

Weekend

Home

York and Albany, London

Sally Shalam

Camden Town has cleaned up somewhat since I inhabited its coffee bars, seedy pubs and late-night music venues as an undergraduate some 30 years ago. It's still an unlikely backdrop in which to find Gordon Ramsay, but blimey, he's here – deep in conversation in the bar.

Gordon Ramsay Holdings now owns in excess of a dozen restaurants worldwide, but the York and Albany, which opened last week, is the company's first with rooms, marking Ramsay's debut as hotelier.

Alongside on this project is chef Angela Hartnett, formerly at the Connaught and a Great British Menu contestant, to oversee two restaurant spaces on different floors, private dining and an all-day tapas menu, along with Nonna's Deli next door, named after her Italian grandmother.

All this is housed in a Nash building on the cusp of Camden and Regent's Park. Here, unimaginable wealth – in the great architect's Regency houses – meets post-war council estates and the main line out of Euston. Chelsea or Mayfair it isn't, but it does offer quick access by cab to the Eurostar terminus.

Does it cut the yellow condiment on an overnight stay?

I'm climbing stairs carpeted in soft



brown and hugged by sage green walls, passing polished Welsh oak pieces, to the shuttered elegance of a bedroom (one of only 10) which, though not large, is so elegantly put together, right down to a tiny hinged mirror on the dressing table, that I can think of few to match it in London for 200 smackers a night. The bathroom is a box – but a large one – with marble tiles, hip bath, and

Miller Harris (though no towel hooks).

Guest info tells me I can order anything I want, book a babysitter or request phonecalls to be blocked. Instead, I'm struggling with the shutters when I spot Mr Ramsay leaving in his silver Range Rover down below. Struggling because I want to close the bottom section for privacy and leave the top open to admit light, but they don't seem to have been fitted

with this option in mind. So I change in the bathroom and descend to the bar.

Lovely London buzz . . . everyone's dressed down not up, girls are knocking back fizz, white-aproned bar staff ferrying cocktails, and I'm in a high-backed velvet armchair with an apple mojito watching a suited Jean-Baptiste glide past. It's like being on the telly.

Every restaurant critic in the land will be in here this month, so of the

food I will simply say it is delicious, accessible and affordable (the £8 starter of pumpkin risotto with gorgonzola, would do me at lunchtime and my companion's salad of wafer-thin smoked duck with charred leeks and a fish stew, simply beautiful).

The ground floor restaurant is flanked by the bar and a courtyard garden. Black button-backed leather and feline grey velvet seating is illuminated by heavy theatre lights and giant Chinese lanterns. The basement restaurant is a den of red silk and crimson velvet around an open kitchen. A cabaret of chefs. We have coffee down here, with toffee popcorn in a retro cardboard box.

This is enormous fun. Interior designer Russell Sage has pulled off something only the British can. Restrained flamboyance. Perhaps that's because everything he's used, including bespoke silk wallpaper, is made in the UK.

Next morning, I don't want to leave my bed (Hypnos mattress and a topper). Then I don't want to take off the super-thick bathrobe. My room's sexy and homely but I need to get going. It's almost enough to make me use the F-word.

● 127-129 Parkway NW1 (restaurant 020-7388 3344, rooms 020-7387 5700, gordonramsay.com). Classic room £182.12, Superior room (in which I stayed) £205.62, Deluxe £240.87, and suite £646.25. Breakfast not included. Expect to pay around £31.50 for three-course dinner excluding drinks but including service, and £12 for a full English breakfast. sally.shalam@guardian.co.uk