



# Room Serviced

It's Murder on the Nile, Philip Watson

Everywhere you look in the Egypt of the ancient queens and pharaohs, you are seduced by the erotic. On temple reliefs and tomb paintings, there are scenes of kings with elongated phalluses that jut forward like horizontal obelisks. On others, there are sleek and slender figures of women with narrow waists, shapely breasts and bottoms, and prominent pubic mounds. The paintings and alabaster statues of Queens Nefertiti (which means, ahem, "the beautiful one is come") and Nefer-tari, who proudly displays a breast to the world, are positively lascivious. Young maid servants wearing little more than collars of sweet-smelling lotus flowers tend to their masters, bestowing on them an occasional caress. There are fertility symbols, love poetry written on papyrus, and aphrodisiac offerings of mandrake fruits. You get the picture.

If all this doesn't inspire you and your chosen one, as you check into your cabin for a slow boat journey down the Nile, then I suggest you're reading the wrong publication. Not that you'll really need much encouragement. There is something deliciously languorous about the gentle glide of a ship moving almost imperceptibly along the river that only seems to heighten the allure. There are views of children swimming by the banks, biblical scenes of bulrushes, fishermen and herds of goats, and in the distance lofty minarets and the flat tops of parched pink mountains. Every so often you'll hear the long resonant sigh of a train whistle or a muezzin's call to prayer. It is magical and utterly unforgettable.

There are a plethora of Nile boats from which to choose (too many for some); we travelled aboard Abercrombie & Kent's somewhat prosaically named *Sun Boat III*. Quite a lot smaller

than some of the cruise ships which plough up and down the river from Luxor to Aswan, it is still roomy enough to have two lounge areas, a bar, restaurant and two sun decks, one with a small swimming pool. The decor is a little cheesy and the evening meals overly formal, but the standard of food and service is about as good as it gets.

All of the eighteen cabins and suites have mini-bars, CD players, air conditioning and views of the river; most have king-sized beds. "It's both tranquillising and invigorating," she said, as we missed breakfast for the third morning in a row.

*Nile cruises on Sun Boat III start at £1,915 per person for eleven nights, seven aboard the boat. Call Abercrombie & Kent on 0845 0700 617; [www.abercrombiekent.co.uk](http://www.abercrombiekent.co.uk).*

APRIL 2002

## Room Serviced

Philip Watson

WE'RE BACK in London this month sleeping in a real gem of a room secreted away in a Mayfair hotel that even locals don't seem to know about. The Wild Apartment is one of 34 one- and two-bedroom suites that form a discreet and secluded townhouse annex to the luxurious Athenaeum Hotel in Piccadilly. Decorated in black satins, red velvets and leopard-skin prints, and having its own private entrance, door key and security, the retreat is the perfect place for assignments, affairs and overnight indulgences.

The suite of rooms that comprises the Wild Apartment is like a cross between an oriental boudoir and an erotic lair. Everywhere you look there are matte-black surfaces that absorb and suffuse the pools of light that seep in through black wooden

blinds. There are black velvet curtains, black lacquered furniture, black kitchen units and a black marble bathroom. Elsewhere, there are touches of gold and crimson, mahogany doors, red chinoiserie cabinets and ornate French mirrors.

In an alcove ideal for dining, there is a *trompe l'oeil* of extravagant draperies surrounding a round glass table overhung by a huge Chinese lamp. The prints that decorate the walls include a prancing leopard in a red leather collar and a revelry of dancing nymphs, one of whom is removing her halo. In the bedroom there is a theatrically canopied bed with monogrammed sheets, a leopard skin throw and watered silk and velvet drapes. Heavy tassels fall onto the bed at wrist and ankle height.

The Wild Apartment can be booked as a package that includes roses, fondant-dipped strawberries and champagne on arrival; a room-service dinner (including, naturally enough, oysters and passion

fruit *delices*); half-hour in-room massages; a Bucks Fizz and smoked salmon breakfast; and, best of all, a memento gift from lingerie lovelies Agent Provocateur of a black tulle, semi-transparent, half-cup underwired bra with black satin edging, complete with matching suspenders, briefs and black silk stockings.

