

SLEEPOVER » GRANDEUR IN WASHINGTON » BY JUDITH RITTER

Where heads of state lay their heads

ST. REGIS HOTEL

WASHINGTON D.C.
923 16th Street NW, Washington,
D.C., 877-787-3447;
www.stregis.com

ROOMS AND RATES

140 rooms from \$396, 35 suites
from \$81.

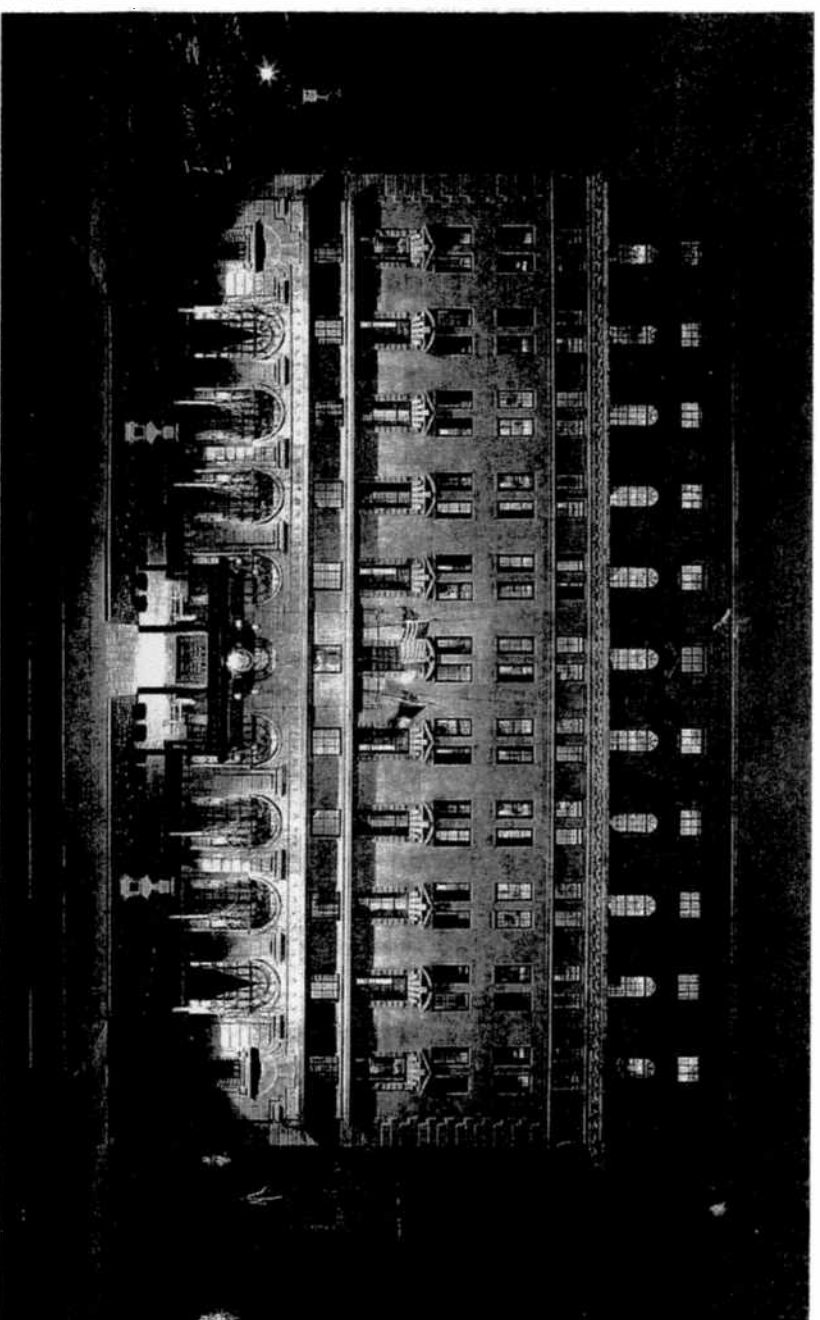
Approximately a million visitors will converge on the U.S. capital over the next few weeks, and it has nothing to do with politics and everything to do with spring. The capital's thousands of cherry blossom trees are about to flower, and so is the National Cherry Blossom Festival, a tradition almost a century old. At the same time, a historic D.C. landmark has gotten some new life: The St. Regis, a landmark of the capital's elite, has just been impeccably restored.

