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THE GOLD LIST 2011

Your definitive guide to the

WORLD'S BEST HOTELS

Welcome to the seventh annual Gold List. Chosen by the magazine's editors and travel experts using six criteria, these are the best hotels for

★ AMBIENCE & DESIGN ★ LOCATION ★ FOOD
★ ROOMS ★ LEISURE FACILITIES ★ SERVICE

KEY TO SYMBOLS



Has appeared in the GOLD LIST five or more times



New entry this year

★ ROOMS



Paint it white: the recently refurbished Grand-Hôtel du Cap-Ferrat in France

BEST HOTELS FOR ROOMS

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EUROPE

★ Grand-Hôtel du Cap-Ferrat, France

NEW ENTRY The grande dame of Cap-Ferrat reopened in May 2009 after a complete refurbishment costing €75 million. There are now 49 rooms and 24 suites (including eight with private pools) in the original building and in a brand-new wing. Other additions include a spa and a restaurant, La Véranda, which joins Michelin-starred Le Cap and the less formal Club Dauphin. Set in 17 acres of grounds, the hotel has stunning views over the Mediterranean.

X-factor 'I'd recommend this hotel for just about everything,' says Gold List contributor Lanie Goodman. 'The revamped modern rooms, the

new suites with pools, the new spa, the chef and the service...' 71 boulevard du Général de Gaulle, Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat (00 33 4 93 76 50 50; www.grand-hotel-cap-ferrat.com). Doubles from €265

★ La Posta Vecchia, Italy

This 17th-century villa, once owned by Jean Paul Getty, is in 15 acres of landscaped grounds overlooking the Tyrrhenian Sea. It is furnished with tapestries, Persian rugs, and 16th- and 17th-century paintings and furniture, most of which belonged to Getty; there's even an archaeological museum in the grounds. Michele Gioia has earned The Cesar Restaurant a Michelin star for his regional cooking; and a health and

beauty centre has recently been added. The fact that it was once a private home gives La Posta Vecchia a relaxed, intimate atmosphere.

X-factor Eleven of the hotel's 19 bedrooms have stone fireplaces, huge antique beds and lamps fashioned from church candlesticks. *Palo Laziale, Ladispoli, Italy* (00 39 06 994 9501; www.lapostavecchia.com). Doubles from €320

★ The Merrion Hotel, Dublin

NEW ENTRY In the 13 years since it opened, The Merrion Hotel has cemented its reputation as one of Ireland's most luxurious five-star properties. Its 123 rooms and 19 suites are temples to Regency-era grandeur and public areas make

excellent use of 18th-century artwork and crackling turf fires to create a relaxed country-house ambience. The Tethra Spa has an enormous infinity pool; diners can choose between the two-Michelin-star Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud for contemporary French cuisine or the Cellar Restaurant for Modern European dishes. All this and 'proper old school service that's not the least bit showy or stuffy', says Gold List contributor Francesca Syz.

X-factor The Lord Monck suite has a wonderful boat-shaped ceiling that features Georgian plasterwork images of birds and flowers. *Upper Merrion Street, Dublin 2, Ireland* (00 353 1 603 0600; www.merrionhotel.com). Doubles from €480

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★ Azura at Gabriel's, Mozambique

NEW ENTRY Rebuilt from sustainable materials by local craftsmen after a fire devastated it in 2008, this 15-villa resort on Benguerra Island is dedicated to preserving its pristine environment through a series of conservation projects. Villas, filled with handmade furnishings and original artwork, are within strolling distance of the white-sand beach, and come with private plunge pools and seafront salas, as well as a dedicated butler service. Treatments in the Azura Spa are conducted in two beachside pavilions; candlelit dinners take place beneath the stars on the beach whenever possible, and menus feature the freshest seafood imaginable.

X-factor The brand-new, three-room Presidential Villa comes with its own 16-metre infinity pool, private stretch of beach, tree-house lounge and personal chef. *Benguerra Island, Mozambique (00 27 767 050599; www.azura-retreats.com). Villas from US\$525 per person*

ASIA

★ The Datai, Malaysia

CLASSIC Surrounded by rainforest, this resort lies above a half-moon cove on the north-western tip of Langkawi. It has 54 rooms, 40 villas (some on stilts) and 16 suites with verandahs. There is also a four-bedroom villa managed by the hotel, half a kilometre away. The beach is lit at night by flaming torches along the water's edge. Thai, Malaysian and global cuisine is served in the four restaurants; the lobby lounge and beach-club bar serve cocktails and are adults-only after 8pm.

