



Party people Tom Ford and Alexa Chung



CHILTERN FIREHOUSE



New York glamour Owner André Balazs (left); Chiltern's bar

SUITE SUCCESSOR?

Put down your crab doughnuts – Chiltern Firehouse has competition. For over a year it has ruled London's social scene, but now a new luxury hotel and cocktail bar is opening around the corner. Guy Pewsey checks out The Zetter Townhouse



The Z factor Owners Mark Sainsbury and Michael Benyan (above); a bedroom



THE ZETTER TOWNHOUSE



Cool crowd Daisy Lowe DJs; Nick Grimshaw

Last year, a decommissioned 19th-century fire station in Marylebone was given a multimillion-pound makeover – and swiftly became London's new celebrity mecca. Owned by André Balazs, the suave hotelier behind Hollywood's Chateau Marmont and The Mercer in New York, Chiltern Firehouse has seen everyone from Kate Moss and David Beckham to Bill Clinton and Bono pass through its doors. In fact, celebrities seemed to spend most of last year queuing round the block to eat at the famed downstairs restaurant, where chef

Nuno Mendes whips up crab doughnuts and the staff are clad in royal blue Emilia Wickstead jumpsuits and J Crew suits. Lindsay Lohan practically moved into one of the suites upstairs. And who can blame her? The huge rooms come with marble vanity tables, pewter baths and access to a personal concierge. On the bedside table sits a telephone and a card with a simple message: 'Dial 0 for anything.'

And, hey, if the early reviews were a little lukewarm, it really didn't matter. Chiltern transcends food: it's about the scene, the buzz, the desire to be among the wealthy, famous

and well-connected. If Jay Gatsby could be peeled from F Scott Fitzgerald's pages and transplanted into London, you would find him here, propping up the marble-topped bar, until it was time to retire to his suite with a Kinky Matador. That's a cocktail, FYI – tequila, Campari, Dubonnet, sherry and grapefruit bitters with a lime twist. As Dylan Jones, editor of GQ, has put it: Chiltern is 'a little bit of New York' in London – atmospheric, sophisticated and glamorous as hell. The glitter came by the bucketful, and the restaurant and hotel have since become one of the

city's most reliable celebrity watering holes.

There's only one problem. There's a new kid on the block. Next month sees the arrival of a shiny new hotel: The Zetter Townhouse on Seymour Street, a few minutes' walk away. The converted 24-bedroom Georgian townhouse is the latest addition to the Zetter empire, which includes the Clerkenwell Zetter and nearby boutique Townhouse. Expect a chic rooftop apartment with terrace, as well as 21 bedrooms (from £258), two studio suites and an achingly hip, drawing room-style cocktail lounge open from breakfast until late.

It's rumoured that the alarm bells are ringing chez Balazs, not least since the new arrival comes just as the buzz around Chiltern has begun to subside. The celebrities are still there nightly – Ellie Goulding and Emma Watson could both be seen recently – but finding a space for dinner has become a lot easier, and booking a suite for the night is no longer the impossible feat it once was. The Zetter brand, meanwhile, comes with its own army of celebrity fans: Benedict Cumberbatch, Daisy Lowe, Nick Grimshaw and Tinie Tempah have all been sighted at the Clerkenwell outposts.

So how do the two compare? Well, Zetter has an impressive track record. The group was founded in 2003 by Mark Sainsbury and Michael Benyan, who first worked together when they opened Exmouth Market's esteemed Middle Eastern restaurant Moro in 1997, before buying a Victorian warehouse in Clerkenwell and turning it into The Zetter. Boutique hotel

CHILTERN FIREHOUSE

Owner André Balazs

Chef Nuno Mendes

Drink Kinky

Matador – tequila, Campari, Dubonnet, sherry and grapefruit bitters with a lime twist

Snack Crab doughnuts

VIP fans Lindsay

Lohan, David Beckham and Kate Moss

Luxe quirk 'Dial 0 for anything'



expert Jason Catifeoglou, formerly of the InterContinental Hotel Group, joined them in 2009, and by 2011 they had a companion boutique hotel down the street: the 13-bedroom Zetter Townhouse in St John's Square.

