

The Collective for Good, Siem Reap, Cambodia

As a photographer and travel writer I've been a frequent visitor to the magical Angkor Wat and the town of Siem Reap over the years since my first visit in 2001 initially fascinated by the temples then fell in love with the people, over the years I've been privileged to see the place grow and evolve into an incredible destination that takes its sustainability and socially beneficial credentials very seriously. My favourite place to stay has been the [Treeline Urban Resort](#) run by another Kiwi Joni Aker, it's designed and owned by Hok Kang a famous Cambodian Architect and founder of Browns Coffee cafes. Built with local materials and with a genuine heartfelt commitment to sustainability and nurturing Cambodian artists, The Treeline is the perfect place to be based. Joni the GM keeps me up to date on what's happening on the sustainability front in town and actively encourages local initiatives such as the Kandal Village project and the new Wat Bo neighbourhood initiative. Both are neighbourhood associations promoting places offering something new and original in their hoods. On my trip before last, she suggested I come back and do a story on a new initiative covering all of Siem Reap town.

#Sustainability

#Ecofriendly #socialenterprises #charities

#cafes #restaurants #hotels #resorts #conservation

#Destinations



A few years ago some key players in Siem Reap sustainable and socially oriented businesses got together and set up The Collective for Good where like-minded businesses could have an accreditation scheme for social responsibility to help the growing number of visitors wanting to know their patronage was going to those businesses genuinely trying to make a difference.

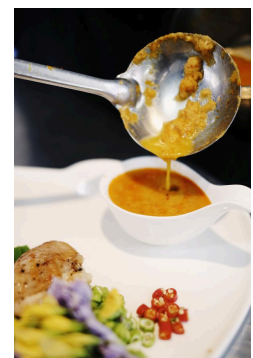
I spoke to David from Little Red Fox Espresso and Craig from Phare the Cambodian Circus who were key players in moving the Collective for Good forwards along with Sara and Paul from Haven. among a few others. The critical meeting was in January

2022, that Enno a very energetic OFFTRACK TOURS intern initiated and led, others present included Wild, Spoons and Heartprint. They explained how the concept was gladly embraced and the group grew to nearly a dozen members very quickly. Not everyone can pass the stringent requirements however but those genuinely wanting to join can always count on the Collective for help and advice on how to raise their sustainability efforts to join the group..

Collective members need to do away with plastic waste, source locally and sustainably as far as possible within the Cambodian context, offer staff medical benefits, and minimum wages, be a registered business, and pay tax and social benefits. In short, play fair and contribute to the community.

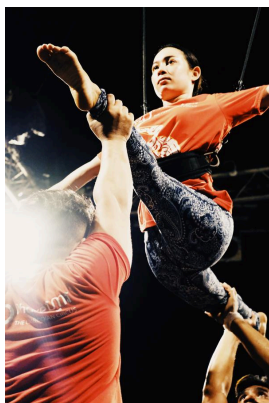
I discovered that many of the main players had come to Siem Reap over the years and like me been inspired by the warmth of the Cambodian people to return and set up businesses or charities hoping to improve the lot of the average Khmer. Mostly rural and entirely reliant on the tourist industry many locals were exploited by unscrupulous people, pseudo orphanages exploiting the children for tourist dollars as photo opportunities, and other "charities" fundraising only to disappear overnight a few months later. Post the "killing fields" the lot of the average rural Cambodian was pretty dire. Luckily with tourism and some good-willed businesses and NGOs, the internet and gradually improving conditions post covid, there is now a remarkable number of young Cambodians with mobile phones, laptops and knowledge of the connected world enjoying Cambodian cafes and arts/craft markets marking a real improvement in the lives and expectations of Cambodians.

I visited the famous Spoons a Hospitality Training Charity supported by their restaurant and cafe and now an official Cambodian charity after a Cambodian management team handover from the original international charity that struggled with fundraising during COVID. This is a great example of Cambodians stepping up and being active in raising expectations and opportunities for themselves. The school is very comprehensive having a great track record placing graduates into the local hospitality industry. The restaurant as well as providing valuable hands on experience also helps to fund the school itself and serves delicious classic Khmer dishes with modern flair garnish coming from their own herb farm out back!





