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Dream team

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Great Scot

Virgin Hotels moves into Edinburgh and Glasgow

Walk on the wild side

Carrie Wicks reveals the rock 'n' roll past of Soho hotel Chateau Denmark

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FRONT COVER PHOTO: SARAH LUCY BROWN

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Gimme shelter

New Soho hotel Chateau Denmark is breaking all the rules. Rooms are set pieces in homage to gothic, punk or Victoriana, with staff dressed to kill and bars in the bathrooms, all set in London's Denmark Street, the home of rock 'n' roll. *Janet Harmer* pays a visit

Chateau Denmark is a hotel like no other. Located across 16 buildings in the heart of London's Soho, the venture is jaw-droppingly bold and brave in its nod to the hedonistic rock 'n' roll scene which played out on its doorstep for some 50 years.

It is not actually described as a hotel, although it is very much one in that it is somewhere you check into a room – albeit a room like no other – for an overnight stay. Any of the usual references to a hotel are banned, explains Carrie Wicks, founder of CAW Ventures, the operating company behind Chateau Denmark, which opened on 4 April. So, housekeepers are chateau keepers, bedrooms are session rooms and standard operating procedures are “anything but standard”.

You get the vibe: this is a business that has turned all the usual methods of hotelkeeping on its head. The result is a unique proposition, both stylistically and operationally. Wicks was excited to take on the challenge of such a bold project. “It was an amazing opportunity for a highly unique and supremely tailored operation,” she says. “It has given us the platform to break away from tradition. There are no half-measures in anything we do.”

The creation of Chateau Denmark came about as part of the wider ambitious redevelopment of the locality by Consolidated Developments, which incorporates the Now Building, which features an immersive media space operated by Outernet Global. When it opened on 1 November, it featured what is believed to be the world's largest LED screen. There are also retail spaces, a recording studio, fitness and wellness spaces and three live venues ranging in capacity from 360 to 2,000 people.

In tune

Chateau Denmark itself is situated on Denmark Street, a stone's throw from Tottenham Court Road tube station, one of the major hubs for Crossrail. It's the location for properties dating back to the 17th century and one of the few remaining streets in London to have retained its original facades. Its links to the music industry stem back to the early 20th century, when music publishers set up shop, with recording studios establishing a major presence during the 1960s and 1970s (*see panel*).

It is this link to the music industry that informed the interior design of Chateau Denmark, created by Taylor Howes, a company best known for its design of high-end residential properties. Working on the project was a major challenge – heightened by the idiosyncrasies of working across a variety of different buildings – for the firm's founder Karen Howes and creative head of studio Jane Landino, but one which they took on with enthusiasm and relish.

“We were encouraged to push the boundaries like we never have before,” says Landino. “The only time Carrie said ‘no’ was when we suggested a piece of art with a controversial religious reference.”

Certainly, some of the interiors are not for the fainthearted, but all have been created with a sense of fun and cheekiness in mind. Neon lights above each room depict them as locations for sinning, while the laundry bags are appropriately emblazoned with the word ‘Filth’.

Skulls and serpents are reoccurring themes throughout, be it on House of Hackney wallpaper, door handles on the bespoke cabinetry and generously sized Champagne flutes ▶



From left: Anita Miskovic, Michael Estares, Freda, Alexia Broadbent, Carrie Wicks and Evgenia Alek



Boakye,
androva

Chateau Denmark

**Chateau Denmark, Denmark Place,
London WC2H 0LA
020 3656 1000
www.chateaudenmark.com**

Owner Joint venture with Consolidated
Developments

Operator CAW Ventures, headed by
Carrie Wicks

Chateau manager Sam Shepherd

Rooms 14 session rooms and 39 apartments

Rates Starting from £450 for a superior
session room up to £2,110 for Clifton
apartment



“We know the reaction from some guests may be extreme, but we think it is good to get people talking”

Carrie Wicks

Denmark Street – the UK’s Tin Pan Alley

The importance of Denmark Street to the history of British popular music was recognized with the granting in 2014 of a blue plaque referring to the location as Tin Pan Alley, the name that was originally given to an area of New York famous for its songwriters.

While the buildings in Denmark Street date back several centuries, it is only in the past 100 years that the area has become synonymous with the music industry and in particular is regarded as the birthplace of British popular music in the 1950s.

Industry publications *Melody Maker* and *New Musical Express* were founded here in 1926 and 1952 respectively. It was also the location where the Rolling Stones recorded some of their earliest works, Elton John and Bernie Taupin wrote songs there and David Bowie is believed to have conceived Ziggy Stardust in Gioconda Café.

The Sex Pistols rehearsed on the street and graffiti believed to have been created by Johnny Rotten has been preserved in the interior of one of Chateau Denmark’s apartments. A live music scene was established at the 12 Bar Club, which became renowned for launching the careers of the likes of Adele, Katie Melua and Keane. While the club closed in 2015 – despite opposition from ardent music lovers – a new version is set to open as part of the wider redevelopment of the area.

Today the street has retained its connection to the music scene via the profusion of shops selling musical instruments. Favourable leases for the stores will guarantee their long-term future, with a clause stating that any new business has to be music related.



safety-pinned curtains and tartan chairs with Mohican embellishment.

The intention is that Chateau Denmark is very much a party venue where excess will abound, so mini-bars are out and maxi-bars are in. Some of the apartments feature bar-throoms in which guests will be encouraged to gather around the bespoke marble-top bar with brass gantry, showcasing a generous selection of more than 20 full-sized bottles of spirits and a dozen bottles of wine, all charged at little more than retail prices. A dramatic roll-top bath, in various deep hues, sits alongside.

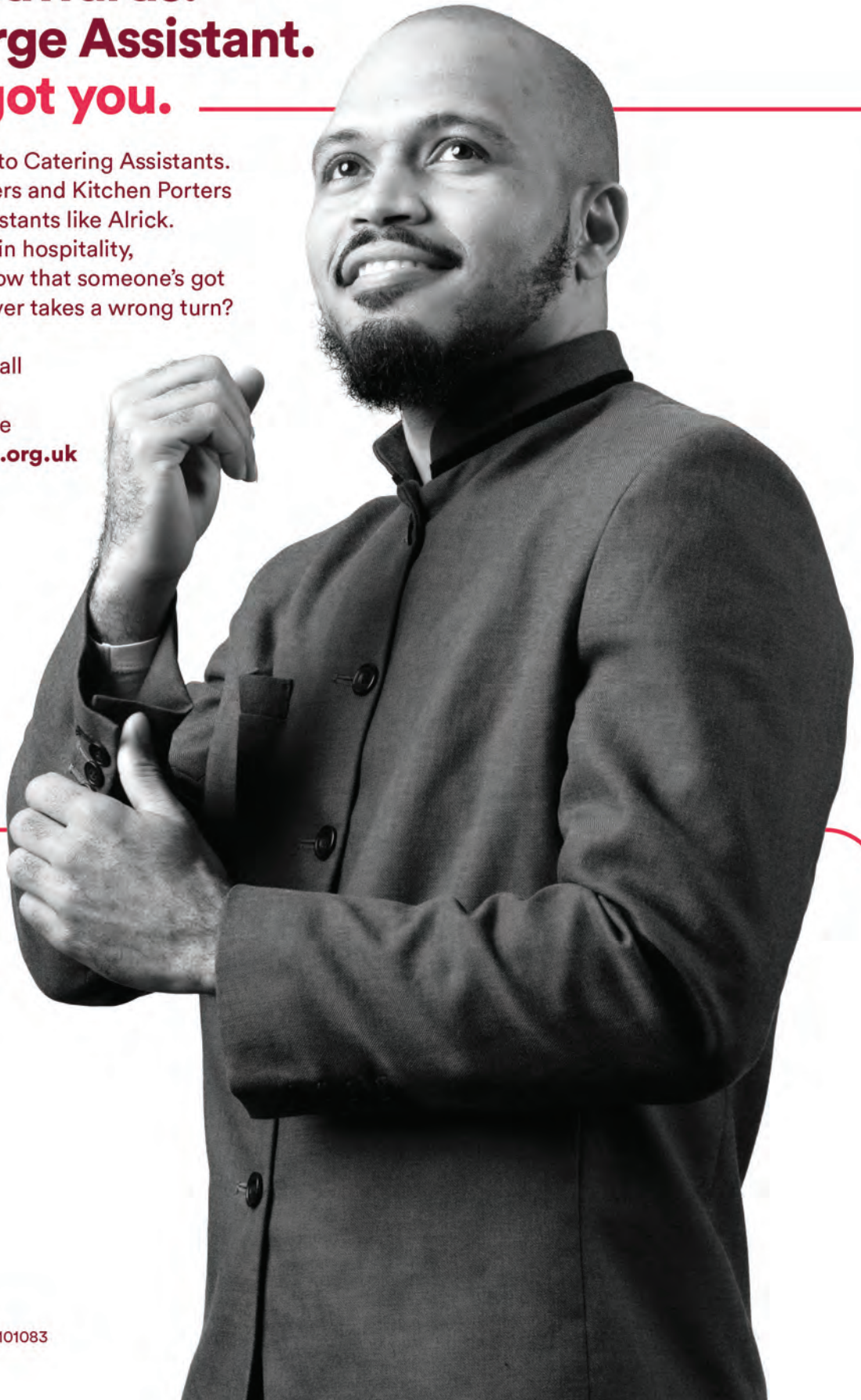
Personality first

With music being the driving force behind Chateau Denmark, it is no surprise that the audio systems in the room are first class and form a key element of an operation that ▶

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◀ prides itself on state-of-the-art technology. As well as enjoying eight curated audio playlists and music videos on 65-inch screens, guests can livestream events from the nearby Outernet venues. Entertainment specialist Butler Harwell has co-ordinated the products from leading audio companies, such as Meridien, Void, Artcoustic and PMC.

