



THE CODES LIBRARY

# The Dictionary of Luxury

*A reference of the words, codes and gestures of the private world*

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THE PRIVATE CONCIERGE ACADEMY

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# How to use this dictionary

The private world has a language of its own. The words you choose, and the ones you avoid, signal instantly whether you belong. This dictionary is your reference for that language.

Each entry gives the term, its domain, a clear definition, and, where useful, a note on how a professional actually uses it. Read it through once to build your ear. Then return to it whenever a word, a code or a gesture is unfamiliar. Over time this vocabulary will stop being something you consult, and become simply how you think and speak.

This is a living reference. It will grow with new editions, and with the terms you meet in your own work. Keep it close.

## One discipline above all

Never bluff a reference. If a name, a house or a vintage is unfamiliar to you, ask, or stay silent and verify later. A confident error is detected instantly in this world, and it is remembered far longer than an honest question.

## À

### À la carte

#### DINING

Ordering individual dishes chosen separately from a menu, each priced on its own, rather than a fixed multi course menu. The opposite of a set menu.

*The mark of a confident host is knowing when a curated tasting menu honours the chef more than an à la carte selection.*

### Amuse-bouche

#### GASTRONOMY

A single, bite sized morsel served before the meal, chosen by the chef rather than the guest. Literally amuses the mouth. A gesture of welcome, never charged for.

*Never call it a starter. The amuse-bouche is the chef's handshake, and acknowledging it graciously flatters the kitchen.*

### Aperitif

#### ART DE VIVRE

A drink taken before a meal to open the appetite, traditionally light and dry: Champagne, a dry sherry, a light vermouth, or a Kir. From the Latin for to open.

*Offer the aperitif the moment a guest is seated, before menus. It signals the evening has begun and buys the kitchen time.*

### Atelier

#### FASHION & CRAFT

A workshop or studio where a couturier, jeweller, or artisan creates by hand. In fashion, it distinguishes true made to measure craft from ready to wear production.

*To say a piece came from the atelier is to say it was made by hand, for one person. It is the language of the bespoke.*

# B

## Background check

### SERVICE

The verification of a candidate's identity, history, references and, often, finances before entry into a private household. Standard, thorough, and never negotiable.

*Expect it, prepare for it, and never be surprised by it. A clean, coherent history is itself a qualification in this world.*

## Bespoke

### FASHION & SERVICE

Made entirely to individual specification, from scratch, for one client. Originally from tailoring, where cloth was spoken for. Stronger than made to measure, which adjusts an existing pattern.

*Reserve the word for what is truly built from nothing. Misusing bespoke for merely personalised marks the speaker as an outsider.*

## Black book

### SERVICE

The private register of trusted contacts a professional builds over years: the florist who answers at midnight, the villa agent, the chauffeur, the doctor. Personal, confidential, and never lent.

*Your black book is built one favour at a time, and it is the quiet reason a principal keeps you. Guard it as you would a confidence.*

## Black tie

### DRESS CODES

An evening dress code requiring a dinner jacket (tuxedo) with a black bow tie for men, and a formal gown or elegant cocktail dress for women. Less formal than white tie.

*If an invitation says black tie, a business suit is a quiet failure. Knowing the codes lets you guide a principal without ever correcting them.*

## Bottle service

### HOSPITALITY

In a private club or high end venue, the purchase of a full bottle of spirits or Champagne served at a reserved table with dedicated staff, mixers, and presentation.

## Boutique hotel

### HOSPITALITY

A small, intimate, design led hotel, typically under a hundred rooms, prized for individuality and personal service over the uniformity of large chains.

*For a principal who values privacy and character, a well chosen boutique hotel often pleases more than the grandest palace property.*

## Butler

### SERVICE

The senior male servant of a household, traditionally responsible for the dining room, the wine cellar, the pantry, and often the supervision of other staff. Today, a symbol of the highest personal service.

