

ROYAL WELCOME

BY DANIEL CAPPELLO

H. G. WELLS, D. H. Lawrence, and W. B. Yeats all dined here, as did Arthur Conan Doyle, George Bernard Shaw, and James McNeill Whistler. Oscar Wilde, Virginia Woolf, Noël Coward, and Rudyard Kipling each engaged in conversation over a table here. The Prince of Wales, the future King Edward VIII, and the Duke of York, the future King George VI, often took lunch here, as would Diana, Princess of Wales, decades later. Brigitte Bardot, Richard Burton, Elizabeth Taylor, Muhammad Ali, and Mick Jagger all peppered the place with glamour. And in 1973, it was here that David Bowie decided to retire Ziggy Stardust, his alter ego, with a star-studded party dubbed “The Last Supper.”

Ever since its debut back in 1865, the Café Royal has been famous as an epicenter of London’s fashionable set—a legend as one of London’s finest dining rooms, with what was long hailed as the best wine cellar in the world (it was, after all, a French wine merchant, Daniel Nicholas Thévenon, who opened the establishment after relocating to London in a bid to flee creditors from Paris). Today, patrons of the Café Royal are privy to this prestigious history, but they can lay claim to a luxury that even Winston Churchill couldn’t boast of: staying the night. After being acquired in 2008 by the hotel group The Set, the Café Royal underwent a three-year restoration led by David Chipperfield Architects, who, in association with the historic building architects Donald Insall Associates, masterfully reconceived the space as a plush five-star hotel. In its current incarnation, the Hotel Café Royal is the epitome of luxurious yet understated 21st-century style, counterbalanced by meticulously preserved historic rooms of the 1860s and 1920s.

In a city hardly short on history, one lament of loyal London

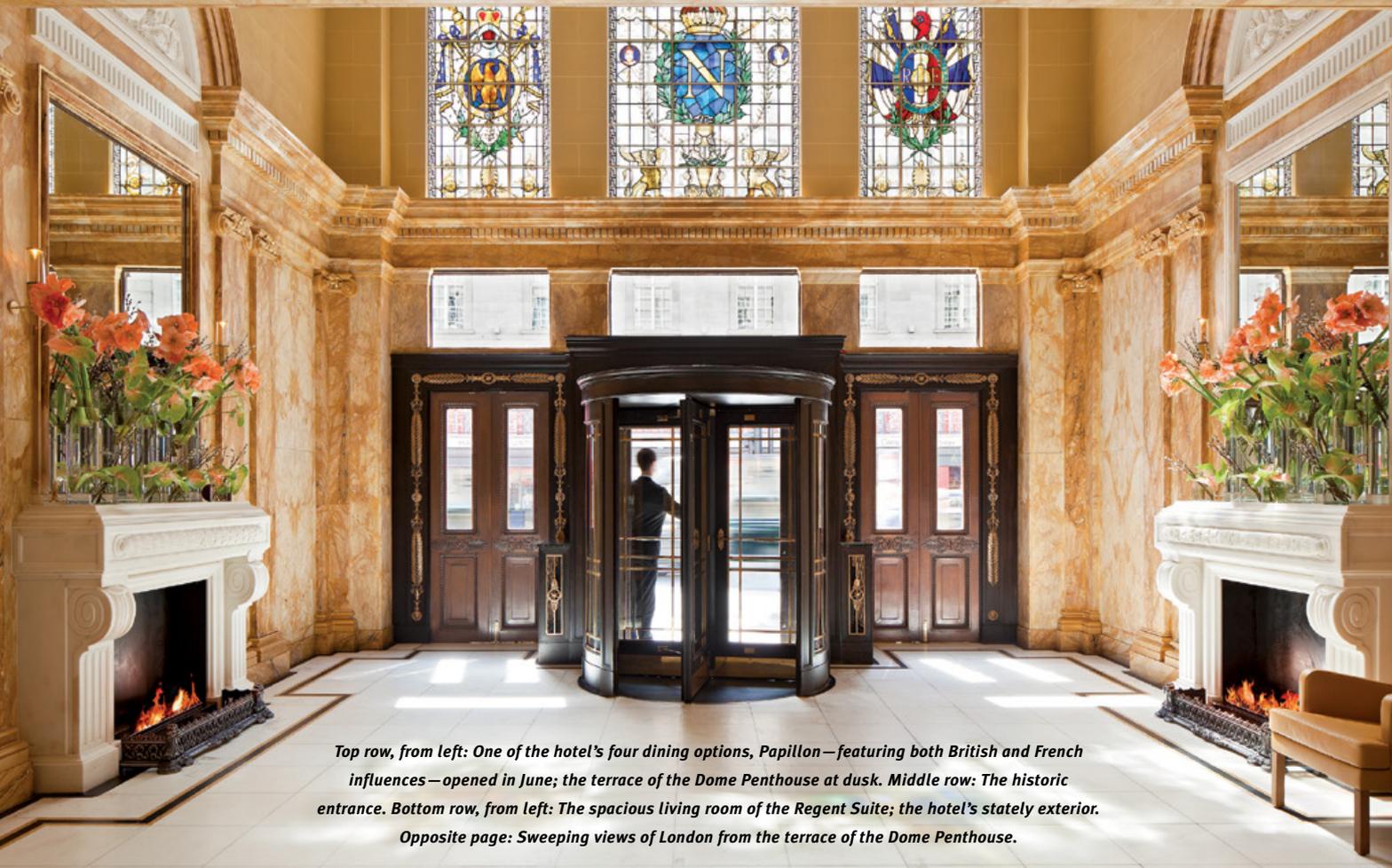
visitors is space—hotel space, that is. Hotel Café Royal, in this regard, is a definitive bridge between London’s past and its future: upon arrival, guests bask in the chromatic light of the beautiful stained-glass entrance to the lobby before settling into what are quite sizeable rooms. The hotel, on posh Regent Street, is located in the heart of the city, with elegant Mayfair to the west and creative Soho to the east—well within walking distance of some of the finest shopping streets, tourist attractions, and theaters. The 160 guestrooms and six signature suites (some of which come with a nifty butler service) offer comfortably contemporary refinement.

The hotel manages to maintain its fine-dining heritage and flair for European café culture with a choice of two bars and two restaurants. Papillon, which opened in June, is a marriage of the best of French and British cuisines—and is the only restaurant in town to front vibrant Regent Street. Papillon is perfect for an elegant en-plein-air summertime dinner at night; in the morning, it’s a choice spot for coffee specialties and a rotating selection of delectable and inventive pastries. But there’s no wrong dining choice at Hotel Café Royal, and from breakfast to lunch, afternoon tea (the hotel just won Best Traditional Afternoon Tea in the Afternoon Tea Awards 2017) to dinner, guests might very well opt not to venture beyond the hotel’s historic charms for culinary delights. Take it from this visitor: book a treatment at the in-house spa—the Akasha Holistic Wellbeing Centre—then sip and nibble the night away with a memorable view from Regent Street. ♦

Hotel Café Royal: 68 Regent Street, London W1B 4DY, United Kingdom. For more information, visit hotelcaferoyal.com.

COURTESY OF HOTEL CAFÉ ROYAL





Top row, from left: One of the hotel's four dining options, Papillon—featuring both British and French influences—opened in June; the terrace of the Dome Penthouse at dusk. Middle row: The historic entrance. Bottom row, from left: The spacious living room of the Regent Suite; the hotel's stately exterior. Opposite page: Sweeping views of London from the terrace of the Dome Penthouse.

