

Robb Report

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SINGAPORE

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BEST CUSTOM-MADE
HOLIDAYS?

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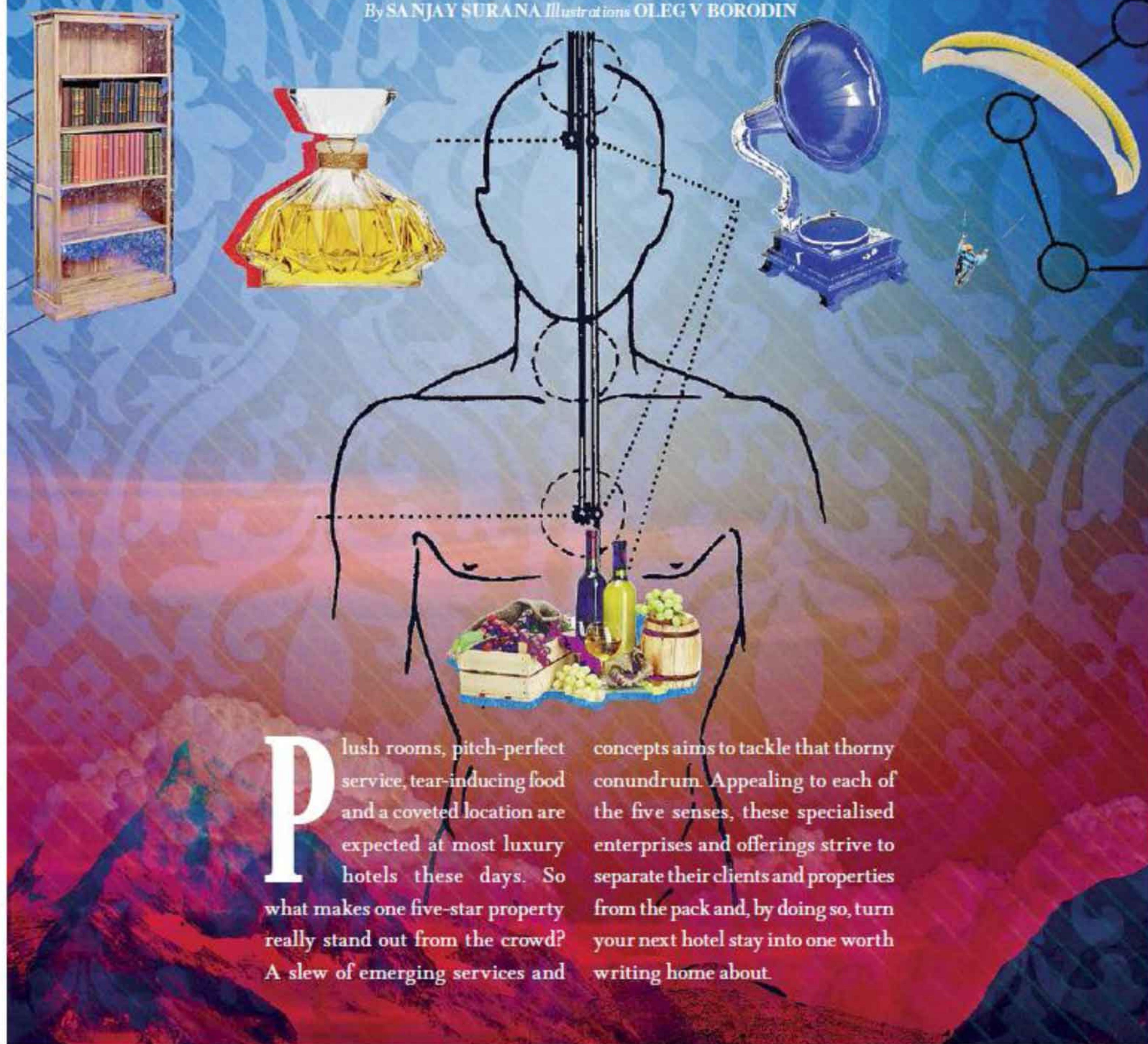


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THE POWER OF FIVE

Treat your senses to a hotel stay like no other.

