sleeper

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If you seen the first myhotel, you might well have done a double take when you opened this spread. Check the headline. Check the pictures. Check the headline again. But of course, myhotel number two was always going to be different from number one. For myhotel is based on the philosophy 'You're unique, you're individual' and so are their hotels - myhotels, that is.

If you expected the next to be like the last, perhaps you misunderstood it in the first place. As myhotel is different, we thought our review of it should be too.

So rather than trying to force it into some pigeonhole or make some neat journalistic sense of it, we thought it fairer to present some photos, some thoughts from owner Andy Thrasyvoulou and designer James Soane of Project Orange, some details of our stay there, then let you assemble your own impressions. After all, you are unique. You are individual. You can make your own minds up. Welcome to our review of myhotel. Or should that be your review of myhotel. Then again, maybe myreview will do...

myhotel chelsea

THE LOBBY

"The guest enters the hotel past a raised external pavement terrace used for al fresco eating and drinking. The discreet entrance is beneath a crescent shaped glass canopy threshold and up limestone steps with windows into the bar and reception on either side. A small pink space leads into the reception room. This is a small well lit room which features two elm desks sitting within two niches. A generous modern day bed, covered in English floral fabric contrasts with the simple lines of the space. A fish tank is embedded into the side wall with views through to a conservatory"

THE BEDROOM

"The bedrooms have a convincing familiarity as though they are in a house one remembers staying in. The floor is carpeted in a subtly patterned grey and purple texture, designed especially for the project, while the walls are chalky white. Windows feature full length toile curtains in cherry red on a white background. The bed has a woven bed head by Lloyd Loom. It's covered in an array of cushions and a soft satin throw. On either side are different bedside tables, one in solid block, the other polished metal and glass. Along the side wall is the desk - very simple, dark stained oak with a long central drawer and a mirror above. A long horizontal elm piece of furniture houses the fridge and coffee making facilities, on top of which sits an ultra modern flat screen television." All the bedroom furniture and casegoods were designed by Project Orange and manufactured by Andrew Thomson & Sons.

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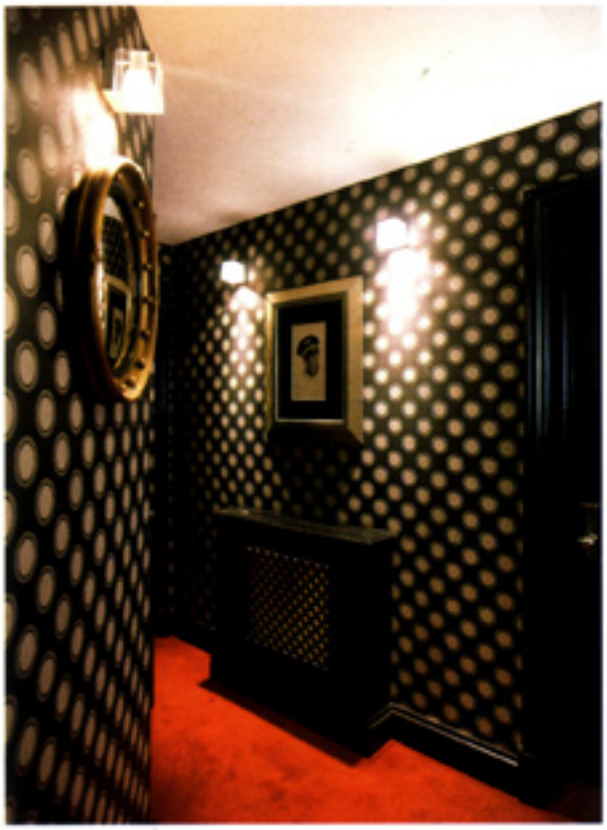
THE BATHROOM

"The clear glass door to the bathroom has an opaque white fabric behind to diffuse the view. All the tiling is white save for a tiny sliver of clay pink glass tiles. The sink is a white bowl set into a pale pink and grey terrazzo top. The floor is tiled in long black tiles laid in a random pattern."
All toiletries are by Aveda.