Choosing the right team was essential. Everyone, including general manager Sam Shepherd (a former graduate management trainee at Firdale Hotels), was selected for their sparkling and flamboyant personalities and willingness to be part of something new.

“We went about the recruitment process by asking the candidates to tell us something about themselves in just 60 seconds, either in writing or via a video,” says Wicks.

“We were encouraged to push the boundaries like we never have before”

Jane Landino

Every team member has also had to display a keenness to become multi-skilled. As a result, many of the staff came on board up to six months before the opening to ensure the most comprehensive training programme could be fulfilled. The person who checks in a guest will also provide a concierge service,

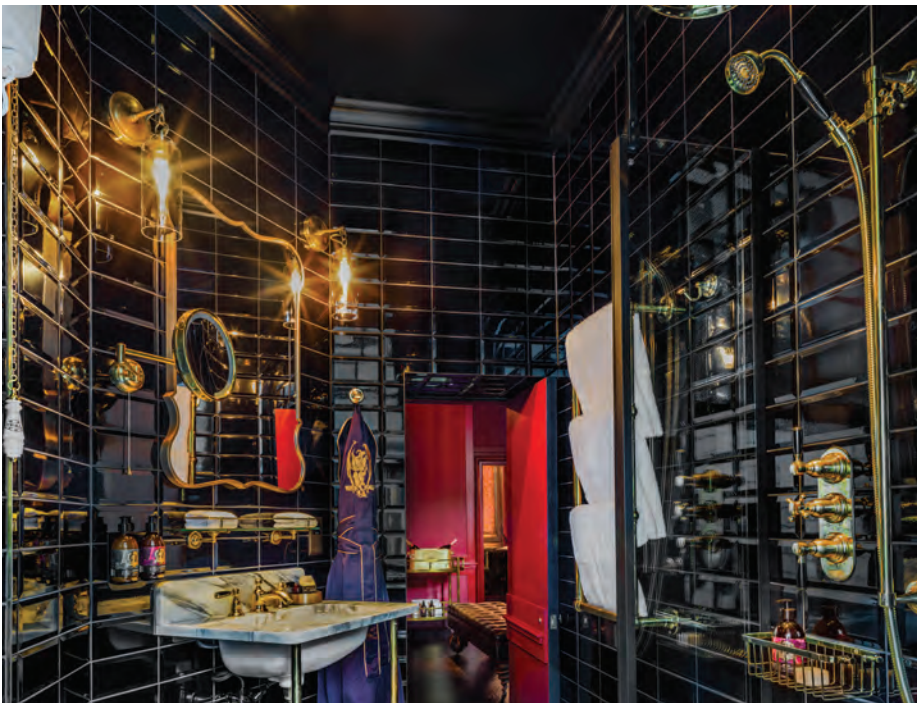
mix a martini or organise breakfast or dinner.

With regards food and beverage, there is no in-house restaurant at Chateau Denmark. However, guests can access Tattu, a Chinese restaurant located on the top floor of the Now Building, situated above the session rooms. The launch of the restaurant marks the first site in London for the independent group, which also has a presence in Edinburgh, Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham.

Further restaurants are set to open in another Outernet building and nearby Flitcroft Street. Additionally, guests can order, via the butler (or BTLR) assigned to each room, any food they choose at any time of the day or night, from a variety of local suppliers that Chateau Denmark has formed links with.

Besides Chateau Denmark’s own lounge bar, Thirteen, there are no other specific public areas for the venture. Hence, Denmark Street itself is where a lot of the meeting and greeting will take place. It is for this reason that the outfits (not uniforms) worn by staff are equally extravagant as the session rooms and apartments. Brocade frock coats and pink-snake-skin-lined, gender-fluid kilts (a cross between a kilt and a skirt), designed by Studio 104 and teamed with high-top white trainers, will make a statement to any passerby who may unwittingly think they have wandered onto an 18th-century film set.

There is certainly something of a cinematic quality to Chateau Denmark in that the experience of the spaces take the guests into another dimension and will undoubtedly appeal to an audience that is expected to largely come from the music and entertainment industries. Its creation has enabled much of the historical and cultural charm of Denmark Street to be restored, although some may find its juxtaposition alongside the futuristic Now Building to be a touch jarring. What can be certain though, is that Chateau Denmark has established a whole new genre for hospitality in London.



Carrie Wicks

The launch of Chateau Denmark marked the highest-profile project for Carrie Wicks since she launched her management consultancy business CAW Ventures in 2016.

Wicks originally started her career in South Africa, where she spent 12 years working in restaurants and hotels in Johannesburg and Cape Town, after graduating with a HND in catering and institutional management at Oxford Polytechnic (now Oxford Brookes University).

Upon returning to the UK, she joined Firmdale Hotels in 1997 as general manager at the Covent Garden hotel. Within two years, Wicks went on to oversee her first opening at the Charlotte Street hotel. Later, as operations director, she was also responsible for the opening of Knightsbridge, No 16, the Soho and Ham Yard hotels – all in the capital – as well as the group's first property in New York, Crosby Street.

Wicks made her name in the wider hospitality industry during the 19 years she spent at Firmdale, becoming known for her work around people development across a 1,200-strong team, which resulted in her receiving *The Caterer's Manager of the Year* title at the 2009 Catey Awards.

On leaving Firmdale in 2016 and prior to getting CAW Ventures off the ground, Wicks spent eight months as chief executive of Leeu Collection, the owner of three luxury boutique hotels in Franschhoek, South Africa, and Linthwaite House in the Lake District.

Her first key independent project was to support the opening of the new Annabel's Club in Mayfair for Richard Caring before focusing her time on the creation and launch of Chateau Denmark.

Outernet Global expects its London development to be replicated worldwide with Wicks involved in the creation of any complimentary hotel-style ventures.



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Ewan Venters

The chief executive of hospitality group Artfarm and art gallery Hauser & Wirth talks to *Caroline Baldwin* about merging art and hospitality and opening the group's first London site in Mayfair

You joined Artfarm after heading up Fortnum & Mason, where you were chief executive for nine years. How have you found the move from retail to hospitality?

My time at Fortnum & Mason was fantastic, it was such a historical business to have led. It gave me that experience of mixing retail with hospitality, but there was a focus on art, too. When Garfield Weston bought Fortnum & Mason in 1951, he had the foresight to buy art for the store. Every lunchtime he would go down to the dealers in St James's and Mayfair and look for interesting art to put on the walls, which he believed would increase dwell time in a retail environment.

During the second half of my tenure at Fortnums I initiated an art programme every year to coincide with the Frieze art fair in London in October. We would take the entire Fortnum & Mason collection down and replace it with work by a mixture or a singular artist. One year we worked with the Manchester-based collector Frank Cohen to exhibit a number of modern British artists, and another year we featured work by the Chinese artist Zhang Enli, who is represented by Hauser & Wirth. So my segue

from Fortnum & Mason into Artfarm was more seamless than one might think.

When did your own love of art begin?

I was brought up in the Kingdom of Fife, just north of Edinburgh on the east coast, where the fishing villages are awash with great Scottish artists. I was always in and around the gallery and artist world, and I would go to London twice a year to see galleries and go to the theatre. I had an ambition to open a gallery when I was 17 – I even saw a property that I thought would make a fantastic gallery – but I was a management trainee at Sainsbury's at the time and the lure of going to London changed that course.

But, 30 years later and working as chief executive of both the gallery Hauser & Wirth and the hospitality group Artfarm, it feels like a very natural world, for me. I have two separate teams for both companies and a good chief executive is largely about providing context for everything we do. I do that for both sets of teams and make sure the dots join up.

Why is art important in hospitality?

The relationship between restaurants and artists dates back hundreds of years. Take the La Colombe d'Or hotel and restaurant in the south of France, where some of the greatest artists in the world left works as a thank you after eating and drinking there. Or Food restaurant in New York City's Soho, which was founded by artists in the 1970s.

At Artfarm we create a very inclusive environment – there's something for everyone, the art lover or the foodie. It's about connoisseurship. People like food, art, wine, music and conversation and you don't go out just for the food, wine or service – it's the sum of the parts that make the experience.

How do your sites differ from others that boast big-name artists on their walls?