By SANJAY SURANA Illustrations OLEG V BORODIN



Plush rooms, pitch-perfect service, tear-inducing food and a coveted location are expected at most luxury hotels these days. So what makes one five-star property really stand out from the crowd? A slew of emerging services and

concepts aims to tackle that thorny conundrum. Appealing to each of the five senses, these specialised enterprises and offerings strive to separate their clients and properties from the pack and, by doing so, turn your next hotel stay into one worth writing home about.

SIGHT

Philip Blackwell has stayed in some fine hotels around the world, but the sorry state of their library collections always upset him.

"We believe we can do better than this," he'd tell the management teams of these hotels, and with those fighting words created Ultimate Library. His plan: to assemble hotel libraries that speak to a hotel's locations and the types of clients it attracts.

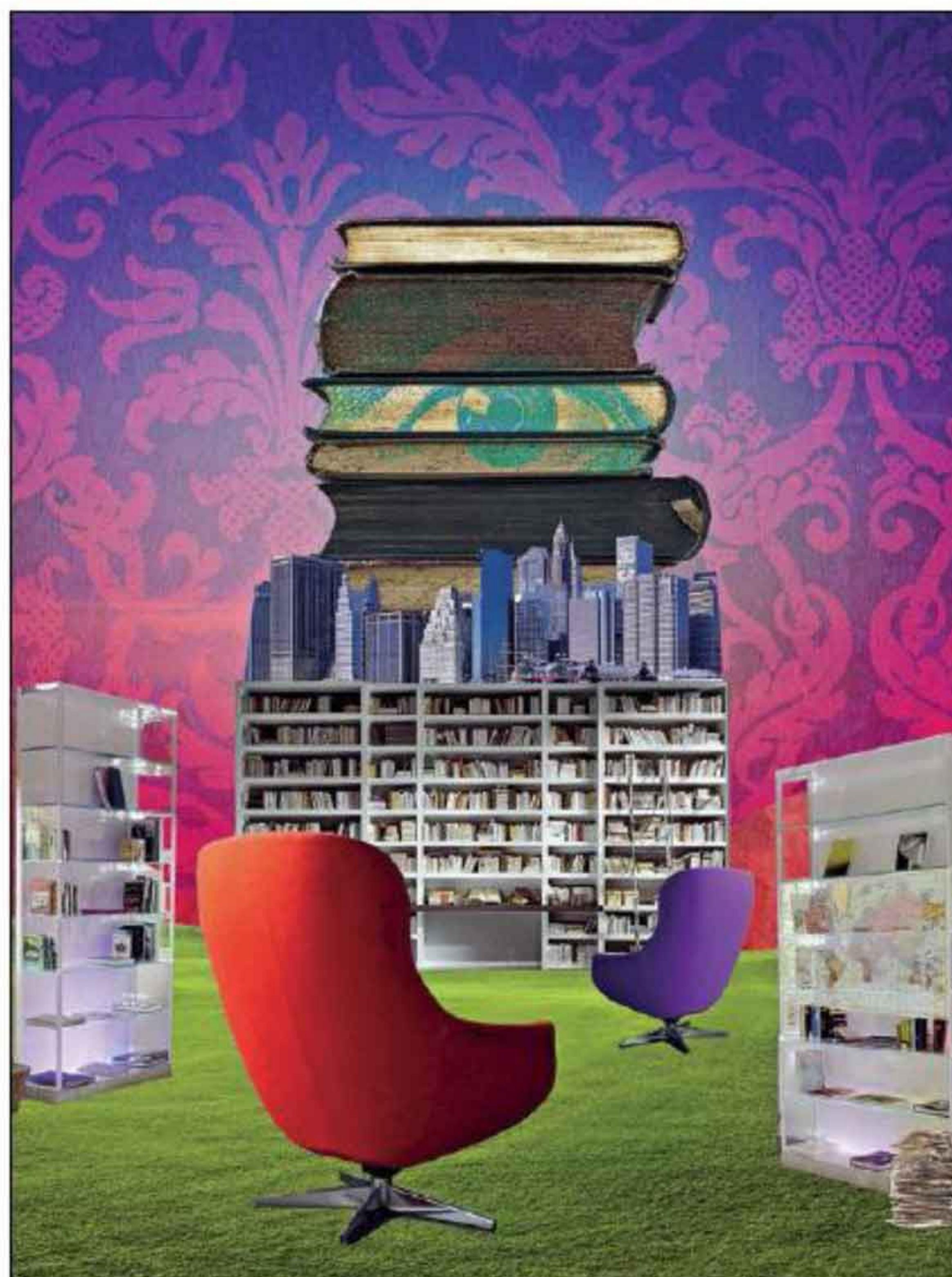
"For example, the novel *Daniel Martin*, by John Fowles, has for me the best description of drifting down the Nile, so I read it when I was on the Nile. You can spend all day and night looking for fiction in Egypt, but you will never get *Daniel Martin*. It can only be discovered by word of mouth."

