

Design

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Tilman Fertitta opens his Post Oak Presidential Suite — 5,000 square feet fit for any VIP

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Photo: Melissa Phillip, Staff / Houston Chronicle

A view of the master bedroom in the Presidential Suite at the Post Oak Hotel, 1600 West Loop South, Tuesday, June 5, 2018, in Houston. (Melissa Phillip / Houston Chronicle)

If Tilman Fertitta's new Post Oak Hotel is going to be known for anything, it will likely be its opulence — and its Presidential Suite, which only recently started welcoming guests, is no different.

The most public spaces in the hotel owned by the very hands-on Fertitta — whose holdings include the many restaurants of Landry's Inc., five casinos and the Houston Rockets — dazzle with slabs of expensive Italian Calacatta marble and chandeliers dripping with shards of crystals. Museum-quality art hangs on the walls of its main lobby, grand ballroom entrance and even its mezzanine level.

All of that is found, too, on the hotel's most private floors, including the 22nd-floor Presidential

Suite, a 5,000-square-foot space that goes for \$12,000 per night. (The weeknight rate for a regular room is \$529, which Fertitta believes is about \$100 more than any other hotel in town.)

Don't be too shocked at the price tag. When Fertitta's own 10,000-square-foot personal penthouse is finished later this year, it will be available to anyone who wants to pay its \$100,000-per-night before-tax tab.

Fertitta, 60, a Galveston native and star of CNBC's "Billion Dollar Buyer," said he spent an average of \$1.1 million on each of the Uptown Houston hotel's 250 guest rooms and suites. The hotel's main floor features Rolls-Royce, Bentley and Bugatti car dealerships, his 29 North fashion boutique and a collection of bars and restaurants that includes the new Mastro's Steakhouse and a reimagined Willie G's Seafood.

Those heading to the Presidential Suite, though, can ride a regular elevator off of the lobby or enter more discretely via a private elevator accessible from the parking garage or from the hotel's helipad.

However they choose, says hotel general manager Jorge Gonzalez, they can come and go without being seen.

If it seems like a magnet for celebrities, so far, none who've been to the city in the past few weeks have used this suite. Gonzalez won't name names, of course — Presidential Suites at any hotel are uber private — but guests so far have been business VIPs who are likely better known for their companies' quarterly earnings than for their legions of Twitter followers.

The suite's foyer-like entrance is a signal of what's inside: plenty of gleaming black and white marble, sparkling lighting and vases filled with ethereal bouquets of white orchids, roses and other flowers.

Inside, you'll stop to admire the suite's beautiful artwork that includes two paintings by 20th century abstract expressionist artist Robert Motherwell. The master bedroom has an oil on canvas by Oscar Saborio ("Summer Wind East of Brenham" 2016) and vintage black-and-white photography includes works by Horst as well as Bob Gomel. Gomel's 1962 image captures streets lined with Houstonians ready to greet then-President John F. Kennedy, who came then to give his famous Space Race speech at Rice University.

Fertitta is known for his vast collection of art, which grew dramatically as he prepared for the mid-March opening of his \$350 million hotel. Purchases made specifically for the hotel included works by Frank Stella, Alex Katz, Friedel Dzubas, Donald Sultan, Howard Hodgkin and Joseph Glas.

Giant windows on the Presidential Suite's three exterior sides — the suite takes up about half of a floor — offer views to the east, west and north. During the day it's a mix of freeways, skyscrapers and construction cranes busy adding new layers to the skyline, but the night view glows with white lights twinkling in tall buildings and red taillights of commuters in a hurry to get wherever they're going.

In a recent tour of the space, Gonzalez talked about the suite's home-like, albeit elegant, atmosphere.

"It has to have the comfort, and it has to show the elegance of the environment," said Gonzalez, who came to Houston from the Mandarin Oriental in Miami, where he was general manager and area vice president. (That hotel earned a Forbes Five-Star rating three times, and both Gonzalez and Fertitta hope that the Post Oak will earn it, too.)

The living area includes a plush, white velvet sectional sofa positioned in front of a marble-encased console that holds a TV that springs to life on command. Hanging from the silver-leafed ceiling are a pair of Italian Novaresi chandeliers, each dripping with 300 strands of faceted crystals.

"Everything in this suite was hand picked. They're all one-of-a-kind pieces. We don't have any of this furniture anywhere else in the hotel," Gonzalez said. "It was very important for Tilman that when you walk into the suite you don't feel like you're in a hotel — but you have all of the hotel services."

In the nearby dining area, a tree-like, gold-leafed chandelier loaded with chunky shards of opaque white agate sprawls over a table set with a handful of globes filled with huge white roses, petals ready to burst open.

Two bedrooms — a master and a secondary room — offer comfortable furniture, upholstered headboards, luxurious bedding and more hidden TVs. (In all, the Presidential Suite has 10 TVs sprinkled throughout its rooms.) Closets are roomy — and there's an extra one just for storage, likely needed by VIPs who travel with luggage they'd rather not look at even if it cost as much as the room.

Slabs of marble are bookmatched on counters and paired as mirror images on walls to resemble Mother Nature's attempt at Rorschach inkblots in the bathrooms. Luxurious gray, veiny Calacatta marble is paired with black granite on floors, around bathtubs and in showers.

The room has an office so executives can hold small meetings or get some work done. A small gym holds workout equipment — it had a Technogym treadmill and cycle, though Gonzalez said the equipment could swap out according to each guest's needs — as well as a massage table with an extra curtain for privacy.

There's a kitchen, too, and it's accessible from the suite or from the hallway in case the guest hires a caterer or chef who needs to slip in quietly.

There's always the possibility that the suite's guest might want to do some cooking, of course. Gonzalez recalled his first celebrity guest at the Mandarin Oriental. It was Luciano Pavarotti, who charmed Gonzalez with a big meal of Italian pasta that he prepared himself.

"We want to be sure that residents staying here feel like they're in a home rather than a hotel suite. You don't see the hotel name anywhere in here except for the logo on the shower drain and on a notepad," Gonzalez said.

Gonzalez pointed to an iPad mounted on a wall, a technological control center of sorts. “Technology is another big thing. It has to have whatever our guests need right now, and be easy to use,” he said. “We don’t want guests to have to call someone from the hotel IT department to come and help you out, but we do have an IT valet on duty 24/7.”