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“This new list of stars is tedious and patronising in equal measure, a dull squeak of irrelevance. The Michelin Guide has apparently been publishing in the UK for 100 years (though not consecutively). Well, it’s certainly behaving like a stereotypical centenarian: gripped by the need for routine, fixed to its bath chair, smelling faintly of ointment and bodily fluids”

The Observer’s food critic Jay Rayner writing about the Michelin Guide’s centenary edition, on The Guardian’s *Word of Mouth* blog

CONRAD HOTELS

Conrad Hotels, Hilton Worldwide’s luxury brand, is set to almost double its global presence over the next three years, with an announcement that it has 14 new hotels in the pipeline. With a current total of 15 in key cities including Tokyo, Hong Kong, Chicago and Miami, its new locations will include Sanya Haitang Bay, China; Koh Samui, Thailand; Algarve, Portugal; New York and Dubai, all of which will open within the next 14 months. The rest, including resorts in Seoul, Beijing, Fiji and Mumbai, will open by the end of 2013. “We are strategically growing the Conrad brand by adding new-build hotels and resorts and smartly converting existing hotels to the brand,” says Ian Carter, president, global operations and development, Hilton Worldwide. Conrad Hotels & Resorts is one of Hilton Worldwide’s ten brands, which includes the Waldorf Astoria Collection.

Flower power

Restaurant entrepreneur Richard Caring of **Caprice Holdings** is to open a London version of Manhattan’s **Balthazar** in Covent Garden. The Le Caprice owner has won planning consent to open a 150-seat New York style bistro in the Grade II listed Flower Cellars building, which used to be the space where flowers were stored and sold until the market closed in 1974. Keith McNally, Balthazar’s owner, is expected to relocate to London to oversee the opening.

CHAPTER HOTELS

The Montpellier Chapter – the first property from Chapter Hotels, a new brand launched by Swire Hotels – opened its doors in December. The 61-room hotel is in a Grade II listed building in Cheltenham, with its original Regency and Edwardian features combined with contemporary additions designed by architecture firm Make. Bespoke designer furniture has been commissioned for each room and an art collection has been curated to include 160 pieces of art by leading contemporary artists as well as by art students. Head chef Tom Rains, who has worked at L’Escargot, Claridge’s and The Berkeley, will be responsible for running the kitchen.

Chapter Hotels will continue to open luxury hotels in period buildings, located in key British towns and cities. The second Chapter hotel will open in Exeter in 2012. Swire Hotels is responsible for opening urban hotels in Hong Kong, China and the UK, including The Opposite House in Beijing and The Upper House in Hong Kong.

FOUR SEASONS

The newly transformed Four Seasons Hotel in Park Lane, London opened at the end of January after a two-year, £125 million makeover. The 192-room hotel, which is on the site of the original Four Seasons Inn on the Park, features a new restaurant, the Italian-inspired Amaranto. Overseen by executive chef Adriano Cavagnini, who has joined from the Hotel Eden in Rome, its interior was designed by Pierre-Yves Rochon, who was also responsible for the refurbishment of The Savoy. A new 10th floor has been added to house the spa, designed by architect Eric Parry, with nine treatment rooms all with floor to ceiling windows and individual relaxation pods.

MORGANS GROUP

The beginning of March will see the latest edition of the Morgans Hotel Group’s Mondrian brand debut in Manhattan’s SoHo. The 270 rooms are described as “elegant jewel-boxes” with floor-to-ceiling windows and custom fixtures. There are also four suites and a 1,170 sq ft penthouse on the 25th floor. Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz, who was also responsible for the interior design of the Mondrian Los Angeles, has created a “romantic feel, drawing inspiration from Jean Cocteau’s 1946 French fantasy film *La Belle et la Bête*”. The hotel also features No Nine, a sustainable seafood restaurant that seats 150. “The addition of Mondrian SoHo to our portfolio marks a significant moment in the evolution of the brand and solidifies our presence in a neighbourhood that is beloved by our sophisticated clientele, both local and international,” says Marc Gordon, president of Morgans Hotel Group.

