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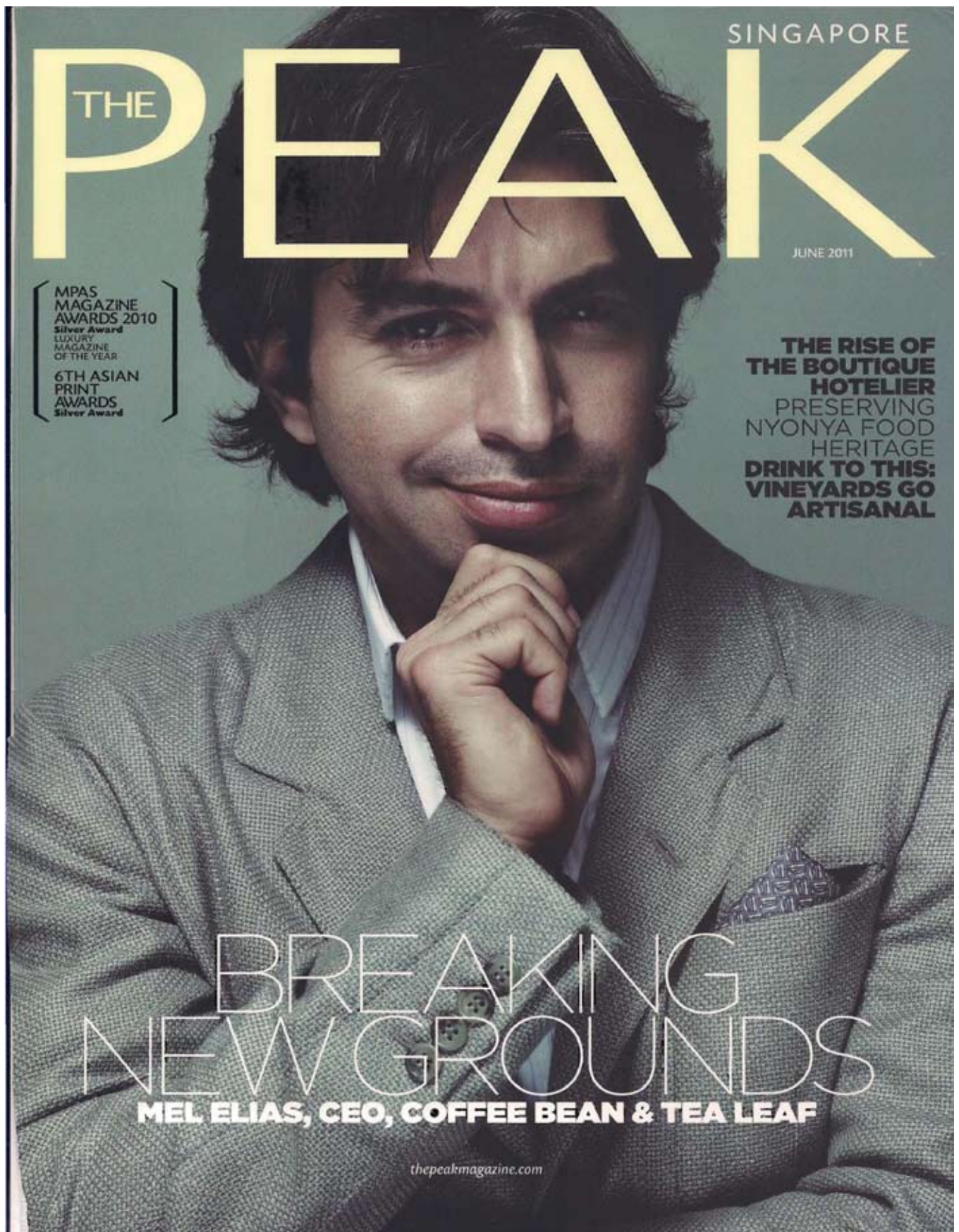
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THE PEAK

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AWARDS
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**THE RISE OF
THE BOUTIQUE
HOTELIER**
PRESERVING
NYONYA FOOD
HERITAGE
**DRINK TO THIS:
VINEYARDS GO
ARTISANAL**

BREAKING NEW GROUNDS

MEL ELIAS, CEO, COFFEE BEAN & TEA LEAF

thepeakmagazine.com

ALTERNATE UNIVERSE

FROM THE BUCOLIC TO THE EXOTIC, LUXURIOUS THEMED HOTELS ARE OFFERING THE WELL-TRAVELLED MORE THAN A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP.

