

The cool hotel guide

The Montpellier Chapter Hotel, Cheltenham

You do not check in the usual way at this new multimillion-pound hotel (to which the *Cool Hotel Guide* had a sneak preview this week) ... you are "approached". As I walked up the steps of the fine Regency façade and entered through old glass doors marked "SH" (many moons ago this was the Savoy Hotel), a floppy-haired man holding a laptop and wearing Converse trainers stepped forward.

He had been standing by a chunk of oak shaped like a giant cannonball (which is all there seemed to be in terms of a "check-in desk"). In moments I was being led past lovely pieces of modern art from St Martin's College in London, an open coal fire, designer chairs, mahogany coffee tables — and up stairs of plush charcoal-grey carpet to my room.

There was more modern art from St Martin's here (intriguing pictures of multicoloured wool), more charcoal-grey



The elegant lounge at the Montpellier Chapter, in the centre of Cheltenham

carpet, an oval bathtub (in the bedroom), and a slate-grey bathroom with pricey-looking aromatherapy products. It was a slick affair with a low-slung bed, fancy lighting, oak cupboards and chairs, and a 3G iPod programmed with albums and linked to various internet "apps". To see if this worked, I checked the BBC weather site and discovered that it was -2C outside in Cheltenham.

There was also a complimentary

minibar containing a couple of bottles of Heineken and a few cans of soft drinks and Hildon water — a nice touch.

The Montpellier Chapter is named after its neighbourhood in the centre of Cheltenham, next door to the famous ladies' college (guests can use the college's Olympic-size pool without charge). Its opening heralds the start of a new mid-to-upmarket hotel chain — in the same hospitality ballpark as Hotel du Vin.

There are plans for sister properties in Exeter and Bristol. The latter will be where the current Avon Gorge Hotel stands, splendidly overlooking Clifton Suspension Bridge. The investor, Swire Hotels, owns Far East properties and is from the group that runs the Cathay Pacific airline. The organisation is not short of a bob or two: and it shows. Montpellier has been designed by Ken Shuttleworth, who has worked on the Gherkin in London and Beijing's new international airport. There is a swish open-air atrium framed by coloured glass panes, a 16-room crescent-shaped wing at the back (there are 61 rooms in all), and a cosy bar with designer chairs and an excellent mini-library. The restaurant, adjacent to the bar, is buzzy and stylish, and my crispy-duck salad, followed by roast pheasant, was first rate; the menu is modern British with a few oriental twists ... very good indeed.

Minor complaints were that I could hear music from the bar in my room, and that lights from the front of the building seeped in brightly from behind the curtains. This, however, is nit-picking. The Montpellier is a fine (reasonably priced) new hotel.

Tom Chesshyre

The Montpellier Chapter (01242527788, chapterhotels.com), Bayshill Road, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL50 3AS. Room-only doubles from £125. First Great Western (firstgreatwestern.co.uk) has advance-purchase Paddington-Cheltenham returns from £18. **Room 8 Service 8.5 Food 9 Value 9 Score: 8.63**