A few years back I visited the Amazing Robert and Morrisson holding court at their fantastic Brick-a-Brack micro hotel in Battambang and was given an insiders walk through of Phare the circus school in Battambang, so it was a joy to meet Craig one of the founding members of the Collective for Good who is the Sales and Marketing Director of the performing arm of the school. Phare The Circus, in Siem Reap. All the Profits from the Circus in Siem Reap go to supporting the school's training program offering opportunities to local villagers in the Battambang area. Greg explained that the most important aspect of the school is not just giving training and work as circus talent but raising the expectations of local people who have often never travelled more than a few kilometres from their farms, or known any other expectations but to work, live and die on one. Many have never seen Angkor Wat their national treasure even though they only live a few kilometres away. The circus however has toured the world and been invited to perform in far and exotic places such as Paris and Miami. Having opened the eyes of the circus people to a world of possibilities many now aspire to be scooter mechanics or nail spa owners, previously inconceivable occupations! Greg feels that anyone operating as a business in Cambodia is obliged to give back to the local community, for foreigners setting up where there is little local competition, it's not fair to exploit that advantage, foreign business owners should operate ethically and not abuse the situation, a very important consideration for the Collective.





Chatting to Little Red Foxe's David he explained how he and his partner Adam, after visiting for many years took the plunge, invested their savings and set up the third cafe in Siem Reap. Offering their own vision backed by their hospitality business experience from Australia and a commitment to help their local Cambodian friends and people. Determined to be sustainable, over the years they gradually evolved from organizing community-based local street rubbish removal to completely doing away with plastics much as possible while sourcing organic and local produce for the cafe that had grown to include a fantastic selection of healthy food dishes! A joy to shoot and sample for sure! And very well frequented by health-conscious travellers and local regulars! Their staff have embraced the sustainable ethos and post covid during which the city transformed the local roads into properly paved dust-free thoroughfares they express a newfound civic pride, initiating plastic rubbish drives while encouraging plastic waste awareness amongst their friends and families. David feels that It's activities like these that create a real grassroots awareness of sustainability in the community.





Sara and Paul of HAVEN explained to me how they grew disillusioned with their lives in Switzerland, feeling “there must be more to life than this”. They saved, then quit their good corporate jobs, sold everything they had and started their extensive world trip. When they arrived in Siem Reap they deeply connected with the place and people. After learning about the lack of opportunities for young adults, it was impossible for them to go back to Switzerland. They wanted to stay, create meaningful opportunities for this next generation and contribute to the development of the community.

With a background in training and nutrition, they decided to set up HAVEN, a training restaurant taking in an annual group of young disadvantaged people and give them the theoretical and practical training to succeed in the food and beverage industry. Supported by the Restaurant itself the training is completely free to the students. They are provided with housing, medical benefits and training in not just the practical matter of working in a kitchen or as service staff but in food hygiene, stock taking, and interview techniques and guided to placements partnering hotels and restaurants regularly taking graduates in the thriving tourist sector. Every year at graduation the whole school and restaurant celebrate and experience immense satisfaction that another year's class of young lives have been uplifted and given opportunities previously unimaginable. Head chef Pardet, who has been with them from the start, eagerly receives visiting former students that come back to thank Chef and the team, telling their success stories of life in the big wide world. There is never a dull moment for SARA and PAUL who obviously thrive on the challenges and

achievements of each class.

