Right. The American Bar in 1931, at the height of the cocktail craze.



Top. *The Savoy Cocktail Book* by Harry Craddock was published in 1930, and remains in print to this day.

Above. Harry Craddock was one of the most famous cocktail bartenders of the 1920s and 1930s. An American citizen who left during Prohibition, he joined The Savoy in 1920.



'Epitomising all the fun and flamboyance of the art deco jazz age, ...'

'Stars of sports, theatre and the silver screen all loved The Savoy.'



Left. Fred Astaire first came to prominence dancing with his sister Adele, seen here together in 1923.

Below. The great Charlie Chaplin on the roof of The Savoy with his wife, Oona.



Right. Marilyn Monroe, in a dress considered racy at the time, at a press conference with Laurence Olivier in 1956 for their film 'The Prince and the Showgirl'.

Bottom. Christian Dior with models in 1950.



Above. Walter Hagen, strikes a pose. The legendary American golfer won 11 majors between 1914 and 1927.





‘The new Elizabethan age saw a new generation of actors, film stars and politicians at The Savoy.’



Above. Lauren Bacall, a regular visitor to London, often stayed at The Savoy.

Above left. John Wayne shows his collection of hats to a pageboy in the 1950s



Left. Pioneering French fashion designer Coco Chanel, famous for her pursuit of expensive simplicity.

Far left. Princess Elizabeth was first seen with Prince Philip of Greece in public at a Savoy reception.



Above. Bob Dylan used an alley behind the hotel for a film clip promoting his 1965 track 'Subterranean Homesick Blues'.



'The Savoy swung into the 1960s with guests ranging from Marlon Brando and Jane Fonda to the Beatles.'

Above right. Princess Diana and Prince Charles attend a reception at The Savoy in 1984.