LOCATION What better place to be than two blocks from the White House? When the president passes the hotel, which happens often, the block closes down – giving guests plenty of time to gawk. That aside, the St. Regis is within walking distance of the National Mall, museums and chic restaurants. And if you're clamouring for a piece of the stimulus package, note that it's on the corner of K Street, the lobbyists' mecca.

AMBIENCE Opened in 1926, the Beaux-Arts hotel has lost none of its elegance with the past year's \$32-million renovation. The lobby may be full of harried citizens of BlackBerry Nation during the day, but at precisely six o'clock, at the chime of an 18th-century grandfather clock, everything changes. A formally dressed butler steps into the room, loudly announces the onset of evening and ritually sables a bottle of Dom Perignon or Taittinger. At that moment all eyes leave tiny screens, there are drinks all around (on the house), and for a few moments the world has once again righted itself.

CLIENTELE High-level executives, plus dignitaries from the Middle East, Japan or Europe – in the lobby it's not unusual to see large silent men with earpieces and sunglasses watching over their charges.

DESIGN The makeover by New York design firm Sills Huniford



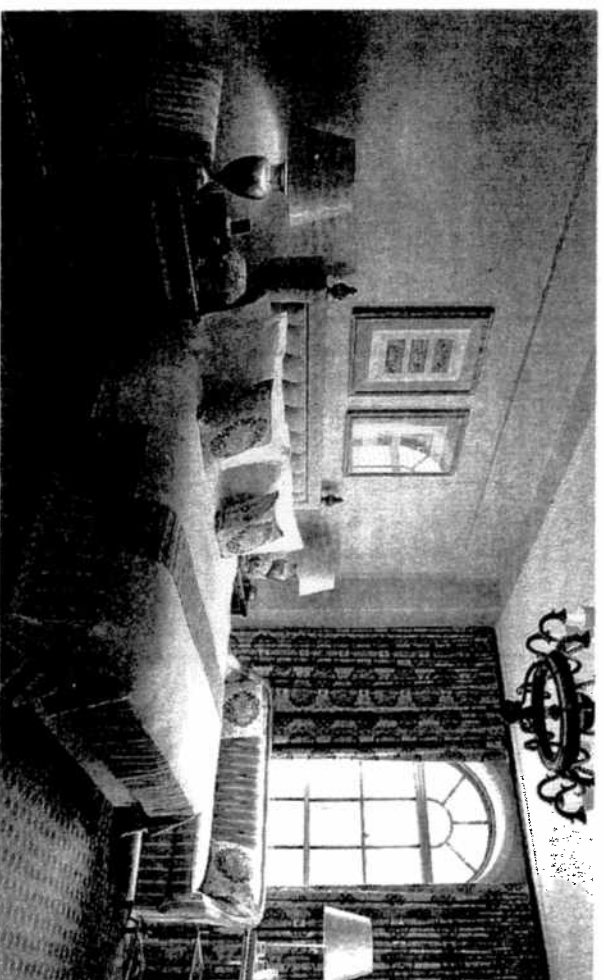
From the outside, the 1920s hotel – based on a Renaissance palazzo – still looks grand; inside, it's undergone a respectful redesign. BRUCE BUCK

Hotel vitals

TOP DRAWS Luxe details, from Waterford crystal chandeliers to a TV inside the mirror.

NEEDS WORK For all the high-tech wizardry in the rooms, there's an impractical lack of plugs around the desk.

BOTTOM LINE Patrician style for the 21st century.



Guest rooms such as this one feature a new, lighter palette of colours and materials. BRUCE BUCK

(whose other clients include Vera Wang and various Rockefeller's pedigree. It maintains the internal grandeur of the building – with architecture modelled after an Italian Renaissance palazzo – with modern touches and lighter, more contemporary furniture. The restored lobby, inspired

by London's Claridges, is the showpiece. The tall arched windows with sheer fabric (replacing heavier grand drapes) increase the light in the lobby and highlight the Waterford crystal chandeliers, each of which was removed during the renovation, so delicate droplets could be cleaned and replaced.

