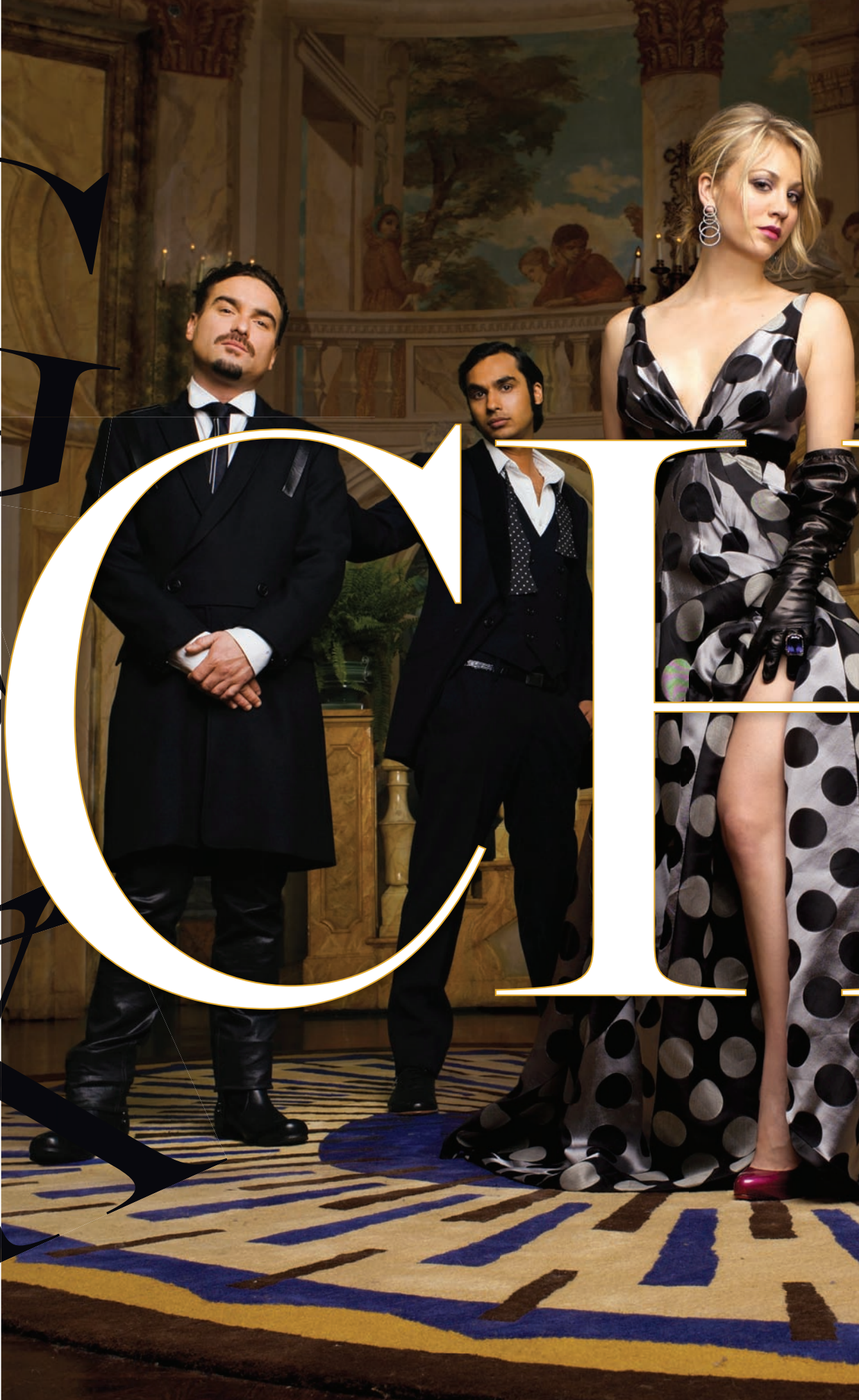


# THE





**No pocket protectors or sci-fi tees here:  
The stars of *The Big Bang Theory* show off  
their sophisticated sides—and discuss how  
viewers have embraced their quirky characters**

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Photographed at  
The Pierre, New York,  
the U.S. flagship of Taj Hotels



# It's

10 a.m. on a Tuesday and from the look of things, the normally fastidious Sheldon Cooper must be playing hooky from the physics lab. And while his best friend and fellow scientist, Leonard Hofstadter, may be sporting an uncharacteristically hip mustache and goatee for the summer, these otherwise super-serious scientists still seem a bit out of their element as they now jokingly preen for the camera.