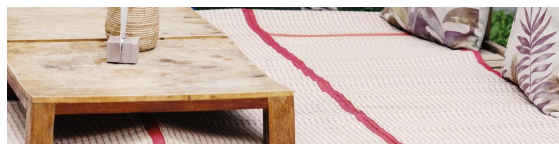






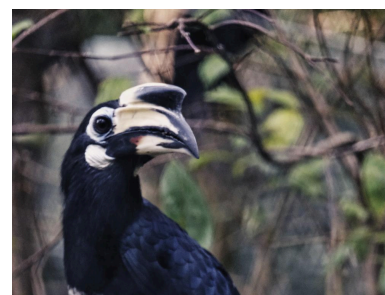
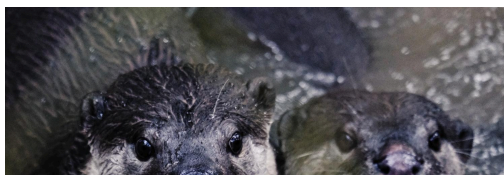
WILD is a real breath of fresh air on the local scene! Bringing exceptionally good cocktails to Siem Reap fusing classics with local flavours. Lorraine and Renaud a Parisian couple, left their successful but unfulfilling corporate careers fell in love with Siem Reap while Travelling. They were compelled to set up a mould-breaking outdoor cocktail bar. Renaud inspired by local food on a visit to the Reunion islands started offering them to friends and visitors and soon they took off big time transforming WILD into a lunch and dinner venue! Part of the attraction of Siem Reap was the opportunity to make a real difference by uplifting the local Cambodian's expectations and opportunities. While not being a social enterprise as such they pay their staff well above the local average and ensure they have medical benefits, good training and access to plastic-free food via the restaurant. WILD actively contributes to local Charities in kind or with funds generated from their shop area featuring sustainable local items and some WILD merchandise such as the nicely decorated stainless steel water bottles. Plastic-free is an important goal for them!

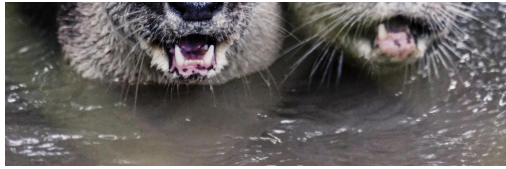




Other Collective members are contributing in different ways like ACCB a biodiversity Centre in the nearby Kulen national park dedicated to preserving endangered Cambodian animal species while also doing their bit to employ, train and source locally. Christel the Center director went out of her way to pick me up in Siem Reap and drove me through classic Cambodian countryside up into the foothills of the National park, while showing me around the beautiful jungle-embraced Centre Christel talked about how her team of Cambodian and international conservationists

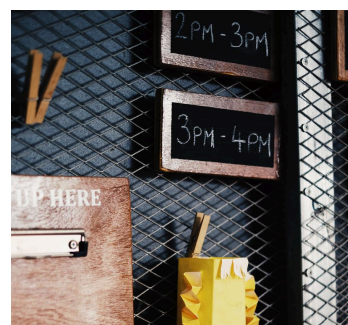
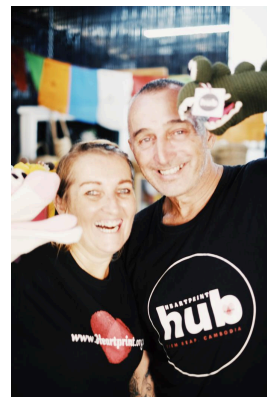
are doing their best to preserve some of Cambodia's most endangered species. The Centre provides a vitally important place to study and breed the endangered water birds and turtle species often unique to Cambodia. Rescuing animals from the trafficking trade provides some real characters, of course these vary depending on what rescued animals are at any time but i was lucky to see monkeys, civet cats (dont buyt the coffee!) and some amazing eagles! My particular loves were the cheeky and playful otters. The center engages on the national level with an outreach program to Cambodian temples that traditionally offer refuge to animals and collaborations with Universities that help shape the nation's attitudes to Conservation. Christel sees an increasing Cambodian interest in conservation and sustainability and is cautiously optimistic about the future.

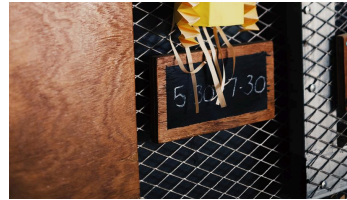




Over at the incredible Heartprint Hub, I chatted to Wendy and Garry about their holiday visits to Siem Reap over the years where they recognized a sore need for education and a safe haven for the children of siem reap especially those from poor families often struggling with addiction problems. Leaving their building business behind in Australia they were ideally placed to help build houses for the poorest families and supply social support, therapy, and assistance to children and expectant mothers in the surrounding villages. Heartprint hub is a cafe and shop that helps support their effects as well as Australian and other charity funding while giving vocational training to older young people with disabilities or disadvantaged

backgrounds.



