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Currents | Suzanne Slesin

Reclaiming Past Glory Of a Legend

In 1902, when the Algonquin Hotel opened at 59 West 44th Street in Manhattan, it was thought to be the most modern home away from home in the world. Two elevators, telephones in every suite, modern plumbing and comfortably heated rooms were some of its luxuries.

It was only after World War I, with the legendary Round Table lunches in the Rose Room, that the hotel garnered the reputation that remains part of its aura today. Unfortunately, the decorating did not keep pace with the wit, and the Algonquin has seemed rather sleepy for half a century.

Now owned by the Aoki Corporation of Japan, the Algonquin is in the throes of a sweeping renovation. "We're trying to redo the place to make it look just as it used



to," said John Ciardullo of John Ciardullo Associates, a New York architectural firm. But he admitted, "I'm a modernist so I didn't know the period." Mr. Ciardullo called in Laura Gottwald, a New York designer, to provide the proper Victorian atmosphere.

The redecoration of the model room, above, and bathroom — all 170 of the hotel's rooms are to be completed by

June 1991 — included refinishing the wood trim and doors, restoring the sliding mahogany doors wherever possible and adding turn-of-the-century style wallpaper, pillows, fabrics and draperies.

Prospective guests might also be pleased to know that an up-to-the-minute telephone system and air-conditioning are among the un-Victorian amenities planned.