



# Breakfast in America

*Beverly Hills. Home of the rich and famous, and the very rich and the very famous. From A-list celebrities and rock stars to politicians and royalty; anyone who's anyone has found their way to Beverly Hills at some point in their life*

Words by *HUGH FRANCIS ANDERSON*

**D**RIVING ALONG THE Pacific Coast Highway in a customised Porsche 911 Turbo S, the soothing ocean breeze brushing gently against my face and the glorious Californian sun lightly kissing my skin, I can see Beverly Hills in the distance. This decorous corner of America's West Coast gets 330 days of sun a year. Perhaps that's why it's such a lure for people who want to live where the streets are paved with gold.

Life in Beverly Hills doesn't come cheap. The city is surprisingly small, covering an area of just six square miles, which explains in part why the average property price is close to \$4 million. It's said it has the highest density of resident celebrities anywhere in the world, which isn't hard to believe. Huge white stucco houses hide behind intimidating double gates and tall, swaying palm trees. They all *look* like they're owned by the rich and famous. Mick Jagger, Charlie Chaplin and Jack Nicholson have all called Beverly Hills home.

The first stop on my tour is the AKA Beverly Hills, one of the city's most exclusive temporary residences. Completed in 2012 under the instruction of property moguls Korman Communities, the residencies are spectacular, particularly the 16 penthouses, one of which has been turned over to me for a couple of nights. There's a minimal feel to it, fed by mid-century-inspired Danish furniture, hardwood flooring and a neutral colour palette. The fireplace adds to the Scandi feel, although given there's been no measurable snow here since 1958, I can't imagine it gets much use. The *pièce de résistance* are the two south-facing balconies offering views out over the Hollywood sign and the surrounding hills. Scanning the city below, my eye falls on the Beverly Wilshire, the hotel made famous by Richard Gere and Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman*.

Managing director Noel Hernandez stresses that AKA is a temporary residence not a hotel, where rooms cost upwards of \$1,000 per night. Most guests stay for months on end. One gentleman held onto his keys for more than 10 years. When the amenities offered include a 20-seat private cinema, a vast third-floor terrace and close ties to the best places to eat in the surrounding area, you can understand why.

One of those restaurants is Spago, owned by celebrity chef Wolfgang Puck and film producer Barbara Lazaroff. It opened on Canon Drive in 1997 and has regularly been voted the best restaurant in Los Angeles and one of the best in the US. At one time it held two Michelin stars, one of only three restaurants in LA to have done so. My lunch of seafood mousse, veal tartar and Wagyu beef was certainly memorable.

Dining in Beverly Hills is becoming increasingly eclectic. Spaghetini & the Dave Koz Lounge opened a little over a year



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PRESIDENTS, KINGS  
AND CELEBRITIES  
COME HERE TO BUY  
THE MOST EXPENSIVE  
CLOTHES IN THE  
WORLD  
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ago, adding to the city's burgeoning roster of immersive dining experiences. It serves up a mix of Italian food and jazz, curated by Koz, a nine-times Grammy-nominated musician. Tom Jones has performed here, but it also offers a platform to breakthrough artists, an LA speciality.

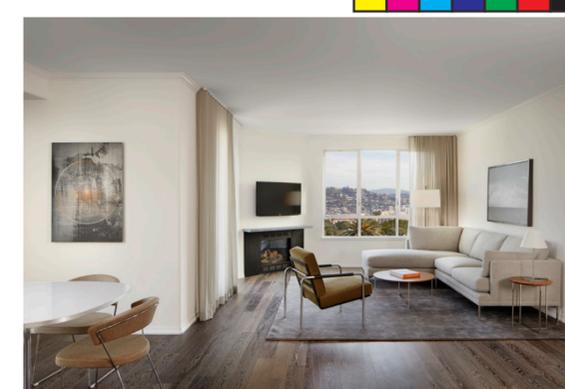
But it's not all new. The Polo Lounge in The Beverly Hills Hotel was completed in 1912, two years before Beverly Hills officially became a city, and has long since been one of the city's most iconic destinations. They say this was Marilyn Monroe's favourite hotel; she lived here a number of times during her troubled life. It's still a haunt for the well-groomed – Denise Richards was at a nearby table as I lunched on succulent steak tartar, pulled-crab cakes and fresh lobster.