Blackwell examines four key

Ultimate Library assembles book collections that speak to a hotel's locations and the types of clients it attracts.

components when curating a hotel library – location, customer demographic, average length of stay, the hotel's brand values and its interior design.

"The right books should fit in with the location, the decor and match the aspirations of the hotel's customers." A library for a hotel



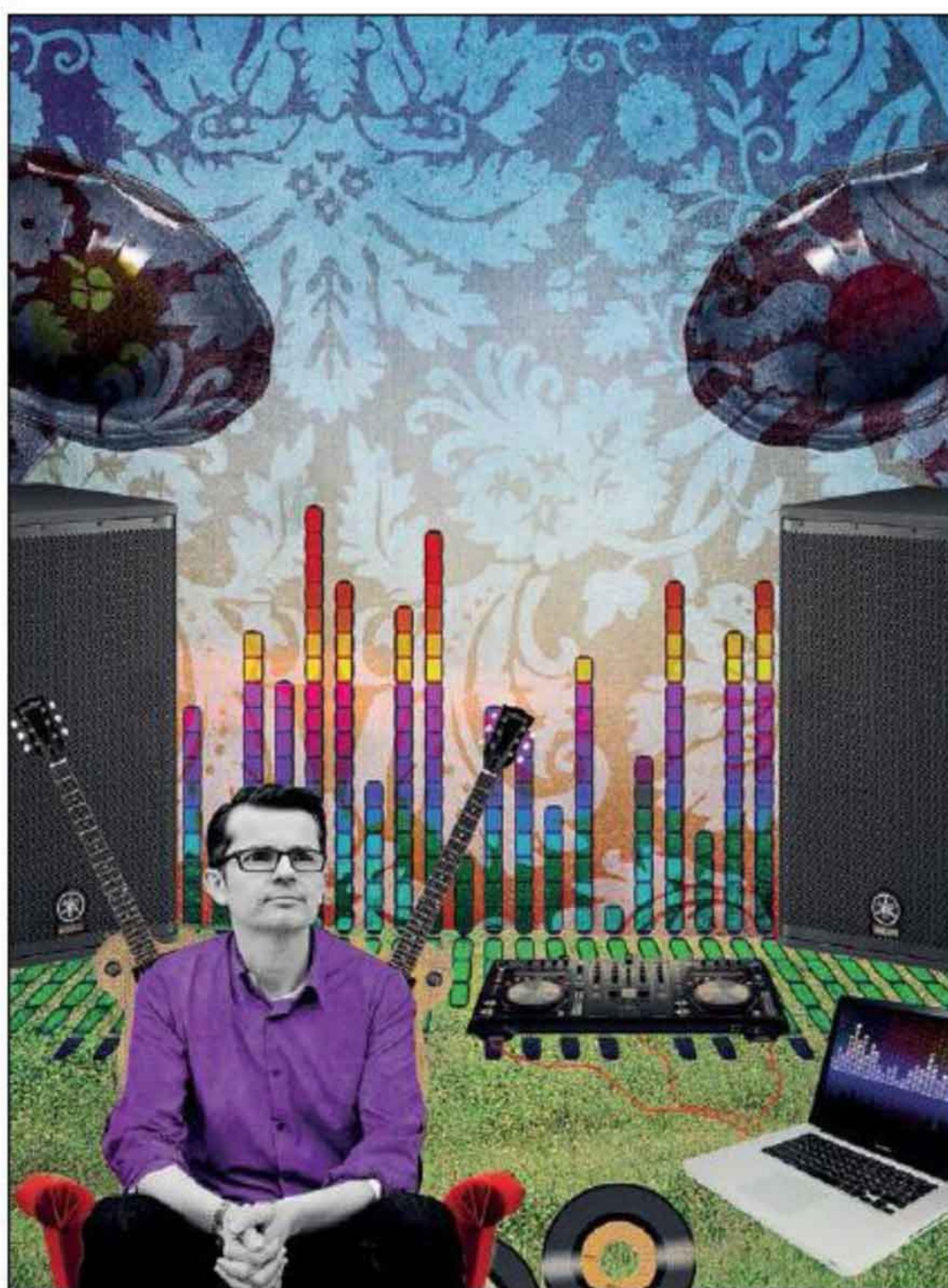
in New York, where guests often check in for just two or three nights, might be heavy on poetry and short stories, whereas an Asian resort where guests stay longer will stock more challenging tomes.