Firstly, it's important to say that none of the Artfarm locations are galleries – we don't sell art – but because of Artfarm's relationship with the artist community, we're able to achieve some extraordinary collaborations.

A number of restaurants in London have

“Many of the silent voices of the brigade are often from very creative and interesting backgrounds”



The Audley



artwork that interacts with a space. You'll also see this in our new project in Mayfair, the Audley, when it opens in the autumn. There will be artworks in the building that will surprise and delight and make people go 'wow, how is that possible?'. The DNA at Artfarm allows those relationships to happen because art is at the heart of what we do.

Can you tell us more about the Audley?

It's always been an ambition to have an Artfarm project in London, but we never wanted to open something in a very generic building, so we've been on the look out for an interesting space. We've got a partnership with Grosvenor Estate, and not just from a transactional perspective as the landlord, but the ethos and thinking throughout has been done hand-in-hand with Grosvenor.

The Audley is an old Victorian pub that we have renovated and opened as a destination restaurant with three floors of 'curious rooms'. These are spaces where you can have a pre-booked meeting, a celebratory lunch,

or a book or product launch, with the wet-led pub downstairs serving beer and wine as well as a great food offer. It's not like anything else and it reflects Mayfair.

And what about the food?

We have Jamie Shears, who has come from London's 45 Park Lane hotel, as executive chef. He was born in Torquay and has a wonderful respect and love of British ingredients. He thought the project was not only a phenomenal opportunity to define his cooking in this environment, but that it would provide a lot of creative freedom to bring about his flair of presentation.

We celebrate classic food from a historical British-London perspective – it's not modern British, but historical food of Mayfair, London and Britain, presented in a relevant way for today, reflecting the authenticity of the area.

So do you have eel pie on the menu?

It could have eel pie, that's a classic London dish, but we would need to make sure it's sus- ►

tainable. It's about making it into a relevant dish for today. Take scallops with mash and green sauce, that was a great London dish, so there's a lot of creativity with what we can do. Jamie spent the summer developing menus, sourcing producers and recruiting his team.

What have been the biggest challenges you've faced in your first year at Artfarm?

The number one challenge has been people. Recruitment in our sector is hugely challenging in a post-Brexit and – almost – post-Covid world. We employ 300 people across Artfarm and have 50-60 vacancies. We will have 130-140 roles at the Audley, so it's a team of 500.

Around 40 of our vacancies are in the Highlands and providing accommodation for workers is a problem. I communicate with local councils around housing strategies for rural communities and the tide is turning a bit, but slowly.

The unique thing for us at the Fife Arms is that it's a paradise, so if you are at the right stage of your life, there's no greater place to be than in the middle of the most glorious countryside.

How are you hoping to attract staff to your sites more broadly?

I'm a huge believer in the magic of people. We're a National Living Wage employer and we put people at the heart of what we do. I think we're an interesting employer of choice, because of those people who want to work in the sector, some want to work in a much more creative environment than the traditional roles of waiter or kitchen porter, so the biggest opportunity we have is our creativity offer.

The Audley, for instance, I think captures the imagination of a lot of creative people. Many of the silent voices of the brigade are often people from very creative and interest-



'Ancient Quartz' by Zhang Enli at the Fife Arms

ing backgrounds. Someone may come from a village in Italy and have studied art or history – everyone has a story to tell, but they don't always get the ability to express that. Our environment provides intimacy between art and the artist. The artists come and eat, drink and be merry – we have a constant revolving door of artists coming into our properties – and how exciting would it be for a 25-year-old from Spain or Newcastle to be in that environment? That's not happening in a chain restaurant.

Do you think the staffing crisis has improved at all over the last year?

I think recruitment is getting slightly easier.

I'm a heavy supporter of Kate Nicholls and everything UKHospitality is doing, and I also want to drive an increase in awareness to make hospitality more of a career choice and support the improvement of working conditions to attract more into the sector.

Also, there's the crisis in Ukraine, and as we open our borders to welcome refugees from Ukraine and elsewhere, the hospitality industry needs to seize this moment and be open-armed and embrace these people with offers to educate and train. It's an opportunity from an employment perspective to say: "Come, be welcome and be a part of our team, we'll support you."

The Artfarm collection

Artfarm was founded in 2014 by the Somerset-based gallerists and art collectors Iwan and Manuela Wirth.

Roth Bar & Grill

Opened in 2014, Roth Bar & Grill is based at the Hauser & Wirth gallery in Somerset and features many Hauser & Wirth artists alongside works from the private collection of Iwan and Manuela Wirth, from Henry Moore's drawing of lobster claws to Rodney Graham's lightbox 'Dinner Break (Salisbury Steak)'.

Durslade Farmhouse

Opened in 2014, the six-bedroom farmhouse in Somerset, on the edge of Bruton, is also located on the site of Hauser & Wirth.

The farmhouse was renovated by Argentinian architect Luis Laplace and features unexpected interiors, vintage furniture and artworks from Hauser & Wirth, including a specially commissioned painted mural in the dining room by Guillermo Kuitca and an installation by Pipilotti Rist that projects the Somerset landscape onto

the walls of the sitting room through a chandelier of found objects and glass.

Manuela

Located in downtown Los Angeles, Manuela opened in 2016 to unite chefs, farmers and artists, celebrating seasonal ingredients sourced from the best farms and producers in southern California. The restaurant was designed by Los Angeles native Matt Winter and is illuminated by specially commissioned works from artists Paul McCarthy, Mark Bradford and Raymond Pettibon.



The Fife Arms

Opened in 2018 in Braemar, the property features more than 14,000 pieces of art, including antiques and specially commissioned artwork. These include the painted ceiling 'Ancient Quartz' by Zhang Enli, a mural by Guillermo Kuitca in the Clunie dining room, 'Red Deer Chandelier' by Richard Jackson and a Steinway piano that was creatively reimaged by contemporary artist Mark Bradford.

Durslade Farm Shop

Opened in 2020, mid-lockdown, Durslade Farm Shop is a community farm shop with its own in-house forager and butcher.

Roundhill Grange

A grade II-listed Georgian house, located in 200 acres of historic parkland on the outskirts of Bruton. The manor house is used for private parties, corporate events and weddings.

The Audley

Opened autumn 2022.

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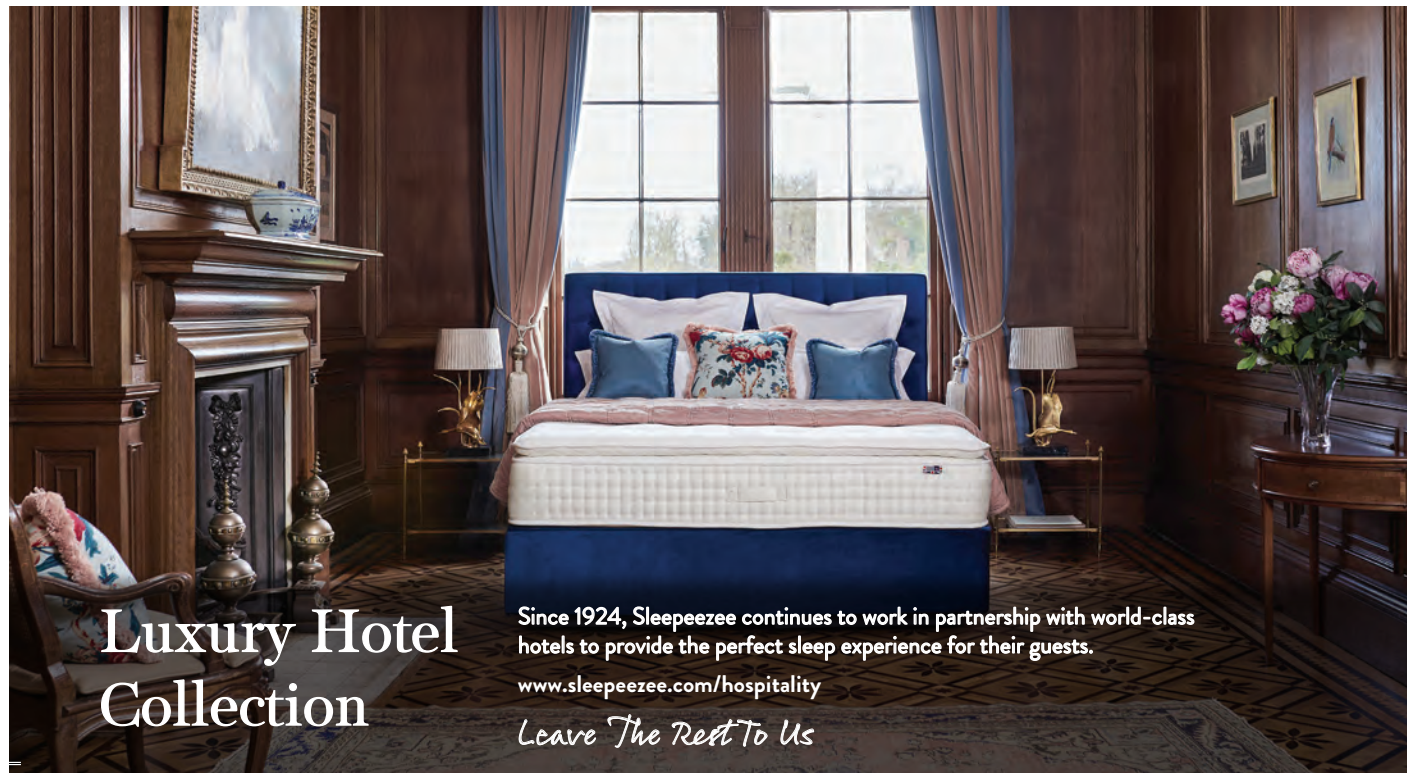
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Leave The Rest To Us

Extra Virgin

Virgin Hotels is back in the UK, this time with openings in two major Scottish cities. *Katherine Price* discovers how the brand is bringing a luxurious aesthetic to the ancient surroundings of Edinburgh's Old Town

In one of the most anticipated launches in recent years, Virgin Hotels has returned to the UK with not one, but two luxury Scottish properties.

