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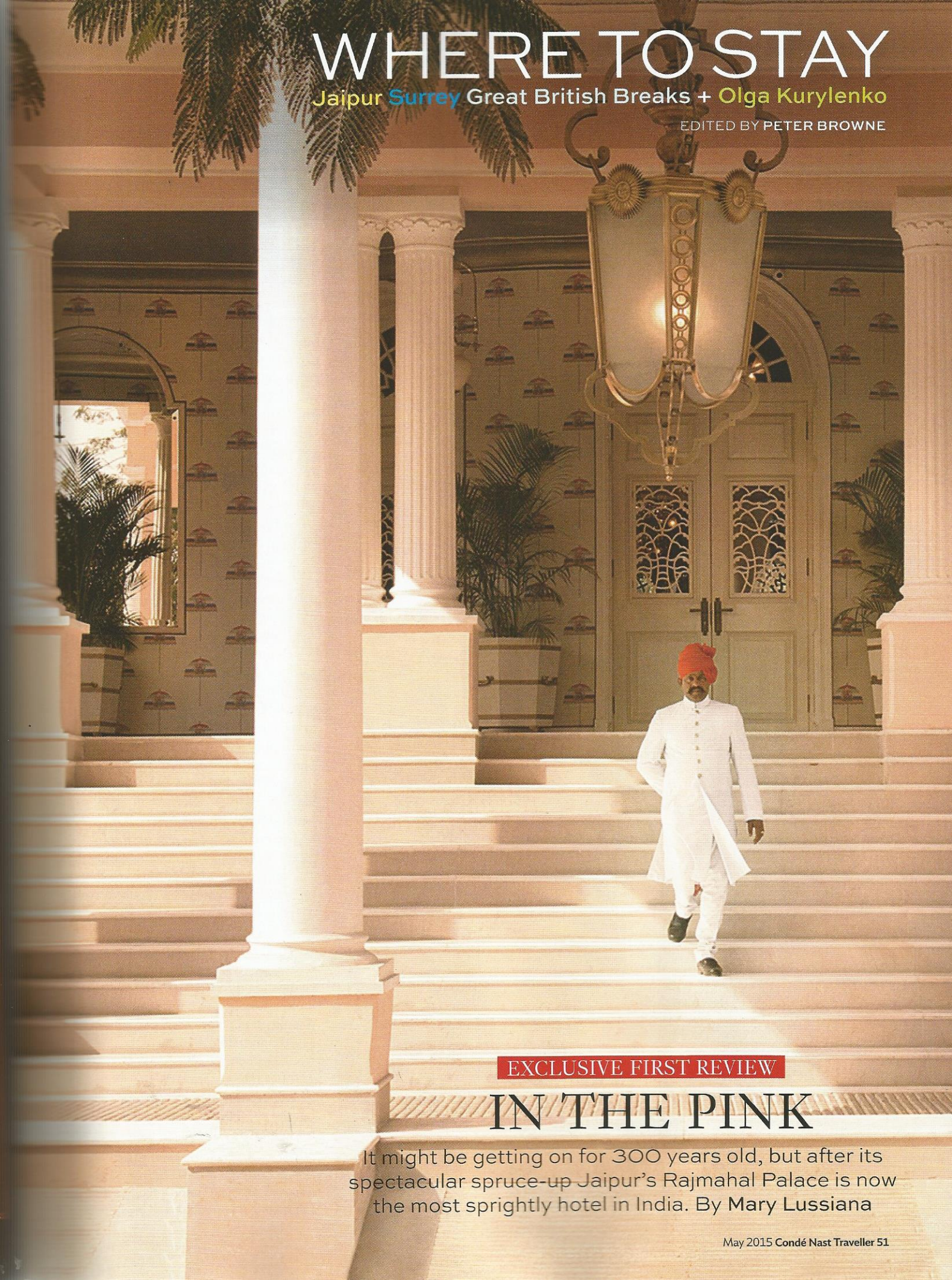
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Jaipur **Surrey** Great British Breaks + **Olga Kurylenko**