Blackwell updates a collection once or twice a year, so even repeat guests will experience a fresh

library. Costs run from US\$2,000 (\$2,500) for a small library to US\$25,000 for a large resort.

For every hotel collection it curates, Ultimate Library donates a library to a local community of the hotel's choice – usually an educational institution.

In addition to ensuring hotel guests are better read, "we hope that we will be remembered for having contributed to improving the educational opportunities for numerous people around the world". www.ultimatelibrary.co.uk



HEARING

Rob Wood is a self-confessed music fanatic. The Londoner has worked as a disc jockey and a music journalist.

But it wasn't until he started to spin at events held in luxury hotels that Wood understood how little thought they put into their playlists. This eureka moment inspired him to set up Music Concierge,

a company that assembles personalised playlists. The modus operandi is straightforward: Wood and his team stay at a hotel, assess its character and interior design, and see how staff use the space.

By compiling these observations, they stitch together music concepts that suit each of the hotel's areas and its overall identity.

Using content management software and hardware, Music Concierge also ensures that often-overlooked details such as consistent volume levels and playlists being activated at the right time of day, are taken care of.

Wood stresses that there are no formulas or templates, because hotels, even those in the same city, vary in character and audience. Take for instance the Caribbean, where the company has clients. The region has a diverse musical culture – with genres such as roots reggae, rocksteady and dub reggae.

There is also the need for a

Music Concierge assembles playlists that suit each area in a hotel and its overall identity.

progression of sound throughout the day, so that the music during sunbathing hours differs from that played at the bar at night or during a beach barbecue.

In Asia, Music Concierge works with hotel companies such as Jumeirah, Swire and Como. For £2,000 (\$4,000) or more per year, Music Concierge promises each company a soundtrack that is customised just for them.

As Wood playfully puts it: "Making the world sound better is a tall order, but somebody has to do it." www.musicconcierge.co.uk

TASTE

The trouble with eating at a fine restaurant is that you usually have no idea how the culinary genius manning the kitchen prepared the dish. Die Kuche (German for The Kitchen), the restaurant at Palais Hansen Kempinski in Vienna, remedies this problem with its revolutionary version of the show kitchen or chef's table.

In this restaurant, guests don't just sit near the chef and watch him prepare the dishes; they act as sous-chefs in waiting, assisting in the preparation.

