

## Waldorf Astoria Orlando brings the glitz

January 18, 2010 by Karen Kuzsel

Filed under: Food/Drink, Luxury, Spa/Wellness



*The grand lobby at Waldorf Astoria Orlando*

Standing inside the new [Waldorf Astoria Orlando](#) during last October's grand opening, this Brooklyn-raised writer stands transfixed beneath the ornate lobby dome. The precisely-duplicated chimes and hotel clock from the famous Manhattan original flood me with nostalgic memories of family dinners up north, where I secretly fantasized about the lives of fur-draped celebrities sitting just a few tables away.

Throughout the 498-room Orlando hotel, the glamorous ambience is adorned with traditional and Art Deco notes that "symbolize elegance, refined class, impeccable service and urbane sophistication," says Tom Parke, director of marketing. During the 3-night stay, Mr. Parke escorted our group through a variety of restaurants bearing the same famed names as their New York counterparts, with the softer, more natural tonalities of Florida in terms of décor. This wasn't just another hotel opening. Parke says Waldorf Astoria Orlando represents "lives once led and dreams yet to be

fulfilled.”

Let the fulfillment process commence!

The Spa by Guerlain brand ranks among the top five in the world, and they didn't miss a beat in this 24,000-sf facility. We begin with a languid soak in the spa tub, followed by the arousing thrust of a 12-jet Vichy rain shower, ending with a warm wrap in the plushiest towels ever made. Then it gets good. The 2-hour signature facial, l'Exceptional Orchidee' Imperiale Treatment, includes two different facial therapies between two separate masks, with an eye contouring treatment thrown in for good measure. Soft music, soothing scents, two hours of doting attention, and I'm ready for dinner.

The Bull and Bear lives up to its famed New York counterpart. The 2-inch sirloin was more than divine as anticipated, but two side dishes surprised: a creamy mac 'n cheese with bacon, and a potato au gratin crowned with a delicately-crunchy Chinese bird's nest texture. Among the dark woods, cozy 3-seat brown leather sofas wallside and picture windows facing the pools and golf course, one can envision C-level execs impressing their G8 colleagues in this room.

I've never considered breakfast fine dining until I dined at another Waldorf NYC icon, the contemporary American brasserie, Oscar's. Do try the half-grapefruit with a slight amount of brulee, topped by caramelized, layered grapefruit. The homemade pistachio granola and thick yogurt with pineapple parfait is a winner for the health-minded, but this was no time to ignore the signature Flakey Frenchman. The two 1-inch slices of French toast are coated with corn flakes laced with pure maple syrup, capped by caramelized bananas and mounds of fresh berries.

For group facilities, Waldorf Astoria Orlando offers 122,000 sf of high-tech, flexible meeting space located at the Conference Center, which it shares with its new sister property, the 1,000-room [Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek](#).

We ventured over to Bonnet Creek to sample that property's signature restaurant, La Luce, helmed by Food & Wine's darling chef, Donna Scala. My advice? Do not miss the paper-thin carpaccio appetizer or the jumbo meal of spicy pasta framed by two pounds of juicy lobster tails and claws.

As to be expected, the room product sings as lofty as the amenities. Back at the Waldorf, the 169 suites are dressed in pale peach, muted blues, greens and gold, with a dining area for four. The view from the balcony outside the picture window looks over the tan cabanas surrounding glassy pools, carts traversing bridges along the Rees Jones golf course, and the colorful Disney resort area. Slipping into the Italian marble soaking tub, I felt a long way from Brooklyn, but very close to my childhood fantasies.