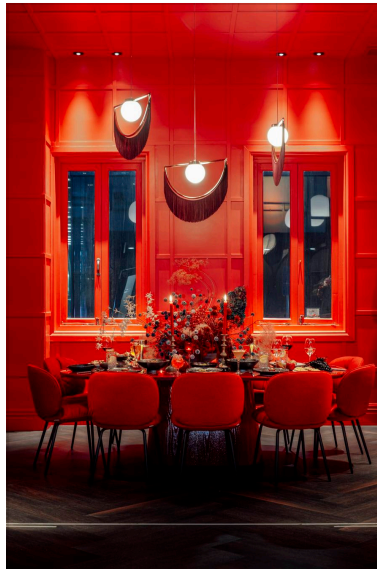




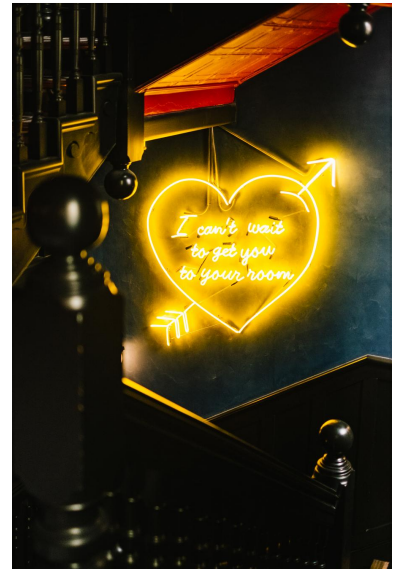
It was a great honour to be invited to meet and shoot some of The Collective for Good's movers and shakers. It's a valuable story that needs to be told and shows us all what's possible with determination and compassion. The Collective is a growing and dedicated alliance determined to offer genuine sustainability and a social conscience to visitors to siem reap who are concerned enough to care where their patronage goes and want to know that their visit benefits Cambodians and the planet as much as possible.