The openings, in Edinburgh and Glasgow, mark a return to the market for Sir Richard Branson's hotel brand, which previously had a handful of hotels in the US, including in Chicago, Dallas, Nashville and Las Vegas.

Virgin's previous collection included Crathorne Hall in Yarm, North Yorkshire, and Buxted Park in East Sussex, both of which were bought by Hand Picked Hotels in 2009.

Although the brand's relaunch in the two cities may appear sentimental – Sir Richard's wife Joan is from Glasgow and his grandparents from Edinburgh – vice-president of operations for Virgin Hotels in Europe, Bryan Davern, says it was more to do with opportunity. He was appointed to the role last year, having previously headed hotels for the Press Up Hospitality Group in Ireland, and he says Scotland is "the beginning of our journey in Europe".

"The opportunities came up in these markets. Edinburgh in particular is a city that probably needed a luxury lifestyle brand. There's definitely a gap in the market there, but I think you could say the same about Glasgow," he observes. "The fact that they're close means there's economies of scale and we could get the best team possible together as well."

Both hotel general managers are Scottish, with Lanark native Scott McArdle appointed to oversee the Edinburgh property, having spent recent years working for luxury hotel brands, including Marriott's Autograph Collection, in the Caribbean and South-East Asia. General manager of the Glasgow hotel, Acorn Award-winner Tom Gibson, is from Aberdeen and joined the property from Edinburgh's Glasshouse hotel, where he was also general manager.

Having studied hotel and hospitality management in Glasgow's University of Strathclyde, "to be opening a hotel in the same city 20 years later, it's everything I've been working towards," he says.

"The hotels all have a unique design, a unique sense of place – there's nothing cookie-cutter about them"

Bryan Davern

Open sesame

The 222-bedroom Edinburgh hotel, situated in the Scottish capital's Unesco World Heritage-listed Old Town, has seen a transformation of the historic India Buildings in Victoria Street into a hotel with multiple dining and drinking outlets. The restoration of the properties has seen three of the four buildings that make up the hotel removed from Scotland's Buildings At Risk Register.

The hotel is undergoing a phased opening – 54 bedrooms and the Commons Club restaurant opened on 1 June, the latter under the direction of Edinburgh-born executive chef Steven Wilson, designed to feel like a modern social club with a menu showcasing seasonal Scottish cuisine. The Funny Library coffee shop, the brand's communal workspace concept, offering a collection of 'whimsical and funny' books and games as well as local literature, has also opened.

The remaining 168 bedrooms – all-day dining space Eve, Greyfriars Hall, a 19th-century church that has been restored and repurposed as an event space and a rooftop area with unobstructed views of Edinburgh Castle – will all open at the property this autumn.

The project was delayed by more a year after an archaeological dig at the site uncovered significant historical artefacts, including siege weapons and cannonballs, and a portion of the original city walls, with some objects believed to be from the 10th century.

Despite the disruption to development,





McArdle fondly says he would love to showcase the artefacts in the property if permitted, although there are no plans for this yet as they are still being analysed (see panel).

Room for rest

The 'chambers' range from 23 sq m to 75 sq m and are split into two areas: dressing rooms, complete with sit-down vanity unit and illuminated mirror, which are separated by a sliding wooden door from the lounges, which house the bed, red Smeg mini fridges stocked with local products and the TV.

Davern says guests "don't want the same bedroom they have at home", and the layout works well, allowing room service to be delivered into a guestroom without intruding on the bedroom space.

Lighting, thermostats and TVs can all be controlled through the brand's mobile app, Lucy, which guests can also use as their key, to order room service and to check-in. McArdle says the technology isn't meant to replace staff but make the guest experience ►

Virgin Hotels' UK properties

Edinburgh

Opened 1 June

General manager Scott McArdle

Bedrooms 222

Starting room rate £320 for chambers and £850 for suites

Owner Flemyn

Asset manager Siggis Capital

Design and architecture ICA Studio, Four-by-Two and Joelle Reid Interiors

Glasgow

Opening November

General manager Tom Gibson

Bedrooms 240

Starting room rate £170 for chambers; £270 for suites

Owner and developer Silk Property Group

Asset manager Siggis Capital

Architecture 21st Architecture



◀ “more streamlined” and allow them to “stay the way they want to stay”.

“We’re really, really proud of the seamless technology, and it’s a big part of our story, but at the same time we’re aware it’s a people-powered business,” he says. “It’s the hospitality that’s going to create the guest loyalty – Lucy is to enhance the guest experience but not replace it. As opposed to going through the bit we all get frustrated with in hotels, which is the standing in the queue, [guests can] bypass a lot of that and really connect with the staff, learn more about the city and what we’re doing, and have all the interactions driven by hospitality, as opposed to admin.”

The hotels also provide dog beds, food and water dishes, ‘pet minibars’, and information about pet-friendly locations across the city – perhaps geared to the boom in dog owners during the lockdowns of recent years?

“Rather than travelling with a pet, we want to make it a stay with your pet,” says McArdle. “We’re in the business of hospitality – we might as well make it as enjoyable for your pet as we do for you,” adds Davern.

The Edinburgh hotel’s suites, meanwhile, include ‘Richard’s Flat’, described as “Sir Richard’s home from home”; and the Eve Branson suite, under the bell tower of the restored church and named after the Virgin founder’s late mother. There is also a Moroccan-inspired Kasbah Tamadot suite, a nod to the Virgin Limited Edition sister property in the Atlas Mountains, with a Bedouin tent-style lounge space – a creative way of turning a difficult low-ceilinged area into a novelty.

Scottish hospitality

The guest profile is broad, they say, and families can be catered for with interconnecting rooms, while the wardrobes are spacious enough for longer stays.

“People are travelling in different ways, and we’re open to catering for everyone we possibly can,” says McArdle. The group said occu-

“Virgin is an experience-driven company, that’s a really great opportunity for us”
Bryan Davern

pancy at the hotel had “exceeded expectations” in the first few weeks of opening and it was “pleasantly surprised” at the volume of business from international markets.

Davern insists the products have not only been tailored for the UK market but their specific cities in both look and feel. The Edinburgh

hotel worked with Visto to curate its art collection, which includes Scottish tartan fashion photography and portraits with a focus on female Scottish artists and subjects. Works include ‘Virgin Lips’ by Edinburgh-based Wendy Helliwell, and ‘Queen of Dreams’ by Alan Macdonald, inspired by Mary, Queen of Scots. The hotel is also working with sister company Virgin Start Up to engage with small and medium-sized businesses and further incorporate local products into its operations.

“[The hotels] all have a unique design, a unique sense of place – there’s nothing cookie-cutter about them,” says Davern. “We describe ourselves as a luxury lifestyle brand. If you break that down a little bit, it’s changed a lot. It’s about community, culture; it’s more relaxed, informal, personalised... it needs to accommodate both the local market as well as visitors and hotel guests.” ▶

City of Edinburgh Council archaeologist John Lawson

“We’re committed to understanding and preserving the story of this great city, and it’s been a fascinating excavation and project to be part of.

“At this site we’ve been able to unearth deep and complex sequences of well-preserved archaeological remains, in parts waterlogged, charting the development of Edinburgh’s Old Town from its early medieval origins, formal formation as a burgh in the 12th century through to the 20th century.