EDITED BY PETER BROWNE

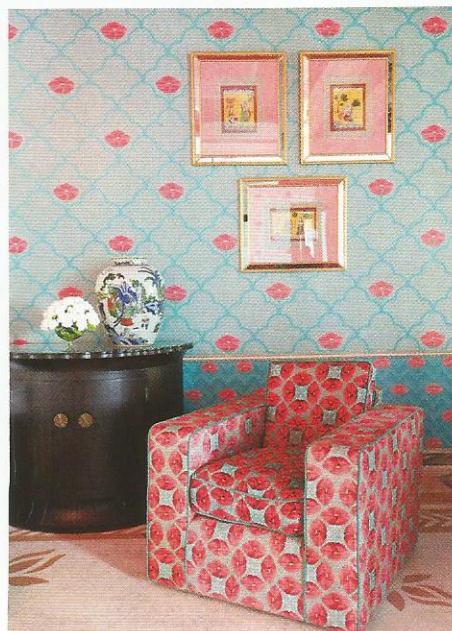
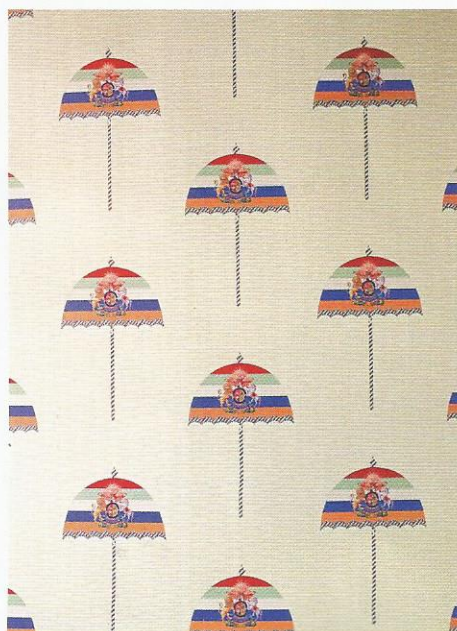
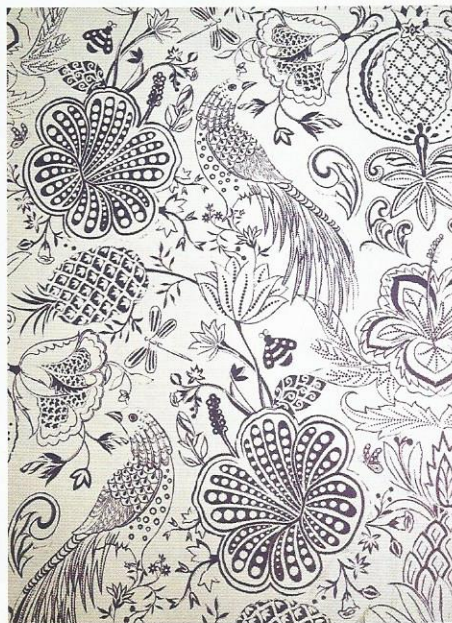
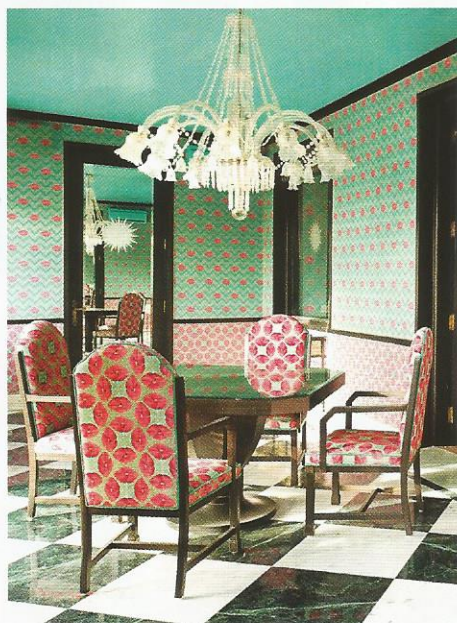
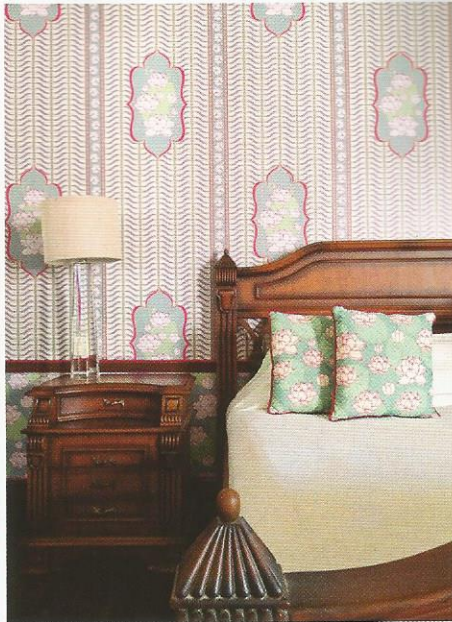
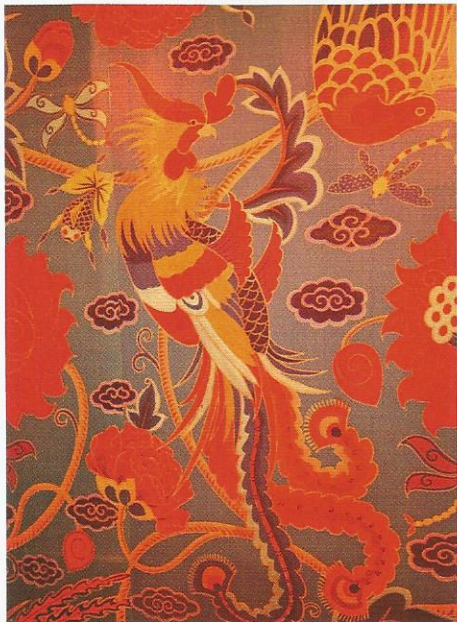


