

# HOTEL CENTRAL



## A Windfall in Dublin

Designer hotels add glamour to the Gaelic city. By JOANN GRECO

The famously lilting voices of Dubliners are positively giddy these days. “Now that we have money...” is a common refrain, a half-sheepish, half-gleeful lead-in to any number of statements, many to do with how hip and fun Dublin is. ¶ For visitors, that means a wealth of sophisticated hotel choices all over downtown. And since Dublin’s liveliest neighborhoods are close to each other, there’s no such thing as a bad location. Generally, the city’s higher-end hotels are located near St. Stephen’s

Green, the 19th-century strolling park that captures the hearts of first-time visitors. From here, it’s a quick jaunt to the Grafton Street shopping district, where another handful of hotels have clustered. And from there, five more minutes brings you to Temple Bar, the raucous, albeit touristy, neighborhood where you’ll want to spend at least one night pub-hopping.

Temple Bar, a once down-on-its-heels warren of streets alongside the River Liffey, was rejuvenated in 1992 when Irish rockers Bono and the Edge of U2 purchased the **Clarence** ([www.theclarence.ie](http://www.theclarence.ie); from \$450). The hotel’s interior surprises with understated arts and crafts touches like original white oak paneling in the lobby and Shaker-inspired furniture in the 48 guest rooms. Its public spaces are popular gathering spots—and, yes, Bono makes an occasional appearance—but for serenity, nothing beats the Tea Room, which

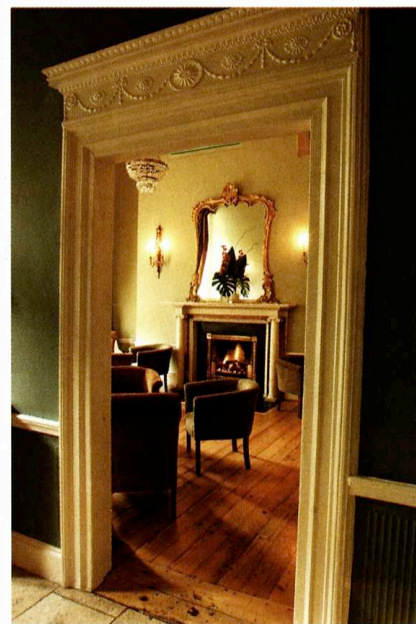
despite its name is open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Widely spaced tables, double-height windows, and 20-foot ceilings make this a gracious retreat.

Directly across the Liffey, via the Millennium footbridge, the recently expanded **Morrison** ([www.morrisonhotel.ie](http://www.morrisonhotel.ie); from \$200) throws down its own cool gauntlet, with a lobby lounge that offers sparkling river views and the restyled Halo Restaurant, outfitted in antique tables and jewel-toned velvet chairs. Guest rooms feature dark wood and creamy walls, relieved by a cache of original art and hand-painted red silk throws. This side of the river is a great base for exploring the Old Jameson Distillery and the James Joyce Centre.

Not far from here, and overlooking vibrant Trinity College, sits the **Westin** ([www.westin.com/dublin](http://www.westin.com/dublin); from \$300), located in a restored 19th-century bank building. Guest rooms are well-appointed, but the

public spaces are what inspire. Sup under the stars (but protected from the Irish drizzle) in the five-story Atrium Lounge and soak up the smell of money in the bank vaults that now house the Mint Bar.

Walk and shop along pedestrian Grafton Street to reach St. Stephen’s Green and a trio of hotels, each very different from the others. The cool and collected **Fitzwilliam** ([www.fitzwilliamhotel.com](http://www.fitzwilliamhotel.com); from \$267), designed by Sir Terence Conran, offsets limestone and slate with crisp, striking hues such as apple green and purple. From anti-mist mirrors and dimmer switches in the bathroom to bedside flowers, this small gem excels at pampering. Throw in a Michelin-starred restaurant, Thornton’s, and you may never want to leave. But then again, you might prefer **Brownes** ([www.brownesdublin.com](http://www.brownesdublin.com); from \$240), which is all Georgian glory, with broad doorways topped by fanlights, fireplaces galore, a sweeping staircase, and a red dining room that specializes in updated Irish cuisine. Several of the 11 rooms offer parkside



Traditional interiors aren’t a thing of the past at the **Brownes** hotel, located near the lively Temple Bar area (top), Dublin’s nightlife hub.



Plush perches invite guests to the Dylan Bar.

views. A few doors down is the much larger Georgian hotel, the **Shelbourne** ([www.theshelbourne.ie](http://www.theshelbourne.ie); from \$362). Dublin's grande dame was founded in 1824 and reopened last spring after a renovation. Walls feature elaborate plasterwork painted in brilliant reds and golds, and if only the walls could speak... history is everywhere. Pull up a stool at the Horseshoe Bar—decorated with original Hogarth prints—and you'll be sitting where politicians have gathered for decades. If the Constitution Room is open, pay homage to the site where Michael Collins and his brethren first drafted the Irish Constitution in 1922.

