



# Ritz and Escoffier: The Hotelier, The Chef, and the Rise of the Leisure Class

*Luke Barr*

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**In a tale replete with scandal and opulence, Luke Barr, author of the *New York Times* bestselling *Provence, 1970*, transports readers to turn-of-the-century London and Paris to discover how celebrated hotelier César Ritz and famed chef Auguste Escoffier joined forces at the Savoy Hotel to spawn the modern luxury hotel and restaurant, where women and American Jews mingled with British high society, signaling a new social order and the rise of the middle class.**

In early August 1889, César Ritz, a Swiss hotelier highly regarded for his exquisite taste, found himself at the Savoy Hotel in London. He had come at the request of Richard D'Oyly Carte, the financier of Gilbert & Sullivan's comic operas, who had modernized theater and was now looking to create the world's best hotel. D'Oyly Carte soon seduced Ritz to move to London with his team, which included Auguste Escoffier, the *chef de cuisine* known for his elevated, original dishes. The result was a hotel and restaurant like no one had ever experienced, run in often mysterious and always extravagant ways--which created quite a scandal once exposed.

Barr deftly re-creates the thrilling Belle Epoque era just before World War I, when British aristocracy was at its peak, women began dining out unaccompanied by men, and American nouveaux riches and gauche industrialists convened in London to show off their wealth. In their collaboration at the still celebrated Savoy Hotel, where they welcomed loyal and sometimes salacious clients, such as Oscar Wilde and Sarah Bernhardt, Escoffier created the modern kitchen brigade and codified French cuisine for the ages in his seminal *Le Guide culinaire*, which remains in print today, and Ritz, whose name continues to grace the finest hotels across the world, created the world's first luxury hotel. The pair also ruffled more than a few feathers in the process. Fine dining would never be the same--or more intriguing.

## Ritz and Escoffier: The Hotelier, The Chef, and the Rise of the Leisure Class Details

Date : Published April 3rd 2018 by Clarkson Potter

ISBN :

Author : Luke Barr

Format : Kindle Edition 290 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, History, Biography, Food and Drink, Food, Cultural, France

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# **From Reader Review Ritz and Escoffier: The Hotelier, The Chef, and the Rise of the Leisure Class for online ebook**

## **Dianne Everson says**

I enjoyed this book, but it is not for everyone.

The history is interesting, but Escoffier's menus were a little tedious after the second multi course one.

It would make a fun movie, with the "ritzy" hotels and period costumes.

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## **Linda says**

Hotelier Cesar Ritz and chef Auguste Escoffier transform the Savoy in London and later open the Ritz hotel. Their story is quite interesting as it exposes the prejudices and the rise of the leisure class.

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## **Deidre says**

A captivating and well-researched slice of Gilded Age life. Ritz and Escoffier are legends in the worlds of service, luxury, and style. The book captures the moment that the Savoy hotel became the place to be seen by London's elite. The details on Escoffier's famed elaborate menus, gossip at the time, and the tidal shift in wealth made this a fascinating read.

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## **SundayAtDusk says**

This book provides an interesting look at the lives of hotelier César Ritz and chef Auguste Escoffier. Both left "the continent" to tackle the jobs of establishing a grand hotel with a grand restaurant in London. At that time in England, fine entertainment was usually done only in private homes and gentlemen's clubs, which of course excluded a lot of people. Also, it was debatable if the food served during such exclusive gathering could even qualify as "fine dining". The British were not seen as being very adventurous with their cooking by others in Europe, particularly those in France.

Messieurs Ritz and Escoffier would go on to change the hotel and dining worlds in England, opening the doors for the acceptable presence of the nouveau riche, Americans, Jews, women unescorted by men, etc. César Ritz was also involved at the same time in other hotels throughout Europe. What he accomplished in a 24-hour day was astounding, but all that never-ending work had a steep price. While I did not find this book by Luke Barr fascinating, it was still interesting enough to keep me reading to the end, and now I know all that was behind the 1920s slang term "to put on the Ritz".

(Note: I received a free ARC of this book from Amazon Vine.)

