

THE AUSTRALIAN

A just SO story

The designers of this new hotel have taken a slice of New Zealand's volcanic history as their muse.

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SO/Auckland's interiors are by acclaimed Kiwi outfit WORLD.

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Hotel branding can be a tad confusing. French hotel behemoth AccorHotels has more brands than you can count on fingers and toes, including the luxury Sofitel. This in turn has given rise to SO/, a small group of avant-garde five-star hotels styled by some of the world's leading designers.

In Berlin it was Viktor&Rolf; in Bangkok, Christian Lacroix. The newest addition, and the first in the Pacific region, is SO/Auckland with interiors by acclaimed Kiwi outfit WORLD.

With 130 light-filled guestrooms, priced from \$360 a night, the hotel occupies the site of the former Reserve Bank building on Customs Street East but the designers have taken the volcanic history of the city as their muse. So rooms are styled as Vapour, Liquid and Solid.



A Liquid guestroom at SO/Auckland.

Fear not, there are no Fred Flintstone rock beds, just plenty of urbane cool with rich fabrics and touches of gold (a glancing reference to the site's banking past).

Each room comes with a bath, separate rainshower, free non-alcoholic minibar and coffee machine. An entire floor has been devoted to the penthouse suites.

Furniture and lighting installations by Dutch design house Moooi are found throughout the hotel, with a mega \$180,000 chandelier by Marcel Wanders (himself no stranger to groundbreaking hotels) dominating the ground floor.



The \$180,000 Marcel Wanders-designed chandelier.

A rooftop bar offering stunning views of Waitemata Harbour is proving a hit with the city's cognoscenti; Michelin-starred French chef Marc de Passorio is rattling the pans in the hotel's Harbour Society restaurant (try his signature vodka crayfish). The lovely day spa offers everything from Tibetan sound healing to Himalayan detox. There's also a fitness centre and indoor pool.

- accorhotels.com

Also try SO/ Bangkok Sofitel; Kameha Grand Zurich; Mondrian Doha.

HOTEL BUZZ

- Opening next March, the latest Art Series Hotel will be named for four-time Archibald People's Choice Award winner Vincent Fantauzzo; with 166 rooms the \$100 million Fantauzzo is carved into the cliff under Brisbane's Story Bridge.
- Marriott's millennial Moxy brand has opened in downtown Washington DC with 200 "industrial chic" rooms; guests checking in to Moxy Washington, DC Downtown do so at the bar in the art-filled lobby with a gratis cocktail; rooms come with "furiously fast and free" Wi-Fi and motion-sensor lighting.
- Mandarin Oriental Bangkok will overhaul the hotel's River Wing next year, reducing room inventory from 338 to 301 to increase size; the lobby, restaurants and pools will also be renovated.
- Located near Sri Lanka's UNESCO-listed Galle, the Kahanda Kanda has added two luxury pool villas, one with a private walled garden, the other offering views of the tea estate.



Entry to the Belmond Grand Hotel Europe, St Petersburg.

- “Live like a Tsar” this northern winter at the Belmond Grand Hotel Europe (pictured) in St Petersburg; the three-night package from £334 (\$582) a room a night includes tickets to the opera or ballet, palace and museum tours, breakfasts and one dinner.

<http://online.isentialink.com/theaustralian.com.au/2018/12/07/70379792-9a8b-4643-bffe-2adf04b4107c.html>