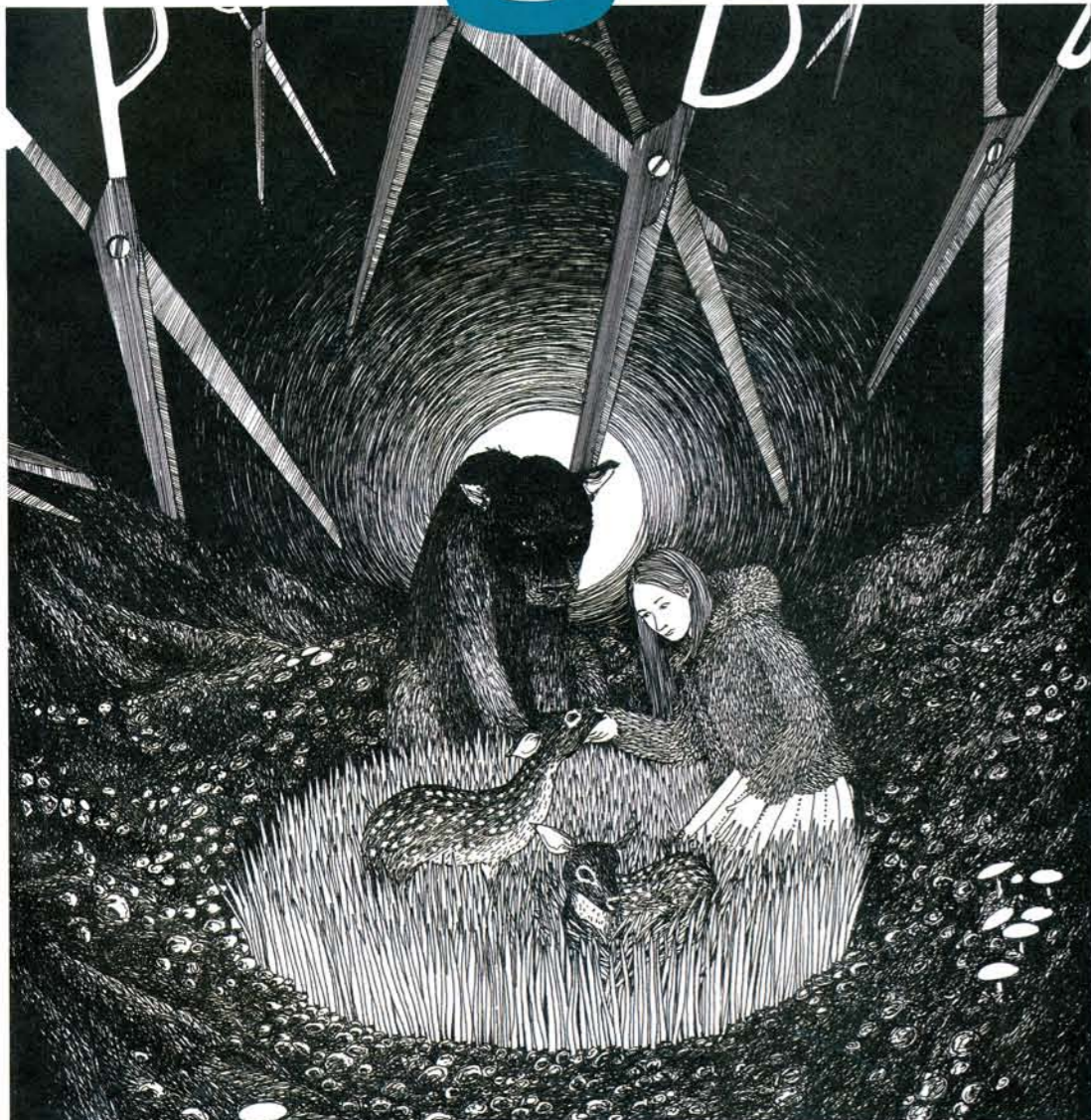


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**Art of darkness**  
work by Rohan Daniel Eason

## Hotel interiors



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# Bargain bijou

A smart hotel concept with a quality touch or two – iconic furniture, perhaps, or a more iconoclastic flea-market approach – can work wonders in the budget arena. **Anna Richardson** takes the measure of three inventive newcomers

THE 'DESIGN HOTEL' is nothing new. Whether it's under a boutique, bijou or lifestyle tag, intriguing or quirky design has long been a selling point for certain hotels, and if you're a lucky or well-researched traveller, you might even find one for a reasonable price. Over the past few years, however, some new concepts have emerged, which tackle the value-for-money equation with different approaches.

