



BROWN'S HOTEL London

The restoration of Brown's was always going to be tricky. A Mayfair hotel since 1837, occupying a block of 18th-century buildings between Albemarle and Dover Streets, it was for many years a much-loved place to take your aunt for tea, and woefully lacking in pizzazz. The news that it was to be Rocco Forte's London flagship caused a stir: could he and Olga Polizzi add some flair without losing the charm? We think they've achieved it: indeed, since its glitzy December 2005 launch, the hotel has developed a discreetly bi-polar personality. The Terence Donovan Bar (duck-egg blue, Donovan prints, jazz guitarist) buzzes away with twenty- and thirty-somethings ordering five types of Bloody Mary across a black leather bar. The Grill restaurant, with its oak panelling and inverted pear-drop lights, is more 'old Brown's': pies and puddings share the menu with lighter, newer dishes (but nothing to frighten a former public schoolboy). Rooms and bathrooms, large for London, fizz with Polizzi touches: mosaics, glass and ceramics, striped silk curtains, Missoni throws, great bathroom sound and an Aquavision TV at the end of the bath itself. But there are odd omissions: fling open your curtains and you are exposed to the houses opposite (there's no linen layer); the card keys are temperamental; a fine print on the wall was obscured by my TV. The staff are charming and helpful, although my bag went to the wrong room and my lamb cutlets turned into a mixed grill. It'll settle. It's Brown's.

WHEN TO GO Winter, for the Bloody Marys and comfort food.

ROOM TO BOOK 101 (honestly), a Royal Suite with double chaise longue.

33 Albemarle Street, London W1 (020 7493 6020; www.roccofortehotels.com).

Doubles from £347; Royal Suite £3,026

Top, the Hellenic Suite at Brown's Hotel in London. **Left**, boldly coloured modern furniture in the lobby of the Byblos Art Hotel, a favourite with design-lovers