

RACONTEUR *on*
**ART, ARCHITECTURE
AND HOTELS**



MOISES MICHA & CARLOS COUTURIER / HôtelAmericano / New York City



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HOTELS ARE TEARING UP THE RULES

The Everland green capsule pops up on art gallery roofs as an 'add-on' hotel

COMMENT The collision of art, architecture and design in new hotels is creating a radically enhanced guest experience. **James Wallman** shares his views on the latest trends

■ I'm about to break the law. And I'm going to do it here, in public, in flagrante.

I'm going to talk about "pop-up", which goes completely against one of the cardinal rules of trend forecasting. The rule that says the role of a trend forecaster is to talk about things that are new and, more importantly, next. Things you've never heard of; things that set you thinking.

That's the problem with pop-up. It's been popping up for years. It hasn't been new or next since at least 2007. Even Debenhams has done it.

But most examples have been in retail, restaurants or bars. And when it comes to the collision of art, architecture and hospitality, pop-up is still at the cutting-edge.

I'm thinking especially of parasitic pop-up hotels such as the one-bedroom Everland, the green capsule hotel that's been popping up on the roofs of contemporary art galleries across Europe, and the boat-shaped hotel by architect David Kohn and artist Fiona Banner, which will be beached on the roof of London's Southbank Centre, overlooking the Thames, during the Olympics next year.

Kohn and Banner's boat is the latest landing from a short, but noble, list of headline-catching, one-room pop-up hotels. A list which regrettably includes a room built earlier this year in Singapore that immured the city-state's iconic statue, the

Merlion, and used it as the bedroom's central decoration.

Imagine if we did that here: would you really want to wake up with Eros poking up through the floor of your bedroom? Happily that shortlist also includes the one-room, one-night-only hotel created by artist-designers Hannah Plumb and James Russell for last year's London Design Festival.

The experience of staying a night at the hotel resembled sleeping in a time-warped piece of art, thanks to a chest of drawers in which the drawers were old suitcases with their tattered travel tags still attached, a bed made with wood from an 18th-century Swedish bed and dresser, Jane Campion's film *The Piano* pro-

jected on one wall and a reworked vintage telescope projecting a moon-like image on another. When you entered the room, it felt like walking into a magical, erotic story where time stood still.

Of course great examples of the collision of art, architecture and hospitality don't only happen at one-

When you entered the room, it felt like walking into a magical, erotic story where time stood still

night-only, one-room hotels. You can stay longer than one night at The Lost and Found one-room hotel in Melbourne, for instance. Created by graphic designer and artist Jonathan Zawada as a physical representation of the Lost and Found city guide, the room brings Melbourne to life through work by local designers. The bronze and marble dining table is by local furniture designer Daniel Barbera, the bedspread is by local fashion brand ffiXXed and the vintage chairs are from nearby vintage furniture store Grandfathers Axe.

Loh Lik Peng has brought art, architecture and hospitality together at the new Town Hall Hotel & Apartments in London. Peng worked with artists and the local creative community for five years to bring the heritage of the Bethnal Green Town Hall back to life. Live art collective walkwalk has created text artworks based on real-life stories from the neighbourhood. Artist Peter Liveridge has made a special-edition publication based on research into the history of the building. Paris-based Rare Architecture worked sympathetically with the Edwardian and Art Deco aspects of the original 1910 building and its 1939 extension, to create, on one outside wall, a laser-cut aluminium skin.

Art and architecture come first at Tasmania's Museum of Old and New Art (MONA), which opened earlier this year. But there's a thriving hospitality element too. As well as the exhibitions, MONA has eight architecturally stunning standalone suites. Each is named after Australian artists and architects, and contains art from the museum. The Charles suite, for example, is named after abstract expressionist Charles Blackman and contains his 1951 painting *Cat on the Roof*. The Walter suite references Walter Burley Griffin, inventor of the carport, who designed Canberra.

So if you could pick one, is there a gallery you would like to see with a hotel on the side, or even the roof? I hope someone at Copenhagen's Louisiana Museum of Modern Art reads this and likes the idea. With its seaside location and its Henry Moores, Joan Miros and Max Ernsts, it would make a great hotel. ●

ONE HOTEL, 19 ARCHITECTS AND LOTS OF STYLE

SUPERSTARS Bringing together 19 of the world's best architects and designers to work on one hotel project was a challenge in itself. The resulting Silken Puerta America in Madrid is a sensation, writes Ellie Stathaki



Instead of choosing just one architect to make their mark in the world of designer hospitality, the Spanish hotel group Silken decided to have it all – and employed 19.

The names in the line-up are cherry-picked, ranging from Jean Nouvel, Arata Isozaki, John Pawson, David Chipperfield, Plasma Studio, Lord Norman Foster and Zaha Hadid to Marc Newson, Ron Arad, Richard Gluckman, Christian Liaigre, Teresa Sapey, Javier Mariscal and Victorio & Lucchino.

With each floor and area featuring a different concept, Puerta America boasts the creations of some of the biggest contemporary stars in the field, each of them adding their own contribution towards this 12-floor hotel.

Jean Nouvel, the French architect, was alone in designing the rainbow-coloured vinyl-panelled facade, but inside each floor was designed by a different architect.

Among them, Zaha Hadid masterminded the Corian-lined, futuristically smooth first floor, Lord Foster is behind the sleek leather-detailed second floor, while Kathryn Findlay's white eighth floor design involves an interactive lighting installation by Jason Bruges, an expert in the field.

Common areas were not left out. Examples include the restaurant's sleek contemporary design by Chris-

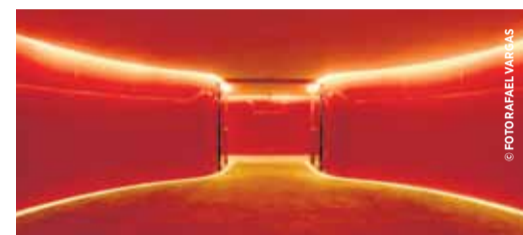
tian Liaigre, the lower-ground garage by Teresa Sapey and John Pawson's calm minimalist lobby and meeting rooms. Even Oscar Niemeyer, the centenarian Brazilian icon, took part by creating a sculptural composition for the adjacent park.

The Silken Puerta America venture has, of course, had its critics. Some questioned its location on the busy Avenida de America. And it could be argued that, attractive as they may be, the rooms are not necessarily as functional as standard hotel accommodation. Neither did it come cheap, representing an estimated €75-million (£67-million) investment.

Still, the scheme took the boutique hotel concept to a new level, orchestrating an exceptional architectural constellation. It represents a showcase of design imagination, mixing a variety of contemporary styles and approaches, something that has never been attempted before in the hospitality world. This five-star hotel can certainly cater for all tastes between its 308 standard rooms, 22 junior suites and 12 suites.

An ultimate design exercise, experiment or experience, there is no doubt that the Silken Puerta America is the perfect conversation-starter for any design-savvy traveller and, for architecture aficionados, probably even a destination in itself. ●

Silken Puerta America interiors (clockwise from left): Plasma Studio; Ron Arad; Marc Newson; Richard Gluckman; Kathryn Findlay; Zaha Hadid; and Norman Foster



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LEADING BY EXAMPLE: A STELLAR DISPLAY OF TOP WORLD HOTELS

SUPER HOTELS The world's finest architects are focusing their creativity on designing spectacular hotels that are bold, innovative and sexy. Ellie Stathaki picks three you will not want to leave

THE GARDEN TERRACE, NAGASAKI, JAPAN: KENGO KUMA & ASSOCIATES

■ With its distinct irregular windows and timber-panelled facade, and offering chic accommodation in a minimalist Japanese style, the Garden Terrace Hotel was designed by Japan's celebrated architect Kengo Kuma.