X-factor Designed in a 'modern Malay' style, the spacious rooms are cool and uncluttered, decorated in a palette of creams and browns. All have Lavazza coffee machines and Bose entertainment systems. *Langkawi, Kedah Darul Aman, Malaysia (00 604 959 2500; www.gmhhotels.com). Doubles from 1,530 ringgits (about £310)*

As the centrepiece of Seven Mile Beach, the Ritz-Carlton, Grand Cayman is like the cat that got the cream,
Francesca Syz

★ The Oberoi Rajvillas, Jaipur

Set in 32 acres of immaculate grounds on the outskirts of Jaipur, this purpose-built palace hotel has a fantastic range of 71 luxury rooms, tents and villas with Burmese-teak floors and four-poster beds. The Surya Mahal restaurant serves Western and Indian cuisine in a pleasant courtyard, and there is 24-hour in-room dining and butler service, a Banyan Tree spa and tennis courts. And with Jaipur twinkling in the distance, the setting could not be more romantic.

X-factor Traditional materials and techniques have created the ambience of an ancient Rajasthani fort, offset by wonderful contemporary design including

Italian marble bathrooms that look out onto the ornamental gardens. *Goner Road, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India (00 91 141 268 0101; www.oberoihotels.com). Doubles from US\$790*

★ Mandarin Oriental Dhara Dhevi, Thailand

By blending architectural influences from Burma to Laos – and medieval Chiang Mai – architect Rachen Intawong has created a stunning resort on the edge of Chiang Mai. Its 123 rooms include two-storey villas and colonial-style suites and residences, many with swimming pools or plunge pools and all with huge bathrooms. A range of cuisine is available, including Thai at Le Grand Lanna and French at Farang Ses. As well as a cookery school, cultural centre and kids' club, there is a spa that specialises in Ayurvedic, traditional Chinese and Thai therapies.

X-factor Locally made silks and textiles are incorporated into the decor in all the beautiful guest rooms. *51/4 Chiang Mai-Sankampaeng Road Moo 1 T. Tasala A Muang, Chiang Mai, Thailand (00 66 53 888888; www.mandarinoriental.com/chiangmai). Doubles from £346*

AUSTRALASIA & SOUTH PACIFIC

★ Wharekauhau Lodge & Country Estate, New Zealand

This exclusive luxury lodge, set on a 5,500-acre working sheep station overlooking Palliser Bay on North Island, has recently been refurbished. The Main Lodge resembles an Edwardian country mansion, with grand rooms and cosy nooks, and is complemented by 10 guest cottages with underfloor heating and fireplaces. The 24-hour recreation centre has an indoor pool and spa-treatment room, as well as a croquet lawn and boules pitch. A new spa is set to open this year.

X-factor All of the charming, sumptuously furnished cottages have magnificent ocean views and provide complete privacy. *Palliser Bay, Featherston, Wairarapa, New Zealand (00 64 6 307 7581; www.wharekauhau.co.nz). Doubles from NZ\$630 (about £300)*

★ Huka Lodge, New Zealand

CLASSIC The 19 suites and two private cottages at this secluded 1920s fishing resort, near Lake Taupo on North Island, are set along the bank of the Waikato River. Spacious and bright, with outdoor terraces, they have a comfortable 'cabin' look but their bathrooms have underfloor heating and sunken tubs. The big attraction here is some of the world's best rainbow-trout fishing, but there are also natural hot springs in the grounds, as well as tennis courts and a pool.

X-factor The four-suite Owner's Cottage,

where a light, Hamptons-style interior helps make the most of the art collection, including works by some of New Zealand's finest artists. *Huka Falls Road, Taupo, North Island, New Zealand (00 64 7 378 5791; www.hukalodge.com). Doubles from NZ\$915 (about £440)*

★ Southern Ocean Lodge, Australia

Combining striking design and an excellent pedigree (its sister resort is the fantastic Capella Lodge), the 21-suite Southern Ocean Lodge opened in 2008 on Kangaroo Island. Architect Max Pritchard has created a sleek eco-retreat that reflects and focuses on the open landscape. A glass walkway leads to the suites, all of which have bathrooms with floor-to-ceiling windows to maximise scenery-viewing. Jed Archdeacon is in charge of the restaurant, which has a daily-changing, seasonal menu. There is a spa and star-gazing platform on a cliff overlooking the ocean.

