

LONDON'S best BEDS

The latest crop of hotels in the UK capital takes London lodgings to new levels. We check out the best places to check in, from restored classics to arty trendsetters.

Nearly 17 million people visited London last year, making it the world's number-one tourist destination, and hoteliers are opening properties at a cracking rate. The more interesting recent openings include the highest hotel in western Europe, a couple of Thameside hotspots and a repurposed 18th-century brewery. We haven't included André Balazs's Marylebone paparazzi-magnet Chiltern Firehouse here – at the time of writing we couldn't access the property – but otherwise these new hotels are the cream of the capital's crop.

ACE HOTEL LONDON SHOREDITCH

NEIGHBOURHOOD: High Shoreditch.

GUEST LIST: Not exclusively trustafarians and fauxhemians.

STYLE: The Ace chain's first European venture doesn't stray far from the formula that has made it such a success in Seattle, Manhattan, Palm Springs and other enclaves of the bearded, the tattooed and the creatively pierced. Retrofitted building in an emerging neighbourhood? Tick. Forcibly effusive staff? Tick. Careful factoring of room size to cost to coolness cachet? Tick. Disco, dream pop and afrobeat in the lobby? Tick, tick and tick. While some similar ventures trade in looks and irony over functionality, the better Ace properties take a reasonable amount of care with the comfort factor. Here in London that means APC does the linen and the warm hybrid hoodie-robos, and

there's a bizarre and compelling array of things for sale in the minibar and the white-tiled bathrooms (Old Jamaica ginger beer and Sipsmith gin in the former, Farmers' foot cream and salt soak in the latter). The gym, sauna, WiFi and photobooth all tick the box, and the location is in the middle of the best of the neighbourhood's new bars and restaurants.

NOURISHMENT: In-room temptations are for the inner child (Curly Wurly bars, pickled onion-flavoured crisps); venture down to Hoi Polloi, the mod-Brit lobby bar and eatery run by the mob from local heroes Bistrotteque. The lamb belly sandwich is exactly the thing you want to find on an after-hours menu.

WE LOVE: Finding the turntable in the room with a Tears for Fears album (*Songs from the Big Chair*, no less) already on the platter.

WE DON'T LOVE: The slightly too institutional bathrooms.

Rooms from \$285, 100 Shoreditch

High St, E1 6JQ, +44 20 7613 9800, acehotel.com

PAT NOURSE

CHEVAL THREE QUAYS

NEIGHBOURHOOD: As close to the Tower of London as it's possible to be without being a crown jewel.

GUEST LIST: Corporates who relish a sense of place.

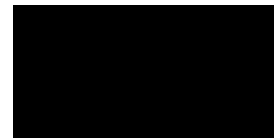
STYLE: At first glance Cheval Three Quays seems like yet another business-facing serviced apartment property – the tortuous name, the fact that black-cab drivers have never heard of it – but then, little by little, the charm sneaks up on you. On the one hand, the kitchen is home to a Siemens induction cooktop, oven and dishwasher, and a Dualit toaster, and, on the other, there are fresh milk and local mineral water in the fridge, good wine glasses on the shelf, Darvilles in the tea caddy and

Tunnock's snowball cakes on the bench. The beds are properly comfortable, the curtains well designed. And then there's the location – absolute river frontage is a rarity in good London hotels, and the Tower of London is right next door. Right! Next! Door! The fact that it's on the Circle line doesn't hurt, either.

NOURISHMENT: There's no restaurant on-site (the rooms have full kitchens, after all); consider a 15-minute walk over the river to Borough Market for inspiration.

WE LOVE: The binoculars supplied for Thames-watching.





WE DON'T LOVE: The name.
Rooms from \$552, 40 Lower Thames St, EC3R 6AG, +44 20 7341 7052, chevalresidences.com
 PAT NOURSE

GREAT NORTHERN HOTEL

NEIGHBOURHOOD: King's Cross ground zero.

GUEST LIST: Eurostar transiteers, business itinerants, cocktail crowd.