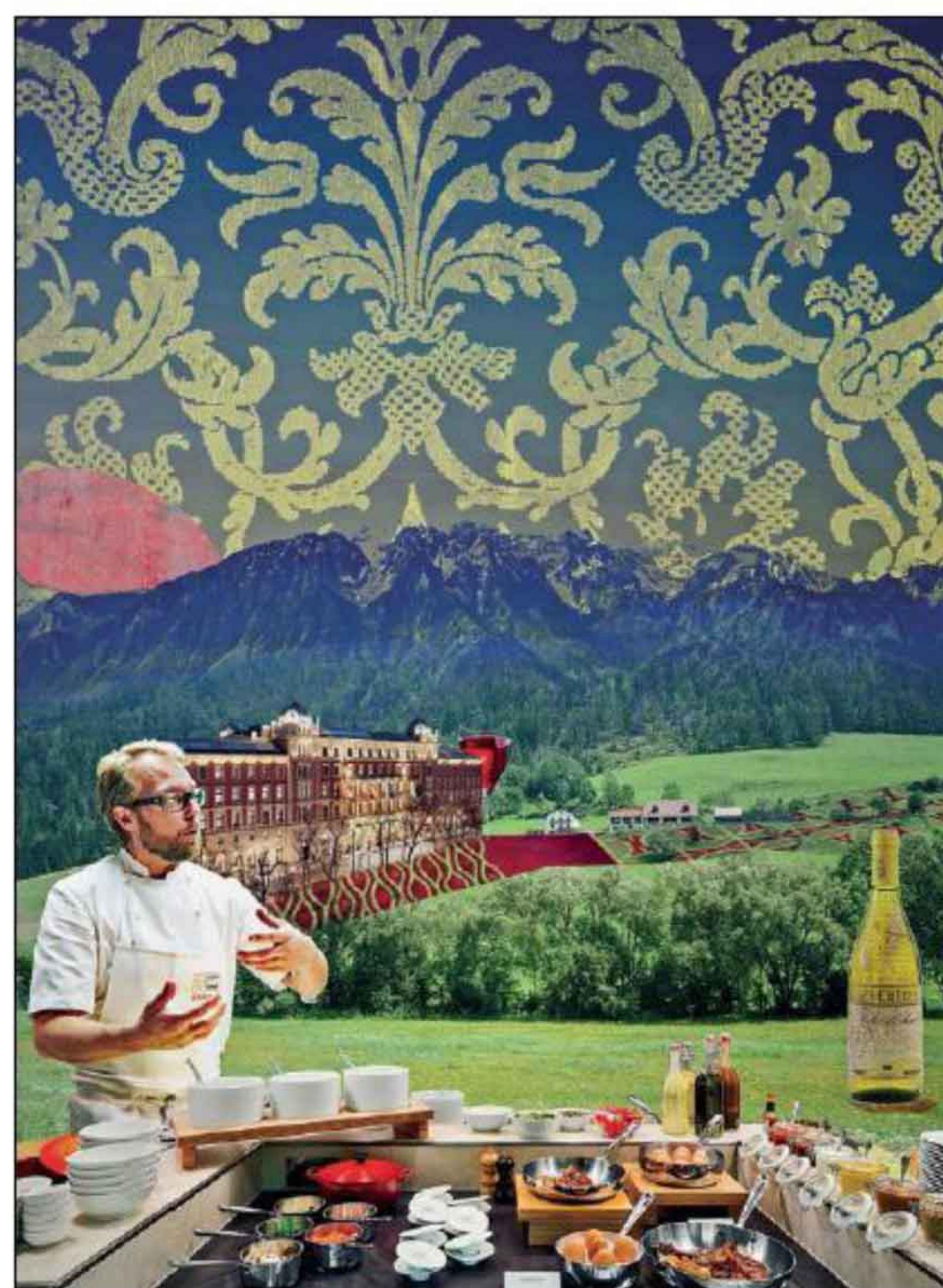
The set-up, the first of its kind in any hotel, replicates the layout and ambience of a home kitchen.

