

# Restaurant Ware Collectors Network®

## Iconic Establishments

A series of articles about the china used by venues ranging from hotels and restaurants to burger joints and hospitals

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### Time-Life Building, continued HEMISPHERE CLUB / TOWER SUITE 4 November 2019

Business executives occupied the 48-story Time-Life Building and other nearby office towers during normal business hours, but returned home at night. One way to make a club dining room profitable, when club members were not using it, was to open it to the general public. This is what was done with the Rainbow Room, in the RCA Building, which served as the private Luncheon Club during the day. The answer for the Time-Life Building was to have 48th floor serve as the members-only Hemisphere Club during the day, and become the Tower Suite public dining room at night.

Restaurant Associates, the operator, selected George Nelson & Company to design this dining space. At that time, it was the city's highest restaurant (space wise, not price wise). George Nelson designed everything in this restaurant from the logo, to the china, glassware, and silverware.

When it opened in late 1960, the Hemisphere Club charged a thousand-dollar initiation fee and then \$360 per year in dues. Food and drinks were additional.

When the executives went home, the lights were dimmed and the space was transformed into the Tower Suite restaurant. There was no printed menu. Customers picked one main course from a rolling cart that contained three different selections each evening. Craig Claiborne, the New York Times food writer, stated in 1961, "This is a restaurant for those with leisure. Because there is a sequence of six courses, the time required for dining is a minimum of two hours and it has, on occasion, stretched to three. The public does not order the menu at the Tower Suite: The food is presented to the guests. The cost of a complete meal is \$8.50".

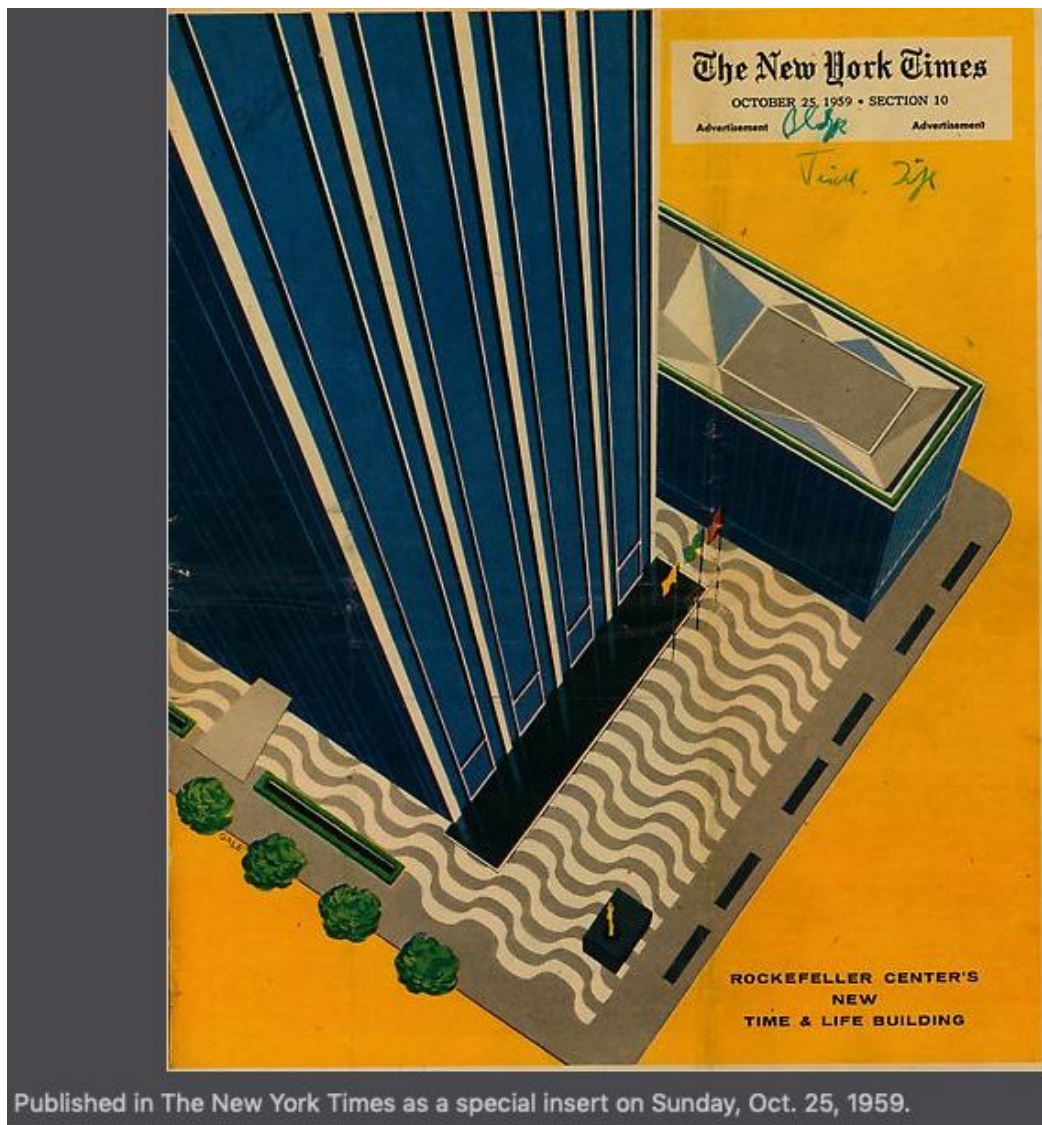
George Nelson designed an uncluttered space where the view was the focal point. Red and yellow was used for the seats, while the tables were covered with white cloths. The china has a very subtle pattern which appears in one close up view to be a series of tapered lines that descend into the verge. This pattern may not be backstamped for the club, or restaurant, as none has turned up in online searches. This far, the maker is unknown. The napkin rings appear in some photos with the Hemisphere Club logo. It may be that in the evening, these were replaced by napkin rings with the Tower Suite logo, thereby transforming the tabletop decoration from one use to the other by just switching the napkin rings. The Hemisphere Club closed sometime after 1991.