That's because today, the actors behind TV's smartest new comedic pair—Jim Parsons and Johnny Galecki as Sheldon and Leonard, respectively—and their *The Big Bang Theory* castmates Kaley Cuoco, Simon Helberg and Kunal Nayyar have traveled far from the show's Burbank, Calif., soundstage. This *Watch!* photo shoot, in the lobby of New York's glamorously renovated and recently reopened The Pierre hotel, offers the cast of CBS' white-hot sitcom a chance to show a different, sexier side—one that's less Caltech, more couture.

## It All Started with a Big Bang

When it premiered in the fall of 2007, *Big Bang* was CBS' sole new comedy for the season. The show's new Monday night neighbors featured cool, hip ladies' men like *How I Met Your Mother*'s Barney Stinson and *Two and a Half Men*'s Charlie Harper. *Big Bang* was instead populated with characters far less suave—go ahead, call them nerds, geeks, brainiacs—and yet somehow fit right in.

“There was a distinct moment, in shooting the pilot, when I knew the show would work,” remembers Helberg, who plays the ineptly skirt-chasing mama's boy Howard Wolowitz. During a scene in which Sheldon and Leonard were at a sperm bank, “I was offstage and heard the audience's reaction, which went on for so long that the director, Jim Burrows, said, ‘There's too much laughter. We have to go back and do it again.’ Then, when Kunal [as the girl-shy, Indian-born Rajesh Koothrappali] and I came in, we got entrance applause—and no one knew who we were yet! I just remember thinking, ‘This is something special.’”

The nation's critics, however, were harder to convince. When the cast appeared at the semiannual convention of TV journalists the summer before the show's premiere, “they said we were going to fail two episodes in. Before they even saw the show, they were not fans,” remembers Cuoco, who plays Penny, the feminine catalyst in apartment 4B.

“And I don't fully blame them,” Parsons admits. “The show is better than its description. But I don't know how to describe it.” Despite the assurances



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to the contrary from the comedy's creators—*Two and a Half Men's* Chuck Lorre and Bill Prady, a former *Dharma & Greg* writer and onetime computer programmer—“the critics assumed that *Big Bang* would be about cheap shots at intelligent people,” Galecki explains. “And if anything, I think the show *defends* intelligent people.”

“I think *The Big Bang Theory* reflects a shift in the cultural landscape,” agrees CBS Entertainment President Nina Tassler. “Groups of friends like this, with their type of ‘geek chic,’ have blossomed into a very familiar and relatable demographic. We’re seeing it in film, in literature, and I think it’s a fresh way to access comedy.”

So is *The Big Bang Theory* making smart sexy? “Just look at this cast!” jokes Nayyar, with a wave around the table.

“One of the things I’ve learned from this show,” Galecki adds, “is that people who are sometimes called ‘nerds’ or ‘geeks’ or ‘dweebs’ are really just people who are passionate about something. And ultimately, passion is appealing, even if the subject is something you’re personally not passionate about.”

Interestingly, for Parsons, the attraction in *Big Bang's* characters lies in what they *don't* feel. “They all have what we might laugh at and call social shortcomings,” he says, “and yet with the possible exception of Leonard, they don’t live their lives at all depressed about that. Instead, they have a firm belief, and strong hope, that they will achieve greatness in areas like science and, for Wolowitz, in attracting women.”

The can-do attitude has won over some former naysayers. “I was sure *Big Bang* would just turn into a one-joke pony about smart guys and a dumb blonde,” admits Susan Young, formerly of *The Oakland Tribune* and now a freelance TV journalist. “How wrong I was. Now it’s my favorite comedy, one I know will always put a smile on my face and have at least one laugh-out-loud moment.”

**C**all it the Lorre/Prady Paradox: that there could exist a show about characters of rarefied intelligence, working in a field that only those in the rightmost standard deviation on the bell curve of IQ would understand—and yet, somehow, its comedy would be universal.

“It’s not rocket science,” *Mediaweek's* TV critic Marc Berman offers in explanation. “The show is not what you would call ‘edgy,’ but just funny. The formula for a good comedy can be very simple: You create characters that people can relate to.