sleeper: I have an admission to make. I've not seen myhotel bloomsbury. I believe this is quite different...
Andy [pointing to James]: "This is the man who can tell you about the differences because he created both."
James: "Andy's vision for myhotel chelsea was to create something different, on a smaller scale. Something more homely, more comfortable, but also unique. The term boutique hotel has become overused and I don't think that's the name to put on myhotel. The challenge here was to take something that had been successful but not to carbon copy it.
This building was originally a police station and had been refurbished as the Chelsea Green hotel five years ago. It was very traditional, quite dull and impersonal, so we looked to freshen it up and also introduced a special theme which looks at Chelsea's bohemian, arts club past. It's quite a unique location so we wanted to capitalise on that.
The furniture is quite eclectic. It feels like a collection over time rather than feeling like we went shopping last week. In the bedrooms it almost feels as if you're in someone's house.
It may not be somewhere you'd want to live all the time, but if it's given you a comfortable and enjoyable experience, that's fine.

sleeper: I only spent a few minutes in my room before coming down to meet you, and I was trying to put my finger on what it was but you're right the rooms do feel as if you're in someone's lounge. How do you achieve that feeling in a hotel?
James: Well it wasn't a mistake - it's achieved through combination of things. It's partly down to being intuitive, in the sense that we didn't want to say from the outset that there's definitely a right way and a wrong way. We did the sample room and then tried to balance and layer it.
It's also as much about what's not in the room as what's in it. You don't find all the paraphernalia, those bits of information you get in hotels that you'd never find in your own home.
There's the juxtaposition of things as well. We didn't want to create suites where everything matches. The Lloyd Loom headboard is old fashioned but then you've got the flatscreen Panasonic televisions and DVD players. The sideboard is quite Sixties inspired, but the desk is a very classic, almost generic piece. Then there's the bedside table in chrome and glass, which is my homage to the Hilton Istanbul circa 1971, whereas the other bedside table is deliberately different, it's just a block of wood.
It's quite wilful but the idea is that it comes across casually.

sleeper: It's very pink. Was that a deliberate attempt to go for a more feminine feel?
James: It is very pink. We did an analysis of the rooms before the refurbishment and there were seven different floral patterns in there. People



almost expect to see that in hotel rooms. But if you pare it down to just one colour and one pattern it becomes something journalists ask questions about.

That particular colour is quite faded - it's not in your face, it's quite a pretty colour. But I think it could have been baby blue and you'd still think it was feminine.

The rooms have a softer feel to them, but because there's a lot of technology in them they don't feel over prettified. Again, people quite enjoy the fact it's different. There's also the point someone made to me recently that most men have to sleep in bedrooms their wives have designed so they're quite used to it!

At the beginning people were questioning whether it would be too much but when we did the sample room we felt it was a peaceful rather than a gendered space.

sleeper: I think it's very refreshing. Too many design hotels are all monochrome or different shades of brown.

Andy: I was looking back at the original image boards the other day. When we were showing those to some of the bankers and board members they said: "Are you sure? Bloomsbury was very successful. Are you going to lose the plot here?"

A lot of the time you see design visuals, then when its executed it's very disappointing. This is exactly the reverse. When you look at the reality, it's worked. The word you used was 'feminine'. It's actually seductive.

The success of a project like this is the collaboration between myself as the owner and James as the designer.

The PR company you work with is important too - they have to understand what you're trying to do and how they foresee telling the story. We've had some great press so far. One article was written by a guy who is travelling round the world staying in top hotels. He's still on this trip and recently said if he had live in a hotel, he would live in myhotel Chelsea.