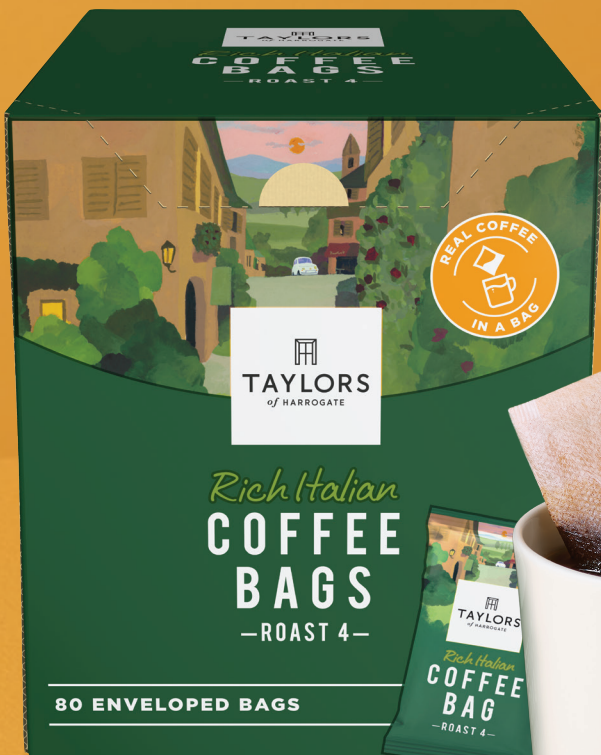
“The excavations are turning out to be not only one of most significant urban archaeological excavations undertaken in the capital but also in the UK. While the analysis of the artefacts is still at an early stage, and being undertaken by RPS and Headland Archaeology, the items will help provide insight into some of the earliest chapters in Edinburgh’s story, its development and lives of its inhabitants.

“The scale of artefactual and environmental evidence has been helped by the waterlogged conditions, which has allowed for the preservation of organic material comparable with discoveries from York and London. We have looked at over 1,000 years of history on this site, from house posts predating the formation of the burgh in the 12th century; a large medieval tannery; pottery from England, France, Germany and the Low Countries; all the way through to tokens and pins from late Victorian tailors. Items reveal the domestic and industrial life of medieval inhabitants as well as artefacts from episodes in Edinburgh’s history, including potentially the siege of Edinburgh by Edward I.

“The site is a microcosm of Edinburgh’s history and will help chart the development of this site. Through the further analysis I look forward to the stories that will emerge.”

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Edinburgh locals will be happy to hear this. On the one hand, the city's hotels association pre-pandemic claimed that hotel supply was set to exceed demand. On the other hand, Edinburgh has become a victim of its own success and has been cited as one of the world's worst hotspots for over-tourism, particularly during its annual August Fringe festival. It remains to be seen whether this summer will see the staycation trend of the past two years continue and how the city and hotel will balance the needs of its tourists and residents.

"The sweet spot is when you bring everybody together, and that's really what we're trying to do in both cities," says Davern. "If you want to accomplish that, you really have to take the food and beverage experience seriously, because that's what's going to bring the local market in. What we're trying to do is create a very inclusive environment so that somebody in Edinburgh or Glasgow feels really comfortable just calling in for a coffee. If they want to work in there, if they want to go into the Funny Library and read a book – that's what we want and will encourage."

Both properties will feature the brand's signature Commons Club restaurant and Funny Library, and Glasgow in particular will showcase local music and comedy talent. "Music is a big part of what we do," Gibson points out, referring to the Virgin Group's origins as a record shop in the 1970s.

The road to Glasgow

The 240-bedroom Glasgow hotel, overlooking the River Clyde, is due to open in December and will also have a brasserie nodding to the city's Italian community and the brand's sister properties in the States.

The artwork in Glasgow's Funny Library will feature local comedians, while the mezzanine will be home to Highyard, a lounge with a 1930s luxury cruise liner-inspired design



overlooking the river. At the front will be a terrace as well as a whisky bar.

Gibson says a lot of custom in the city is still domestic, and it is "reassuring" opening at a time the property can ride the staycation wave. He adds: "A lot of airlines are announcing new routes into both cities, which is even more promising and bodes well for the future."

Davern adds that corporate travel is "starting to come back" and that organisations are looking for longer, more differentiated company get-togethers than they used to. "They don't necessarily want to be in just another boardroom, they want an experience. Virgin is an experience-driven company, that's a really great opportunity for us. We've got some really great meeting and event spaces that are a lot more creative than your average boardroom."

Despite the industry's widely reported staffing problems, both general managers say recruitment is going well. Davern says people buy into the Virgin culture, which he describes as unscripted, allowing people to be themselves.

"Service is more intuitive now, you want your team members to be able to read the guest, to be curious," he says. "That was one of the fundamental things we were looking for – people who were curious, asking questions and wanted to learn more."

McArdle continues: "The brand comes with a set of expectations – when I would ask people the question, 'what brings you to us today?', many of those who are working with us now said they were looking for something different – that entrepreneurial spirit, that ability to be creative and think outside the box."

Gibson agrees: "People identify with the brand. They see Virgin and they know what it's about. They know it's a culture they want to be a part of... I've been really impressed with the calibre of applicants I've seen. We expected there to be a lot of interest – it's a new opening and an edgy brand in a vibrant market."

He adds: "Employers are having to adapt how they play the game to make it an environment that people want to be with, and we've got a good opportunity to get the culture right from the start because we've got a blank canvas."

Greener pastures

People also increasingly want to know they're working for a company with a solid ESG strategy. Virgin Hotels is aiming for net zero by 2030, part of which will involve the hotels setting up 'green initiative committees' and committing to zero waste to landfill.

Once the properties are at the minimum possible carbon emissions, the group will then offset the rest, focusing on the areas affected by its operations, such as farming, agriculture, and construction.

Sustainability is also given a nod at the Edinburgh hotel through the artwork of Arthur Mamou-Mani – a chandelier measuring three





metres wide in Greyfriars Hall is one of the world's first bioplastic 3D-printed sculptures of its scale. Meanwhile, Lalla London has provided Moroccan rugs for guestrooms that support women's weaving co-operatives in the Atlas Mountains.

The Edinburgh hotel will be working with transition to work programme Project Search along with Edinburgh College to offer apprenticeships to those with learning difficulties or are neurodiverse, welcoming up to 10 students to work as operational staff for six months.

Gibson, meanwhile, is particularly passionate about engaging with hospitality graduates in Glasgow to keep them enthused about the sector: "When I was trying to get on graduate programmes, there wasn't as much guidance and support as I felt there could have been," he says. "If we can get in there beforehand and

provide mentorship to some of these students, help them with their interview techniques and confidence in that environment, that's huge, because you just lose so many people when they graduate.

"In my year at the Scottish Hotel School, of the 70 or 80 of us that started, maybe a dozen or so are still in hospitality. What can we do to keep those people engaged and provide an environment where they can develop? They're the general managers of the future as the company begins to grow."

As for future expansion plans, Davern says there are "quite a lot" of properties in the pipeline, especially in the US. The group is also looking for opportunities in London and "a number of other cities" – although he adds that the focus will be on "quality rather than the quantity".



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Buddy up with a brand

Working with a like-minded brand can bring oodles of energy and creativity to marketing activity. *Janet Harmer* highlights operators whose partnerships have boosted business

The author CS Lewis coined the phrase “two heads are better than one”, and when it comes to marketing there is certainly a lot to be gained by partnering up with a third-party brand.

Marketing activity in the hospitality sector lends itself nicely to brand collaborations. The plethora of supply companies in the sector, be it a drinks or specialist ingredients company, means there are plenty of compatible businesses willing to boost the marketing activity of a restaurant or hotel for mutual benefit. It also brings opportunities to think outside the box, often resulting in successful collaborations, such as the award-winning package created by Hotel Indigo Edinburgh and Edinburgh Zoo (*see panel*).

While boosting revenue may be the prime motivating factor in setting up a brand part-

nership, the benefits can be wider-reaching. They include the opportunity to tap into a new audience, reposition the business within its marketplace, showcase its corporate and social responsibilities, introduce greater creativity and ultimately enrich the guest experience.

**Andrew Kelly,
the Bradley Hare**

nership, the benefits can be wider-reaching. They include the opportunity to tap into a new audience, reposition the business within its marketplace, showcase its corporate and social responsibilities, introduce greater creativity and ultimately enrich the guest experience.



The Bradley Hare



Mutual benefit

An essential consideration for any brand partnership is selecting the right partner. Rochelle Cohen, founder and managing director of Roche Communications, advises clients on arrangements between restaurants and commercial partners.

“A brand collaboration should bring businesses together for mutual benefit,” she says. “Look for partners with similar values and cultural synergy, although sometimes it’s the most unexpected marriages – think of fine dining meets street food trader – that garner the most interest. Questions to bear in mind when selecting a partner are:





what does the client want to get out of it, what can they offer in return, does the brand reflect the ethos of the client, and are the demographics aligned?”

As a hotel committed to the most stringent ethical and sustainable practices, Whatley Manor in Malmesbury, Wiltshire, works only with brands that share the same ethos. It is this philosophy that led to its partnership with Sapling Spirits, a drinks company launched in 2018 to inspire sustainable change in the drinks industry. A tree is planted for every bottle of Sapling sold, with nearly 25,000 planted so far.

The partnership led to the launch of Whatley Manor Citrus Vodka to mark Zero Waste Week in September 2021. Some 500 bottles of the vodka were made, using 10kg of waste lemon and orange peel from the hotel's kitchen.

Sue Williams, general manager of the 23-bedroom hotel, describes the initiative as having great purpose. “Learning how to combine best-practice distilling with a waste product makes perfect sense, and has resulted in a very delicious drink too.”

