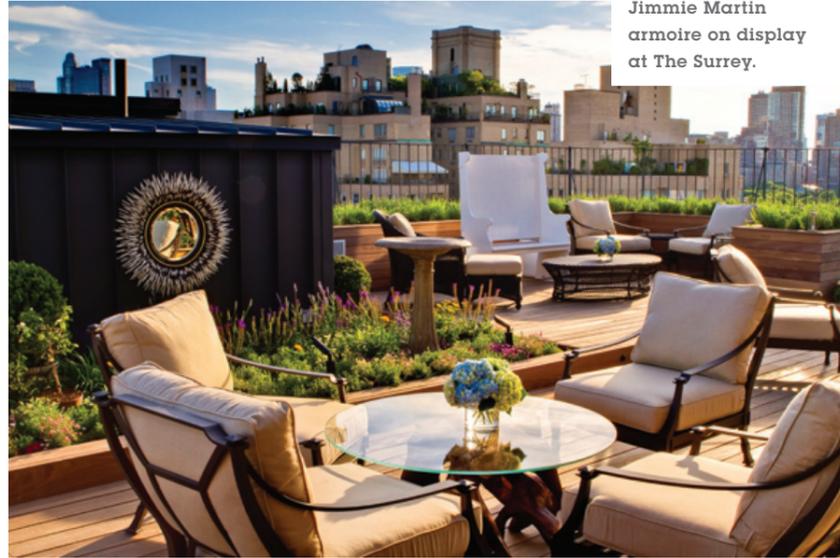




CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Bar Pleiades is great for celebrity-spotting; Daniel Boulud's French-inspired Café Boulud; The Surrey's rooftop patio; a Jimmie Martin armoire on display at The Surrey.



ART ATTACK

AT THE SURREY IN MANHATTAN, LOCAL IS THE FLAVOR OF THE DAY.

BY SUZETTE LIPSCOMB

The first stunning piece you notice as you enter The Surrey lobby is the raw, textured face of Kate Moss replicated on a large-scale tapestry by Chuck Close, an American-born painter and photographer best known for his massive, close-up, photorealistic portraits that he creates using a daguerreotype (an early photographic process that gives a nuanced tonal quality to the print). Close has prosopagnosia, a cognitive disorder of face perception where the ability to recognize faces is impaired, so he chooses his subjects by what is pleasing to his eye, a bit like sacred geometry for faces. Close is a local artist, and like many conscious choices at The Surrey, local is the flavor of the day. Local influences are found in the art, the cuisine and the choice of everything from the liquor in the rooms that includes Hudson Baby Bourbon Whiskey and Due North Rum from Brooklyn, to the revolving boutique display in the Jimmie Martin Armoire that most recently featured Suite 1521 (a

members-only Upper East Side showroom designed by Lizzie Tisch and Kim Kassel). The Surrey mixologist will even roll up a liquor cart (perfect for an in-room picnic), teach you to make your own cocktails and leave you to enjoy them in the sitting area of your room. If you want to venture over to Central Park as we did, you can borrow The Surrey picnic basket and a blanket and head out.

The Surrey feels like it could be my Manhattan apartment, except Michael is the concierge instead of my doorman. He has been awarded Les Clefs d'Or by Relais & Chateaux, yet he's not above chasing a coffee for me when I appear in the lobby five minutes after the service has been closed. Quiet and meant to evoke a private residence, the boutique hotel recently underwent a \$60 million remodel that has cemented its status as the only Relais & Chateaux hotel in New York. The ideal Upper East Side spot at 76th and Madison offers world-class boutiques, half a dozen museums

within walking distance, and it's a hop, skip and a jump to the reservoir in Central Park, my favorite place to run in the city.

There are many special features to The Surrey, not the least of which are the top and bottom floors, consisting of the newly remodeled rooftop deck and garden that overlooks the city skyline, and Café Boulud and Bar Pleiades on the ground floor. The first taste of food art arrived at precisely 8:30 a.m. The strong coffee was rich with no bitterness, and my soft-boiled egg came with a piece of fresh-baked seeded bread with European butter and delectable jams, but the standout of my petit déjeuner was the fresh fruit perched atop a layer of mango purée dividing the fruit from the whipped crème fraîche. The middle of The Surrey, where most of the rooms are located, is no less spectacular than the top and bottom. Luxurious Italian linens cloak every custom-made Duxiana bed, even in the least expensive room category. I managed

to pry myself out of my luxuriously quiet "greige" room (sporting walking shoes) in time to meet Monica, my docent from Context Tours, to take a guided private tour of the Frick and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

THE ART

The Frick Collection is to museums what The Surrey is to hotels – understated, spectacular and popular with those in the know. I know saying the Frick is my favorite New York museum is a lot like choosing a favorite child – impossible to do – but if you are totally honest with yourself, one comes to mind first. When you walk along Fifth Avenue in the present, try to imagine how it looked in the past. Before the industrialist Henry Clay Frick built his mansion on almost an entire city block, there was nothing surrounding the property for miles. Frick was a visionary and designed the house specifically to showcase art, always with the intention of leaving his collection and its riches to the public. It's a shame he was only able to enjoy the completion of the estate for a few years before he died of accidental food poisoning. A perfectionist through and through, Frick had a monopoly contract for all of the stone to be taken from a particular quarry in Indiana in perpetuity so that when the museum subsequently added on to the property, the newer stone was undetectable from the original.