But while the three mean business, Team Z are no match for Balazs in the glam stakes. The Boston-born NYLoner owns eight hotels in the US, including Long Island's Sunset Beach and The Standard in Miami and New York. He's enjoyed an on-off relationship with Uma Thurman, is good friends with Pippa Middleton and has been linked with Kylie Minogue.

WHAT ZETTER'S TOP BOYS LACK IN STAR CONNECTIONS, THEY MAKE UP FOR IN PANACHE AND PLAYFUL JOIE DE VIVRE

He also knows how to host a damn fine party – and his hotel is the perfect venue. Indeed, it was at Chiltern that Tom Ford chose to celebrate the launch of his new Noir Extreme fragrance in January. Guests included Alexa Chung and Jack Guinness.

Still, what Zetter's top boys lack in star connections, they make up for in panache. Their portfolio of properties is infused with playful joie de vivre. Not for nothing has the 59-bedroom Zetter Hotel been named one of

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THE ZETTER TOWNHOUSE

the world's 50 coolest hotels by industry bible *Condé Nast Traveller*: the sweeping, pitch-black marble bar is a sight to behold (as are the croque monsieurs concocted by chef Bruno Loubet). Each room in the Clerkenwell Townhouse, meanwhile, is designed in the style of the fictional and very eccentric Great Aunt Wilhelmina. They are studded with her 'souvenirs' – antiques, collectibles and taxidermy *objets* are to be found in every nook and cranny. Guests can sleep in a four-poster bed draped in 200 thread-count linen, or play ping-pong in the games room while sipping on a Köln Martini (dry vermouth, gin and citrus aromatics). And while there won't be any crab doughnuts at the new Seymour Street Zetter Townhouse, there will be potted fish and meats in Kilner jars; and the bar, Seymour's Parlour, will have master mixologist Tony Conigliaro, aka the Heston Blumenthal of the drinks world, helping to devise drinks. In contrast, the style of the Chiltern's suites is muted – a palette of whites, creams and pale pinks.

Both hotels are on the vast Portman Estate, which covers the area north of Oxford Street from Edgware Road almost to Marylebone High Street. The property arm of the aristocratic Portman family is headed up by Christopher Portman, the 10th Viscount Portman, and the company is determined to make Marylebone a destination rather than somewhere people pass through. The estate has worked hard to transform it into a cosmopolitan shopping destination. And while the

Owners Mark Sainsbury, Michael Benyan, Jason Catifeoglou
Chef Bruno Loubet
Drink Köln Martini

(dry vermouth, gin and citrus aromatics)

Snack Potted fish and meats in Kilner jars
VIP fans Tinie Tempah, Daisy Lowe, Nick Grimshaw and Benedict Cumberbatch

Luxe quirk Roof apartment and terrace



so-called 'Chiltern effect' has seen a slew of fashionable shops and restaurants open to cater for the hotel's globetrotting clientele – including a boutique from haute chocolatier Pierre Marcolini and, as of this autumn, an outpost of Paris eaterie Les 110 de Taillevent – it hasn't all been smooth going.

Since its arrival, Chiltern Firehouse has inadvertently alienated the locals. Some neighbours complained of excessive noise and an influx in traffic, a hospitality industry faux pas; and the Portmans were said to have taken an active role in smoothing things over between residents and the hotel.

The Zetter Group is in a different position. It was the Portman Estate that made the approach, keen to bring the brand into town. Sainsbury, Benyan and Catifeoglou jumped at the chance, and work began on a site a stone's throw from Portman Square. Zetter also has pleasing eco credentials – each bedroom at the new opening has an occupancy detection system so that when guests aren't there, minimal energy is used, for instance – and claims to be one of the most eco-friendly hotels in the city.

No doubt the three are at pains to keep the locals sweet. Whether they can do that and knock the Chiltern off its perch as the coolest destination for London's A-list remains to be seen. One thing is certain: the Zetter boys will be working round the clock to ensure that the opening next month goes off with a bang. A good first impression is priceless – and that's one thing you can't get from dialling 0. **ES**

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