Developed in partnership with Network Rail, Sleeperz opened its first hotel in Cardiff late last year. The chain is based on the idea of great station hotels and occupies city-centre plots, close to railway stations, often in tricky spaces or conservation areas. The building design responds to these unique locations, says architect Peter Clash of Clash Associates, which designed the Cardiff hotel and further schemes in Manchester, Newcastle and Birmingham.

The interior, designed by landscape architect Jamie Buchanan with Clash and Creative Design, is inspired by the traveller. The rooms evoke journeys by ferry or train, with compact, fitted furniture and details such as an object wall that offers hanging space, storage, a suitcase rack and a laptop desk. The contrastingly spacious public area includes bespoke furniture, a wood-burning fireplace, brown leather Offeect Ghost sofas, Kvadrat curtains and oak flooring to create the atmosphere of an inn.

Conceived to compete in the budget sector, Cardiff's Sleeperz now occupies the 'compact lifestyle hotel' category, says Clash, although the pricing is still competitive with its budget rivals. The rooms are small, but 'the level of design is higher, finishes are more luxurious and there's a very strong design identity', he explains. 'It's in direct competition with the Travelodges and Holiday Inns, but it's a much more interesting hotel.'

Dutch hotelgroup Citizen M, which will open its first UK hotel in Glasgow next year, is also based around the concept of its visitors – in this case globally aware, savvy frequent travellers. To meet their high expectations of quality and design, while remaining affordable, Citizen M partnered high-end suppliers to add value. It collaborates with Vitra to offer designer furniture for the public spaces, and with Philips on electronics, including an all-in-one mood pad that controls rooms' curtains, temperature and ambient lighting system. 'It's how we can offer this affordable luxury to the consumer without it looking cheap or low quality,' explains Robin Chadha, chief marketing officer at Citizen M.

Investing in iconic furniture is a popular ploy for lower-budget hotels. Furniture manufacturer Fritz Hansen, which predominantly supplies the high-end of the hotel market, has noted increasing demand for its design classics from lower-category hotels, according to Martin Kraunsoe, vice-president of business development. An Arne Jacobsen Egg chair will make a surprising impact in a more affordable hotel, as design-conscious customers would not expect it.

But there is more to making a design statement than an iconic piece of furniture. Citizen M's 14m<sup>2</sup> rooms, designed by Dutch design consultancy Concrete, were inspired by luxury yachts and small private jets to convey a luxury feel, and modular construction methods mean greater quality control and faster delivery.

A different type of quality is being pulled together at the Michelberger Hotel in Berlin, which occupies a former factory building from the turn of last century and is due to open later this month. Founder Tom Michelberger decided to open it as part of a wider desire to create a vibrant, welcoming community inspired by Berlin

itself, and working with like-minded and creative people. Michelberger teamed up with furniture designer Werner Aisslinger, who appreciated the concept and conjured an approach that bore the city's character in mind. 'My approach was to [create] a collage world, not a clean, designed world,' says Aisslinger. 'Not one where everything is perfect, but one that's more family-oriented, with some chaos.'

Other creatives, including makers, film set designers and graphic designers, joined to add their personal take on the underlying idea. 'The main thing was not to make it a typical "design hotel",' says set designer Anja Knauer, who scoured Berlin's flea markets and antique shops with fellow stylist Sibylle Oellerich to decorate the rooms and public areas. Sugar bowls to mount on the wall for use as towel racks, flower vases transformed into soap dishes and different books for each room speak of a typical Berlin lifestyle.

'With the design, whether it's graphic, website or interiors, we are concerned that the pieces have a story or a character,' adds creative director Azar Kazimir, who also designed the playful visual identity for the hotel. 'That's the quality – blending the design world with a more authentic story.'

Despite the collage approach, the Michelberger conveys a coherent design aesthetic – thanks to the creative passion of everyone involved, believes Kazimir. It's a mix-and-match of vintage and hand-crafted surfaces and areas, making the most of the spaces and the budget.

'The basis for [the hotel] is the experience of living in Berlin,' explains Michelberger. 'We don't feel comfortable in perfectly designed spaces. We didn't want to shake up the design world, we wanted to create something durable, solid and smartly done, with a great atmosphere.'