

The stunning art deco lobby



ROOM WITH A VIEW

With unspoilt views across iconic Green Park, The Athenaeum Hotel showcases the best of London has to offer but its interior has something to thank Sussex for, as **Simone Hellyer** discovers

PHOTOS: Chris Tubbs Photography

London is always a good idea, or so stated a colourful tea towel I saw in a gift shop recently, and when the sun is shining and the trains are on time it's a statement that's hard to disagree with.

At this time of year, when the sun makes an appearance the sight of the whole city flocking to one of its parks is really something to behold. And I was lucky enough to get an unspoilt view of sun seekers flocking to the aptly named Green Park when I stayed at The Athenaeum Hotel in London's glamorous Mayfair recently.

The view inside my room was just as good too, no wonder given that it was designed by renowned interior designer Martin Hulbert. Martin, who until recently lived in Twineham, breathed new life into the hotel's rooms and suites



BELOW:
Style is something that The Athenaeum has in spades

last year by playing up to its Art Deco spirit, while capturing the rather royal feeling of Green Park opposite the hotel.

The royal theme was very evident in my room, adorned as it was with a quirky display of several royal guard figurines flanking one of the Queen. The hotel is dotted with several eccentric and eye-catching pieces of art that were all created by Martin and his team. They are designed to look like old theatre sets and depict much loved British treasures – from David Attenborough riding an elephant and the Queen with a corgi, to representations of Grayson Perry and the Rolling Stones.

Style is something that The

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Athenaeum has in spades, the beautiful art deco architecture and design in the foyer is an attraction in itself, but the hotel is rich in history too. It started life as Hope House, the elegant private abode of MP Henry Hope, before being turned into a popular gentleman's club in the Victorian era. In the 1930s it was transformed into a luxurious Art Deco apartment block and then into a hotel four decades later by British entertainment group The Rank Organisation. The company renovated the building and neighbouring Victorian town houses into a luxurious hotel to house its movie stars whenever they were filming in the capital.

The hotel's link to the movies also extended to its staff, with Sally Bullock, a child star in the original



Many of the rooms come with a spectacular view of Green Park

St Trinian's films, becoming executive manager in the 1970s. She worked at the hotel on and off for 25 years and is said to have helped The Athenaeum continue to be a magnet for personalities in the entertainment industry.

There were no celebrities to spot during my stay, but it isn't hard to imagine the stars of the silver screen enjoying the sumptuous surrounds or the top quality food in the hotel's restaurant. Galvin at The Athenaeum is the hotel's restaurant from Michelin-starred London chefs Chris and Jeff Galvin. The restaurant's menu marks the first time the brothers have stepped away from their trademark French-inspired menus in favour of championing Britain's delicious homegrown produce and supporting independent farmers across the UK. And the results are really rather delicious.

There is a fixed price menu, with three courses at a reasonable £24.50, but with so much tempting options available I ordered from the à la carte menu. For my starter I went for a beech-smoked chicken

salad that was crisp and light. My main was the charcoal-grilled beef rib eye, which came with duck fat parmentier, heritage carrot and watercress. The meal was rounded off with a delightfully sticky tart tatin. The food was delicious, but the thing I was most impressed by was the relaxed and informal style of the restaurant – not always the case in five-star hotels. The restaurant is definitely on my list of places to visit again.

Guests who want to make the most of their stay and the views across London can head to the resident's lounge on the top floor. There you can enjoy panoramic views across the city, a daily complimentary tipple and a selection nibbles from the restaurant. The space is also occasionally used to hold surprise masterclasses, such as how to make the perfect G&T, or mindfulness sessions overlooking Green Park.

The hotel also houses a spa that offers bespoke Ren treatments and a chance to relax in two cedar wood hot tubs, a sauna, steam room and relaxation area. But for me, the best part of the hotel was my room, with its well stocked tea, coffee and snack station, designed furniture, huge shower and comfy bed. I sometimes struggle to sleep in hotels due to all the light pollution from the hallway and electronic devices, but that was not a problem at The Athenaeum as there were two doors between my bed and the hallway. Now that's what I call luxury. ♦

Good to know:

Starting rates for a normal room are £305 in low season and £660 in high season.
athenaeumhotel.com

