

by John Sedgwick

Sometimes it seems that money is wasted on the wealthy, again, if the rich life means sitting in the lap of luxury, Rich Kids author John Sedgwick would rather stand.

AH,

the Suite Life!

When the silver Lincoln Mark IV stretch limo pulled up at our apartment to take us across town to our \$5000 weekend in the Lafayette Hotel's Presidential Suite, the car blocked the street in both directions. From our bedroom window, it looked as though a Titan missile had come to call. Those things are B-I-G.

I'm a little shy about opulence, but my two-year-old daughter took to it immediately. She saw the Persian rugs stretched out across the living-room-sized back seat and immediately shed her shoes and socks, pulled out all her toys and turned the place into a portable romper room. Me, I travelled most of the way before I even tried the radio.

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When we pulled up to the hotel, a photographer was ready with klieg lights to record our entrance. Across the street, hundreds of workers were gathered at the windows of a big office building to gawk the celebrities. I could see they were having some trouble identifying us.

My daughter maintained her nonchalance. She hardly stopped for the photographer, just pranced on barefoot into the lobby, pushing her yellow-and-red plastic shopping cart before her to the elevators, trailed by tricorn hatted bellhops bearing her weekend supply of Huggies. We hurried in after her.

I had never thought of myself as Presidential timber, but Max Friedli did. He is the dapper, Swiss-born public relations director of the Lafayette. The hotel itself is quite splendid and I had said so in an article about the place in a travel magazine. So when Max wanted a journalist to sample the \$5000 weekend the hotel was preparing to offer in its Presidential Suite, Boston's largest, he figured I was his man.

He was right. I may not have sought the Presidential duties, but the Presidential lifestyle is another matter. I was only too happy to accept his weekend invitation, and all the things that came with it: ten hours of limousine service from Fifth Avenue Limousine, a champagne reception by the management, dinner in the hotel's four-star Le Marquis restaurant, an outing at Astrid and Zofia's beauty salon, a session with the hotel photographer, theater tickets, a private moonlight swim, a look-in at an opera rehearsal, a special dessert concoction by the hotel's esteemed pastry chef, and all the room service we could take.

The first date we selected for our weekend of wild abandon went by the boards because George Bush came to town unexpectedly. I told Max that mine was the *Presidential Suite*, and the Vice-President's digs were downstairs. He didn't quite see it that way, so we rescheduled.

I have a weakness for jumbo hotel

rooms, even without all the extras. But at 3200 square feet, the Lafayette's Presidential Suite is by far the largest in Boston; it's the only place in town big enough for the stars—Diahann Carroll, Dionne Warwick, Carly Simon, to name some of my predecessors—and their egos.

You need a map and a rent-a-car to get around the place. It sweeps from the master bedroom—complete with bedside exercycle and a Jacuzzi in a marbled, Roman-style bath—through a spacious anteroom, to a vast living room with a long balcony and endless picture windows framing a view of the State House and the Common; around to the dining room and connecting kitchen; then out to a smaller, adjoining suite where we stashed our daughter and her babysitter. We caught our child watching *Lost in Space* the next morning. We sympathized.

Decorated in easy-on-the eyes earth tones, with imitation Chippendale furniture, four TVs hidden inside cabinets, and a smattering of modern art, the place has a corporate feel to it. It's as though the "president" the designer had in mind was not the U.S. president, but the company president. But then it's not easy to communicate luxury simultaneously to Ronald Regan and Prince.

One of the highpoints of our stay came right at the start when our butler, Benjamin, unpacked our bags—the backpacks that my wife and daughter favor and my own Ungaro carry-on. He delicately hung up my jackets and pants, and then—was it my imagination?—paused for a moment before unzipping the section containing my underwear. I shyly reached out to stop him, but Benjamin waved me off. He folded my jockey shorts and stacked them in the drawer, laid my socks down in pairs, all of them curving inward like end-parentheses, and placed my T-shirts neatly beside them. After he left, I gazed upon his handiwork for some time. My underclothes looked like *nouvelle cuisine*.

There are, we discovered, three major activities in life at the

Presidential level: eating, drinking and looking beautiful. Of the three, I'd say I did the drinking the best. With my private limousine on duty around the clock, and the hotel footing the bill, I figured that if there was ever a good time to drink myself into sweet oblivion, this was it. My stupor was initially fueled by the three bottles of Moët and Chandon the management laid on to greet us; it roared into high gear with the bottles of Pommard and Chardonnay that accompanied our dinner at Le Marquis that first night, and was kept humming with regular dips into the ample stock of the open bar in our room.