EXCLUSIVE FIRST REVIEW

IN THE PINK

It might be getting on for 300 years old, but after its spectacular spruce-up Jaipur's Rajmahal Palace is now the most sprightly hotel in India. By Mary Lussiana

WHERE TO STAY



THIS IS A BEAUTIFUL MONTH in Rajasthan. The skies are blue, the flowers are beginning to bloom, birds sing and the days are clear and cool,' wrote Gayatri Devi in her memoirs, *A Princess Remembers*. Beauty was something she was renowned for, as was the glamour she brought to the royal family of Jaipur when she married Sawai Man 'Jai' Singh, the dashing, polo-playing Maharajah of Jaipur in 1940, becoming his third and favourite Maharani.

The couple lived for many years in the Rajmahal Palace in Jaipur, originally built in 1729 as a pleasure pavilion, far from the city, where peacocks strutted on green lawns and cooling breezes swept through sunlit spaces. In 1821 it was loaned to the British Resident Political Officer and it remained in British hands until independence in 1947. In an attempt to introduce a bit of Home Counties familiarity to the dusty subcontinent, the garden was transformed by herbaceous borders and tiered hedges; in addition, the original domed pavilion was enveloped by a two-storey, colonial-style building.

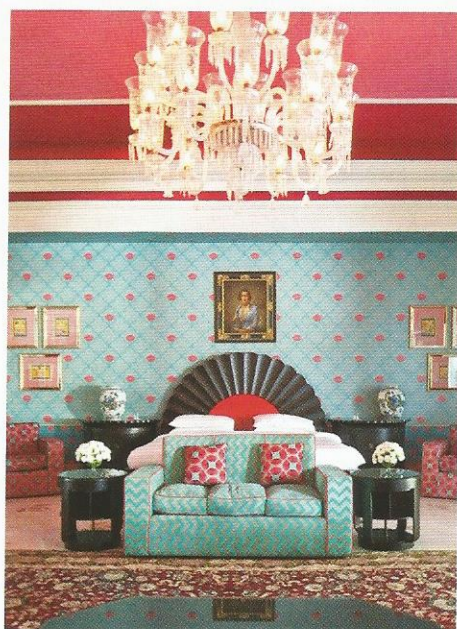
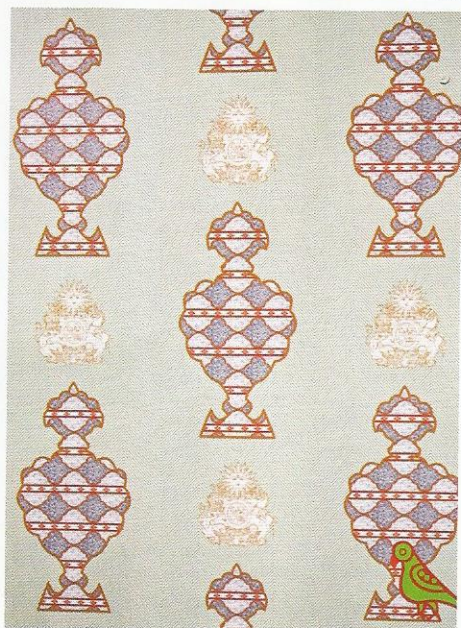
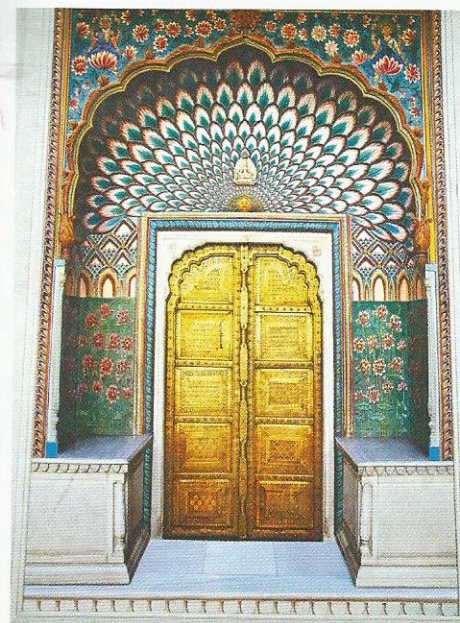
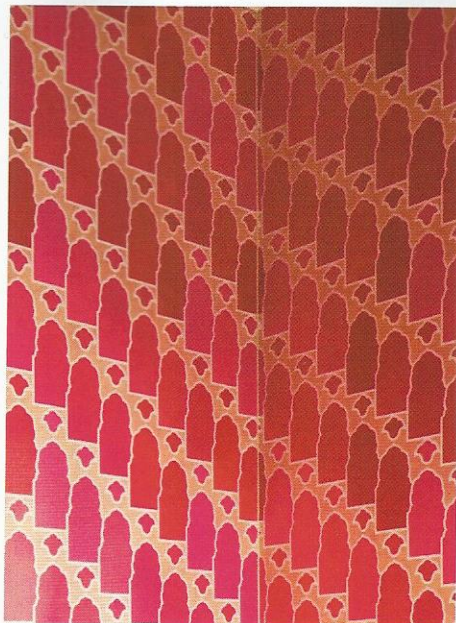
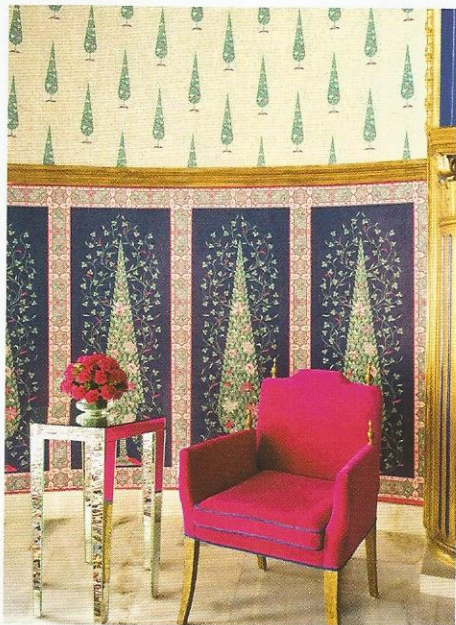
After independence, Rajmahal was returned to Jaipur's royal family and in 1957 they adopted it as a private residence, having previously lived at Rambagh Palace, which the financially astute Jai turned into the first palace hotel in India. 'It was much smaller than Rambagh, but when the workmen had finished it had charm and character and a pleasantly informal atmosphere,' wrote Devi. Here they entertained lavishly with long lunches on the lawns and suppers at the Lalique glass dining table. Jackie Kennedy, Lord Mountbatten and the Queen were all guests, mixing duties of state with polo matches and tiger-hunting in Ranthambor.

