



Meadowood, the top luxury hotel in the Napa Valley

I have always felt that hotels should not just be places to sleep at the end of a day away from home. Hotels should be, and the great ones are, grand destinations in themselves. A great hotel is an oasis of quality, elegance and tranquility in a sea of the ordinary, the plain and the stressful. Great hotels always have the highest standards of comfort, service and cuisine. Here are three great hotels I recently visited in New York, Berlin and the Napa Valley. Each is a grand destination and staying in them is a rare treat.

In 1979 successful real estate developer H. William Harlan was searching for land on which to create a wine estate when he was shown Meadowood on the Silverado Trail outside St. Helena, California. It was for sale and it had a casual restaurant, swimming pool, tennis courts and nine-hole golf course, but it wasn't suited to grape-growing. Mr. Harlan, however, was intrigued with the property and bought it with some partners. They transformed it into a luxury destination for discerning travelers from around the world. Fifty posh guest rooms and thirty-five suites were built and a spa was added, and Meadowood was soon invited to join the exclusive collection of Relais & Chateaux hotels. Today it is the top luxury hotel and resort in the Napa Valley.

Naturally, wine is the main reason for visiting the Napa Valley and wine is also a main focus of Meadowood. The resort has many diverse amenities and activities, and has a professional staff that includes, among others, a master sommelier working as the director of wine education,

# 5 Star Hotels

by Charles Moyer

a Michelin 2-star chef, a restaurant sommelier, a cultural affairs director, a tennis professional, a golf professional, and a croquet professional (many resorts have a golf pro



Relaxing after dinner with wines are, left to right, Meadowood Chef Christopher Kostow; the author; Gilles de Chambure, Master Sommelier and Director of Wine Education at Meadowood

and a tennis pro, but how many resorts have a croquet pro?). Recently I stayed at Meadowood while working on a premium Napa Valley wines article for a future issue of *Chronos*. I had dinner in the Meadowood restaurant with Gilles de Chambure, Master Sommelier and Director of Wine Education at Meadowood, and he gave me an overview of the wine tastings and programs available to guests. Chef Christopher Kostow prepared a spectacular 8-course tasting menu for us, and Gilles matched each course with a superb wine from Meadowood's extensive cellar. Meadowood's Website: [www.meadowood.com](http://www.meadowood.com)



The Dorchester Collection's New York Palace Hotel

In the early 1880's railroad baron Henry Villard retained the iconic architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White to design brownstone townhouses situated around a courtyard on Madison Avenue. They were built in the neo-Italian Renaissance style, patterning the buildings after the Palazzo della Cancellaria in



The dining room of Gilt, part of the Villard Mansions at the New York Palace

Rome. Until Villard's death in 1900, this was one of the elite centers of New York society. In the late 1970's mega-developer Harry Helmsley acquired the Villard mansions and built an adjoining 55-story tower containing 899 luxury hotel rooms and suites. The Villard mansions were preserved and used as some of the hotel's restaurant and meeting rooms. It opened in 1981 as the Helmsley Palace and quickly became one of New York's top luxury hotels. In 2008 it became part of the Dorchester Collection, a small group of ultra luxury hotels comprised of, in addition to the New York Palace, London's Dorchester, the Plaza Athenee and Le Meurice in Paris, the Principe di Savoia in Milan, and the Beverly Hills Hotel and Hotel Bel-Air in Los Angeles.

The New York Palace occupies the entire block on Madison Avenue between 50th and 51st Streets. I stayed there several months ago and was impressed by the luxurious ambience and the extremely high level of service, very unusual in a large hotel. In my opinion the New York Palace is the top hotel in New York. The hotel's restaurant *Gilt* is part of the Villard mansions section of the hotel and has two Michelin stars. Its executive chef is Justin Bogle with whom I visited after enjoying one of the best dinners I've ever had in Manhattan. Another restaurant, *Istana*, is an elegant brasserie in the hotel's grand lobby where Chef James Staiano serves excellent bistro-style cuisine. Website: [www.newyorkpalace.com](http://www.newyorkpalace.com)



Chef Justin Bogle, master of the Michelin 2-star Gilt restaurant at the New York Palace

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In October, 1907, restaurateur and wine merchant Lorenz Adlon opened the new Hotel Adlon at 1 Unter den Linden in Berlin. It immediately became one of the top luxury hotels in Europe. Guests like European royalty, the Tsar, and Maharajahs all stayed at the Adlon as did Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, John D. Rockefeller, Albert Einstein, Charlie Chaplin and Richard Strauss. Marlene Dietrich was discovered at the Adlon. It was *the* hotel in Berlin, a place to see, and to be seen in. The landmark 1932 film *Grand Hotel* is set in a Berlin hotel inspired by the Adlon, and it was there that Greta Garbo first uttered her trademark line, "I want to be alone." The Adlon was tremendously successful during the teens and twenties, held its own during the thirties, and even escaped World War II without bomb damage, but on the night of May 2, 1945 a fire caused by drunken Soviet soldiers destroyed more than half the building. That was the end

of the Adlon's glory days because the hotel was located in East Berlin. Under communist control one of the greatest hotels in Europe sank inexorably down to mediocrity until the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany in 1990. At that point Kempinski, Germany's leading hotel group, acquired the original site on Unter den Linden and built a new ultra luxurious hotel inspired by the design of the original Adlon. On August 23, 1997 the Hotel Adlon Kempinski Berlin opened and immediately assumed the position of Berlin's top hotel. It has the best



Night view of the Brandenburg Gate from my room at the Adlon



The Hotel Adlon Kempinski Berlin

location in the city, adjoining both the British and American embassies, across the street from the French embassy, and one block from the Bundestag, Germany's parliament. It has 304 extremely comfortable guest rooms, 78 suites, and four restaurants, three of which have a Michelin star. I enjoyed delicious Italian cuisine at dinner in the Adlon's *Restaurant Gabriele*, and the gourmet breakfast buffet in the *Restaurant Quarré* with its spectacular view to the Brandenburg Gate was absolutely wonderful.

Website: [www.hotel-adlon.de](http://www.hotel-adlon.de)