

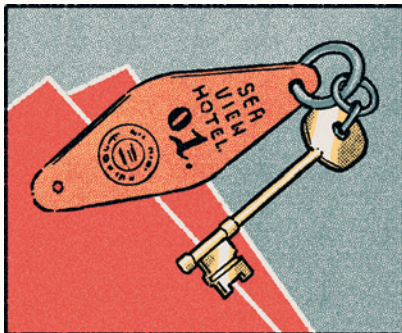
I. How to design a hotel

by William Brian Smith

Designers are often quizzed for secrets: easy dos and don'ts. My answer is usually disappointing. "It depends," I'll utter with a shrug. Magazines, newspapers and blogs announce trends with buzzwords or hastily written headlines: "Three ways to use baby pink"; "Seven must-haves to make a space feel organic". I typically dismiss such trends as empty but occasionally these catchphrases can help demystify or democratise design. I've been given a little hope by the increased use of one word: "authentic". Unlike prescriptive trends advocating a particular pink or labelling a tumbledown hotel "shabby chic", authenticity encourages us to pick our brains, not just a colour.

In the early 1900s, the Russian actor Konstantin Stanislavski had the idea to introduce reality into theatre, a technique that later evolved into method acting. He noticed that audiences weren't connecting with theatre because the acting felt hokey. Schools were training actors to mimic emotions rather than feel them. Sad? Frown. Angry? Shake a fist.

Stanislavski implored actors to dream up detailed narratives about their character's life and to ask themselves why the character is doing what they're doing. Armed with a deeper understanding of their character, actors began realistically capturing subtlety and better



portraying the authenticity of the role. This philosophy always chimed with my understanding of design. It also prompted a question: how can details from thoughtfully constructed stories convincingly connect guests to the life of a hotel? There are, it turns out, lots of ways to do it but for now I'll share two.

The hotels we create at Studio Tack use signals in the form of art, objects or signage, which elaborate on and tell the hotel's story. They should reinforce the design story but never retell it. If you're designing a hotel in Brooklyn, avoid art and signage that repeats the borough's name or murals of its famous bridge: they'll feel lazy. Even the least observant guests already know where they are before they step into your lobby.

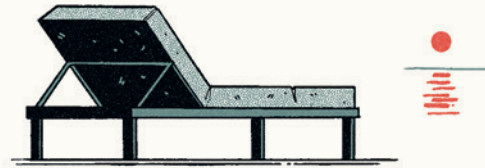
Instead, try subtler prompts to tell the city's story: a pop-up magazine kiosk with the best of the city's print; a florist flogging locally grown blooms; a coffee shop from a nearby roaster-done-good. These experiences relate directly to a positive story about entrepreneurship and the city beyond the hotel's door. In effect, we create vignettes of miniature cities within our hotels, hinting at what's best about the city as a whole: abundance of choice, accessibility and possibility.

Secondly I'd suggest that designers and hoteliers consider touch points: doorknobs, switches, taps and curtains. Anything guests can grip should send a message, feel sturdy and be forged from the best materials your budget will stretch to. The goal is for the guest literally (and figuratively) to connect with the design. Individually, these details are minor, simple upgrades but, when applied throughout, they make a big difference.

Think about the light switch as the first line of the room's story: a wobbly, cheap one is the equivalent of a spelling mistake in the first sentence. The knurled knob of an engineered dimmer tells a guest you've got the grammar right and they'll be ready to hear more of your story. Curtains in flax linen and bronze drawer handles wrapped in vegetable-tanned leather show commitment to the narrative's details.

Next time you're at a hotel, ask yourself what story it's telling, whether you're thinking about it or not, whether it's authentic or otherwise. The walls are talking. The important question is, do you believe them?

About the writer: William Brian Smith is a partner at interior-design firm Studio Tack.



2. A day in the life of a sunlounger

by Saul Taylor

Not all sunloungers are created equal. Some of us come pre-formed in bright white plastic and leave fleshy grooves in pink calves; some of us have faded wooden slats and sit sad and idle as the seasons batter our dignity. Then there are those of us born into the Kettal family in the little Catalan town of Bellvei. We are destined for greater things and grace the well-kept lawns and decks of the Mediterranean's more elegant hotels.

05.30: Daybreak. We can be found pointing pool-ward in a chevron formation, awoken by that rare species of early bird, the power swimmer, who drops his towel at our feet, dives into the still expanse to embark upon 30 heart-starting laps, then leaves without a trace before breakfast. By now, crisp white towels have miraculously appeared on our nether regions while the bar service is announced by quiet clinks behind closed shutters.

08.00: The day's sun-seekers arrive, brushing croissant flakes from their mouths in the rush to bag the best spot. We brace ourselves for impact – please, not the German with the ample arse and chronic skin condition again! The water, still chilly from the night before, elicits sharp breaths and we're soaked as guests shriek with cries of joy in anticipation of the day ahead.

08.30: Folded towels are shaken open and someone creaks my neck awkwardly at 45 degrees while unceremoniously tumbling books, magazines and newspapers onto me. Clothes come off, suntan lotion is slopped on and the first refreshments are ordered in one hurried summer gesture.

10.30: The familiar moan of a young couple who've over-imbibed the previous evening rings a little too loudly across the calm. They plonk themselves heavily onto two of my poor compadres, adopting the foetal position to avoid the glare of the sun. Everyone else makes their first manoeuvre of the day, lifting us aloft and positioning our frames directly into the path of the solar arc.

13.00: Lunch menus are distributed and entire families draped in damp towels huddle around small tables filled with club sandwiches while we groan under the weight of their backsides. Stuffed and satisfied, some seek the solace of a siesta in their room while others stay with us to doze in the light of the overhanging pines, only to be awoken by the cries and flirtatious splashing of the young couple (they've shaken off their hangover with a long drink or two).

16.30: A sudden change in the afternoon light, from squint-inducing white to warm yellow, heralds cocktail hour. The deep-tanned bar staff in navy polos and starched white shorts dart effortlessly from lounge to lounge with goblets of fizzing gin and tumblers of ruddy aperitivo. When the sun disappears behind the main building and the warming effects of the alcohol begin to subside, there's a sad exodus of guests who bundle up their things and desert us for the balmy after-sun of their rooms.

01.15: The young couple comes creeping down for a spot of forbidden skinny-dipping and we're left with the realisation that, much like loungers, not all men are created equal.

About the writer: Saul Taylor isn't a sunlounger. Instead, he's a contributing editor at Monocle.





3. The rules of the ryokan

by Fiona Wilson

A night in a proper Japanese ryokan (inn) is unlike any other hotel experience – and all the better for it. It's worth remembering that ryokan are the product of centuries of tradition; asking for services you'd find at a generic hotel would miss the point entirely. Here are a few tips to ensure you make the most of this unique experience.