"Yes, the rooms are very black – and very dark," said the nice man who showed us to the room, as he valiantly switched on all the lights and tried nonchalantly to stroll by the gifts lying expectantly on our bed. "But I guess that's the whole idea."

*Athenaeum Hotel and Apartments, 116 Piccadilly, London W1 (tel: 020 7499 3464; e-mail: [info@athenaeumhotel.com](mailto:info@athenaeumhotel.com)). Wild Apartment packages at up to £695 per night; cheaper rates also available.*

*Philip Watson is lightly touched with gold and crimson. And at £695 a throw I should bloody well hope so.*





# Room Serviced

La Colombe d'Or, Philip Watson

There has always been something irresistibly erotic about the French Riviera. It's those potent images of Brigitte Bardot exposing the world's first bikini, of Mick Jagger strutting his stuff in St Tropez, of casinos and sportscars and beautiful people. The Côte d'Azur may have become tackier over the years (Fergie and toe-sucking), but there are few more glamorous places for fun or a fling.

The centre of that sexual allure is La Colombe d'Or. Housed in a chateau perched in St-Paul-de-Vence, one of the Riviera's most scenic hilltop villages, the hotel and its restaurant have long attracted artists, lovers, stars and romantics. Picasso used to lunch here, up from his house at Vallauris. Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir stayed, as did Cary Grant, Marlene Dietrich and the Duke of Windsor. Yves Montand and Simone Signoret had their wedding party here in 1951. Signoret once wrote that when they first met at La

Colombe d'Or, "in the course of four days there occurred something dazzling, indiscreet and irreversible". The celebrity guest list is endless. It's no wonder the beds creak and sag a little.

The appeal is partly to be found in a private art collection that only guests and diners can enjoy. The hotel's original owner, Paul Roux, was legendary for both his extravagant parties and passion for art, a combination that attracted many of the painters drawn to Provence. Matisse visited in the Thirties, and Braque, Leger, Chagall and Miro were all to become regulars, continuing the tradition of paying for their board and lodging with paintings. Picasso came: "It was my kind of hotel," he once said. "No name outside, no concierge, no reception, no room service... and no bill."

It was an exchange that has left the walls of the dining room lined with works by some of the greatest artists of the 20th century - from Bonnard and Miro, to Dufy, Derain and Dubuffet. Outside, there's a Leger mural, a Braque mosaic dove, and an enormous Calder mobile

pirouetting above the secluded swimming pool.

The sixteen bedrooms and ten suites are simple and Provençal in style, with frescoed walls and antique furniture; some have four-poster beds. There's the thrill of long, long lunches on the stonewalled terrace, starting with the famous *carte hors d'oeuvres*. There are strolls through the ancient cobblestoned and arcaded streets of St-Paul. There's also the small square right outside the hotel, where locals drink pastis and under the lime trees.

And there's the hotel bar with its gallery of photographs of the patron and the stars he welcomed. Johnny Hallyday is there with various wives, as are such smoothies as Alain Delon, Roger Moore and, the last time I was there, "Monsieur Dick Boggard".

*La Colombe d'Or, Place des Ormeaux,  
St-Paul-de-Vence (00 33 4 93 32 80 02;  
www.la-colombe-dor.com).  
Doubles from £165.*

MAY 2002 33

## Room serviced

Philip Watson

Brighton has always been the perfect place for a dirty weekend or saucy seaside affair. The city's amusement arcades, can-dyfloss stalls and crumbling piers, and its strong associations with Graham Greene, Bank Holiday mods and rockers, and trousers-rolled-up paddles in the chilly English Channel, make it by turns fun and funky, sleazy and cool.

It is an atmosphere playfully captured at the Pelirocco, a new rock 'n' roll hangout in a five-story Grade II-listed building in Regency Square, just yards from the seafront and near the West Pier. Swanky and retro-kitsch, the hotel is painted throughout in deep purple and decorated with specially designed or salvaged furniture; the feel is closest to that of a laid-back house party or a post-club crash pad. There is a breakfast room that doubles as a bar area open until 4am at weekends. The corridors host art and photography exhibitions.