Wake up to wine-infused cheese and merlot-flavoured pastries at breakfast. Indulge in a post-ride massage while your Harley-Davidson gets an engine overhaul. Or retreat after a hard day's sightseeing to a Lennon-inspired suite, yards away from the famous Cavern Club where the Beatles played their first gigs.

To stand out from the crowd, hotels the world over are breaking away from the cookie-cutter approach and tailoring one-of-a-kind experiences for their discerning guests – and for good reason.

"Hotels are no longer just places to sleep in," observes Stephane Junca, Asia Pacific director of Relais & Chateaux. "As a result, an increasing number of well-travelled clients want to use the hotel as an extension of their beings during their stays."

Kick-starting the trend about a decade ago was the Pocono Palace in Philadelphia, US, which boasted ultra-romantic suites with names such as Champagne and Garden of Eden to draw honeymooners. Mega-hotels and casinos in Las Vegas, such as Caesars Palace with its Roman decor and the Egyptian-inspired Luxor, were quick to follow suit.

With smaller boutique hotels, the theme is often borne out of the personal interests of the owners themselves, says Junca. "They use the property as an extension of their personalities. This in turn attracts those with similar interests."

This move away from the "standard experience", adds Dr Ghassan Aidi, president of the International Hotel and Restaurant Association, has become big business as guests are more willing than ever to pay for exactly what they want, especially if it's an experience that can't be replicated elsewhere. "That's something chains can never do or compete with," he says.

From a space-inspired hotel in Salvador, Brazil to a lavish biker hideout in Milwaukee, US, here are seven haute properties where luxury meets the unusual.

ART AND STAREK

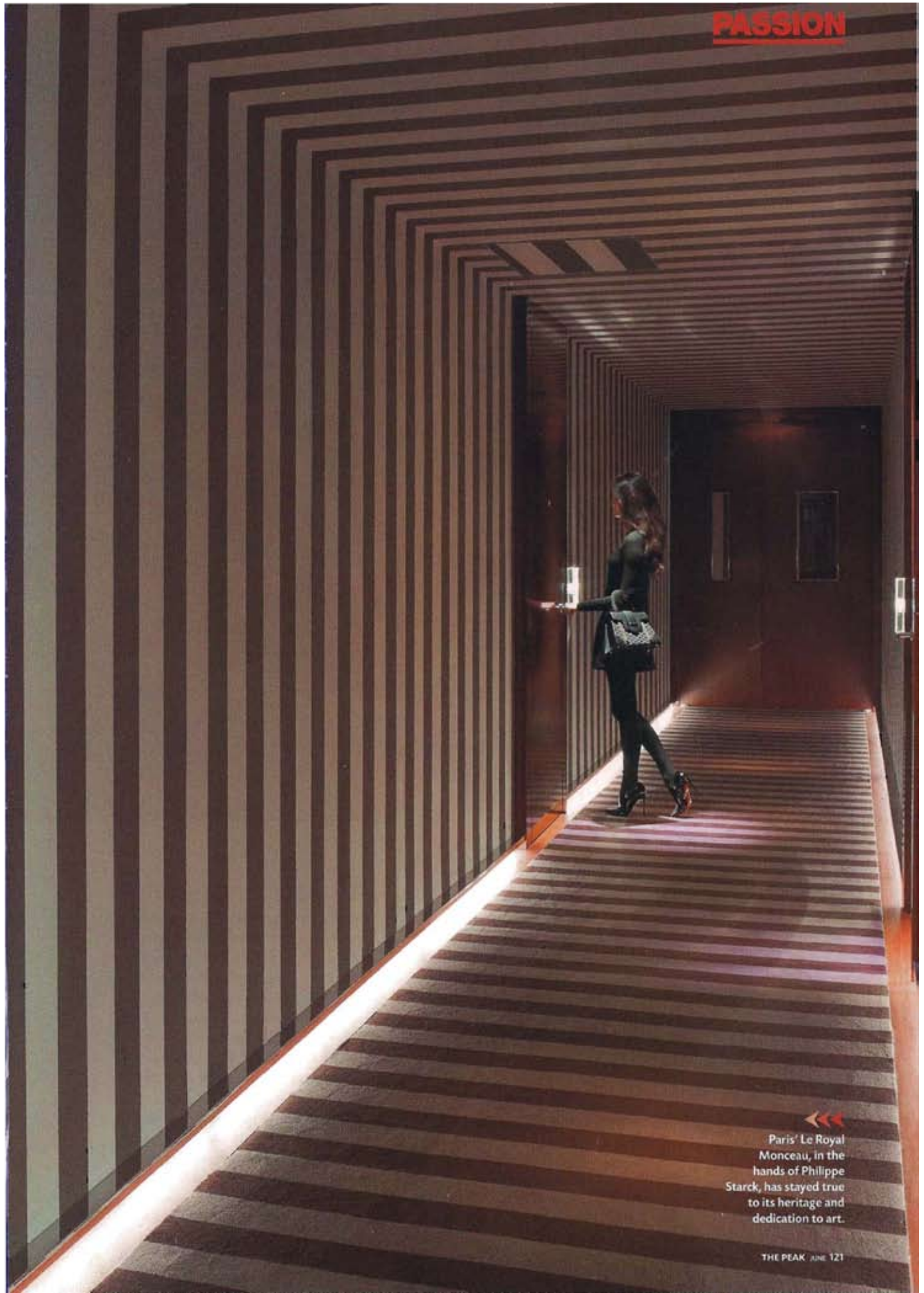
When **Le Royal Monceau** opened its doors in 1928, it quickly became the preferred Parisian haunt for artists and intellectuals. A 2010 revamp in the hands of designer Philippe Starck has stayed true to its heritage and its dedication to art.