STYLE: Formerly an ungainly expanse of London real estate kept permanently under hoarding by the IRA, the becalmed space between King's Cross and St Pancras stations is finally returning to life. (Even the Brits are calling it a piazza.) At the heart of the rejuvenation is the Great Northern, built in 1854 by the same architect as the station itself, Lewis Cubitt. The painstaking restoration last year is more whimsical than nostalgic, with nods to the romantic past of rail travel sidling against very modern touches: USB ports, free pre-loaded films and express WiFi. It's less ostentatious than the palacious St Pancras Renaissance, but at night more lively in the bar (and quieter in the rooms). All sorts of places get called a hub, but the Great Northern isn't just sitting in a refreshed London district; it's right at the nexus between Isles and Continent. That's not a bad place to be.

NOURISHMENT: Mark Sargeant's Plum and Spilt Milk (taking its name from the livery of the Flying Scotsman) is big and beefy, centring on charcoal-grilled meats and local classics such as devilled kidneys; fish pie; battered cod, chips and peas. Eating from a kiosk at a British Railways station conjures up the image of a sad pasty, but the Kiosk is very different, with generous carvery sandwiches.

WE LOVE: The communal pantry on each floor, which dispenses with the solitary minibar cuppa in favour of shared space. Free cake adds

a touch of boarding school midnight feast.

WE DON'T LOVE: Minding the gap in the bathroom doors.

Rooms from \$366, King's Cross Station, Pancras Rd, N1C 4TB +44 20 3388 0800, gnhlondon.com
 RICHARD COOKE

HAM YARD HOTEL

NEIGHBOURHOOD: In the heart of happening Soho, minutes from Mayfair.

GUEST LIST: Art world aesthetes, media types and design buffs, the bold and the beautiful.

STYLE: Tim and Kit Kemp have outdone themselves with Ham Yard, their eighth style-setting hotel in the capital. Ham Yard is more like a small village than a mere hotel. Kit Kemp's bold, bowerbird aesthetic suffuses every corner, from the neon-tastic Dive Bar to the vintage bowling alley imported from Texas, the group's début spa and a rooftop garden. The 91 rooms are textured, curated and desirable, from the dip-dyed grey and white drapes to framed illustrations from children's circus books. Bathrooms feature Frette towelling, exclusive to Firmedale, and Kemp's new amenities range, Rik Rak. It's so delicious the bottles have warnings to "keep out of reach of children" (never mind the kids; the shampoo smells so pudding-sweet I was tempted to taste it). Obsessive detailing extends to the minibar, which offers deluxe popcorn and Kinky Knickers.

NOURISHMENT: The hip Ham Yard restaurant and bar serves great down-to-earth food, like the slow-roasted porchetta with Gorgonzola polenta.

WE LOVE: The roof terrace, with its vegetable plots, espaliered fruit trees, olive trees and bird boxes set high above Soho.

WE DON'T LOVE: The nuclear-strength coffee served at breakfast.
Rooms from \$634, 1 Ham Yard, W1D 7DT; +44 20 3642 2000; hamyardhotel.com
 KENDALL HILL>

MONDRIAN LONDON AT SEA CONTAINERS

NEIGHBOURHOOD: More touristy than neighbourly just yet.

GUEST LIST: Young and solvent.

STYLE: This daring new hotel in the 1970s Sea Containers building has added glamour to a pocket of South Bank with little to recommend it yet as a nightspot. By day, though, the location is handy for cultural behemoths including the Tate Modern, the Globe Theatre and the Southbank Centre. The building, which was office space for decades, was designed as a hotel and finally, in Morgans Hotel Group's first Mondrian venture outside the US, Sea Containers meets its destiny. Tom Dixon's tongue-in-cheek look draws on fantasies of transatlantic travel, seen in the vast copper hull in the lobby and the brass accents and porthole-shaped mirrors in the 359 rooms and suites. The Dandelyan bar, dressed in velvet, marble and British racing green, is run by Ryan Chetiyawardana, who's known to mix plants from the English countryside in his drinks. The party continues in the social, below-sea-level spa.

NOURISHMENT: Irish New Yorker Seamus Mullen heads the open kitchen, serving food best described as transatlantic fusion with produce from nearby Borough Market. Take a seat around the stainless-steel island reminiscent of an American diner.

WE LOVE: River views in many of the rooms and the rooftop bar.

WE DON'T LOVE: The name.
Rooms from \$479, 20 Upper Ground, SE1 9PD, +44 20 3747 1000; mondrianlondon.com

LYDIA BELL

MONTCALM AT THE BREWERY

NEIGHBOURHOOD: Deep Barbican.