Magazine publisher Time-Life occupied 21 floors when the building opened. The executive dining room, designed by William Tabler, was on the 47th, just below the Hemisphere Club, and probably used the same kitchen. The cafeteria for the rest of the employees was down on the 2nd floor. So far no "Time-Life" crested china has turned up, so what was used in these two dining areas remains a mystery.

In May 2014, Time Inc announced that they would be moving out of the Time-Life Building to new quarters in lower Manhattan.

As of 2019, The Capital Grille, a chain restaurant, occupies space in the building with several private dining rooms. I could not find information on which floor, but no mention was made of the view, so I suspect it is not far above the street level. The Capital Grille china is not crested.

Information sources included: New York Times; The Capital Grille website, <https://www.thecapitalgrille.com>; Wikipedia; eBay.com; WorthPoint.com; AOL image search; Google image search.



Cover: 1959 New York Times special insert.

## Hemisphere Club and Tower Suite Restaurant, Time-Life Building, New York



The name and purpose of the 48<sup>th</sup> floor of the Time-Life Building changed from day to night. During the day, it was the Hemisphere Club, solely reserved for business meals for the members of the club, while in the evening it became the public Tower Suite Restaurant. The most important design element to distinguish the two functions from one another was the special lighting that Gordon Chadwick designed with Martin Garon, a lighting expert from Gotham Lighting Company. Their design included dimmable light surfaces that covered the columns between the large windows, a hung ceiling of aluminum rods with integrated downlights, as well as a few light tables. The tables for the guest were grouped in a U-shape around a central kitchen block, thus covering the entire floor. The kitchen block was completely covered with green-gold textiles and a silver-green anodized aluminum grating that was supposed to evoke the impression of looking onto a garden through a fence. The whole project included the design of tables, chairs, utensils, glasses, silverware, and the logos of the two restaurants.

Hemisphere / Tower Suite information





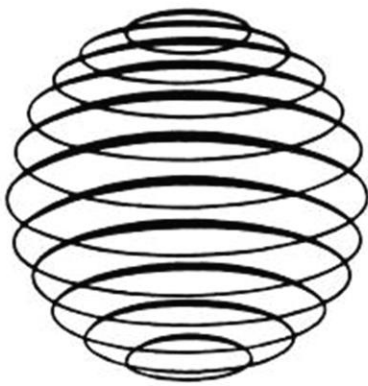
1961  
Gordon Chadwick, Tomoko Miho, et al.,  
The Restaurant, 1961

1961 view with china



Detail view of china

### The Logo



Above is the logo for The Hemisphere Club, also designed by George Nelson. Source: *American Trademark Designs: A Survey With 732 Marks, Logos, and Corporate*

Hemisphere logo



Tower Suite logo

## *Make The Capital Grille Yours.*

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Every private dining room is elegantly appointed with the warmth of mahogany, the comfort of leather and the glow of brass accents. All offer you the intimate atmosphere that makes special gatherings, well, special.