This five-star hotel, just a short walk from the Arc de Triomphe, not only has its own art gallery featuring the works of European and international artists, but also an art concierge who can point you to worthwhile artistic sights like the 11th arrondissement famed for street art, as well as organise a private in-room viewing of artworks. A contemporary art

bookstore in the hotel has screens that stream live feeds of international art auctions and guests can catch up on the industry's latest via the hotel's up-to-date blog, artforbreakfast.com.

The first in Paris to house a 100-seater cinema (complete with gourmet snacks by Pierre Herme), Le Royal Monceau prominently displays contemporary artworks throughout. Whether it's a colourful mural by acclaimed French artist Stephane Calais on the ceiling of restaurant La Cuisine or the hand-blown glass masterpieces from Murano, Italy that adorn the luxurious suites, the hotel will ignite a person's creative streak.

PASSION



Paris' Le Royal Monceau, in the hands of Philippe Starck, has stayed true to its heritage and dedication to art.



FOR THOSE WHO FANCY THEMSELVES ASTRONAUTS, OR FEEL LIKE GOING INTO ORBIT AWAY FROM THE CARES OF THE WORLD, COCOON OFFERS PLENTY OF ORIGINALITY.

Although there are 110 rooms, those with deeper pockets will love the two suites honouring the famed singer-songwriters. Sir Paul McCartney's suite, with its £750 (S\$1,525) rate, displays oversized photos and newspaper cuttings across one entire wall, as well as a full suit of armour as a nod to his knighthood. The John Lennon suite features a white piano similar to that used when he performed the hit song *Imagine*.

There's even a "Two of Us Wedding Chapel" that can accommodate up to 60 guests for a Beatles-themed wedding ceremony. After saying "I do", accompanied by Beatles tunes, of course, the party can continue in the hotel's reception rooms for more "Fab Four" fun.

FLY ME TO THE MOON

For those who fancy themselves astronauts, or feel like going into orbit away from the cares of the world for a while, **Cocoon**, just a short drive from the best beaches in Salvador, Brazil, offers plenty of originality.

In keeping with the owner's spaceship theme – think *Starship Enterprise* – the staff are dressed in bright, '50s retro-style uniforms and address guests as "astronauts".