It is the bedrooms, however, which really make the Pelirocco a pleasure. Each of the 18 rooms has a Playstation and large comfortable bed, is themed around "youth subculture or provoked by

visionary artists, maverick musicians and inspired individuals", and is unlike any other in Britain. The seaview Pussy room, for example, has fuchsia fake fur rugs, blue plastic rocking chairs, and mugs marked "Master", "Mistress" and "Slave". Lift the lid on the teapot and inscribed within are the words "HOT KINKY ACTION".

Elsewhere, the Magic Room is designed by Sex Pistols' artist Jamie Reid and features a picture of a lipsticked John Wayne, "No Future" wallpaper and curtains, two rubber bathing rings on the ceiling, and a duvet cover imprinted with "FUCK FOREVER". There is a boudoir dedicated to buxom 50s' American pin-up Betty Page, which has a peephole through to an Electric Blue bathroom with a spa bath for two; and a surrealist room which, instead of a traditional window, has a huge fleshy pair of velvet lips through which you can spy the sea.

There's also a Love Palace created by spoof 70s-style comedian Lenny Beige, which features a leopardprint chaise longue, a plastic stag's head and a copy of *The Joy of Sex*, as well as rooms

dedicated to Muhammad Ali, with white satin blinds to match his shorts; Modrophenia, a homage to the film *Quadrophenia* with target-logoed bed spreads and scooter wing-mirrors; and a girly glamour room with a sex-kitten mural, slogans shouting "VIRGIN BITCH ANGEL WHORE", and a cat-shaped phone that, instead of ringing, meows.

Breakfasts are generous, there is a late check-out option and cult movies are shown on Sunday afternoons. The hotel will also soon be offering a bedroom menu including a "Bondage Starter Kit" and "Dirty Weekend Pack" full of such essentials as fluffy handcuffs, silk scarves, flavoured condoms and phallic soaps. "We are yet to finalise the contents," says Jane Slater, co-owner of the hotel, "but we like anything - and anyone - a bit cheeky and rude."

*Hotel Pelirocco, 10 Regency Square, Brighton  
BN1 2FG (01273 327055;  
www.hotelpelirocco.co.uk). Doubles from £65,  
including breakfast.*



# Room Serviced

Philip Watson

HAVANA is unquestionably one of the sexiest cities in the world. Any town that can serve up open-air salsa clubs, dangerous daiquiris, seriously big cigars, and some of the planet's most beautiful people – sometimes simultaneously – is always going to find favour with pleasure-seekers looking for something a little more edgy and sensuous than your average two weeks in the sun. Even the cars, those extravagant, long-finned, aeronautical 1950s Dodges and Chevrolets, have an erotic appeal.

The problem, however, has always been how to find a hotel that matches the city's balmy sexuality. There's Hemingway's old haunt in the Old Town, the Ambos Mundos; and there's the crumbling, colonial

Inglaterra; the over-priced and over-westernised Santa Isabel; and the imposingly totalitarian Nacional, once popular with Hollywood stars and Chicago gangsters – but none seem to hit the mark. None achieve the winning combination of style and seduction that can make an overnight stay truly memorable.

The Conde de Villanueva is different. Marketed as the world's first "cigar hotel", this good-value resting-place opened last year in a grand and beautifully restored eighteenth-century Spanish merchant's house in La Habana Vieja. You walk through the smart reception to a cool and tranquil terracotta-tiled inner courtyard, which has leather rocking chairs, a small cigar bar, strutting peacocks and a statue of a reclining female nude. On the walls are photographs of celebrity puffers such as Groucho Marx, Charlie Chaplin and Demi Moore. Nearby is the hotel's excellent restaurant (by Cuban standards at

least) and very own cigar shop, where Havanas are freshly rolled (yes, sometimes, even on thighs) and cheaply sold.

