

night—we were shocked. Eventually, though, it became clear that the St. Regis was not going anywhere just yet, and the other day we decided to seize this reprieve and pay the old place a visit in its suspended state. The grand, gaudy main entrances, on Fifty-fifth Street, were sealed. A security guard ushered us in through the King Cole Restaurant doorway, down the block. Inside, on the mezzanine level, above an altogether vacant lobby, we found one office occupied—that of Peter Tischmann, who, according to the hotel directory, is vice-president and managing director for St. Regis-Sheraton, New York.

Mr. Tischmann, a hearty, bluff-speaking hotelier with a Teutonic accent, filled us in on the St. Regis's situation. The hotel was up for sale, he said, and discussions were under way with a number of interested parties. Until a sale could be completed, the St. Regis would remain shut. "We are dealing here with an eighty-four-year-old building that cannot mask its age," Mr. Tischmann went on. "There is still D.C. wiring in these walls. Many of the bathrooms contain the fixtures that John Jacob Astor put in when he built the place, in 1904. The plumbing is shot. The wiring is shot. The windows are old, and they let in far too much street noise. To see the St. Regis returned to the highest level of guest comfort would take eighteen months of restoration."

Mr. Tischmann invited us to walk around the hotel with him, and together we wandered back through the silent lobby. We passed into the King Cole Room, where, beneath the Maxfield Parrish mural, stood row upon row of richly upholstered chairs, looking like soldiers awaiting marching orders. We strode through scoured kitchen caverns that were absolutely bare. We rode an elevator to the St. Regis Roof and looked out over a mid-town cityscape that was dominated by construction cranes and girders. "Hotelmen have a tendency to be sentimental," Mr. Tischmann murmured, staring down at Maxim's—formerly the Gotham and soon to be the Peninsula Hotel on Fifth. "The trick, of course, is to balance somehow the financial aspect with the sentimental ego."

St. Regis

WHEN we first heard that the Hotel St. Regis had closed its doors—just like that, almost over-

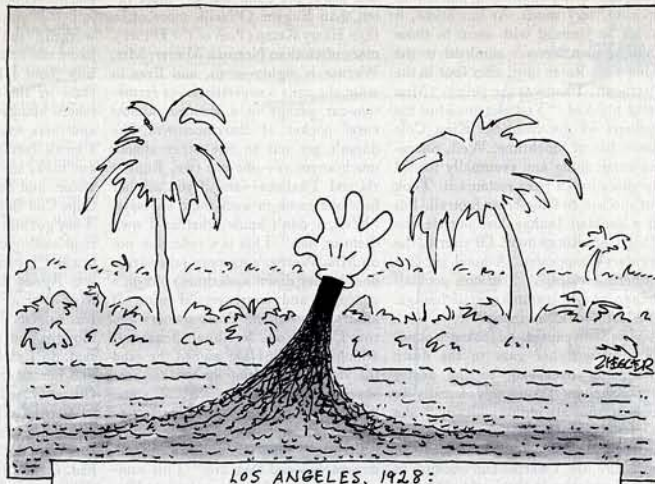


We moved on. In a guest bathroom that Mr. Tischmann said was "typical," a huge old porcelain basin, an old-fashioned porcelain tub, and brass towel warmers did indeed look very tired. Back in the hallway, we spotted some ancient-looking outlets near the baseboard, and Mr. Tischmann explained that they were part of the hotel's original central-vacuum system—in the early days, chambermaids could plug their hoses in here and hook up to two enormous vacuums in the St. Regis basement.

We saved the Dali Suite for last—a set of rooms named for Salvador Dali, who lived in the St. Regis for fourteen years during the sixties and seventies. In the Dali Suite, the bathroom was newly marbled and the bath came with a Jacuzzi. The living room had a fireplace. "Not a working fireplace," Mr. Tischmann explained. "Never a working fireplace. It was originally a very primitive air-conditioner. The air was drawn in here, and recirculated through filters in the wall. They're still here. See them? 'Purified air,' they called it in 1904." The Dali Suite was still luxurious, but we were disappointed to find no trace of Dali himself: not a litho, not a painting, not a cheap print—nothing.

We said goodbye to Mr. Tischmann, and, outside again, strolled past the St. Regis's street-level tenants: the Ambassador Florist, the St. Regis Pharmacy ("PHARMACY WILL REMAIN OPEN DURING HOTEL RENOVATION," a big sign above its window said), Gordon's Bookstore. There was a bullet-like hole in the bookstore's window. We decided to investigate.

"Oh, it's just a BB-gun shot," Alice Stein, Gordon's proprietor, told us. "It's our second this year. I don't know what it means."



LOS ANGELES, 1928:
MICKEY MOUSE EMERGES FROM THE PRIMORDIAL OOZE

We inquired about the store's future plans.

"We're going out of business," Miss Stein said. "Our lease just ended, and I notified the hotel that we wouldn't renew. We moved here in 1965, from our original location, on Fifty-ninth Street off Fifth Avenue. That whole block came down—it's where the G.M. Building is now—but we got lucky and were offered a ten-year lease here, which was unheard of at that time, because every building in midtown, it seemed, was set to be torn down and replaced by a skyscraper. We never even met the big real-estate mogul who owned the hotel then, but he apparently felt that ours was the kind of store that should be in his hotel. And our business here has always been rather special. Cecil Beaton used to have an apartment in the hotel, and he would come in for his British paper. Alfred Hitchcock stayed at the hotel, and he also came in because we carried British papers. Of course, Dali came in every day. We used to get many, many theatre people, too."

We asked Miss Stein about her history with Gordon's.

"I joined the company in 1946, on a trial basis, to see if I would like it," she said. "And I did. It was always a personal business. The store was started back in 1923, by Mr. Raphael Gordon—it was a magazine-and-newspaper shop then—at 32 East Fifty-ninth Street, down the block from the Savoy Plaza Hotel, and it stayed there until the move in 1965. Mr. Raphael Gordon had retired by then, and his son, William Gordon, and I were partners. During the war and just after, Mr. R. Gordon got magazines that no other magazine dealer could get. It was a talent, really, and, as a result, his customer list read like the *Social Register*. That little, tiny store, hedged in by Nedick's and Charlie's Shoe Shine Parlor, had the most extraordinary accounts. But things change, of course. We maintain many of those original Fifty-ninth Street accounts—those that are still alive—but the business since 1965 has been bound up with the hotel, and over the years the hotel has changed. I mean, take the King Cole Room. That used to be the hotel bar—wood-pannelled, with a brass footrail, and that marvellous Parrish