



# THE FANTASY OF LIVING IN A HOTEL

Imagining an alternative life at Hotel 850

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**LOCATION** HOTEL 850 SVB

**O**n the afternoon of Sunday, Feb. 25, I drive to West Hollywood to spend a night at a hotel. I want to imagine what it would be like to live in one. There is too much noise in my head, and I am trying to clear it. I keep picturing a clean, fresh hotel room, a kind of blank slate — a chance to start anew, step into another life. I decide to keep a time log and write a diary entry for the 19 hours I am about to spend living out this experiment.

**3:10 p.m.**

I arrive at the hotel. It is called Hotel 850 SVB, a name that I have a hard time remembering and sometimes call SVB 850 when I tell friends. One of them observes that it sounds like a vaccine. SVB stands for San Vicente Boulevard. The hotel is a white wooden house covered in green vines. In the early 1900s, it housed railroad workers who were building a railroad between Hollywood and Santa Monica boulevards. In 2018, hotelier Jeff Klein, the same owner of the Sunset Tower Hotel and the private club San Vicente Bungalows, opened Hotel 850 SVB, a hotel he has



described as having “a soul, like a beautiful home.”

A bellman named Winston checks me in. He welcomes me to “Hotel 850.” I have booked the Carriage Room, inspired by the carriage houses designed to fit single horse-drawn carriages. It’s the room that books up fastest, perhaps because it is the cheapest, but it is also the most charming, with its walls all painted blue and bookshelves framing the bed.

When I walk into my 200-square-foot room, I take off my shoes and put on the white hotel slippers. The things I encounter in the room give me ideas and expand the possibilities of what I can do: do yoga before bed on the blue mat, iron my shirts (which I never do), drink a bottled 1934 Cosmo for \$18, read books with names like “The Millionaires.” Maybe it’s all that blue or the circular window, but when I lie on the bed, I feel like I’m on a ship.

#### 4 p.m.

I realize it sounds silly to say I’m living in a hotel for less than 24 hours. Most people who’ve claimed to live in hotels have done so for at least a few months

or often years. In this town, those people are often actors who come to stay for transient periods of time for film productions or they simply like the luxuries of a hotel. Marilyn Monroe lived on and off at the Beverly Hills Hotel; a TikTok video says the hotel still sprays her suite, 1A, with Chanel No. 5 to summon her scent. Elizabeth Taylor lived for a year at the Hotel Bel-Air. Robert De Niro, Keanu Reeves and Lindsay Lohan all lived at Chateau Marmont. Lohan was staying at the Chateau while playing the role of Taylor in “Liz & Dick” when she was apparently forced out by hotel management after 57 days for not paying her bill of \$46,350.04. I prefer a story I find in the Daily Mail that says Katharine Hepburn checked into the Chateau Marmont with a luggage of men’s clothes, “wearing an eye patch.”

#### 4:45 p.m.

I walk out to the hotel lounge area, which is on the same floor as my room, in my slippers. The lounge is more like a living room, with mismatched couches, Louis Armstrong playing in the background, and a

glass jar with pretzels for the taking. Any time a guest exits their room and comes to the lounge to grab a water or sit on the patio, I say hello. I receive a few smiles from these strangers but never hear their voices in exchange. I think I see an actor I recognize. I Google: *older white actor who wears round glasses*. Pictures of John Lennon populate.

A housekeeper wearing a baby-pink dress says hello and asks me how I am. She elegantly lays out the complimentary happy hour drinks on the dining room table that’s already adorned with a vase of purple orchids. After she is finished, I take an *authentic* Bavarian beer from the metal bucket filled with ice. I flip through *Variety* magazine. Four sips in, I’m given the illusion of suddenly being on vacation. I am relaxed, charmed by the chair to my right covered in a print of violet flowers.

The hotel guests here are not like those I read about who lived at famed hotels. They are not like the ones at the Chelsea Hotel in New York who were bohemian, wrote songs and plays, did drugs in the bathrooms and started fires. “They just let anybody

in over there, that hotel is dangerous,” Andy Warhol wrote in his diary about the Chelsea Hotel in October 1978, “it seems like somebody’s killed there once a week.”

