

(from top) The hall of mirrors in Falk's Bar dates back to 1839; rooftop dining; the Penthouse covers the eighth floor

Delightful dualism

A major revamp at Munich's Bayerischer Hof has layered modernist splendour atop the hotel's opulent traditionalism

The capital of Bavaria isn't short on incongruities. Widely considered 'spiessig', or stuffy, in other parts of this markedly liberal republic, it is also home to Oktoberfest (beer has had official status as a food group here since health-related regulations introduced by Duke Wilhelm IV in 1516) and parks that have nudist areas packed with sunbathing office workers. It is pristine, congenial and palpably safe, yet the history-savvy are likely to feel a few unsettling frissons taking a stroll around its centre (it was considered the 'Hauptstadt der Bewegung', or 'Capital of the Movement', throughout the Third Reich period). You can go skiing for the day, or opt for surfing instead (seriously: an ice-cold wave rolls constantly along the Eisbach, a small channel of the Isar River).

So it's fitting that the Bayerischer Hof ('Bavarian Court'; bayerischerhof.de), Munich's most imposing and storied hotel, situated in the heart of the city on Promenadeplatz, is a rich dichotomy of old and new. One minute you find yourself in a densely carpeted, lavishly chandeliered lobby or dining area with the distinctly old-school, *hygge* charm of one of those gargantuan hotels found in the coldest extremes of North America (the lift doors even have those half-moon-dial floor indicators); climb a staircase or two and you may find yourself in an ultra-modern spa-side conservatory restaurant.

In the rooms, elegantly battered desks made of timber felled in centuries past are juxtaposed with modish tables comprising circular slabs of onyx balanced on giant logs, while the food in the triple Michelin-starred restaurants is classic yet contemporary. Even the two statues outside – one of Renaissance composer Orlando di Lasso, festooned with Michael Jackson tributes since the death of the latter (a regular guest), in patina'd bronze; the other a ribbed-metal, vaguely sci-fi rendering of 19th century statesman Count von Montgelas – complement each other with elegant discord.

The recent transformation of the south and north wing's higher floors turbo-boosts the contemporary credentials of a premises conceived by King Ludwig I and



built in 1841. The work of Belgian interior designer, art collector and antique dealer Axel Vervoordt – who usually specialises in the kind of palatial digs owned by rappers, designers and famous software magnates – the 18-month, €12 million refit has created 23 double rooms and five junior suites. The brighter, south-facing suites are furnished with more vibrant colours, while the darker north-facing ones are appointed with more sombre tones.

The piece de resistance (or 'Hauptgericht'), though, is a near 3800-square-foot Penthouse Garden Suite, which takes up the entirety of a new eighth floor (the renovations involved the demolition of four floors and the construction of five). A charming, tasteful space characterised by soothing, natural tones (granites, fawns, dark browns, creams), rustic beams, linen seat covers and eclectic artworks, its living room features a central fireplace while the entire two-bedroom suite is surrounded by a 360-degree terrace, replete with greenery and featuring a Japanese hot-tub and whirlpool. A 24-hour personal driver and butler service is also included.

This was already a hotel with much to recommend it: not least an unbeatable location; a congenial approach to hospitality that fourth-generation owner Innegrit Volkhardt puts down to it having been a family business since 1897; and a wonderfully serene, Andree Putman-designed seventh-floor pool in which, each time you turn to breathe, you glimpse a new angle of the Cathedral of Our Dear Lady, the Gothic domes of which are visible at eye level thanks to a prohibition on buildings higher than 99 metres (325 feet) in the city centre.

Yet the new refurbishment brings something fresh: an easy, ultra-modern bonhomie that would surely have been appreciated by late Bayerischer Hof regulars such as Henry Ford, Nelson Rockefeller and Princess Grace of Monaco. And, were they to visit today, they'd still get to enjoy the old-school, cosy majesty that characterised it in their day. – NICK SCOTT

Bayerischer Hof, Promenadepl. 2-6, 80333, München, Germany. Double room in the new wings, from €495; Penthouse Garden Suite, from €15,000.