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THE GETAWAY | STEPHANIE ROSENBLOOM

In New York, by the Light of a Crackling Fire

Where a hotel bar's fireplace makes you want to while away the wintry hours.

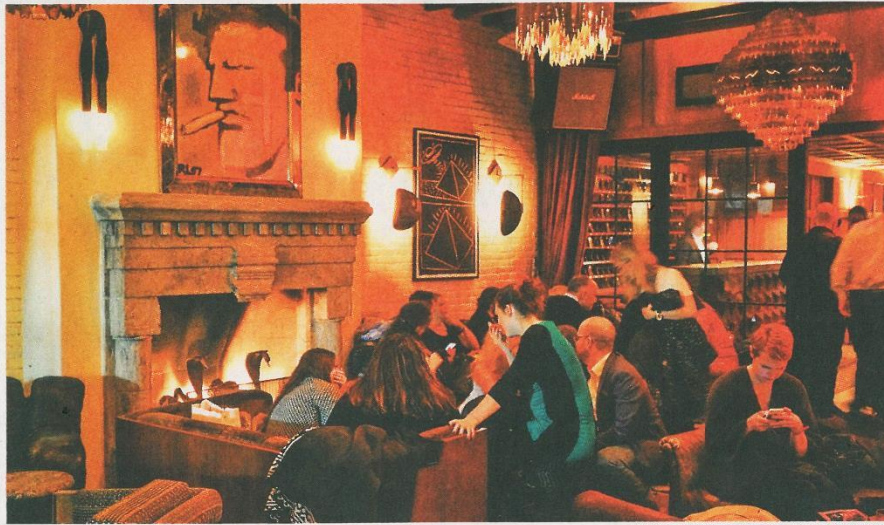
WHEN THE FEBRUARY AIR is biting and Manhattan's avenues seem never-ending, few pleasures compare with ducking into a hotel bar and sinking into a club chair beside a fire.

Not all hearths are equally inviting, of course. There are sleek fireplaces that, like people, seem to warn, "Look, but keep your distance." There are fireplaces that beckon yet can be enjoyed only by guests and those who slide past doormen at hotels like the **Jane** and the **Bowery**. There are playful fireplaces too, such as the virtual blaze at **Aloft Harlem**. But unforgiving winter days call for the real thing: crackling fireplaces that inspire slow sipping and invite you to come closer.

And what better time to get closer than Valentine's Day? A fireplace crawl a few days before the holiday winnowed the competition to five Manhattan hotels where you don't have to be a guest (you don't even have to have a reservation) to enjoy the heat with your flame.

Gramercy Park Hotel The Rose Bar

Dark room? Check. Flickering candles? Check. Sumptuous curtains? Check. In some ways, the Gramercy is a romantic's dream, with its blush walls and rouge furniture (billiards table included), its black-and-white checkered floor and the kind of pervasive shadows that encourage imaginations to run wild. Yet though you may be sitting on a posh couch watching orange embers float up the limestone fireplace, incongruities are all around you. There's the rock music (on a recent evening by Young the Giant, Locksley, Nada Surf), the rotating modern art gallery on the walls (including close-ups of stiletto heels and extended tongues), and, on this particular night, at least one disinterested waitress. All of this seems designed to broadcast that the Rose Bar is where it's at. Show up when it opens at 5 p.m. (but not long after that) and you may be able to get a table. By 6 o'clock the fire had died down (although there is another fireplace in the lobby where you can sit closer), and the place had filled up. About 20 minutes later, the fireplace was relit and I leaned back against the couch to finish off a salmon and dill plate (\$18) and a Pancho Villa cocktail (Illegal Mezcal, Don Julio, spicy sangria, chile pepper and lime; \$19) that appears deceptively sweet (it's pink) but, like the Rose Bar, has a welcome kick. Perfect for: sensualists; aspiring V.I.P.s. 2 Lexington Avenue; Gramercyparkhotel.com.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY TONY CENICOLA/THE NEW YORK TIMES