Another Dublin classic, the **Merrion** ([www.merrionhotel.com](http://www.merrionhotel.com); from \$400) luxuriates behind the facade of four interconnected 18th-century town houses, one of which is the birthplace of the first Duke of Wellington. Inside, the feeling that you're visiting a gracious urban home continues, as two drawing rooms lead to period gardens landscaped with roses and terraced seating. The Merrion is one of the few Dublin hotels that offers a spa, and its dining options are top-rate, including Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud, which has been awarded two Michelin stars.

For something different, the **Dylan** ([www.dylan.ie](http://www.dylan.ie); from \$300) hotel is about a half mile south of St. Stephen's Green and, hence, that much farther from the action. Seamlessly linking a new building to a Romanesque Victorian built in 1901, the hotel features 44 guest rooms, none of which are alike. All share a sense of whimsy, though, heightened by custom-made furniture, vintage silver and crystal, and black-and-white photography.

CHECKING IN

## For Art's Sake

Hotels showcase world-class artwork in gallery settings.

Dull artwork reproductions over hotel beds are so yesterday. Original art is no surprise in Vegas, but in 2006 the trend broadened. In Minneapolis, Louisville, and Lancaster, historic structures have been adapted into contemporary hotels and filled with original artwork. Video performances loop in guest rooms, hallways, and the outdoor courtyard bar at Minneapolis's new **Chambers Hotel** ([www.chambersminneapolis.com](http://www.chambersminneapolis.com)). All-white surfaces make an ideal backdrop for owner Ralph Burnet's collection, which includes works by Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin. At the **21c Museum Hotel** ([www.21cmuseumhotel.com](http://www.21cmuseumhotel.com)) in Louisville, Kentucky, guests cohabit with art by Chuck Close and Andres Serrano. Even Pennsylvania Dutch country has the **Lancaster Arts Hotel** ([www.lancasterartshotel.com](http://www.lancasterartshotel.com)) that's filled with contemporary artwork and furniture crafted (and available for sale) by Lancaster County artists. —ANN COCHRAN



Chambers sculpture.

STAYS UNDER \$150

## Vancouver, Australia, and Thailand

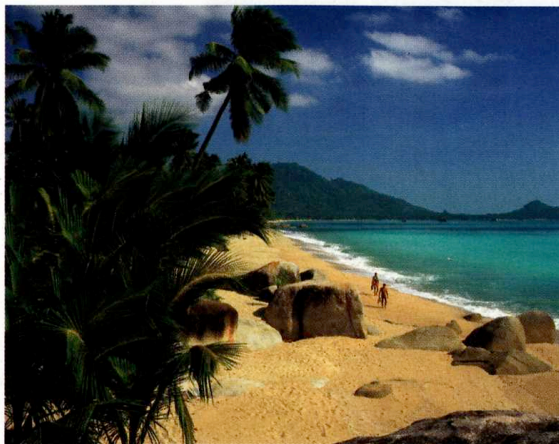
**1 Sylvia Hotel, Vancouver, BC** What the Sylvia lacks in modern amenities, it makes up for in location. Situated on the south side of Vancouver's West End, this 1912 Edwardian-style hotel is steps away from the English Bay waterfront, Stanley Park, and downtown Vancouver. Twelve suites come equipped with kitchens, some offer ocean views. Guests can also savor the vistas from Sylvia Restaurant,

where chef Simon Chen recommends the free-range chicken breast stuffed with goat cheese and cranberries. In 1975, Vancouver named Sylvia Hotel a heritage building, ensuring the survival of its old-world charm. From \$110; [www.sylviahotel.com](http://www.sylviahotel.com).

**2 Richmond Hill Hotel, Richmond, Australia** A former YWCA hostel housed in an 1885 mansion, this simply

furnished 60-room hotel offers a mix of private suites and economy rooms. Steps from the 12-minute tram to downtown Melbourne, the homey inn is also close to the Yarra River, and near the Melbourne Cricket Ground and Bridge Road, a heritage area and vibrant shopping district. From \$79; [www.richmondhillhotel.com.au](http://www.richmondhillhotel.com.au).

**3 Aloha Resort, Ko Samui, Thailand** On the other side of the peninsula from touristy Phuket lies Thailand's third largest island, known for its coconut trees and the pig-tailed monkeys that are trained to climb them. Ko Samui's white sand beaches and sparkling blue seas are a magnet for sun worshippers and divers from around the world. The 72-room resort directly on Lamai Beach offers a pool, a spa, and a Thai tailor shop. Most guest rooms have balconies overlooking the sea. From \$80; [www.alohasamui.com](http://www.alohasamui.com). —Reported by Alison Ogden and Emily Haile



In Thailand, Lamai beach beckons visitors to Ko Samui island.