Located on the slope of Mount Inasa, outside Nagasaki's port, the hotel is not the first project in the region for Kuma. Not too long ago, in 2005, the studio designed the city's art museum.

The two buildings sit at opposite ends within the town's amphitheatric shape and, while they are undoubtedly two quite different constructions, their visual rapport was inevitable. "Facing each other, the two buildings' relationship was our first experience of the project," says Kuma.

The commission stipulated strict instructions. The complex had to be made of timber and include four volumes – a large box, two smaller ones

and a linear space. While the shapes could be accommodated in the project's programme, resulting in the construction's striking lines, creating a building of such scale out of timber is no mean feat.

Kuma inventively came up with the solution of timber panels. Using cedar panels to create unique facade patterns, the building elegantly and clearly features wood as its highlight, both inside and out.



W KANAI RETREAT, RIVIERA MAYA, MEXICO: RICHARD MEIER & PARTNERS

■ Located on the gorgeous Yucatan coast, the W Kanai Retreat combines luxury, scenery and, of course, a "starchitect's" design, by the hand of Pritzker prize-winning architect Richard Meier.

Comprising four hotels and a beach club, the 180-room luxury facility may be large in size, yet it was designed on a carpet of mangroves, respectful to its sensitive natural flood-plain setting. Clean and sim-

ple linear forms create a confident contrast against the blue horizon and lush surrounding nature, but at the same time careful planning went into the design in order to create a seamless connection between the inside and the outside space.

"We tried above all to produce a sensitive project, as unobtrusive as possible to the nature around, but we also wanted to create an energetic and distinct typology, unlike

any other resort in the area," says Guillermo Murcia, the project architect behind the W Kanai Retreat.

A T-shaped floor plan makes the most of the area's abundant natural lighting and views, while the guest rooms will offer unobstructed sea vistas, come scheduled completion in 2014. The retreat's more urban sibling, W Santa Fe in Mexico City, is also designed by Meier and is due to open in 2013.



TREEHOTEL, BODEN, SWEDEN: VARIOUS ARCHITECTS

■ The recently opened Treehotel may be modest in scale, but it surely stands out among its peers, owing its distinct identity to a series of unique room designs. Located in Sweden's northern municipality of Boden, the hotel is a true nature-lover's delight, with a contemporary design twist.

"We wanted to offer high-standard accommodation in a harmonious setting, where daily stress quickly fades away, and guests can enjoy the peace and

purity of unspoiled nature," explain the hotel's owners Kent and Britta Lindvall.

First-phase tree-rooms were designed by four of the Sweden's leading architecture practices. Cyrén & Cyrén are the brains behind the Cabin Room, Sandell Sandberg worked on the Blue Cone, Inredningsgruppen's Bertil Harström designed The Bird's Nest and the UFO, while the dynamic Stockholm-based studio Tham & Vidgård created the Mirrorcube, a vol-

ume which is cleverly camouflaged by tree foliage.

Perched at varying heights from four to six metres, the rooms share spectacular views and offer a relaxing experience within minimal, yet comfortable, interiors. Rooms are particularly eco-friendly, built using sustainable construction methods and energy solutions. With 19 more tree-rooms planned, the second phase is due for completion in 2012. ●



GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT

INTERVIEW Brazilian architect Isay Weinfeld can boast a hospitality portfolio that includes the iconic Hotel Fasano in São Paulo, just one of his many signature modernist hotels and restaurants around the world. He explains to Ellie Stathaki how to balance drama with elegance

■ It was a little over ten years ago that Rogerio Fasano came and asked me to design the Fasano Hotel in São Paulo, which was my first hotel commission. Indeed, this first collaboration went so well that we repeated it quite a few times. I have designed many projects for the Fasanos since, including the Barrett Bar, as well as other hotels and restaurants, in Brazil and abroad.

In every hospitality project, getting the balance right can be tricky. The aim is, of course, to create a unique guest experience through great architecture, but comfort is always the most important element. I think it is essential to understand the client deeply, be they an independent hotelier or a chain, as it is the combination of their

personality with the spirit of the site that will give me the key orientation for the design.

I like to get fully involved in every hotel I design, preferring to do both architecture and interiors if I can. To be honest, I don't think I could work any other way. Unless it is the case of a protected building, like the one I have been working on in Salvador, I will only take an assignment if I am commissioned to design it all, both the building and the interiors, to the smallest detail – to the point of organising the books in the shelves, hanging the pictures and picking the flowers.

My most recent hotel projects include the Fasano Las Piedras in Punta del Este, Uruguay, which opened in Janu-

ary, and the Square Nine Hotel in Belgrade, Serbia, which opened in March. But I am working on even more hotels at the moment, in Brasilia, Porto Feliz, Salvador and Trancoso.

If I had one piece of advice to offer when it comes to choosing a hotel to stay in, I'd say go for one where the bed is more comfortable than your own. As far as my personal preferences go, I don't think I have a favourite holiday or business hotel as such and I wouldn't go for a design hotel either. I have to admit that I tend to like those somewhat old, decadent places you find sometimes that have a doorman who calls you by name, aged waiters and a club sandwich that beats my own. ●

SUPERSTAR DESIGN DUO BRING BRAZILIAN FLAIR TO EUROPE



INTERIOR DESIGN The Campana brothers' latest project, the New Hotel in Athens, is alive with energy and passion. They explain to Christopher Kanal why design is storytelling, and how they combine art and furniture

■ Award-winning Brazilian designers the Campana brothers ventured into the unknown with their first hotel project. The eagerly anticipated New Hotel in the Greek capital opened earlier this month. It is an extraordinarily creation that blends art, sculpture and design.

Hotels owner Dakis Joannou, who commissioned the Campanas, is a champion of contemporary design and one of the world's biggest art collectors. In 2005, the designer Karim Rashid used surreal curves and colour to radically revamp one of Joannou's other five hotels in Athens, the Semiramis.

Joannou bought the former Olympic Palace Hotel, built in 1958, near Syntagma Square, in the heart of Athens. Designed by architect Iasonas Rizos, the building is considered one of the city's finest examples of Modernist architecture. Joannou decided to restructure the building piece-by-piece without discarding anything and reinvigorate it as the New Hotel.

Enter the Fernando and Humberto Campana, who were approached by Joannou in 2007. "Dakis wanted people to go into the hotel and crack a

smile," explain the brothers. "We remember that sentence very well, so in each thing we designed we always had that in mind like an echo."

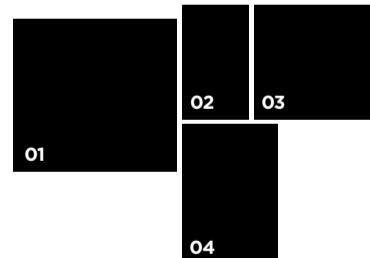
The Campanas have built their reputation on creating viscerally stunning design products with an explosive "favela" edge. The double act bring a sexy, colourful, sometimes dangerous energy into their work, painstakingly using recycled materials and cast-offs. Many of the creations from their 30-year career, such as the *Vermelha* armchairs that are made from 500 metres of rope woven together, are design icons. The Campanas have made furniture out of furry toys, such as the *Shark and Dolphin* chair, and recreated the colourful swirls of California sushi in a plastic carpet and limited edition series of chairs called the *Sushi* range. At this year's Milan Design Week, they unveiled wildly imaginative furniture designed in collaboration with South African ostrich leather manufacturer Klein Karoo. For the Campanas, material and form come first, followed by function.

The São Paulo-based Campanas never intended to be designers.

Humberto, eight years older than his brother, originally studied law, but began to design furniture in the mid-1980s after Fernando completed his architectural degree. Europe and North America first took note of their highly original and energetic designs. Recognition in Brazil took longer. Today they are design superstars at home and abroad. "As brothers and associates, we have a great intimacy," the Campanas reveal, laughing. "We would say it's like a marriage without sex."

