



# BLACK INK

THE ART OF EXTRAORDINARY LIVING • SPRING/SUMMER 2014

## THE KEY

111 SMALL HOTELS AROUND THE WORLD



# THE SMALLER PLEASURES

**T**he BLACK INK reader is a well-seasoned traveler who knows the big hitters—the classic luxury hotels that define perennial destinations. Which is why we didn't bother with those in these pages. Rather, this list provides the off-the-map, lesser-known small hotels (we loosely defined them to have fewer than 50 rooms but sometimes a bit more) that often escape our notice because they lack (or don't require) powerful press machines or marketing budgets.

These retreats, instead, rely on word of mouth. And that is exactly how this short list has been gleaned—through real recommendations from real people with whom we have built deeply trusting relationships over the past decade. The bylines are not the point; indeed, sometimes it's a convergence of voices we have refined to create sharp reviews that carry important caveats. Because while we believe this list of 111 hotels is ruthlessly edited, we also think not every property here is perfect for every kind of traveler. Our pinpoint opinions—and breadth of experience—help you, the discerning traveler, to navigate the same-same world of luxury resorts and uncover the brilliant, the maverick, the soulful.

We believe this list captures the zeitgeist that the luxury hotel is coming to represent; it is far more than the sum of its parts, be they fine-dining restaurants, linen thread counts, private butlers or staff-to-guest ratios. These hotels are one in a million, and even with their quirks and perhaps even kinks, they will change the way you feel about a destination and, of course, about travel.

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## GERMANY

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### DAS STUE

◆ Berlin

In 2012, Spanish interior designer Patricia Urquiola took the former Danish embassy and turned it not so much into a hotel as a chic hangout (*das stue* means “living room” in Danish), complete with mesh animals in the lounge and a crocodile head prominently placed in the entryway.

Along with a contemporary mix of quilted-fabric sofas and theatrical industrial lighting, the 79-room retreat in Berlin’s Tiergarten district has another appeal: the hotel bar, conceived by Till Harter of the über-hip Tausend (*Schiffbauerdamm 11; tausendberlin.com*), which has the city’s fashion set clamoring for strong cocktails and addictive snacks. So even though it’s tucked into a quiet, leafy alcove by the city zoo, Das Stue has an alluring, come-hang aesthetic that draws the right crowd: Pharrell Williams recently stayed, and the women of Missoni—grandmother, mother, daughter—spent a girls’ weekend here. *Rooms start at \$275; Drakestraße 1; 49-30/311-7220; das-stue.com.*



### DAS STUE

Germany

One of the Suites, with views of Tiergarten or the Berlin Zoo

## GREECE

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### MYSTIQUE

◆ Santorini

Inside Mystique’s sinuous façade, perched on top of a cliff, sleek suites are carved from ancient caves, with driftwood headboards and tables that look like enormous pebbles. The well-trained staff caters to any last-minute whim, from organizing private picnics to orchestrating the ultimate proposal. (One guest popped the question during a helicopter ride over the island’s crater.)

This summer the property will add a second pool, a cozy captain’s house-turned-lounge and an Asian restaurant on the roof. But despite all the latest innovations and the best wine cellar for miles, the old-school haunt is a throwback to simpler times—meaning you

will rarely hear the ring of a smartphone in any of the public spaces. *Room start at \$565; Oia; 30-228/607-1114; mystique.gr.*

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### PERIVOLAS

◆ Santorini

Perivolos—all sensuous, whitewashed curved walls, skylights and occasional pops of fuchsia and lilac—manages to feel both dramatically exclusive and laid-back. The infinity pool that appears to flow seamlessly into the turquoise waters of the Aegean Sea is legendary. While the rest of the top properties on Santorini keep adding butlers and iPhone docks, Perivolos, one of the first to open in Oia, a village built into red volcanic cliffs, sticks with its original fail-safe formula: friendly service, gorgeous views, healthy food, privacy and no outside distractions (TVs are forbidden here). *Rooms start at \$580; Oia; 30-228/607-1308; perivolos.gr.*

## IRELAND

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### BALLYFIN DEMESNE

◆ County Laois

Any hotel that arranges white-aproned housemaids in a receiving line as your car comes to a halt at the end of a bluebell-laden drive; or has a butler ready to unpack, press and launder your clothes (at no extra charge); or offers predinner Champagne receptions in a 19th-century rotunda is obviously one of another class.

The 194-year-old manor, located at the foothills of the Slieve Bloom Mountains, also has a picnic hut on a grouse moor, a tower, a grotto and an Edwardian garden. Some take the *Downton Abbey* effect further to heart, even dressing in period attire purchased from the Lyric Opera of Chicago. (The owner is a trustee there.) But despite Ballyfin’s reputation as the most opulent hotel in all of Ireland, the atmosphere at the recently restored estate is anything but stuffy—also seen at dinner alongside bustled skirts: popped collars and loafers worn by guests just back from a day out on the 28-acre lake. *Rooms start at \$1,100; 353-5/7875-5866; ballyfin.com.*