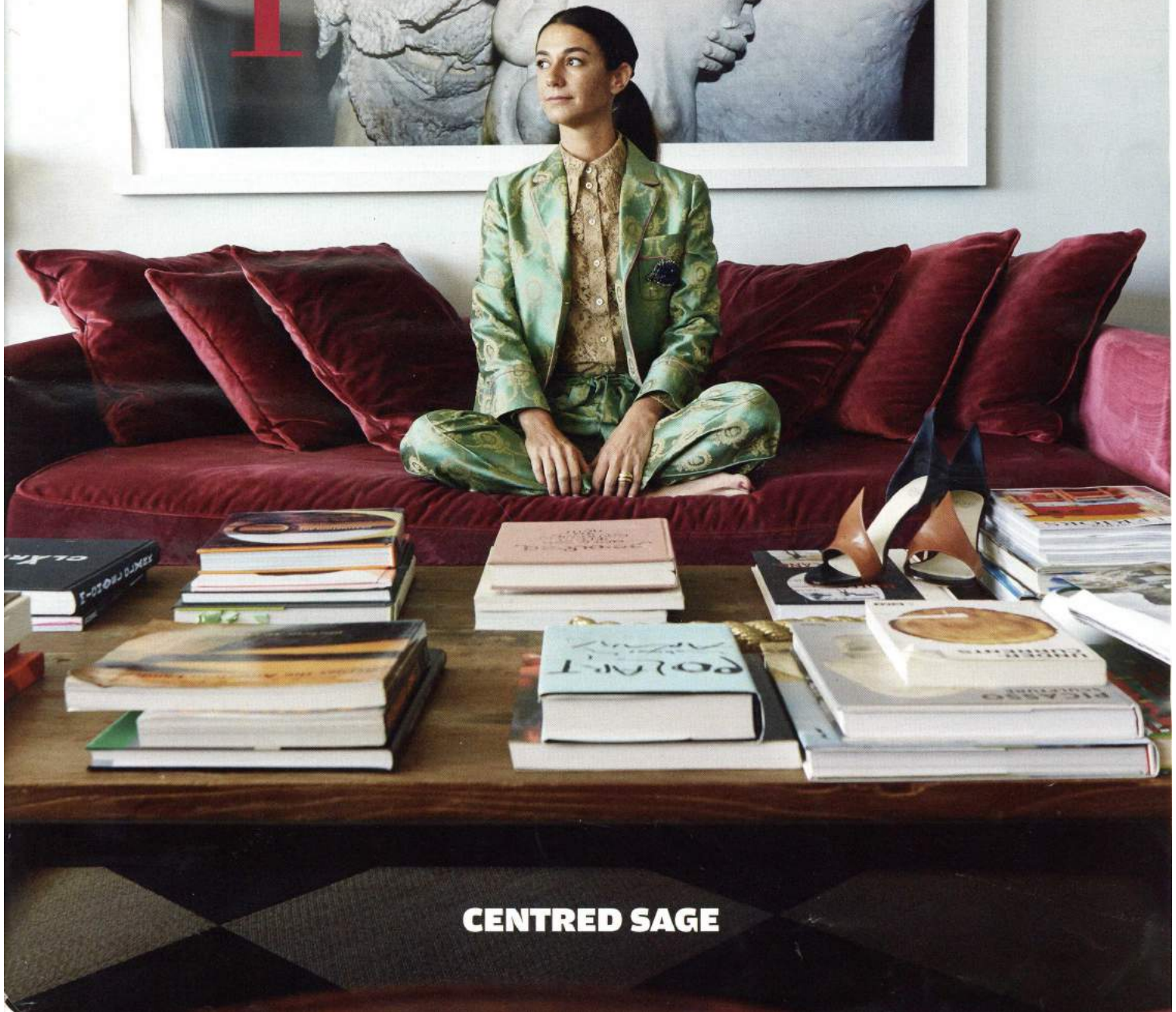


FINANCIAL TIMES

how to spend it

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CENTRED SAGE

travelista

Wander woman Maria Shollenbarger
fast-tracks international intelligence
on where to be and what to see

→ Some years back, Saadiyat Island, with its line-up of blue-chip cultural venues, was the focus of all **ABU DHABI** buzz. But with the Jean

Nouvel-designed Louvre satellite, Frank Gehry-designed Guggenheim and late Zaha Hadid's Performing Arts Centre still pending, the hotel lens has shifted to Al Maryah Island. Already home to a sleek Rosewood property, it now boasts the 34-storey **Four Seasons Abu Dhabi at Al Maryah Island** (www.fourseasons.com; from about £186).