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## **Margaret Sankey says**

Have I mentioned lately how much I miss teaching the World of Food class? Before Ritz and Escoffier, "hotels" were either the house of someone from whom you could wrangle an invitation, or a crummy inn where you might sleep with strangers and bedbugs, or maybe an exclusive spa that refused to admit nouveau riche Americans or Jews. Cesar Ritz and Auguste Escoffier has begun their quiet revolution in hotels in Switzerland and along the holiday coast of France, but their paths crossed at the whim of Richard D'Oyly Carte in his new London Savoy hotel. D'Oyly Carte might know musical theater, but had no sense of the hospitality industry--giving Ritz and Escoffier the chance to institute the modernized kitchen brigade system, teach guests how to use flush toilets, put unaccompanied elite women in the dining room (in full view!) and invent the gentle art of celebrity management (Sarah Bernhardt has taken too much chloral in Room 473!).

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## **Lauren Albert says**

This gives a very good sense of what it was like then for people with money and/or fame. He shows how Ritz stage managed a change from a world where women did not eat in restaurants to a world where anyone who could afford to ate in restaurants. And perhaps most significantly, a world where hotel rooms did not have bathrooms to a world where they did. ?

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## **Resh (The Book Satchel) says**

I loved this book!! If you have a thing for glitz and glam and luxury living, this book is for you. I love how Barr writes! He does not make the narrative boring anywhere along the whole book. While I was aware of Ritz because of the chain of hotels, I had no idea of Escoffier, his friend and chef, who was instrumental in his growth.

That's what the book is all about. What a pair Ritz and Escoffier are! Their stint at Savoy hotel and their decision to start out on their own. There are scandals, literary figures and political figures in guest appearances, the development of 'luxury' for the rich and so on. Not to forget the fine food descriptions and recipes that Escoffier develops. Drool worthy!! The writing was fun, amusing and engaging. By the end I wished there was more of a deep character study of Ritz and Escoffier but I also realised I didn't mind it not being there because the book was so good. It was a wonderful and entertaining read.

*Disclaimer : Much thanks to Crown Publishing for a copy of the novel. All opinions are my own.*

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## **LAPL Reads says**

There is something wonderfully gossipy about Ritz & Escoffier: the hotelier, the chef, and the rise of the leisure class. In tracing the rise of the luxurious Savoy Hotel, under the leadership of César Ritz and Auguste

Escoffier, Luke Barr grants readers a glimpse into some of the biggest scandals of the Belle Époque, letting us get up close and personal with the celebrities involved. Barr also provides luscious descriptions of extravagant parties held at the hotel. These parties are filled with glitterati living the highlife. But they are also rife with consequences for the people working to make them happen. Take for example, the time that the Duc D'Orleans and the Prince of Wales (who hated each other) both wanted extravagant royal parties held at the Savoy on the same night. Ritz didn't have the space! Unless he could retrofit a basement at the last minute and turn it from a damp, hot, unused billiard room, into a space fit for a royal wedding reception, while Escoffier produced not one, but two, different epic banquets. What follows is full of drama, fancy dresses, and luscious desserts.

As figures who rocked the world stage at the turn of the century show up at the Savoy you, gentle reader, get to find out if Oscar Wilde was a good tipper. Will Gilbert and Sullivan ever mend their relationship and get back to making opera? Is Sarah Bernhardt okay? This book gives you a slice-of-life view of these celebrated people, through the humanizing lens of Ritz and Escoffier's lives. And Ritz and Escoffier, for all the drama surrounding them, move through their lives dedicated to their crafts. They do things that no one else ever had, maybe that no one else ever could.

John Rogers, a writer on the television show *Leverage*, calls the thrill of "watching smart people tackle tasks with freaky aptitude," competency porn. Beyond the gossip and the history, Ritz and Escoffier: the hotelier, the chef, and the rise of the leisure class is excellent competency porn. Both Ritz and Escoffier were masters of their art, and reading about how they performed for the great, the good, and the nouveau riche is deeply satisfying.

Reviewed by Andrea Borchert, Librarian, Science, Technology & Patents Department

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## **Ronald Koltnow says**

What does one think of when one hears the name Ritz? Cesar Ritz, the man behind the concept of ritzy, was a simple man, uneducated and insecure. He thought he had peasant hands. Yet, he knew the hotel business. When approached by the owners of the Savoy Hotel in London, Ritz took charge and modernized the concept of hotels and service forever. Ritz's first act was to install Auguste Escoffier as the hotel's chef. Escoffier, with his theory of brigade de cuisine, revolutionized the preparation of food and the philosophy of service. He fought to have cooks recognized as professionals. This is a compelling adventure story, as Ritz and Escoffier battle tight-fisted directors, old-world attitudes, and the sheer physical challenge of serving hundreds of fastidious diners at private parties and at evening service. This is a rarefied world of princes, lords, ladies, and the occasional courtesan. Ritz changed the social order by appealing to Jews and the nouveau riches (those who earned money). This slim narrative has color, excitement, history, and even financial scandal. Names are dropped, especially the Prince of Wales (soon to be King Edward VII), tons of truffles are eaten, and champagne flows throughout. This book may be about snobs but it is not for snobs. A delight!