*The finest butlers are defined by anticipation and discretion, not formality. Presence without intrusion is the whole art.*

# C

## Cabana

### HOSPITALITY

A private, shaded structure beside a pool or beach at a luxury resort, reserved for the day, offering seclusion, dedicated service, and comfort away from the crowd.

## Cellar (wine)

### GASTRONOMY

A collection of wines held and aged under controlled conditions, and the room itself. A serious cellar signals both means and genuine connoisseurship.

*Knowing how to speak of a cellar, its depth, its balance, its readiness, lets you converse credibly with a principal who collects.*

## Chauffeur

### SERVICE

A professional private driver, distinguished from a taxi driver by discretion, presentation, knowledge of the principal's preferences, and seamless anticipation of the day's movements.

*A great chauffeur manages far more than the car: timing, privacy, the door held at the precise moment, the route chosen to avoid delay and attention.*

## Chief of staff (private)

### SERVICE

The most senior figure in a large private household or family office: strategy, staff, properties, budgets, and the principal's entire operation. The summit of a private-service career.

*This is a destination, not an entry point. It is reached through years of proven trust, and never through a certificate.*

## Concierge

### SERVICE

The professional who arranges, obtains, and solves on behalf of a guest or principal: reservations, access, logistics, the impossible request. From the French, once the keeper of a household.

*The concierge's true currency is the network and the reputation that opens doors. What cannot be bought can often still be arranged.*

## Concours d'élégance

### ART DE VIVRE

A prestigious event judging the beauty, rarity, and condition of classic and collector automobiles. A fixture of the collector and connoisseur calendar.

## Couture

### FASHION

Short for haute couture, the creation of exclusive, made to order garments by hand, to the highest standard. In France, a legally protected term with strict criteria.

*Not every expensive dress is couture. The word denotes hand craft and exclusivity, not merely a high price.*

## Cru

### GASTRONOMY

In wine, a vineyard or estate of recognised quality, and the wine from it. Grand cru and premier cru denote the highest official classifications in regions such as Burgundy and Bordeaux.

*To recognise a grand cru on a list, and to know when it is drinking well, is to speak the language of the serious collector.*

## Crudité

GASTRONOMY

Raw vegetables served as an appetiser, often with a dip. In fine dining, an exercise in freshness and precision rather than simplicity.

# D

## Decanting

GASTRONOMY

Pouring wine from its bottle into a decanter, to separate it from sediment and let it breathe. Older reds especially benefit. A ritual of both function and elegance.

*Offer to decant a mature red without being asked. The gesture shows care and knowledge, and improves the wine the principal is about to enjoy.*

## Degustation

GASTRONOMY

A tasting menu: a sequence of small, chef chosen courses designed to showcase range and progression. From the French for tasting.

*A degustation is an act of trust in the chef. Guiding a hesitant principal toward it, gently, is a quiet service.*

## Demi-bouteille

GASTRONOMY

A half bottle of wine, 375 millilitres. Useful for a single diner, or to pair different wines across courses without excess.

*Suggesting half bottles lets a principal enjoy variety across a meal without waste, a considerate and refined touch.*

## Discretion

SERVICE

The disciplined art of holding what one knows: knowing what never needs to be mentioned, recorded, or repeated. The defining and most tested virtue of private service.

*Discretion is not merely silence about secrets. It is a permanent vigilance over the flow of information around the person you serve.*

# E

## Egyptian cotton

ART DE VIVRE

Long staple cotton prized for softness and durability, used in the finest bed linens and shirting. Higher thread counts are not always finer; quality of fibre matters more.

*Beware the myth that a higher thread count always means better linen. Fibre quality and weave matter more than the number alone.*

## Empty leg

TRAVEL

A private jet repositioning flight, flown with no passengers, offered at a fraction of the charter price. Timing is fixed and rarely flexible.

*Knowing the empty-leg market lets you offer a principal real value without ever compromising on privacy or standard.*

## En primeur

GASTRONOMY

Buying wine as a future, while still in the barrel, before bottling and release. Common in Bordeaux. A way to secure sought after vintages, often at a lower price.

