



## THAT FAB FEMININE TOUCH

### The Sloane Club, London

by Lew Toulmin, Ph.D., F.R.G.S.

We stayed at the Sloane Club in Chelsea for eight nights in late August and early September 2017 while touring London and presenting a paper at and attending the annual conference of the nearby Royal Geographical Society. The club is located in the fashionable area near Sloane Square, the headquarters for the famous “Sloane Rangers” (which included Lady Diana Spencer before she married Prince Charles). These were fashionable

young women who roamed the area, armed with money, a “public school” education, self-confidence, and a love of country sports.

### HISTORY

The Sloane Club building started life as a late Victorian development in the “Pont Street Dutch” style. In World War II the building was taken over by the Service Women’s Club (devoted to female military and service officers). Later the club was re-established as the Helena Club for women, by a lady-in-waiting to Princess Marie Louise. It was re-named the Sloane Club in 1976.



### MEMBERSHIP

Full membership in the club is open to women, and since the early 1970s has also been open to men. There are about 4000 members in five categories, based on residence and planned club usage. The categories are: full, with a 20% discount on bedrooms and family and friends usage any time of year; social, for less frequent users, with a 10% discount; London resident’s membership; overseas resident’s

membership; and Chelsea resident's membership, oriented toward weekend use. Annual dues for the first four categories range from 400 to 700 pounds per year. The Chelsea category has a 250 pound joining fee and a 350 pound annual subscription.

Oddly, staff, the website, and on-line research could not supply names of past distinguished members of the club.

## **FACILITIES AND DRESS CODE**

The club has a large five-story red stone Victorian building on Lower Sloane Street in Chelsea, about 200 yards south of the Sloane Square tube station. Facilities include a dining room, bar and bar eating area, an open "roof top" (really a courtyard) lounge and



refreshment area, and several modest-sized meeting rooms. The 130 bedrooms are arranged in a trapezoidal shape around the courtyard. All facilities were updated several years ago, and all have a very feminine touch that contrasts with the usual London male club, with the typical male dark paneling and "old boy" décor. Instead, the Sloane Club has pastel colors, light blue/green walls, taupe floor carpeting, off-white ceilings and massive six-foot-high floral arrangements that give it a refreshing feminine feeling.

The club offers tours of and sometimes meals at palaces and historic houses around London and the Home Counties, and has some classes for members, e.g., "iPad for beginners." A spa is available to members and reciprocals.

The Sloane Club has over 180 reciprocal clubs around the world, a substantial number.

The dress code at dinner and lunch in the formal dining room is jacket and tie for men, and the equivalent for women. However, the formal dining room was closed from August 1 to September 3, except for breakfast, thus covering our entire stay. We ate breakfast in the dining room and meals in the bar dining area during our stay, and I never had to wear a coat or tie once! In that area and at breakfast we saw members wearing sweaters, polo shirts, a few coats and ties, and even some T-shirts! (The Horror...the Horror!) So this club has a much different policy than most London clubs.



## **FOOD**

The executive chef is Bernhard Mayer, formerly at The Savoy. The dinner menu is traditionally British, and there is an extensive wine list.

We had two dinners and eight breakfasts at the club. The continental breakfast was included in the room rate, even if we ordered hot chocolate. A cooked breakfast was seven pounds extra, but was not worth it, with small portions, rather bare dressing of the plates, and not-very-expertly cooked eggs.

Our major dinner served in the bar dining area was a Caesar salad (16 pounds, a “B+”), a Scottish eight ounce steak (26 pounds, also a “B+”), mashed potatoes and green beans (4 pounds each, also a “B+”), and an Eton mess dessert (7.50 pounds, an “A”).

Service varied from friendly to a bit brusque, and minor service mistakes were fairly frequently made, e.g. eggs not cooked to order, drinks ordered with no lemon served with lemon, etc.

Front desk service was friendly and informative.



## **BEDROOMS**

There are 130 bedrooms at the club, all air-conditioned and modernized. Our en-suite king bedroom was about 15 x 11 feet, large for London. It had an attractive tan and off-white décor, modern but small TV, included WiFi (sometimes slow), writing desk, closet, safe, and handy electrical sockets. As a reciprocal we paid only 167 pounds per night, very reasonable for London. However, we were told this was a “special school break rate.” The air-conditioning did not work well at first, but after the filter was cleaned it was very efficient. The bathroom was almost as large as the bedroom. The shower controls were hard to figure out – when will hoteliers the world over learn to clearly label their ever-more-bizarre shower creations?

Bedrooms come in five types: single en-suite; twin or double en-suite; king en-suite; king or twin en-suite plus a sitting room; and “club room” with shared bathroom.

Bedrooms are available to reciprocal members at high demand periods such as the nearby Chelsea Flower Show and the London “Silly Season.” However, these should be booked at least six months in advance, preferably sooner. Higher prices are charged during these periods; for example a 210 pound room would go for 265 during the Chelsea Flower Show.



The club has an association with a separate company which owns and rents out 18 nearby apartments, done up to the same high, modern feminine standard. These are available to reciprocal members and even to the general public. Rates start at 1500 pounds per week for a studio; one and two bedroom apartments are also available.