



WORDS AMY LAUGHINGHOUSE

CITY of GOLD LONDON

The traveller is the winner as new and newly refreshed hotels vie for accommodation laurels in **LONDON'S OLYMPIC YEAR.**

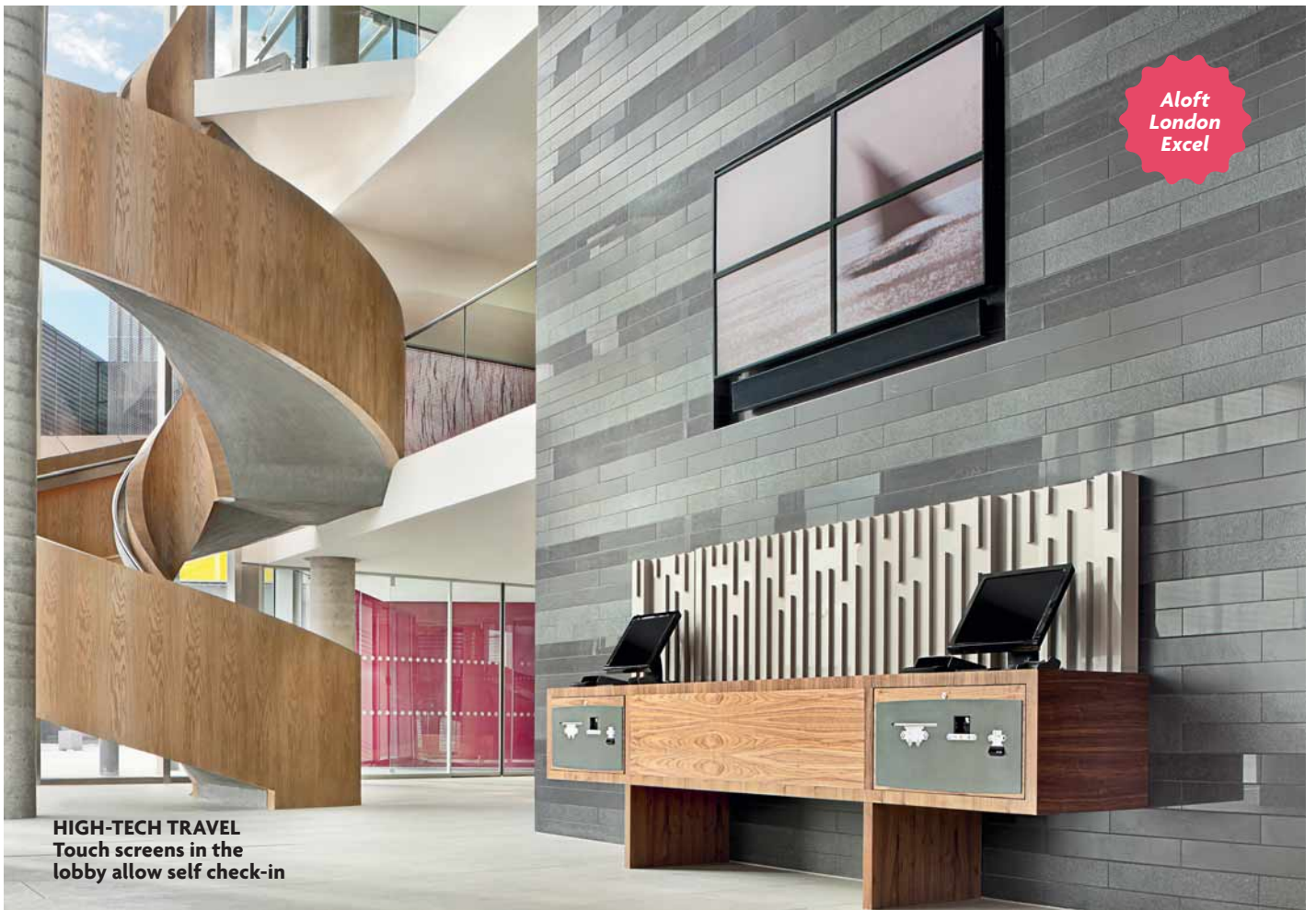


Wolfgang Puck's Cut restaurant

45 Park Lane

This year is shaping up to be one of London's biggest in decades – eclipsing even 2011's global fixation on Will and Kate's fairytale nuptials and the sight of Pippa in *that* dress. Not only will the city be hosting the Olympics, but an array of major events – from the World Shakespeare Festival (from April 23) and Queen Elizabeth's Diamond Jubilee, to the opening of Warner Bros *The Making Of Harry Potter* studio tour – should ensure that London remains front and centre on the world stage. To welcome the swarm of international tourists, hoteliers have rolled out the red carpet with a range of properties, as well as va-va-voom renovations that extend far beyond a new coat of paint and freshly plumped-up down pillows on the bed. >

PHOTOGRAPHY: NIAL CLUTTON



**Aloft
London
Excel**

HIGH-TECH TRAVEL
Touch screens in the lobby allow self check-in

**St Ermin's
Hotel**



Aloft London Excel
1 Eastern Gateway,
Royal Victoria Dock.
(0)20 3203 0700.

www.aloftlondonexcel.com
Edgy and modern, Aloft, which officially launched in November, capitalises on the energy of the emerging East End. With the construction of the Olympic Stadium and Westfield Mall at Stratford City – the largest urban shopping centre in Europe – the area is quickly leaving its reputation as an industrial wasteland in the dust of construction. Aloft is adjacent to the Excel Centre, which will host Olympic and Paralympic events, including boxing, fencing and judo, and is just 10 minutes from Canary Wharf, a development housing more than 200 shops, bars, cafes and restaurants. After exploring, kick back in Aloft's Remix, which combines a bar with a sunken

