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TEST
By
WELLS TOWER
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OBSESSION

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Due South

TRAVEL AND ADVENTURE FOR THE SOUTHERN SOUL

OPEN-DOOR POLICY

Faded pastels set the tone in Playa Grande Beach Club's cottages.

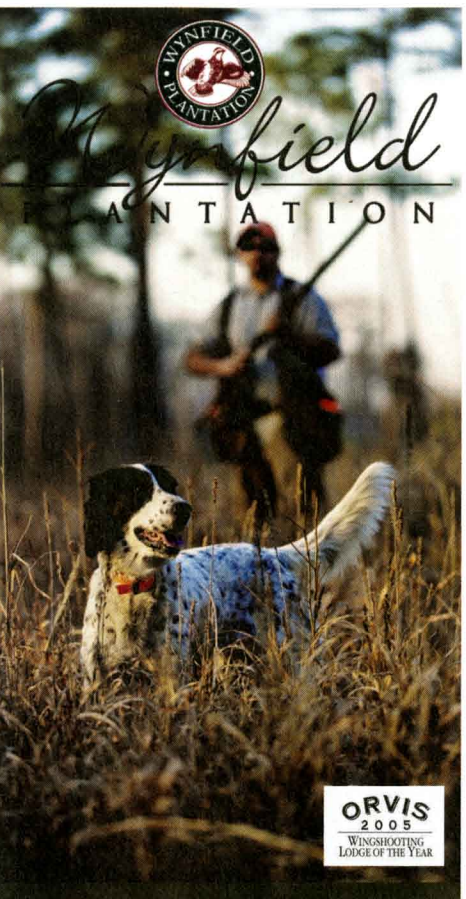


Staying Power

A peek inside seven of the South's most stylish new hotels

by MIKE GRUDOWSKI

★ WEEKENDS / FORK in the ROAD p.161 / OUR KIND of PLACE p.164 / THE SOUTHERN AGENDA p.179



ORVIS
2005
WINGSHOOTING
LODGE OF THE YEAR

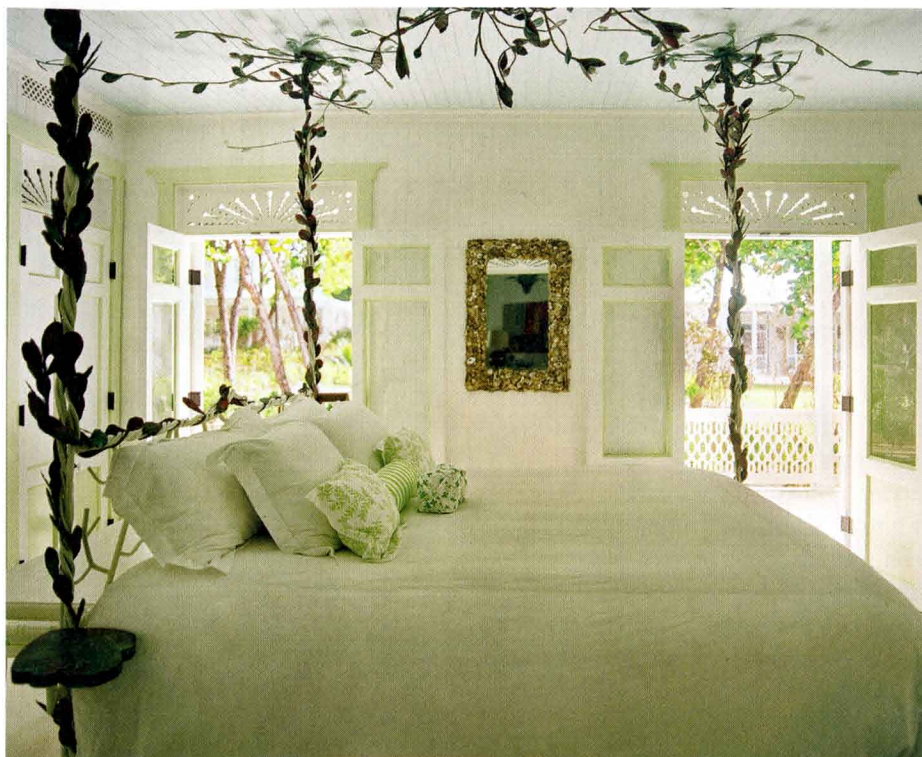


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SLEEPING BEAUTY

The custom-made creeping vine trellis beds at Playa Grande Beach Club are outfitted with crisp white Bellino linens and down duvets.