1. Check-in is unlikely to be earlier than 15.00 so don't turn up in the morning. And don't hang around when it comes to departure time; most guests leave soon after breakfast.
2. On arrival you'll be expected to remove your shoes as soon as you cross the threshold; the ryokan is a private space and relaxation begins by saying sayonara to your shoes and switching to slippers. Spiked heels and muddy boots would also wreck the tatami mats that cover the floor. You'll be greeted by the manager, known as an *okami* – usually a no-nonsense woman in a kimono who

is also likely to be a member of the family that owns the place. A room attendant (*nakai-san*) will show you to your room.

3. It's obvious to those who know but often startling to newcomers: your room will be empty apart from a low table and a couple of legless chairs. Don't bother looking for the beds, they're folded up in cupboards behind the sliding doors.
4. Don't look for the ensuite bathroom either – while your room is likely to have a lavatory (with a heated seat), private bathrooms don't feature in traditional ryokan; instead, you'll bathe in a shared bath. If you're lucky enough to be staying somewhere mountainous this could also involve a soak in a mineral-rich outdoor hot spring bath, known as a *rotenburo*.
5. Unless you're planning to head out of the inn (and Japanese guests wouldn't – they're here to relax), change into ryokan garb: a starched full-length cotton *yukata* robe, which will probably be folded in a basket in your room. If it's cold, there will be an extra jacket to wear on top; this is acceptable wear throughout the ryokan, including at mealtimes.
6. Bathing in Japan can be a baffling experience for novices. The rules, however, are simple. On no account wear swimming costumes or trunks in a Japanese bath, indoor or out; before you enter the steamy bathroom, remove your *yukata* and put it in the basket that will be laid out in an anteroom (you can always use the postage stamp-sized towel supplied to maintain your modesty). Head to the row of thigh-high showers at the side of the bath and sit on one of the low stools – you don't go near a Japanese bath until you've showered and rinsed thoroughly. And the shower isn't supposed to be a quick spritz either; get stuck in with the soap and shampoo that will be next to the shower. Only then should you go to the water. The bath is for relaxation, not washing.
7. After a bath, you'll go for what's likely to be an early dinner, which will be served on the table back in your room. Dinner is included in the cost, which can explain the spectacular prices of top ryokan. Depending on the quality of the inn, it will be a long affair, involving many courses served in succession. Don't expect to turn up at 21.00 and ask for



- dinner; ryokan run like clockwork and 19.30 would be late for a meal.
8. Once dinner is over, retreat for another bath while the beds are made up. When you re-enter your room it will be transformed – lights low and futon mattresses laid out, with fluffy quilts and rice-filled pillows. Don't be alarmed by the prospect of sleeping on the floor. A combination of the hot *onsen* water, the saké served at dinner and the comfortable set-up leads to most guests having the best night's sleep they can remember.
9. In the morning, breakfast may be served in a public room. For Japanese guests, it will comprise grilled fish, *natto* (fermented soy), sharp *umeboshi* (pickled plums) and rice. The western option will likely be white toast with an egg, salad and a cup of coffee; don't make requests for granola and soy milk.
10. Remember that prices quoted are generally per person, not per room. Also, don't book for a whole week, particularly in a city. For most Japanese, one night at a ryokan does the trick.

About the writer: Fiona Wilson is a ryokan regular and *Monocle's* Tokyo bureau chief.

4. How to stage an affair

by Robert Bound

Slip in the key card and feel the release. What is it about hotels? I see you in the bar and I come over, sit next to you and say, "Hi". I wouldn't normally but I do. And you say it, too, right back, after a beat. No, two. I make a play of guessing what you might like to drink; narrow my eyes and purse my lips like a smile but it isn't a smile, not yet, rather a suggestion that one might come. You bite your lip, look away and read aloud the label on a bottle behind the bar and say, "Yes, two". And let's not play games. You're under low lamplight in a hotel bar at 21.00 pretending to have a late dinner but we both know you're not here for the food.

What is it about hotels? Managers and maître d's know. They've noticed that woman on a week-long business trip – whose husband sent flowers to the hotel on their anniversary – drop her key into the breast pocket of a man who's just added a night to his stay. Perhaps the man thought she'd say no. Or perhaps he knew she'd say yes but would still rather do the sleeping part on his own. And, probably, so would she. And you?

When you wake up with someone for the first time and know it's the last, you stretch, smile, kiss them and leave. Back in your own room, you gaze at the bathroom mirror and smile through the steam, maybe sing in the shower. No need for a swim this morning; your back aches and you're happy. You just hope the bite marks fade on the plane. The receptionist twinkles: "We hope your stay was a happy one, sir." She knows. It had been late when she brought up the silver tray with the ice bucket, vodka, limes and glasses. Yes, two.

What is it about hotels? Are you alone in feeling, as you sit in these rooms, that tonight may be the last night on Earth? In feeling you'd be a fool, before the world stops spinning – say, tomorrow at 10.00 – not to go for a drink at the bar with a folded newspaper and an open disposition? I bet it's not just you who feels that, who knows that if hotels are theatre and romance then nights like these, stolen out of a script unwritten, are like little operas. The stories are improbable, the acting regretful but the best parts, those arias that swirl from nowhere, are deep in you somewhere. You'll smile again in plenty more bathroom mirrors. Stay another night? No, two.

About the writer: Robert Bound is a paragon of fidelity and *Culture* editor at *Monocle*.

5. The housemaid's tale

by Kimberly Bradley

In his essay “Shipping Out”, penned on a Caribbean cruise, the late writer David Foster Wallace captures something of the oddity of having someone look after you without ever meeting them. He develops a “searing crush” on an elusive cabin stewardess called Petra and touchingly tries to fathom how she keeps his cabin so pristine. His obsession deepens as he pops out for short periods, darts around corners and waits, fruitlessly, for Petra to appear in plain sight. He muses on his invisible benefactor as “a figure of magical and abiding charm, and well worth a postcard all her own”.

My own Petra moment came at the Mandarin Oriental in New York. Every time I left my room – even for half an hour – something small would be adjusted in my absence: toiletries tweaked, bed turned down, a delicate blossom placed on the pillow. How did he or she know I wasn't there? I channelled Wallace and began bluffing, leaving the room for shorter intervals and moving the little bed-rug a few inches out of place. Sure enough, on my return, the rug had been returned to its intended position. Like Wallace, I never did catch anyone in the act of fixing it but it did make me wonder about these mysterious visitors who so painstakingly perfected my stay.

Years later, I had the pleasure of talking to a lady called Claudia, the head of housekeeping at a starry ski hotel in Vorarlberg, Austria. A known haunt for royals and celebrities, it's also where I finally learned how the best housekeepers transform a shambolic room into a chamber literally fit for a king.

