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SPECIAL REPORT

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First-timers are quickly initiated. Hot news comes thick and fast: yesterday, **Accor's** CEO Luxury, Chris Cahill, announced a forthcoming 501-room Sofitel Dubai Wafi - and, as its President, Jennifer Cronin, revealed **Wharf Hotels Management Ltd**, the immediate trading name for Marco Polo and Niccolo • Yes, ILTM Asia is keep-alert – at least, cross fingers, today'll see sunshades replacing those potential poking weapons known as umbrellas. Need to keep fit? Here's a first. **St Regis Shanghai's** LifeFitness machines have Wikipedia on the screen possibilities (learn Croatia's island geography as you notch up used calories). At last night's marvellous official ILTM party, it was Veuve-Clicquot, dim sum, sushi and jazz, and more, in a setting of Dale Chihuly glass wall art and three-D glass sculptures, the latter somewhat similar to Chihuly's equally spectacular green, and yellow, wall displays in **Ritz-Carlton Millenia, Singapore**. St Regis Shanghai's GM, Chris Tsoi, who was led into luxury travel via a hot Hong Kong soap set entirely in hotels, says his owner, whose portfolio includes **Four Seasons Shanghai Pudong**, is just passionate, about hotels, and art • In Japan, collectors include former rock drummer Yusaku Maezawa, who last week paid US\$110.5 million for a Jean-Michel Basquiat skull painting (arty Chinese billionaires include movie producer Wang Zhongjun, busy, via Sothebys, buying up Van Goghs to start his own museum) • All this bodes well for Beijing's forthcoming **PuXuan**: the new-build seven-floor structure, by cult architect OMA (think Seattle Public Library) is five minutes' walk from the north-east corner of the Forbidden City. It will house China's oldest art-auction house, China Guardian, which coincidentally owns 13.5% of Sotheby's. Above are four floors of hotel, managed by **PuLi** creators Urban Resorts. Here, GM Mark Wouters (long-time Huka Lodge) says the 116 rooms and suites will have similar calm, and fabulous service, staff dressed by Hermès partner Shang Xia, who are all trained by professional theatre directors. Expect a rooftop bar, Rive Gauche brasserie and Cantonese where all circular tables are almost enclosed, as private dining rooms PDRs, by five-foot fences • Urban Resorts' leaders Markus Engel and John Laing are now working on a forthcoming 250-room Kuala Lumpur project, Ireka Group's **The RuMa Hotel and Residences**, being designed by Andy Hall, MQ Studio.

Pendry, youthful sibling in the **Montage International** family, has two hotels open, Pendry San Diego and Sagamore Pendry Baltimore (the latter's food overseen by NoHo Hospitality Group's Andrew Carmellini) – coming up are Los Cabos, and, in California, La Quinta, where Pendry shares billing with a forthcoming Montage, plus an 18-hole Arnold Palmer Signature Golf Course • **Conrad Bora Bora Nui** opened this April, GM Jean Duc (114 rooms, plus 86 over-water villas). **Conrad San Luis Potosi**, Mexico, opened in May (134 rooms, GM Pierre Kranzel). This month, Markus Kosch opens 309-room **Conrad Guangzhou** and GM Karan Singh opens 164-room **Conrad Osaka** • Under exuberant president, Radha Arora, in chronological order, **Rosewood Puebla** opened last month; **Hôtel de Crillon, A Rosewood Hotel** re-opens in Paris on July 5th, and coming up are the 71-unit **Rosewood Phuket** (featuring new spa concept Asaya), and the 175-room **Rosewood Phnom Penh**, on the top 14 floors of the city's tallest building. Looking ahead, Rosewood's openings include Bangkok, Guangzhou and Hong Kong (MD Marc Brugger is still, magically, heading **Rosewood Beijing**) and, announced last Thursday, Vienna • Heiko Steiner opens 1,300-room **Atlantis Resort Sanya Haitang Bay** – its US \$1.68 billion cost covers an aquarium with over 86,000 sea creatures • On the Sofitel front, July sees the launches of **Sofitel Foshan**, 325 rooms, GM Olivier Larcher; **Sofitel Kuala Lumpur Damansara**, 312 rooms, GM Thomas Gassner, and **Sofitel Singapore City Centre**, 223 rooms, GM Wouter De Graaf. In November, Greg Brady opens 590-room **Sofitel Sydney Darling Harbour**.