If you're not lunching in Beverly Hills, you're probably shopping. Rodeo Drive is still a luxury retail Mecca, lined as it is with the flagship stores of global luxury brands belonging to Chanel, Cartier, Bulgari, Gucci et al (the latter's gold-and-glass fronted store is particularly brash). It's also a car park for Bugattis, Lamborghinis and Ferraris, and during my visit, a hideous paisley-printed bright yellow Rolls Royce – proof that where there's money, there's not always taste.

And then there's The House of Bijan, clothiers to the most powerful men in the world. I'm shown around by the founder's son and current owner, Nicholas Bijan, or the Prince of Luxury as he's known. He shows me photo after photo of presidents, kings, congressmen and celebrities – all of whom have come here to buy, in Nicholas's own words, 'the most expensive clothes in the world'. He's not wrong. On one peg I spot a charcoal baby-alligator and mink-lined trench coat. Yours for a wallet-emptying \$195,000.

Somewhat more modest is Isaia, another menswear outlet. The vibe here is different – more relaxed, a bit more California, you might say. The price points are down-to-earth, and you can choose your suit with a Negroni in hand.

Rodeo Drive is one of the rare places in Beverly Hills where walking comes naturally. Otherwise, you need a set of



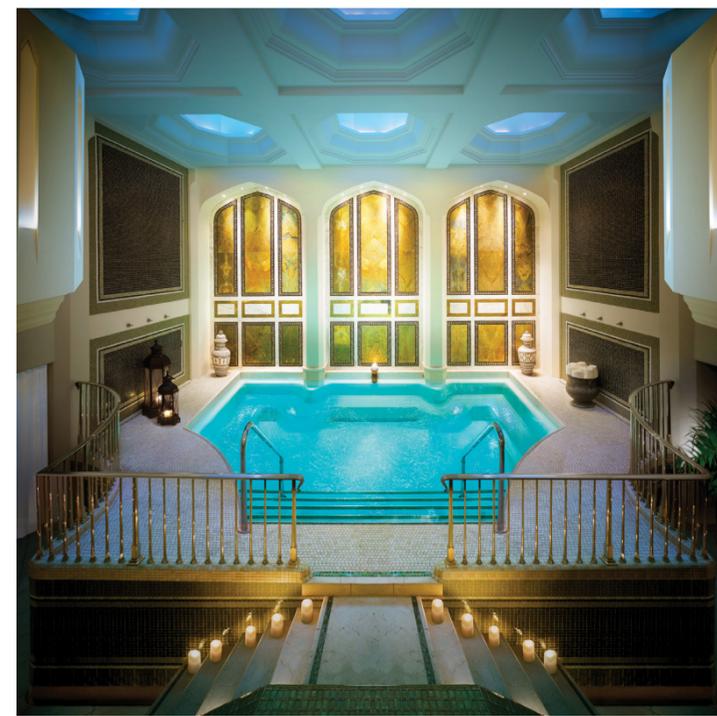
**WEST COAST STYLE**

Clockwise from left: Rodeo Drive shops; a apartment in the AKA; the residents-only terrace lounge in the AKA; the Polo Lounge; and a Rodeo Drive signpost





**TOP THAT**  
A rooftop view from the Montage Beverly Hills (left) and one of its gadget-laden luxury rooms (below)



**PICTURE MONTAGE**  
Clockwise from top left: mineral pool in Spa Montage; a view of the Hollywood Hills from the Montage; and the rooftop pool

wheels. My ride for the duration is a £155,000/\$232,000 Porsche 911 Turbo S, which despite its grunt and flair manages to feel understated here. Driving in this part of town feels less about getting from A to B, and more about announcing yourself. Hence the paisley, I assume, although why you'd want to announce to the world you've single-handedly destroyed the aesthetic of an automotive icon, I'm not entirely sure. Anyway, cruising along the West Coast in a convertible supercar, I can't say I've arrived, but it's hard not to assume the mentality. With its infectious excesses, this place gets into your head.