## Entremetier

GASTRONOMY

In a classic professional kitchen brigade, the cook responsible for vegetables, soups, and starches. Part of the brigade de cuisine system codified by Escoffier.

## Escoffier

GASTRONOMY

Auguste Escoffier, the chef who modernised and codified French haute cuisine and the professional kitchen brigade. His name is shorthand for classical culinary rigour.

*To reference Escoffier correctly signals genuine culinary literacy, the foundation on which modern fine dining still rests.*

## Estate

ART DE VIVRE

A large property with land, often a principal country residence. In wine, the domaine where grapes are grown and wine is made, as in estate bottled.

## Estate manager

SERVICE

The professional who runs one or several private residences: staff, vendors, budgets, maintenance, standards, and the guest experience. Often the head of a household team.

*Where a concierge arranges, an estate manager governs. Learn the difference in vocabulary before you use either title.*

## Etiquette

CODES

The system of accepted conduct in polite and formal society: how to greet, dine, address, seat, and behave. In service, the invisible grammar that signals belonging.

*Etiquette is not stiffness. Its purpose is to put everyone at ease by removing all doubt about what is correct.*

# F

## Family office

SERVICE

The private structure that manages an ultra-wealthy family's wealth, investments, legal affairs, philanthropy and often its household staff. A single-family office serves one family; a multi-family office serves several.

*Know who signs, who decides, and who merely relays. In many houses, the family office, not the family, is who truly hires you.*

## Fine dining brigade

GASTRONOMY

The organised hierarchy of a professional kitchen, from the chef de cuisine down through the sous chef and the chefs de partie, each with a defined station. Codified by Escoffier.

*Understanding the brigade lets you speak correctly with a kitchen and know who to address for what. Precision of address signals respect and knowledge.*

## Flute

### GASTRONOMY

A tall, narrow glass for Champagne and sparkling wine, designed to preserve the bubbles. Increasingly, connoisseurs prefer a white wine glass to reveal aroma.

*Know that serious Champagne is now often served in a tulip or white wine glass, not a flute, to release its full aroma. A quiet mark of expertise.*

## Foie gras

### GASTRONOMY

The rich, delicate liver of a specially fattened duck or goose, a classic of French haute cuisine, served seared or as a terrine. Legally restricted in some regions.

*Be aware that foie gras is controversial and banned or restricted in some places. Read the table and the setting before assuming it is welcome.*

# G

## Gala

### HOSPITALITY

A grand, formal social event, often for charity, typically black or white tie, with dinner, entertainment, and a programme. A key fixture of the philanthropic season.

## Garde manger

### GASTRONOMY

The kitchen station and cook responsible for cold dishes: charcuterie, salads, terrines, and the pantry. From the French, to keep to eat.

## Grand cru

### GASTRONOMY

The highest official vineyard classification in regions such as Burgundy, Alsace, and Champagne, denoting exceptional and consistent quality of terroir.

## Gratuity

### SERVICE

A tip, given for good service. In the private world, norms vary widely by country and setting; in some, a discreet fixed arrangement replaces individual tipping entirely.

*Learn the tipping norms of each country you operate in. Getting it wrong, high or low, quietly signals unfamiliarity with the setting.*

# H

## Haute couture

### FASHION

The pinnacle of fashion: exclusive, hand made, made to order garments meeting strict standards. In France, a label legally restricted to approved houses by the Chambre Syndicale.

*Only a small number of houses may legally use haute couture in France. It is a protected designation, not a loose compliment.*

## Haute horlogerie

HORLOGERIE

The highest level of watchmaking: complex movements, hand finishing, and rare complications, made in small numbers by the most prestigious houses.

*In haute horlogerie, value lies in the movement and finishing, the craft unseen on the wrist, not merely the name on the dial.*

## Hospitality

SERVICE

The art and business of welcoming and caring for guests. At the highest level, the seamless anticipation of needs so that a guest feels effortlessly at home.

## Household budget

SERVICE

The annual and monthly budget of a private residence: staff, vendors, maintenance, provisions, travel. Managed with precision, reported without being asked.