Aqua Expeditions highlights themed cruises, say, this December, both on the Mekong, photography with Leica instructor Francisco Marin, or wellness with Lululemon ambassador Alex Salihin. There are also Jean-Michel Cousteau cruises, culinary specials with consultants Pedro Miguel Schiaffino of Malabar, Lima, and Australian legend David Thompson: alternatively, cruise with CEO Francisco Galli Zugaro (the Galapagos specialist who founded Aqua with his father-in-law, financier Fred Brown, ten years ago). All-inclusive here means good house wines but if, say, Guangzhou picture-taking enthusiasts must have Margaux or 50-year old Hennessy, order ahead, at cost • Interestingly, Chinese guests now invariably constitute the majority in China's luxury hotels – in Sanya, domestic business can reach 97%. But, say long-time expats, they like foreign managers, though they sometimes suspect others get better treatment (not true, protest anonymous GMs). Here's another nugget, applicable globally: whereas at other times Chinese like green tea and other local brews, at the increasingly popular afternoon tea hour they prefer English Breakfast or Earl Grey.

LA Tourism suggests LAX's hassle-free in-and-out The Private Suite at LAX, first-of-its-kind in the USA; perks include private TSA screening, on-site immigration processing, and direct BMW 7-Series transportation across the tarmac. Los Angeles certainly reinforces its celebrity status: Beverly Center (Westside) is spending \$500 million on upgrading retail, and dining (including two restaurants by Michelin-starred Michael Mina). Westfield Century City Mall (Century City), which already has over 40 stores, including Bloomingdale's, Gucci, Meizhou Dongpo, Rolex and Tiffany, will have more than 55 dining possibilities, and a Tourist Lounge concierge. New hotels include Larry Ellison's 16-room **Nobu Ryokan Malibu**. The 12-floor sculpted shape that is **Waldorf Astoria Beverly Hills** opened last Thursday, GM Luc Delafosse. All 170 rooms have sizeable balconies (the 3,200 sq ft President Suite's terrace is 1,500 sq ft) – savour rooftop Jean-Georges Vongerichten dining and adjacent working garden, and, next to it, hotel guests only, the big pool. Throughout, be bowled over by interior art, sculpture and books personally chosen by owner Beny

Alagem • Showing the growing importance of the LA Live area, **InterContinental Los Angeles Downtown**, part of the \$1.1 billion Wilshire Grand Center, opens June 23rd, 2017 - 70th floor lobby, and the 73rd floor rooftop holds restaurant, bar and infinity pool, weddings up to 1,800 guests. GM of this Korean Air-owned 900-room beauty is another Frenchman, Jean-Jacques Reibel, • Reibel's successor at InterContinental Hong Kong, Claus Pedersen, is also a foodie: long-time culinary partner Alain Ducasse has added a sensational light-bright Rech seafood brasserie.

Overseen by long-time Mandarin Oriental hotelier Bruno Schöpfer, **Bürgenstock Resort Lake Lucerne** re-opens from August. An hour from Zurich Airport, and at 1,500 feet above Lake Lucerne, it has four hotels – Robert Herr is complex MD. Add clean Swiss mountain air, fine dining at 12 restaurants and bars (including authentic-Asian Spices) and superb cigar and wine lounges, plus the Bürgenstock Alpine Spa, and a doctor-staffed Waldhotel Health and Medical Excellence facility. More talking points? Audrey Hepburn married in the working chapel here, and Sean Connery and the entire crew of the Bond movie *Goldfinger* stayed a month – and, forward to today, if retail addiction hits, take the resort's private funicular down lakeside, to Lucerne, home of Bucherer and De Grisogono, both open Sundays • For immersion in Swiss tradition, try Zurich's 1844-vintage **Baur au Lac**, GM Wilhelm Luxem – when Walt Disney stayed here 1969 he dedicated a whole comic magazine to it. Memories? Over 1,000 fresh flowers are used daily by the 119-room hotel's two inhouse florists, and it's less than ten minutes' walk to Bahnhofstrasse and its stores, or to Cabaret Voltaire, Kunsthaus Zürich, or Zurich Opera House • Gstaad's selling points include Alpine authenticity, and nature: it has over 3,100 beds, and fine hotels, now joined by a just-opened 11-suite **Ultima**, GM Andres Oppenheim, which has a La Prairie spa • **Hotel Schweizerhof Luzern**, 1845 and still going strong, has given each of its 101 rooms a story about a former celeb guest – the Luzern Suite is dedicated to both Leonard Bernstein and Leo Tolstoy (GM Clemens Hunziker).