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## **Janet says**

From the Publisher - In early August 1889, Cesar Ritz, a Swiss hotelier highly regarded for his exquisite taste, found himself at the Savoy Hotel in London. He had come at the request of Richard D'Oyly Carte, the

financier of Gilbert & Sullivan's comic operas, who had modernized theater and was now looking to create the world's best hotel. D'Oyly Carte soon seduced Ritz to move to London with his team, which included Auguste Escoffier, the chef de cuisine known for his elevated, original dishes. The result was a hotel and restaurant like no one had ever experienced, run in often mysterious and always extravagant ways--which created quite a scandal once exposed. arr deftly re-creates the thrilling Belle Epoque era just before World War I, when British aristocracy was at its peak, women began dining out unaccompanied by men, and American nouveaux riches and gauche industrialists convened in London to show off their wealth. In their collaboration at the still celebrated Savoy Hotel, where they welcomed loyal and sometimes salacious clients, such as Oscar Wilde and Sarah Bernhardt, Escoffier created the modern kitchen brigade and codified French cuisine for the ages in his seminal *Le Guide culinaire*, which remains in print today, and Ritz, whose name continues to grace the finest hotels across the world, created the world's first luxury hotel. The pair also ruffled more than a few feathers in the process. Fine dining would never be the same--or more intriguing.

Abit of history (from me)

We all have heard of Ritz but few have heard of Escoffier unless you have read about or studied hotel and restaurant history. At the end of the Victorian era, snobbery was beginning to peak, although it would not really be over until the end of the Edwardian era. Caught up in this snobbery were the nouveau-riche and their "dollar duchesses", women (such as Consuelo Vanderbilt) who were married off to cash-poor gentry with titles. The nouveau-riche liked to show off their wealth and where better but a hotel and its famed restaurant where women could (gassssp) eat alone in full view? (We can also blame Escoffier for the kitchen brigade and despotism that led to tyrant chefs such as Gordan Ramsey.. thanks for that...not!)

If you love social history and anything travel and food-related you will love this book. Deftly and highly entertainingly written you will be caught up in the founding of what we take for granted today whether we are camping out at Motel 6 or ensconced in the presidential suite at the Savoy in present-day London. I am still laughing at the thought of having to teach these snobs how to flush a toilet that (gasp) was **IN THEIR ROOM** vs. a w.c. down the hall or using a water closet. [fun fact - my husband's grandfather refused to have an indoor bathroom as late as the 1930s ... he thought that was the most disgusting thing on the planet.

This is a great book for any reader of history, traveler, or foodie --- it is certainly being purchased by me and placed on my bookshelf once published..

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### **Theresa Connors says**

Well researched but the writing was meh. It didn't draw me in.

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### **Elease says**

This was pretty good, but I was left kind of sad at the end. I also felt like there was something missing...I don't know. The main focus is on Ritz, but we learn very little about his early life; he sort of just materializes as someone who is already fairly well established in the hotel industry. And Escoffier plays second fiddle a bit for the first part of the book. I feel like I learned even less about his back story (oh, and his poor wife...whatever happened to her?!).

Also, I wish I had not listened to in on audio, because the lists of who attended what dinners and what was on the menu did get tedious to listen to. I certainly would have skimmed right past these in a physical book.

All that said, a nice romp through late 19th century high class Europe and an easy enough summer read.

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## **Marks54 says**

Luke Barr, who has written before on high profile chefs, provides a dual biography of Cesar Ritz and August Eschffier, the hotelier and chef who together invented 20th century models for the luxury hotel with the world class restaurant attached to it and serving the most prestigious customers in the world. The book chronicles the rise of the duo from early successes in Europe to their breakout at the Savoy Hotel in London to their move back to Paris to found the Ritz Hotel to their subsequent expansions after 1900. Eventually the world changes (WW1) and time catches up with the pair. Their influence is still around both directly (Ritz-Carlton Hotels; Ritz Crackers) and indirectly (the Home Alone movies; Eloise at the Plaza; even the hotel environment in “A Gentleman in Moscow”). We take the combination of world class hotels and top flight dining as a given and yet Barr shows this is a fairly recent development dating from the last decades of the 19th century.