ROYAL ACADEMY OF ARTS/OLIVER PEYTON

Oliver Peyton’s restaurant group Peyton & Byrne has opened a new restaurant and bar at London’s Royal Academy of Arts. Working alongside head chef Andrea Zuccolo, Peyton has created a menu that makes use of prime British ingredients. Over 20 wines will be available by the glass and British afternoon tea will also be served. Design Research Studio, under the direction of Tom Dixon, was responsible for the interior, which features a glass installation housing sculptures from the Royal Academy’s permanent collection. A bar made from handmade brick and lava stone from Mount Etna occupies the length of one wall and also serves as a counter for guests to eat lunch. This is Peyton’s sixth enterprise in London, joining Inn the Park, The Wallace Restaurant, The National Café, The National Dining Rooms and The Orangery at Kew Gardens. There are also a series of Peyton & Byrne cafes at the British Library, Heal’s, St Pancras Station and the Wellcome Collection.

JUMEIRAH

A luxury resort hotel and residences on the island of Anguilla in the Caribbean is due to open within the next three years. Situated on 370 acres of beachfront, the 140-room hotel, operated by Dubai-based luxury hospitality company Jumeirah Group, will feature a spa, conference facilities and beach clubs, as well as 460 residential units. Jack Nicklaus is creating a championship 18-hole ‘Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course’, which will run along a stretch of seafront. Jumeirah Group is a member of Dubai Holding and operates a portfolio of hotels, resorts and residences worldwide.

VILLA CLARISSE

The 17th-century Hôtel de Toiras on Île de Ré will be opening a sister property in May

this year. Villa Clarisse, which is just a few minutes walk away from Hôtel de Toiras, is a privately owned listed 17th-century home situated in the heart of the port of Saint Martin de Ré, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The refurbishment of the 10-room property, which features gardens, a boutique spa and swimming pool, was overseen by Pierre Yves Rochon, who was responsible for designing the Hotel de Paris in Monaco and The Peninsula Shanghai. Saint Martin de Ré is the capital of Île de Ré, which is a tiny slice of land stretching out into the Atlantic Ocean for 30km from La Rochelle.

NOPI

This month will see the opening of a new venture in Soho, London. Nopi is an all-day brasserie-style dining venue by the team that created the deli-style eaterie Ottolenghi. The food is described as ‘contemporary London’ and is based on Mediterranean, Middle Eastern and Asian ingredients. Ottolenghi’s Noam Bar says: “We wanted to challenge ourselves, to launch a new concept, to allow ourselves to create a new restaurant from a fresh start. We also wanted to launch a full blown restaurant rather than a restaurant/ deli, and a top level one at that.” The setting is slightly more formal with more of an emphasis on finer dining. There are now four Ottolenghi shops in

London: Kensington, Belgravia, Islington and Notting Hill. *Ottolenghi: The Cookbook* was published in 2008.

NORTH ROAD

Danish chef Christoffer Hruskova has opened a new restaurant in London’s Clerkenwell. The two-floor venue, called North Road (referring to the Great North Road, which started its course in Smithfield in pre-Roman times), features a Nordic-inspired menu – familiar to diners at Hruskova’s original London restaurant, Fig. British produce such as wild herbs and flowers from Kent, Dorset lobster, Norfolk deer and Cumbrian lamb is widely used.

Fig has been rebranded since its move from Islington to Clerkenwell and is now known as Fig Bistro, serving a bistro-inspired menu of rustic French food. It has taken over the premises originally occupied by the Clerkenwell Dining Room.

THE GRACE HOTELS GROUP

The Grace Hotels Group – best known for its boutique hotels on the Greek islands – has kicked off its expansion into the Americas with the announcement of a new hotel, spa and residential villas development in Calchaquí Valley in north-west Argentina; the acquisition of Vanderbilt Hall hotel in Newport, Rhode Island; and the launch of its first hotel in Central America, the Grace Panama.