"It was a challenge to convince two of the greatest designers of our time to apply themselves in dealing with architecture and space rather than object, and on top of that in a city unfamiliar to them," says Joan-

As brothers and associates, we have a great intimacy. We would say it's like a marriage without sex



- 01 HUMBERTO (LEFT) AND FERNANDO CAMPANA
- 02 CORRIDOR AT ATHENS' NEW HOTEL
- 03 GREEK FOLKLORE ROOM
- 04 JAGGED MIRRORS AMPLIFY SPACE



PHOTO: SYLVIA DIAMANTOPOULOU

nou. The Campanas rose to the challenge, drawing heavily on Athenian culture and injecting it with Brazilian joie de vivre. “We tried to use anthropomorphic concepts, and eating the local culture and digesting it with our consciousness, our Brazilian heads,” they say.

“We never had the experience of working on a scale larger than objects, which scared us at first,” explains Humberto. “Dakis gave us total freedom for this project; freedom to dream, a utopia.” Fernando adds: “For me it was a big deal, because I graduated in architecture school about thirty years ago and this is my first project after all that time.”

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The Brazilians brought in architectural students from the University of Thessaly and created a workshop that reinterpreted local materials and culture for the project and remixed it. Students graduated from being industrial designers to “bricoleurs”, as defined by Claude Lévi-Strauss, who strived to produce unexpected combinations through re-evaluating craft and using fragments from culture. “The workshop became like a school inside the hotel,” says Humberto. Most of the hotel’s chairs were designed by the students.

The project brought together the trinity of restoring, recycling and sharing that has been at the heart of the designers’ creative approach. “We had the opportunity to apply all our knowledge and all our concepts which we’ve worked on in the 30 years, and give it a second life by investigating popular local culture, making a portrait of modern Greece and bringing in young people to help us.” The result, from the lighting and fur-

niture to the realisation of space, cleverly creates a contrast between historical Athens and the contemporary hotel. “One of the aspects of our work is about storytelling and each piece of furniture has a different point of view,” they say. Chairs and doors salvaged from the old property were reborn as gorgeous artworks. The Campanas and their students scoured the local antiques markets for furniture that was reborn in the hotel as hybrid tables and chairs.

The design of the public areas plays with perceptions of space. The columns in the lobby are covered in narrow strips of wood, already familiar from the *Favela* chair, while wildly jagged mirrors amplify the space. The mosaic of varying visual and tactile experiences pays tribute to the Campanas multifaceted country of origin. Many parts of the hotel were left untouched to create architectural scars and bandages.

Each of the 79 rooms and suites is a living art installation that guests can immerse themselves in. “We wanted to make a hotel that breathes art and that bears poetry,” says Humberto. The Campanas worked within three clearly identified Greek themes for three different room types. The first pays homage to the hunchbacked fictional shadow puppet Karagiozis from Greek folklore. The next uses charms to ward off the evil eye – “We wanted to amplify a beautiful, ‘useless’ object. ‘Useless’ because it carries a mystic idea,” they say. The final theme features lost postcards that reinterpret old Athens in a contemporary setting.

“The experience was one of the richest experiences in my life,” reveals Humberto of the New Hotel project. “We didn’t want to make a Campana hotel, only with our things and our furniture. We didn’t want an ego-project, without sharing, and sharing was the great beauty of this experience.” ●

A QUESTION OF PERSONAL TASTE

VIEWPOINT Four designers tell Kathryn Tully about their favourite hotels around the world, why they stay there, and assess when a hotel’s approach to art and design succeeds or fails



PHOTO: KEVIN DAVIES



01 PHILIP TREACY
MILLINER

02 JIMMIE KARLSSON
FURNITURE DESIGNER

03 ROD WINTERROWD
INTERIOR DESIGNER

04 ANNE PASTERNAK
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

PHILIP TREACY

“When I was asked if I would like to be design director of The G hotel in Galway, my first thought was absolutely not! I had never worked on a hotel before but, of course, a hat designer can design other things. Design is about taste.

Now the hotel is finished, some of the details are very ‘mine’. The concierge desk is like a miniature amphitheatre. It’s a shape I made, like ones I make hats from, and then enlarged to 15 feet high. It’s a kind of shell. People look at other hotels, come back to the designer and say, ‘But they have it in the Four Seasons.’ And my response would be, ‘Well, then I don’t want it’.

I took the same approach to art for the hotel. I bought neon art saying, ‘This Must Be The Place’. I also saw that a 1950s Irving Penn Vogue cover was coming to auction, estimated at £15,000. I went with my friend Isabella Blow and £50,000 later, got it, but I thought a few beautiful things would be better than oceans of junk.”

JIMMIE KARLSSON

“I’m always a sucker for Philippe Starck hotels. I find him hard to beat from a design perspective. I know he has been around for a long time, but our work is all about breaking boundaries and he excels at that. All of his hotels are so cool. Some people say that they are bored of the boutique hotel look, but hey, I’m am not.

It was great that The Surrey in New York commissioned us, because it is quite a traditional hotel and they had the guts to put furniture of ours in there with graffiti all over it. It shows how in-your-face pieces can still work in a very classic environment and retain that luxury feel about them.

We also do interior design work, which is not necessarily the same as the Jimmie Martin style, but definitely pushes the boundaries more than you would see in an average hotel. I find that most hotels do tend to play it too safe, especially the big brands.”

ROD WINTERROWD

“Home for me in London is Claridges. While retaining the classically Deco splendor, they have cleverly redone rooms with a more modern spin. Certain rooms and suites have been revitalised with neutral palettes and clean lines, but the beautiful antiques remain. The Bar – The Fumoir – is handsome, deadly chic, hip and young, but still of the period, as is the restaurant. The eclectic mixing of old and new produces a fluid, authentic and tranquil result.

Too often great properties are destroyed by bad design that bears no relationship to what the building was or what it is. There is certainly a place for properties by Ian Schrager and Andre Balazs, the inventive and talented owners of fun, whimsical, minimally designed hotels, but this ubiquitous

approach is now a global prototype for new and renovated hotels. The limited imaginations that think this concept is ‘de rigueur’ lack an appreciation of what great hotel experiences once were. Not everyone wants to stay in a white ice cube.”

Not everyone wants to stay in a white ice cube

ANNE PASTERNAK

“I tend to be very loyal. I stay in The Standard Hotels wherever I go and I did this even before Creative Time partnered with them to curate art programmes for the hotels. They are luxurious, at the right price, yet very hip. The Standard’s Andre Balazs has such a fierce creative vision and arts professionals really respect him. I also love Ritz-Carlton Hotels. I think they were the first in the United States to put emerging artists in their hotels. Now that is much more common, but at the time it was a real breakthrough. Some of the artists they feature are very well known, but some are completely new. You would not have thought that a traditional brand like Ritz-Carlton would take this approach, but I love how they combine the traditional and the contemporary.” ●

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JW Marriott Hotel Ankara



JW Marriott Marquis Hotel Dubai



JW Marriott Gaakoshibee Resort & Spa

The newest and future locations in Ankara, Dubai and the Maldives exemplify the details and experiences the JW Marriott guest can expect.

JW Marriott Hotel Ankara, conveniently located in the heart of the political and business centre of Ankara, opened earlier this month, bringing world-class luxury to Turkey's capital city. The striking 24-storey, 413-room landmark hotel is designed in a rich palette of coloured glass and epitomises the very best of Marriott® International's luxury brand.