There are two tables by the cooking stations, with each seating six to eight people. Only those who have booked these tables will experience this unique "cooking

Diners can watch the chef prepare their dish and assist in the preparation as well.

class". Guests are expected to mingle and help the chef (think of him as the host), maybe sauté some mushrooms or finish a seared salmon. The premise works remarkably well.

As you're seated at the table - which is next to display cabinets



filled with heavy iron skillets, cookbooks, Mason jars, and small china cups, bowls and saucers - you often find yourself chatting with the chef a few metres in front of you as he's cutting vegetables or extracting something from the fridge. It's easy to forget you're in

an elegant 152-room hotel just off the Danube. And if you still can't suspend disbelief, there's a special thrill when the chef of this high-end boîte is whipping cream in front of you and, in mid-whip, asks you to pitch in and finish the job.

You might, for a few fleeting seconds, feel like a rock star, or better yet, a celebrity chef.

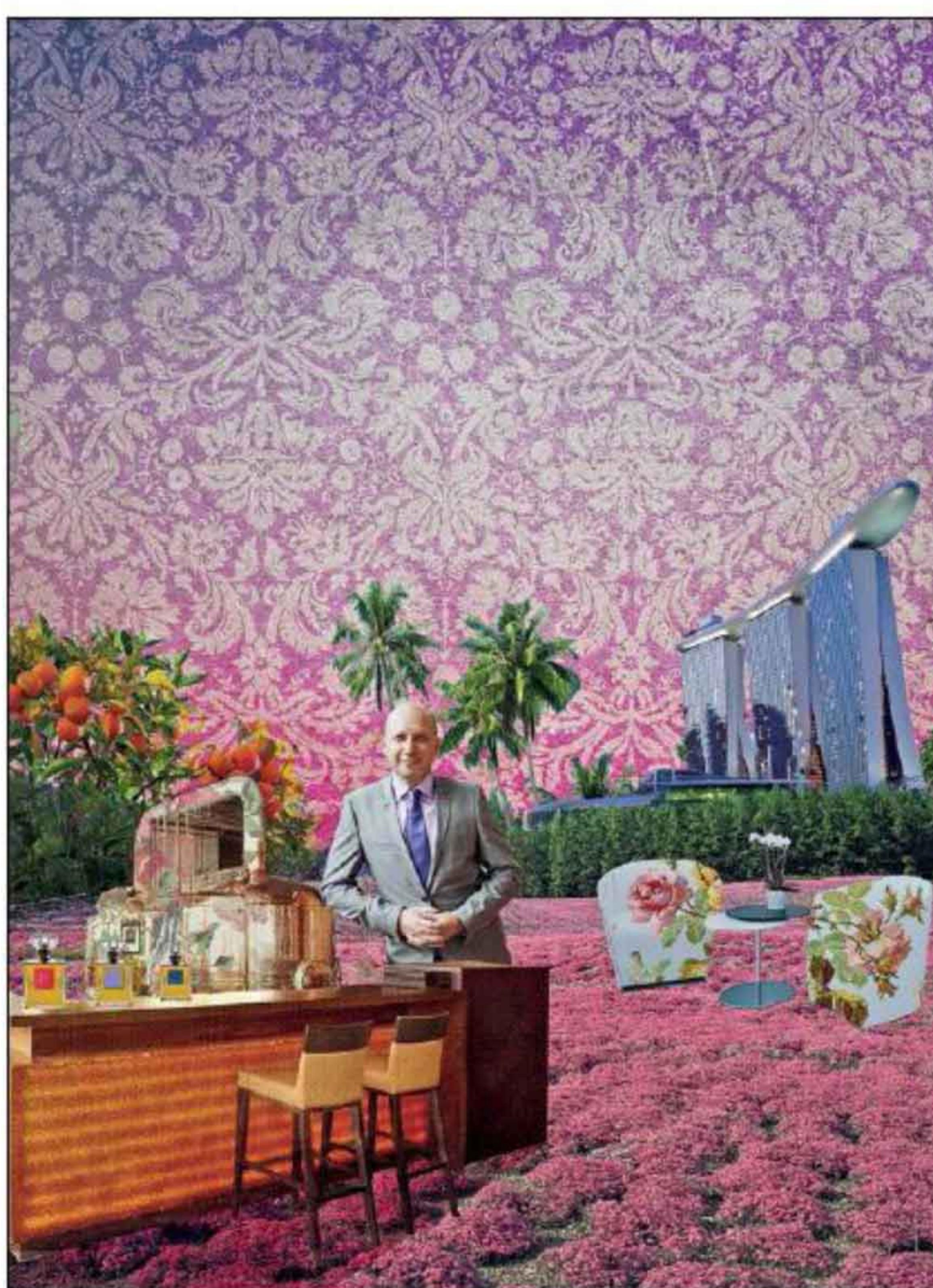
The restaurant opens for lunch and dinner, and this experience is available for both meals.
www.kempinski.com