The pink city of Jaipur may now nudge up against the Palace's 10 acres of walled gardens, but when its doors opened as the Suján Rajmahal Palace in February this year, the skies were indeed blue and the days clear and cool. It was as if nothing had changed and Jackie Kennedy could, at any moment, walk down the marble staircase to enjoy a pineapple and cardamom Martini in the Polo Bar where Jai's silver trophies decorate the shelves.

It has taken a great deal of work and love to restore the palace's faded charms, but the royal family knew just where to look for help: Adil Ahmad, an acclaimed interior

Previous page: the entrance to Suján Rajmahal Palace. *This page, and overleaf:* designer Adil Ahmad's new interiors flaunt a dazzling palette of bold turquoise and bright pink ➤

WHERE TO STAY



NORMAN PARKINSON'S PHOTOGRAPHS OF INDIA FOR *VOGUE* INSPIRED THE BRIGHT COLOURS OF THE PALACE'S BREAKFAST-ROOM WALLPAPER

➤ designer and a friend of Rajmata Padmini Devi, the wife of Jai's late son, who succeeded him as Maharajah, and who had come to live in the palace as a young bride.

The present Maharajah, a student at Millfield, is a polo player like his great grandfather Jai, and it was with him in mind that Ahmad set to work creating a contemporary palace, while taking care to reference traditional Mogul motifs and family history for the 46 wallpapers he designed. Ahmad used existing family furniture, portraits and photographs, and sourced the beaten silver vases and marble bottles for the bathrooms filled with rose and jasmine. He put symmetry back into the building where it had lost it,

and referenced the latticework in the famous Palace of Winds on the upper corridor windows. He designed the china and the chairs with the characteristic peacock arches which are echoed on the wallpaper of the pink-on-pink breakfast room, inspired by Norman Parkinson's photographs of India for *Vogue*. Ahmad turned his back on royal red, choosing instead bold turquoises and bright pinks to create informality within a regal setting.

The reimagined palace has 14 suites and rooms, including two extremely smart apartments, each with a chauffeur and butler on call. It serves breakfasts of stuffed paratha, lunches of Jaipur *thali* on the lawns and suppers of local river sole

cooked in mustard oil and fenugreek amid gilded splendour. The staff are always smiling, the swimming pool awaits, all is well with the world. Which could be because it has been entrusted to Jaisal Singh, another friend of the family and the founder of Suján, a cluster of highly polished safari camps, and a man who innately understands quality. Whatever the reason, there is no doubt that this is a thrilling place to stay. **T**

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