The interior design of the public areas and rooms is bold and futuristic with minimal decoration or fuss. The large oval windows along the front resemble the spaceship portholes from '60s sci-fi films.

Inside the 27 rooms, stark concrete walls, low-lying beds that look as though they're



Opposite: The large oval windows along the front of Cocoon resemble spaceship portholes from '60s sci-fi films.

Left: Moscow Hotel in downtown Dubai boasts a lavish lobby that is a replica of the Bolshoi Theatre.

suspended in mid-air, good use of mirrors and a nifty bathroom, which features a transparent glass roof for stargazing, all bring a sense of being aboard a spaceship to the experience. But don't for a minute think that there's little to do besides ponder the universe while you're there.

Step out onto the open terrace and enjoy the swimming pool, which changes colour every five minutes through clever lighting and is boldly emblazoned with the hotel's name in futuristic letters across the bottom.

Evenings are the perfect time to enjoy a selection of tasty tapas along with a few cocktails at the bar. Don't miss the house special, a heady concoction of Absolut Vodka and Cachaca Sagatiba.

TRIBUTE TO TSARS

Lovers of all things Russian will adore the palatial **Moscow Hotel** with views of the Creek in downtown Dubai and just seven minutes' drive from the airport.

Inspired by the royal residences and public buildings favoured by the Tsars and appealing particularly to those who love to be surrounded by lavish extravagance at every turn, the Moscow Hotel sets the stage for a real Russian experience.

Begin your journey in the massive lobby, a worthy replica of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow. The grand central staircase leads to a white-balustraded gallery, which in turn is crowned with an enormous crystal chandelier illuminating the

fresco of the Greek god Apollo and the nine muses.

Rising 10 storeys, the luxurious hotel offers 138 rooms, which include 20 Emperor Suites. Imperial Russian colours form the palette throughout the rooms, and guests can choose from suites dressed in peacock blue, regal crimson, yellow or emerald green.

With names such as Volga, Red Square, Tolstoy Library Lounge and Bolshoi, the hotel's restaurants, bars and nightclubs all evoke the atmosphere of Russia through decor, food and entertainment.

Start the night in the Tolstoy Library Lounge with a glass of champagne or a perfectly prepared Black Russian cocktail. Lovers of Tolstoy's works can leaf through some of his greatest works from the shelves which surround the lounge, or watch Russian films on the large screen.

Move into the Bolshoi Restaurant to savour traditional beef stroganoff served with bread dumplings, or a bowl of Russia's favourite potato and cabbage soup, borsch.

After dinner, the night is still young at the Moscow Hotel and guests love to party on in the Red Square Nightclub where traditional Russian folk dance shows followed by live music and DJs keep everyone moving until late.

THE GRAPE ESCAPE

From the wine-steeped cheese at the breakfast buffet to the vino-infused



Top: In each room at Rathaus Wine and Design, you'll find an in-room "wine altar" with a selection of fine stemware to make the most of the featured wines.

Above: At Aria Hotel, you will be greeted by mosaics on the floor that resemble a music score.

Opposite: The centrepiece of The Iron Horse's vintage-chic reception area is a '30s racing motorcycle.

cosmetics in the bathroom, guests at **Rathaus Wine and Design** in central Vienna get an education in Austrian wines every step of the way.

Round-the-clock access to over 250 wines from 39 vintners, either by the glass or bottle, is a given. But guests can also tap the expertise of the hotel's sommelier, who is always on hand to explain the vintages and their finer points, or pass on recent news about their Austrian producers.

For example, those visiting in the warmer months should sample a few glasses of chilled chardonnay by the Giefing Wine Estate, which has been around since the 15th century. The soil in the area of Rust, about 100km south of Vienna, where the

vineyard is located, offers a high mineral content perfect for producing white wines.

Private tasting sessions, where specific wines are paired with carefully curated canapes to bring out the nuances of each grape variety, can also be easily arranged.

The focus on wine continues upstairs. Each of the 39 modern rooms is dedicated to a top Austrian vintner and takes its name from the estate. On a specially designed in-room "wine altar", you'll find a selection of fine stemware to make the most of the featured wines, as well as information and seasonal notes about the bottles on offer.