The Collective for
Good, Siem Reap



Lola Rouge,
Wellington



Naumi Studio Hotel,
Wellington



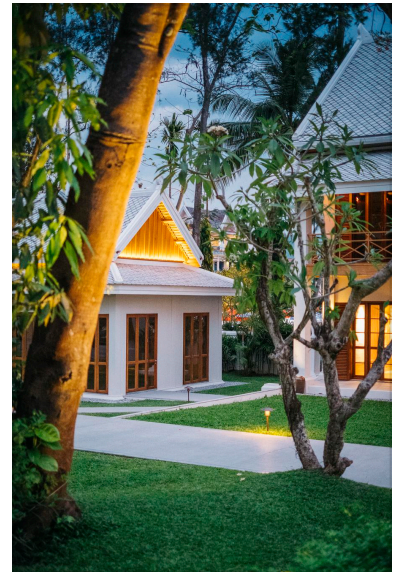
The Treeline, Siem Reap



Bric-à-Brac, Battambang



The Amantaka, Luang Prabang



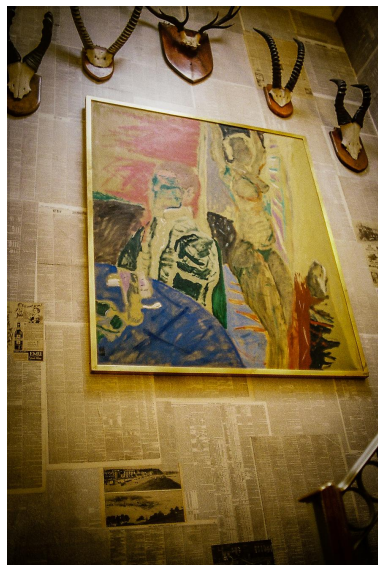
The Azerai, Luang Prabang



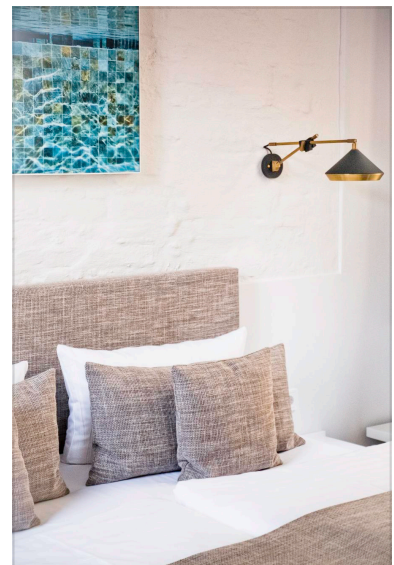
The Strand Hotel, Yangon



The Old Clare, Sydney



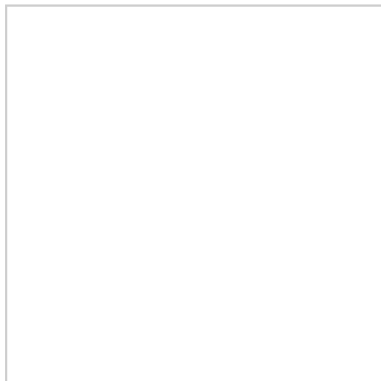
The Zetter Townhouse, Clerkenwell



