

SPA couture

writer Michael Nassar

You love designer duds, covet a closet full of fashionable shoes and handbags - why would you even think of staying anywhere other than a designer hotel? That's exactly the thinking among a handful of the world's top fashion houses, including Armani, Versace, Bulgari, Missoni, and Moschino, who are boldly taking the idea of lifestyle chic to new levels. Haute holidays have arrived. Here's our peek at the new chic: spa couture.



MAISON MOSCHINO

MILAN

HISTORY: In Milan's chic Corso Como enclave, playfulness abounds at Maison Moschino, where the fashion label's creative director, Rossella Jardini, transformed a 1840s railway station into a trendsetting 65-room hotel. The look of the space — note illuminated floating dress lamps, pastry-adorned chandeliers, and beds fashioned to look as if you should be sleeping in a ball gown — is unmistakably Moschino. Fairy tale meets high fashion in the public spaces and guestrooms, each of which has its own look and feel. In the Prestige Room, a velvet dress headboard creates the effect of sleeping on a plush ballgown. The guestrooms all have different looks, but share minimalist white furnishings and Moschino custom-scented bath products. If you're craving pizza, you won't find it at the hotel's on-site restaurant, Clandestino, helmed by Michelin-starred chef Moreno Cedroni. Here it's all about high-concept dishes like potato dumplings with seafood or a vegetarian bento box. The space itself is pretty high-concept too, done in muted colors with whimsical touches like grosgrain ribbon-wrapped chairs and Moschino handbags intended to serve as decorative objects.

PERKS: Sybarites should indulge in any one of the treatments at the small Culti-operated Spa Mareminerale. The signature treatment to book is the Youth Energy Facial, which reduces wrinkles and keeps tired, jet-lagged skin looking fresh. For added pampering, the spectacular mosaic-accented Turkish baths are a divine way to unwind.

www.maisonmoschino.com

HOTEL MISSONI

EDINBURGH

HISTORY: Avant-garde and oh-so-trendy, Hotel Missoni Edinburgh is anything but ordinary. Staying here is an immersion in Italian fashionista Rosita Missoni's vibrant world, one that replaces the muted tones of most hotels with bold patterns, vibrant colors and textured fabrics that scream for attention. "I think of Missoni through patterns, through the pleasure of using colors and patterns together," says the matriarch of one of the world's top fashion houses. "For me it's my lifestyle, it's our lifestyle." It's as if Austin Powers teamed with the Mod Squad — and yet it works. The modernist blonde-and-rose facade of the Hotel Missoni highlights the gap between the chic boutique and its UNESCO World Heritage Site location, known for its classic gray stone architecture. Step inside the lobby to a harmony of dizzying black-and-white checks, stripes, florals, waves and zigzags against bold splashes of purple, pink, gold and teal. That synergy of color and pattern continues inside the guestrooms, too, where a sliding glass door opens to the bathroom with a spacious mosaic-tiled rain shower, signature Missoni toiletries and fluffy bathrobes. WiFi and espresso machines are included in the rate, as is laundry for two items daily — a rare hotel treat.

PERKS: Spa Missoni treats guests to the same style and sophistication as the rest of the hotel, infusing bold colors with iconic design while bringing the latest in cosmetic innovation from Eve Lom and Natura Bissé to the Scottish capital. Try the regenerative Diamond

Lifting facial which restores elasticity to the eyes, face, neck, and décolleté. If that's not enough, the hotel's primo location puts the Royal Mile's must-see tourist sights - Edinburgh Castle and Holyrood Palace - within footsteps.

www.hotelmissoni.com

ROUND HILL

JAMAICA

HISTORY: Round Hill is one of the Caribbean's most legendary and low-key full-service escapes, where guests don't need to lift a finger unless they want to. It's all about effortless luxury along the northwest coast of Jamaica's Montego Bay; Round Hill doesn't need to beat visitors over the head with an in-your-face style and flashy amenities. Designed by Ralph Lauren, a member of Round Hill's board, this is a place where East Coast style meets a chill Caribbean vibe. In addition to the gorgeous Caribbean colours, expansive rooms feature four-poster beds and sunken baths that allow for deep relaxation after a long day in the sun. The beach is relatively small, but private, with an attentive staff and (of course) the requisite beach bar - although the vibe is more conducive to book reading than Bacardi downing. Waiters come by to check on beachgoers without being obtrusive, and there's no rush to do anything until it's time to dress for dinner. Take note, however: this isn't a place where guests track beach sand into the restaurant in flip-flops; the clientèle keeps it sophisticated, smart and cool. It's all about colorful dinner jackets and sophisticated, simple dresses that don't try too hard.

