



THIS PAGE: Guestrooms feature woodwork in polished mahogany, white veined marble for the bathrooms, details in chrome, and a mini-bar incorporated into a traveller's trunk. B&B Italia and Flexform supplied upholstered furniture whilst Lema Contract provided closets, doors, woodwork and custom furniture for guestrooms. Enzo Degli Angiuoni supplied custom fabrics for the curtains and headboards

Bulgari London

Words: Giovanna Dunmall Photography: Richard Bryant

No expense has been spared in the creation of Knightsbridge's Bulgari hotel, with sumptuous interiors by Antonio Citterio, Patricia Viel & Partners.

Gleaming black granite, polished mahogany and shiny leather greet you as you enter the lobby of London's spanking new Bulgari hotel, and almost everywhere else you turn in this elegant and opulent five-star hotel. Located in the heart of Knightsbridge, the Bulgari hotel stands across the street from the country's most expensive apartments – One Hyde Park – and boasts the sort of interiors and facilities that are the epitome of sophisticated but understated luxury. Aside from 85 rooms and suites, it offers an oak-and-mosaic tiled 2,000m² spa, a hi-tech gym, a 47-seater state-of-the-art cinema, a clubby leather-and-wood cigar shop and an 80-seat restaurant and bar.

Designed by architectural firm Antonio Citterio, Patricia Viel & Partners, with London-based Squire and Partners as the

delivery architects, the London hotel is the third of Bulgari's forays into luxury accommodation after the opening of its flagship hotel in Milan in 2004 and a stunningly picturesque resort in Bali in 2006. Bulgari's London location opened at the end of May 2012 and exudes the sort of confidence that you can only really pull off when the developer, in this case Prime Development, knows who is going to occupy the building before it is built. Everything seems to be in the right place for the right reasons, from the mechanical equipment (which is all hidden throughout the building's six basement floors) to the electricity socket located above the hairdryer drawer.

The 11-storey building (the top four floors house private apartments that have nothing to do with the Ritz Carlton-operated hotel), is made out of quintessentially London ▶





► Portland stone with handsome bronze detailing: window frames, roof cornices, balcony parapets and door and window fixtures on the ground floor; there's even a swirling bronze balustrade by British artist Nicky Hirst outside the small terrace bar. The 85 bedrooms are large – probably some of the most spacious in central London – and purposefully serene and streamlined affairs that use cossetting neutral tones (creams, greys, browns and blacks), wool carpets, silk fabrics and the aforementioned acres of polished Sapele mahogany to silently envelop you. In the bathrooms veined black Marquina marble reigns supreme. There are luxurious Frette towels and bathrobes, and Bulgari's addictive green tea amenities and candles. There's a floor-to-ceiling leaning mirror outside that at first looks randomly placed but – like everything in this place – is purpose-designed.

Custom-made beds have grey velvet bases,

velvet trunks at the foot of the bed, and above all, the delicate but striking gold-and-silver silk headboards shot through with a baroque floral motif based on a brooch designed by Bulgari founder Sotirio Bulgari back in the late 19th century. Minibars are housed in highly covetable black-and-grey coated canvas and leather vintage-style travel trunks (many guests have asked to have one custom-made). Given that Antonio Citterio is one of Italian furniture manufacturer B&B Italia's leading designers, it is no surprise to find that much of the furniture in the rooms and public spaces is designed by Citterio and manufactured by B&B Italia with special custom fabrics. The black wood and leather TV console and bedside tables are custom-made by Italian manufacturer Lema Contract to a design by Citterio, the armchairs in the rooms are by Flexform, and the floor lamps are by Flos. In addition, the seven top-end Bulgari Suites feature

massive vintage Moroccan carpets from the Beni Ouarain tribes, contemporary Murano glass chandeliers, great views of Hyde Park and Knightsbridge and some of them have sleek open fireplaces as well.

No expense has been spared. The Sapele mahogany, used to line many walls and for the hotel's doors and wardrobes, has been varnished 40 times. There is even a French polisher on site three days a week to ensure that it remains in tip-top condition. The hotel may be brand new but its evident and strong Italian heritage infuses it with a sense of history and substance.

