

FINANCIAL TIMES

HOW TO SPEND IT

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DAINTREE — ST BARTHS — PARIS — ZAGORA DESERT — THE BAHAMAS — MEXICO CITY — BAHÍA SOLANO — ST-ÉMILION — LAKE COMO

Below: bar seating at the Hotel Chelsea's El Quijote restaurant.
Below centre: a bedside table in one of the rooms



TRAVEL NEWS

Remade in Chelsea

From a New York icon to a Bermuda beach classic, landmark hotels are making a comeback

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As New York stories go, the Hotel Chelsea's is good enough to have filled pages already. Opened in 1884 as one of the first Manhattan private co-ops (and, at 12 storeys, then the tallest building on the island), it evolved through the 20th century on a wild up-and-down trajectory involving multiple ownership changes, famous tenants (among them Allen Ginsberg, Arthur Miller, Jasper Johns, Betsey Johnson, Patti Smith and Bob Dylan), notorious film and photography shoots (Warhol's *Chelsea Girls*; Madonna's *Sex*), and a handful of legendary demises (such as that of Dylan Thomas, in 1953, who supposedly sank

an entire bottle of whiskey in his final hours). With hotel guests partially subsidising long-term residents, and grand old (if virtually falling down) interiors, it continued to attract romantics until its sale and closure – as a hotel, anyway – in 2011.

Cut to spring 2022, and the Hotel Chelsea is open, once again, for business. After yet more ownership scuffles, tenants' rights agitations that stalled all work for two-plus years, and the pandemic, it has quietly, partially reopened under owners Richard Born, Ira Drukier and Sean MacPherson. That's a formidable New York triad – between them the three are responsible for The Mercer, The Bowery, The Jane and Maritime Hotels, the Waverly Inn, and half a dozen more seminal Manhattan addresses (MacPherson has been called "the man who shaped Downtown" by *The New York Times*).

What have they changed? Some original elements remain: artworks collected throughout the heyday '70s, '80s and '90s, by the likes of Donald Baechler and Sandro Chia, for instance. Fireplaces in some rooms, stained glass in others. True to the building's hybrid hotel-residence history, these still range hugely in size, from queen-bed studios to two-bedroom pieds-à-terre. But the vestiges of the past

factor into a master refit: the Hotel Chelsea monogram is now inlaid into entrance halls, and embossed on doorknobs; bed linens are customised 400-thread (also with logo); the pieds-à-terre feature Lacanche cooktops and ranges in the kitchens.

Downstairs, the lobby and lobby bar are the beneficiaries of a careful polish. The mosaic floors and inlaid ceiling have been simply but meticulously restored, while plush solariums have been added to the lobby bar, where both hotel guests and anyone who books have access to a smart cocktail and small-plates menu. Rooftop spa and fitness centre, check (for summer); semi-private dining room in the original El Quijote restaurant, check. Another, eventual French-ish restaurant, check. Depending on one's nostalgic leanings, the new Hotel Chelsea is either a travesty of history, or instantly on the must-do list. *From \$295; hotelchelsea.com*

Above: the Lobby Bar.
Below: a two-bedroom pied-à-terre



THE DINING ROOM AT EL QUIJOTE RESTAURANT