“We watch for when people leave but mostly we listen,” said Claudia. “You can hear when the door falls shut.” In her hotel, the housekeepers hover in a small, secret office on each floor, waiting for guests to scuttle off and springing into action when they're safely out of sight. Claudia and her staff clean 50 rooms every day, all day.

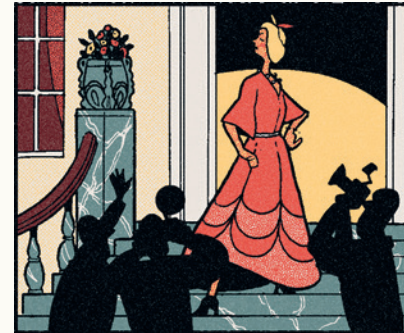
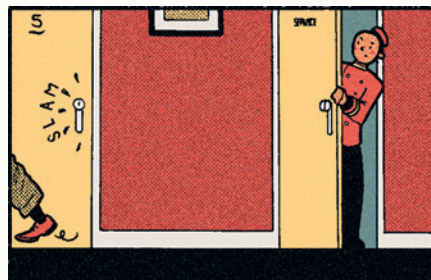
Some of their work is anticipation. Regulars leave feedback about how they want their rooms and their predilections are stored on a database. “Two regular guests have customised mattresses,” said Claudia. “Some want four pillows, some want seven and some want a feather bed.”

A few cunning (or perhaps immeasurably bored) guests, like Wallace, have tried to trick Claudia and her team. “Some leave, say, a coin in a strange place, to see what happens to it,” she said. “I used to be a nurse in surgery, so I'm extremely conscious of cleanliness, even sterility. I can see everything. So I always find things like this. I check every single room before I approve it and every room in the building must be approved every day.”

The inspection involves looking under beds and toilets, examining everything from the sewing kit to the remote control. Tiny items are cleaned individually with cotton swabs. Cleaning supplies are kept as natural as possible (bleach? Heaven forbid), even if every once in a while there's a bigger spill requiring more stringent measures. Crucially, said Claudia, keeping things clean is about speed: a guest returning to the room mid-sweep, she insists, is awkward for everyone (unless for you, like Wallace, this is the ultimate victory).

What does Claudia like most about her work? “I like going home at night and knowing we've done a good job. I like it when the room looks beautiful, smells good and people are happy.” Whether or not we ever meet our elusive housekeepers, staying in a clean, fragrant and cared-for room is a mark of the most enduring luxury. It's a simple sentiment and a rather sweet one – something to mull over any time you pluck a chocolate from your pillow or plunge under the clean covers of an immaculately made bed.

About the writer: *Kimberly Bradley is a tidy hotel guest and Monocle's Vienna correspondent.*



6. Hotels and high drama

by Luke Barr

My first job when I moved to New York was at the Royalton, the Ian Schrager (*see page 174*) hotel on 44th Street, designed by Philippe Starck. I'd never heard of Schrager or Starck or the Royalton – I was a kid, I knew nothing. But when I walked into the lobby in 1994, I felt all the mysterious glamour of New York concentrated in a single room. It was like walking onto a film set.

Long, narrow, dark-blue carpet ran from the front doors back to the restaurant. It was lit with spotlights, like a fashion-show runway. All eyes were on you, both because of the lighting and because of the architecture, which set that walkway a few steps above the rest of the lobby, so guests would glance up to see who was making an entrance. Music played (Massive Attack or Sade) and odd, horn-shaped lights protruded from a mahogany wall like something out of a David Lynch film. Then there were the guests, impossibly beautiful and glamorous: Karl Lagerfeld surrounded by a menagerie of models and hangers-on; Tina Brown and Anna Wintour at their usual banquet tables; Tupac sinking a drink.

Working there, I could see backstage and understand how it all worked. We pored over the VIP list at the start of every shift, listing everyone of note and any special requests or warnings. There were frequent adjustments to the lighting and music, depending on the

time of day. I remember the care, bordering on obsession, given to the seating arrangements in the restaurant, crowned by the brilliant cooking of an ambitious chef. It was an ultra-competent but never obsequious service we knew to provide.

A new genre of hotel and hotel lobby was being invented that harnessed the power of design to create a seductive fantasy. The Royalton was by no means New York's fanciest or most expensive hotel but it was the white-hot centre of social chic.

I thought about the Royalton recently, as I worked on my book, *Ritz & Escoffier: The Hotelier, the Chef, and the Rise of the Leisure Class*, which tells the story of the London Savoy and the Paris Ritz in the 1890s. Just like the Royalton 100 years later, the Savoy and Ritz redefined luxury and the cosmopolitanism at the end of the century.

Hotelier César Ritz and chef Auguste Escoffier set up the concept of hotel and restaurant as a theatre of food for anyone with money to foot the bill. The resulting openness, welcoming a never-before-seen mix of people from all parts of society, was a sign of the times, yes, but also an agent of change. The Savoy in 1890 was the first restaurant in London where respectable women came to entertain, where raffish US industrialists ate alongside princes, bohemian artists, writers, actors and opera stars.

César Ritz was intent on creating an abiding atmosphere of aristocratic wealth and glamour but with an unfussy look. He hated wallpaper, knick-knacks and anything that could gather dust. He loved flowers and put them everywhere. Every suite had a private bathroom, then unheard of in Europe. An orchestra played on weekend nights. Obsessed with lighting, he spent hours testing lampshades to find the perfect and most flattering apricot-peach hue and he meticulously kept track of all his guests' preferences: who needed a bottle of water on his bedside table and who required what kind of pillow.

As at the Royalton years later, Ritz ensured his lobbies were spaces of high drama – places to see and be seen in. At the Carlton hotel in London, he asked the builder to make an expensive late change by installing a flight of marble steps between the palm court and the restaurant, “so that ladies entering the dining room or leaving it may do so dramatically”. Like Schrager and Starck, Ritz was thinking like a director and never forgetting that the hotel lobby was his set.

About the writer: *Luke Barr is a US-based author.*

7. Fully booked – hotels in literature

by Chloë Ashby

When I asked Ian McEwan why he chose a hotel as a backdrop for his 2007 novel *On Chesil Beach*, he told me, “Hotels – whether they are gorgeous or grim – are a kind of blank slate on which the novelist finds a form of freedom. Isolated from the clutter, demands and familiarity of home, the guests, as characters in a novel, enact the drama of existence between sea and sky.”

