

NEWSLETTER

The T List

A Thoughtfully Designed Homestead on a New Zealand Sheep Farm

Plus: a mistress's chateau in France, a railcar-inspired resort in Thailand and more recommendations from T Magazine.

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NEW ZEALAND

A Secluded Homestead in the Southern Alps



The patio of the four-bedroom Flockhill Lodge, dwarfed here by Broken Hill, is made of poured concrete topped with limestone tiles. The outdoor furniture is by Minotti. Courtesy of Flockhill

By Michaela Trimble

On New Zealand's sparsely populated South Island, an alpine retreat has opened in the windswept Craigieburn Valley. Flanked by three ski fields in the Craigieburn Range and nestled near limestone formations once used as shelter by the Ngāi Tahu, the traditional Māori stewards of the land, Flockhill Lodge is a four-bedroom homestead set within Flock Hill Station, a working sheep farm comprising 36,000 acres. Located near Arthur's Pass National Park, the lodge was designed by the architect Jonathan Coote, of the Auckland-based firm Warren and Mahoney, to give guests a real sense of place. "When you're here, you're absolutely consumed by the scale and majesty of the landscape," says Coote, whose straightforward approach includes timber, limestone and tinted concrete cast in slim layers, as well as a simple pitched timber roof, an ode to the utilitarian farm structures scattered around the homestead. Each of the four bedrooms features organic New Zealand-made interiors: wool-and-bamboo silk rugs by Nodi, hand-blown glass lamps by Monmouth Glass Studio and reclaimed rimu-wood bed frames topped with Merino Dreamwool mattresses and alpaca blankets produced on a farm near Dunedin. Along with the pool, hot tub and firepit on the expansive terrace, the rooms are positioned in a straight line so as not to interrupt the views of glimmering Lake Pearson and Sugarloaf Mountain. Accessible via a 25-minute helicopter ride or a 90-minute drive from Christchurch, the lodge includes a private chef and an attendant who can advise guests on activities to enjoy during their stay, from mountain biking on the single-track trails in nearby Craigieburn Forest Park to hiking along the Waimakariri, one of the largest braided rivers in New Zealand. *Rooms from \$7,300 per night, two-night minimum; flockhillnz.com.*

FRANCE

A Royal Château in the Loire Valley



The gardens behind the Château Louise de la Vallière in Reugny, France, feature roses, trellised apple trees, topiaries and a water mirror. Éric Sander

By Yulia Denisjuk

After a two-year search for a restoration project in France's Loire Valley, the Swiss entrepreneur Mira Grebenstein found the place of her dreams: the Château Louise de la Vallière, built in 1236. Louise de la Vallière was the favorite of Louis XIV's five official mistresses, or *maitresse-en-titres*. When de la Vallière's childhood home opens to guests on October 1 as a boutique inn, part of the Relais & Châteaux's network of luxury hotels around the world, it will mark Grebenstein's first foray into lodging; to convert the château into a 20-room retreat, she joined forces with the legendary French interior designer Jacques Garcia, whose prior projects include Château du Champ de Bataille in Normandy and Hôtel Costes in Paris. For five signature rooms, each dedicated to women (Madame de Pompadour, Marie Antoinette et al.) who held influence over various kings throughout history, Garcia hand-selected textiles and decor. In Madame de Maintenon's suite, the walls are dressed in *lampas*, a Renaissance-style blue silk with gold and red floral motifs that Garcia sourced from the renowned French fabric house Tassinari & Chatel. The reception displays original 17th-century tapestries and a glass cabinet with documents signed by Louis XIV legitimizing the two surviving children he had with de la Vallière. In the restaurant, chef Maxime Lesobre of Paris's Michelin-starred La Grande Cascade worked with the French gastronomy historian Jean-Claude Ribaut to recreate a seven-course menu typical of the Sun King's era featuring dishes such as vol-au-vent puff pastry with snails, eel and leek and veal sweetbread in a churned-milk marinade with caviar and turtle herb sauce. Beyond the château's walls, the roughly 46-acre estate has an ancient forest of bicentennial Lebanese cedars, now a wildlife refuge; a conservatory of figs (Louis XIV's favorite fruit); and a garden of "forgotten vegetables," where Lesobre sources plants such as skirrets, pencil-thin white roots with a potato-esque texture and a sweetness reminiscent of parsnips and carrots. "This is our goal," says Grebenstein, "to bring the spirit and taste of the past together for a riot of the senses while protecting the nature and wildlife around us." *Rooms from \$500; chateaulouise.com.*