Guest rooms offer the ultimate in relaxed elegance and luxury, featuring 300-thread-count Turkish cotton linens, marble baths—more than 11,365 square metres of marble was used in constructing the hotel—with deep-soaking tubs, separate showers and the latest in-room entertainment technology. The business traveller and executive-level guests have access to a lounge, located on the 22nd floor, offering complimentary breakfast, all-day snacks and beverage service, afternoon tea, evening hors d'oeuvres and dessert, as well as a business centre and boardroom.

A dazzling grand ballroom—with soaring ceilings and magnificent Czech crystal chandeliers—is an ideal location for any wedding or social event. In addition, the hotel's outdoor terrace is one of the largest open-air function spaces in Ankara.

The spa and fitness centre has both indoor and outdoor pools and an authentic Turkish hammam. The spa's signature "Kese" is performed on a marble plinth and includes an exfoliation treatment and relaxing massage with Turkish oils. A VIP spa with private hammam is available for individuals or small groups.

JW Marriott Marquis Hotel Dubai, spread across two landmark towers, is due to open next year.

Dubai is a city of awe-inspiring ambition and unsurpassed luxury, home to the world's tallest building, the largest shopping mall, the iconic Palm and now the JW Marriott Marquis Hotel.

Elevated above Dubai's business district, on Sheikh Zayed Road, the hotel is situated in one of the most desirable locations in the city. Accommodations comprise 1,164 king-size rooms, 400 double rooms, 220 one-bedroom suites, 16 large one-bedroom suites and six presidential suites.

The suites are a testament to intelligent design and contemporary comforts, with opulent lounge areas and sleek bathrooms. Each guest room strikes the perfect balance of form and function with a breathtaking blend of sumptuous fabrics, hardwoods and atmospheric lighting.

And weaved into every luxurious room is the latest state-of-the-art technology, including LCD TVs, iPod stations and wireless Internet connection.

The hotel will feature exceptional business and event facilities, including two spacious ballrooms and 22 breakout meeting rooms, as well as the sublime Saray Spa and Health Club, an outdoor pool and eight retail shops.

A feast of vibrant colours, sounds, scents and flavours will come together to create the ultimate dining experience. An impressive range of 15 restaurants, bars and lounges, featuring international and specialty cuisine, including Italian, Thai, Indian (celebrating chef Atul Kochhar), Japanese and Lebanese, will take diners through a myriad of culinary sensations.

JW Marriott Gaakoshibee Resort & Spa, scheduled to open in spring 2012, is a 106-villa luxury resort situated on its own private island of Gaakoshibee in the Shaviyani Atoll of the Maldives, just 55 minutes by seaplane from the capital city of Malé.

The island is largely untouched, with dense foliage throughout, and boasts a pristine white sand beach fronting the resort. Like other islands in the Maldives, Gaakoshibee offers rare and colourful underwater beauty along with an abundance and variety of sea life.

The resort will offer a variety of accommodations. Air-conditioned water and reef villas will have their own private plunge pools and Jacuzzis. Beach villas with direct beach access, also have a private garden, indoor or outdoor five-fixture bathroom, outdoor shower and oversized bathtub. Over-water villas will have five-fixture bathrooms, a day bed on a large private sun deck and direct access to the lagoon.

Guests will have a choice of five food and beverage outlets: an all-day restaurant, two specialty restaurants and two bars including an underground wine cellar. Both specialty restaurants, with their own bars and outdoor areas for alfresco dining, will be located over water to offer patrons more than just an experience for the palate.

Recreational amenities will include an over-water spa with eight treatment rooms, a beauty and barber shop, health and fitness centre, yoga, discovery centre, library, lounges, Olympic-sized lap pool, lagoon pool, kids' pool, water sports centre, diving centre, kids' club, games room and recreation pavilion, observation deck and excursions. -By Peter Archer

JW Marriott Hotel Bangkok



JW Marriott Khao Lak Resort & Spa



JW Marriott Hotel Shenzhen



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WHEN HOTELS COMPETE WITH GALLERIES AND GUEST ROOMS BECOME ART INSTALLATIONS

INVESTMENT Hoteliers are increasingly aware that their guests appreciate art and expect more than a familiar print bolted to the wall. Luxury brands are investing substantial sums in works by established or emerging talent and are curating their own collections, as Kathryn Tully discovers

Earlier this month, The Standard Hotel in New York held a party in the ultra-hip Boom Boom Room to celebrate the launch of its second series of video installations to be shown in all guest rooms. The videos include work from seven contemporary artists and in *Rabbit Holy Days*, by Terrence Koh, fluffy white bunnies are filmed relaxing in one of the hotel's minimalist bathroom sinks and admiring the view from the 18th floor.

While the long-held stereotype of hotel art has involved something bolted to a wall, simultaneously decorative yet bland and almost apologetic for its own existence, things have moved on a lot. In recent years, the hotel industry has realised that many of their guests are also art aficionados and that cultural tourism can begin the minute they arrive the lobby.

In an increasing number of hotels, art is not an afterthought, but a central part of the guest offering. In fact, it is so integral to some new hotels that they are designed with the art work in mind. The Sofitel Vienna Stephansdom, for example, designed by architect Jean Nouvel, features multicoloured video ceilings by Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist.

Today, many hotels compete with galleries and museums as an alternative exhibition space, producing glossy catalogues of their collections and employing creative directors

and curators to help them select works for permanent display or temporary exhibitions.

When Brian Williams, managing director of Swire Hotels, wanted to create a contemporary art collection for The Montpellier Chapter in Cheltenham, he turned to Jane Lee, course director in fine art at Central St Martins College of Art and Design in London for help after he met her at a degree show. "We were very keen to promote both established and young British artists and Central Saint Martins has a long reputation for producing artists of some repute," he says.

Approaches vary quite dramatically. Sometimes, art is intended to gel with the hotel's overall design aesthetic; sometimes quite the opposite. In The Surrey, a renovated Manhattan hotel that reopened in 2009, the ambience of a luxurious, traditional Upper East Side townhouse is offset with playful contemporary art works, such as a graffiti-adorned armoire in the lobby and graffitied tables in the bar by UK furniture designers Jimmie Martin.

This was also the thinking at The Montpellier Chapter. "We were keen that the art was a standalone feature of the hotel and not driven solely by design aesthetic," explains Mr Williams. "We wanted our guests to be intrigued and interested by the art and that it didn't feel like a corporate acquisition."

Some hotels, like Zurich's The Dolder Grand, are proud of their extensive, museum-quality collections. Others, such as The Opposite House in Beijing, want to showcase the work of emerging artists. Earlier this year, it commissioned art students at China's Central Academy of Fine Arts to produce a series of postcards to be left as gifts during the hotel's turn-down service.

But not all properties want to be thought of as an art hotel. "We didn't want to be another art hotel, where you just put high-end, expensive art into the environment," says Eva Ziegler, global brand leader of Le Méridien and W Hotels Worldwide. "We want our lobbies to be a creative hub where people can gather and exchange ideas." Nevertheless, Ms Ziegler says that guests formulate lasting impressions of hotels within ten minutes of arriving, which is why Le Méridien has high-impact art in its lobbies.

Yet, whatever the approach, the benefits are much the same. Art is a way of defining a hotel's identity and giving it a unique draw, whether that draw is the presence of Old Masters by Giuseppe Zais and Giuseppe Bazani in the lobby of Rome's Cavalieri Hilton or guest-room murals by contemporary artists in Copenhagen's Hotel Fox.

Of course, it certainly helps if a hotel owner already has an exten-

sive art collection or a hotel can borrow from other private collections, because it is never easy to build a collection from scratch. Finding, selecting and buying the art or commissioning the right artists takes time. It took two years to put together the collection at The Montpellier Chapter, which started by buying works by established artists such as John Hopper and Mario Rossi and then adding to these core pieces with art by younger talent. Executing bespoke commissions takes even longer and installing art work presents another logistical challenge before a newly built or newly refurbished hotel can throw open its doors.

