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Australia

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★ AMBIENCE & DESIGN

Are you sitting comfortably?
The drawing room at
Lime Wood, Hampshire

BEST HOTELS FOR AMBIENCE & DESIGN

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UK

★ Lime Wood, Hampshire



Set in the heart of the New Forest, this 29-room country-house hotel opened in late 2009. Interior designer David Collins has created a sexy, relaxed atmosphere throughout; chef Luke Holder serves up hearty British dishes made with seasonal ingredients. The Herb House Spa was unveiled last November with 10 treatment rooms, a 16-metre indoor lap pool and a rooftop gym with stunning forest views.

X-factor The decor, which combines statement furniture with historic detailing. 'The decor is lovely, the food fresh and delicious, and the staff super-friendly and efficient,' says Gold List contributor Lisa Grainger. Beaulieu Road, Lyndhurst, Hampshire (023 8028 7177; www.limewoodhotel.co.uk). Doubles from £245

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★ The Henry Jones Art Hotel, Hobart

CLASSIC What was a jam factory and a row of 1820s warehouses overlooking Hobart's busy harbour is now a stylish, 56-room hotel. Named after the late-19th-century jam magnate, it is Australia's only dedicated 'art hotel', with strong connections to the nearby Tasmanian School of Art. The public areas serve as an exhibition space for more than 250 works by Tasmanian artists, many of them for sale. The natural timber furnishings, steel-and-glass bathrooms and hi-tech amenities create a contemporary but comfortable feel. There's an excellent restaurant, and a bar that's said to have the longest counter-top in Australia.

X-factor The magnificent, beamed Jones & Co Room is great for parties, and the hotel feels like a museum – a very stylish one, mind you – with artworks throughout. 25 Hunter Street, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia (00 61 3 6210 7700; www.thehenryjones.com). Doubles from A\$310 (about £190)

★ Mollies, Auckland

NEW ENTRY Set on a leafy residential street with views over Waitemata Harbour, the 14-suite Mollies is Auckland's ultimate boho bolthole. A grand piano sits in the airy, art-filled lounge, which is the setting for regular operatic recitals, while all the individually designed bedrooms are filled with antiques, vintage finds and other curiosities. Decor is classic-contemporary and the atmosphere throughout is akin to that of an upmarket literary salon. Facilities include a day spa and The Dining Room Restaurant, where chef Lance Tripp prepares excellent contemporary Kiwi cuisine, complemented by a superb regional wine list.

X-factor Premier Villa Suites, decorated in creams and whites, are a natural extension of the hotel's musical leanings and come with grand pianos. 6 Tweed Street, St Mary's Bay, Auckland 1010, New Zealand (00 64 9 376 3489; www.mollies.co.nz). Doubles from NZ\$600 (about £290)

THE AMERICAS & CARIBBEAN

★ Faena Hotel + Universe, Buenos Aires

This 100-room Philippe Starck-designed hotel in a historic, seven-storey building on the banks of the River Plate combines a decadent, *belle époque* aesthetic with modern elegance. It has 21 individually designed suites; one of them, the F Suite, is the most expensive in Latin America. The 'universe' is a multi-functional space with a spa and hammam, bars, two restaurants and a performance space in which a Starck-designed cabaret appears nightly. The outdoor swimming pool is in a courtyard garden surrounded by plants and flowers.

X-factor The design is astonishing, from

the 10-metre-high stained-glass entrance to etched-glass crystal mirrors and stuffed animal heads mounted on red velvet. Martha Salotti 445, Buenos Aires, Argentina (00 54 11 4010 9000; www.faenahotelanduniverse.com). Doubles from US\$425

★ The Setai, Miami

The oceanfront Setai is one of the most luxurious hotels on South Beach. Behind the Art Deco-inspired façade are 86 suites, all incredibly chic with black-granite baths and rainfall showers. An adjacent, 44-suite, 40-storey glass tower has a 10,000sq ft penthouse with its own lap pool and serviced apartments below and a recording studio. There's a spa and three pools; the dining options are pan-Asian cuisine in The Restaurant, international dishes in The Grill, sophisticated Asian 'stall food' in The Bar & Courtyard and Mediterranean-style dishes at the Pool & Beach Bar.

X-factor A sleek Asian look (the brick, bronze and teak lobby is particularly beautiful) has been fused with high-octane Miami style to spectacular effect. 2001 Collins Avenue, Miami, Florida, USA (00 1 305 520 6000; www.setai.com). Doubles from \$960

★ Inkatererra La Casona, Cusco, Peru

NEW ENTRY Set in a 16th-century mansion on a historic plaza, the 11-suite Inkatererra La Casona is one of the most luxurious places to stay in the Andean city. Close to Machu Picchu and Sacsayhuamán fortress, it takes its design inspiration from the Incas, and is laid out in a stark, geometric fashion. This doesn't mean it's a relic, though: contemporary touches are everywhere, from iPod speakers and underfloor heating in the suites. The dining room serves excellent Latin American cuisine and there is a range of excursions to must-see sights.