Spending wisely

A recent report has identified a new trend infiltrating the hotel industry: the growth of **FLASH** (Feeling Low and Spending High) consumers. “Attainable Luxury: saving to spend in an Age of Austerity,” by law firm **Trowers & Hamblins**, shows that post-recession spenders are reappraising luxury and increasingly opting for quality over quantity and looking for fewer, but better hotel experiences. “FLASH consumers are driving a new trend in the hotel industry,” explains Michael Patinson, corporate partner and head of the firm’s hotel and leisure practice. “Now is the time to make the changes necessary to compete in the luxury market. Far from a nice-to-have, keeping up with the competitors in terms of perceived luxury is now essential for hotels to survive in this climate. Failure to invest in developing and maintaining the luxury aspect of your business will alienate this new brand of post-recession spender. Hotel owners must now explore the wider cost impact of a strategy of investment in luxury.”

Island in the sun

Spanning two islands in Cambodia’s Koh Rong Archipelago, **Song Saa Private Island** resort, due to open later this year, is destined to offer the ultimate in luxury relaxation with a conscience. Setting new standards for responsible high-end accommodation, developers Rory and Melita Hunter are following a strict conservation programme with all 25 of its over water, rainforest and beach villas being built with sustainable materials. They have also established a marine reserve to safeguard the islands’ reefs and marine life and are working with various groups to protect the environment and safeguard local livelihoods in a sustainable way. The resort will feature an infinity edge pool, spa and wellness centre suspended in the rainforest, yoga and meditation centre, and over-water restaurant and lounge. The plan is to open another two Song Saa resorts in Cambodia in the next few years.

The Grace Cafayate, due to open early next year, will have 52 rooms and 20 residential villas for sale, situated within 1,250 acres of land. The main building will feature a library, health club and spa, with signature therapies based around locally sourced crystal salt and grapes from the Cafayate vineyards. The complex is being created in conjunction with Grace Hotels’ sister company, developer First South American.

Vanderbilt Hall will feature 33 rooms and suites with gourmet restaurant and cocktail bar. Over the next few months, the restaurant and wine cellar will be transformed, with a relaunch scheduled for this spring. The hotel was most recently owned by British entrepreneur Peter de Savary before its sale.

Grace Panama, slated to open in the summer of 2012, will occupy the ground floor and five upper floors of the new Twist Tower office and hotel development currently in development in Panama City’s upmarket Obarrio district. It is being developed in association with F&F Properties.

SPICE MARKET

This month will see the launch of Spice Market London in the new W London – Leicester Square Hotel. The South-east Asian-inspired restaurant will be the sister to Spice Market in New York and headed up by three Michelin-starred chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten. The interior is designed by Amsterdam-based Concrete and blends the old-world feel of Spice Market NY with the contemporary architecture of W London.

The hotel itself is a 10-storey building veiled in translucent glass, which will change colour according to the time of day and ambience.

This will be the third Spice Market to open within a W property, the other two being in W Atlanta and W Doha. The hotel also has a new nightclub: Wylde. A collaboration between W Hotels and Ignite Group, Wylde will feature a specially curated premium tequila selection with small-batch, rare and vintage tequilas by the shot, bottle or in bespoke cocktails. “Central London is crying out for a hotel nightclub that brings back the glamour, the vibe and the party,” says Matt Hermer, founder and managing director of Ignite Group.

BANCA

Veteran restaurateur Giuliano Lotto has announced the launch of his latest high-end Italian restaurant. The 3,700 sq ft site, near Grosvenor Square in London, is due to open in September with 120 covers. It will be an “Italian version of La Petite Maison,” says Lotto, who is working with Peter and Arjun Waney, co-founders of Zuma and La Petite Maison, on the project. The interior design will be overseen by David d’Almada whose previous projects have included Zafferano, L’Oranger and Il Baretto.