Our private dining rooms and seating capacities are:

- Mezzanine – 45
- Wine Room – 35
- Olmstead Room – 21
- Time-Life Room – 24
- Rockefeller Room – 20
- Board Room – 12
- Phillip Johnson Room – 6
- Shirley Chisholm Room – 6

Audio Visual equipment is available upon request.



The Capital Grille entrance



## Private Dining Capacities

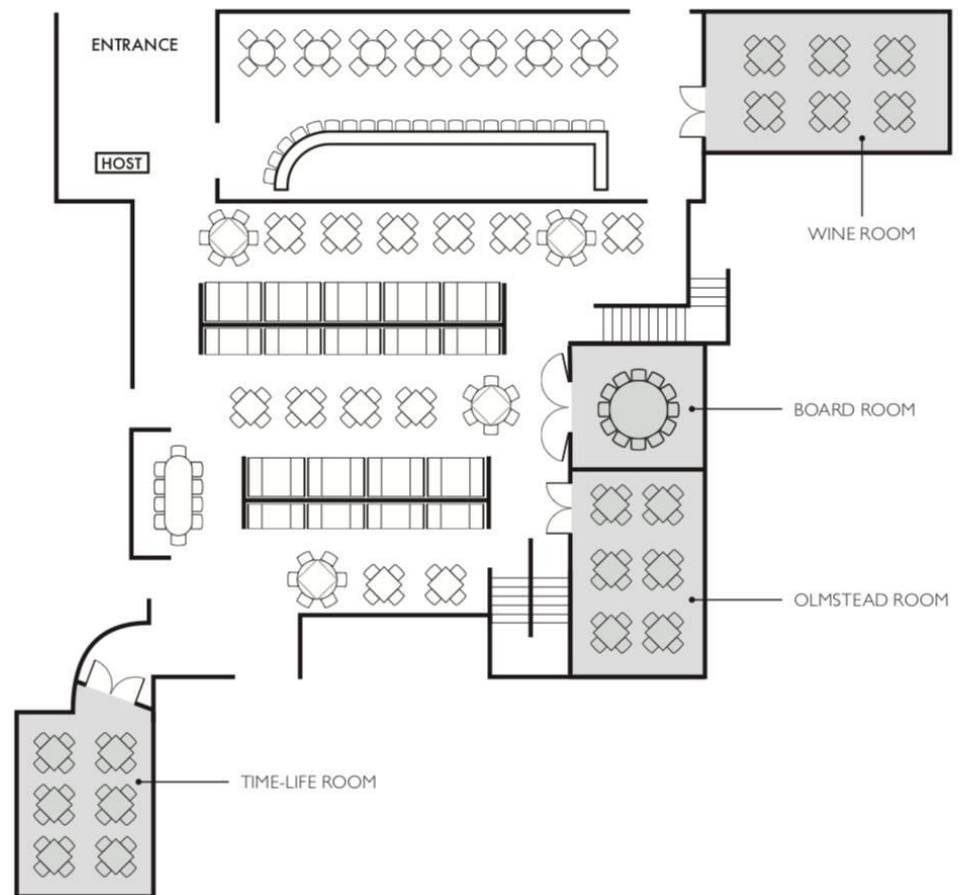


Time-Life, NYC



ROOM	GUESTS	A/V
BOARD ROOM	12	
OLMSTEAD ROOM	20	YES
PHILIP JOHNSON*	6	YES
ROCKEFELLER ROOM*	20	
SHIRLEY CHISOLM ROOM*	6	
TIME-LIFE ROOM	24	YES
WINE ROOM	35	YES

\*See additional floor plans



Layout of Capital Grille dining rooms



*The Rockefeller Room*

## Rockefeller Room



*The Olmstead Room*

## Olmstead Room





*The Time-Life Room*

Time-Life Room