

D.C.'s Mayflower: Respectful refurb

By Eric Moya

Winston Churchill once said, "We are masters of the unsaid words, but slaves of those we let slip out." If an embarrassing story about his 1945 visit to Washington's Mayflower Hotel is to be believed, Churchill knew whereof he spoke.

Legend has it that during a state dinner in the hotel's Chinese Room, Churchill leaned over to his neighbor to tell an off-color joke. Problem was, the room's mural-adorned dome was also a whispering gallery: It amplified his hushed utterings with stunning clarity across the room — within earshot of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and "two distinguished women," as a plaque outside the room today puts it.

The punch line that left Churchill chagrined has been lost to time, but that story and others about the 20th century's most influential people endure at the Mayflower, a 10-minute walk from the White House and the venue for every presidential inaugural ball from Coolidge to Reagan.

In recent months, the Connecticut Avenue hotel, which celebrated its 90th anniversary last year, has been squarely positioned for the 21st century with a \$20 million room renovation and a move from Marriott's Renaissance brand to its Autograph Collection of independent properties.

During my recent weekend stay sponsored by the hotel, it seemed every corner had an accompanying anecdote plucked from the history books.

There was the Presidential Suite, where Monica Lewinsky taped her 1999 deposition during impeachment proceedings for Bill Clinton. (These days the suite is Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's accommodation of choice when he's in town.)

Then there's the hotel restaurant: Formerly known as the Cafe Promenade and catering to the power-lunch set, it was recently reconceived as a family-friendly American



A renovated guestroom at the Mayflower Hotel, which celebrated its 90th anniversary last year.

brasserie and renamed Edgar, after J. Edgar Hoover, who ate lunch there nearly every workday for 20 years. The longtime FBI director's go-to meal (chicken soup, buttered toast and a salad of lettuce, cottage cheese and grapefruit) isn't on the menu these days. Diners will instead find fresh, upscale takes on familiar fare: I sampled the organic roasted chicken, served with Brussels sprouts and Yukon Gold mashed potatoes.

Renovations to all 581 rooms, completed in April, were made with an eye toward keeping the property's early-20th-century

ambience mostly intact. No iPad-controlled curtains or rainfall showerheads here: If not for the two flat-screen TVs and WiFi access (\$12.95 per day), I imagine my one-bedroom Congressional suite was more or less the same as it was nine decades ago.

Which, of course, is part of the Mayflower's appeal: D.C.'s grande dame has been updated for the contemporary traveler, but it's still recognizable as the hotel where history was made. Sometimes with just a whisper.

Rates for standard rooms begin at \$169, double. Visit www.themayflowerhotel.com.

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