THAILAND

A Railroad-Inspired Resort Near Khao Yai National Park



The gently curved ceilings of the one-bedroom heritage railcar suites at the InterContinental Khao Yai Resort in Thailand incorporate textiles from Jim Thompson Fabrics. Courtesy of InterContinental Khao Yai Resort

By Nora Walsh

Wealthy Bangkokians have long escaped the capital’s clammy heat by heading two and a half hours northeast to the cool, forested hillsides surrounding Khao Yai National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site spanning about 900 square miles. With the new InterContinental Khao Yai Resort, set on 46 evergreen acres near the park, the award-winning architect and interior designer Bill Bensley has transformed 22 cast-off train carriages into a lakeside teahouse, spa and 19 stand-alone suites with jungle terraces and plunge pools. Bensley leaned into the romance of 20th-century train travel for the reimagining, as well as the history of King Rama V, who is considered the father of the modern Thai railway system. “It’s a time warp into another era,” says Bensley, who collected much of the railroad memorabilia himself. Each carriage suite takes its inspiration from a different train journey in Southeast Asia: The upholstery, wallpaper, headboards and artwork were all custom-designed to reflect the landscapes and fabrics a passenger would see in Chiang Mai, Phnom Penh, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. Forty-five additional guest rooms mimic the look and feel of heritage train cars, with passenger-style windows, station signboards and green-and-white-striped trellis awnings shading balconies and outdoor bathtubs. The resort’s verdant grounds are sprinkled with five sparkling lakes and a canopy of banyan, baobab and eagle wood trees, while the national park just beyond houses a variety of wildlife (Asian elephants, gibbons, pig-tailed macaque), as well as plunging waterfalls such as the 82-foot Haew Suwat, made famous by a cliff-jumping Leonardo DiCaprio in the 2000 film “The Beach.” *Rooms from \$200; intercontinental.com/khaoyai.*

IVORY COAST

A Leafy Sanctum in the Abidjan Suburbs



The brass-accented bar at La Maison Palmier in Abidjan, the first Design Hotels property in West Africa, was hand-painted by the Nantes, France-based decorative-arts company Studio Julien Gautier to resemble green onyx marble. The bar stools are Iroko wood upholstered with velvet from Lelièvre Paris. Yann Deret, Design Hotels

By Peju Fajomure

As Ivory Coast works to revitalize more than seven million acres of rainforest by 2030, part of its five-year, \$1.5-billion Abidjan Legacy Programme, a palm-fringed oasis awaits in Abidjan, an economic hub of five million people. La Maison Palmier is the first boutique property in West Africa to join Design Hotels, a collection of more than 300 independently owned luxury inns spread around the world. This one is located in the upmarket Deux Plateaux neighborhood in the suburb of Cocody, a fine jumping-off point for galleries, shops and restaurants. Designed by the Ivorian architect Désiré M'bengue, the 74-room hotel comprises nine buildings linked by garden paths and camouflaged amid 200 species of palm trees. The maison recalls the midcentury modern work of Catalan architect José Antonio Coderch and the minimalist Cycladic architecture of the Mediterranean. Whitewashed walls, fake wood ceilings and handwoven textiles offer a refreshingly different design beat from the more corporate hotels found throughout Abidjan. The hotel's owner, the real estate developer Abdallah El Ghandour, says the goal was to create "a scene from an exotic travelogue" — a vision he realized by hiring French interior designer Maxime Liautard and Senegalese textile designer Aissa Dione. In the hotel bar, where fashionable locals gather for Mango Mule mocktails, striped banquettes and rattan ceiling fans bring tropical energy, while the brass-accented mirrored bar adds a touch of glamour. An emerald-hued marble pool flanks a Parisian-style terrace — both ideal for basking in Abidjan's year-round balmy weather. African materials are incorporated throughout, from the Ghanaian stones in the terrazzo flooring to the Ivorian cocoa in the silky-smooth chocolate mousse at Le Bistrot Palmier, the hotel restaurant. *Rooms from \$200, including breakfast; lamaisonpalmier.com.*

UNITED STATES

A Pedigreed B&B in Rural Vermont



Left: The parlor library at South Shire is paneled in rich mahogany. The chess set on the 150-year-old teakwood coffee table is from Rajasthan, India, and includes pieces hand-carved from bone. Right: The Otto Suite features an antique four-poster bed made up with Egyptian cotton sheets from Matouk. Lorianne Weathers