X-factor Owners Denise and Joe Koehlin have personally sourced every item – from the original Inca wall hangings to Spanish religious icons – in the hotel, which gives the place an intimate, very personal feel. Plaza Nazarenas 113, Cusco, Peru (0800 458 7506; www.inkatererra.com). Doubles from US\$345

AFRICA, MIDDLE EAST & INDIAN OCEAN

★ The Chedi, Muscat

CLASSIC Combining traditional Middle Eastern architecture (reflecting pools, fountain courtyards) with Eastern-influenced minimalism (Zen pools in the gardens, black-stone floors), the Chedi was the first contemporary hotel to open in Muscat. Decorated in a soothing,

neutral palette, all 156 rooms have open-plan bathrooms with rain showers. Three more rooms will be added this year. Most have views of the Al Hajar Mountains or the Gulf of Oman. It has an excellent beachfront location, a spa, tennis courts, family and adults-only pools. The fabulous restaurant serves Indian, Mediterranean, Asian and Arabic cuisine from four open kitchens.

X-factor The successful fusion of contemporary and the exotic, with cloisters, archways and clusters of low-hanging lanterns, and tranquil bedrooms decorated in muted desert shades. 'It's the most relaxing place on earth: the kind of place people swim quietly so as not to disturb each other,' says Gold List contributor Fiona Lintott. 133 Al Khuwair, Muscat, Oman (00 968 2452 4400; www.ghmhotels.com). Doubles from 263 Omani rials (about £100)

★ Soneva Gili by Six Senses, Maldives

Built using sustainable materials and furnished with natural fabrics, Soneva Gili is chic and eco-conscious. There are 45 stylish, contemporary over-water villas – and while all the rooms (each of which has a sundeck and open-air bathroom) are gorgeous, the Private Reserve is spectacular. Reached by boat, it has three bedrooms, its own spa, a waterslide and resident staff. In addition, there are two restaurants, a bar and wine cellar, pool, tennis court and dive centre. The Six Senses spa is in its own tranquil, over-water domain.

X-factor The seven Crusoe residences, marooned off the north shore of the island, are the ultimate in seclusion. Lankanifushi Island, North Malé Atoll, Republic of Maldives (00 960 664 0304; www.sixsenses.com/soneva-gili). Villas from US\$1,040

★ Shompole, Kenya

NEW ENTRY With just six thatched, open-air rooms on the edge of the Great Rift Valley, this eco safari lodge offers a five-star take on alfresco living. Beds, baths and private plunge pools are all open to the elements, and the architecture is inspired by the surrounding landscape. Walls are built with white quartz, stairs are made from polished fig wood and the whole space blends seamlessly into the hillside. African-inspired cuisine is served in the main thatched area with its sensational views over the plains. There are two more secluded luxury suites at Little Shompole, a short hike from the main lodge.

X-factor 'I love Shompole for the simple beauty of the organic design,' says Gold List contributor Lisa Johnson. Masai Mara, Kenya (00 254 20 884135; www.wilderness-ventures.com). Doubles from £850

★ BEST HOTELS FOR LEISURE FACILITIES

Continued from page 28

AUSTRALASIA & SOUTH PACIFIC

★ Hayman, Great Barrier Reef

CLASSIC A private island fringed with coral beaches, Hayman has 210 bedrooms, suites and penthouses and villas set in tropical gardens. These include several new Kerry Hill-designed beachfront villas, each with floor-to-ceiling glass windows and private pools, which opened at the end of 2010. There is a choice of five restaurants, including La Fontaine for Modern European cuisine and Azure for contemporary Australian dishes and seafood.

X-factor There's an extensive spa, six floodlit tennis courts, two squash courts, swimming pools, a driving range and putting green, and a range of water and reef activities, including diving. Hayman, Great Barrier Reef, Queensland, Australia (00 61 7 4940 1234; www.hayman.com.au). Doubles from A\$595 (about £370)

ASIA

★ Six Senses Hua Hin, Thailand

This all-villa resort in Pranburi, 30-minutes' drive from Hua Hin, combines luxury and attentive service with environmentally friendly, low-impact architecture. All 55 villas have stone-walled private gardens with pools, and dedicated butlers; most have in-room spa treatment areas. Dining options include the Beach Restaurant for seafood and wood-fired pizzas, and the Living Room restaurant for informal Thai fusion cuisine.

X-factor The striking Earth Spa is housed in nine domed buildings built from mud mixed with rice husks and straw, and has two steam rooms and a meditation cave. 9/22 Moo 5 Paknampran, Pranburi, Prachaup Khirikhan, Thailand (00 66 32 632 111; www.sixsenses.com). Doubles from £255

★ Banyan Tree Phuket, Thailand

Part of the vast Laguna Phuket complex, this 174-villa resort was the first Banyan Tree property to open back in 1995. On Bang Tao Bay, a manicured tourist enclave in north-west Phuket, this is a flagship destination spa. All villas have gardens, salas or sundecks and open-air sunken baths or pools; the 22 new Deluxe Two Bedroom Pool Villas are ideal for families. The four restaurants include Saffron for traditional Thai and the Tamarind spa restaurant.

X-factor The spa has a team of exceptional therapists; meditation, t'ai chi and aerobics classes are available. There's an 18-hole golf course and the new Banyan Tree Rangers children's club. 33/27 Moo 4 Srisoonthorn Road, Amphur Talang, Phuket, Thailand (00 800 300 2000; www.banyantree.com). Doubles from US\$245