GUEST LIST: Business meets creative meets business.

STYLE: "At the Brewery, eh?" we hear you murmur. "Sounds like a mighty-fine place to get loose." Pay more attention to the Montcalm part of the name: a polished, pleasantly business-like ambience

rules the day, and while the determined bon viveur could most certainly organise a piss-up on the premises, the prevailing mood is one of guests using the property as a base and sanctuary from the pressures of the corporate wilderness. The touches of luxury (Hermès amenities, free WiFi that simply works) are more about soothing and comfort than razzle and dazzle, and the scale of the place balances ease and amenity. They call it boutique, but the 235 rooms scattered over the heritage and contemporary areas of the 18th-century Whitbread & Co brewers support 24-hour room service, a gym and spa, and a butler service for the fancier suites.

NOURISHMENT: The Jugged Hare interprets the site's beer-soaked history with luxed-up takes on British pub classics (potted prawns with Melba toast; pork and stout sausages with onion gravy) but also pushes the boat out with the likes of whole roast grouse with bread sauce, and snails with bone marrow.

WE LOVE: The striking friendliness and helpfulness of the staff.

WE DON'T LOVE: The lobby is a bit OTT.

Rooms from \$424, 52 Chiswell St, EC1Y 4SA, +44 20 7614 0100, themontcalmlondoncity.co.uk
 PAT NOURSE

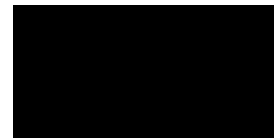
SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, AT THE SHARD

NEIGHBOURHOOD: Newly trendy Southwark-sur-Thames.

GUEST LIST: Global villagers, Qatari royalty.

STYLE: It's like a magic trick, the way guests enter the ground-floor elevator and seconds later emerge in the Shangri-La's 34th-floor Sky Lobby to find all London's luminous treasures arrayed before them. The hotel's 202 rooms occupy floors 34-51 and are rated by view – south-facing are cheapest; rooms ending in 01,

Source: Gourmet Traveller (Australia) {Main}
Edition:
Country: Australia
Date: Saturday 1, November 2014
Page: 166,167,168,169....
Area: 3281 sq. cm
Circulation: 0 Monthly
Ad data: page rate £0.00, scc rate £0.00
Phone: (02) 9282 8000
Keyword: The Montcalm



with bay-window-like protrusions capturing views east, north and west, are most expensive. All are spectacular and feature welcome indulgences, such as signature Shangri-La beds (intensely comfortable), marble bathrooms with push-button Japanese toots and Acqua di Parma products. Book a table at 52nd-floor Gong bar for a dry Martini mixed with gin distilled downstairs in Bermondsey, and take a memorable dip in western Europe's highest pool.

NOURISHMENT: The all-day restaurant, Ting, sources produce from neighbouring Borough Market and showcases the best of British ingredients, such as hand-dived scallops from the north-west coast of Scotland. In the adjoining lounge, chef Cheah Keong whips up a mean laksa and Hainanese chicken.

WE LOVE: The 52nd-floor gym, its glass walls facing south for workouts with wow.

WE DON'T LOVE: The crowds of rubbernecks who mill about the Sky Lobby and clog lifts for hotel guests.

Rooms from \$920. 31 St Thomas St, SE1 9QU, +44 20 7234 8088, shangri-la.com/London
KENDALL HILL 

JUST OPENED (OR ABOUT TO)

Making its début this northern autumn, the **Hoxton Hotel** at Holborn displays a similar style to its hip sister hotel in Shoreditch. Its interiors blend warm timbers, bricks and leather with vintage-style furnishings. The Holborn property has 174 rooms, two restaurants and a nail salon (thehoxton.com). There are great expectations for **The Lanesborough**, the Regency landmark on Hyde Park Corner that's due to emerge in April from a makeover by the late interior designer Alberto Pinto. Pinto's previous commissions have included English castles, Middle Eastern palaces and private jets, so the aristocracy is breathless with anticipation (thelanesborough.com). Celebrated British artist Antony Gormley has designed a bizarre suite for the soon-to-open **Beaumont** in Mayfair. The Deco jewel now sports a giant crouching man on its façade that contains the sculptural, spare Gormley suite, the most singular of the 73 rooms (thebeaumont.com). The big news out east is the arrival of Nobuyuki Matsuhisa, the world's most famous Japanese chef and budding hotelier. His first branded hotel, **Nobu**, opened last year at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas and he was scheduled to unveil his second in Shoreditch this year, but the opening is now slated for early 2016 (nobuhotels.com).