In *On Chesil Beach*, that drama is a single disastrous sex scene. The novel opens with newlyweds Edward and Florence arriving at a Georgian inn on the pebbly Dorset coast in the summer of 1962. He’s raring to go, she’s racked with nerves. They sit down to a dour and tasteless dinner – “this was not a good moment in the history of English cuisine” – before retreating to a tidy bedroom to consummate their fledgling marriage. “The bed squeaked mournfully when they moved, a reminder of other honeymoon couples who had passed through, all surely more adept than they were.”

Hotels make for attractive literary backdrops because they present the opportunity for chance encounters, overheard conversations and, as in McEwan’s novel, intimate and awkward interactions. As a guest settles into bed she might hear the creaking of a door, a service trolley rattling along the corridor – or, if she’s an Agatha Christie character, the clatter of a bloody knife falling on a stone floor. *Evil Under the Sun* is about a murder in a secluded hotel in south Devon. Who dunnit? The retired officer, the former teacher, the fashionable dressmaker? Christie gives us an eclectic cast in uncomfortably close quarters.

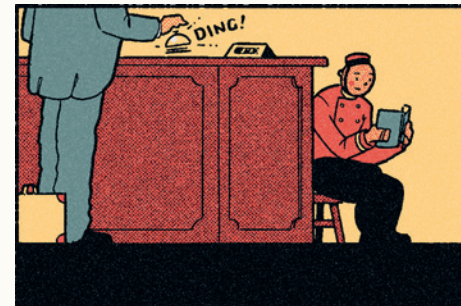
For Ali Smith, a hotel is “a gift of concise hierarchical social structure” with “people who can afford to stay there, people who can’t and a workforce keeping the machine running”. Her first novel, *Hotel World*, is set in The Global Hotel, a plush pad in a gritty northern English town. It tells the story of five very different



women from very different backgrounds, including melancholic receptionist Lise and Else, a homeless woman permanently parked outside the hotel’s revolving front doors. Chapter one opens with the ghost of chambermaid Sara Wilby gliding through the sky: she narrates post-mortem, having plunged to her death in a silver-coloured dumbwaiter shaft. “Nobody could say I didn’t have a classy passage out; the rooms very newly and tastefully furnished with good hard expensive beds and corniced high ceilings.”

Herman Melville, too, brings opposites together in *Moby Dick*. Ishmael spends a night in the run-down Spouter-Inn in the whaling port of New Bedford, Massachusetts. With no free rooms, the landlord invites the good Christian to share a bed with the pagan harpooner Queequeg. After judging that the alternative, a wooden bench in the hotel bar, is a tad uncomfortable, Ishmael agrees and learns there’s more to this “savage” than his shaved head and garish tattoos.

Naturally, not all hotels in literature are good advertisements for the industry – in fact, Stephen King’s *The Shining* almost screams, “Don’t check in!”. Writer Jack Torrance takes an off-season caretaking gig at the secluded Overlook Hotel



in the Colorado Rockies, hoping to put pen to paper and resist reaching for a drink. You know the story: he and his family get snowed in, his psychic son Danny sees the hotel’s ghastly past and Jack goes mad. The novel was inspired by King’s own visit to The Stanley Hotel in Colorado (and his recovery from alcoholism).

John Irving’s *The Hotel New Hampshire* is full of equally chaotic events but, on the whole, funnier and less frightening – featuring a bear called State O’Maine, a girl in a bear suit called Susie and a stuffed dog called Sorrow. It tells the story of the eccentric Berry family, who run a succession of three hotels, all called Hotel New Hampshire. The first is actually in New Hampshire, the second is in Vienna and the third is in Maine. Win Berry, meanwhile, is a dreamer whose “imagination was his own hotel!”

McEwan ranks Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice* and *The Magic Mountain* as the greatest hotel novels. In the former, a love story of sorts plays out against the glistening backdrop of the Lido’s Grand Hôtel des Bains – frequented by Hollywood darlings until it was shuttered in 2010. The latter is set in a tuberculosis sanatorium in the Swiss Alps – a semi-hotel for semi-invalids?

Hotels appeal to writers because they offer a blank canvas on which to project dreams, desires, fantasies and failings – and I suspect they appeal to guests for the same reason. When you check into a hotel, at least on holiday, you leave your worries at the door. A room is ready and waiting, perhaps like Edward’s and Florence’s with a four-poster bed “pure white and stretched startlingly smooth, as though by no human hand”. Whether you’re a novelist or a guest, the room is yours, a clean slate to make of it what you will.

About the writer: *Fittingly*, bookworm Chloë Ashby is associate editor of *Monocle’s Books team*.

8. Raising the bar

by Dan Poole

Hotel bars have so much to recommend them that it would be impossible to do the topic justice in the space afforded here. It would take a whole book, in fact – I offered to write it but the editor said something about sitting down quietly and getting on with my day job.

Anyway, it helps that if you are in a hotel bar you’re probably on holiday. I wouldn’t mind betting that there’s sound science to prove that the combination of alcohol and annual leave produces enough oxytocin to border on the orgasmic. Imagine your state of heightened arousal when, sat at a bar having ordered something amber-coloured on ice, the bartender utters those immortal words: “Shall I charge this to your room?” Yes, my good man, you shall. Because then it will feel like I am receiving this drink for free. Reality may bite come check-out time but who cares? I’m pleasantly inebriated, that bowl of nibbles has just been refilled and soon I’ll have a bath in the middle of the day *because I can*.

Another reason to love hotel bars: they stay open late. Once I was in a hotel with friends in the English county of Kent; I forget its name but that’s probably because it had a security guard who doubled as a 24-hour barman. Every time we required more drinks we’d wave at this fine gentleman; he’d sigh, get up from behind reception and replenish us. The later it got, the grumpier he got, and the more muscular and menacing he looked. But who doesn’t like a whiff of danger with their pint?

There have been other highlights. The Royal Harbour Hotel in Ramsgate has a lounge and library that features books (of all things), board games, a record player, a roaring fire when required and views over England’s south coast. Tying all these elements together? A delightful little honesty bar. Further afield, at the Hotel Palácio do Governador in Lisbon, my wife and I were presented with a complimentary glass of port in its Occasus Bar, which we enjoyed on the terrace. Original? Not particularly. Enjoyable nonetheless? Abso-bloody-lutely.

The wonder of the hotel bar is that it feels familiar yet exclusive; you should be as relaxed as if you’re at home but looked after enough to feel special. Any hotel without a bar should not be trusted; it’s akin to a scuba-diving outfit without an oxygen tank. So check in and make a beeline for the person in bow tie and waistcoat. Drop by often enough for them to know your usual and by check-out you’ll have achieved the final stage of enlightenment.

About the writer: *Dan Poole loves a whiff of danger with his pint and is chief sub-editor at Monocle*.