is scheduled to welcome its first guests in the revitalized Pearl, a retail, residential, and, restaurant complex on the northern end of San Antonio's captivating River Walk, it will arguably become the state's coolest new refuge. The hotel is named after Emma Koehler, who successfully ran the brewery for decades after her husband, Otto, was shot to death in 1914 by one of his mistresses, also named Emma (it's a long story). When the landmark brewhouse, built in 1894, shut down in 2001, all manner of industrial brewing artifacts remained, and the creative minds at the New York design firm Roman and Williams wove many of them into the hotel: An antique compressor adorns the lobby, for instance, and the bottom of a cast-iron hopper forms the ceiling of a suite. (Stephen Alesch and Robin Standefer, the firm's husband-and-wife founders, previously left their mark on everything from high-end hostels in Miami and Chicago to sets for *Zoolander*.) Inviting details in the 146 guest rooms include margarita-stocked iceboxes, Frette towels, mesquite tables, and (in some suites) claw-foot tubs and fireplaces. And yes, you can still order a beer. thehotlemma.com

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Playa Grande Beach Club

Río San Juan, Dominican Republic

"It was a free-form fantasy," says Celerie Kemble, an interior designer who grew up in Palm Beach and now works out of Manhattan. "This was completely a passion project." The result of her vision—Playa Grande Beach Club, a cluster of nine white bungalows centered around a clubhouse on two thousand acres of coastal forest and unspoiled white sand on the Dominican Republic's north shore—is about as far from a bland vacation-factory megaresort as you can get. The architecture and decor play off island vernacular, with abundant gingerbread such as ornamental wooden fretwork, called *tragaluz*, over doors and windows, patterned concrete tiles, corrugated green metal roofs, and wide shaded porches. Kemble also layered in fanciful embellishments and homey touches: copper soaking tubs, palm trees crafted of hammered metal, salvaged wicker armchairs, and a soft palette "like the colors of faded bathing

suits,” she says. “One of our overriding goals was to create a place that looked and felt old. There’s a grace and an ease that an old house has. We used as much reclaimed material as we could. We encouraged the craftsmen to leave their thumbprints.” playagrandebeachclub.com

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Quirk Hotel

Richmond, Virginia

With the success of Southern gems like the 21c Museum Hotels (in Louisville; Bentonville, Arkansas; and now Durham, North Carolina), the era of the hotel as gallery has arrived, and the Quirk is going all in. For starters, the seventy-four-room property, in Richmond’s Arts and Cultural District, is something of an artwork unto itself—an Italian Renaissance Revival that debuted in 1916 as the J. B. Mosby department store, with a grand twenty-four-foot vaulted ceiling and a limestone-arched facade. “It’s a very Richmond-centric hotel,” says Katie Ukrop, who co-owns the property



BAR NONE

Lacquered walls and richly upholstered furniture create a cozy spot for a cocktail at the Spectator.

with her husband, Ted, a fourth-generation Richmonder, and their investors. “We have an artist-in-residence program. All the rooms have original art,” most of it from local talents. The beds, bar top, and coffee bar are all crafted from pine joists salvaged from the building next door, where Katie’s ten-year-old Quirk gallery has relocated and now connects to the hotel via a marble-floored courtyard. The crowning detail: an open-air rooftop bar that promises to become a downtown fixture. quirkhotel.com

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The Spectator

Charleston, South Carolina

Opened in July, the Spectator isn’t shy about its retro ambience. The lobby and library-like adjoining bar lounge greet arrivals with an 1,800-crystal Murano glass chandelier, a burbling “wall of water,” strikingly lit arched bookcases, smoky antique mirrors on the ceiling, and a stuffed white peacock, already nicknamed Daisy (as in Buchanan, the *Great*