

Hotel Review | The Montpellier Chapter, Cheltenham

A new hotel from a new hotel chain gets the green light from our hotel reviewer, but what's a giant nut doing in reception?



Sally Shalam
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The Montpellier Chapter's lounge and library.

A new British hotel chain, Chapter Hotels, launched this week, in the quiet, stuccoed gentility of Cheltenham. Owned by Swire, a multi-national concern whose portfolio includes Cathay Pacific airlines, the group aims to deliver affordable, contemporary style. The Montpellier Chapter will be followed in 2012 by another in Exeter.

The Montpellier Chapter

Bayshill Road, Montpellier,
Cheltenham

GL50 3AS

01242 527788

chapterhotels.com

From £125-£220 per night, room only. Penthouse, £400. Full English breakfast, £7.50.

Three-course dinner around £40 per head excluding drinks

The press bumf is littered with words like superb, artisan, inspiration, craftsman, even genius. Can't help wondering whether my notes will be littered with the word "gimmick".

"See you around 7pm," I email Bea, "and prepare to be swept off your feet."

"I recognise this place," I tell the taxi driver when he draws up outside an attractive early Victorian villa. "It used to be called Hotel Kandinsky. It opened in the late 90s with a nightclub and a wood-fired pizza oven."

Ooh, hello. There appears to be a giant hazelnut where reception would normally be. Staff (natty in low-slung trousers and Converse trainers) are standing around the hazelnut (actually a solid hunk of carved wood) waiting for something to happen. I feel a bit silly.

Paperless check-in (a laptop resting on the nut) over, I'm off to my room. There are 61 in all, most in the original 1847 villa, but I'm in the new, crescent-shaped rear extension, reached via a wedge of glass-encased courtyard.

The pale expanse of Room 106, with a big bath halfway along its open-plan length, seems to beg for a party. Floaty curtains divide room areas, expanses of blond wood conceal wardrobes, ironing things, Nespresso machine, mini bar of free beer and water. Big windows overlook tennis courts. Hotel info is delivered via iPod; a smart catalogue tells me all about the original art on the walls.

Down in the library, while I'm reclining on a Matthew Hilton sofa, sipping a mocktail, Bea arrives. "Ooh, I'd never have found out about this place," she says, with a satisfied look.



The hotel was built in 1847.

Where my room is all light and space, Bea's, in the original building, is cosy, with rich velvet, dark carpeting and slate in the bathroom.

We love the restaurant, with its (new, swanky) wood-fired oven and indoor barbecue. "The curved seating reminds me of Soho's Atlantic Bar & Grill in its heyday," says Bea. It's draughty, mind.

The menu is light on vegetarian excitement, but the quail's egg tart is an exquisite starter. Roast pheasant with game chips and bread sauce, and a fillet steak au poivre go down very nicely thank you, but not as well as perry-poached pear and an extraordinary blood orange posset.

An adventurous wine list from a whippersnapper of a sommelier, and a sense of pent-up excitement from the staff remind me of Hotel du Vin in its infancy. Add in wonderful beds, the paintings, a well-stocked library, Aromatherapy Associates toiletries, pleasing and comfortable furniture and delicious loose-leaf tea at breakfast, and we're giving it a green light.

Any faults? I always think rates that don't include breakfast are a cheat. "Nothing to read in the room," says Bea, "And that funny reception."

Ah, the giant nut. I knew I'd get gimmick in somewhere.

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