9. Ode to the concierge

by *Melkon Charchoghlyan*

As technology runs amok and marketeers seek new ways to cut costs, we're in danger of losing the concierge. Some may scoff at the loss, imagining a smartphone knows a city better than a local. But armed with little black books of contacts and reassuring smiles, concierges are more than speedy bookers of taxis – they're people who look out for you.

My first debt of gratitude to a concierge came as a seven-year-old on a family trip to Rome. After dinner at the foot of the Borghese Gardens, we hopped into a cab to our hotel. But once in the lobby my mother realised her handbag, complete with wallets and passports, was still in the taxi. She sank into the sofa in shock and gathered her thoughts. Suddenly Aldo, the sprightly sexagenarian concierge was standing over us, my mother's bag in hand; he'd hopped on his scooter and hared after the taxi. "I recognised the car as you pulled up," he said. "Those drivers all meet in Piazza Sonnino at this time of night." That, to me, is the role of the concierge. To help, sure. To rescue, perhaps. But also to surprise.

A survey of my colleagues showed I wasn't alone in my appreciation of these guardian angels. Our Vienna correspondent, staying at the Paramount in New York in the aftermath of 9/11, was grateful for daily transport when the city was in a gridlock. "I wouldn't have made it through that harrowing time without Clayton," she says of her concierge. Meanwhile, when our advertising manager pulled up at a hotel in London's Mayfair, a year after his last and only other stay, he was chuffed that the concierge, Paul, opened the door and remembered his name.

The best concierges go out of their way to look after you. As our Culture editor learned, they'll often solve a problem before you know you have one. One night, he was approached at Seoul's Grand Hyatt by a concierge and housekeeper. The latter suspected she had added a rip to his shirt, which he'd tossed in the laundry that morning. "No, no, it was like that before," our editor insisted. But the concierge would hear nothing of the sort and handed over a bespoke replacement, made that day by the in-house tailor. "I still have it and, yes, it's my favourite," he says. Did he return to the Grand Hyatt next time he was in Seoul? You bet your best shirt he did.

About the writer: *Melkon Charchoghlyan takes good care of his belongings and is a writer on Monocle's Books team.*

10. Coming of age in a hotel

by *Hugo Macdonald*

My parents were dealt a strange hand early in their marriage. My father's father died suddenly and they moved to the Isle of Skye to look after my grandmother, inheriting a large amount of debt and a 17th-century hunting lodge. Spurred on to clear the former, the pair spent a year turning the latter into a hotel. They were barely in their twenties and couldn't have imagined how it would shape the course of the rest of their lives. Mum did all the interiors and cooking, Dad managed the staff and business, and together they were hosts.

Growing up in a remote hotel on a Hebridean island off the west coast of Scotland – at the time only connected to the mainland by a small car-ferry – was weird and wonderful. The original building had 11 bedrooms, a dining room and two drawing rooms, and our family home was a small extension connected to the hotel by doors on the first and ground floors. Yet, despite these private-public thresholds, our lives were utterly intertwined with the goings on in the hotel. We were all staff and the staff were all family.

In the 1980s, during my childhood, it was an intrepid guest who holidayed on Skye. It was the perfect foil to the potential loneliness that extreme rural isolation might bring, to be surrounded by an endless cast of eccentric characters. My horizons, and those of my three older sisters, were broadened; our overactive imaginations were constantly fed by the lives and stories of guests. Because it felt like we were at the end of the world, people would come to stay to escape from their lives and, due to the intimate scale of the hotel and its location, there

wasn't much room for anonymity. At times it felt like the hotel was a residential therapy facility and we were the carers.

Strange dramas consumed us. There was the lady whose dog died slowly and loudly, and the guest whose husband died quietly during the night. There was the man who walked up the mountain at sunset never to return, and another man who did the same but was found alive by the mountain-rescue team hours later (he claimed that he'd been overcome by a strangely magnetic sensation that he had to keep walking). There was corridor creeping and partner swapping. Mum found two strangers "locked in a carnal embrace" in the drawing room one night, long after everyone else had gone to bed. Our hotel gave people permission to behave strangely and gave us the opportunity to observe human life with all of its idiosyncrasies.

As soon as we were deemed responsible enough, my sisters and I were allowed to work in the hotel, which despite a more formal education was the greatest learning experience of my life. Working in a small hotel, you don't just learn how to change bedding in seconds or peel 50 potatoes in 30 minutes, you also learn to quickly read people from small signals. You detect personality types from cleaning bedrooms and serving breakfasts, plotting daily excursions on a map and topping up someone's whisky after dinner. The same people who think it's fine not to flush the toilet often struggle to look you in the eye as you pour their coffee.

My parents ran our hotel instinctively as an extension of our home, creating a feeling of hospitality that was relaxed, comfortable and fun. Nothing was more rewarding than seeing people arrive frosty then visibly melt after a day or two. Once, Dad famously asked a guest who was angry and rude to pack their bags and

leave because they threatened to destroy the experience for everyone else. Despite cringing with embarrassment at the time, I look back and admire his reasoning that this was our home and he would not tolerate rudeness under our roof, whether someone was paying or not. This was long before TripAdvisor.

I do believe that the warmth and personality of my parents meant guests miraculously forgave situations that might have finished them off in today's regulated, risk-averse climate of trial by social media. We were at the mercy of the elements, in wilderness territory. Our water supply, which came from a deep river pool higher up the mountain behind the lodge, would freeze during prolonged or heavy frosts. Dad would disappear up the mountain in the dark and defrost the pipes with a blowtorch. When storms blew in, the electricity would go out and Mum would visit every guest with a supply of candles and matches, as well as Thermos flasks of tea made on our gas Aga. One winter, the little bridge that connected us to the rest of the world washed away and the army had to come to rebuild it. This was part and parcel of the adventure and, so long as things were restored relatively quickly, it only added to the experience. The log fires would always be roaring and the bar was always open.

It was peculiar to grow up in such a remote setting yet to be so heavily involved in many people's lives – but that's precisely what made the experience special. We were brought up to understand the importance of basic hospitality – that it is engendered not through a checklist of amenities but through a feeling of deep care. I have vivid memories of Mum rushing outside to welcome guests in from the wind and rain with promises of fresh cake and a wee dram of whisky by the fire.

Much of the hotel industry today has lost sight of the true meaning of hospitality, replacing it with blander aspirations of convenience and consistency. Remote check-ins and automated check-outs don't inspire a genuine feeling of welcome. Happy memories are made from human contact.

About the writer: *Hugo Macdonald is a writer, journalist and author of 'How to Live in the City' (Pan Macmillan).*





II. Why I love a good motel

by Jayson Seidman

We Americans used to be mobile. With a system of endless highways at our beck and call and a healthy – some would argue unhealthy – car culture, motels boomed from the 1950s onwards, offering cheap stopovers for travelling salesmen and discreet rendezvous spots (not to mention, if Hollywood is to be believed, the odd messy shoot-out).