In an increasing number of hotels, art is not an afterthought but a central part of the guest offering

Critically, some artists are also ambivalent about their work appearing in hotels or any large commercial setting. Le Méridien bypassed this problem by recruiting Jérôme Sans to be the hotel's cultural curator, who has selected Le Méridien 100 (LM100), a group



01 SOFITEL VIENNA STEPHANSDOM

02 LOBBY OF NEW YORK'S THE STANDARD



which includes artists and photographers such as Sam Samore, Joan Fontcuberta and Ralph Gibson, to create art works, video installations and soundscapes for the hotels. As Ms Ziegler puts it: "Jerome opens doors that we would never have been able to open as a brand, particularly for artists that don't normally engage with big companies."

However, Anne Pasternak, president and artistic director of public art, non-profit Creative Time, which curated The Standard's new video series, thinks that, as long as artists work with the right brand, the pervasive clichés surrounding hotel art are redundant. "Not one artist that we approached to work with The Standard turned us down," she says, adding that the hotel has a very hip reputation.

If anything, she says that the hotel project gave video artists more creative flexibility than they have when producing installations for other public spaces. "We do video projects in New York's Times Square where passersby have a very short attention span, whereas a hotel guest might engage with an in-room video installation for 20 minutes."

Of course, a still more compelling reason for hotels to exhibit art is that it democratizes the process of enjoying it.

JW Marriott has teamed up with Christie's auction house to feature special art exhibitions. The first of these was a preview of unseen Beatles photos at London's Grosvenor House. Another is due to be held in December at Miami's JW Marriott Marquis. ●

RENAISSANCE FRESCOS OR CONTEMPORARY STREET ART?

CASE STUDIES Kathryn Tully combines hotel living and art appreciation in a tour of five of the world's leading art hotels which each offers its own individualistic guest experience



THE DOLDER GRAND
ZURICH

■ Built between 1897 and 1899, and spectacularly reimaged by architect Norman Foster before it reopened in 2008, The Dolder Grand sits on a hillside just 15 minutes from Zurich airport. The two modern wings, added by Lord Foster to the palatial original building, allow guests a panoramic vista of the city. The Dolder Grand boasts an impressive art collection selected by owner Urs Schwarzenbach. Salvador Dalí's *Femmes Metamorphoses* hangs in the restaurant. Other highlights in the hotel's common spaces are *Horizontal Brushstrokes* by Sol LeWitt and a permanent installation by Joachim Fleischer. Hotel guests can also enjoy discounts to major art events taking place in the city. The Dolder Grand offered 10 per cent off entry to the recent Picasso exhibition at Zurich's Kunsthhaus museum.

Tel: +41 44 456 60 00
www.thedoldergrand.com



FOUR SEASONS
FLORENCE

■ Hotel owners often spend years building art collections in their properties from scratch. Another approach is to open a new hotel in a stunning 15th-century palace, already heaving with Renaissance frescos, friezes and sculptures. This is what guests will find at the Palazzo della Gherardesca, Florence, which has been home to nobles, princes and the future Pope Leo XI, since it was built in 1473. It opened as the Four Seasons Hotel, after a seven-year renovation, in 2008. The lobby features bas-reliefs by Bertoldo di Giovanni, who taught Michelangelo. All guest rooms combine antique furnishings and paintings with 21st-century amenities, but those who stay in the Royal Suite, Gallery Suite, Noble Suite, Renaissance Suite or Presidential Suite can also enjoy vaulted, frescoed ceilings, without leaving their rooms.

Tel: +39 055 2626 1
www.fourseasons.com/florence



HOTEL FOX
COPENHAGEN

■ It cannot boast the same ultra-luxurious accommodation offered by some of its art-hotel rivals, but this fun, city-centre boutique residence certainly wins marks for innovation. At Hotel Fox, each bedroom is a different piece of art. When it reopened in 2005, as part of an innovative marketing campaign for the launch of the Volkswagen Fox 21, a collection of 21 contemporary artists, graphic designers and illustrators painted and adorned each of the hotel's 61 rooms in a different style. Guests can find themselves sleeping surrounded by street art, benevolent monsters or Mexican wrestlers. Be warned, much of the art in Hotel Fox is loud. If you don't fancy sleeping in a hot pink room featuring a large black-and-white weight-lifting cat, for example, then room 407 is probably not for you.

Tel: +45 33 13 30 00
www.hotelfox.dk



LANGHAM PLACE
HONG KONG

■ Chinese contemporary art is the hottest art market in the world at the moment and Hong Kong's Langham Place hotel has a world-class collection. The hotel houses an eclectic range of 1,500 art works, which can be found on each of the 42 floors, some by big names such as Wang Guangyi, Yue Minjun and Jiang Shuo. The lobby is used as a temporary exhibition space and, from February to April, the hotel's art consultant, Angeli Li, arranged for 29-year-old Chinese sculptor Luo Zhenhong to hold his latest exhibition, *Mirror Mirror On The Wall*, which featured 109 caricature sculptures, all posing on and around a battered Mini Cooper, taken from a scrap yard. Essentially, though, the whole hotel functions as a gallery and, if they choose to, guests can take tours of the whole collection during their stay.

Tel: +852 3552 3388
www.hongkong.langhamplacehotels.com



GRAMERCY PARK HOTEL
NEW YORK

■ The Gramercy Park's lobby, famous Rose Bar and other common spaces feature an extremely impressive collection of 20th-century masterpieces by Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Damien Hirst, Richard Prince, Keith Haring, Julian Schnabel and others, which are on loan from private collections. Currently, three oil paintings from Damien Hirst's 2008 series, *The Golden Jubilee*, hang in the sumptuous lobby. Julian Schnabel designed the interior of the hotel, in collaboration with Ian Schrager, when the 1925 landmark building was renovated. Guests will find framed photos in the hotel's bedrooms, which were selected from the *Magnum* archive, the photographic agency founded by Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Capa, George Rodger and David Seymour in 1947.

Tel +1 212 920 3300
www.gramercyparkhotel.com

COMMERCIAL FEATURE

Quality, style, sanctuary and relaxation



When it comes to standing out from the competition, architects know that the hotel bathroom is where first impressions and reputations can either be won or lost.

That is why they turn to Swiss bathroom specialists Laufen who have developed sanitaryware ranges with the hotel environment specifically in mind. These ranges enable designers to create spa-like retreats that offer guests the last word in comfort.

With homeowners looking to create their own ever-more luxurious bathroom spaces, the hotel bathroom is a focus for guests seeking a new level of sanctuary and relaxation. The quality and comfort of the hotel bathroom will stay in the discerning guest's memory long after their visit is over.

Understanding the importance of good bathroom design, whatever the setting, Laufen has introduced several sanitaryware and furniture collections that are not only ideal for architects

working in the hotel sector but can also be chosen to create a luxury boutique hotel-look at home.

A timeless classic, Palace offers great versatility in the hotel bathroom by effortlessly combining form with function. Central to the range is the elegantly simple washbasin, with ample open storage in the form of an easy-to-clean ceramic shelf below the basin and other practical details that are integral to hotel bathroom design, including an optional liquid soap dispenser in the washbasin.

Taking bathroom ceramics to new heights, Living Square by Laufen has been designed with the ultra-chic city hotel in mind. Featuring sleek surfaces and clear-cut contours, the washbasin gives the appearance of hovering in front of the wall, while a practical washing area is created by the ceramic shelf below the double washbasin. Meanwhile, Laufen's II Bagno Alessi One ceramics collection is the

epitome of bathroom luxury and opulence, as shown on the left. The soft lines and beautiful shapes of the range are encapsulated in the iconic washbasin with gentle curves that create an elegant wave-like appearance and an extended countertop space that provides the perfect wipe-clean area for guests to store toiletries. For a fully co-ordinated bathroom design, the II Bagno Alessi One collection also features a luxuriously deep bath, WC, bidet and shower tray.