My drinking had a bad effect on my eating, however. Our dinner at Le Marquis ran to eleven courses—I think—I lost count. It was a degustation menu especially prepared by the chef. I did take notes as we went along, but I can't now make them out: they look like a graph of the stock market before the crash. I specifically recall some heavenly foie gras and succulent scallops marinated in a crayfish sauce passing under my nose, but more generally, I recollect a nearly endless series of exquisite tastes that exploded like fireworks inside my head.

My behavior got a little embarrassing at the end, when the chef himself, a charming young Frenchman wearing a high, fluted toque down low over his eyebrows, came to our table with a sample of his own private reserve dessert wine. With a sweeping congratulatory gesture for the heavenly repast he had prepared for us, I knocked my wineglass into his lap.

We repaired to the pool. Tipsy as we were, we could still float, and possibly the alcohol coursing through our veins even gained us a little bouyancy. There was a lifeguard on duty just in case. She let us play with a beachball despite the posted rules. My wife and I splashed about like seals, tossed the ball around, and yelped like pre-schoolers.

Thereafter, we took most of our meals in the privacy of our suite. We had our own personal waiter
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assigned to us, though, and he established himself two paces behind my wife, hands clasped behind him and his round face looming over the table like the full moon. Here was a waiter who was content to wait. I was afraid he had us under surveillance. My daughter loved it; never before had she had her milk cup refilled so promptly. But I was uncomfortable to see the man acting like a floor lamp, and I nearly asked him to pull up a chair.

Our private party Saturday evening was a smash. We had invited a bunch of literary types whom we would never be able to impress at home. They toured our quarters like Filipinos gawking at Malacanang Palace after the liberation. Whatever moral questions our writer friends may have had about the place dissolved when they spied the pastry chef's magic concoction: a chocolate cake in the shape of my latest book, *Rich Kids*, a perfect confectionary replica right down to the silver spoon that adorned its cover. "It's one thing to go into paperback," I boasted, "and another to make it into pastry." Never has my prose been so delectable.

As for personal beautification, I think I'll leave myself the way I am. Astrid, a muscley Russian emigre, started my facial off nicely as she swooped about my face with her delicious unguents, did figure-eights around my eye-sockets, and then plunged her slippery hands down my neck to mingle with my chesthairs. But then she turned murderous as she attacked what she called, in her thick accent, my "blockheads." There were cucumbers or something over my eyes so I couldn't see, or I might have died of fright. As it was, I writhed in pain on the recliner. When it was all over, my face was red and puffy, as if I'd been worked over by a prize fighter.

I resolved henceforth to take care of my beauty needs myself, and I turned to the Jacuzzi. I managed to fill the tub by myself, but it took my first lady to figure out that the impressive panel of switches and dials

by the door turned on the Mixer-master itself. She fumbled with them for a moment, then the machine roared to life—it sounded like a tugboat pulling out into Boston harbor—and planting a goodbye kiss on my forehead, she left me there.

Things went swimmingly until I spotted the sample bottle of bubble bath on the bathtub rim by my right elbow. I dumped the whole thing in, a surprising amount for such a small bottle. The thrashing waters turned eerily quiet as a white froth spread across the surface and then steadily and rapidly began to mount, building from a snowy meadow to rolling wintry hills to—uh-oh—the Swiss Alps and then on to a vertiginous mass of white that had no earthly analogue.

It occurred to me that I Love Lucy had once encountered a problem like this, but I couldn't remember how she got out of it. Bubbles were overhanging the tub edge and I didn't know how to turn the damn thing off. I yelled out to my wife, but, because of the quiet rumble, the vast distances involved and the sound-absorbing bubbles, I got no response. I lept out of the tub to the control panel, but couldn't make anything of it. I suddenly envisioned myself being returned to my apartment not by limousine but by a wave of Jacuzzi bubbles. I charged out of the bathroom, looking like the abominable snowman, to search my wife out. By some miracle, as soon as the door opened, the machine stopped dead. The world seemed wonderfully still again, the silence broken only by the pinging sound of bursting bubbles.

