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## See Mackinac Island Grand Hotel suites, decor in designer's new book

[Emma Keith](#), Detroit Free Press Published 11:12 a.m. ET July 18, 2019 | Updated 12:02 p.m. ET July 18, 2019



Grand Hotel's Jane Seymour suite, photographed for hotel designer Carleton Varney's book "Rooms to Remember" (Photo: Michel Arnaud)

Anyone who's visited Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island remembers the magic of the legendary lodging: the 660-foot porch, the rich landscaping and flowers, the hospitality and the unparalleled views of the Straits.

According to renowned interior designer Carleton Varney, "not having seen the Grand is not living."

Varney should know — the historic hotel has been part of his life for more than 40 years, and he rediscovers its magic in his new book, "Rooms to Remember."

"The Grand has the thing that other hotels do not have: It has a thing called glamour, and glamour is gone. (There's) very little glamour in this world," Varney said. "The Grand still offers that, and that is why so many people want to go there, because they want to have one thing: A touch of glamour."

Varney says the Grand certainly wasn't glamorous before he got there — it looked like any other hotel.

The president of Dorothy Draper & Co. and the Grand's interior designer since 1976, Varney crafted the hotel's 397 rooms — including 43 named suites that honor historical and political figures from Gloria Vanderbilt to Napoleon Bonaparte.

His latest book honors his journey with the hotel, walking readers through 222 pages of Grand Hotel suite and design evolution.

Now 82, Varney has worked on projects from the vice president's official residence in Washington, D.C., to hotel decor in Ireland, the Virgin Islands, and Japan. His designs, catering to politicians and Hollywood stars alike, have been in demand for decades.

He's served as an interior designer to everyone from Judy Garland to Laurance Rockefeller, so it's no surprise that the creator of Grand Hotel's First Lady Suites actually knew the first ladies for whom the suites are named.

The Grand's seven ornate First Lady Suites honor women from Jacqueline Kennedy to Laura Bush. Varney worked with each to perfect the suites' character, matching each first lady's room to the personality and color he associated with her— rosy peach for Georgia peach Rosalynn Carter, brilliant red for Nancy Reagan's signature color, soft blue for Texas lady Barbara Bush.



Grand Hotel's Nancy Reagan suite, photographed for hotel designer Carleton Varney's book "Rooms to Remember." Varney knew Reagan and worked with her to design the suite named and decorated in her honor. (Photo: Michel Arnaud)

"In each of those first ladies, there was a color, as there is in every human being in this world," Varney said. "Good decorating is about using color in appropriate ways. I think that rooms should look finished before any furniture goes in — the carpets, the rugs, the curtains, etcetera."



Grand Hotel's Laura Bush suite, photographed for hotel designer Carleton Varney's book "Rooms to Remember." Varney knew Bush, and worked with her to design the suite named and decorated in her honor. (Photo: Michel Arnaud)

Varney's new book offers a tour of his vibrant, distinctive hotel interior design, which defines spaces from the Lilac Suite — adorned with lilac murals and purple accents — to the "Somewhere in Time Suite," honoring the 1980 sci-fi romance starring Christopher Reeve and Jane Seymour and filmed at the Grand Hotel.

Nothing about the suites' decor is subtle. The wallpaper, carpets, curtains, bedding — they all reflect Varney's favorite design element: color.

"I believe in color and patterns ... I am not a minimalist, I'm a maximalist," Varney said. "And people don't understand that a maximalist is a person who likes to look at pretty things."

Varney has written 35 other books — including two novels — that focus on his design experience and work, but none extensively highlight his 40 years of work with Grand Hotel like "Rooms to Remember."

The Grand Hotel, a 132-year-old Michigan landmark that's [hosted guests](#) from Mark Twain to Robert De Niro, has been owned by generations of Musser family members. In 1976, before the Mussers officially bought the hotel, then-hotel president R.D. Musser overhauled the Grand's design and enlisted Varney to handle the decor.

In all his Grand Hotel designs, Varney has gotten to reflect a hotel he sees as uniquely American and uniquely glamorous. He's pulled from American history and culture to create a regal atmosphere he believes stands out.

"At the Grand, where every room is very special, guests have the opportunity to walk into a hotel that is not oatmeal," Varney said. "Many hotels, they do a scheme, two schemes, and every other room is a different scheme. They're all either beige or gray. But the Grand Hotel offers you the experience of a beautiful statehouse ... it's a magical place."

Varney's "Rooms to Remember" is [\\$65 at Barnes & Noble](#).



Grand Hotel's Lady Astor suite, photographed for hotel designer Carleton Varney's book "Rooms to Remember." (Photo: Michel Arnaud)



Grand Hotel's "Somewhere in Time" suite, photographed for hotel designer Carleton Varney's book "Rooms to Remember." The "Somewhere in Time" suite honors the 1980 movie of the same name, which is set at the hotel and stars Christopher Reeve and Jane Seymour. (Photo: Michel Arnaud)



The seating area of the Milliken suite, photographed for hotel designer Carleton Varney's book "Rooms to Remember." (Photo: Michel Arnaud)



The seating area of the Grand Hotel's Carleton Varney suite, photographed for Varney's new book "Rooms to Remember." Varney, a renowned interior designer, has designed for the hotel for more than 40 years. (Photo: Michel Arnaud)



One of the Grand Hotel's Cupola suites, photographed for hotel designer Carleton Varney's 2019 book "Rooms to Remember" (Photo: Michel Arnaud)