And we’ve all lived our lives at some point either knowing a nerd, or feeling like one. These are four guys and a woman we feel like we could be friends with in real life, and so that’s why they keep us so entertained.”

In fact, in what the show’s cast considers a sign of the best-written character comedy—and what they say is the ultimate compliment to *Big Bang's* writers—they often find themselves not having to say a word to get a laugh.

Particularly in the show’s second season, Parsons explains, the show’s characters were already so well-defined and familiar that “the audience would start to jump the laugh before the joke had even landed. And that was because they knew what the character was thinking. It was strange for us at first, but it’s wonderful.” The resulting electricity in the room, Cuoco notes, “makes the show’s taping nights really fun. Because every crowd is like a rock concert.”

Lorre usually cuts the longest “laugh spreads” from the finished product, Galecki explains, so viewers at home don’t get a true indication of the high jinks happening on Warner Bros. Stage 25. Nayyar, who everyone agrees tends to crack up the most at such moments, says he has to resort to deliberately sipping his soup.

And then there is the little mind game Galecki and Parsons have begun playing with each other as they stall during the laughter, waiting to get out their next lines. “Jim and I will battle each other when we’re left with nothing to do but stare. He has taken to trying to break me,” Galecki reveals. “He’ll—just so slightly, and I don’t know if even the camera will pick it up—raise an eyebrow a little bit at me. I’ve even mouthed to him, ‘That’s not fair.’ And he’ll mouth back, ‘I know.’”



## Add a Penny on the Scale

*Big Bang* was a ratings winner right from its first few airings. But like many other now-classic sitcoms before it, this show, with its ardent astrophysicists, truly soared in the Nielsen ratings in its second season. And Tassler has several theories as to why.

“For one thing, people have fallen in love with the characters,” she notes. “Chuck Lorre has crafted such clever, smart, specific stories that have illuminated these relationships.” Particularly, she posits, between Penny and the boys. “With Sheldon and Leonard, you got them right from day one. But in Season 2, Penny really blossomed as a character. We saw how she could become more integrated into their lives, and how they would be more involved in hers, and audiences really embraced that.”

And Tassler is not the only one who thinks that, ironically, it may be the average-brained Penny who balances this quintet’s genius comedic success. Penny, Cuoco says, is everyman’s entry point into the realm of the brilliant. “I feel like I represent the audience, who can look at these guys through my eyes.”

Cuoco’s ability to convey such a natural, good-natured groundedness, Helberg notes, is a testament to her talent. After all, these physicists are connected to their new friend by such a delicate chemistry.

A year before this current hit incarnation, Lorre had attempted an earlier *Big Bang* pilot, with a female character instead named Katie. The show’s four male characters, Nayyar observes, “are very innocent, without any trace of malice.” And so when “Katie” acted more manipulative with these malleable men, “it was like she was shooting fish in a barrel. It didn’t work,” Galecki says. “We’ve had that problem with guest stars, too,” the actor notes. “If they’re too malicious towards the guys or show too much of an edge, the audience hates them.”

In fact, he and Cuoco say, the show’s writers, noticing this phenomenon, even turned it into one of her favorite episodes in Season 2. When their building’s newest foxy female began working her wiles on our boys, Penny came to the rescue in a laundry room showdown. “When I stuck up for them and said, ‘These are my guys,’” Cuoco remembers, “the crowd screamed. And I kept thinking, ‘Don’t cry! Don’t cry!’ Because I was so touched. We’re all so protective of these characters, I could cry right now thinking about it.”

## Nerds on the Floor

Both Galecki, a young veteran of ABC’s long-running *Roseanne*, and Cuoco, who got her first big break as





“Each cast member is very skilled, a consummate pro, who brings a lot of heart and compassion to the work, and they have a real bond off-camera,” says Chuck Lorre. “That combination is not only rare and priceless, but also clearly visible when you watch the show. The end result is an incredibly funny and smooth-working ensemble.”

a teen on that network's *8 Simple Rules*, adjusted early on to the fame, and fan familiarity, that comes with life on a hit sitcom. During his *Roseanne* years, Galecki remembers, he would often play the outdoor bowling game *pétanque* with his friend Brad Pitt. “And people would come up and touch *me*, because I was on TV. Meanwhile, Brad was on the side of every bus and on every billboard for his movie *Interview with the Vampire*. And he would say sarcastically, ‘Yeah, feel free to touch him.’ Because he was shocked.” (“Are you saying Brad Pitt was jealous of you?” Cuoco immediately teases.)