A hotel is a house where you can misbehave (or at least give in to what you wouldn’t do) and indulge in the out of the ordinary. Ideally this doesn’t involve killing someone. The classic example is the “Eloise” books, where a 6-year-old girl lives at the Plaza Hotel and drinks Champagne and gin, wears furs, eats meringue glacée and watches TV with a parasol “in case there’s some sort of glare.” (Eloise might have been based on Liza Minnelli, who lived in hotels with her mother, Judy Garland.) Maybe it’s because I’m 33, or because Hotel 850 is made to look like an eccentric aunt’s house, but rather than dreaming of debauchery, I’m looking at the red striped armchair and imagining what it would look like in my living room. I’m imagining the day I have walls tall and big enough to hold a vintage poster like the one in the room. I’m in a hotel, playing house.

### 5:25 p.m.

The truth is I did live in a hotel once. When my family moved from Brazil to Miami when I was 14 years old, we lived at the Sonesta Hotel for three months. I made new friends in high school by inviting them over for slumber parties that involved ordering movies on demand and room service. Aside from that, there was nothing too remarkable about the experience, and after a while, we got tired of the bland furniture.

I think I would get less tired of the furniture here. The designer, Rita König, deliberately resisted “beige and boring” hotel aesthetics. In my room — because it is now *my room* — there is a table lamp with a giraffe for a base. It is a lamp that König replicated from her own home.

### 6 p.m.

In the days leading up to my stay at Hotel 850, I read “The Hotel” by Sophie Calle, a book documenting the week the artist spent working as a chambermaid at a hotel in Venice, Italy. Each time she cleans a room, she fusses through the guests’ belongings and photographs them: a stethoscope and rosary on the bedside table, a torn-up postcard, a lobster claw under the bed sheets, a pair of black heels in the trash, white underwear hanging to dry and diaries detailing “excellent lasagna,” hot baths, small bridges and good soup. She lets the objects speak for themselves but admits when she is “bored” by her findings.

I go back to my room to get ready to leave for dinner. I imagine what Calle would see and fixate on: that I brought three pens in different colors (green, pink and blue), that I color-coordinate them in my agenda (“dry cleaning” is in blue, “pick up pie” is in green, “6:30 p.m. massage” is in pink), and that I use hand cream that’s a blend of mandarin, lime, gera-





nium and rosemary. She would note that I wear contacts, comb my hair in the shower and take thyroid medication. I want her to be interested in me but I don't think she would be.

### 8 p.m.

I end up, unintentionally, at another hotel for dinner, where the bartender explains to me that the red, green and white dollops on the flatbread represent the Lebanese flag. Later, I eat Meyer lemon ice cream and share the sidewalk with one of those delivery robots for restaurants; it outpaces me. It is Sunday in WeHo, which is to say, it might as well be Saturday, and a bar is playing a techno remix of "Respect."

When I come back to my room, I write this diary entry as if I am a tourist, registering my evening in L.A. When you're traveling and staying at a hotel, every detail becomes important and worth recording. Life is finally observed and savored.

### 8:30 p.m.

I shower — admittedly it's the moment I am looking forward to the most, when I get to test out the little shampoos and conditioners and liquid soaps. The shower products are all lemon-scented, and the body lotion is a strong rose that takes me several strokes to blend into my skin. There is a poet named Adilia Lopes who likes to use hotel bath products at home because it gives her the sensation of being in a hotel without leaving her home. The containers at Hotel 850 are too big for taking; they are not souvenirs.

Winston, the bellman, had mentioned in passing that I would be most welcome to make myself some tea at night in the shared kitchen. Since I somehow feel that this is an experience not to be missed, I go to the all-yellow kitchen to make myself rooibos tea. I am shy about being caught in my pajamas, so I wear my coat.

Maybe the moment I am looking forward to the most is actually getting in bed, slipping my bare feet under the freshly ironed sheets. I do this while I drink my rooibos tea and watch a boring episode of "Friends." If I could steal one thing from a hotel, I think it would be the sheets.

### 8:30 a.m.

At breakfast, there are three Frenchmen lounging around. One of them is upset because he woke up at 6 a.m. While I eat my yogurt, I fantasize that if they ask me where I'm visiting from, I will lie. I decide I will tell them I am visiting from New York, that it is my first time in Los Angeles. But they never ask me. I begin to wonder what would happen if I stayed longer, what persona I would gradually adapt, what alternate life I would build.

But I have to check out and head to work. Before leaving my room, I do one last scan. I never did the yoga or ironed my clothes or drank the Cosmo.

"Safe travels," the bellman says on my way out. I drive home.

