

WELCOME TO OUR FIRST ANNUAL HOT LIST,

a shamelessly select guide to the coolest new hotels in the world. All have opened since 1998, are deftly designed, dedicated to service, and exude a singular sense of place. Whether your preference is for a business hotel with Internet access and a great spa, a luxurious African lodge with a private plunge pool, a castaway's dream cottage in the Caribbean, or an oasis in the world's driest desert, you will find something to suit you here. The range is extraordinary, the new standards set exceptional: these are truly 21 hotels for the 21st century.



UNITED KINGDOM

St David's Hotel & Spa, Cardiff



You can't miss St David's. Rocco Forte's imposing new hotel in Cardiff. From a distance the sculptural flourish atop the 130-bedroom property, built on the edge of Cardiff Bay, looks like a flying merlin; the hotel itself looks as if it's about to set sail. It is an astonishingly confident statement: the first five-star hotel in Wales, the first purpose-built property in the new Rocco Forte Hotels portfolio. Inside, the soaring atrium reinforces the nautical theme with sweeping, bright-white balconies. All the rooms lead onto wood-slatted decks overlooking the Bay, and the spa is appropriately geared to hydrotherapy. There are glass walls everywhere, including all the rooms, giving the clean, curvaceous structure light and life. Decor is by Olga Polizzi (Forte's younger sister) and strong duo-tones – deep green

and blue – predominate, although the suites are single cream. Martin Green from London's Connaught is behind the Tides Bar and Restaurant, and his kitchen produces fresh, imaginative cuisine. The only concern is that once the word is out, it will be difficult to get a table. St David's is already attracting a strong business base, but the combination of a unique spa, excellent food and service, and superb location will, in time, appeal to those looking for a revitalising weekend break.

WHEN TO GO Spring and summer, although the light that bounces off the water in the Bay is extraordinary all year round.

WHICH ROOM TO BOOK The bigger the room, the wider the view – and the higher it is the better (studio suites are particularly good value, from £250).

ST DAVID'S HOTEL & SPA Havannah Street, Cardiff Bay CF1 0SD. Wales (0)1222 454045; fax: 487006; Doubles from £179.



One Aldwych, London

One Aldwych opened in July 1996 in the grand Edwardian building once occupied by the Morning Post and, more recently, Lloyd's Bank. Its owner, Gordon Campbell Gray, came up with the slogan "stealth wealth", to reflect the hotel's restrained ambience and the clientele it hoped to attract. It would never, he said, be trendy. But it did come up with the correct degree of chic: in your room, instead of a wicker fruit basket, you'll find three perfect plums and three peaches; chirts has been shunned in deference to efficient greys, chocolate brown, creams and crisp whites; bedspreads are banished (the linen is fine Italian). One Aldwych is well positioned for businessmen and tourists, and its two restaurants, Indigo (on the mezzanine overlooking the lobby) and Axis, are popular for pre- and post-theatre dinners. One Aldwych has all the facilities you'd expect at an upscale property, including a health club and a pool (with underwater music), and a few extra-fide bonuses: mini-main-black TVs on stands in the bathrooms, a plush subterranean screening room with adjacent dining room, mobile phones on request and an impressive contemporary art collection.

WHEN TO GO October, when most of the crowds have left London.

WHICH ROOM TO BOOK The Studio Suite (£200) is the business for contextual impact, overlooking The Strand towards Trafalgar Square.

ONE ALDWYCH 1 Aldwych, London WC2B 4BZ
 (0171 300 1000; fax: 300 1301); Double £295-£320.

No 5 Maddox Street, London



Another hot London hotel named after its address, the luxe 12-suite No 5 Maddox Street is a two-minute walk from the fashion emporia of New Bond Street and 10 minutes from the hotspots of Soho. A sister property to groovy Fountains (1 Lancaster Terrace, London W2), it has a similar 'do your own thing' policy, which means the suites' private kitchens are stocked with basic complementary groceries and a pay-on-consumption 'Big Bar'. There's also 24-hour room service – or you can get your groceries delivered and hire a chef. Just don't expect anything as conventional as a restaurant or bar: the only public spaces are a tiny but tasteful reception area with a fish tank and curved, green-leather banquettes, and the very sleek, five-floor stairwell (there's no lift). So your suite is your castle, and while some of the bedrooms are very small indeed, with just enough room for your faux-satle-draped bed, they are made up for with spacious living-cum-dining-cum-work spaces, some of which have fireplaces, proper balconies and even well-planted decks. The technology quota is high, with cordless phones, music systems and modem ports. It is probably no coincidence that No 5 officially opened during London Fashion Week on 20 February; it is edgy, urban and acutely international in outlook.

WHEN TO GO January for the Bond Street sales.

WHICH ROOM TO BOOK The top-floor two-bedroom loft (£300) – if you can manage the stairs.

NO 5 MADDOX STREET 5 Maddox Street, London W1R 9LE (0171 647 6200; fax: 647 0200); Suites £195-£195.