By the time I was a kid in the 1990s, the motel’s heyday had passed. My family, however, still stayed in them on holiday. I remember the neat, woody interiors; while people lounged by the pool, I would stand on the wraparound mezzanine, peering down at the comings and goings of guests: some families like mine, some travelling salesmen, some leading furtive affairs. It’s a nostalgic image: the neon sign, suspended from a banner and flashing “vacancy”.

The motel had a simple, low-lying, linear and ever-so-modern premise. Guest rooms were located along the first floor, facing an inner courtyard; there might be a pool, maybe

a café or diner for passing trade and guests to hunker down in. The comparative cheapness of these one or two-storey structures allowed for fast construction and led to a substantial spike in building. By the mid-1960s, their popularity began to wane as demand for greater luxury increased and the notion of the motel became altogether seedier and dingier. With rising real-estate costs and the desire to build vertically and ever more vertiginously, the motel was forgotten, deemed inefficient and eventually undesirable.

But one thing has been ignored in the rush for newer and taller hotels with more and more rooms: the guest experience isn’t always elevated the further you get from the ground. Actually, the higher you go, the more secluded you feel. Historically, motels were about simplifying the guest experience. The horizontal structure and open, often playful, architecture lent itself to a more communal atmosphere, chance encounters, the ability to watch others as they schlepped in and out. Motels create a relaxed backdrop for overnighters and locals to rub shoulders and even clink glasses. Unlike congested downtown hotels, motels also have the advantage of location: room for a pool, perhaps, but also quick access to the countryside and forests, beaches or rolling plains.

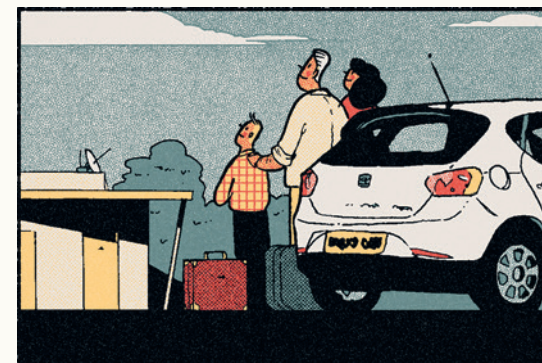
Sadly, however, motels have barely survived and few do justice to the sunny optimism that spawned them. Many have been abandoned, some torn down in favour of shinier chain-run

stopovers. But in the demolition of such relics we lose a lot. The motel tells a story of the US, of the open road and frontiersmanship. It’s why I’m an advocate for renovation and restoration. When I see a motel in the middle of Bushwick, Brooklyn or on California’s Highway 1, I don’t see a sad story or an outmoded space, I see possibility: to restore them to their former glory and provide personable hospitality to people travelling either on or off the beaten path. It’s the reason I chose to restore a previously ill-fated 1950s motel in New Orleans, Louisiana.

I called it *The Drifter* (see page 23), a name dreamed up as an image of both my travels and what I believe to be a growing population of free-spirited explorers. It’s a space that was created to bring people together. That said, restoring motels isn’t about making them what they were but rather what they need to be in order to work today. I discarded the car park in favour of a sizeable pool surrounded by palm trees. Without the parking area, *The Drifter* gains peace and quiet: it’s a serene space where guests and locals can escape the chaos of New Orleans surrounded by nostalgic, mid-century architecture. But more than just a hotel, *The Drifter* riffs on New Orleans’ design history, while adding footfall to a formerly quiet neighbourhood.

Hotels touting exclusivity are a thing of the past. Today it’s about creating something smaller, more intimate and with a more communal feel. Should any of you in the hospitality industry roll up to a comely motel that’s still standing and that has an owner who is inclined to sell (seldom the case), I urge you to resuscitate it. Failing that, do feel free to let me know about it.

About the writer: *Motel-minded Jayson Seidman is a New Orleans-based hotelier.*



I2. Alpine hotels

by Jessica Carmi

Alpine hospitality – of that fireside, fresh-aired sort – has had some distinct ups and downs over the past few years. When skiing became popular at the beginning of the 20th century, most Alpine hotels were small family-run holdings that were ill-equipped to cater for the influx of international guests. From the end of the Second World War until the 1970s, flights became cheaper and the mass market for winter sports boomed. The small mountainside chalets transformed into mazes of megahotels: many with the same Alpine decor, most without the charm that lured people in the first place.

Today, however, a new generation of travellers is bypassing the pre-packaged experiences of Alpine Europe in favour of the independents. One such authentic affair is the *Taxhof*, an *almhotel* (meaning it’s in a mountain meadow) made from farms not far from Austria’s Hohe Tauern mountains. The buildings sit on a piece of land that’s been in the Unterberger family since 1687; the daughters prepare breakfast and their father Matthias takes care of the animals. As of 2016, new suites were on offer in a grove of 500-year-old maples.

Other hotels – such as the *Almhof Schneider* in Lech, an exclusive but homely hamlet in the Austrian province of Vorarlberg – combine stately service with family history. The *Almhof* story began in 1451, when the Schneiders came to the Arlberg region with many other *Walsers* (a Swiss clan from the Valais region that colonised Arlberg). “I don’t see this as a hotel,” says Hannelore Schneider, the matriarch of *Almhof Schneider*. “It’s a big household.” One look at the contented guests and you’ll see her statement rings true. Her son Gerold and his wife Katia are architects who updated the hotel’s interior, adding a smart spa for apres-ski indulgence in 2017.

Other properties, such as the *Piz Linard* hotel in Lavin (see page 99) – a town of 200 people in Switzerland’s Lower Engadine Valley – are newer ventures. In 2007, hotelier Hans Schmid quit his job as cultural director of the town of Sankt Gallen to run the place with his family.

“People want to be closer to nature and go back to simple, honest things,” says the *Taxhof*’s Berta Unterberger. Here’s hoping such family-owned stopovers remain popular. It’s these hotels – not the glitzy chalets and megahotels – that made the Alps favourable to visit in the first place and to which people will continue to return.

About the writer: *Jessica Carmi is a US-born writer and high-altitude-hotel enthusiast based in Mitteleuropa.*

13. Keeping it in the family

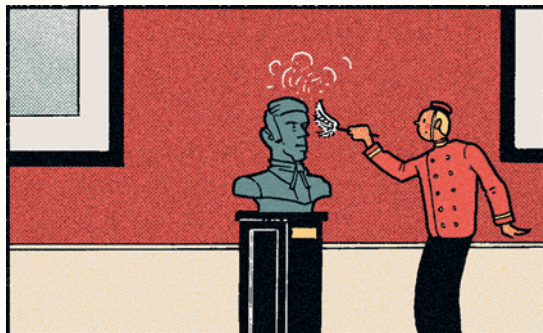
by James Chambers

Every Sunday, The Peninsula's Cantonese restaurant Spring Moon serves dim sum to Hong Kongers. This iconic hotel on the Kowloon side of the harbour has a special place in the social fabric of the city regardless of which famous heads and heads of state are resting in the 300-odd rooms upstairs. But the Peninsula (*see page 77*) is a family hotel in more ways than one.