For more information on how Laufen can create bathrooms of distinction call 01530 510007, visit www.laufen.co.uk or follow us on twitter #laufenuk

DESIGNER HOTELS SEIZED THE BOUTIQUE BATON FOR A RUN WITH FASHION



COUTURE When fashion designers lend their name and talent to a hotel brand, the resulting style becomes a marketing tool with varying degrees of success or failure. Mark C. O’Flaherty considers the trend for collaboration between couture and hotel design

■ When Palazzo Versace opened on Australia’s Gold Coast in 2000, it represented a radical new look and business model for the luxury hospitality industry.

For the previous 25 years, New Yorker Ian Schrager had taken the boutique hotel format, perfected by Anouska Hempel – who opened Blake’s in London in 1978 – and had huge success, reinterpreting it with a night-club sheen as a string of properties that would be seen as successors to his defunct Studio 54.

Hotels were the new discos. Rooms were tiny, but lobbies designed by Philippe Starck were extravagant, geared towards double-page magazine spreads and after-show events. Predictably, the novelty wore off. Starck interiors no longer looked like the freshest, most radical thing on the block and paying customers tired of being forced to take the rear elevator to their rooms while gauche hip-hop stars partied behind velvet ropes in the bar. From the turn of the millennium, fashion hotels would seize Schrager’s baton.

Palazzo Versace took the existing concept of fashion designers lending their names to suites in grand hotels one giant step further. Designers

would no longer merely be commissioned to dress a single set of rooms in the penthouse at the top-of-the-rack rate. Instead they would go on the payroll of major hotel companies to create whole new brands.

Just as Starwood fashioned its foil to independent Manhattan hoteliers Schrager, André Balazs and Jason Pomeranc by rolling out its urban-hip W brand, so Rezidor – the company behind Radisson – would get into bed with the Missoni family to put their name to a chain of hotels, and Dubai-based Emaar Hospitality would sign Giorgio Armani to do the same.

According to Emaar Hospitality’s chief executive Marc Dardenne: “It’s full steam ahead. We are maximising our assets. We opened in Dubai in April and we are about to open in Milan. We are making the address international and creating a global, five-star, lifestyle brand. Potential owners have responded very positively to the new brand.” Having an internationally recognised designer put their name to a hotel is nothing if not a stroke of marketing genius. Giorgio Armani has a press and marketing value you can’t put a price on.

When the second Hotel Mis-

soni opened this summer, it was in Kuwait. “Our first hotel was in Edinburgh,” says hotel chain owner Rosita Missoni. “It’s a European, cultural, historical city. The new hotel is more of a resort. I wanted a more Arabian feeling. And just as with creating a fashion collection, there’s always a starting point. With this, it was with a striped swimming pool.”

The hotel is certainly spectacular and a sleek paradigm of the kaleidoscopic Missoni style, but it’s doubtful that many from the fashion circuit will ever be swimming in its pool. At the grand opening party Rosita Missoni and her family held court while the bar served alcohol-free cocktails. No champagne corks popped. Kuwait is a purely business destination and the Hotel Missoni is Rezidor’s guarantee of having the number-one hotel in the country.

Similarly, by drafting in Maison Martin Margiela to reinvent the lobby, restaurant and several suites of the Hotel La Maison Champs Elysees in Paris this summer, its new owners – it was previously a Sofitel – have assured themselves of superlative press coverage that will keep even the plainer rooms full at premium rates.

Moschino, Bulgari and Camper have all aligned their brands with properties in the last few years, but it’s Armani and Missoni who offer the most creatively dynamic and “on-brand” solutions for interiors. Armani launched a homewear range in the same year that the Palazzo Versace opened in Australia, and his fashion work is based around texture and palette – notably his celebrated greige tones – rather than silhouette. Missoni likewise. When

Fashion is a capricious beast. Armani, Missoni, Bulgari et al are tried-and-tested safe-bets and bigger brands than their namesakes



**01 CHRISTIAN LACROIX ROOM
AT LE BELLECHASSE, PARIS**

02 DESIGNER KENZO TAKADA

**03 DEVIL IN THE DETAIL
AT SOFITEL SO RESORT, MAURITIUS**



Philip Treacy was drafted in to create the G Hotel in Galway in 2007, it was a more difficult fit. The result was vivid and plush, but it's harder – or at least a stretch – to translate an aesthetic of feathered fascinators into a set of bedrooms. As a brand, you can't roll it out.

Armani has spoken of the “subtlety rather than grandeur” he has been striving for when it comes to the style of his hotels, which is what a potentially regular visitor will want. His hotels are in business hubs, where the customer wants a luxe, yet restrained, environment rather than a quasi-religious experience from their bed linen.

Talking about his designs for the new Sofitel So Resort in Mauritius, Kenzo Takada describes the style as “contemporary but soft, with a Zen aspect to it... simplicity with softness.” Kenzo, again, is a perfect fit for hotels. The Paris-based Japanese designer eschews his Tokyo peers aggressive and dark aesthetic in favour of romance and nature, exactly what a five-star Indian Ocean resort needs.

He also has an acute understanding of the difference between a hotel and a dress with a six-month shelf life.

“When I'm about to create a fashion collection,” he says, “the decision to select a theme is based on my general feeling about the world at a certain moment, and for a short time. For a hotel, the thought process is not fleeting. When you go there, you need to feel the vibes of the place and the local culture, which is something timeless.”

Some fashion hotels are flights of fancy. Kenzo cites Christian Lacroix as a fashion designer who has translated his aesthetic particularly successfully into hotels. The two Paris properties he art-directed – Hotel le Bellechasse and Hotel du Petit Moulin – are romantic four-star boltholes aimed more at the weekend aesthete than the businessman. They're ravishing but, at the same time, Lacroix's time-star has long faded. He's, quite literally, no longer in fashion. A menswear label bearing his name has reappeared for next spring, but he has nothing to do with it. When his couture house folded two years ago, it owed millions. Just as well then that no Christian Lacroix-branded hotel chain was ever slated. Fashion is a capricious beast. Armani, Missoni, Bulgari et al are tried-and-tested safe-bets and bigger brands than their namesakes. But consider how, less

than a year ago, the idea of a John Galiano hotel may well have seemed like a truly excellent idea.

It's the nature of a specific brand, not an association with an abstract idea of the fashion industry, that is key to the success of a fashion hotel. Just as the term “designer” has been abused to the point of redundancy on the high street, it's a label and the label's style, rather than the trappings of fashion, that make for a lucrative hotel project. Credibility in fashion has a profound fragility and one misjudged diffusion line or franchise can kill a label.

It's interesting that the Al Habtoor Group, a UAE-based company, has announced it will soon be creating the world's first generic “fashion hotel” in association with Fashion TV. It will feature a 100-metre exterior LED screen, broadcasting Fashion TV but, as far as reports go, no specific designer will have a hand in the look of the hotel. The project is risky. As the spectacular failure of the Fashion Café in 1998 – intended as a couture competitor to the Hard Rock and Planet Hollywood chains – confirmed, fashion as an abstract concept just isn't enough of a draw. Style needs substance. ●

Coco Chanel Suite, the Ritz, Paris



LUXURY AND STYLE ARE THE FASHION FOR TOP HOTELS

PEDIGREE Fashion has been integral to the culture of luxury hotels since the opening of the very first five-star, writes Mark C. O'Flaherty

■ The most rarefied boutiques still line the lobbies of the grandest of hotels and designers' trunk shows continue to take place in suites named after the most famous labels in history.