Back then, Galecki says, fans on the street would often unimaginatively shout out the name of his TV girlfriend: “Where’s Darlene?” And so he expected the *Big Bang* taunts to have started by now. “But the fans of this show treat



And ironically, as it turns out, in real life, all four of the actors now famous as TV scientists have no actual affinity for the stuff at all. Growing up on the hurricane-prone Gulf Coast of Texas, Parsons says he had an initial flirtation with a career in meteorology. “I took a class in college—and it was the only class I ever failed,” he admits. “That, plus I didn’t take to it at all. It turns out, the sciences didn’t want me any more than I wanted them.”

In the end, that key difference between actor and character just makes playing Sheldon, who often spurts pages-long monologues full of jargon supplied by the show’s technical consultant, that much more of a challenge. Parsons reveals that he learns his lines—usually without comprehending the scientific principles behind them—by writing them out longhand.

### A Star Sitcom Explodes

With the show’s third season comes a new time slot, Mondays at 9:30. “One of our priorities this year is to punch *Big Bang* into the stratosphere, to make this top 20 show a top 10,” explains CBS scheduling chief Kelly Kahl.

The move, to the time slot behind *Two and a Half Men*, creates a virtual Chuck Lorre Power Hour. And as Lorre explains, he’s thrilled to have the continued opportunity to create more *Big Bang*.

“Each cast member is very skilled, a consummate pro, who brings a lot of heart and compassion to the work, and they have a real bond off-camera,” says the veteran producer. “That combination is not only rare and priceless, but also clearly visible when you watch the show. The end result is an incredibly funny and smooth-working ensemble.”

This spring CBS announced that the network was taking the rare step of renewing *Big Bang* for not just one but two more seasons, which in TV is the equivalent of academic tenure for a Ph.D. like Leonard. Subsequently, Nayar and Parsons put down roots in L.A. by each buying a house, as they plan for a long and prosperous run. Meanwhile, when we last saw Sheldon and his cohort in May, they were headed for a summer of research in the Arctic. As they arrive back in Pasadena, and on our small screens, this fall, *The Big Bang Theory* is poised to generate laughs well into 2011. In physics, that’s known as having great “potential energy.” Perhaps that’s a phrase we’ll hear any one of our favorite, funny physicists utter in Season 3. ■



these characters with such respect,” the actor says. “There was just one time, when we had really good seats at a Lakers game, and some jock was jealous. He yelled, ‘NERDS!’”

“And you were like, ‘Whatever! We’re the nerds on the FLOOR!’” Cuoco quips.

The bestowal of such celeb status on erstwhile eggheads has predictably won the show quite a few fans among Sheldon and Leonard’s real-life counterparts. “Let’s be honest, this is the biggest thing that’s happened to scientists in a long time,” Cuoco jokes.

But as Nayar elaborates, “We also have many fans in the high school theater community. For a lot of people who maybe have felt like misfits, or haven’t fit in with the cool crowd, we sort of become rock stars.”



## IN THIS SHOOT

### PAGES 44–45:

**Galecki:** Jacket, shirt and pants by Carlos Campos ([carloscampos.com](http://carloscampos.com)). Tie by Dunhill ([dunhill.com](http://dunhill.com)). Boots by He by Mango ([mangoshop.com](http://mangoshop.com)). **Nayyar:** Three-piece suit and shirt by Z Zegna ([zegna.com](http://zegna.com)). Belt by Dior Homme ([diorhomme.com](http://diorhomme.com)). Bow tie by Polo Ralph Lauren ([polo.com](http://polo.com)). Shoes by Carlos Campos. **Cuoco:** Gown by Pamela Roland ([pamellaroland.com](http://pamellaroland.com)). Gloves by Saks Fifth Avenue Collection ([saks.com](http://saks.com)). Feticha pump by Christian Louboutin ([christianlouboutin.com](http://christianlouboutin.com)). Earrings and ring by Helen Yarmak ([helenyarmak.com](http://helenyarmak.com)). **Parsons:** Tuxedo jacket by Valentino ([valentino.com](http://valentino.com)). Vest by Ralph Lauren Rugby ([rugby.com](http://rugby.com)). Shirt by Charles Tyrwhitt ([charlestyrwhitt.com](http://charlestyrwhitt.com)). Pants by Banana Republic ([banana-republic.com](http://banana-republic.com)). Tie by Brooks Brothers ([brooksbrothers.com](http://brooksbrothers.com)). Pocket square and boots by Z Zegna. Cufflinks by Helen Yarmak. **Helberg:** Jacket and sweater by Ra-Re, ([ra-re.it](http://ra-re.it)). Shirt by Commonwealth Utilities ([commonwealth-utilities.com](http://commonwealth-utilities.com)). Jeans by William Rast ([williamrast.com](http://williamrast.com)). Bow tie by Z Zegna. Shoes by He by Mango.