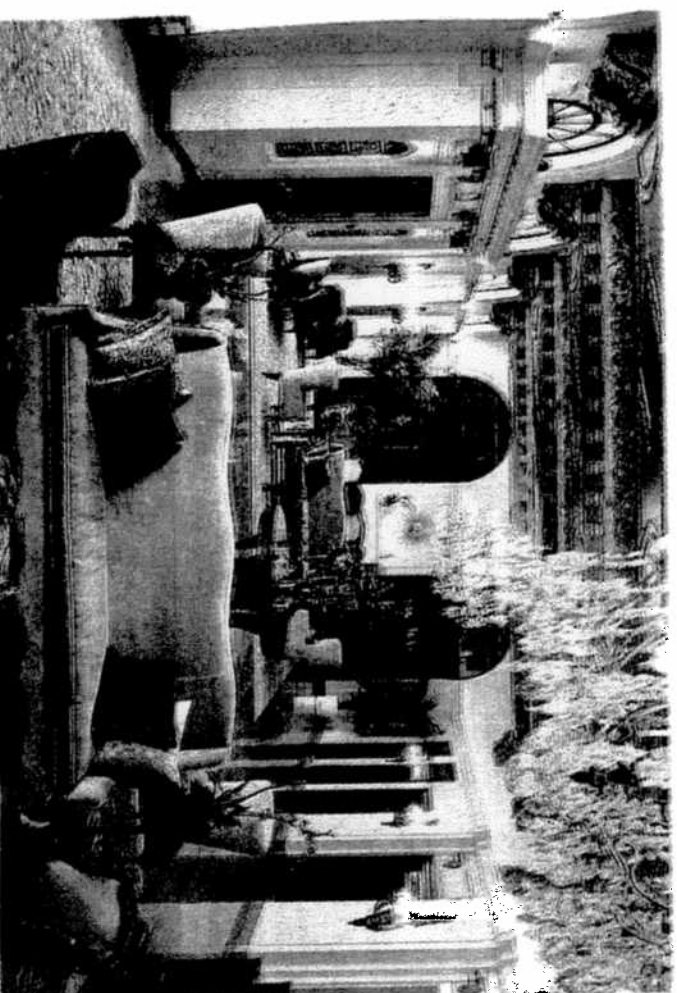
ROOMS There are fewer rooms than before the renovation, but they are larger, and there are more suites. The interiors have colour palettes in golds, siennas and rich blues. Handsome sycamore and maple cabinetry lends a warmth and a homey feel in this elegant and rather formal hotel. Despite the accent on history, the gadgets are

INSIDE » SLEEPOVER

A Washington monument rejuvenated

D.C.'s St. Regis gets a facelift

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JOHN LEHMANN/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Whistler Blackcomb has been hit with a metre and a half of new snow in the past couple of weeks, which should make for some great spring skiing and boarding at the venues for some of next year's Olympic events. Snowpack permitting, slopes will be open through June 14 – and there are a couple of deals to

as most people go golfing. If you book a lodging package of at least three nights at the B.C. resort, you receive an additional 15 per cent off all WestJet flights to Vancouver through May 31. The Telus World Ski and Snowboard Festival is back April 17 to 26, and packages with two nights accommodation and a two-day

per person per night. Finally, the resort has a Third Night Free promotion, with rates from \$199 for the first two nights. **» For flight deals, call 1-888-403-4727. For Telus Festival rates, visit www.whistlerblackcomb.com/14727. For Third Night Free deal, visit www.whistlerblackcomb.com/deals_packages/deals/3nightfree/index.htm**

AMENITIES Night owls will find a small, round-the-clock gym equipped with Technogym equipment, the digital darling of the fitness world. An all-hours business centre has notarial and secretarial services, and the hotel's British-trained butlers carry handheld wireless devices to catch guests' e-mails and texts. Plus the St. Regis has an in-house "guest historian," who keeps tabs on the preferences of each visitor.

FOOD AND DRINK The big draw is Adour, an Alain Ducasse restaurant (and sibling to the one in the New York St. Regis). It offers contemporary French cuisine and as in other Ducasse restaurants, wine holds a place of honour. In Washington, that place is a pair of floor-to-ceiling glass vaults stacked with wines. The Bloody Mary was invented in the New York St. Regis in the late 1930s, and the Tradition lives on here with 13 variations of the drink on offer.

THINGS TO DO Several of the major museums run by the Smithsonian Institution (www.si.edu) are steps away; but try the Corcoran Gallery (www.corcoran.org) for a new exhibit by Maya Lin (who designed the Vietnam War Memorial here). And it's worth swinging by the White House to try to catch a glimpse of the new First Family. If they don't drive past you first.

» Special to The Globe and Mail