

IN-STORE

St. Regis New York uses ereaders to let consumers glimpse at history

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St. Regis New York exterior

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

St. Regis Hotel New York is letting its bookish patrons peek into the building's past.

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The library of John Jacob Astor IV has been encased in the same spot since 1904 on the second floor of the St. Regis Hotel, which the Astor family opened, and its contents will be made available to the property's guests on Thornwillow Press leather-bound Amazon Kindle readers. The offering simultaneously gives consumers a look into the hotel's history, the life of a historical figure and a way to pass the time.

"In a city with such a high level of competition, and where the scope of luxury is constantly evolving, it is no longer enough to offer standard amenities," said Hermann Elger, general manager of the **St. Regis, New York**. "Consumers are looking for one-of-a-kind experiences and St. Regis continues to evolve and innovate to provide guests with unmatched and anticipatory services that exceed our clientele's expectations.

"The Astor Digital Library is a collection of curated leather-bound devices available to guests, loaded with titles from hotel founder John Jacob Astor IV's original collection, which has been housed for over a century on the hotel's second floor," he said.

"Through fusing the St. Regis's remarkable history with modern touches we invite our guests to engage with our storied past, while simultaneously enjoying the benefits of state-of-the-art technology, offering an experience that cannot be found anywhere else in the city."

Unsinkable

The Astor family was once known as "The landlords of New York," and although their presence in real estate today has diminished, the family legacy lives on in the names of streets, the Waldorf Astoria hotel and even the Astoria neighborhood in the borough of Queens in addition to the St. Regis, which the family founded.

Mr. Astor was commonly believed to be the richest man alive and was worth as much as \$87 million in 1912 dollars over \$2 billion today when he died in the sinking of the RMS Titanic.



St. Regis New York interior

Mr. Astor donated a portion of his wealth to what has become the New York Public Library, emblematic of his aim to make literature accessible throughout the city. An avid reader himself, he amassed more than 3,000 books from Scriber & Sons for his personal collection.

The collection, housed in the hotel, has never moved and was originally available to all guests of the hotel. Soon, guests of the St. Regis New York will again be allowed exclusive access to the library itself through appointment with hotel concierge.

Because the collection is of historical interest, guests are not able to check books out directly; however, Kindle devices loaded with books from the entire collection as well as newer books in which the hotel is featured, from Donna Tartt's "The Goldfinch" to Lauren Weisberger's "The Devil Wears Prada" will be available for checkout.

Hotels often provide guest with a gym, spa or restaurant and bar for guests to fill their leisure time, but St. Regis' initiative gives consumers a completely different way of spending their time. Curious guests and avid readers who finish their book early or leave it at home by mistake now have a plethora of options available at their fingertips.

For those interested both in excavating the life of the Astor family and in literature, a Kindle with a custom Thornwillow cover is available for purchase for \$1,500 a great deal on a per-book basis.

This initiative positions St. Regis as a brand interested in history, its own heritage, culture and the convenience and stays of its guests, all of which help to distinguish it in an increasingly competitive hospitality industry. The use of an ereader and the foresight to convert fragile analog artifacts into accessible digital goods also shows that the brand is forward-thinking and adaptable.

"I think the possibility of using digital technology to bring the Astor Library to a broader group of people is very exciting," Mr. Elger said. "When technology can be used in such a way that allows us to connect further with our guests, it is imperative that we utilize this to the fullest capacity.

"At the St. Regis New York we are constantly looking at how we can both honor the colorful legacy and traditions of this flagship property, while still remaining relevant and enticing to the next generation of luxury travel," he said. "The Astor Digital Library exemplifies the perfect balance between what is modern and what is timeless."

Words and music

St. Regis has a deep connection to the arts and uses that legacy in creative ways to reach consumers.

In April, St. Regis Hotels and Resorts began curating events for jazz enthusiasts with an eye toward the past.

Jazz has been an integral part of St. Regis' cultural promise since the beginnings of the music genre's popularity in the 1930s and '40s. The hotel brand will be teaming up with the nonprofit Jazz at Lincoln Center to cull artists ([see story](#)).

Other hotels are offering patrons intellectual engagement of another form.

Since June 2014, The Trump Hotel Collection has adapted to consumer desires by offering digital news outlets through its wireless Internet.

Trump Hotel was the first luxury hotel to offer guests The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times and PressReader.

The turn towards digital print subscriptions is a new concept for hotel brands, but this adaptation will likely be a useful amenity to the digitally connected guest ([see story](#)).

Such initiatives that give consumers ease-of-access to amenities more commonly found in the home appeals broadly to travelers of all kinds.

"Today's luxury consumer is increasingly younger and more international, and The St. Regis New York strives to become a home away from home for our guests," Mr. Elger said.

"Our clientele includes some of the most discerning travelers who continue to return because of our attentive service and meticulous attention to detail," he said. "It is these added luxuries that truly make visitors feel at home while they are on the road."

Final Take

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