PERKS: Housed in a beautifully restored 18th century plantation house, the ocean front spa is an understated retreat in the lush Jamaican rainforest. A special Pineapple Body Buff utilises all-natural local ingredients to scrub you whistle clean, while the signature Hangover Massage will stimulate your immune system with Jamaican Sweet Basil to purge your system of those pesky toxins. Then again, so will a fiery dish of copper-singed Jamaican jerk chicken.

www.roundhill.com

THIS PAGE: Spa at Round Hill, OPENING PAGE: Lobby at Armani Hotel





HOTEL PLAZA ATHÉNÉE

PARIS

HISTORY: Since opening in 1911, Hôtel Plaza Athénée has ushered in the Vanderbilts, the Rockefellers, Jackie Kennedy, and a veritable who's who of celebrity bright lights. Christian Dior first set up his couture salon on the Avenue Montaigne simply to be near the Plaza Athénée, and Chanel, Nina Ricci, Louis Vuitton and Caron all followed his lead. Today, the Avenue Montaigne is a byword for luxury and haute couture, while the Plaza Athénée has become a legend, mingling glamorous tradition with modern comfort and technology. This is one of the most refined quarters of Paris: the garden courtyard is ablaze with flowering vines and red geraniums; the antique wood paneling in Le Bar gleams; chef Alain Ducasse sends Michelin-starred masterpieces out from the kitchen; and the first few floors of the hotel showcase French taste at its best, with Louis XV, Louis XVI and Regency furniture in marked contrast to the bold Art Deco themes of the top two floors. With rooms overlooking the chestnut trees of Avenue Montaigne or boasting panoramic views of the Eiffel Tower and rooftops of Montmartre, this is the Paris of which you've always dreamed.

PERKS: Recently opened, the Dior Institut au Plaza Athénée is a serenity stop of innovative skin-care from the legendary French fashion house. Designed by Patrick Ribes, the elegant space blends an image wall of fashion show clips recounting the Dior legend with plush Louis XVI furnishings in a style that screams – demurely, of course – Paris chic. Plus, clients at the hotel are the only ones who can enjoy a sneak preview of the new “Dior Prestige” beauty treatment – a proprietary combination of exclusive beauty therapy movements and Dior Prestige products unavailable anywhere else. www.plaza-athenee-paris.com

BYBLOS ART HOTEL

VERONA

HISTORY: When Dino Facchini, the owner of the dramatic fashion line Byblos, fell in love with Villa Amista, he originally intended to make it a home for himself. But after filling the 16th-century villa in the heart of Valpolicella with his bold, contemporary art collection, including several works by Damien Hirst, Marina Abramovic, Sandro Chia and others, he decided to convert it into a unique hotel. Architect Alessandro Mendini was commissioned to blend the villa's classic lines and mosaic floors with startling colours, shapes, furnishings and art installations. The result is a design mix deserving of the one-of-a-kind label. You won't see anything like it anywhere else. All 60 rooms and suites are individually designed, and the colors are, to put it mildly, Crayola-esque. Be prepared for chartreuse mixed with red, turquoise and bright yellow, and the hotel's signature color, neon orange, is everywhere. The art sometimes makes you look twice: Is that really a statue of Jesus in a glass case in the restaurant? Are those metal wolves climbing up the outside of the building? And are those paintings really paintings or a collection of bathroom graffiti?

PERKS: Don't miss a Déclor treatment in the subterranean Espace spa — it's styled on the ancient city of Pompeii. By day you can take the hotel shuttle to Verona, the city of Romeo and Juliet, stroll in the gardens surrounded by 300 varieties of flowers overseen by Sr. Facchini — he stops by every morning to check the gardeners' work — or relax by the pool tiled in deep blue and surrounded by frescoes. And if you need to shop, there are dresses displayed in cases and catalogs of Byblos' fashion and home design lines – just one advantage of having a fashion tycoon in-house. www.byblosarthotel.com

