

UK

BANKSIDE HOTEL, LONDON

London's centre of gravity wobbles this way and that, but the South Bank has clocked a prime view of the action since Roman ships scudded up the Thames. But never has it seen so much urban drama as right now. Despite a profanity of high-rises gobbling up the sight lines, the Bankside Hotel is appealingly succinct at just six storeys behind Blackfriars Bridge, angled to catch the light. It's been curated by Dayna Lee, a former film-set designer for *Dances with Wolves*. What it brings to mind, though, isn't Hollywood but the set of a Sixties arts-and-culture TV show, with Elisabeth Frink and Harold Pinter poised in the wings. It's all those sheer white walls and honeycomb concrete, jaunty Scandi chairs and pottery shelves with line-ups of bone-white vases, and abstract shapes in every direction. One of the standout pieces, however, is the ceramic mural running along one wall of the restaurant and bar, picking out scenes from riverside history: Viking boats, fishing and the Great Fire. Boxes of sharpened pencils and hoodie-style bath robes are nice touches; pick up Tom Ford sunnies and even engagement rings from the lift-side vending machine. A mezzanine gallery with arts titles for browsing leads onto a garden terrace – views of the river and St Paul's are a little restricted but you're still in the stalls up here. There's a mid-century positivity, a Festival of Britain-style optimism; this is a thoughtful, pied-à-terre hotel for dedicated followers of London. **FLASH POINT** With water stations on each floor, single-use plastics are banished, and key cards are made from paper. +44 20 319 5988; banksidehotel.com. Doubles from £290



SWITZERLAND

CASA CAMINADA, FURSTENAU

There used to be a singular motive for skiers in Switzerland's Pinot Noir-producing Rhine Valley to ditch the glitz of St Moritz and head an hour west to the village of Fürstenuau après their après: Schloss Schauenstein, an understated 16th-century castle with a three-Michelin-starred restaurant. Now its chef, Andreas Caminada, is giving them reason to stay the night. Last October, he opened the exquisite Casa Caminada in a born-again barn on the castle grounds, where rustic ambience is tempered with urban touches, and authenticity replaces the musty luxuries ubiquitous in Swiss mountain-palace hotels. Upstairs, 10 sun-flooded rooms retain original exposed beams, enhanced by reclaimed larchwood-parquet floors and furniture custom-made by local carpenters. To soften the masculinity, Patricia Urquiola added pops of refined Italian style, including tangerine tweed sofas and brass and magenta linen loungers for absorbing sunshine or finishing a novel. It is unexpected and fabulous. The airy new restaurant, popular with hikers, offers an ugly-delicious alternative to the main castle's refined cooking. There are buttery and crunchy *maluns* (crumb-like dumplings made with shredded potatoes), ravioli filled with dried pears plucked from gnarled trees in the castle courtyard, and walnut tortes baked in a volcanic stone oven, all served with knock-out views of the surrounding Piz Beverin and Lenzerhorn mountains. Casa Caminada places the design and food expected of Milan, 130 miles south, in one of the most glorious natural settings anywhere on earth. **FLASH POINT** To access the village's 14th-century evangelical church, use the honour-system key in a wooden box by the cemetery gate. +41 81 632 30 50; casacaminada.com. Doubles from about £150