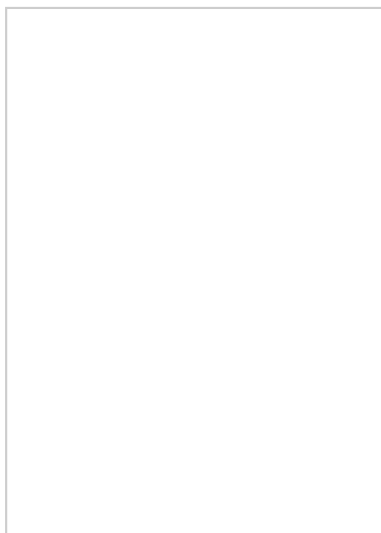
Hotel Oderberger Berlin



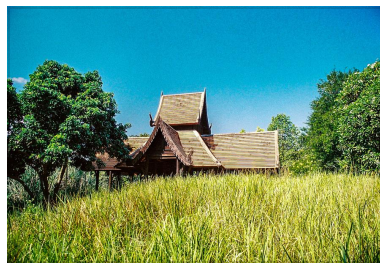
The Danforth Inn,
MAINE



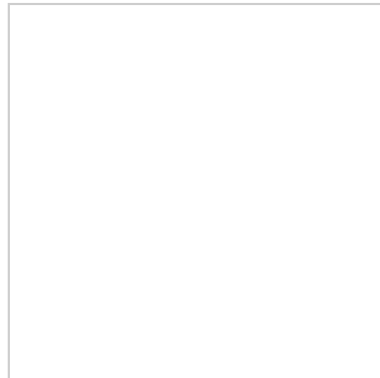
The Naka



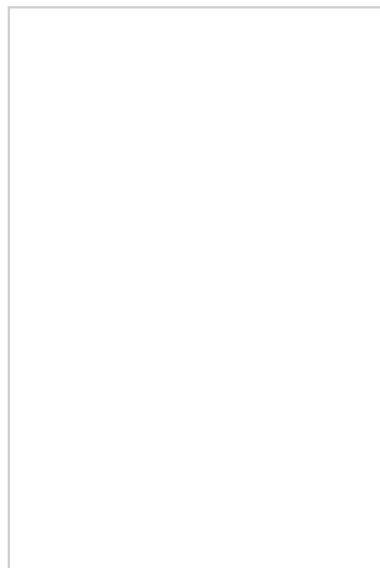
The Ace Hotel



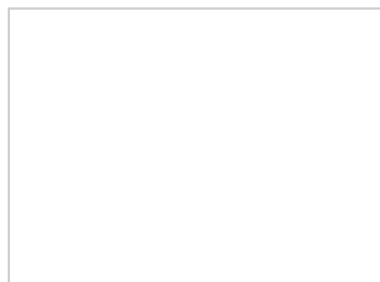
The Veranda, Chiang
Mai



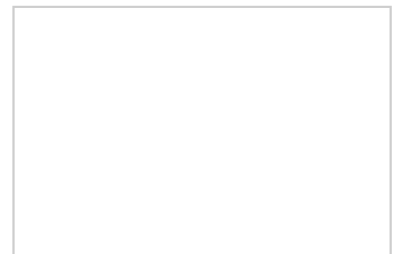
Knai Bang Chatt, Kep



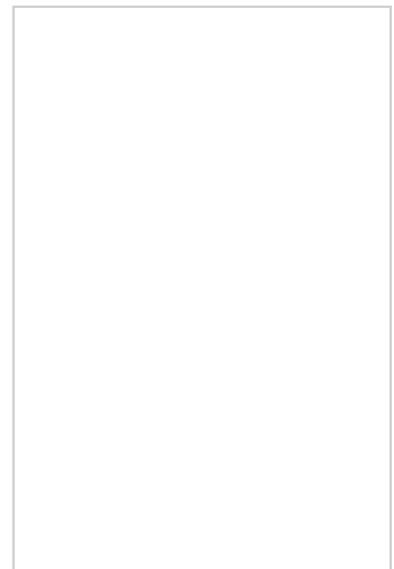