SMELL

Of all the senses, smell triggers the most intense associations. Scent, according to Simon Faure-Field, of Singapore-based consultancy Equal Strategy, is key to making clients spend more time in commercial, retail and hospitality environments.

Inspired by the work of Danish brand guru Martin Lindstrom, Faure-Field decided to combine sound and scent to set corporate entities apart from each other when he moved to Asia in the late 1990s. It's this practice of scent management that makes Equal Strategy a little uncommon. "Most marketing budgets focus on communication that appeals to our eyes, yet often our decisions are based upon what we smell," says Faure-Field.

Concocting the right scent for a property can take several weeks. "We meet with the general manager and



Smells serve as geographic touchstones and the right scent offers a sense of place as well as creates a welcoming environment.

his management team to discuss and refine how the hotel's brand can be translated into music and fragrance."

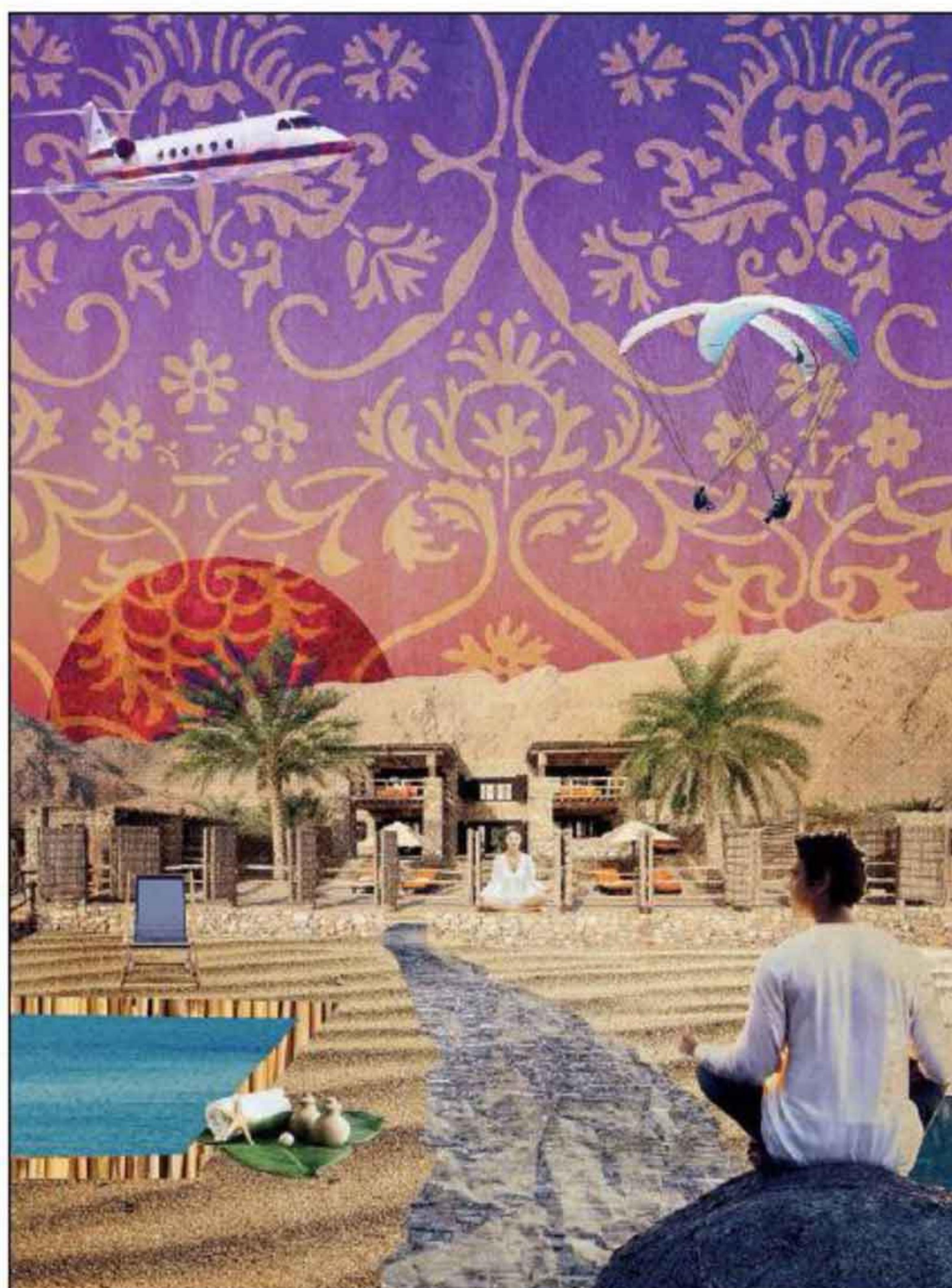
Equal Strategy then formulates an identity statement; potential scents and genres of music are developed on that basis, and before long, the hotel has a "sensory