Of particular interest are the rooms dedicated to the wines from the Vienna estates such as Zahel, which produces excellent riesling, sauvignon blanc and chardonnay.

CHORUS OF APPROVAL

At Prague's **Aria Hotel**, your musical journey begins the minute you enter the lobby. You're led through a passageway where the mosaics on the floor resemble a music score to an airy atrium where you'll be handed your room key - shaped like a treble clef, no less.

Nestled in the ancient Mala Strana district, the 52-room luxury boutique hotel takes its music seriously. Each room features either an artist or a composer. The hotel's four floors - aptly named jazz, opera, classical and contemporary - allude to what is to come. You can snuggle up with Billie Holiday, huddle with the Beatles or rest your weary head to Gershwin.

Apart from a bedside iPod, filled with music from over 50 musicians, each room also boasts antiques, art pieces, books and DVDs relating to the showcased musician. An Internet-linked flat-screen TV puts information about music events in and around Prague at your fingertips.

Even more helpful is Ivana Stehlikova, the hotel's music concierge with a doctorate in musicology. Not only will she book you tickets to the city's most popular concerts, she can also make recommendations from the hotel's library of 3,000 CDs.

You might also yourself singing the praises of the Coda restaurant where you'll

find a veritable opera of gastronomic delicacies the likes of Canadian lobster ravioli with garden vegetable salpicon, all beautifully presented on plates and mugs with caricatured famous musical icons by Czech artist Josef Blecha.

BIKER SHRINE

Road warriors looking to hang up their boots and helmets for the night will find comfort at **The Iron Horse** in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a hip luxury hotel geared towards high-end motorcycle enthusiasts.

Set in a repurposed century-old warehouse across from the just-opened Harley-Davidson Museum, The Iron Horse is without doubt a two-wheeler haven.

Beyond the '30s racing motorcycle that dominates the reception area, the hotel boasts check-in carts specially designed to transport saddlebags and crash helmets, as

well as a wash station and on-call bike maintenance services.

The motorcycle culture extends to its 100 rooms where guests will find custom hooks for hanging heavy leathers and benches for removing and storing boots and helmets.

Guests can also ease their aches with a rejuvenating post-ride massage. Even brunch at Smyth – one of the hotel's four dining options – is centred around Route 66. Drawing inspiration from famous stops along the 3,940km historic highway, the menu features items such as whiskey quiche, scotch eggs and chicken-fried skirt steak.

Though aimed at bike lovers, the hotel, with its vintage-chic decor, is also attracting road warriors of a different kind – business travellers looking to rev up their stay with a ride down the open road. ☉

ROAD WARRIORS LOOKING TO HANG UP THEIR BOOTS AND HELMETS FOR THE NIGHT WILL FIND COMFORT AT THE IRON HOUSE IN MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN.





▶▶▶
Le Royal Monceau's Italian restaurant, Il Carpaccio, features seashells on its walls and even ceiling, which are spellbinding with their metallic gleam.

Opposite from top: At Hard Days Night, the John Lennon suite features a similar white grand piano to that used when he performed *Imagine*, while the Sir Paul McCartney suite has a wall covered with newspaper cuttings.



IN BED WITH THE BEATLES

As the birthplace of the world's undisputed greatest pop group, it comes as no surprise that Liverpool boasts a district and a hotel dedicated to the Beatles. Billed as a "Fab Four star" hotel, **Hard Days Night** is housed in a converted 1884 building, adjacent to the Cavern Club where John Lennon, Paul McCartney and their bandmates got their start in the early '60s.

Themed around the group's storied history, the hotel showcases original artefacts including historic photos, record covers and ticket stubs from their early concerts as well as art pieces to honour the men. In the John Lennon suite, for example, there are two paintings *Give Peace a Chance* and *Instant Karma* by the New Jersey-based artist Shannon that reflect their passion for music and their impact on the world.

From the Yellow Submarine jukebox in the lobby to Hari's, the basement bar decked with photographs of the bearded Beatles in their Maharishi-influenced days, the property has earned the nod from fans.