Founded in 1928 by Lawrence and Horace Kadoorie, Mizrahi Jewish brothers born in Hong Kong to immigrant parents, it is to this day majority-owned by the same family. Sir Michael Kadoorie, current chairman of The Peninsula's holding company, has fond memories of growing up in the hotel as a child in the 1950s and is grooming his children to take over the business.

Few pre-war hotels have remained under the stewardship of the same family for so long and grown into internationally renowned brands. The modern Peninsula is part of a global hospitality chain, with locations from Beijing to Beverly Hills.

The first mention of the Hong Kong hotel in the company archive is a 1924 entry in a large ledger. It is entered under land assets with a book value of HK\$385,000 (€39,600). Today, its value has surpassed HK\$12bn (€1.2bn). It is little surprise that such a place is headquartered in Hong Kong, where family-owned property companies dominate the business landscape.



However, family ownership doesn't always endure. The original Hilton opened in Dallas at the same time as the original Peninsula. The 14-storey building, also a horseshoe shape, lasted little more than a decade under Conrad Hilton's ownership before being sold and renamed.

Hilton profited from the Texas oil boom, suffered during the depression, then prospered as the first international hotel chain that catered to the US's postwar leisure market. Today there are more than 500 Hiltons operating in more than 85 countries but Hilton's son Barron sold the final family stake in 2007 to a private equity group.

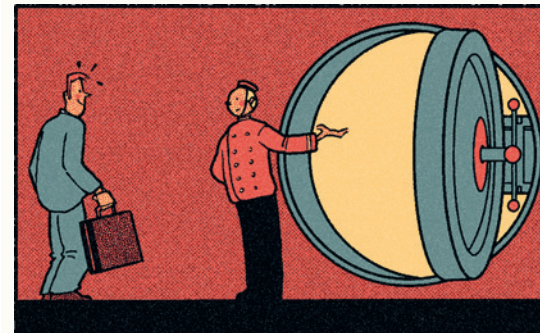
The Marriotts and the Pritzkers – owners of Hyatt Hotels Corporation – are two other great US hotel families that followed in Hilton's footsteps. Both got their start in hotels in 1957 and almost 60 years later the two companies grappled over the Starwood stable of brands, which includes the St Regis and W Hotels. Marriott won, spending \$13.6bn in 2016 to become the world's largest hotel operator.

The JW Marriott brand stands as a legacy to the founder John Willard Marriott Sr, who died in 1985. But not every founder of a global hotel chain is immortalised in neon lights. Two are still actively involved in the business and chose not to commercialise: Isadore Sharp of Four Seasons and Robert Kuok of Shangri-La.

Sharp began in his father's Toronto construction firm while Kuok was a major commodities trader. Launched within a decade of each other, the Four Seasons and Shangri-La have grown into five-star hotel groups with more than 100 properties apiece. But in that time the two founders have seen their shareholdings reverse. Sharp's stake has been reduced to 5 per cent as billionaire Bill Gates and Saudi prince Alwaleed bin Talal have come on board. Kuok started with a 10 per cent stake before taking control and passing management to his children.

The Malaysian businessman, now in Hong Kong, has talked about the family business continuing. Shangri-La's most recent brand, the Kerry, opened its first Hong Kong hotel in 2017 on the Kowloon harbour. But it will take several generations – ideally under the steady stewardship of a family with the long term in mind – for it to become a hospitality landmark like the Peninsula, just 2km along the water.

About the writer: James Chambers loves Spring Moon and is Monocle's Hong Kong bureau chief.



14. In praise of pop-ups

by Gregor Wöltje

Take a look around your city and you'll spy temporary cafés, temporary cinemas and temporary shops – few spaces are truly permanent. Even those establishments that have been around for a long time may suddenly host the prefix “pop-up”. And why not? Although there's plenty to be said for continuity in cities, these pop-ups make the most of gaps between rents in which spaces, parks and corners might otherwise sit empty.

Pop-ups aren't new. They started when artists were looking for temporary studios or exhibition spaces (Andy Warhol's Factory in New York springs to mind) but today they're home to a plethora of marketing campaigns for everything from ateliers to kitchens. It stands to reason that an empty space can be put to better use, even if only temporarily.

Now for a confession: I enjoy sleeping in unusual places. When I was a child I moved my bed into my wardrobe, I slept outside under a construction of deckchairs and I always, perhaps unusually, dreamed of overnighting in a vault. In 2017 I came fairly close to fulfilling that dream when we opened a two-year, pop-up hotel in a one-time bank building in Munich. The building was stuck in limbo, caught up in a court dispute, so I thought, “Why not make use of it while we can?”

When embarking on the concept of the temporary Lovelace hotel, our research revealed few short-term spaces from which to draw inspiration or ideas. Those that did exist were mostly mobile structures and our idea was more in keeping with a grand hotel than a “glamping” experience. We remodelled the top three floors of the listed building into 30 guest rooms but also left scope for spaces that could be used for gigs and exhibitions, or simply in which to sink a drink. We included a coffee shop, a rooftop bar and spaces for live music, exhibitions, temporary shops, workspaces, film screenings and more.

We quickly learned why there were so few intrepid pop-up hoteliers before us: the amount of work and money that needs to be invested seemed unreasonably high and the short shelf-life meant there was only a finite amount of time to recoup it. It was a risk but a worthwhile one.

So what does it take to turn a bank into a happening hotel for a fleeting 18-month stint? Here's what I learned.

1. **Bring your own money:** Banks don't like to finance pop-up projects, plus you will be more thrifty with your own funds.
2. **Be time-conscious:** It's more important to get the place up and running so that you can test and refine it using real people than it is to plan to the finest detail before launch.
3. **Stay away from built-in fixtures:** Flexible furniture allows flexible use. Our hotel rooms can be used as makeshift bars, concert venues and showrooms.
4. **Write your own story:** Just being a pop-up doesn't get the job done. What makes your place unique? Invite the locals and turn it into a place for fun. Make room for events and culture and invest in a regular programme.
5. **Think of it like a song:** The hotel brings the basic melody, the rhythm. The guests join in, improvising with the staff and the locals, until one day it's all over. All the encores are done, the lights go up and the show moves to the next venue.

About the writer: Gregor Wöltje is a Munich-based entrepreneur and co-founder of the Lovelace.

