



THE LOWELL

BEST-KEPT SECRET

This intimate Upper East Side hotel has, with quiet grace, emerged in recent years as one of New York's great treasures. Many of the rooms were designed by White House decorator Michael Smith. The quality of hospitality would make Amy Vanderbilt proud. "Hospitality in its oldest sense is about making one feel welcome," one UK travel writer explains. "It's about security, discretion, privacy. General manager Ashish Verma is one of the few who can do

that without being a sycophant." The hotel has many long-term guests. One gentleman who stayed there for two months during a kitchen renovation recalls, "I didn't want my apartment to ever be finished!"

Room to book We almost cringe to spill the secret, but it has to be 17B. The majority of the 17th floor is dominated by a gorgeous Michael Smith Penthouse. But the connecting option, also by Smith, can be booked separately and is startlingly perfect. There is a charming terrace and a generous bathroom. You'll want to move in. **Room 17B starts at \$625; 28 E. 63rd St.; 212-838-1400; lowellhotel.com.**

HOTEL PLAZA ATHENEE

THE ONE TO BEAT

Plaza Athénée is the perfect hotel if you're looking for one that feels small and intimate yet is large enough to offer privacy. If you want to feel ensconced in uptown luxury but still have a sense of humor—dogs are allowed, and 15-year veteran doormen joke in the elevator—it's all here. The quiet intensity of this hotel's appeal is hard to describe. One hotelier puts it this way: "It's the kind of place you go to for an affair with your wife." A 2010 renovation introduced a guest-only spa by the Germany-based cosmetics house Babor and Swiss company Valmont, whose skincare products have an obsessive following. The rooms completely black out and are dead quiet—amazing night's sleep.

Room to book No. 1704—a Grand Deluxe Room with a balcony. It's one of only two non-suites on the floor. It earned this spot because you have the option of taking out the separate living and dining area on the floor below (no. 1607) to create a singular duplex with its own private staircase. **Grand Deluxe Rooms start at \$1,090; 37 E. 64th St.; 212-734-9100; plaza-athenee.com.**



THE PENINSULA

THE PROS

While this hotel isn't breaking the mold, it does everything right. The rooms have functional, up-to-date technology, including hookups for guests' own devices and a clever phone by the bathtub that edits out ambient sounds like, say, the ones you make when you're splashing around in a bubble bath.

Room to book A Grand Luxe King Room on a corner for a sweeping boulevard view of Fifth Avenue. It's especially nice on lower floors, like the fifth, where you can really take in the street scenes. **Grand Luxe King Rooms start at \$895; 700 Fifth Ave.; 212-956-2888; peninsula.com.**

THE SETAI FIFTH AVENUE

JUST RELAX

Blessed be the hotel that doesn't impose its taste on guests. Between Koreatown and Grand Central Station, the location, in the East 30s, may be a bit odd, but once inside you'll breathe a sigh of relief. The rooms have woven neutrals with Italian walnut paneling and accents. The innovative Duxiana beds sit low to the ground, and the Gris-marble bathrooms have TVs in the mirrors. They've thought of everything, but nothing is announced—the influence of the obsessively diligent general manager, Francois-Olivier Luiggi.

Room to book Premier Avenue Rooms, which end in 06 on floors five through ten. The beds are enthroned in front of the window and the desk is behind the bed, separated by a wall with a peekaboo window. You don't need to stare anxiously at your charging devices while in bed but, instead, can contemplate the Empire State Building view. **Premier Avenue Rooms start at \$845; 400 Fifth Ave.; 212-695-4005; capella-hotels.com.**