Our Forum venue Monday, the **Portman Ritz-Carlton**, has a new GM, Tarik Temuçin – and striking re-done elevator facades. Predecessor **Derek Flint**, by the way, is now GM **J.W. Marriott Singapore**, formerly The South Beach. He's toned down some of designer Philippe Starck's more outrageous design elements and, cleverly, last month the Spa introduced two quick-treatment pods (lean-forward stools, where anyone can go, without appointment, for 12-minute eyelift, scalp or shoulder treatments, or longer hand, feet and or detox-revive sessions) • Under GM Rene Zimmer, **Finca Cortesin Hotel Golf & Spa**, 45 minutes from Malaga Airport, has added spa treatments with ancient healing techniques to relieve body and stress imbalances (or try Ayurvedic, or a Matahari face massage, with warm coconut oil to relieve facial tension): the 1,900 sq ft Cortesin Suite is largest of the 70 suites and villas, and expect newly-planted environmentally-friendly, UltraDwarf Bermuda grass on the Jack Nicklaus golf course, Japanese, Spanish and Italian-Mediterranean cuisines • There's a new vegetarian restaurant, Rutabaga (chef Gabriel Ask, from Thomas Keller's French Laundry), at **Grand Hôtel Stockholm**, GM Pia Djupmark • **Bulgari Resort Bali** opened the second Il Ristorante - Luca Fantin last month: onsite chef at the intimate 36-seat restaurant is Fabrizio Crocetta • For unique weddings, how about a table-for-12 at **Grand Hyatt Tokyo's** chef's table? After your ceremony in the hotel's chapel or Shinto temple, your choice, move to the French Kitchen's office where a chef cooks in front of you, and the all-inclusive price, food, drinks and service, comes with two-nights' stay • Talking of marriage, entice destination weddings coming from Chengdu by offering all-day festivities with ceremony+lunch, preceded by, and followed by, mahjong (elsewhere, Chinese prefer later-timed weddings) • Chengdu's stunning **Temple House**, GM Kurt Macher, is as cool as the city's adorable pandas – two centuries-old houses now form an art gallery, and a 24/7 library with 2,000 Blackwell-chosen books, and the spa: a connected futuristic 10-floor dark glass 'sculpture' holds 100 rooms, 65 sq ft plus. A grassed courtyard, themed for tea terraces, has peep-holes down to lower level wellness, and Italian dining. Add bespoke pistachio bikes and, a few yards away, a next-gen Apple Studios, surrounded by hundreds of old-look retail houses, Armani to Zara.

Peninsula fields a powerful team here. Led by COO Peter Borer, we have GMs Rainy Chan, Hong Kong; Joseph Chong, Shanghai; Vincent Pimont, Beijing; Joseph Sampermans, Bangkok, Sonja Vodusek, Tokyo • At stunning **Peninsula Beijing**, now completely refurbished, with expanded wellness facilities, and a farm-to-table organic restaurant, the Beijing Suite is 1,776 sq ft but even the smallest size, in what is now a 230-suite hotel, is over 600 sq ft (employee count remains 500). Realising that busy and regular travellers now increasingly live out of their open suitcases, without unpacking properly, walk-in closets have eight-foot long padded shelves for storage • The Academy at **Peninsula Hong Kong** (top The Peninsula Suite, 4,111 sq ft) adds family-themed programmes, including shaolin wushu martial arts – and an escorted half-day tour to the unique Tai O stilted fishing village on Lantau Island • **Peninsula Tokyo** celebrates its 10th birthday on October 26th, 2017, with a big party showcasing dishes cooked by all Peninsula hotels' chefs: guests will include drivers and navigators from the 80 vintage cars driving the hotel-sponsored Rally Nippon Kyoto-Tokyo earlier that week • **Peninsula Shanghai**, top Peninsula Suite, 4,305 sq ft, adds Blanc de Champagne, and Saumur Champigny Cabernet Franc, to its now-seven own label wines, and an Azimut 47 Flybridge Private Yacht to its fleet – and the neighbouring former British Consulate at No 1 Waitanyuan is fully managed, and operated as an event space, by the hotel.

2017 is the 150th birthday of architect Frank Lloyd Wright, 1867-1959, who designed Tokyo's Wright Imperial, predecessor of **The Imperial Tokyo**, MD Yukio Kanao – handy for Ginza, Hibiya and the Imperial Gardens. Today, 1,800 staff supervise 931 rooms, and 17 restaurants, all highly popular with locals (at Kamon teppanyaki, a lightning-quick spatula artist flips Hokkaido fillet into one-bites). From Tokyo take a hotel limousine two hours to Alpine-style **Kamikochi Imperial Hotel**, open April to November, and then to **Imperial Hotel Osaka**, next to the historic castle • **Waldorf Astoria**, led by Hilton's luxury brand guru John Vanderslice, is into driving and dining. First, cars. Waldorf Astoria Driving Experiences allow test driving Lamborghini's Huracán RWD Spyder and Aventador S.Coupé – sessions will be held in Versailles, July 14-16, 2017; Rome, July 28-30, 2017; Boca Raton, November 3-5, 2017, and Dubai, November 16-18, 2017.

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