identity", as Faure-Field calls it.

Equal Strategy offers off-the-shelf fragrances and can also craft a client's bespoke aroma from scratch. The company works with a German fragrance company called Drom to customise the scents.

Smells serve as geographic

touchstones, and Equal Strategy is sensitive to ensuring its offerings create a sense of place and a welcoming environment. While scent branding isn't new – Westin Hotels & Resorts started introducing its White Tea scent in its properties a decade ago – its importance is beginning to gain traction. "We hope businesses realise that sensory branding is every bit as effective as more conventional marketing," Faure-Field declares. www.equalstrategy.com



TOUCH

Despite being the most emotive of senses, touch is probably the one least explored by hotels. Six Senses Hotels Resorts Spas plans to remedy this by pushing touch as the next experiential frontier. It has already been incorporating unusual elements into a guest's visit (visitors to the Six Senses' property in Zighy Bay, Oman, for example,

can paraglide in to the resort and then check in).

Guests begin their Six Senses sensory sojourn with the airport transfer, when a driver proffers soft neck pillows, eye-masks filled with buckwheat, and rice-stuffed organic cotton stress balls as ways to banish the just-got-off-a-long-flight feeling. At the resort, travellers are

encouraged to walk barefoot on sensory trails and floors made from stone, bamboo, sand and pebbles, and complimentary shoulder massages in the lobby aid in further unwinding.

Foot washes upon entry to the spa are de rigueur, and the spas will soon introduce swings and hammocks to put spa-goers at ease. Rooms come with pillow menus, while cushions are filled with the right combination of stuffing so that they can be hugged or manipulated in various ways. Drinking glasses are made in irregular shapes, presenting the holders with unforeseen proportions

Visitors are encouraged to walk barefoot on sensory trails.

and textures. Materials such as hay and coconut fibres are mixed with cement for the walls to create surprising surfaces to touch.

The company will soon introduce Earthing, a way for guests to reconnect with the earth via guided barefoot walks, strolls through labyrinths, Kneipp walks (walking in cold water pools), and outdoor meditations in various settings. These measures may appear small-scale, but they play a hugely important, and unheralded, role to reawaken our physical relation to the world. We could all do with some of that. www.sixsenses.com