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MICHAEL WINNER DESIGN SHOWCASE THE HOWARD MYHOTEL MALMAISON

Photography Richard Leoney

chelsea myhotel



Usually, the blurb that we read in the press packs supplied by public relations companies makes their client venues sound far better than they actually are. You'd expect that. If a new venue was promoted as 'boring with poor design and offering abysmal service' then no one would bother going and the place wouldn't get a write up. The trick is to learn to read between the lines - like you have to when you read the brochures put together by estate agents. A garden referred to as 'mature' is bound to be overgrown. Likewise a chef who has 'worked in many of London's finer restaurants' probably can't hold down a job. The press pack which relates to the new myhotel in Chelsea is no exception; chock a block full of superlatives. The throws on the beds aren't decorative, they're 'luxurious', the cocktails in the bar aren't inventive or well prepared, they're 'decadent' and every room is opulent, desirable, seductive or indulgent. In fact, every page of the press pack is littered with adjectives. Thankfully, on this occasion, exuberant terminology is warranted. myhotel Chelsea is wonderful, it's captivating and it is surely one of the best boutique hotels in London.

It has been designed by James Soane of Project Orange. James worked on the first myhotel in Bloomsbury when he worked for CD Partnership, Terence Conran's design firm. There was much to be admired at Bloomsbury although some thought that the hotel was a little pretentious; too much style, too little substance. Perhaps now, in its fourth trading year, the Bloomsbury hotel has improved, or perhaps the concept and philosophy behind it was ahead of its time then but is more acceptable now. Certainly, that same philosophy - a mix of Far Eastern calm and ideology with Western hedonism - is applied at myhotel Chelsea yet somehow it suits the building better. It's a warmer, more

interesting property and the designers, together with interior contractors, Cathedral Contracts Ltd., have brought out its best features. The ground floor in particular is a triumph. It combines all the practicalities of a good small hotel with immense humour and style. The main lounge and bar appears to take its reference from New England; a wooden interior has been created giving a warm, minimalist look. It has clean, wooden floors, gloss white wooden walls and a predominantly white, wooden bar. The room is furnished with an eclectic mix of sofas and chairs, old and new, and long white curtains frame the bay windows. Behind the bar, at the rear of the hotel, are two bedrooms which have been given the names Ruby and Scarlet. Unlike most of the bedrooms on the upper floors, that favour a white and rose pink colour scheme, these two rooms are dark and sexy, painted in hot reds and deep purples. Erotic photographs adorn the walls and seductive mood lighting adds to the allure. Whilst the rooms cannot be rented by the hour (that would be highly improper) it is possible to book them, on impulse, with a discreet word in the ear of the duty bartender. And being a paying guest will gain you access to other parts of the hotel, including the residents only conservatory, a beautifully laid back and comfortable space, the fitness room and the jinja - where qualified therapists will repair (or so it says in the press pack), relax and pamper you with treatments and massage.

If there is anything that lets the hotel down aesthetically it is the corridors on the upper floors. Much can be done to make corridors more exciting and visually appealing, we've seen this in hotels like K West in Shepherd's Bush and Cowley Manor (see last issue), yet here the walkways are little more than functional. It's a shame really because in most areas Project Orange are brimming with innovative ideas. >





In the basement of the hotel are two sizable private suites: both can be hired for dinners, meetings, presentations and so on. The larger of the two has large French windows that lead out to a small decked area which serves as a courtyard. It has been given the Feng Shui treatment which makes it a genuinely calming little spot. This area is at the back of the hotel; a space that divides two buildings. The facing wall has been rendered and painted white. The conservatory, directly above this suite, also makes use of the space between the buildings. French windows open onto a wooden balcony that overlooks the courtyard and the rendered wall is sometimes used as a screen for projecting images and films upon it. On one visit, black and white episodes of the Avengers, starring the deliciously sexy Diana Rigg as Emma Peel, flickered silently upon the wall above.

There is a theme of artwork throughout the hotel. Four award winning final year photographic students were commissioned to explore and interpret everyday Chelsea through the camera's eye. The works, which are highly professional and personal, are displayed in public and private areas in 'art cube' frames. They add to the individuality of the hotel.

The best room in myhotel has to be the Thai Suite. It is a spacious room equipped with its own kitchen, bathroom, steam room and walk in wardrobe. It is beautifully presented with its black stained floor, white textured walls, seared orange curtains, antique Thai bric a brac, candles and subdued lighting, and an enormous, heavily decorated bed. It is chic and comfortable. Getting in there will be like trying to book a table at the Ivy, possible only if you book months in advance.

The services and 'extras' on offer at myhotel Chelsea appear to cater for every whim. According to the press pack, 'myhotel Chelsea acknowledges that we are all unique and individual by providing every guest with a 'mypreferences form' prior to arrival. Simply choose from a wide range of services and options to ensure your stay meets your own specific requirements.' The press pack continues... 'Personal shoppers and picnic hampers, botox and bespoke suits, meditation and massage, hot water bottles and made to measure Muji rain macs...cashmere throws and cookery classes...' Added to this are 'palmists, tarot readers and life coaches available on request...a choice of bedding, music, DVDs, flowers, Rocco chocolates and champagne...'

myhotel Chelsea is a destination in itself although it will appeal to a certain type of customer. It may well benefit from its fashionable surroundings; there's a lot of money in SW3, but if it was reproduced in Leeds, Manchester or Birmingham it would do equally well. As the Public Relations script writer says, 'it exudes charm without chintz...and combines 'sex in the city' contemporary glamour with the feel of an English country house.' And that just about sums it up. •