living room, two-sided glass fireplace, pool table and a 24/7 gourmet deli that's perfect for midnight snacks. From \$161.

St Ermin's Hotel
Caxton Street, Westminster.
(0)800 6350 438.

www.sterminshotel.co.uk
Buckingham Palace, the Houses of Parliament, Westminster Abbey and the leafy oases of St James's and Green Park are all at your fingertips – or rather, your footsteps, just a short walk away. This imposing red brick mansion block, originally built as apartments, first opened as a hotel in 1899. In the 1940s it became headquarters for the British team that masterminded covert operations during WWII and later served as a spy safe house and home to MI6. A recent \$44m renovation restored its elegant period features, such as intricate



St Pancras Renaissance Hotel



Sir George Gilbert Scott Suite

A \$220m renovation has restored St Pancras to beyond its former glory

plaster moulding and an impressive dual staircase, but with a 21st-century twist. LA designer Dayna Lee has paired subtle textures with geometric patterns to create an up-to-the-minute milieu that still pays homage to the past. James Bond would feel right at home here, ensconced in the clubby Caxton Bar with a martini. From \$210.

45 Park Lane

45 Park Lane, Mayfair.

(0)20 7493 4545.

www.45parklane.com

The art deco-inspired 45 Park Lane, which opened in September near Hyde Park, is a sleek retreat with suede walls, velvet armchairs and corduroy sofas outfitting its 35 rooms and 11 suites, many of which feature private balconies. A black staircase leads to Bar 45 and a library stocked with art and architecture tomes. Photos, prints and paintings by British artists such as Damien Hirst line the walls. But the hotel's biggest drawcard is its restaurant. Wolfgang Puck's Cut (his first European enterprise) specialises in steak, including aged USDA prime black angus and Australian wagyu beef. From \$799.

Corinthia Hotel London

Whitehall Place, Westminster.

