

WORDS ELISABETH KING

## ROOMS WITH A VIEW AND LIMITLESS LUXURY

I LOVE giving new luxury hotels a test-run. Who wouldn't? In fact, apart from opening jitters they are a lot easier to review. There's nothing worse than trying to find the good points about a grand hotel once famed as a favourite of Brigitte Bardot whose decor matches the former bombshell's sad decline.

There's no need to use "careful" wording about the Aman Canal Grande in Venice, the luxury hotel group's newest European property, which boasts two of only a handful of private gardens on the "main street" of Venice. Housed in the 16th century Palazzo Papadopoli, Aman's fourth property near the Med is more likely to prompt a flood of superlatives and outright gushing.

Each of the 24 suites delivers on Aman's promise of "impossible luxury". The

position in the multi-billion dollar Lujiazui financial district. Perched on the banks of the Huangpu river, it offers the sort of seamless five-star modern luxury Mandarin Oriental perfected in Hong Kong.

There's 318 rooms, 44 suites and 210 apartments if you are on a longer business trip. The 13-treatment room spa, lavish indoor pool and six signature restaurants, including the Fifty 80 Grill for modern French cuisine and the Yong Ti Ying for Shanghainese delicacies, will soothe away the stress of Shanghai's frenetic pace and notorious smog blankets. On a clear day, the view from the Qi Bar seems like the sci-fi city in the movie, Her.

The fabled Waldorf Astoria in New York was founded by the descendants of John Jacob Astor. Born in Walldorf,

with the tagline - Pimp Your Stay. There's nothing more down-and-dirty on offer than rose petals on your bed and champagne, chocolates and fruits in your room on arrival. Located on the edge of the Museum Quarter in a grand 19th century mansion block - olde worlde ends there. Phillippe Starck's yoo design company kitted out the 63 rooms in a relaxing but avant-garde style. There's also a Slow Food-inspired restaurant, proximity to a clutch of Vienna's top fashion boutiques and gob-smacking views of the city's historic district from the rooftop terrace. The name? It means "without care" in French.

Justin Bieber stayed at The Thief, a "six-star" hotel in Oslo owned by billionaire Petter Stordalen, during his Norwegian tour. The 50-year-old zips around Oslo in a bio-fuel powered Ferrari and the hotel is crammed with \$4.5 million worth of art, including works by Andy Warhol. Located in the gentrified Tjuvholmen waterfront where thieves swung from the gallows in the 18th century, Bieber bedded down in the \$4200-a-night Oslo Suite - complete with Peter Blake art installation. City suits are the main customers in the exy organic restaurant and the ice in the cocktails is ultra-clear and chipped from chain-sawed blocks.

Once immortalised as the "corner mansion" in Alexander Pushkin's poem, The Bronze Horseman, the Four Seasons Lion Palace in St Petersburg is back in the global spotlight. Formerly owned by the fabulously named Princess Cleopatra Lobanova-Rostovskaya, the building's Soviet-era history as a hostel and dingy offices has been sent packing. The first Four Seasons hotel in Russia is again awash with sweeping staircases, intricate ceilings and the finest furniture. One thing that didn't change in Communist times was the palace's astounding views of the city and the Neva river. Forty different vodkas are available in the Xander Bar,

*Do you believe in ghosts? If so, some of the ones haunting New York's The Quin are worth waking up for.*

ceiling of the Alcove Tiepolo Suite was painted by the 18th century namesake artist and the fireplace in the Sansovino Suite is the work of Jacopo d' Antonio Sansovino, the renowned 16th century Venetian architect. Following your arrival by private motor launch, take time for a treatment in the spa or gawk at the 19th century neo-Rococco splendour of the piano nobile - the palazzo's showcase floor. The place to be at sunset for a chilled glass of champagne or prosecco is the rooftop terrace, with panoramic views of the Campanile and Rialto Bridge.

In the movie Skyfall, James Bond tails hitman Patrice from Shanghai's Pudong International Airport to a futuristic skyscraper. The film-makers used Broadgate Tower in London to fake the scenes in China's most populous city. The Mandarin Oriental Shanghai is the real deal and holds a centre-stage

Germany, he was the wealthiest man in the US when he died. For a temporary billionaire's lifestyle in Europe, you won't do better than the Waldorf Astoria Berlin - from the first Guerlain spa in Germany to Les Solistes, the gourmet restaurant run by Michelin-starred French chef, Pierre Gagnaire.

The spectacular Corner Suites make the most of the hotel's central location - a short stroll to the Ku'damm, the city's ritziest shopping street. The Art Deco-inspired Lang Bar, named after iconic movie director Fritz Lang, is as much a place to share space with the German capital's most stylish residents as is the aptly-named Peacock Alley. Smart move: Book the one night package that includes a limo from the airport and a glass of champagne on arrival.

Perhaps Vienna's Hotel Sans Souci shouldn't have spruiked its extra services

# Dennis

OF McLAREN VALE


wines of distinction

*Peter Dennis*



a tribute to Tsar Alexander II for whom Louis Roederer Cristal champagne was created. One of the former courtyards is now the glassed-in Tea Lounge where vintage samovars rule again. Lenin must be spinning in his grave.

Do you believe in ghosts? If so, some of the ones haunting New York's The Quin are worth waking up for. Legendary pianist Paderewski and opera great Guisepppe de Luca are just two of the music legends that stayed in the former hotel on the West 57th St site - The Buckingham Hotel. Opened last June, the change couldn't be more dramatic, from the white leather-wrapped columns in the lobby to the two-storey artisanal restaurant designed to "evoke the experience of an old gentleman's club with a touch of the disco era". The 205 guestrooms are fitted with DUX by Duxiana beds and Sferra Venetian sheets. Billed as the Quintessential New York hotel, the location is unbeatable - a short stroll to Central Park, Fifth Ave, the Lincoln Center and major museum. Relax in The Wayfarer, a double storey restaurant/bar resembling a smart gentleman's club where the food emphasis is on using as much New York State produce as possible.

Closed for seven years for a multi-million dollar revamp by Orient-Express, El Encanto's stunning makeover includes a unique feature - a cow called Ellie. The pampered Holstein's milk will be used to make a cheese exclusive to the century-old property in Santa Barbara on the so-called "Californian Riviera". Clark Gable and Carole Lombard hid away in one of the 92 California-style bungalows with open fireplaces, plantation shutters and private terraces. If you're after a Ralph Lauren ad of a vacation from Big Sur ocean views to Cabernet Crush scrubs in the spa or a glass of El Encanto's home-brewed, unpasteurised beer - just call the personal concierge. 

Since its establishment, Dennis Wines have been awarded over two hundred medals at capital city and international wine shows.

These include The Dan Murphy and Bushing King awards (twice) for the best wine in the McLaren Vale Winemakers Exhibition.

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