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POWER POINT
The Shard, home to the
Shangri-La Hotel.
Opposite: the lobby of
Cheval Three Quays.



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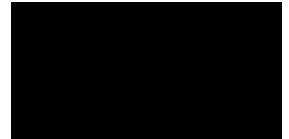
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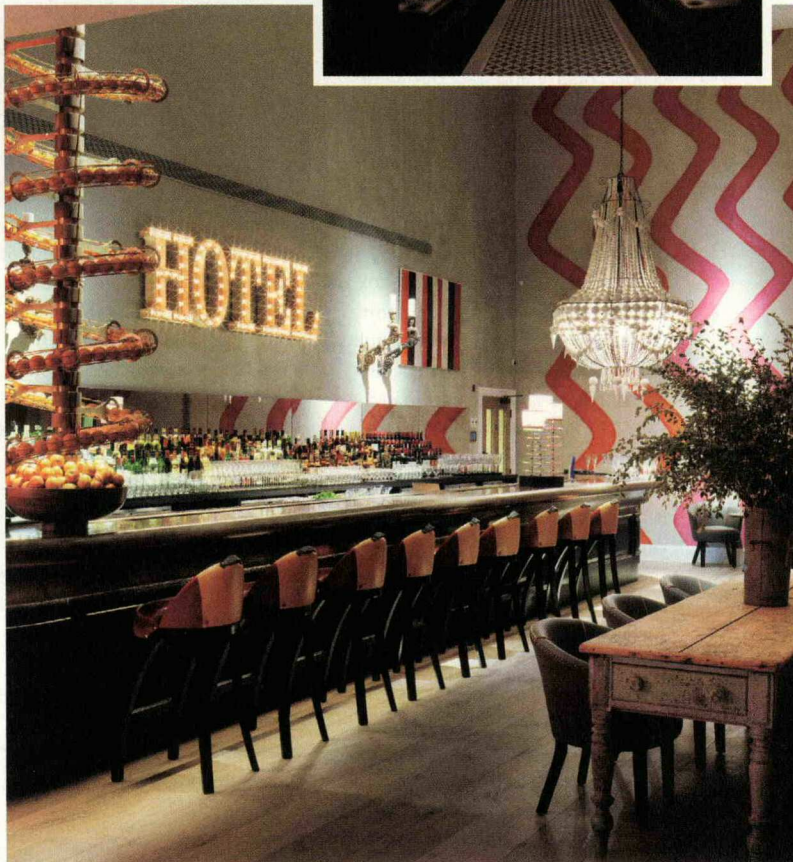
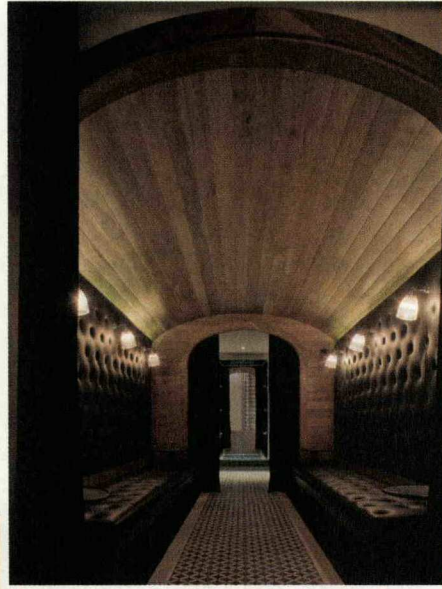


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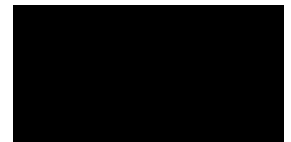
FIRST CLASS

From right: the Great Northern pays homage to railway carriages; Ham Yard's Dive Bar; the front-desk retail space and deck of Ace Hotel London Shoreditch.



PHOTOGRAPHY ALICIA TAYLOR (SHARD P166)

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