Upstairs – around the elegant balcony – are nine simple yet large and airy bedrooms, each named after a leading Cuban tobacco region. The rooms have white-washed walls, large beds with crisp linens, green-shuttered windows and marble bathrooms. As well as room service being available from 7.30am to 10pm, the hotel's bedrooms, unusually for Havana, have mini-bars, security safes and air-conditioning. The best two rooms also showcase a feature known to bedroom *aficionados* the world over. They are, I'm pleased to say, *habitaciones suits* "Jacuzzi".

*Hotel Conde de Villanueva, 202 Calle Mercaderes esquina a Lamparilla, La Habana Vieja, Cuba (00 53 7 62 92 93). Doubles from £80 to £150 per night. For deals call Special Places on 01892 661157.*

THE Erotic REVIEW SEPTEMBER 2000 19

# Room Serviced

## Orient-Express

Philip Watson

THE VENICE-SIMPLON Orient-Express is one of travel's great fantasy rides and, approached as such, will deliver one of the more memorable 30 hours of your life. This is a trip dedicated to luxury and refinement. The Orient-Express is the apogee of the notion of travel for travel's sake: you board the train at Venice's Santa Lucia station and alight at London Victoria. A'long the way you'll pass Verona, the Dolomites, Innsbruck, the Tyrol, Zurich and Paris. The train – and not the destination – is the point of this particular journey.

By day you can marvel at the gleaming brass and marquetry of immaculately restored carriages built in the Art Deco

1920s, and beloved of film-stars, gangsters, princes and spies. If there is one thing the Orient-Express resolutely lives up to, it's that the journey is vividly filmic, maybe even dreamlike.

It is in the evening, however, and the night, that the train really comes into its own. In keeping with the slightly surreal sense of occasion that the journey generates, there is nothing blasé or knowing about the experience, or about the travellers who choose to savour it. Passengers dress grandly for dinner. A jacket and tie for a man, and a party dress for a woman, can, but simply will not, do. Tuxedos and ball-gowns are the order of the evening, an extra effort that is rewarded by the exemplary standards of service and cuisine in the dining car. Guests are greeted with crystal goblets of champagne, while a piano player does a very passable pastiche of Noël Coward. The food at dinner, considering the size of the kitchen in which

the heroic chefs labour, is worthy of some of Paris's better restaurants.

Retiring to your cabin afterwards – although the bar will stay open all night if you so desire – you will find your steward has transformed it from comfortable compartment to amorous couchette. Tucked into an ingenious cabinet is a period wash-basin; crisp damask cotton sheets adorn the beds. Perhaps the compact size of your cabin, and the old-fashioned bunk-bed sleeping arrangement, requires a somewhat creative, gymnastic and even fumblingly comical approach to the art of lovemaking. Yet this is one erotic bedroom in which the rhythmic movements of the elegant old carriages, and the not inconsiderable noise they make, are a definite advantage.

*For further information call 020 7805 5100 or visit [www.orient-express-trains.com](http://www.orient-express-trains.com). Venice to London from £1165.*





# Room Serviced

The Pavilion, London, *Philip Watson*

We are returning to the capital this month to check in to a hotel so stylishly secretive and indecently affordable that even I had almost forgotten about it. The Pavilion may be located in a fairly faceless Victorian building in a street full of anonymous budget hotels near Hyde Park, but inside it's another world. Billing itself as a "small, funky, laid back town-house," the hotel has a glam boarding house meets boho bordello vibe which has made it a firm favourite of music, media, movie and, especially, fashion folk, most of whom seem to guard its off-beat reputation and in-house fame as if they were the latest catwalk creations. Opulent, overstated and occasionally over-the-top, The Pavilion is all about fun and fantasy. "Maximalist" I think they call it; Harpers & Queen described it as "London's chicest little hotel".

Opened eight years ago, the hotel is the creation of the ridiculously young, half-English and half-Afghan brother and sister team of Danny and Noshi Karne. He's a 27-year-old former fashion model who got very bored of big, bland hotels; she's a 30-year-old dental student-turned-hotel designer who realised her passion was more for filling upper rooms than lower molars. Like the groovy and quirky Pelirocco in Brighton, each of the 30 rooms is themed, leaving lovers of liaisons and erotic escapades to chose a bedroom dreamland according to their particular proclivities.