Bulgari was founded by Greek émigré Sotirio Citterio who first started selling his ornamental silver wares in a shop in Rome's fashionable Via Sistina. Accentuating this heritage are the vintage Bulgari advertising posters in every bathroom, original film posters for Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow Up* and Federico Fellini's *La Dolce*

BELOW: Il Ristorante features mahogany floors and walls. The banquette seating is finished in dark brown leather and booths are upholstered in a combination of fabric and leather. BOTTOM: Il Bar has black granite floor, polished Sapele mahogany walls and panels in mirrored and mesh steel with frames in glossy steel



► Vita outside the hotel's cinema and original b+w photos from the Bulgari archives depicting the stars of the Dolce Vita in Rome on the walls of the cosy fire-lit library. In one wonderful print dating from 1957, Sophia Loren is giving a rather provocatively-dressed Jane Mansfield what can only be described as a dirty look.

The massive 2,000m² spa, with treatments by the world-renowned Espa, may be underground but it is an airy and wonderful place with a 25m long indoor pool (a rarity in central London hotels) and a shimmering vitality pool tiled with gold leaf mosaic. Once again the detailing here and the blend of precious, traditional and modern materials is extraordinary. The walls are lined in sandblasted Vicenza stone that is full of character and laid out slightly unevenly to create textured effects, while the pool is framed by seven illuminated columns of wavy opaque methacrylate and seven oak cabanas with marble side tables. The Vicenza stone (a stalwart of Palladian architecture) is a leitmotif throughout the spa and features throughout the 12 treatment rooms each of which has its own shower. The private double spa suite also features three green onyx walls that reportedly took a year to create given that all the veins are perfectly lined up. That in itself is mind-boggling.

The grand sweeping staircase that leads down to the restaurant features a hand-crafted and polished steel balustrade and a massive metallised fabric on the wall featuring hologram-style sketches of Bulgari jewellery pieces from the 1920s and 1930s. The restaurant itself is somewhat surprisingly windowless but, combined with the circular and majestic staircase, this lends it the atmosphere of an elegant early 20th century ocean liner. The tables with the banquette seating are a little more intimate and now that the hotel has sorted out its lighting (there was a problem with the dimming at first), the restaurant has the potential ►



► to be romantic as well as elegant.

A major design theme is silver, a tribute to the company's silversmith origins. Accordingly there are contemporary silver pieces displayed in cases in the entrance lobby, a bar made out of hammered and polished stainless steel that echoes silver-hammering techniques, and bedside table lamps inspired by Bulgari's vintage candlestick designs. The basement ballroom has a dome housing two awe-inspiring solid silver chandeliers weighing 90kg each that look like the swirling layered ballgown-skirts in motion. Another related design element that is repeated throughout the bedrooms and public spaces is the brushed and mirrored mesh steel screens with glossy steel frames. These can be found in the ballroom, in the bar, in the restaurant and in the bathrooms of the larger bedrooms and suites. They are used for privacy, to break up spaces and as a contrast to the use of wood.

Despite being designed to accommodate the most demanding of luxurious lifestyles, the building is also, perhaps surprisingly, comparatively sustainable: 25% less concrete and 65% less reinforcement than a traditional reinforced structure was used during construction, while ground source heat pumps have been installed for heating and LED, intelligent lighting to reduce energy consumption and a green roof to encourage local wildlife.

The longer you spend time at the Bulgari London, the more you appreciate the level of detail, expense and craftsmanship that has gone into every door handle, every window, every piece of fabric and every item of furniture. Even the floral arrangements and orchids are conceived to create different moods in different rooms and areas of the hotel. Bulgari London is the sort of place where you can spot another detail every time you visit. ■

ABOVE: The 25m swimming pool is lined with shimmering green and gold mosaic tiles, whilst the walls and floors are made from sandblasted Vicenza stone

EXPRESS CHECKOUT

Bulgari Hotel & Residences

171 Knightsbridge
London, SW7 1DW, UK
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7151 1010
www.bulgarihotels.com

- 🛏 85 rooms and suites
- 🍷 11 Ristorante
- 🍸 11 Bar
- 🧖 2,000m² spa, beauty & fitness area
- + 2 boardrooms, business lounge, 2 offices

Developer: Prime Development Limited
Operator: Bulgari Hotels
Interior Design & Architecture: Antonio Citterio, Patricia Viel & Partners
Delivery Architect: Squire & Partners