What did I like about the book? The story about restaurants and hotels is a good one, but it cannot be the key. It cannot just be about the food, especially what we now know and what the scolds never tire of repeating about the health benefits of gourmet eating. Living well took its toll on many of the principals in this book. Mr. Barr provides lots of interesting detail into how all the different aspects of this complex product had to fit together for the overall result to be successful. This took to powerful integrating eye of Cesar Ritz to balance the impossible set of variables that were of potential interest for discerning and wealthy customers. A good example of this is the discussion of how Ritz decided on the lighting schemes for his Ritz Hotel before it opened in Paris.

The product is indeed a fascinating one, and Mr. Barr’s book provides a lot of nifty detail about how the business works and how Ritz made his choices. Imagine how difficult of a business this must be, given the variety of different customers, the wide range of possible offerings, and the cutthroat competition in which an establishment would get one chance to captivate a customer and would lose them forever if the customer was not enthralled.

Having said that, there was not enough said about the broader business model, including the financing, pricing, and broader supply chain. In a business where key ingredients are sourced globally and stakeholders are numerous and complexly intertwined, how does the business model generate profits for those who are good at it? This is far from obvious. I know that the world of financing and social media and suppliers has moved on to more modern conditions, the basic problem persists. How does one create, price, and sustain an adventure catering to those who literally have money to burn? Mr. Barr provides tantalizing hints of this world in his discussion of the situations that forced Ritz and Escoffier to leave the Savoy and go to Paris. They are only tasty tidbits, however, and more discussion of this would have helped the book. It is no doubt true that personal relationships dominate this sort of business, but the numbers involved in these businesses are no doubt staggering and telling the interpersonal narratives does not get to the heart of how this sort of business worked then or works today.

Having said that, I will note that there are few if any books about high end restaurants that are really satisfying and Mr. Barr’s book is one of the better ones currently on offer.



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## **Judy Lesley says**

I received an ARC of this book through the Amazon Vine program.

Cesar Ritz was already on his way to making a name for himself before Richard D'Oyly Carte convinced him to come to London for a short stay to help get the new Savoy Hotel on its feet. Ritz brought along Auguste Escoffier to take care of the food side of the service. Both men remained much longer than they had expected to and were instrumental in changing the old rules of accommodation and dining for their wealthy patrons. The juggling act of including new money patrons with the aristocratic customers was deftly handled by Ritz. Escoffier began to educate the palates of Englishmen who were more inclined to entertain at home. During these late years in the reign of Queen Victoria the social climate was changing as more and more money was being made through trade, not inheritance. D'Oyly Carte was content to allow Ritz and Escoffier to run the Savoy as they saw fit until the profits began to disappear. Through a combination of bad management and conducting business as it had always been done the men were on a collision course with disaster.

Ritz and Escoffier worked so well together they established the standards for luxury and indulgence in hotels throughout Europe. This book is a look at what went wrong at the Savoy after everything had gone so right. From there Ritz and Escoffier continued to run hotels only now as owners or partners. Their willingness to use modern technology, such as 24 hour electricity throughout the hotel and elevators which worked round the clock, made their properties the destination of choice by those who could afford to stay there.

This book gives readers a look at an important age of social change. Ritz was such a forward thinker he didn't hesitate to break down the old rules of who would be allowed access to the finest luxuries in lodging and food. His efforts were directly responsible for women dining in a public place when unaccompanied by a man. It seems that Ritz was constantly working to loosen the strictures of society in order to make his hotels more financially successful but also to give genuine pleasure and comfort to patrons. Escoffier changed the entire atmosphere of the kitchen and provided an example of how a kitchen could be run to remove the turmoil which had been known to rule there. These are food service standards which are still practiced today. Both men had a proven impact on how the two industries they represented were changing with the times. The hotel and food service industries would never be the same. The information is available in an easy to read narrative but I have to admit to finding the book easy to put down. This book might be of more interest to readers with a special interest in the food and lodging industries.

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## **Sarah Wolfe says**

Enjoyable and engaging overview of Ritz' and Escoffier's career(s). Set well in the context of history.

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