

LONDON'S NEW ROOMS UNLOCKED

From revamped classics to ambitious debutants, the capital is bursting with glam hotel openings. Sean Newsom sleeps at five of the hippest

Something strange has been happening in London over the past year. The capital has been inundated with hotels — it's estimated that 70

new or improved hotels will pop up in the run-up to the 2012 Olympics. While many of them are budget hotel/hostels or soulless corporate bed farms, some of the best are glitzy bling palaces or stylish hipster layovers, with cool bars and

destination restaurants that might dominate the city's social life for years to come.

Eager to find out whether these upstarts could stand up to their considerable hype, we put on hard hats and shower caps to bring you the

essential guide to what's happening in London's all-new luxury hotel scene.

CORINTHIA HOTEL

You want wow? We'll give you wow — go stand underneath the enormous starburst chandelier at the Corinthia Hotel, down on Northumberland Avenue. Made from 1,001 crystal baubles, it

fills the hotel's soaring lounge with light and sums up the ambition here perfectly. Clearly, the sky's the limit.

So far, £300m has been spent on this grand old Victorian building — which was originally the Metropole, before being taken over by the War Office in the 1930s. It's not hard to see where the money went. The public spaces are dazzling, nowhere more so than in London's biggest hotel spa, which has black marble on the walls and snakes over four floors in a series of sinuous curves and secretive corners. It feels more like a place for a lovers' tryst than somewhere to go for a swim.

Northumberland Avenue is an odd place for a landmark building: close to everything, but on the road to nowhere in particular. Don't let that bother you. If you've got a wedding anniversary or a big promotion to celebrate, and your schedule includes the National Gallery or the South Bank, then put it on your short list. For extra pizzazz, save up for one of the executive rooms, ending in the numbers -29, -30 or -34. They start at an eye-watering £720 a night — but for that you get one of the biggest, and best, five-star bedrooms in London.

Doubles from £515, room-only; 020 7930 8181, corinthia.com

FOUR SEASONS HOTEL

Just off Park Lane, the Four Seasons has had a £125m refit, with the interiors stripped back to the concrete and rebuilt from scratch. For all that, though, what's really striking here is the service. The staff don't scamper about, grinning like idiots. They are genuinely charming. At the end of your stay, you'll emerge feeling like a film star.

Downstairs, the public areas are a treat: not rooms so much as a succession of rather lush

seating areas, some with tables and some without. If you want to have dinner sitting in an armchair, or breakfast at the bar, that's not a problem. Upstairs, there's an unshowy art-deco feel. The rooms have been well designed — even the standard doubles have big bathrooms and walk-in closets — but you can't help wishing that the ceilings were a bit

higher. You may also wish you were a few blocks further away from Hyde Park Corner. Yes, the location makes it fantastically well connected,

but we are talking about one of London's busiest — and most polluted — stretches of road. *Doubles from £594, room-only; 020 7499 0888, fourseasons.com*

ST ERMIN'S HOTEL

St Ermin's is set in a Victorian mansion block just around the corner from New Scotland Yard and St James's Park Tube station. The view is pretty daunting — straight onto the back of a spectacularly ugly post-war office block — but the fancy brickwork and wedding-cake interior of the lobby are ample compensation, and the bedrooms are excellent, given that they're less than half the price of their five-star competitors. The only obvious shortfall is in the undersized bathrooms.

These are early days for the new St Ermin's: the restaurant isn't yet open and the staff are still finding their feet. Still, it has the potential to become a hit: offering 75% of the class for 50% of the money is surely the right idea. Who knows, London's espionage community may even take up residence again — in the old days, the KGB double agent Guy Burgess was a frequent visitor.

Doubles from £239, room-only; 0800 635 0438, stermishotel.co.uk



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ST JOHN HOTEL

You may already know the St John restaurants. They've made a name serving all sorts of offal and other emphatically English food in pared-down, no-nonsense surroundings, and they're a big hit with London's professional classes, especially when they're in an unfussy, elbows-on-the-table mood. Whether or not the concept

translates to hotel-keeping is open to debate, now that the St John is up and running on Leicester Street, just behind Leicester Square. After all, when you're paying £330 a night for a room, fuss is exactly what you want. You want a reception area that is bigger than a corridor and a bar or lounge that looks fancier than a student union, too. Okay,

the standard doubles are a decent size, and are well built, but even here the less-is-more approach becomes wilful. Where's the desk to work on? Is that stool in the corner the only chair? At £175 a night, this approach could be a runaway success. At this price, it seems a bit of an insult.

Doubles from £330, room-only; 020 3301 8020, stjohnhotellondon.com

THE MONTCALM

The latest hotel to open its doors in the capital is [the Montcalm](#), which occupies the former Whitbread brewery on Chiswell Street, near the Barbican. In fact, it's so new, the only way I could see most of it was in a plastic hat and a luminous yellow jacket. Even so, it's clear that it will be a welcome addition to the City hotel scene.

For a start, it's not set in some featureless multistorey block, but in a higgledy-piggledy range of brick-built 19th-century offices and store rooms. The brick vaults in the lobby are exposed and the lounge is set in what looks like an old counting house or clerk's room. One of

the two restaurants will be a gastropub. If you're in town, and care that the town you're in

is London, not Dubai, Shanghai or Frankfurt, it could be for you. *Doubles from £214, room-only; 020 7374 2988, themontcalmlondoncity.co.uk*

STILL TO COME IN 2011

Ecclestone Square Hotel:

in a Georgian townhouse, with 3-D TVs in every room, baby! Opens late June.

45 Park Lane: little sister of the Dorchester. The American superstar chef Wolfgang Puck will have his first European restaurant here. Opens end of summer.

Belgraves: Thompson Hotels' first property in Europe promises a little "bohemian attitude" on the stuccoed streets of Belgravia. Opens this autumn.

Aloft London ExCeL: opening at the end of the year, and aimed at the conference market, but close to the Olympic Park.

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