X-factor The 120sq m Remarkable Retreat lives up to its name. It has floor-to-ceiling windows, a private terrace and a freestanding timber bathtub with ocean views. *Hanson Bay, Kangaroo Island (00 61 2 9918 4355; www.southernoceanlodge.com.au). Doubles from A\$990 (about £610)*

THE AMERICAS & CARIBBEAN

★ Sandy Lane, Barbados

This flash Palladian-style beach resort is by far the most luxurious on Barbados. Frequent revamps ensure that the 49-year-old hotel remains as good as it can be. The service is top-notch, too. The 112 opulent rooms and suites average 900sq ft, and have marble floors, hi-tech amenities and large terraces. There are four restaurants, seven bars, nine floodlit tennis courts, several golf courses and dedicated clubs for both kids and teens. The magnificent spa provides a range of treatments using Anne Sémonin and Aromatherapy Associates.

X-factor The five-room Villa is the epitome of luxury. Set in its own gardens, and with its own dedicated team of staff, it is essentially a private home in the midst of one of the world's great luxury resorts. *St James, BB24024, Barbados, West Indies (00 1 246 444 2000; www.sandylane.com). Doubles from US\$1,000*

★ Parrot Cay, Turks & Caicos

A private-island resort with white-sand beaches, Parrot Cay is 35 minutes by speedboat from Providenciales. It has 60 suites and villas, five with private pools and butler service; all come with four-poster beds and huge bathrooms. Executive chef Daniel Moran serves delicious Asian-inspired cuisine, dominated by fresh seafood, at Lotus, while European dishes are available at Terrace. The fantastic COMO Shambhala Spa offers everything from one-off holistic treatments to serious retreat weeks.

X-factor The three-bedroom beachfront villas at Rocky Point are private houses (with pools, outdoor dining areas and

dedicated butlers) that can be rented when the owners aren't on the island. *Turks & Caicos, Caribbean (00 1 649 946 7788; www.parrortcay.com.bz). Doubles from US\$696*

★ The Beverly Hills Hotel, Los Angeles

NEW ENTRY Right on Sunset Boulevard, this pale-pink, palm-fringed hotel is a favourite with Hollywood A-listers for a reason. Stars love this 204-room property for its old-fashioned grandeur, as well as its friendly and discreet service. And the customised range of anti-ageing treatments in the La Prairie spa no doubt hold huge appeal for those who spend their lives in front of the cameras. Three restaurants cater to all culinary desires and the laid-back Polo Lounge serves seasonal Californian cuisine and afternoon tea to an impeccably dressed clientele.

X-factor The 23 garden bungalows are the ultimate in film-star glamour. Liz Taylor honeymooned here with six of her seven husbands. Two new Presidential Bungalows are set to open in March. *9641 Sunset Boulevard, Beverly Hills, California 90210, USA (00 1 310 276 2251; www.beverlyhillshotel.com). Doubles from US\$500*

★ BEST HOTELS FOR LOCATION

Continued from page 34

★ The Wickaninnish Inn, Canada

The 75-room Wickaninnish Inn, on the remote western edge of British Columbia, is forged from local cedar, stone and glass. The individually decorated bedrooms, all of which have fireplaces, enjoy ocean and beach views through floor-to-ceiling picture windows; and the hotel houses an enviable collection of Canadian art and sculpture. There's also a spa, excellent restaurant, beachfront coffee lounge and library, all looking out over the Pacific Ocean.

X-factor The McDiarmid family chose this location based on their love of storm-watching, and it's still the best place to be when winds start whipping up. Guests can cosy up by one of the many windows to witness 30ft-high waves roll by. *500 Osprey Lane, Tofino, British Columbia, Canada (00 1 250 725 3100; www.wickinn.com). Doubles from C\$300 (about £185)*

★ The Ritz-Carlton, Grand Cayman

NEW ENTRY One of the longest sandy beaches in the Caribbean, this glamorous, 365-room resort is an excellent all-round tropical retreat offering impeccable Ritz-Carlton service. Its main, crescent-shaped building frames a large pool and a succession of luxurious poolside cabanas. Facilities include four tennis courts, a nine-hole golf course, and Jean-Michel Cousteau's Ambassadors of the