

# EIGHTY YEARS OF GLAMOUR

**The Peninsula Hong Kong has just celebrated her 80th birthday. Mark Llewellyn visited to see what's new.**

She's affectionately known as the Grande Dame of the Far East, but that moniker implies she's a little old-fashioned and stodgy. She isn't. The Peninsula Hong Kong certainly retains a traditional aura, though, and as she celebrated her 80th birthday last December, she reminded us that it's possible to grow old with great class and enormous dignity, yet still possess a modern outlook.

Originally planned during the 1920s to be "the finest hotel east of Suez", she became a prominent feature of Hong Kong's social scene right from her opening in 1928. She has survived a war – Hong Kong's formal surrender to the Japanese in 1941 was signed in Room 336 – and, as Hong Kong grew in size, stature and popularity, she steadfastly maintained her position as the Grande Dame.

In 1994 a new 30-storey tower was unveiled offering another 132 guest rooms, shops, a rooftop heliport, a contemporary rooftop restaurant – Felix (designed by Philippe Starck) – as well as a state-of-the-art swimming pool and fitness centre and the Peninsula Spa by ESPA. This new extension made her a truly 21st-century facility and her reputation for good taste, luxury and indulgence has grown ever since.

Indeed, as you take in the magnificent, elegant beauty, the pillars, the marble sculptures, the famous pageboys buzzing here and there in their white uniforms and pill-box hats, you get the feeling that, like any octenarian, she has many stories and secrets to tell.

Even arriving at the Peninsula is unique event. Book the limousine airport transfer and you'll be met from your plane and escorted to one of the hotel's 14 custom-built Extended Wheelbase Rolls-Royce Phantoms. Finished in Peninsula green and sumptuously trimmed in tan-coloured Connolly hide, you just know you've made it big-time as you are expertly chauffeured through the city's busy traffic to the hotel.





Above: Exquisitely furnished Deluxe Harbour View Suite expertly blends colonial and Chinese style.

Opposite page from top: The Boudoir Room and L'Afrique Room each give a glimpse into Shanghai socialite, Madame de Ning's life

Pulling up in front of The Pen's famous façade, the flight is quickly forgotten as you are warmly welcomed by guest relation managers and guided through the plush-carpeted lobby which rises two stories and is dotted with ornate columns.

Exquisitely furnished, the rooms and suites at The Pen combines classic colonial grandeur with Chinese elegance, along with all the modern conveniences expected these days. Large flat-screen TVs, elite sound system and high-speed internet are only the beginning. All rooms also offer a dedicated fax machine, a two-line speaker-phone system and a room control panel which manages all of the room's functions including airconditioning, curtains, even turning off the room's doorbell. And the bathrooms are something else – an extravaganza of white and black marble with, perched in the corner with views to die for, a luxurious spa bath..

If you can tear yourself away from the splendour of your room you'll discover something else the Peninsula is well-known for: food. You have the choice of seven award-winning restaurants offering the best cuisine from France, Japan, the Mediterranean, Switzerland and, of course, Hong Kong.

Standouts include Gaddi's, the hotel's French restaurant, which has been open since 1953 and is a gracious place to dine. Expect dishes such as Scallop carpaccio with black truffle, or Poached pike soufflé with pan-fried crayfish... you get the idea. Gaddi's has another winning attraction – the Chef's Table, which is in the kitchen and offers a front-row view of the chefs in action.

Spring Moon, the Cantonese restaurant, is given an Art Deco theme complete with stained glass, wood panelling and wooden flooring. Here, too, you can dine at the Chef's Table. Trained tea masters preside over a traditional-style tea counter where more than 25 carefully selected Chinese teas are available.

For something altogether lighter, The Verandah offers a bright and airy atmosphere and fine Mediterranean cuisine. Signature dishes include Oak-wood smoked Scottish salmon, or Pan-fried goose liver with caramelised mango, baby spinach and Grand Marnier sauce.

Oh yes, and we shouldn't forget to mention The Lobby. Best known for the celebrated Peninsula Classic Afternoon Tea, it's an ideal place to meet friends or colleagues and the





Above: Backlit panels create an unusual lighting effect in the main lounge at Salon de Ning. Left: Exclusive Rosé Champagne is served by staff wearing Chinese-chic uniforms.

atmosphere manages to be both friendly and formal. A casual menu is served all day and, surrounded by the splendour of marble-topped tables and Tiffany chinaware, it's a great spot to watch the hustle and bustle.

But if you're just after a relaxed drink, there's nowhere more sophisticated than the new Salon de Ning lounge. Inspired by the life of a well-travelled 1930s Shanghai socialite, Madame Ning, Salon de Ning reflects the elegant glamour and style of the "Paris of the East".

Suspended from the ceiling of the main lounge are a series of backlit paintings created from multi-coloured crystal beads. Each one represents an episode of Madame Ning's life. Off the main lounge are four themed rooms representing Madame's extensive travels. The entrance to each area is marked by a giant picture frame, which gives you the impression you are walking into a photograph straight out of Madame Ning's life. A mounted lion's head marks the entrance to the L'Afrique Room, where the design theme features a sculpture of an ostrich and an African tent.

The walls and ceiling of the Ski Room are made from solid timber made to resemble a rustic Swiss chalet, while the Boudoir Room displays Madame's collection of dresses, jewellery, accessories and perfume bottles. The ceiling features a stunning pendant light made from 13 hats. Finally, the Bailar Room is designed like the pre-function area of a glamorous ballroom. Madame Ning's dance trophies, dancing gowns and shoes are displayed here, along with very clever digital photo frames depicting the lady and her partner dancing.

Champagne would seem to be the order of the day here, and Salon de Ning has its own exclusive label, a Rosé naturally enough, created by Deutz of France. If it's a cocktail you fancy, then you'd be hard pressed to go past the signature Ning Sling, a refreshing little number made from Absolut Mandarin, Soho Lychee Liqueur and fresh mint leaves shaken with lychee and passionfruit juices.

Overall, then, we have to admire the Peninsula Hong Kong and the way she has weathered her 80 years. Grande Dame perhaps, but today she looks fresher and more beautiful than ever. It is one of the finest hotels you will ever stay at, and it's made even better by the astonishing attention to details and it's people. Peninsula folk just seem to love working there; the smiles are genuine and the courtesy is real. As a guest, you will probably appreciate that most of all. 