*Handling a household budget cleanly is the fastest way to become indispensable, and mishandling it the fastest way to leave.*

## Household staff

SERVICE

The team serving a private residence: house manager, butler, housekeeper, chef, nanny, chauffeur, gardener, security. Each with a defined place, and a hierarchy to be respected.

*Know who does what, and never step across a colleague's station without being asked. Harmony among staff is itself a service to the principal.*

# I

## Iconic

CODES

Widely overused, and therefore powerful when withheld. Truly iconic denotes an object or design so recognisable it defines its category. Use sparingly, or lose its force.

*Restraint with superlatives is itself a code. The professional who calls few things iconic is believed when they finally do.*

## In-villa dining

HOSPITALITY

A private meal prepared and served within a guest's villa or suite by dedicated staff, offering total privacy and a bespoke menu away from the restaurant.

*For a principal guarding privacy, in-villa dining is often preferred to the finest restaurant. Anticipate and offer it before it is requested.*

# J

## Jeroboam

GASTRONOMY

A large format wine bottle, equivalent to three or four standard bottles depending on region. Large formats age more gracefully and make an occasion of a table.

## Jet lag protocol

SERVICE

The anticipatory management of a principal's arrival across time zones: adjusted meals, light, rest, and schedule to ease the body's adjustment. A hallmark of thoughtful private travel.

*Anticipating jet lag, quietly adjusting the first day's plans and meals, protects the principal's peace before they have felt the strain.*

## K

### Kir

GASTRONOMY

A classic French aperitif of white wine with a touch of crème de cassis (blackcurrant liqueur). Kir Royale uses Champagne in place of still wine.

## L

### Livery

SERVICE

The distinctive uniform worn by household staff or a chauffeur, historically in a family's colours. A mark of a formal, traditional household.

## M

### Made to measure

FASHION

A garment made by adjusting an existing base pattern to a client's measurements. More personal than ready to wear, but distinct from bespoke, which is built from scratch.

*Know the ladder: ready to wear, then made to measure, then bespoke. Using the terms precisely marks genuine familiarity.*

### Magnum

GASTRONOMY

A wine bottle holding 1.5 litres, the equivalent of two standard bottles. Prized because wine ages more slowly and elegantly in the larger format.

*Suggesting a magnum for a table of several guests is both practical and festive, and signals an eye for the occasion.*

### Maitre d'hôtel

HOSPITALITY

The head of the dining room, responsible for reservations, seating, service, and the guest experience. Often shortened to maitre d'. The public face of a fine restaurant.

*A relationship with a great maitre d' is worth more than any booking system. Cultivate it with courtesy and it opens tables others cannot reach.*

## Michelin star

GASTRONOMY

A distinction awarded by the Michelin Guide for culinary excellence, from one star (very good) to three (worth a special journey). The most recognised mark in fine dining.

*Know that one star is a genuine achievement and three is exceptionally rare. Speak of stars accurately, not loosely.*

## Mise en place

GASTRONOMY

Everything in its place: the disciplined preparation and arrangement of all ingredients and tools before service begins. A principle of readiness that extends well beyond the kitchen.

*Mise en place is a philosophy for all service: everything anticipated and ready, so the moment itself unfolds without friction.*

## Monogram

ART DE VIVRE

A personal emblem of initials, applied to linens, luggage, stationery, or shirts. A discreet, traditional mark of ownership and refinement, best kept subtle.

*The elegance of a monogram lies in its subtlety. Tone on tone, small, and well placed says more than something large and loud.*

# N

## NDA

SERVICE

A non-disclosure agreement, signed before or upon entering a private household. It binds you to silence about everything you see, hear and learn, often permanently.

*An NDA is not a formality, it is the floor. The professionals worth hiring behave as though one existed even where none was signed.*

# O

## Omakase

GASTRONOMY

A Japanese dining style meaning I leave it to you: the chef selects and serves a personalised sequence, often at the counter. An act of trust in the chef's judgement.