The Observer did a piece on new boutique hotels in the UK. Their only complaint about myhotel Chelsea was

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THE SUITES

"The two bedrooms behind the bar have a distinctly different character to those in the rest of the hotel. Here the muted colours have been exchanged for a palette of hot reds, clashing pinks, and burned claret. They are most certainly rooms best enjoyed at night with their luxurious 'polar bear' throws, erotic photography and moody lighting. These fantasy rooms are seen as an escape from everyday life into the cinematic world of 'Moulin Rouge'."

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THE CONSERVATORY

"The conservatory opens off the pink ivy wallpaper-lined lobby with a view through the fish-tank into reception. The area is seen as a garden room with double doors opening out onto the white painted courtyard. Along two sides are large clapboarded walls finished in pale green, punctured by chrome portholes through to the gym and treatment room. The room is furnished with a collection on pieces old and new: a tan chesterfield sofa, a low zinc coffee table, wicker arm chairs, and a collection of stools and wooden blocks. Plants from Clifton Nursery add to the freshness of the room. In one corner are computer stations for guest use as well as a juice bar."

THE THAI SUITE

"The Thai Suite existed in the original hotel but has been restored. This capacious room is equipped with its own kitchen, bathroom, steamroom, walk in wardrobe and generous bedroom. Furniture is a mix of antique Thai and modern classics. The centrepiece is the huge heavily decorated bed set off against seared orange curtains"

that the DVD player in the bedroom was smaller than the one in the lounge.

sleeper: Do you see this attracting a different clientele to myhotel bloomsbury?

Andy: Yes. There are some similarities in corporate business such as the larger accounts like American Express etc. There's the tie-ups you have in the local area. Then you start getting into what comes in off the street. That's the biggest difference. At Bloomsbury the average stay is about 2.5 nights. Here you've got much longer stays. Because it's a residential area people stay here when they come over to visit friends. When we took it over we were barely achieving £50 average room rate. We've jacked that up to about £140 and most of the reviews we've had are saying that it's fantastic value for money. It shows what you can do with a shift in design, culture and service.

sleeper: What was the brief you gave to Project Orange?

Andy: James is an amazing wordsmith, particularly when it comes to describing visual identity. I'm not a wordsmith - I just create straplines. They're like seeds I plant in James' head for him to interpret. Here it was 'Brideshead Revisited meets Sex in the City.'

James: Design is about telling stories. You can layer that with all sorts of different readings or explorations.

What's nice about hotel design is that people read your story. People stay there and tell other people. They might talk about the design, or the food, or what's in the minibar. You create this experience that people like to relate to others.

But if you're staying somewhere very bland there's no story. It's: 'Oh, I stayed in 'x''. 'What was it like?'. 'Fine.' It's left no mark on them at all. That's the challenge.

sleeper: Our former editor Paul Day made a similar observation recently when he said staying in a hotel has now become a dinner party topic of conversation.

James: You can attribute it to the Wallpaper effect - an improved general awareness of design - and magazines like Conde Nast Traveller.

If people are going to spend the money they want the experience as well. They want to stay somewhere that has flavour. People are more canny and with the internet you can define what you're looking for, rather than relying on the familiarity of a chain. That was once the design criteria. I think people were more afraid of travelling then and they wanted security whereas now they want a local experience.

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THE BAR

"The bar is full of life, combining traditional sensibility with contemporary streamlining. The whole room is clad in gloss white painted timber strip boarding, including the bar, which is topped in shiny pewter metal. The windows feature simple sheer blinds and white curtains within the bay windows. Two doors open up onto an external deck and one side is a simple chrome fire surround with a mirror above. The furniture is a collection of old and new, including leather arm chairs and sofas, burnt orange upright chairs and the odd plaid coloured tub chair."

sleeper: How did the design process work?

Andy: I've learnt not to look at it just as a shell. You look at all the different layers, from design to service and everything in between. You asked what makes you feel a certain way. There are some things that are obvious, that you can see, but there are a lot of things that are not so obvious. That's when you start getting into the other senses: smell, taste, sound, touch. Ultimately there's that kind of primal sense of feeling at home. When you start a project it's so easy to want to layer everything right from the start before you've even got your guests in.