### PAGE 46:

Peacoat, pants, sweater and belt by Brunello Cucinelli. Shirt by Brooks Brothers. Boots by Fratelli Peluso ([fratellipeluso.com](http://fratellipeluso.com)). Umbrella by Burberry ([burberry.com](http://burberry.com)). Cufflinks by Helen Yarmak.

### PAGE 47:

Tuxedo and shirt by Carlos Campos. Tie by Z Zegna. Tie clip, Barneys New York ([barneys.com](http://barneys.com)). Shoes by Bally ([bally.com](http://bally.com)).

### PAGE 48:

**Galecki:** Tuxedo and shirt by Brunello Cucinelli ([brunellocucinelli.com](http://brunellocucinelli.com)). Ascot by Fairfax ([barneys.com](http://barneys.com)). Shoes by Pearl & Co. for Brooks Brothers. **Helberg:** See credits for page 47. **Cuoco:** Dress by Georges Chakra ([georgeschakra.com](http://georgeschakra.com)). Shoes by Giuseppe Zanotti ([giuseppe-zanotti-design.com](http://giuseppe-zanotti-design.com)). Earrings and ring by Helen Yarmak. **Parsons:** Tuxedo and shirt by Brunello Cucinelli. Bow tie by Charvet ([bergdorfgoodman.com](http://bergdorfgoodman.com)). Pocket square by Brooks Brothers. Shoes by Z Zegna. **Nayyar:** Suit and shirt by Carlos Campos. Pin by Helen Yarmak. Shoes by Cole Haan ([colehaan.com](http://colehaan.com)).

### PAGE 49:

Hat by Eugenia Kim ([eugeniakim.com](http://eugeniakim.com)). Jacket by Brunello Cucinelli. Shirt by Brooks Brothers. Necktie by Neiman Marcus ([neimanmarcus.com](http://neimanmarcus.com)). Scarf by Ra-Re. Gloves by Dunhill ([dunhill.com](http://dunhill.com)).

### PAGE 50:

See credits for page 48.

### PAGE 51:

Gown and cape by Zang Toi (212-757-1200). Earrings and ring by Helen Yarmak.

### PAGE 52:

See credits for page 48.

### PAGE 53:

Shirt and shorts by Carlos Campos. Top hat by Rod Keenan ([rodkeenannewyork.com](http://rodkeenannewyork.com)). Hosiery by Wolford ([wolford.com](http://wolford.com)). Shoes by Dior ([dior.com](http://dior.com)). Earrings and ring by Helen Yarmak.

### PAGE 54:

Gown by Zang Toi. Earrings by Helen Yarmak. Vintage necklace by Chanel.

## LOCATION:

Celebrated for its exceptional personal service and private residential-style elegance on New York's Central Park at Fifth Avenue, The Pierre, the iconic U.S. flagship property of Taj Hotels, Resorts and Palaces, is fresh from a meticulous \$100 million renovations program. With its original 1930s grandeur restored and the addition of the most modern of comforts, the hotel now features 189 new guestroom and bath interiors that evoke a feeling of quiet luxury. Eleven of the hotel's 49 newly inviting suites are unique signature suites, many with dramatic city and Central Park views and two with landscaped terraces suitable for grand-scale entertaining. The welcoming public spaces include a gracious new reception area with contemporary Indian artwork, new destination bar and lounge, and a new restaurant. Just steps from world-class museums, galleries and the fashionable boutiques of Madison Avenue and Fifth Avenue, and a short walk or drive to business districts and fabled New York City attractions, The Pierre is New York's preferred social and business address.

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