A bigger bang

Brand partnerships are an excellent way to establish a newly launched hotel or restaurant in the marketplace. The Bradley Hare in Maiden Bradley, Wiltshire, has had great success with such agreements since opening in June 2021 following a transformation of the property by owner James Thurstan Waterworth, the former European design director ▶



How to make a hook-up work

Petra Clayton, chair of the Hotel Marketing Association and chief executive of Custard Communications, explains the key issues in creating a successful brand partnership.

- Ensure the brand values of both organisations are aligned.
- Hotels should be used to building guest personas, analysing trends and behaviours of their audience as well as identifying trends. Use this information to establish who is the right brand partner for you.
- Don't ignore social media influencers – they can provide a direct and effective partnership to help position and build a hotel's brand. As with all partnerships, an influencer needs to target the same audience as the business, and to respect and understand the service.
- A brand partnership is not a quick win. The relationship needs to be nurtured and evaluated throughout the period of the

agreement. While it may start off with one idea, it is healthy to consider how it can be developed to grow more business.

- Plot a full communication plan to ensure everything – from the language used to the agreed activations – is prepared in advance and executed at the best time.
- There needs to be accountability within the partnership. Manage expectations from the beginning, outline how the partnership is to be measured, and conduct reviews.
- Don't be rigid – be prepared to discuss adjustments. Keep revisiting, auditing and measuring for the best outcome.
- An open discussion between both parties needs to take place at the beginning to confirm budgets and ROI (return on investment), whether it's reliance on internal resources or direct marketing costs. Some partnerships will heavily depend on a mutual contra deal to avoid each party incurring direct costs.

◀ of Soho House. The stylish design of the building, which features a pub and 12 bedrooms, has been the ideal setting for partnerships with a number of lifestyle brands.

Andrew Kelly, project manager for the Bradley Hare, says an arrangement with clothing and homeware brand Toast was “a natural collaboration”. The PC Agency worked with Bradley Hare and Toast to host a back-to-back press trip for fashion and lifestyle journalists that showcased Toast’s SS22 collection and promoted the pub to a group of influential individuals.

A tie-up with fashion brand Cefinn, founded by Samantha Cameron, revolved around a social media campaign and competition on Bradley Hare’s and Cefinn’s Instagram accounts. With a prize of a one-night stay at the Bradley Hare and an item of Cefinn clothing, the arrangement enabled both parties to tap into each other’s targeted databases.

A third partnership involved cutlery company Robert Welch creating a case study on the Bradley Hare centred around two photo shoots. It generated great imagery for the pub to use and a promotion across Robert Welch’s database, in newsletters and via its social media pages.

Kelly describes the partnerships as widely beneficial, particularly via social media exposure.

“Through working with each brand, we reach new audiences, and the overall benefit is to attract new customers to book a stay with us.”

There have been no financial arrangements with any of the brands the Bradley Hare has worked with. Each partnership has simply been a cross-collaboration beneficial to both parties. “We tend to offer up a giveaway prize or a space for a photoshoot or event and in return reap the rewards,” Kelly says.

Established players

Brand partnerships are not just for new businesses. Well-established operators



resulted in widespread publicity as the CBD market has grown exponentially.

When it comes to the financial agreement between its hotels and brands, an ILH spokesperson says that a favourable return on investment is sought by both parties. “Other partners are also suppliers, such as Oto at Cliveden, where our business has purchased their stock, with both parties benefitting from PR and promotional exposure,” says Erika Steward, business development director at Cliveden House.

Alliance brokers

Many hospitality companies work with PR companies to set up partnership arrangements. Burger & Lobster, the restaurant chain with nine sites in London, for instance, works with Roche Communications on setting up partnerships with external chefs to drive engagement and new audiences to the brand.

“We are known for our mono-product approach and for creating an extraordinary union of great-quality burgers and fresh Atlantic lobsters,” says Hannah Williams, head of marketing and digital at Burger & Lobster. “Our chef partnerships are simply another version of how a great union can create something new and exciting – and often unexpected.”

Burger & Lobster’s partnerships have included a tie-up with Max Halley of Max’s Sandwich Shop, who has created two bespoke items for the chain: a lobster cocktail roll and a fish and chip lobster roll. While the group’s core menu will remain in place, Williams says the partnership with chefs is all about innovation and creativity, which adds excitement for customers. Further collaborations with those she describes as “some of the country’s best culinary talent” are to be introduced later this year.

Ultimately, partnerships provide an opportunity for a hotel or restaurant to gain the trust of potential customers, something which is not always easy to achieve for a new business. “By working with a similar brand, we help maintain trust with our audience and ensure we are exciting, creative and at the forefront of their mind,” says Kelly.



Oto spa products



Oto spa products at Cliveden House



Max Halley

Room with a zoo: Hotel Indigo Edinburgh's giraffe experience



A unique partnership between Hotel Indigo Edinburgh and Edinburgh Zoo has had far-reaching benefits.

It has ensured that the two giraffe-themed bedrooms created as part of the hotel's Ultimate Giraffe Room Experience have been a hit with guests. And the promotion has also resulted in widespread publicity for Hotel Indigo Edinburgh, as well as a feelgood factor benefitting an animal conservation charity and an enthusiastic workforce.

For Marc Saunders, director of marketing and PR at Splendid Hospitality, the owner and operator of the 60-bedroom Hotel Indigo Edinburgh, brand partnerships should always be holistic. "You shouldn't think about a partnership in isolation. You should think about how it creates a wow experience for guests and impacts every touchpoint," he says.

The promotion stemmed from the announcement of the arrival of five giraffes at Edinburgh Zoo. It was the first time giraffes had been housed at the zoo for 15 years and the intention was to raise awareness that the number of giraffes in Africa has declined by nearly 30% since the 1980s to 117,000 as a result of habitat loss and poaching.

"It is well known that tigers and rhinos are endangered, but fewer people are aware of the threat to giraffes," says Saunders, who recognised the benefits of working with a local business as the UK emerged from lockdown. "I wanted to do something to help, regardless of the commercial benefits to the hotel."

The resulting Ultimate Giraffe Room Experience involved creating two giraffe-themed bedroom suites – one double and one family – incorporating a double bed and tepee beds for children up to the age of 11. It was important that the rooms, which were designed in-house, should not be gimmicky, but should feature stylish and subtle references to giraffes. "The rooms had to fit in

with the four-star, boutique style of the rest of the property," Saunders says. "We didn't want giant plastic giraffes in the rooms."

The bedrooms launched in June 2021 and have been a huge success, with 240 enquiries within the first 48 hours of opening and more than 5,000 enquiries in total.

Some 20,000 page views have been recorded, with an average of two minutes and 38 seconds being spent on the webpage – a period of time Saunders describes as "incredibly long".

Guests booking the Ultimate Giraffe Room Experience get to enjoy the themed bedrooms, breakfast, transport to the zoo and entry passes (with tickets at a discounted rate), and all children receive a toy giraffe. The hotel donates £5 from every room booking to the Giraffe Conservation Foundation.

A key part of the partnership has been providing staff at Indigo Edinburgh with tickets to the zoo to ensure the giraffe experience becomes an integral part of the hotel's DNA. "This created great enthusiasm and motivation among the team, which in turn has helped wow guests, drive revenue and result in an enormous amount of publicity," Saunders says.

The Ultimate Giraffe Room Experience won Hotel Indigo Edinburgh the Best Partnership Marketing accolade at the Hotel Marketing Awards 2022, while Saunders has been named Most Inspirational Marketer by HOSPA at the HOSPACE Awards 2021.

The judges of the Hotel Marketing Awards praised the campaign for "excellent results delivered across email marketing, social media and PR", leading to "a significant increase in average spend per room, a high social media engagement rate, and an improvement in guest satisfaction metrics". They were also impressed by Hotel Indigo's acting at a time when many hotels felt that nothing could be done to combat Covid.

Tom Ross

The managing director of the Pig hotels tells *Lisa Jenkins* that staying on-brand while growing the portfolio is a must, and how the business will manage the people challenge

Your parents owned Bath-based properties Homewood Park and the Queensberry, so were you destined for a life in hotels?

I suppose I was, but I didn't know it at the time. I grew up knowing and hearing the names of all the great country house hotel owners of the time, from Martin and Brigitte Skan at Chewton Glen to Paul and Kay Henderson at Gidleigh Park. Coming home from school often meant hanging about in the kitchen, getting in the way and eating things I was not supposed to, but I absorbed the sounds, the smells and the atmosphere.

I might not have known the details at the time, but I knew what a service was, I knew about the guest journey, and I knew what it was like to be in the hot, humid role of a pot-washer. However, my parents sold the hotel before I got into the industry.

Where did your journey in hospitality begin?

At the Chicago Rib Shack in London. The restaurant legend Bob Payton was a good family friend and he kindly sorted it out. I was 18, living on my own in a bedsit in Bayswater and I absolutely loved it. The team there were like nothing I had seen before, and it was a machine – it felt like a chapter from an Anthony Bourdain book. Waitresses who were fearsome about their section and tips, chefs from every corner of the world churning out meal after meal. It was incredibly dynamic and while I only worked there for six months, it still stays with me today.

