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## LONDON'S MAY FAIR HOTEL ROCKS

By Anne Z. Cooke, Tribune Media Services  
[World's Fare](#)

LONDON -- I wish I'd stayed in the penthouse suite, at the five-star May Fair Hotel in London, but my budget refused to stretch. I did get a leisurely tour and a glass of cabernet, however, long enough to admire the very large bed and marvel at the pink and gold clouds that framed the city's skyline at sunset.

Taller than its neighbors here in the Mayfair district, the nine-story hotel's terrace actually enjoys 360-degree views, a rare highlight of any stay in this posh retreat. Other bonuses were the sleekly modern decor, vivid colors not seen since Picasso spilled his paint box, total privacy, a slick kitchen and 2,138 spacious feet in which to spread out.

Even without the penthouse, there are other reasons this five-star hotel rocks. One is the rad location, on Stratton Street in the heart of Mayfair, now London's newest-hip-and-happening place. I walked out the door and found myself three minutes from historic Piccadilly, five minutes from Green Park and a jog around the corner from Berkeley Square. Buckingham Palace was near enough for a brisk walk; the jogging path between Hyde Park's green lawns beckoned.

I don't shop in this rarified neighborhood: \$900 loafers and \$1,200 sweaters aren't in my budget either. But somebody's buying all that fine china, antique silver, fur coats, name-brand handbags and shoes, all on display when you go for a prowl. We worked up enough of an appetite for a pub lunch, with hot shepherd's pie washed down with ale.

The hotel's May Fair Bar also happens to be London's hottest new watering hole. The jolly hour starts at sundown and goes to the wee hours. Ever a people-watcher, I joined a gang of self-appointed young lions and high flyers at their latest sport: guessing the ingredients in the bar's award-winning cocktails. Having spent more time cooking than I suspect most of those smart young things ever did, I put them to shame.

The signature martinis, created by "head mixologist" Marios Elias, are no longer a shot of "gin with a twist." Now they come in neon colors, scented with exotic flavors. Stop by, find a seat at a table, check out the smoked glass panels and oriental art, and sample Elias' famous mojitos. They and the martinis are priced from 50 to 150 GBP).

If your idea of bright lights includes a night at "the tables," ask for a guest pass to the glittering Palm Beach Casino, sequestered behind an unobtrusive door near the concierge desk. This members-only casino has occupied a cave-like hideaway here since 1927 when his majesty King George V opened the hotel, the start of 50 glamorous years and a parade of visitors from five continents. Happily, I came away with my wallet intact.

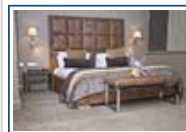
If you fly under the radar like we do, you'll appreciate the commitment to service. Service was spot-on during our stay, and the concierge staff was available and informed. Waitresses and maids were prompt and helpful. When the drain in the shower coughed and water threatened the carpet, the in-house engineer was at the door in a jiffy. We booked two massages in the Asian-themed spa, where the large gold Buddha-mask and hushed atmosphere banished all street noise. Exotic oils and ointments from Algothem and Pevonia Botanica completed the Tibetan illusion.

Truly avant-garde, the decor is a novelty, the "it" theme for today, but fated-to-be-dated. Abandoning flowery chintz, the lobby lounge is the most severe -- off-putting, actually -- with white, black and champagne walls and floors, and minimalist furniture in black and purple chairs. Brrrrr! A few plump sofas with ample coffee tables

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wouldn't be amiss.

In the 10 smaller suites, the interior decorator hit high C, juxtaposing pink, red, pumpkin orange and silver with gold, blue and brown. If it wasn't chrome, steel or ceramic, it was shag, straw, velvet, silk, tanned cow hides or lacquered wood. In contrast, numerous large decorative pieces are Asian, and antiques. If you're color-sensitive, check the photos before you book one of these.

Our double guest room, was swathed in rich browns, cocoa, coffee, wheat and white. The headboards were retro-1940s padded frames, and beds were heavenly, like sleeping on a cloud. All the contemporary conveniences were present and accounted for: upholstered armchairs, a desk, recessed lighting, flat-screen TV, entertainment center, big closets, built-in drawers, iron and ironing board, robes and an electronic safe. The marble-tiled bathrooms had overhead showers and decorator fixtures -- the European-style tubs were long and deep, promising a delicious soak. But by this time, I was spoiled. I'd seen the penthouse first.

**INCIDENTAL INTELLIGENCE:**

During the low season in March 2009, superior double rooms start at \$175 on weekends and \$200 on week days. Add \$25 to \$55 to include full English breakfast. Seasonal discounts are available. Prices are nearly double during holidays and high seasons.

The May Fair Hotel is a member of the Radisson Edwardian group. Contact: resmayf(at)radisson.com or visit [www.radissonedwardian.com/Mayfair](http://www.radissonedwardian.com/Mayfair), 1-800-333-3333.

(Anne Z. Cooke and Steve Haggerty explore the world from Venice, Calif.)

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