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THE GOLD LIST 2018

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COUNTRY HOTELS

GLENEAGLES PERTSHIRE, SCOTLAND

Ireland has long nailed the castle retreat, but Scotland has claimed back its crown with the suddenly revitalised Gleneagles. New owner the Ennismore group, under visionary Sharan Pasricha, has brought a gentle nod of London cool to this much admired but creaking institution, which first opened in 1924. All elements of the refurbishment are cleverly forward-thinking but not too scary for the old guard, a balance that is often tricky to achieve. Out went the orange Art Deco lighting, the swirly carpets and the arum lilies drowning in goldfish bowls and in came a sweep of dove-grey herringbone fabrics, painted panelling and pillows stacked four deep. In the speakeasy-style American Bar, designed by David Collins Studio, walls are clad in the palest lilac cashmere and Champagne-laced drinks are whipped up by scarlet-lipstick'd head bartender Lulu Fedi. In the Century Bar one of Gordon Ramsay's former mixologists concocts whiskey cocktails with a puff of gunpowder for a pre-dinner sharpener before guests head into Andrew Fairlie, the only two-Michelin-starred restaurant in the country. The golfers still have their championship courses and clubhouse, but everyone else (who now make up the majority) has the run of the rest. The landscape here is enduringly lovely: that crisp heathery air, the long summer nights when the sun lingers on the horizon, and the dark broodiness of the short winter days. Gleneagles Mark II is full of beans and undoubtedly one of the best weekend spots country-wide right now. +44 1764 662231; gleneagles.com. Doubles from £325



LE GRAND BELLEVUE GSTAAD, SWITZERLAND

Built in 1912 as a spa, this heavyweight palace hotel loosened up a few years ago when youthful new owner Daniel Koetser and his design-whizz wife Davia set about unbuttoning its formality. It now has a see-through, double-sided fireplace in the drawing room, jolly House of Hackney bird-prints on the walls, idiosyncratic side tables made from Alpine walking sticks and a life-size tweed camel standing guard at the bar entrance. Seats in the nightclub are carpeted for the inevitable dancing on furniture, and the kids' club has wallpaper to colour in. Everything is well-made, nothing is showy. In summer, Sunday brunches are a highlight, serenaded by jazz while chefs flip burgers and Champagne glasses are topped up. Leonard's is a Michelin-star bistro (beef tagliata, bouillabaisse Marseillaise, basil sorbet), and in winter there's a fondue cabin in the grounds. Compared to the lively public rooms, bedrooms are more subdued, with limed oak floors, enormous beds and big bathrooms bearing large tubs of Bamford products. Part of the fun of getting here is to ride on the Wes Anderson-style Golden Pass railway from Montreux, and on arrival it's possible to giddy up on a horse-drawn carriage, arrange a film screening with its own tasting menu, or take Roger Moore's 1962 Bentley for a spin (the Bond actor had a home in Gstaad and would rendezvous here for cocktails with Liz Taylor). But perhaps the Bellevue's star attraction lies underground in the wonderful, chalet-style spa complex, where it is possible to lose an entire day moving slowly from Himalayan salt grotto to hay sauna, pausing only for that essential goat-milk-and-honey bath. +41 33 748 0000; bellevue-gstaad.ch. Doubles from about £300