*Omakase rewards a guest who surrenders control to the chef. Encouraging a principal to relax into it is a gentle, knowing service.*

## Orangerie

ART DE VIVRE

A grand glasshouse or garden room, historically for wintering citrus trees, now often an elegant space for events and dining on a great estate.

# P

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## Palace hotel

### HOSPITALITY

In France, an official distinction above five stars, awarded to a small number of exceptional hotels. More broadly, a grand hotel of the highest standing and history.

*In France, palace is an official rank above five stars, not a loose term. Knowing this distinguishes the informed from the impressed.*

## Patina

### ART DE VIVRE

The soft sheen and character that age gives to fine leather, wood, silver, or a watch. Prized as evidence of quality and history, never to be polished away.

*Old money treasures patina; it is proof of quality that has endured. To over restore an heirloom is to erase its story.*

## Pied-à-terre

### ART DE VIVRE

A small secondary residence kept in a city for occasional use. From the French, foot on the ground. A convenience of the mobile and the well established.

## Principal

### SERVICE

The person one serves, in a household or private capacity. The preferred, respectful term over boss, employer, or client, conveying the seriousness and dignity of the relationship.

*Principal is the correct register in the private household. Using it naturally signals that you understand the world you work in.*

## Private aviation

### TRAVEL

Travel by private jet or chartered aircraft, offering privacy, flexibility, and time. Terms such as fractional ownership, charter, and empty leg denote different ways of access.

*Learn the vocabulary of private aviation: charter, fractional, empty leg. Fluency lets you manage a principal's travel with quiet confidence.*

## Provenance

### ART & COLLECTING

The documented history of ownership of an artwork, antique, or fine object. Strong provenance authenticates, adds value, and reassures. A gap in provenance raises questions.

*In art and collecting, provenance is everything: it proves authenticity and protects value. Always ask for it before advising a purchase.*

# R

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## Ready-to-wear

### FASHION

Prêt-à-porter: garments made in standard sizes for immediate purchase, as opposed to made to measure or bespoke. The foundation of most luxury fashion houses' business.

## Reserve

### GASTRONOMY

On a wine or spirit label, a term suggesting higher quality or longer ageing. In some regions strictly regulated, in others merely marketing. Know which is which.

*Reserve means something precise in Rioja and little in other places. Do not assume the word alone guarantees quality.*

## Ritz-Carlton

### HOSPITALITY

A byword for a standard of gracious, anticipatory hospitality. Its founding philosophy, ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen, shaped modern luxury service.

*The Ritz-Carlton credo, that service is dignified on both sides, is a useful model: you serve from a place of professional pride, never servility.*

## Rota

### SERVICE

The staff schedule of a private household: who is on duty, when, and where, including rotations, cover, and time off. Often complex across several residences.

*A well-kept rota is invisible and a badly kept one is felt by everyone. Learn to read one before you presume to build one.*

# S

## Savoir-faire

### CODES

Literally, knowing how to do: expertise, skill, and the quiet competence to handle any situation gracefully. A prized and untranslatable quality in luxury craft and service.

*Savoir-faire is competence made to look effortless. It is shown, never announced.*

## Savoir-vivre

### CODES

Literally, knowing how to live: the grace, manners, and ease of someone at home in refined society. The social counterpart to savoir-faire.

*Savoir-vivre is the art of putting others at ease. Your own composure and courtesy quietly grant it to everyone around you.*

## Security detail

### SERVICE

The close protection team around a principal and their family. Movements, routes, guests and schedules are coordinated with them, always.

*Never plan a movement without the detail. A beautiful itinerary that ignores security is not a service, it is a risk.*

## Silver service

### SERVICE

A formal serving technique in which the server transfers food from a platter to the guest's plate using a spoon and fork held in one hand. A mark of trained, traditional service.

*Silver service is a genuine skill that takes practice. Where it is expected, competence is assumed and clumsiness is instantly visible.*

## Sommelier

GASTRONOMY

The wine specialist of a fine restaurant, responsible for the list, pairings, and guidance. A great sommelier reads the guest as carefully as the cellar.

