

## What's in a name?

Who are the hoteliers whose very name is a draw, whose new ventures we actually look forward to, who really know how to create magic?

Given the world's obsession with celebrity, it was only a matter of time before the hotel industry threw up some A-listers of its own. Of course, the Swiss hotelier César Ritz (1850-1918), who opened the Paris Ritz in 1898, had a surname that's become synonymous with luxury (the adjective 'ritzy' is dryly defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as 'high-class, luxurious; ostentatiously smart'). They may not yet have chains of hotel schools and indeed hotels (if you take Ritz-Carlton) named after them, but our own epoch has thrown up its own hotel stars. So who merits a place in our hall of fame? Who are the hoteliers whose very name is a draw, whose new ventures we actually look forward to, who really know how to create magic?

In no particular order, first off we'd nominate André Balazs, a man who really understands his market and knows how to create atmosphere. Much of his hotels' distinctive style comes from his respect for retro. Take the Chateau Marmont, arguably the flagship of his empire. Or The Mercer,

where Christian Liaigre interiors have acquired an almost retro, or at least classic, status of their own, given how copied his style (not least his sofas and lamps) has been over the past decade.

For it's about far more than décor; it's about character. Balazs's talent lies in the way he creates atmosphere by imbuing his hotels with a sense of himself. It's about the way his hotels use music, the way they're lit, the way his staff interact with the guests, whether they're recognisable (is it possible to be in the Mercer lobby and not run into Kate Moss, Karl Lagerfeld or Marc Jacobs?) or not. It's testimony to the success – to the style – of the Raleigh that during Art Basel Miami Beach 2004 both Rem Koolhaas and Philippe Starck chose to stay there, the latter choosing it in favour of the two Miami hotels he himself designed (the Shore Club and the Delano). They're just places where everyone feels comfortable (unless you're very chippy, of course), not cool, not self-regardingly modish. Just right.