Salford Lads Club



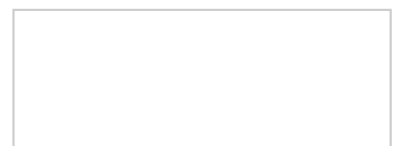
Luang Prabang

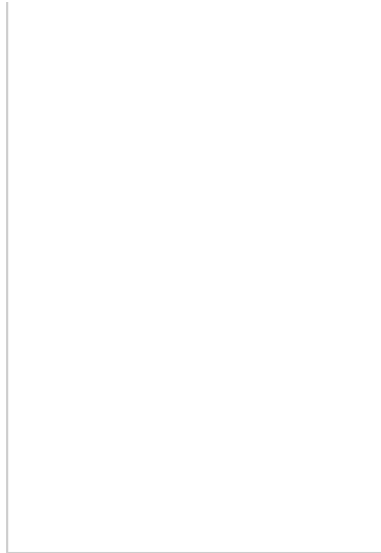


Oyster Inn, Waiheke

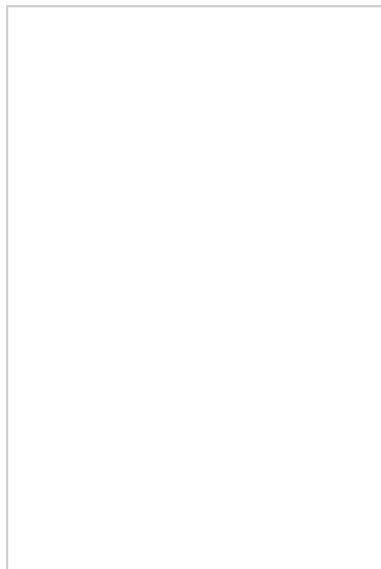


Fitzroy Quarter

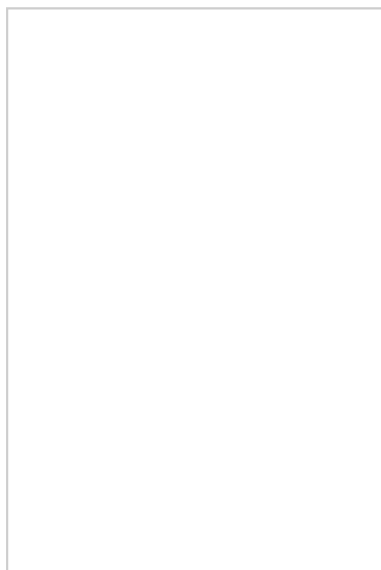




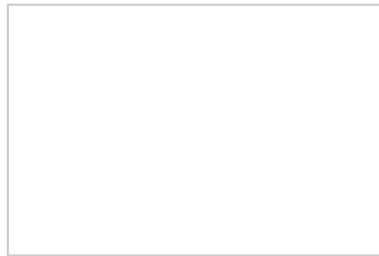
Hotel DeBrett



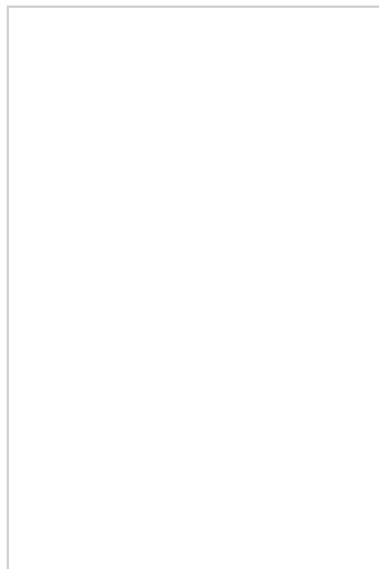
The Siam



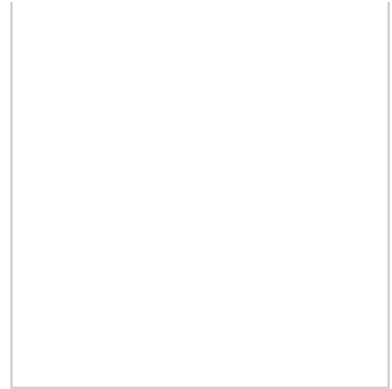
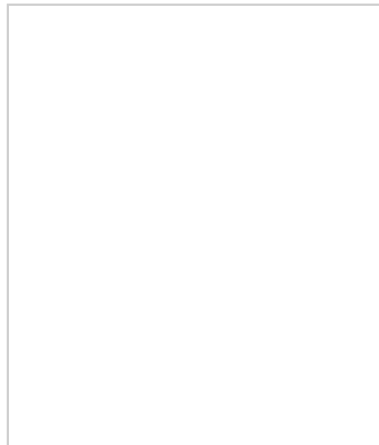
Town Hall Hotel