The Ludlow The Lobby Lounge & Garden

With its hardwood floors and white brick walls, light-filled atrium and dreamy tracks from Michel Colombier and Serge Gainsbourg, the Ludlow is one of the most cheerful yet serene places to while away the hours by a fire. Perhaps the most delightful time to stop by this hotel in the heart of the Lower East Side (Katz's Delicatessen is across the street and Russ & Daughters is around the corner) is on a weekday in the late afternoon, when you can get a spot on one of the velvety couches beside the fireplace, or a club chair on a geometric print rug. "Just pick a seat and someone will find you," a desk clerk said when I asked if I could plop down even if all I ordered was tea or water. I ended up with a club soda (about \$5) and the conviction, after staring into the hearth for a half-hour, that fireplaces are perhaps even more soothing during the day than after the sun goes down. Perfect for: catch-ups with friends; freelancers itching

to upgrade from coffee shops. 180 Ludlow, between East Houston and Stanton Streets; Ludlowhotel.com.

Royalton New York Forty Four

There are more than 50 wood-burning fireplaces in the guest rooms at the Royalton in Midtown, and guests for whom a run-of-the-mill fire just won't do can customize theirs with scented sachets such as Oak and Apple. For the rest of us, double doors automatically and dramatically swing open into the lobby, revealing a long strip of fire behind glass, one of the rare spots of light in the lounge area of bar Forty Four. This particular fireplace is slick, like something Al Pacino might have in his Manhattan office in "The Devil's Advocate." And only a few couches are right next to it, though I was able to get one, having arrived a little after 10 p.m. just as the kitchen closed. That said, with a Margarita Manzana (Avion reposado, apple cider, lemon, agave, ha-

banero bitters; \$19) in hand, the lobby's blackness and sunken seating area create a feeling of coziness, along with music turned down enough so that one can actually have a conversation — a rare and precious thing in today's New York. Perfect for: assignments. 44 West 44th Street; Morganshotelgroup.com.

The Marlton Hotel Espresso Bar

For me, few places hold a candle to the Marlton's lobby on a chilly afternoon. That's not only because there's plenty of comfortable seating around the glowing fire. It's because the space is filled with Greenwich Village locals leisurely tapping away on MacBooks. It's because the place is hushed yet not dead; dim yet not gloomy. And because the food is not only affordable, but also downright tasty. A roasted eggplant sandwich with mozzarella, preserved tomato and arugula on warm bread with shoestring fries (\$12) was a spicy surprise, hitting the spot on a windy day. "There's no rush to order," said a waiter when I hadn't looked at the menu after 15 minutes of surfing the Internet and letting mellow tunes by Chris Staples, Glen Campbell and Greg Clarke wash over me. It's come as you are, and stay as long as you want, creating a place where the fire is not the only thing that makes you feel warm. Perfect for: locals; creative business travelers. 5 West Eighth Street; Marltonhotel.com.

Refinery Hotel Refinery Rooftop

An artful arrangement of hat-making tools in the lobby of this garment district boutique hotel, which opened in 2013 in a century-old building, is a nod to its former life as a millinery factory. On a Monday night, jazz wafted from the intimate, Prohibition-era-style lobby lounge, but up in the more than 3,500-square-foot indoor-outdoor rooftop lounge, 1980s hits ruled and visitors were treated to close-ups of the Empire State Building. In a corner, a handful of tables and couches are clustered around a fireplace. Alas, it's not especially warm. But sitting below strings of cafe lights amid exposed brick walls, tucking into terrific comfort food — margherita flatbread (\$14), butcher's meatball sliders with herbed ricotta (\$12), tater tot nachos with short rib, tomato, horseradish and Cheddar (\$21) — one feels cozy all the same. The rooftop was busy around 9:30 p.m., though a table for two near the hearth was easily procured without a reservation (but do make one if you can). Perfect for: date night; girlfriend get-togethers. 63 West 38th Street; Refineryhotelnewyork.com.