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Left: A junior suite at the impeccably restored Belmont Cadogan Hotel in Chelsea. Below: The terrace of the Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park's Royal Suite.

Restoration Period

The ever-expanding London hotel scene has added a sparkling lineup of new and newly redone properties all across the city. *by Ben Ryder Howe*

"THE HISTRIONIC ART is the London art par excellence," travel writer Jan Morris once wrote. The city is a never-ending spectacle of pageantry and performance, where, according to Morris, "the greasepaint is always on." Nowhere is this currently more evident than in the sheer multitude and ambition of new and reborn London hotels.

Take, for example, one of these properties, the **Stratford** (rooms from \$253; manhattanloftgardens.com) at Manhattan Loft Gardens, a 42-story, double-cantilevered tower. Harry Handelsman, the 69-year-old developer behind the project, wants to shift the city's center of gravity toward Stratford, a previously grim part of London best known as the site of the 2012 Summer Olympics. It's a tall order, but Handelsman, who with André Balazs brought the high life to sleepy Marylebone with the Chiltern Firehouse, is confident that Manhattan Loft Gardens will serve as a beacon to the young and chic. It's certainly big enough: Designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, the team behind the Burj Khalifa and One World Trade Center, the 145-room obelisk (there are also 248 rental lofts) hovers on the eastern flank of the metropolis, far enough to be only dimly visible from the city center, a radical statement of confidence in the power of the city to limitlessly expand.

While Manhattan Loft Gardens aims to dazzle with spectacle and size, the **Belmont Cadogan Hotel** (rooms from \$600; belmond.com) seeks to impress with stateliness and exclusivity. Situated on a Chelsea corner ready-made for a foggy, gaslit

scene from a Henry James book jacket, the 54-room Queen Anne-style townhouse has been operating as a hotel under various owners since 1887 (it was the scene of Oscar Wilde's arrest for indecency in 1895) and now becomes Belmond's first London property. Belmond likes its hotels to feel as if they have been in place forever, which the Cadogan certainly does, thanks to a deft restoration. Every space in the hotel seems built for civilized carousing; it's all too easy to picture Wilde himself carrying on after hours at the hotel's Carrara-marble bar. The pièce de résistance, however, is Cadogan Place Gardens, a proper English garden (members-only but open to hotel guests) shaded by mulberry and plane trees and featuring a pair of macadam tennis courts.

The former Camden Town Hall Annexe, in King's Cross, a Brutalist slab that once housed a radical leftist city council, is aesthetically the antithesis of a Chelsea townhouse but in its way just as pure an expression (CONTINUED ON P. 65) →





(CONTINUED FROM P. 64) of London's character. Three years ago, the run-down hulk, on the verge of demolition, was acquired by the Standard. As a construction manager showing me the rooms said, "Nothing should be boring in a Standard," which would be almost impossible inside the aquarium-like, 266-room property, with its convex windows and bulbous concrete façade. From the Harris Tweed upholstery to the endless wraparound bar on the ground floor, almost everything in the **Standard, London** (rooms from \$299; standardhotels.com) had to be specifically designed for the undulating, curvilinear space. There are inspired touches such as the additional matte-black floors planted fez-like atop the original beige structure, an external elevator that conjures a vertically ascending miniature red London bus, and an inventive adaptation of the hotel's windowless central rooms, which have been geared toward DJs and other nocturnal types.

The Standard is a hotel to gawk at, but for sheer number of camera-pointing tourists blocking sidewalks, it's hard to beat the **Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park, London** (rooms from \$847; mandarinoriental.com), an opulent landmark in London's glitziest shopping district. A fire last summer briefly derailed the most extensive renovations in the building's 130-year history, leaving only its public spaces open (including Dinner by Heston Blumenthal, the Michelin two-star restaurant). The hotel fully reopened this spring and features all-new guest rooms and suites, as well as two penthouses



ornamented with chandeliers and other lighting referencing the British crown jewels. (The penthouses also come fortified with bulletproof windows and sleeping quarters for bodyguards.)

For pure glamour, the **Connaught** (rooms from \$492; theconnaught.co.uk) is a hotel so opulent you might want to arrive in a tuxedo (or, as a guest standing next to me at check-in did, a bathrobe). Charles de Gaulle's favorite hotel in London (he installed himself on the first floor during the Blitz), the Connaught recently added the Mews (\$12,835), a townhouse offering high-touch hotel service in a private residence. Furnished with artwork from the Gagosian Gallery (Louise Bourgeois, Marc Newson) as well as a grand piano, the Mews stands just a block away from the Connaught, to which it connects via a private corridor. You will likely be tempted, however, to come and go through the Mews's carriage house entrance on Adams Row. Fulfill your fantasy by wearing one of the Burberry trenches in the closet or dipping into a Moynat leather jewelry trunk filled with vintage treasures. After all, as Morris wrote, "London is a stage!"

Clockwise from top left: A members-only garden, open to Belmond Cadogan Hotel's guests, that includes a pair of macadam tennis courts; one of 145 rooms within the Stratford; the Mews, a private townhouse addition at the Connaught, features art from Gagosian Gallery.