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Hotel as home

[Guest in residence?](#) The concept offers a bevy of perks 24/7 to the well-heeled and mobile.

Moments after the private elevator in the Montage Beverly Hills slides open, the staff warmly greets Larry Field and ushers him to a pool-view seat at the rooftop Conservatory Grill. The hostess gives him a hug. Servers nod in recognition.

"Mr. Field, anything you want to eat, the chef will make," says the waiter, who nevertheless proffers a menu.

Now this is the life. Field is the first and, so far, the only "resident guest" at the Montage, meaning his \$7 million condominium set within the hotel development comes with services and amenities beyond those available to overnight visitors. Eventually he will have to share the perks with other owners of the Montage's 20 residences, but for now, Field has it all to himself: an entire wing separate from the riffraff paying \$475 to \$1,250 a night for a Montage hotel room. And just like some fairy tale, Field's every wish is the staff's command, whether he wants a hot pastrami at 3 a.m., a chartered jet at 7 or a delivery of daisies at 8.

It's a new spin on an old but alluring idea: hotel as home. This spring, two other high-profile properties in the area — the W Hollywood Hotel & Residences and the Ritz-Carlton Residences at L.A. Live — will begin handing over the keys to homes set inside hotel complexes. All promise luxury accommodations and the kind of pampered, room-serviced life that beckons travelers to check in. The difference? Residents don't have to check out.

The perks that attract potential buyers today are the same that filled hotels with long-term residents in the last century, said Paul Groth, a professor of architecture history at UC Berkeley and author of a history of residential hotels in the United States.

Then, as now, "most of the people who lived in hotels also had homes elsewhere," Groth said. Living in a hotel meant that "they didn't have to maintain a city home or keep a staff of servants. They could also entertain on a more lavish scale in a hotel, because they didn't have to have their own ballroom," he said. "It made sense for a lot of people."

The convenience of round-the-clock service, a central location and a prestigious address has long made upscale hotels attractive to the all-hours lifestyle of the rich, famous and mobile, Groth said.

No wonder, then, that celebs such as John Lennon, Johnny Depp and John Belushi lived (and in some cases died) in the kitchenette-equipped rooms at the Chateau Marmont, or that Marilyn Monroe, Elizabeth Taylor and Howard Hughes called the Beverly Hills Hotel and its bungalows

home. (Long-term guests at the Pink Palace can still book rooms by the month or longer — and get the 15.2% city and occupancy taxes waived if they stay at least 30 days.)

The Beverly Wilshire Beverly Hills, a Four Seasons Hotel, was home to Warren Beatty. He spent 15 years in the Veranda Suite during the '60s and '70s. The hotel fielded love notes from fans of Elvis Presley, who took up residence while filming the 1960 Western "Flaming Star."

The late Thelma Becker became an in-house celebrity after living at what is now called the Millennium Biltmore Hotel in downtown Los Angeles for 57 years. When she retired on a fixed income in the 1970s, the hotel gave her a special rate: \$33 a night.

Hotel residents of yesteryear may have had prestige, but today they also want control, the kind that comes with ownership. Unlike time shares or earlier forms of hotel-condo developments, these new L.A. developments don't require owners to rent their units to transient guests part of the year.

Field was free to personalize his three-bedroom Montage residence with custom furniture and artwork. He hired Darrell Schmitt, who created the hotel's interiors, to incorporate Marc Chagall paintings, a vintage cash register and Field's bar mitzvah portrait into an elegant neutral palette. Schmitt also designed a desk and table and arranged the living room furniture to allow meetings for 20 to 30 people.

Field, a Beverly Hills real estate developer, is downsizing from several homes but sees the Montage as anything but a sacrifice. He lists what he's gaining — a gym, a barber, a person to accept deliveries, cafes, restaurants, piano bars — and also talks of what he's giving up, including the gardener, the alarm company, the pest control company and the repairmen.

He's giddy about the little things: the crisp Frette sheets, the monogrammed pillow that the hotel provides. Maids fold his tissues into a fan and leave Godiva chocolates on his pillow.

"It's somewhat of an intangible, but what we're really selling is the lifestyle," said Alan Fuerstman, founder of Montage Hotels. He said buyers have one thing in common: a love of hotels.

That's what attracted Reno Rollé, chief executive of Red Rock Pictures, to the W Hollywood. Rollé, a frequent guest at W hotels, was one of the first to buy at the Hollywood and Vine complex, partly because work frequently draws him to L.A. from his home in Ojai.

"We had an office on Sunset Boulevard, but I thought the W would be perfect for meetings," he said.

When people come to meet, Rollé said, he can greet them in a grand lobby, order a drink, have a snack and charge it to his account.

"There is a lot of potential prestige in having an address there, but it's also about the convenience — laundry, room service, housekeeping, valet, concierge service."

He's planning to outfit his 1,100-square-foot space as a home office that can also accommodate his family, guests or business associates. With units selling for about \$530 per square foot and

up, the purchase made economic sense too. The condo will cost less than his office space on Sunset Boulevard, Rollé said.

"We have many people who want a home office away from home," said Russ Filice, the director of sales for the residences at W Hollywood. One buyer may turn his pad into a media room so that he doesn't have to remake a room in his home, Filice said. "Another guy doesn't really want guests in his house, but they entertain a lot, so it's a guest house away from home — but with a staff of 500 built in."

At the Ritz-Carlton by L.A. Live, where 224 residences will co-exist with 123 hotel rooms in a 54-story tower, interest has come from Russia, Japan and Kuwait. Prospective buyers have included ardent Lakers fans who want easier access to the adjacent Staples Center as well as business people from the worlds of sports, music, fashion and finance. At least one future resident is a student at nearby USC.

"It's sort of redefined the whole concept of student housing," said Laurie Miskuski, director of sales and marketing for the property's developer, AEG. Tuition at the private college looks like pocket change next to condos at the Ritz, which are priced from \$1.4 million to \$5 million. (Oh, unless you want a penthouse. Then you're looking at \$10 million.)

The renaissance of the hotel-as-home represents more than a real estate trend. For many, it's a dream. It's Eloise at the Plaza, all grown up, with preferential access to the hotel spa and nightclub.

"There are certain people for whom this will be a party pad," said interior designer Mark Cutler, who created one of the model residences at the W. "But there also is a group of people for whom living in a hotel has always been a fantasy."

Who wouldn't love eggs Benedict delivered on a silver tray at any hour? Or the chance to be play voyeur in an ever-shifting scene?

While some might gripe at forever sharing a pool with strangers, the devoted hotel fan may see a daily vacation, a life of luxury and ease played out with more patio umbrellas, stemware and staff than any mansion could offer. More star sightings. More encounters with well-heeled humanity.

For Field, however, the fantasy does come with a downside.

"It's true, very true," he said. Being a resident of a hotel very well could ruin the experience of being a guest at one. "But I'll risk it."

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