The 200 rooms, including 38 suites, evidence little of the gilt-and-chandelier spasms that tend to get the better of designers in this part of the world: instead, cool neutral tones and slick lines prevail, most fetchingly at the white-on-white rooftop terrace bar and in the eight-suite spa.

→ While Necker Island has long been Richard Branson's hideaway-for-hire in the **BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS**, Branson himself favoured his strictly-for-family redoubt **Moskito Island** (www.virginlimitededition.com; from \$47,300), set – like Necker – off the north shore of Virgin Gorda. This summer, the retreat, with three thatch-roofed, multibedroom villas, each with its own living, dining and outdoor entertainment spaces, is, for the first time, available for takeover. Think swathes of whitewash and wicker, a so-fine-it-squeaks sand beach, and a crack team to attend to all needs, from paddleboard lessons to gluten-free menus.

→ Potato Head, the rollicking lounge-club-DJ space on Seminyak beach in **BALI**, is definitely not to all tastes; but, for better or worse, it's

something of an island institution. More grown-up – and interesting – is **Katamama** (www.katamama.com; from \$270), the 58-room boutique hotel that team Potato Head opened behind the club in April. Though their local inspiration, materials and craftsmanship are much touted, the aggregate effect of these, in truth, is a sleek but fairly nationless contemporariness – a place that could be in Palm Springs or Punta del Este as easily as Bali. That said, the rooms look good, with whimsically tiled bathrooms made elegant by brass fittings, and supremely cool in-room bars taking up an entire wall. Its outpost of MoVida (www.movida.com.au), the excellent Australian-Spanish tapas bar, is worth a visit no matter where you're staying.

→ In **NEW YORK**, Lower Manhattan's renaissance continues: media giant Time Inc has followed Condé Nast's lead and relocated downtown, and with such a dense concentration



Above: the infinity pool at the Beach Villa on Moskito Island in the British Virgin Islands. Below: the Rooftop Suite at the Katamama hotel on Seminyak beach, Bali



Above: The Beekman hotel, Lower Manhattan





Above: Shakti's new River House offers the opportunity to commune with monks in the Himalayas. Below: the drawing room at Palé Hall hotel, just outside Snowdonia National Park in Wales

Tom Colicchio and Keith McNally – whose Odeon restaurant, just up West Broadway (itself once again a nexus of cool), more or less put downtown on the map almost 40 years ago.

→ Michael Caines garnered two Michelin stars during his 20 odd years at Gidleigh Park in Dartmoor before reinventing himself as a hotelier last December. Grade-II-listed **Palé Hall** (www.palehall.co.uk; from £190), outside Snowdonia National Park in **WALES**, is his maiden venture – formerly a quaint four-star hotel, which Caines shuttered earlier this year for a total refurb (opening in September). The 18 rooms, all unique and idiosyncratic (it's said Queen Victoria liked hers so much when she passed through that she extended her visit), are now elevated with heritage textiles and meticulously restored. But the feature attraction will likely be the dining room, manned by Caines.

→ “Poor but sexy” may be how former mayor Klaus Wowereit once described **BERLIN**, but these days it has boasting rights to a luxury that few other places in the world do: Belmond's legendary **Venice Simplon-Orient-Express** (www.belmond.com; from £4,420 per couple) has debuted a new route, with the gritty-chic German metropolis as its final disembarkation point. Guests travel on the venerable British Pullman in London for the journey south across Kent, meeting the VSOE in Calais after a luxury transfer through the tunnel, then spend two days and a night in the considerable comfort to which Belmond habitués are accustomed: from the decorative panelling and gleaming brass in the cabins to cut crystal and black tie in the dining room; meandering through Paris and along the Rhine, it's quintessential old-school luxury.

→ Jamshyd Sethna was a young tea planter in Assam when he had the idea to create a

network of village homestays as a means of becoming embedded in the culture of Sikkim and Ladakh in the **HIMALAYAS**. His company **Shakti** (www.shaktihimalaya.com; journeys from \$5,776 based on two sharing) has only moved from strength to strength since. This summer its focus is family, with the new Shakti River House, a luxurious four-bedroom villa surrounded by verdant Indus River flood plains, with views of mountaintop monasteries. A host of complimentary new experiences cater well to young minds and souls, including opportunities to commune with young monks and “study” with medicine men. ✦



Above: the poolside bar at the Four Seasons Abu Dhabi at Al Maryah Island

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