The St Regis in New York has its Christian Dior Suite and the Ritz in Paris has the black, white and gold Coco Chanel Suite, where Gabrielle Bonheur Chanel lived for more than three decades.

Charles James spent the last 14 years of his life at the Chelsea Hotel in Manhattan, where cutting-edge costumer Zaldy lives today; their names are a part of the vivid aura of the glamorous, if notorious, W23rd Street building.

Fashion brings as much heat to a hotel as a destination dining room. It creates a scene. “People mistake interior decoration for an indication of the coolness of a hotel,” says André Balazs, the hotelier behind The Standard, The Mercer and current torchbearer of the legendary Chateau Marmont, which will forever be associated with the late Helmut Newton.

“It's nothing to do with looks. It's to do with the culture. I was at a Radisson in Panama City recently and there were so many elements from boutique hotels from the last ten years there, but it was still a Radisson.”

Few New York City hotels have ever generated a buzz like Balazs' highline-straddling Standard in the Meatpacking District, which

opened in 2009. Balazs is, himself, as much of a brand as any fashion label. He was the face of Brioni for a recent advertising campaign and was named one of the Ten Most Stylish Men in America by *GQ* in the States. Besides being photogenic, he has a fantastic eye for art and design. His loft apartment is full of work by Francis Bacon, Julian Schnabel and Andy Warhol, and furniture by Sergio Rodrigues.

The Standard is similarly chic but, like the miniature figure of Uma Thurman in *Kill Bill* guise that he has on a shelf of his loft (he dated Thurman for two years), it's the detail in the scene that makes it so successful.

He collaborated with Le Baron club promoter and artist André Saraiva to create the rooftop party space, which has an invite-only door policy and, between their mutual address books, they pretty much run the city's social scene. The club continues to generate column inches on Gawker-type blogs and in the style press. Like those Brioni adverts, it's his shop window.

Next year Balazs opens a branch of The Standard in London's Chiltern Street, with further plans for a hotel on the sight of the old Battersea Power Station. London's notoriously cliquy fashion community will, once wrangled within Balazs' new Marylebone enclave, serve as the perfect walking advertisement for the new venture. ●

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SERVING UP DESIGN ON A PLATE

FOOD DESIGN It is said that you eat with your eyes first. And now chefs are taking this dictum more seriously than ever with mouthwateringly striking food design, writes **Simon Brooke**

■ There was a time when restaurants in hotels were seen as the refuge of the tired and the timid, but not any more. In recent years a group of hotel restaurants have become destinations in their own right.

And, just as hotels have realised that in order to differentiate themselves and attract customers they need to emphasise their own striking, individual design, this design imperative is influencing not just the decor of their destination restaurants but the food itself.

These days arresting design applies as much to what's on the plate as it does to bedrooms, dining rooms and public areas. It's certainly something that Dennis Kuipers, executive chef of the Restaurant Vinkeles at the boutique Dylan Hotel in Amsterdam, is aware of.

"Twenty years ago there was just food on plates, but now it's much more about entertainment," he says. "These days you're cooking for the eye; it's a complete experience."

Created from a line of 17th-century canal-side houses on Amsterdam's elegant Keizersgracht, the Dylan's design ethos blends traditional opulence with clean, modern lines – a look echoed by the food in its main restaurant. Classic ingredients are presented with modern colours and geometric shapes.

Take, for example, one of Restaurant Vinkeles' signature dishes, a fillet of John Dory with pointed cabbage, fresh almonds, black pudding and a jus of smoked eel. Inspiration for not just the taste but the look of this dish came about when Kuipers was walking on the beach with his son looking at the stones, sand, sea and sky.

Ryan Murphy, newly arrived executive head chef at The Lowry Hotel in Manchester, is creating dishes which will reflect the neo-industrial architecture of the hotel with its vast expanses of glass. His pan-fried red mullet is served with langoustine and a pomme soufflé, among other

ingredients. The shimmering elegance of the pomme soufflé is created by using two slices of potato, which are brushed with egg white, dusted with potato flour and then fried at 74C (165F).

"The potato separates within but it's still held together to form the lightest pillow of potato and really complements the whole dish," says Murphy. "Guests are looking for light dishes in the main and we are planning to work with a nutritional biochemist to develop dishes that look appetising but also healthy."

Wit, as well as lightness, is a key feature of this design trend. At the Maison Moschino hotel in Milan, for instance, head chef Moreno Cedroni has created a colourful sushi collection with a sushi toothbrush, a mint-and-cocunut-flavoured edible toothpaste, and a sake-and-mint-based mouthwash.

"Our generation no longer eats just to be nourished. If anything, the less we eat, the better we feel," he says. "Food design will be more and more about

raw food and, as we have to think of light and healthy diets, the presentation of dishes will be also lighter."

Competition among hotel restaurants is one of the driving forces behind this culinary aesthetic, says Sven Elverfeld, of the three-Michelin-star restaurant at the Ritz Carlton, Wolfsburg, Germany.

■ Tiramisu is served in a ball of spun sugar, which looks like an ethereal light bulb

"There are more and more good restaurants around the world these days, and the internet means that everyone can see what their dishes look like," he says. Arriving at the hotel, he realised that he'd have to develop dishes that complemented

Spoon feeding: idiosyncratic food design from Marije Vogelzang's Amsterdam studio-restaurant Proef

not only the hotel's architecture with its natural materials, but also the views of the landscape through its picture windows. Tiramisu, for instance, is served in a ball of spun sugar, which looks like an ethereal light bulb.

"The whole team will start with something very simple, such as a piece of fish, and then think about the texture and colour," he says. "From that we'll work on the design and then decide what we're going to serve it on." These days, he points out, that could be glass, slate, wood or paper.

Kitchens also include more technology today, which benefits food design. Elverfeld will sear a piece of pork belly for two minutes on each side but then cook it for 24 hours in a vacuum pack in a water bath, or "sous vide", where the temperature is maintained electronically at exactly 65C (140F). "I've got a blender that does 24,000 rotations a minute so it will turn a vinaigrette, for instance, into something like toffee," he says.

Even the grandest hotels and greatest names of French cuisine are involved in this trend.

Jocelyn Herland, executive chef at Alain Ducasse at London's Dorchester, says: "Some very gifted chefs couldn't express themselves in traditional or classic cuisine, so they found a way in more experimental cuisine."

Over the last few years, Christophe Michalak, pastry chef at the Plaza Athénée, in Paris, has been creating cakes that represent elements of the design of the hotel and reflect its surroundings.

"I'm inspired by the place and its inheritance," he says. "The hotel is located on Avenue Montaigne so I like to play on the haute couture element, as well as the traditional side of the hotel." Cakes include a perfect replica of the kind of rounded, Empire-style chest to be found in the hotel's rooms and a clipped tree similar to those from around the entrance, but all made from sugar, flour and chocolate.

Whatever their design styles, one thing that all chefs agree upon is that the food must come first. "Beautiful produce will offer you everything you need to create striking recipes," says Jocelyn Herland.

Dutch designer Marije Vogelzang, who describes herself as an "eating designer", is certainly at the cutting edge of gastronomic visual innovation. She recently built a striking abstract, but edible, lunar landscape of pizza dough which stretched across a series of bowls. Guests ate this dough with a stew that was served alongside it. At the launch of a lingerie label, she placed hors d'oeuvres on swaying rods, tied up with ribbons, to give the impression of a swarm of butterflies.