*Trust and cultivate the sommelier. Asking their guidance, rather than performing knowledge, often yields the finest and best judged pairing.*

## Staff meal

SERVICE

The meal taken by household staff, distinct from the family's table. Its quality and timing say a great deal about how a house treats those who serve it.

*Notice it in any house you enter. It will tell you more about the family than any interview ever will.*

## Suite

HOSPITALITY

A hotel accommodation of multiple connected rooms, from a junior suite to a presidential or royal suite. The tier and naming signal a property's finest offering.

*Know a property's suite hierarchy before booking. Placing a principal in the right suite, for the right occasion, is a considered act.*

# T

## Terroir

GASTRONOMY

The complete natural environment, soil, climate, slope, that gives a wine or produce its distinctive character. A concept at the heart of French ideas of quality and place.

*To speak of terroir is to understand that the finest things are of a place. It signals depth beyond brand names.*

## Thread count

ART DE VIVRE

The number of threads per square inch in a fabric, often cited for bed linen. A useful but overrated measure; fibre quality and weave matter more than a high number alone.

*Do not be seduced by a high thread count. A finer fibre at a moderate count often makes the superior sheet.*

## Tourbillon

HORLOGERIE

A watch complication, a rotating cage for the escapement, invented to counter the effect of gravity on accuracy. Today, chiefly a demonstration of watchmaking mastery.

*The tourbillon is prized as a feat of craft more than for practical gain. Admire it as artistry, and say so accurately.*

## Trousseau

ART DE VIVRE

Traditionally, the fine linens, clothing, and household goods a bride brought to a marriage. Now, more broadly, a curated collection of the finest personal or household items.

## Truffle

GASTRONOMY

A rare, intensely aromatic subterranean fungus, white (Alba) or black (Périgord), among the most prized and costly ingredients in gastronomy. Shaved fresh, never cooked hard.

*White Alba truffle is seasonal and extraordinary. Knowing the season and handling, shaved fresh at the table, marks true familiarity.*

## Turndown service

### HOSPITALITY

The evening preparation of a hotel room for sleep: bed opened, curtains drawn, lights softened, a small touch left. A quiet ritual of anticipatory care.

*Turndown is anticipation made visible: the room readied for rest before the guest thinks to want it. Study its logic; apply it everywhere.*

## V

## Valet

### SERVICE

A personal male attendant responsible for a gentleman's wardrobe, dressing, and personal effects. Also, the service of parking a guest's car. Context distinguishes the two.

## Vintage

### GASTRONOMY

The year a wine's grapes were harvested, and, more broadly, wine from a single specified year. A great vintage denotes a year of exceptional growing conditions.

*Knowing the strong and weak vintages of the major regions lets you guide a wine choice with genuine, quiet authority.*

## W

## White glove

### SERVICE

Denoting service of the highest care and attention to detail, from the gloves once worn to handle fine objects. Now shorthand for premium, meticulous, personal handling.

*White glove is a promise of meticulous care. Use the phrase only where you can truly deliver the standard it implies.*

## White tie

### DRESS CODES

The most formal evening dress code: for men, a black tailcoat, white waistcoat, and white bow tie; for women, a full length formal gown. Above black tie in formality.

*White tie is rare and exacting. Recognising it on an invitation, and preparing a principal correctly, prevents a conspicuous and memorable error.*

## Y

## Yacht (charter vs ownership)

### TRAVEL

A luxury vessel, accessed by ownership or by charter (hire, usually by the week, with crew). Terms such as tender, flag, and charter broker denote the specialised world around it.

*Learn the difference between owning and chartering, and the role of the broker and captain. It lets you manage a principal's time on the water with confidence.*

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# Z

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## Zero proof

### GASTRONOMY

The contemporary term for sophisticated non alcoholic drinks, crafted with the same care as cocktails. Offering an elegant zero proof option is now a mark of thoughtful hospitality.

*Always have a considered zero proof option ready. Offering it, unprompted and without fuss, quietly respects every guest's choice.*