My journey in hotels started with two suggestions from my dad about where to apply. The first was the Goring, and the other was an unusual place in Winchester called Hotel du Vin. I interviewed at both and was working at Hotel du Vin a few weeks later. Again, I loved it. It suited a generalist like me. I knew

the ropes, so I fitted in quickly. I only lasted 18 months though, as I had an urge to travel, so I told [Hotel du Vin founder] Robin Hutson I was going to leave. I was gutted when he did not ask me to stay. Instead, he encouraged me to go and get experience elsewhere, and I am so glad I did.

Did working at Farrington House Inn in North Carolina and as the maitre d' at the French Laundry in California's Napa Valley influence your management style in any way?

It is important to always stay true to who you are as a person but to allow one's management style to evolve over time based on experience and learning.

Farrington was a one-of-a-kind Southern US hotel. It had very high standards but a relaxed feel. I was exposed to a whole new world of grouper, grits and gravy. Most importantly, it is where I met my wife, Melissa. We worked hard and played hard, and I think often the best teams do this – we remain life-long friends with colleagues from that time. The general manager was a very people-focused person. He would throw dinners at his house and it felt like a big family – something I have always gravitated to in the places I have worked.

When I walked through the door of the French Laundry, Laura Cunningham, the general manager, came out and had a chat, and I was working the next week. This place truly influenced me. The focus on being better was a daily thing and the quality and care taken with the ingredients was remarkable. It made you so proud to work there.

Thomas Keller gets all the attention – and rightly so – but it is Laura who is an inspiration to so many French Laundry alumni. Calm and professional and with amazing standards, she ►



◀ takes you on the journey with her. It taught me that if you get enough people following a united goal, it becomes self-fulfilling. Everyone there wanted to improve every day and that meant inevitable improvement. It no longer had to be driven from the top – we drove each other.

What did you do on your return from the US?

I rejoined Hotel du Vin in 2004, just before it was sold, and stayed with the company until 2010. I loved the day-to-day of working in a hotel as part of a team and knowing the guests, but I would not say I had some dynamic plan.

It was that time in life where it is head down and crack on because you have three children under three and a tough job as general manager and a very supportive wife.

That said, I started to feel a bit stagnant at Hotel du Vin and an operations director role was the logical next step. What I really wanted was a role with a few properties close together – but that never happens, I thought. A week later, I got a call asking if I would interview with Jeremy Mogford in Oxford to be operations director for his collection of properties. It was a great learning curve with a hugely successful entrepreneur.

I have always worked for talented entrepreneurs – I enjoy the dynamism and learning to spot and deal with the curve balls. I would go crazy working somewhere where rules is rules.

And what about working with Robin Hutson?

It seems like only yesterday when Robin contacted me and asked if I would be interested in joining the Pig. I had just moved back to Bath with no job and it felt serendipitous. I loved opening the Pig near Bath and still have a real soft spot for that property. After only 18 months the Pig at Combe was brought on, and I oversaw that opening, and from there became group operations director.

Obviously Covid was a fundamental time as operations director and I was exposed, as we all were, to incredibly difficult decision-making. I saw the true meaning of putting your people first in those first days. I remember conversations where we thought the company might have six weeks left, and Robin saying that we would continue to support everyone until the pot had run out.

We went line by line through 800 staff, understanding their personal circumstances. I am very proud of how we acted as a business. It also highlighted what an incredible team we have. The hotel directors, the operations teams and the central team all had huge pressure on them and dealt with it time and time again.

We opened two hotels during the pandemic and one thing you learn working at the Pigs is we never stand still. The managing director role was a culmination of Robin wanting



The Pig at Harlyn Bay



to take a step back from the business but not leave it, and this coincided with the recent investment from KSL.

What's the brief for the role of managing director of the Pig hotels?

I'm still working that one out. It is a very exciting time at the Pig, and for me much of that is shaping what the role of managing director looks like. It was not like slotting into a static company with an agreed structure. With the investment from KSL, the role is managing the alignment of expectations and creating a structure that allows growth to happen, while at the same time being acutely aware of the business as it stands today. My role is to be the guardian of a 10-year-old business as it navigates its next 10 or even 20 years. That means staying true to what we do and who we are as well as continuing to grow. Ultimately, I feel a huge sense of pride and responsibility.

Is F&B still your focus in the hotels?

Yes, 100%, and this will never change. We are a restaurant with rooms, after all. Locally sourced food and our 25-mile menu are at the heart of what we do. We talk about food every day and the kitchen gardens sit proudly at each hotel. What you see in the garden ends up on your plate – we produce literally tonnes and tonnes of our own food. For many of us the enjoyment is knowing the local supplier, knowing their family, learning about their

“There is a palpable air of anticipation among the teams because new hotels means opportunity for each of them”

trade. Often all we do is showcase their amazing product, and I wish we could tell their stories more often.

The same is true of wine. The English wine market is exciting, and we are delighted to be backing it. Our wine lists feature loads of English wine, and we cannot wait to try juice from our own vineyard at the Pig in the South Downs – very local wine!

What do you attribute the success of the Pigs to – the people, locations, style or a combination?

It is a combination of these things, but if you distil it down, the success is in creating places where we would like to go ourselves. This was one of the founding principles and is still true today whenever we make a decision.

Our people are obviously central to what we do, and we spend a huge amount of time talking about them. It is very much a group effort and there are several very talented individuals. I call it the monotony of excellence. Doing the same thing over and over can become tedious, but it must be done to the same exacting standard if you want to be great at what you do.

The yin to this yang is that we know we will



The Pig at Bridge Place

get things wrong, no matter how hard we try, and we accept that and are very supportive of each other. Of course, it also helps that the properties are very special and in beautiful places.

Now that private equity group KSL Capital Partners is involved with the Pig hotels, are there plans for further expansion?

We are excited to be expanding, although in reality we have always been doing this. There is a palpable air of anticipation among the teams because new hotels mean opportunity for each of them. Historically, expansion was very organic; however, with the arrival of KSL it has been interesting to be introduced to new ways of looking at things, and this has been an incredible learning curve for me personally. While we have reached eight hotels on our own, we occasionally creak a bit. My role is to create the structure we need to expand while at the same time ensuring the current hotels continue to deliver as they always have.

How do you stay true to the brand while continuing the expansion?

I don't subscribe to the notion of expansion and dilution of the brand being inevitably linked. There are plenty of examples of it being

done successfully. Focus and not deviating from your core values to try and fit some other narrative are key. It is important to understand where we have come from, and we have paused and taken some time to think about it. What are the pillars of the business and why do we do what we do at the Pigs?

The other influencing factor is the people. There is a culture and understanding of the brand that comes only with time served. There are literally hundreds of people within the company that have a deep knowledge of the business. At least half a dozen of us worked for Robin at Hotel du Vin nearly 25 years ago, and there are plenty within the business that have been here five to 10 years.

How do you find all the extra staff required – and what's the people strategy for the future?

Each new Pig opening has several senior staff from within the current business. To not have that is a very significant risk, and we spend an enormous amount of time strategising. In each hotel we know who is ready, whether they want to move and what we need to do to get them ready for the role. We could probably do this for two new hotels today, but then there is the back-fill required when they move hotel. So we are identifying people within the business who are not in management positions yet and understanding how we get them there.

Of course, a majority of the team will come from a local area, and like everybody else we must work hard to recruit them. Our in-house recruitment does a great job and our L&D team have a training programme that we have used at a number of openings.

I would argue that recruitment is sometimes a lesser issue than retaining people. This is where company culture and individual management ability comes into play. Creating an environment where people want to stay because it is an enjoyable place to work is an important part of our strategy.

What do you find most exciting about your role right now and what motivates you?

Being part of the Pig story is exciting at any

time, but at the moment my learning and development have gone through the roof. Working alongside the team at KSL is very enlightening. It is enjoyable challenging ourselves as a team to work through a different lens and the prospect of opening new hotels and all that it entails is enough to get the pulse racing.

I believe everyone has a level of inner drive, and I'm reasonably self-motivated. I don't like the idea of letting others down and I have always aspired to be someone that others felt was doing a good job. However, as I have taken on more responsibility, I realise that the most important thing is to know that you are doing a good job. This is a more productive and positive mindset than worrying whether someone else thinks you are doing a good job. If you are happy with your own effort, you should be fine – we all know when we take a shortcut.

Who do you lean on in your team?

I lean on everyone! That's the nature of working as part of a collaborative team. We are lucky enough to have many people who are very good at their job. Whether it is the senior teams in the operation or the central team, I know I can rely on people to come up with ideas and solutions. I probably tend to lean more on disciplines that are not my area of strength. I like input from people who are experts in their area to guide me through a decision-making process.

We focus a great deal on work-life balance. In general, I think we are pretty good. We are not perfect, and if things get out of kilter it is for a short period of time and we pay every hour of overtime. At the Pigs, the notion of massive hours being the norm is long gone. It is more subtle than this, though, because it is often about the right hours for an individual to create the work-life balance they need.