BULGARI RESORT

BALI

HISTORY: Once the hunting grounds of the Balinese royal families, the Bukit peninsula is now home to some of Bali's most exclusive villas, as well as one of the island's holiest temples and some of the world's finest surfing locations. It's also home to the breathtaking Bulgari Resort, a 59-villa property located near the village of Pecatu and the stunning cliff top site of the Pura Luhur Uluwatu Temple. On the island's far southwestern tip, the resort offers unrivalled views from 150 metres above the sea. Every villa is a room with a view – including three two-bedroom villas and the 1,300-square metre Bulgari Villa – and each has a private garden, a pool, and an open-air living room looking out over the Indian Ocean. Taken together it's like an entire village of contemporary interpretations of traditional Balinese design – one that nevertheless also conveys Bulgari's distinctive Italian style: built and furnished by hand, with volcanic stones, rich exotic woods and refined fabrics; landscaped with native plants, flamboyant frangipani trees, and huge vases carved out of boulders and ancient single-stone totems. The result is a resort that seems to have always existed, carved into the landscape long before man appeared on the scene.

PERKS: At the heart of the resort, the spa is built on the edge of a cliff – an ideal spot for a hot stone massage that targets your seven chakras. Or if you're feeling particularly royal there's the unforgettable Double Bulgari Royal Lulur – a couple's ritual performed by four highly experienced therapists working in synchronized harmony. Plus, because the beach is protected by a coral reef, only hotel guests can access it through a funicular that goes straight down the cliff from the villas. Look out below! www.bulgarihotels.com/en-us/bali

PALAZZO VERSACE

AUSTRALIA'S GOLD COAST

HISTORY: The first outlet of Versace's hotel chain (coming soon: Dubai), the 151-room, 54-suite sprawling complex looks exactly as you would imagine designer Donatella Versace's fantasy palace would: over the top. Refurbished in 2006 to replace some of the more opulent original flourishes (white marble columns) with more modern touches in blacks and beiges, the hotel still features Roman sculptures in every overstated nook and cranny. Using its brand heritage and fashion pedigree, the aim is to create stylish, aspirational experiences like Roman Holiday, which mimics the Cary Grant/Audrey Hepburn film with a pair of bespoke vespas, and Red Alert, an adrenaline junkie's fantasy getaway of high-octane jet ski, speedboat and parasailing lessons.

PERKS: Embellished with the unmistakable Versace style, Salus Per Aquum was anointed a Leading Spa of the World in the very first accreditation programme conducted by The Leading Hotels of the World in 2005. Key feature: discretion. Tucked away in a private location on the lower lobby you can enter and escape in total backdoor privacy just like U2 and The Rolling Stones, who have been known to take over a fleet of the hotel's ultra-glam Imperial Suites. www.palazzoversace.com.au

ARMANI DUBAI

DUBAI

HISTORY: Occupying 15 floors of the Burj Khalifa, the tallest tower in the world, the Armani Dubai is a hotel for those who find the luxe charms of Las Vegas wanting. These are the most glamorous residences in the most glamorous building in the most glamorous city on earth, until the stock market corrects itself, anyway. Armani Hotel Dubai's luxurious rooms and suites are an expression of minimalist opulence, with every detail bearing the practicality and elegance of Armani's signature style. Think muted. Very, very muted. Dedicating nearly five years to the project, Armani personally oversaw every aspect of the hotel's design. The result is a hotel that feels bespoke, from the Eramosa stone floors, zebra wood paneling and fabric covered walls to the scents of the bath and spa accessories.

PERKS: From the moment guests begin their booking, a personal Lifestyle Manager steps in to promise a home-away-from-home experience ensuring every need is attended, if not anticipated – which makes it all the easier to chill out in the ArmaniSPA, where minimalist Zen is given new meaning. Begin the journey dressed in luxurious silk pajamas before challenging the ageing process with one of the new Signature Collection treatments, which feature two specially designed Armani products – Crema Nera for women and Skin Minerals for men. Applied to the face using hot and cold obsidian stones, the treatment helps restructure, firm and enhance the skin's texture. Finish in the therme suite of sauna, steam, and herbal-infused rain showers and you'll find it hard to believe that you're in the desert.

<http://dubai.armanihotels.com> 

THIS PAGE: Culti Spa at Maison Moschino. OPPOSITE PAGE: (right to left) Dior Institut at Hotel Plaza Athénée; Espace Spa at Byblos Art Hotel