By Cynthia Rosenfeld

Thirty years after accepting founder Adrian Zecha's invitation to join the nascent Aman Resorts brand, and having managed such celebrated properties as Amanpuri in Phuket, Thailand, and the Oberoi Udaivilas in Udaipur, India, Joseph Polito purchased a dingy bed-and-breakfast in Bennington, Vermont, in 2021. He'd fallen hard for the Queen Anne Victorian-style house from 1887, with its gabled roofline, veranda and carriage house designed by William C. Bull, a prominent local architect of the late-Victorian period. "But the inside looked like Granny's house," recalls the Rochester, New York-born hotelier, who removed every last ceramic figurine and doily to draw attention to the ornate plaster moldings, leaded glass pocket doors and windows operated by weighted pulleys. The Karen hill-tribe headdress Polito bought off a woman's head in northern Thailand now tops the Beethoven bust in the mahogany-paneled library, where Burmese opium weights adorn a teakwood coffee table from Lombok, Indonesia. A chess set hand-carved in Rajasthan, India, is one of several parlor games that accompany the complimentary self-serve bar stocked with Lillet, Benedictine and brandy. In South Shire's nine bedrooms, Matouk linens grace the beds, most of which have antique or four-poster frames, with Frette bathrobes and Flores toiletries rounding out the five-star amenities. The Bangkok-based architect and interior designer Bill Bensley suggested red tip photinia shrubs to complement the grounds' prodigious beechnut and maple trees, which are more than 135 years old. Polito, a trained chef who began his hospitality career alongside Daniel Boulud and Jacques Torres at New York's Mayfair Regent hotel, serves regionally inspired dishes such as locally sourced venison bourguignon and cranberry panna cotta with crème fraîche from Vermont Creamery. These are plated on his favorite Portuguese ceramicware, but Polito insists that none of these material elements matter as much as meaningful human interactions. The Aman manager turned real-life Bob Newhart chats with every guest, recommending nearby canoeing lakes, deserted swimming holes and cross-country ski trails, as well as neighborhood treasures like the world-renowned collection of Grandma Moses folk paintings at the Bennington Museum, poet Robert Frost's grave at Old First Church and Vermont Shepherd sheep milk cheeses. "Mr. Zecha taught us to take care of people as if they were guests in our own home," says Polito. "This costs nothing but makes all the difference." *Rooms from \$225, including breakfast; southshire.com.*

A Nature Retreat in the Hudson Valley



Left: The entryway of the Ridge Cottage at Wildflower Farms in Gardiner has a hand-blown Murano glass light fixture and a hand-knotted wool rug commissioned by New York-based interior design studio Ward + Gray. Right: The walls and pitched ceilings of the Bower Cabins are covered in tent-like worn canvas sourced from Lord Fabrik in Maryland. Courtesy of Auberge Resorts Collection

By Janet O'Grady

Staying at Wildflower Farms is like stepping into a Hudson River School landscape painting — at least that's the feeling that Auberge Resorts Collection hopes to evoke at its new nature-gone-luxe retreat in Gardiner, about 90 minutes north of Manhattan. Sixty-five cabins, cottages and suites, designed by California architecture studio Electric Bowery, are tucked into the woodlands of this 140-acre escape at the foot of the Catskills. The entrance, a 3,500-square-foot portico, is more of a great room than a standard hotel lobby with its cushy sofas and locally made sheepskin poufs. Textured interiors take their inspiration from vintage Americana, the area's rich antiques history and the wildflower-flecked meadows just beyond the guest rooms' floor-to-ceiling windows and private decks. Every object, whether it was found or custom-made, "feels as if it came from someone's home," says Christie Ward of New York design firm Ward + Gray. This includes framed antique textiles, handmade quilts in moody fall colors, large-scale botanical art by Stuart Thornton and glass sconces with forsythia motifs. At the hotel's Clay restaurant, overseen by executive chef Rob Lawson, hand-knotted tapestries depicting the four seasons hang from the fireplace; and the chairs, inspired by Arts and Crafts-style turned-oak pieces that Ward + Gray spotted in an upstate antiques shop, were made to order in Mexico and upholstered in Pindler mohair. Clay's menu makes the most of New York's seasonal ingredients: a salad featuring six varieties of tomato grown on-site; a charcuterie board with meats from La Salumina in Hurleyville and cheeses from Old Chatham Creamery in Groton; and a heritage breed chicken wrapped in kombu, baked in potter's clay and then cracked tableside for a little drama. The hotel's Maplehouse cooking school offers lessons in foraging and baking with botanicals, while its 9,000-square-foot spa features an indoor saltwater pool, two outdoor hot tubs and treatments that incorporate essential oils made by local organic beauty brand Cultivate Apothecary. *Rooms from \$1,000; wildflowerfarms.com.*