But when you've got the right people working for you in the right space with the right product it can be stunning. And that's what we've achieved.

sleeper: Was Chelsea somewhere you wanted to be, or just an opportunity that came up?

Andy: Both. It was always on the map, but it came along as an opportunity sooner than we expected. We'd identified five sites in London because we think London could easily accommodate five myhotels. But after we did Bloomsbury we thought we weren't going to do another in London because the market was overheated. So we started to look at the provinces: Bristol, Oxford, Glasgow, Brighton. But after September 11th a lot of opportunities came up in London. This was one and we grabbed it."

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mystay

After our interview and a whistlestop tour of the conservatory, jinja treatment room, and ruby / scarlet suites on the ground floor with Andy and James, sleeper spent the remainder of the afternoon and evening, at myhotel. As James and Andy had emphasised throughout our conversation every stay at myhotel is unique and individual - an experience. To give you a flavour of some of the personal touches which make up that experience, we thought we'd share some of the details with you...

I'd already had a quick look at my room, number 20, before dashing down to the bar to meet Andy and James, but decided to go back and start exploring in earnest.

Whilst I'd been gone, someone had thoughtfully come and put an ashtray in the room. And there was a handwritten note from the nice young lady who had shown me the room earlier, welcoming me personally to myhotel.

First port of call, as always, the minibar. But not your average minibar. Sleeper had heard prior to our visit that London bar consultants the Gorgeous Group had been involved with the contents of the minibar as well as the cocktail list for the public bar. Rather than the usual mixture of cans and bottles, there is an artfully arranged collection of pretty pink things. Rose shaped sweets, organic chocolate with a metallic pink foil, a bottle of champagne (rosé, naturally) plus an array of dauntingly healthy looking drinks, as well as some more conventional mineral water, Kettle Chips and Coke cans. Sadly though, no Stella, (we must remember to complete the mypreference form before we arrive next time) so we returned to the bar.

Or at least we were about to, until your writer went to put his laptop in the safe (cleverly locked and unlocked by swiping your room key or credit card) and was distracted by three perspex boxes, each marked 'myneeds' and each bursting at the seams with a variety of novelty items and medicinal / cosmetic goodies from Anatomicals and Aveda. To give you the gist of this concept, the box marked 'Seduction' contained Chakra bath oil, scented candles, some Long Time Coming cream by Anatomicals (you work it out) and a book containing 100 Explosive Tips for the bedroom.

Another, marked 'Pamper', offered 'everything needed for a night of indulgence'. But your writer, deciding that the first box was not needed for a bloke on a single occupancy stay, and that the other was a bit girly, decided sensibly to save the last box, 'Recovery', for the morning after and returned to the bar for a beer. Even here, the beer is not your average beer - we opted for something Icelandic, whilst sinking into the sofa with a newspaper.

myhotel does not have a full service restaurant but an array of light bar snacks (croque monsieur with frites, thai fishcakes, salad nicoise and chicken satay skewers) provided all the sustenance needed as we ploughed our way through the bellini section of the cocktail list before crashing headfirst into the 'long drinks' section.

By the time I repair to my room, the room fairies have been in again. Luxuriously soft silk cushions and Damask throws have been placed on the chair and sofa. Miniature mince pies have been left out. 'His and Hers' hot water bottles, by Pringle, are sat on the bed.

When the complimentary copy of The Independent is pushed under the door the next day, a pink slip has been stapled to it, carrying a 'Thought for the Day', the weather forecast, and a suggestion as to what I might like for breakfast. Sadly, a train awaits, and there is no time to sample the lobster omelette or a more traditional Full English.

We didn't have the time to sample, or the room to tell you about, the vast range of wellbeing treatments available in 'Jinja', the private business / social rooms Lavender and Sage, or the Thai Suite.

But then every stay at myhotel is unique and individual. As you should find out for yourself.

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