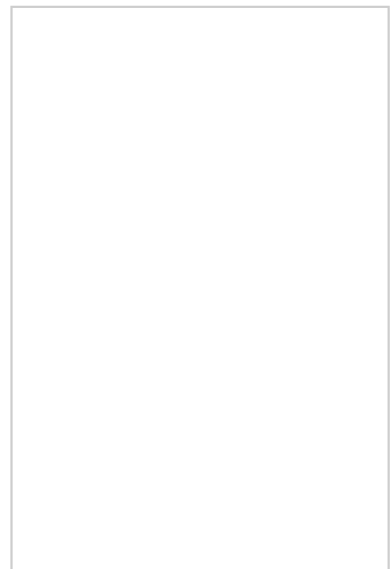
Quince



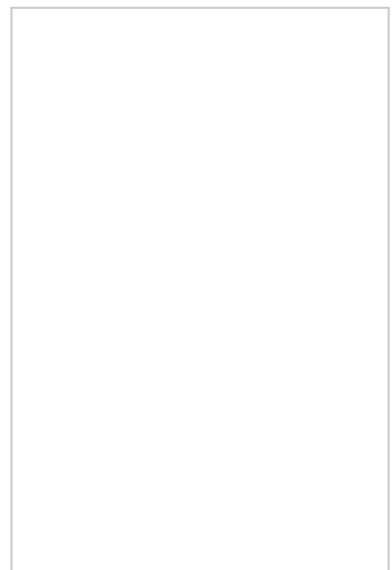
Aesop, Fitzroy



Bush Hall & Dining
Rooms

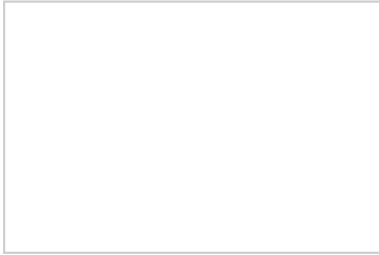


Hideaway, Yao Noi

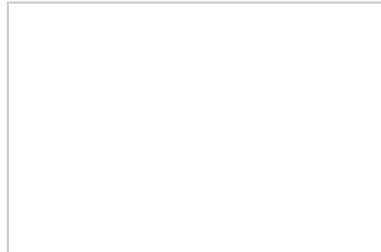


Shoreditch House

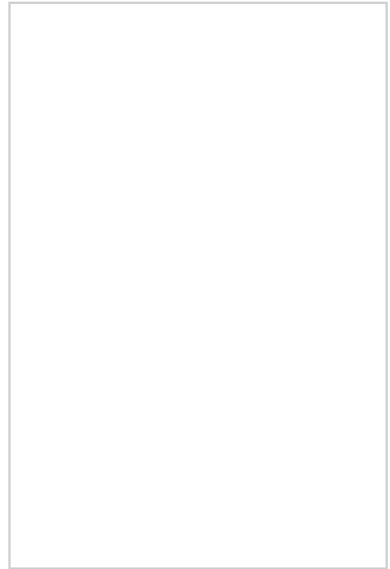
Columbia Road



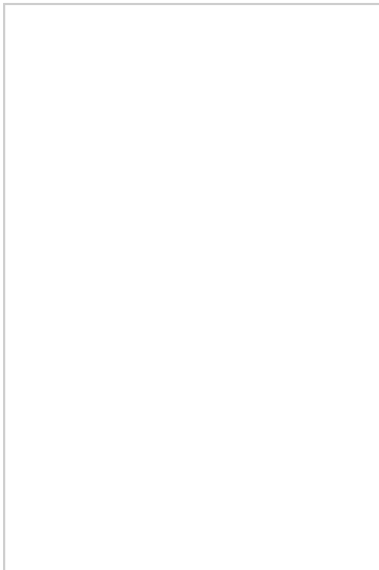
The Tsitouras
Collection Hotel



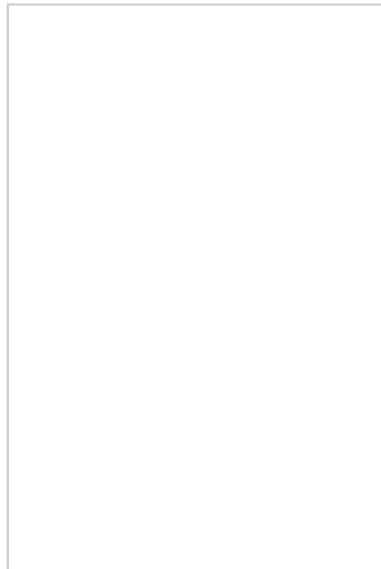
Ohtel



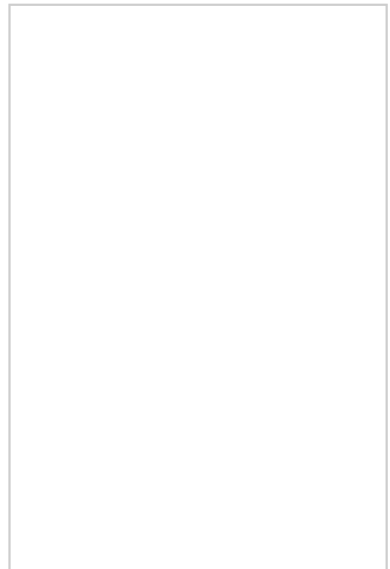
Lord Byron



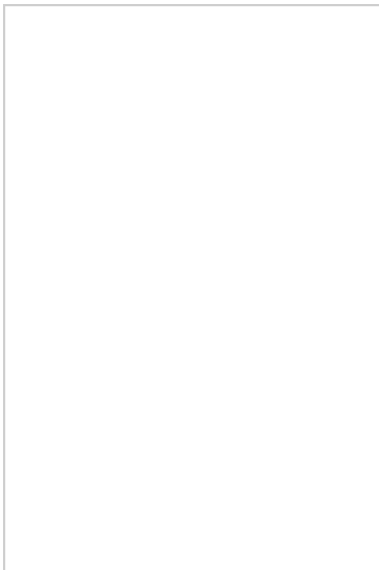
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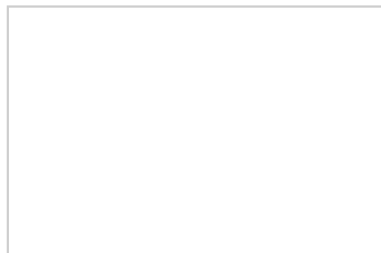
Lost and Found



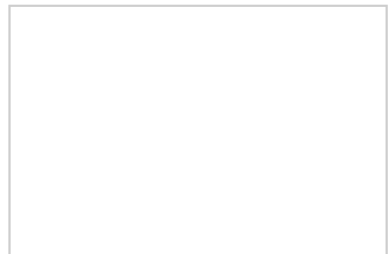
Charming House



The Boundary



ACE Hotel NYC



Hotel Particulier

Twitter, Instagram,