(0) 20 7930 8181.

www.corinthia.com

From the outside, it's the epitome of Belle Époque grandeur, a turreted monument of grey stone. Inside, this

294-room hotel near Trafalgar Square, which opened in April, feels airy and contemporary. A sleek Baccarat chandelier, gleaming with 1001 crystals in the shape of a full moon, dangles from the lobby's soaring glass dome. In the Northall Restaurant, which serves seasonal British fare, two-storey windows alternate with mirrored walls that reflect the light, while the David Collins-designed Massimo Restaurant and Oyster Bar feels like a modern Venetian palace, with its tall striped columns and globe-shaped light fixtures. The Bassoon bar, also by David Collins, offers a witty nod to 1920s speakeasies, with classic cocktails and a grand piano built right into the bar. Seven signature suites, as well as a four-storey spa – the largest in London – confirm the Corinthia as a sybarite's paradise. From \$422.

St Pancras Renaissance Hotel

Euston Road.

(0)20 7841 3540. www.

stpancrasrenaissance.co.uk

After farewelling its last guests some three-quarters of a century ago, the red brick neo-gothic *grande dame* beside St Pancras station officially reopened in spring last year. A \$220m renovation rescued the building from near ruin and restored it beyond its former glory with such features as gilded cornices, gothic revival metalwork, stenciled fleur-de-lis motifs and a sweeping staircase ▶



Amaranto Restaurant

Four Seasons Hotel

with 15m windows. There are nine suites at the St Pancras Renaissance in total, including the Sir George Gilbert Scott suite, which perfectly replicates the hotel's original living room – right down to the dark wood panelling, marble fireplace and hand-blocked wallpaper – as it was when it opened in 1873. Today this 245-room Marriott property boasts luxuries that would have made the pleasure-denying Victorians blanch, such as a subterranean spa offering African, Indian and Far Eastern treatment “journeys”. And after a meal at Marcus Wareing's The Gilbert Scott restaurant, you can forget about lacing up the corset. From \$299.

Four Seasons Hotel London at Park Lane Hamilton Place, Mayfair.
(0) 7499 0888. www.fourseasons.com/london

The Four Seasons emerged from a cocoon of construction in January 2011 with a dramatic new interior, at once regal and refreshingly modern. Crimson walls and gleaming black marble greet guests as they enter the lobby, which leads to the wood and vermilion velvet-panelled Amaranto Restaurant, where Italian dishes are accompanied by a selection of 350 wines. A new rooftop spa offers panoramic skyline views and the Spa Lounge, with its picture window and sky-blue ceiling

painted with wispy clouds, functions as a lunchtime cafe and an “early arrivals” lounge, where guests just in on the red-eye flight can shower and relax while their room is prepared. From \$730.

Bulgari Hotel & Residences
171 Knightsbridge.
(0)207 591 2442.

www.bulgarihotels.com
Bulgari introduces its inimitable elegance to Knightsbridge next month. A stone's throw from the leafy fringes of Hyde Park, it has 85 rooms and suites, including seven suites that are more than 200sq m each. In addition to a bar, restaurant, ballroom,

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business centre and fitness area, indulgences include a cinema and a spa with a 25m indoor pool. With a sleek rectilinear facade and an interior outfitted in marble, fine woods and a chic silver colour scheme, it promises to be as intricately crafted as the jewels of the same name. As regulars to Bulgari's Milan establishment will know, the joy is in the attention to detail – personalised business cards, the finest juices in the fridge, and so on.

Dorset Square Hotel

39 Dorset Square, Marylebone.
(0)20 7581 4045.

www.firmdalehotels.com

Kit Kemp's London hotels are utterly beguiling with their bold colour, stylistic edge, individual motifs and zeitgeist buzz. Soho, Charlotte Street and Haymarket are all destinations of choice for discerning travellers. The latest in the portfolio is the Regency townhouse that is Dorset Square Hotel, in hip Marylebone. Offloaded in 2002, it is now back in the fold and opening next month. There are 38 bedrooms, many looking onto the leafy, private garden square, originally the site of Thomas Lord's first cricket ground. It will feature the Firmdale signature drawing room, bar and brasserie. 

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