15. How to stay independent

by *María Ulecia*

When I was first contacted by a big booking site, I was running a small hotel in a former 18th-century Portuguese convent. It said it would help me fill the place for a 20 per cent commission on each booking. My answer was “no”. Instead, I invested 20 per cent of my income into creating my own website and booking system, as well as a small press kit that I sent to my favourite magazines and newspapers. The following year we were reviewed by some of the most influential travel and design publications in the world.

In July 2006 I opened Micasaenlisboa (*see page 45*), a one-bedroom guesthouse in Lisbon. As I was fully booked that December I travelled and conducted some research. I sampled some B&Bs and a few chains too. I alternated between booking with the owner directly and tour operators. When dealing with middlemen, I realised, I never knew what sort of hotel I’d be stepping into.

When I returned to Lisbon I wanted to ensure that my hotel would stay real and independent. “I’ll draft the concept from scratch and create a unique place where I’d want to go on holiday,” I vowed. I launched a simple, self-written site with no way of booking other than through me. Soon there was a small article in *El País*, praising the breakfast. My little guesthouse went from having one bedroom to four bedrooms before I knew it.

Over the years I’ve had to wrestle with plenty more booking platforms – Airbnb is not a new form of adversary for independent hotels. What it has done, however, is make the world think that it’s new and unique – as if it reinvented the B&B. And it’s ballooned since. What began in 2008 as a lean start-up trumpeting fairness and the sharing economy has become a financial behemoth, with less time for the guest and host.

It can be difficult to stay independent but it is possible – and a positive thing to do. Collaborating with small booking platforms is inevitable – my rule is I only accept sites that feature fewer than 15 places in the city and that I’d consider using myself. After a long refurbishment and another enlargement, Micasaenlisboa is a nine-room independent guesthouse. Call by if you’d like to see what a thriving independent hotel looks like.

About the writer: *María Ulecia is the founder and owner of Micasaenlisboa, Lisbon’s prettiest hotel and best breakfast.*

16. A war reporter’s guide to hotels

by *Lyse Doucet*

“How long will you be staying?” I stood in the cold gloom of the cavernous lobby and pondered my reply to the Afghan hotel clerk in a sombre black suit. “Would it be six days or six weeks?” I asked myself. I simply did not know.

The clock behind me was similarly stuck for an answer. Its metal hands had stopped, frozen in time in the dark depths of a Kabul winter in the last days of the Cold War. I hadn’t expected to end up at Kabul’s Intercontinental Hotel on Christmas Eve in 1988, a date that happens to be my birthday. But when a rare visa was issued by the communist government, I rushed to the Afghan capital as Soviet troops started their pull-out after a decade-long disastrous engagement.

Other journalists did the same. And, as so often in war zones, the rhythms of hotel life were written into this moment of history-making headlines around the world.

Actually, there were two hotels of note. The Intercontinental was perched on a hill to the north. The Kabul hotel, a dull Soviet-era block, sat in the very heart of a capital gripped by fear of rockets fired by western-backed *mujahideen* rebels in the snow-capped slopes of the famed Hindu Kush. Word spread that the Intercontinental, with its superior telex and telephone services, should be the destination of choice for deadline-obsessed hacks. It wasn’t exactly the suite-life though. Kabul’s first so-called luxury hotel, opened in 1969, lost its connection to the famed Intercontinental chain when Soviet troops invaded a decade later.

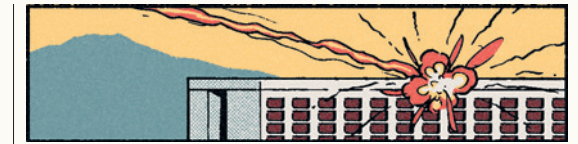
Nonetheless, the camaraderie was wonderful. Journalists came and went; I stayed on. The world’s best snappers left me copies of their photographs to hang in my room. New correspondents showed up at my door, in the hope of gleaning some useful tips. They also wanted to glimpse the Afghan carpets brightening up my quarters – on loan from discerning Afghan merchants who, in keeping

with tradition, urged me to take them to my new home until I made up my mind.

My “home away from home” had a charm of its own. Farid, who headed room service, cheerily served me chicken kebab, usually with Afghan spinach, almost every day. When the hotel manager took chicken off the menu as market prices soared, Farid threatened to resign. (Chicken kebabs remained firmly on the menu.)

Nasser, who worked the hotel’s telephone exchange, knew that my daily call to London was the most important service of all. So cut off was Kabul that there were, curiously, only two international lines: one through Moscow and one through Glasgow. The operators at the Glasgow Exchange became my dear friends. The service went both ways. They connected me to the BBC every day without fail and routed calls from frustrated journalists without visas trying to reach Kabul through me.

The winter of Soviet withdrawal turned into the spring of rocket salvos and the summer of major battles on several front lines. By then, the hotel was almost empty, except for *The New York Times* correspondent John Burns and myself. We decided to make an expedition to neighbouring Pakistan, a base for *mujahideen* fighters, to see



the war from the other side. Coincidentally or not, it was the only week that the hotel, the highest point in the capital, was hit by a rocket. By the time I returned to Kabul, I found that agents from Khad, the feared Afghan intelligence services, had moved into my fourth-floor room. With a profound apology from the staff, I was moved into another. In the end, I stayed for 10 months. To this day, when I walk into hotel rooms with worn carpets and wooden furniture that’s had its day, I’m brought back to the feel of my room. It’s the feeling of history.

The Safir hotel in the Syrian city of Homs, one of my latest outposts, has felt much the same over the past seven years. Time and again, I’ve returned to a place whose darkened lobby offered a front-row seat on a worsening war. The UN’s blue-helmeted peacekeepers came and went, so did spooks in black, and aid workers have taken rooms on long lease.

As I sat sipping Syria’s delicious flower tea on my last visit, news came that my cherished Kabul home was under attack. The Intercontinental, with a lobby now sparkling with glittering chandeliers, was under ferocious assault by suicide bombers; frightened guests were trapped inside.

The news took me back to what seems like Afghanistan’s forever war. Most of all I remembered 1992, when the *mujahideen* finally stormed into the city, bringing down a government that lost its ally when the Soviet Union collapsed. Not long after, I had stood on the hotel terrace in the warm Kabul sun. Sharif, the manager, beamed with pride as he showed me samples of new crockery on order, as well as new uniforms for the staff. He was brimming with ideas for what he dared to believe would be a new beginning.

The next day a rocket slammed into the fabled Intercontinental. Sharif – the man at the front desk who first welcomed me into a hotel that quickly became my home – was killed instantly.

About the writer: *Canadian journalist Lyse Doucet is the BBC’s chief international correspondent.*