

THE CARLYLE GALLERY

My admiration for the Carlyle Hotel is not primarily for its distinctive tower, its famous guests, or for its refined blend of classic and art-deco detail. Nor is it for the elegant dining room or Bemelman's bar.

Rather it is for the smallish and comfortable Gallery, a modest octagonal room, with cushy banquettes and chairs, a glorious wallpaper of colorful fruits and flowers and abstract forms, and small round white-clothed tables. Over many years, I have been here for drinks alone or with friends, for a date, and even for an interview. It is as you know behind the Madison Avenue entrance, after heading through the vestibule, a few steps down and through a glass door on the left.

At a length of perhaps 30 feet, it opens not only to this entrance, but also through a hallway to the lobby, to the dining room, up angled steps to Bemelman's bar and to a back hallway with restrooms and a private entrance to 50 East 77th Street. It manages to combine the sensations of passage and intimacy like no public room in New York-- all the more impressive because of the scale and din of so many of our public places. And it allows me to treasure a drink in the corner, while watching familiar and unknown worlds seated near me or walking by.

It is a luxurious public space, to which I can occasionally choose to belong. It gives the sense of an old, well preserved place that has been graciously modified and preserved, so that I can go there again and again, feeling somehow that it has never changed.

And yet my sense is an illusion, as the room was redesigned under the direction of Renzo Mongiardino in 1989.

Larry Sicular