The Frick is manageable, and by that I mean you can enjoy the collections and still have a marvelous lunch and take it all in without sensory overload. Dutch masters occupy an important part of the collection. There is a particularly beautiful Vermeer in the West Gallery entitled *Mistress and Maid*. The light is the thing I notice first when I gaze at the painting. There is something more special about appreciating the art displayed in his Beaux-Arts residence that doubles the pleasure. Beginning April 1, you will find Enlightenment and Beauty, Sculptures by Houdon and Clodion, exhibited in the natural light of the Portico Gallery, highlighting the important French sculptors who studied together in Rome.

THE ART OF FOOD

Stroll back to Café Boulud for lunch. Daniel Boulud's philosophy is based on four concepts: La Tradition (classic French and country cooking), La Saison (plates inspired by the season), Le Potager (the garden), and finally, Le Voyage (a destination). Our amuse-bouche was arancini that were unlike any I have tasted before. These little fried risotto balls had a light interior and were perfectly seasoned with a bit of cheese and a citrus

infusion. I had the two-course prix fixe lunch starting with the frisée and endive salad topped with roasted beets, tossed with a shallot vinaigrette, and blanketed with two delicate slices of manchego cheese. The grilled poussin followed with emerald green broccoli rabe, artichoke hearts and polenta fries. In between, Executive Chef Gavin Kaysen surprised us with a middle course consisting of the three tiny handmade beet raviolis that were delicate and flavorful. The ravioli was my favorite part of the meal. If you skip dessert, have coffee and sample the baby Madelines dusted with a snowflake of powdered sugar. Kaysen's hand is influenced by his San Diego roots, formerly cooking at the Rancho Bernardo Inn, and he still marvels at the plethora and diversity of our California produce.

THE ART OF SHOPPING

If you need fuel to start your spree and crave the hustle and bustle of an authentic Italian cappuccino experience, then dash up a block from The Surrey to Ambrosia to stand at the bar and swoosh down your cappuccino, or sit down in back and linger with pastries or a full breakfast and ponder the seemingly endless amount of time some people have to lounge over breakfast on a weekday, seemingly with nowhere to go in the hustle and bustle of New York. This is the perfect spot to begin a shopping excursion.

The beauty of The Surrey's Madison Avenue location is that walking uptown or heading down to midtown both provide a delightful experience. One morning I started at the new Vince outpost – one of my favorite designers of easy-to-wear classy neutrals, then continued on to Perrin, a Parisian family-owned creator of unique "bowling ball" handbags in various sizes of supple buttery leathers and exotic skins. I stopped at Rebecca Taylor to check out the fashionista dress vibe, and headed down the avenue. It's always nice to visit The Mansion, and by that I mean Ralph Lauren's flagship store. I was out of breath by the time I reached Barney's and felt the familiar joy of passing through the doors and into the rainbow loom of color, especially my favorite home section, Chelsea Passage, where for a decade, everyone who knew me and got married received their wedding gift from this selection of limited-edition pieces of pottery, cashmere throws, linens, or stemware.

THE ART OF SPA

It's rare that I have been served Champagne and a special menu of treats while waiting for my spa treatment to begin. If your calves ache from the touring and shopping, or you want to feel your best for a night out on the town, make time for a signature facial or massage in The Surrey's Cornelia Spa. Prior to the appointment, I was greeted with a fine glass of bubbly and a treat. In the cozy treatment room, I swallowed a teaspoon of honey to sweeten the experience, detox my body and prepare me mentally and physically for my massage. The variety of services follows The Surrey philosophy of individual care, and the spa menu reads like a meal at a fine dining restaurant. The treatment options include wine, caviar, cranberry, papaya, and green tea. My therapist, Helen, was gifted. Allow time to soak in the spa's selection of truly artful books by Taschen, Rizzoli and others on a wide range of beautiful subjects – art, fashion, architecture, furniture, gardens, and generally beautiful people. Or, if you want to see the beautiful people in person, head down to the art deco Bar Pleiades for an old-fashioned cocktail, with its perfect globe-shaped ice cubes, and watch for the stars.

■ **GO THERE** :: If you are a shopping-loving runner who likes to eat well and visit museums, The Surrey is the place for you.

The Surrey :: thesurrey.com

Café Boulud :: cafeboulud.com/nyc

Bar Pleiades :: barpleiades.com

■ **TAKE A TOUR** :: Context tours will make you feel as if you majored in art and show you the best that New York museums have to offer.

:: contexttravel.com/city/new-york

■ **INSIDER TIP** :: All of the No. 09 rooms from the 12th floor and below feature a corner room configuration with a bathroom window and expanded seating area.