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# The Newbury

## BOSTON

Jeffrey Beers, Alexandra Champalimaud and Mario Carbone join forces to restore Boston's grand dame to its former glory.

Words: Ayesha Khan  
Photography: © Nikolas Koenig (unless otherwise stated)

Ask any Bostonian what their idea of luxury is, and they'll probably mention two things: Newbury Street and The Ritz. They will no doubt go on to regale you with stories of how they had their wedding, first high tea, or a friend's graduation party at what they always thought to be the fanciest hotel in town, perched at the edge of the manicured public garden and, of course, Newbury Street.

Originally built in 1929 as the flagship to the now-ubiquitous Ritz-Carlton brand, this storied property was the first in the country to offer a private bath for every guest and enlisted pioneering French chef Auguste Escoffier to create an enviable benchmark for hotel cuisine.

After languishing in obscurity for decades, the grand dame has re-emerged following an extensive makeover to reclaim her rightful place as Boston's ritziest hotel – pun intended. Helping her on her way were masterful architecture and interior design firm Jeffrey Beers International (JBI), luxury hotel interiors expert Alexandra Champalimaud, and chef-restaurateur Mario Carbone of Major Food Group, widely regarded as a modern-day culinary virtuoso.

For the design of the public areas, developer Highgate had a clear brief for JBI. "It was never meant to feel alien or completely different from what the people of Boston had come to know and love," explains Christina Zimmer, Highgate's Senior Vice President of Design. JBI chose to imbue the space with a dark, sophisticated appeal by bathing the lobby walls in a signature grey-blue and laying Nero Dorato marble on the floor. "The palette is modern, strong and handsome," says Jeffrey Beers. "The tones complement the history of the





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Celebrated designer and Boston native Ken Fulk together with chef-restaurateur Mario Carbone of Major Food Group have reimagined the restaurant as a chic Italian resort

iconic property while providing a contemporary and edgy feel.”

A staircase carpeted in the more saturated cobalt tone widely known as ‘Ritz Blue’ and topped with a chandelier from Dutch maker Brand van Egmond leads to the second level, where the storied Ritz dining room and beloved Ritz tea salon – the setting of many a Boston memory – both sit. Rather than start from scratch for the interiors on this level, JBI chose to enhance elements original to the 1929 structure. “A struggle we had through the course of the project was what to retain and what to throw away,” Zimmer reveals. “Keeping some of the original design elements really allows for authenticity. I truly believe if you ripped everything out, the scheme wouldn’t be as successful.”

Integral to the design of these spaces is the use of art to create what the hotel describes as a 21<sup>st</sup> century salon for the arts. An alum of Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and an artist himself, Beers was particularly fond of

this notion. “I am very partial to the hotel’s well curated art collection and the dialogue that exists between each piece, its location and the surrounding design,” he confirms. As fate would have it, his RISD compatriot Lynne Kortenhaus, in her own right an esteemed Boston curator, was enlisted to choreograph the art salon, much like elite art purveyor Isabella Stuart Gardener once did. “Most of the artists were selected because they represented a modern take on art through a historic lens,” says Kortenhaus, citing *Dejeuner 2020*, a contemporised version of Édouard Manet’s *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe* that sits squarely behind the check-in desk and was commissioned from Maine-based artist Elise Ansel. Other interesting contemporary reinventions include a ‘trophy head’ hewn from fabric and repurposed table legs, and a series of painted photographs by Amy Arbus in which modern-day portraits are inspired by those of masters like Amedeo Modigliani and Paul Cézanne. Kortenhaus likens the collection to that of a personal residence, where guests are





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able to interact with, and in most cases, even touch, the pieces of art and sculpture.

For the guestrooms, Champalimaud Design was at liberty to be generous with reinventing the aesthetic. “A lot of the people who used the building had never seen the rooms, so that gives you a little more latitude to do something new,” Zimmer says of the brief. “The spaces were fussy and heavy, so we wanted a comfortable room with touches of history and a palette that would be very soothing.”

Champalimaud’s first order of business was to expand the bathrooms into the corridors to make them more spacious. They then infused rooms with a neutral colour palette, adding blonde woods and warm, indirect lighting accents to create sanctuaries that deftly float above the public garden’s canopy. Personal touches such as illuminated two-pane dressing mirrors – a nod to the fashion houses of Newbury Street – Frette robes and linens, and chaises on which to steal a nap by the window add to the appeal.

The hotel’s rooftop once housed a makeshift tent structure but has now been converted into the hottest table in town, where diners sip on Negronis while marvelling at 360-degree views. Along with celebrated designer and Boston native Ken Fulk, chef-restaurateur Mario Carbone imagined the restaurant as a homage to a chic Italian resort. “This was the first Ritz-Carlton in America, so I started to think of this Italian aristocrat that may have come over as the first of her generation,” he explains of the story behind the eatery, aptly named Contessa. Northern Italian cuisine and Carbone’s debut venture into pizza delights amid a colourful interior filled with plants – a nod to the park, to be sure – are topped off by a scalloping retractable roof.

As the sun sets over Contessa, Boston’s grand dame, who once defied soaring electricity bills during The Depression and turned on all her lights to give the illusion of being full, shines once again. This time though, she truly is at full occupancy, and may she be for years to come.



**EXPRESS CHECK-OUT**

**Developer:** Highgate  
**Interior Design:** Jeffrey Beers International, Champalimaud Design, Ken Fulk  
**F&B Consultant:** Major Food Group  
[www.thenewburyboston.com](http://www.thenewburyboston.com)