Talking of which, after a couple of serene nights at AKA, it's time for a change of scene, and indeed a change of tone. Next stop is one of the most famous hotels in LA, the mighty Spanish-inspired Montage Beverly Hills, said to be an homage to Southern California estates of the 1920s and 1930s. Completed in 2008 at a price of \$300million, it is Beverly Hills' most recent hotel build and yet a slice of old-world glamour. On the door and inside its palatial walls, valets wear top hats and white gloves, and you can take afternoon tea in the tea salon every day, washed down with live harp music.

My room, a grand suite, picks up the theme. It's flooded with polished marble and hardwood, and the furniture is a mix of Spanish, Italian and Moroccan. But this isn't a dusty museum. This is a 21st century temple to luxury and there are gadgets everywhere. I can even open the curtains from my bed.

Among the hotel's unique highlights is a visit to Gornik & Drucker, the 'barber to the stars'. As I settle in for a haircut and beard trim, William Gornik tells me I'm sitting in the same chair Frank Sinatra and Ronald Reagan once sat in, which sends a tingle down my spine. The hotel has a host of five-star amenities too, including the Spa Montage, a 20,000ft<sup>2</sup> oasis of calm, complete with private relaxation areas, a mineral pool and 17 tranquil treatment rooms.

Another great hideaway in the Montage is its secret drinking hole, the £10 bar, an unapologetically lavish cocktail experience that's accessed through the kitchens of the Montage's restaurant,



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**THE MONTAGE IS A SLICE OF OLD WORLD GLAMOUR WITH NO SHORTAGE OF 21ST CENTURY GADGETS**  
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**LIFE OF LUXURY**  
The £10 bar in the Montage hotel (left); The House of Bijan on Rodeo Drive (top right) and some of the items on sale (bottom right)

Scarpetta. The £10 bar offers a range of cocktails, costing from \$40 to \$2,000, all served in Lalique crystal tumblers. The manager, Cash Black (nominative determinism in action?) tells me he shares a simple mantra with his clients; 'come as a customer, leave as a friend'.

Sticking with the indulgent theme, I couldn't leave Beverly Hills without heading over to Little Santa Monica and popping into the Buena Vista Cigar Club, the smoker's paradise nonpareil around these parts. Proprietor/bartender Rigoberto Fernandez has created a cosy hangout for the cigar aficionado, no doubt reminiscent of the emporiums built by his Cuban cigar-manufacturing ancestors. Part of its charm is in how other-worldly it feels, a brief respite from the Beverly Hills bling and bang. It's got a sort of Cuban sportsman's club feel to it and there's not a single stretched face or trophy pooch in sight. We're talking wood panels, antlers, stuffed ducks, some

old historical photos and – somewhat incongruously, no matter whether you're in Cuba or LA – some old skis. You don't have to be an experienced stogie smoker to cross the threshold, and I'm encouraged to pick out a cigar and to take my time enjoying it, with a glass of single malt in hand. For a wonderful moment, I could be in Old World Havana.

But of course I'm not, and in fact I'm not long for Beverly Hills either. This place has got to me, in a good way. The warmth in the air would be welcome any time of year, not just during the British winter. This is a capital of indulgence, a theme park for the deep of pocket, and for the casual visitor a cinematic experience in which you are the star. Reluctantly, I pack my bags, doff my hat in the direction of the Montage's impeccable staff and hand the keys back to that magnificent car, far from ready for the 14-hour trip home. I recommend you book a trip now. Just don't forget your cheque book.

**HEAD OVER HILLS**

For information on hotels, restaurants, car rental and walking tours in Beverly Hills, visit [lovebeverlyhills.com](http://lovebeverlyhills.com)



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Return flights from London to Los Angeles start from £404 per person in Economy and £961 in Premium Economy [airnewzealand.co.uk](http://airnewzealand.co.uk)



**AKA BEVERLY HILLS**  
A one-bedroom suite at AKA Beverly Hills starts at \$425/£285 per night based on a one week stay [stayaka.com](http://stayaka.com)

**MONTAGE BEVERLY HILLS**  
Prices start from £465/\$695 per room per night [montagehotels.com](http://montagehotels.com)



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RODEO DRIVE IS  
A RETAIL MECCA  
LINED WITH FLAGSHIP  
STORES OF GLOBAL  
LUXURY BRANDS  
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**FLIGHT READY**  
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