There's "Enter the Dragon," an oriental opium den of a room with a collection of carved and gilded wooden masks; "Better Red Than Dead",

described by the Karnes as shaded in a "voluptuous symphony of claret, vermilion and burgundy"; "Honky Tonk Afro," a kitsch, lime-green homage to the disco 70s that has beaded curtains, heart-shaped mirror headboards and fluorescent pink feather boas; and "Highland Fling," a tongue-in-cheek pastiche of a Scottish baronial bedroom, with faux wood panels, stag hunting trophies and heavy tartan drapes.

Perhaps best of all, and certainly the most requested, is the Art Deco-meets-the-Moors room, "Casablanca Nights." Here you'll discover a rich invention of deep purple crushed velvet curtains, tassled brass lamps, potted ferns and an oversized Moroccan lantern that casts waltzing patterns across a ceiling painted with silver and gold stars. The twin Edwardian beds are draped in leopard-print spreads and mosquito nets; best, of course, to push them together.

The hotel might possibly be in better shape, and some of the bedrooms are on the small side and have shower-rooms rather than marble bathrooms the size of your living room, but doubles start at a miraculous (for London at least) £100 a night, including continental breakfast. The Karnes's extensive contact list can also come in handy if your planning a night out in some of the city's more insufferably exclusive bars and clubs. Anyway, at these prices, the Pavilion may not be super-smart but it sure is clever.

*The Pavilion, 34-36 Sussex Gardens, London W2 (020 7262 0905).*

*Rooms can be viewed at [www.eol.net/mt/pavilion](http://www.eol.net/mt/pavilion).*

## Room Serviced

Philip Watson

Ask most Los Angelinos about Palm Springs, the small desert resort town lying 125 miles inland en route to Las Vegas, and you're likely to be told it's a tacky oasis only for committed golfers and retirees. "The average age out there is deceased," one Venice Beach trendoid informed me.

In the 1950s, however, this was the hot spot to which *le tout* Hollywood escaped to party. With such playboys as Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Tony Curtis making it their home, the town became famous as the happy haven where stars could be themselves and do and indulge as they pleased. It was, in short, where Hollywood went to have sex.

Recently rediscovered by those hip to the town's fashionable mid-century modern (that's 1950s, to you and me) architec-

ture and long associations with Ol' Blue Eyes himself, Palm Springs is seeing a return of the bacchanalian spirit and liberal ethos. Nowhere more so, perhaps, than at Ballantines Hotel.

Opened a year ago, this snazzy 14-room property is a smart refurbishment of an original hideaway built in 1938 and extended in the 1950s. While most of the celluloid set stayed at the nearby private Racquet Club, with its hedonistic, martini-fuelled, poolside buzz and chic cottage retreats, some stars, including Veronica Lake, Gloria Swanson and most famously Marilyn Monroe, preferred somewhere far more discreet.

Ballantines's Marilyn Monroe Suite faithfully recreates this playful mood. Stepping over a heart-shaped doormat, you enter a palace of flamingo pink kitsch. There is a pink carpet and television, pink lamps and phones, and a funky sofa covered with crazy pink 1950s atomic fabric.

Elsewhere are glam photos of Marilyn,

a large Warhol Marilyn print, period appliances and furniture, a stylish dressing room, and a formica-countered kitchenette leading to a private patio. The generous platform bed has a vinyl headboard, chenille spread and fine Egyptian cotton linen. Around the courtyard pool are sleek sun loungers resting on blue Astroturf and speakers hidden within rocks that trickle out cocktail jazz.

"Marilyn apparently loved it here, but the hotel was also popular with stars staying at the Racquet Club who were conducting affairs," says Scotsman Fraser Robertson, who part-owns Ballantines with his partner, English artist, Sarah Robarts. "This was a favourite for those who enjoyed a good matinee."

*Ballantines Hotel, 1420 North Canyon Drive, Palm Springs, California 92262, USA (001 760 320 1178; [www.ballantineshotels.com](http://www.ballantineshotels.com)). Doubles from \$105 (£75) per night inc breakfast, exc taxes. Marilyn Monroe Suite \$265 (£190) pn.*