

## DESIGN &amp; DECORATING



LOVE STORY

## Shine On

Silver-plated pieces from the 20th century's fanciest hotels make for usable, evocative treasure

By ANNIE P. QUIGLEY

**T**HE LAST TIME I was home in Maine, I went shopping in my parents' basement. I was moving in with my boyfriend from a New York City rental to a place of our own—and I wanted to bring a few things my mom had been keeping for me.

What I was looking for, in particular, I found in a Rubbermaid bin: a large, silvery oval platter so heavy I had to hold it with both hands.

Even in the basement light it glinted. But there was also something hardy about it, largely unembellished and crosshatched with scars. The tarnish looked like storm clouds rolling in. "I bought that at a tag sale in Boston for two dollars," my mom said, rummaging in a box. I wrapped it up to take with me.

When we moved, I put the platter on our only table and we began tossing mail there. But even under a pile of envelopes it held a certain charge. One night I dumped off the ConEd bills and examined it.

A marking, barely legible on the back, read "Parker House, 1927." A quick Google search lead to an ex-

cerpt from "Built To Last: 100+ Year-Old Hotels East of the Mississippi," by hospitality historian Stanley Turkel. Parker House, opened in 1855, hosted Boston's illustrious Saturday Club, whose members included Emerson and Longfellow. John Wilkes Booth was a guest a week before he shot Lincoln, wrote Mr. Turkel, adding that Malcolm X waited tables and Ho Chi Minh baked there. And that JFK proposed to Jackie in the hotel restaurant.

Looking at my platter I felt a tingly possibility: Who touched it, ate from it, carried it? I stayed up late, searching for photos online, hoping to spot it, before I gave up and went to bed.

That weekend, I visited Tudor Rose Antiques, an vintage-silver shop in the West Village. Owner Myra Donowitz inspected the platter like a forensic pathologist. "It's silver-plated nickel," she confirmed, peering through a lens. "It's Gorham. They were one of the better makers." Turning it over: "See the cut marks? That's from carving—I would guess meat, because they're deep."

Back at my apartment, I found a 1927 Parker House platter on eBay



**INN VOGUE** Inset above: A team of silver polishers at London's Ritz hotel, 1950. Above, clockwise from left: Beverly Hilton Hotel Serving Dish, \$145, [parishotelboutique.com](#); Parker House Platter, author's own; The Ritz Salt and Pepper Shakers, \$295, [hudsongracesf.com](#); Cafe Heublein Creamer, \$39, [shopbatterbyhouse.com](#); Ritz Carlton Hotel Flatware, \$200 for set of 104, [chairish.com](#)

for \$66. But when I searched "hotel silver," dozens of pieces from the world's grand hotels popped up, most of it silver-plate, on eBay, Etsy and antique retailers' sites: a 104-piece flatware set, each knife and fork inscribed with a cursive "Ritz Carlton"; a covered pot emblazoned with a starburst from the Beverly Hilton in California, perhaps used to keep room service hot, now a suitably theatrical way to serve a side dish at a dinner party. I fell for a diminutive creamer from New York's Waldorf-Astoria, \$25, with a beaked

spout that made it resemble a bird—ideal for a small spray of flowers.

Another click revealed a cache of serveware from the Carlyle Hotel in New York, for sale by Connecticut liquidators Black Rock Galleries. I called the outfit's founders, Grant Panarese and Christie Spooner. A few years ago, Mr. Panarese said, the Carlyle was consolidating storage and Black Rock was called to take the hotel silver. "Laundry bins full," he said. "They didn't want to use it. It's not in keeping with new trends." Some buy Carlyle pieces for their

utility, Ms. Spooner said. For others, a piece is a memento. That's true for my mom. She and her siblings went to the Parker House as kids for Christmas dinners after their dad died.

I'm in search of another piece of hotel silver, something tarnished and dented. "You can't put a value on this," Ms. Donowitz said of my platter. She told me not to have it replated, adding, "Who knows who made this score mark? Maybe the waiter walked over and JFK said, 'I want that end piece right there.'"

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