By nature, our industry has unsociable hours – that won't change – but our attitude towards recruitment must. We must question whether a business is sustainable if it relies on staff regularly working well over their contracted hours because there is an unwillingness to adapt.



The Pig at Bridge Place

Dawn chorus

It's time to rev up your morning menu with iced chai lattes, yogurt and fruit smoothies and luxurious hot chocolates. *Ian Boughton* sets the table for breakfast

Put the tired old teabag on a string and pre-made filter coffee aside, as there are multiple options for your breakfast drinks menu, especially when it comes to customers looking for the healthier option.

Smoothies tick the health and customisation options for operators. "We are seeing a growing demand for health and wellbeing offers around breakfast," says Eddie Laposi, head of coffee at Restaurant Associates. "We have definitely seen an increase in smoothies and immunity shots beside an uptake in water infusions and hydration in general. This sector is growing and we will see even more uptake in the future."

London's fanciest hotels are offering their own luxury take on the drink: the Ritz London offers the Supergreen Smoothie of avocado, vanilla yogurt, honey and lime (at £12), a blackberry and apple crumble smoothie and one made with almond milk and porridge oats. Carlton Terrace offers a breakfast smoothie bar, where guests can choose from coconut, pineapple and lime, or maybe apple, beetroot, ginger and mint, and the Connaught's Green

Boost shake features almond milk, avocado, apple, spinach, dates and banana.

"We have seen a notable increase in smoothies on breakfast menus," says Helen Ostle, marketing head at Beyond the Bean, producer of the Sweetbird fruit smoothie range. "Using our yogurt frappé with some oats, milk and a Sweetbird fruit smoothie, you can create really filling breakfast smoothies in any number of flavour combinations."

Fruit fancy

Tea's horizons have also broadened to include infusions and iced chai drinks, again aimed at the guest looking for something different.

"We know there is a growing number of health-conscious consumers who look at their morning tea to support their wellbeing," says Adam Perry, impulse controller at Ecotone, owner of the Clipper brand. "Citrus-flavoured infusions are increasing in popularity as a breakfast beverage."

Healthy tea drinks are up, agrees Allan Pirret, sales director at Novus: "Decaff Ceylon is the choice for those looking to skip the caffeine

Cereal on the go

Unexpectedly, Weetabix is now appearing in the beverage side of the breakfast market.

It has created Weetabix On the Go breakfast drinks in five flavours, which "provide the protein, energy, and fibre of a typical Weetabix cereal with milk".

Its Caffè Latte flavour is said to contain the same amount of caffeine as a regular cup of coffee. "Catering for people in the morning can be a tricky business," says the brand. "We know consumers are concerned about the healthiness of their breakfast, and we aim to look out for new ways to elevate it."





yet still want a robust cuppa. “Juice is always on the breakfast buffet, and we have pushed hotels to combine matcha with juice, such as apple juice, which is delicious. We are also looking to extend into a ‘ceremonial’ matcha, made of the younger leaves, which is sweeter.”

Meanwhile, Novus has created a cold-brew Persian pomegranate tea infused with nitrogen, a texturised drink he likens to a flat white. “Forget kombucha, this is way better – it’s super-refreshing and uplifting drink, though to date, we have not persuaded anyone to serve nitro at breakfast!”

Why not chai it

Beside straight black tea, more attention is being given to chai as a breakfast drink. It was Drink Me Chai that pioneered the concept of easy-to-make powdered chai. Several of the brand’s products are ‘instant’ drinks containing milk powder, but the newest is Artisan Blend, created as a quick-serve solution for baristas who prefer to use the steam wand and milk jug of their espresso machine.

“It is important to offer an authentic chai

taste, which is often unachievable with a syrup,” says Michelle Younger, head of marketing at Aimia Foods. “Baristas can use Artisan Blend to create authentic-tasting chai lattes, or by using cold milk and ice they can adapt it to cold chai lattes or shakes.”

The value of cold and iced chais and teas should not be overlooked, says Louise Cheadle, co-founder of Teapigs: “After far too many years of saying ‘try our teas iced’, we’ve finally created a range of ready-to-drink iced teas. By using a touch of agave for sweetness, not syrups or added sugars, we have launched iced teas, black tea with peach, and our super-fruit mix of hibiscus with sweet berries.

“Consumers are drinking more iced teas as part of prioritising healthy eating – they want alternatives to drinks packed full of sugars, but without having to compromise on the sweet taste of iced tea.”

Ostle reports a ‘huge’ uptake in iced tea drinks this summer. “Iced teas using our Sweetbird syrups have been specials on a number of menus, so there’s no doubt they are going to make their way into more estab-

lishments as the days heat up. They make 41 twelve-ounce drinks with one bottle; you just need water and ice, and it’s quick and easy both for individual servings or to pre-prepare in large quantities for breakfast buffets.”

Hot stuff

The most active drink on breakfast menus turns out to be – hot chocolate.

“We certainly see breakfast as a time for hot chocolate, and many cafés and hotels are already used to serving it from the moment they open their doors,” says Brad Wright at Marimba, a pioneer of ‘flake’ easy-melt chocolate. “It is a great way to start the day for those avoiding caffeine; there’s a touch of sugar to get you moving but without being too sweet.

“On a breakfast menu, I would be inclined to keep it simple – breakfast is a functional meal, so serve chocolate in a straightforward way and leave the cream and marshmallows for your mid-afternoon business. You may also offer a milk or dark hot chocolate for dipping your pastry into in the continental style.”

Hotels with standalone coffee shops already sell well with hot chocolate in the morning, says Paul Eagles at Kokoa Collection, who introduced single-origin chocolate in disc

Suppliers

Beyond the Bean

<https://beyondthebean.com>

Carpigiani

www.carpigiani.co.uk

Clipper

www.clipper-teas.com

Drink Me Chai

www.aimiafoods.com

Glebe Farm

www.glebefarmfoods.co.uk

Lincoln & York

www.lincolnandyork.com

Kokoa Collection

www.kokoacollection.co.uk

Marimba

www.marimbaworld.com

Notes

www.notescoffee.com

Novus

www.novustea.co.uk

Paddy & Scott’s

<https://paddyandscotts.shop>

Teapigs

www.teapigs.co.uk

Weetabix

<https://weetabixfoodservice.co.uk>

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Drink Me Chai



Clipper teas

form. “Early in the day, chocolate is for sustenance rather than indulgence, so for breakfast I would suggest a darker chocolate, our Madagascar or West Africa varieties, with a slogan such as ‘kick-start your day’, to mimic the hit the customer expects from espresso.”

“Hot chocolate should be a permanent breakfast menu staple,” agrees Paul Ingram, managing director at Carpigiani UK. “It satisfies the craving for something sweet and warming, it suits those who don’t want tea or coffee, and with the new popularity of plant-based milks it continues to evolve – coconut milk in a hot chocolate is a taste revelation!”

That is an interesting aspect, says Phillip Rayner, co-founder of Glebe Farm. “Your milk or milk alternative will greatly affect the flavour and overall experience of your drink – the creaminess, sweetness, bitterness and how well it foams and froths.

“One in three Brits will now drink dairy alternatives”

Phillip Rayner

“One in three Brits will now drink dairy alternatives, so it’s important to do your research, because your plant-based milk could make the difference between a one-time and a repeat customer.”

However, some still like their coffee black, says Joseph Cordy, commercial head at Paddy & Scott’s: “We are witnessing a popularity surge in black Americanos at breakfast time.

We don’t know if this is because people are ditching dairy.”

But the fastest-growing drink is a milk coffee, says Ross Schofield, commercial director at Lincoln & York. “It is no surprise that breakfast customers want more than just the standard coffee. With the flat white being the quickest-growing beverage in the UK, this is a no-brainer addition to a breakfast menu... and offering a seemingly more complex drink adds choice at a premium price.”

‘Speciality’ coffee now outperforms the growth for the UK coffee market as a whole, says Ali Anderson, sales manager at Notes Coffee. “We are supporting hotels in making the coffee service an extension of their culinary skills, with a 12-month programme of seasonal and guest coffees. If the quality of their coffee offer at breakfast isn’t good enough, guests will remember.”

Fresh format and flavour freedom

UCC Coffee UK & Ireland’s recent commissioned survey shows 44% of consumers rank flavour as a top factor when deciding which coffee brand to drink. Offering guests a freedom of choice is a great way to elevate your breakfast offer and improve the overall experience. Their



Lyons Coffee bags achieve this with multiple flavour profiles (including decaf for the health conscious) and are easy to store, easy to make, taste great and produce no coffee waste.

Their insight also shows 75% of hotel guests rank coffee poor or average in hotels and 30% claim this would not encourage them to return. Quality is the number one driver of value and volume in coffee, so offering fresh, great tasting formats such as coffee bags is a convenient approach to providing this quality. Lyons coffee bags provide the same quality as pressed coffee and are simple to use and store.

Sixty per cent of consumers have either never seen or do not know about coffee bags – but those that use them are faithful to the format, with over a third purchasing at least once a month as a minimum.



Teapigs iced tea



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