However extravagant her designs, for Vogelzang it's also the raw ingredients that count. "I think food is perfectly designed by nature," she says. "I don't want to redesign food or mess around with it." ●

FIRST AND LAST IMPRESSIONS: MARCUS WAREING

CUISINE Two-star Michelin chef Marcus Wareing's latest restaurant venture, The Gilbert Scott, opened in the refurbished St Pancras Renaissance London Hotel in May. Once a boxer, he pulls no punches when he talks to **Simon Brooke**



Marcus Wareing: boxer turned chef, fighting for food distinction

■ The first impression of a dish is always created by its visual aspect. The flavours and the texture of the individual items of food on the plate all come into the creative mix to produce the overall look of the dish.

You also have to think about how it's going to be served. What will be served by the chef and what by waiter? What type of plate will it come on? Chefs are now using individual plates for certain dishes. You might buy 12 plates for a particular dish on the menu, whereas you used to buy 50 standard main plates, 50 dessert plates and so on, and everything went on a similar plate.

Chefs get bored quickly. Also, the internet means that you can see what other chefs around the world are doing almost instantly these days. Blogging and social networks mean that everyone is in everyone's backyard – it's quite scary. You've got to think of new ways of presenting even the most ordinary food.

For instance, at the moment we're working on bread and butter. We're looking at using a whipped butter with coarse-grained sea salt and truffle, and then moulding it into quenelle shapes on a chilled plate or even a piece of slate or wood. The slivers of dark truffle and silver

grains of salt will be really striking against the pale yellow butter – and taste great, of course. Customers can have a variety of different types of bread to go with it. So it's a bread-and-butter service, which is a little bit different.

Chefs are increasingly influenced by the overall look of a restaurant. At The Gilbert Scott, the whole restaurant menu was based on the history and look of the St Pancras building. Our food research started from when the hotel was built in the 1870s. We bought old cookery books from that era, including menus by Mrs Beaton. She has a recipe, for instance, called

Soles in coffins. It's lemon sole in a baked potato which they called a coffin. The idea was that you baked the potato, scooped out the flesh and then put sole and shrimps into it. We've taken roughly the same ingredients but deconstructed it and given

“You've got to think of new ways of presenting even the most ordinary food”

it a lighter, modern look that is still in keeping with the look of the hotel.

These days, chefs will think of every different angle when they're designing a dish. In the past, Ferran Adrià, the chef at El Bulli, in Spain, was concerned about molecular gastronomy and the science of food when it came to presenting it. Not a lot of chefs could follow his scientific approach but today, if you take somewhere like Noma in Copenhagen, which was named best restaurant in the world last year, it's all about simple, fresh food from the land and the sea. It's just great ingredients served with very little execution and so it's much easier for more chefs to create beautiful looking food with a strong design element.

The look of the menu, the design of the plates, the style of the food – it's all constantly changing now, partly because there have been so many more restaurants opening over the last year or 18 months which means that there is increased competition among chefs.

Every aspect of food is being reconsidered. For example, for the end of the meal, we're creating an exciting new idea for chocolates instead of the traditional plate of petit fours – but I can't tell you what that is yet, you'll have to wait and see. ●

COMMERCIAL FEATURE



Creating a new hotel experience

Born 1972 in France, Le Méridien was conceived as the discerning hotel guest's "home from home". The child of Air France, a leader in Seventies design and innovation, the first Le Méridien hotel, Le Méridien Etoile in Paris, nurtured a chain of hotels in the world's premiere cities and resorts throughout Europe, Africa, the Middle East and the Asia-Pacific region

French chic and Le Méridien's established international customer base caught the eye of US hotel giant Starwood Hotels & Resorts which, in 2005, made a successful takeover bid and set in motion a bold plan to create a new kind of hotel experience.

Le Méridien, under Starwood, was reimagined to cater for the "creative class".

To define this innovative concept, Le Méridien has unveiled a series of brand initiatives, partnerships and artistic signature programmes offering a new perspective on the hotel experience.

Le Méridien has introduced LM100, which is envisaged as a 100-strong community of creative experts and cultural innovators, curated by Jérôme

Sans, director of the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing.

LM100 members currently include world renowned artists Sam Samore, Joan Fontcuberta and Michael Lin, award-winning photographer Ralph Gibson, film maker Kiki Allgeier, video artist Marcus Kreiss, composer Henri Scars Struck, wine expert Linda Grabe, coffee specialist Andrea Illy and three-Michelin-star chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten.

As Le Méridien's cultural curator, Jérôme Sans is responsible for translating Le Méridien's passion points of art, design and cuisine into a stimulating and gratifying guest experience.

Jérôme has created Le Méridien's Unlock Art programme, which features an artist-designed electronic keycard that allows access to more than the hotel room. The keycard, created by an LM100 contemporary artist, is intended to become a collector's item and is also a complimentary ticket to a local cultural event or exhibition.

He has also aided the transformation of the arrival experience at Le Méridien hotels worldwide. Proprietary customer research shows that the first ten minutes of arrival in a hotel define the guests' entire experience and establish their mindset for the rest of their stay. Therefore, transforming the arrival experience to enhance the senses has been an important mission for Le Méridien.

Beginning with the hotel entrance,

high-impact arrival art immerses guests into the world of Le Méridien. This transformation is accomplished through a visual work of art, a projection or a unique soundscape.

Sensory experience is enhanced with Le Méridien's signature scent, LMO1, created by perfume house Le Labo, engaging guests' memory and emotions through the sense of smell.

And Le Méridien also transforms the expected and predictable event of taking the hotel lift into an elevated experience through video and sound.

Le Méridien has recently announced that it is transforming its lobbies to offer a gathering place that promotes dialogue, awakens curiosity and stimulates guests' creative minds. The new Le Méridien Hubs will offer both guests and locals a creative atmosphere where contemporary, curated artwork sets the environment.

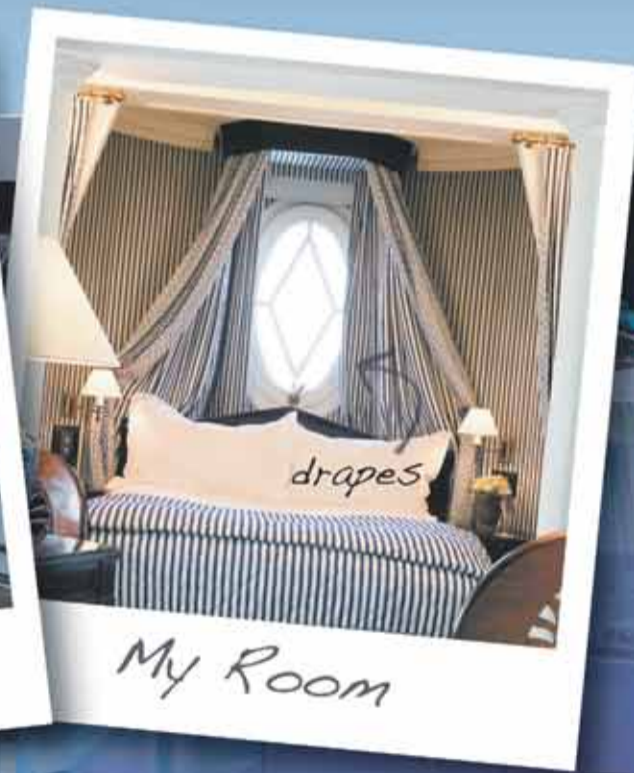
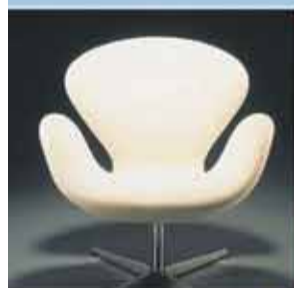
Le Méridien's global portfolio currently totals 106 hotels in 50 countries with the latest flagship addition opening later this year in Istanbul. Dynamic expansion is planned, within the next five years, in the United States, Latin America and Asia-Pacific, including India, Thailand and China.

For more information, please visit www.lemeridien.com

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