

Counting to Den...

If you need a bolthole in central London, the Fox Club in Mayfair has it all, says **EUGENE COSTELLO** – funky, contemporary and exceptionally well located



THERE IS NOTHING that feels quite so decadent as staying overnight in London when you already live there. Obviously, I don't mean at your own home, but at a central London address. As any child knows, a hotel in Mayfair makes you top dog in the game – and woe betide the opponent who has the bad fortune to land there.

But the Fox Club on Clarges St (between Curzon St and Piccadilly, half a minute from Green Park Tube station) offers a superb solution that gives you the chance to bed down in luxury in the heart of Mayfair, and for little more than budget hotel prices for members.

46 Clarges St is a five-storey Georgian townhouse that became the residence of political legend and civil liberty campaigner Charles James Fox. He lived here with his mistress Mrs Armistead, a society courtesan, and the house acquired a reputation for hedonism, as Fox's friends gathered to help him indulge his passions for drinking and gambling.

Now an altogether more sedate place, it is a real home from home in the heart of Mayfair, and gave us, the weekend we visited in late October, the opportunity to make like tourists and capitalise on its location and comforts.

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First, the club. As well as the ground-floor bar and breakfast room (where you're sure to enjoy a drink and a chat with the wonderfully friendly Maxine, Yorkshire's finest but long a denizen of London), there are nine superb guest rooms at members' disposal upstairs.

We were staying in the George IV suite on the third floor, a wonderfully balanced fusion of the traditional and the contemporary that managed – like the Fox Club – to be both sumptuously luxurious and splendidly funky. It screams at you to kick off your shoes and dive onto the ludicrously comfy super king size bed, all plump cushions and Egyptian cotton sheets, TV remote control in hand.

A small room off has a three-seater sofa bed, should you want to bring the family in tow, and this leads to a funky, modern bathroom, all chrome and marble, and Molton Brown smellies.

We made the most of being tourists for a weekend, with a stroll across Green Park, past the Palace and into St James's Park – the views from the Blue Bridge across the lake after sunset of the Palace one way and Horseguards' Parade the other make you feel you are at the heart of London, as the tourists and shoppers start to head home. And the twinkling lights of the London Eye, which peeps out from beyond Horseguards' Parade and Whitehall, are reflected like darting fish in the inky depths of the lake.

We wandered back to our suite for a welcome relax before heading out once again, this time to the charms of Shepherd Market, a two-minute stroll away. Soho for the middle classes, Shepherd Market is one of London's hidden gems, a bohemian collection of pubs, restaurants and late-night grocery stores that prove it is somewhere real people live (and work, too – its history as a red-light district has

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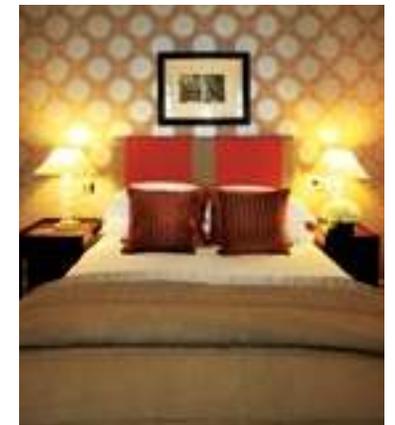
not been consigned completely to the past). Here, you'll be spoilt for choice for dinner, with Lebanese, French, Italian and modern European cuisine all well represented.

Make sure you enjoy a pint either before or after at local institution the Grapes, which has a good range of real ales – I can personally vouch for the Cornish tippie, Doom Bar.

And so to bed. Did I mention it was one of the most comfortable I've ever slept on? Let me say it again – and that's up against some pretty stiff competition, too.

If you are one of those who normally choose to skip breakfast, make an exception if staying at the Fox Club. It is the English breakfast par excellence – rashers of smoked back bacon, proper butcher's sausages, massive free-range eggs with yolks like balloons, black pudding... you might want to go back up to your room afterwards for a little lie-down so do factor that in when planning your morning's schedule.

The only downside of the Fox Club? It's with a heavy heart that you finally have to stop pretending you live in Mayfair and get back on the Tube to the suburbs... **H** Doubles from £141, suites from £164.50 (£200 and £230 for non-members). 46 Clarges St, W1; 020 7495 3656; foxclublondon.com



SUITE SENSATION:
A selection of the Fox Club's stylish and contemporary bedrooms