At the end, we had a little trouble persuading our daughter it was time to leave. "But I don't want to go home," she said, over and over. We laughed that off, and just carted her out to the limo. But once we got home, she seemed to regard our place as a bit of a comedown—a little cramped, with poor service—and for days afterward, when she woke up in the morning, she didn't ask where Mommy was, or Daddy, but "Where's Max?" She'd been returning to the Presidential Suite in her dreams. So have we. ■

SHOPPERS GUIDE

Pg. 17 Ralph Lauren's Roughwear Line: Long sleeve workshirt, \$59; turtle-neck sweater, \$140; coast pant, \$65; silk scarf, \$55; pink Yarmouth sneaker, \$37. Ralph Lauren's men's coral knit shirt, \$39.50; button-down shirt, \$67.50; sweater, \$97.50; twill jacket, \$72.50; pleated pant, \$55. Polo Shop Ralph Lauren (Boston—Copley Place, Connecticut—West Farms, Stanford) **Pg. 18** Oxford button-down, \$42.50; knit shirt, \$39.50; sweater, \$99; pleated pant, \$55. Ralph Lauren's Activewear: Camp shirt, \$65; racquet skirt, \$88; mesh shirt, \$39; vest, \$159; cotton scarf, \$32; navy Yarmouth sneaker, \$37; Polo Shop Ralph Lauren (Boston—Copley Place, Connecticut—West Farms, Stanford) **Pg. 19** Ralph Lauren's Classic Line: Silk shirt, \$110; angora cardigan, \$129; silk wicket skirt, \$139; crocodile shoes, \$395; lace stockings, \$35. Men's button-down oxford, \$42.50; doe skin blazer, \$420; pin-striped cotton pant, \$95; silk tie, \$37.50; crocodile belt, \$192; crocodile moccasins, \$585; cashmere and wool socks, \$16. Polo Shop Ralph Lauren (Boston—Copley Place, Connecticut—West Farms, Stanford) **Pg. 20** Terry cloth robe, \$130; bathing suit, \$54; men's jama, \$36. Polo Shop Ralph Lauren (Boston—Copley Place, Connecticut—West Farms, Stanford) **Pg. 21** Ralph Lauren's cable-knit cardigan, \$99; Jamaica skirt, \$119; Panama blouse, \$89; crocodile belt with silver tip, \$525; silk scarf from Ralph Lauren scarves, \$20. Polo Shop Ralph Lauren (Boston—Copley Place, Connecticut—West Farms, Stanford) **Pg. 32** Silk chiffon croissant ensemble, \$1100. (Contact Janet Sandler, Boston 244-0966) **Pg. 34** Silk Venetian blind cocktail dress, \$485. (Contact Janet Sandler, Boston 244-0966) **Pg. 35** Silk charmeuse slip dress, \$810. (Contact Janet Sandler, Boston 244-0966) **Pg. 36** Blue-black silk Faux Moire dress, \$1000. (Contact Janet Sandler, Boston 244-0966) **Pg. 37** Silk spider dress, \$750. (Contact Janet Sandler, Boston 244-0966) **Pg. 49** Marithe Francois Girbaud mock turtle-neck shirt, \$50; Girbaud stretch trousers with braces, \$60. Cignal (Boston—Copley Place, Marketplace Center, Connecticut—Danbury Fair) **Pg. 50** Full length evening duster by Willi Smith Willi Wear, \$135; formal trousers, \$65; rayon shirt by Le Garage, \$100. Cignal (Boston—Copley Place, Marketplace Center, Connecticut—Danbury Fair) **Pg. 51** Norma Kamali three-quarter length jersey dress, \$90; Norma Kamali cotton turtle-neck, \$60; Norma Kamali peddlepushers, \$50. Cignal (Boston—Copley Place, Marketplace Center, Connecticut—Danbury Fair) **Pg. 52** Prima Maglia nappa suede blouse, \$300; Prima Maglia full length suede skirt, \$290. Cignal (Boston—Copley Place, Marketplace Center, Connecticut—Danbury Fair) **Pg. 53** Shang Hai double-breasted sport jacket, \$130; Shang Hai pleated trousers, \$85; Cignal linen shirt, \$44. Cignal (Boston—Copley Place, Marketplace Center, Connecticut—Danbury Fair) **Pg. 59** Michael Hoban's button-fly jeans, \$250; leather flap jacket, \$400. North Beach Leather (Boston—Copley Place) **Pg. 60** Lambskin leather scooter dress by Hoban, \$495. North Beach Leather (Boston—Copley Place) **Pg. 61** Michael Hoban's fashion blazer, \$450; pleated trouser, \$250. North Beach Leather (Boston—Copley Place) **Pg. 62** Leather bustier top with laced back, \$150; leather fan-tail skirt by Michael Hoban, \$300. North Beach Leather (Boston—Copley Place) **Pg. 63** Michael Hoban's strapless leather dress, \$325. North Beach Leather (Boston—Copley Place)