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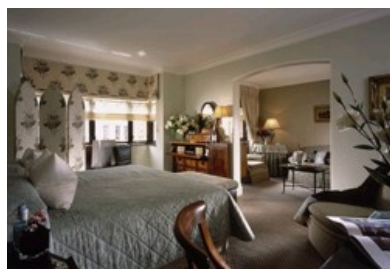
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Knightsbridge hideaways

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THE LONDON VILLAGES series continues in the April/May 2010 issue of BRITAIN magazine with our exploration of the Belgravia & Knightsbridge area. My research led me to a couple of Knightsbridge gems. Discreetly tucked away in a small street next to Harrods,

two of London's most charming hotels: the tiny 12-room Levin and, next door, its sister hotel, the 49-room, award-winning The Capital are both owned by hotelier-wine grower David Levin.

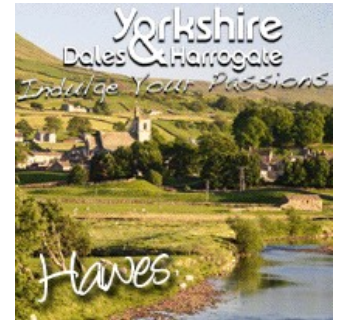
[The Levin](#), which opened three years' ago, is like a private townhouse inside. My guide Melanie points out the Penguin Classics library in the *eau-de-nil* painted foyer. Guests can choose from 500 titles while sipping a drink from the Honesty Bar. "Each room has a champagne bar. This is for guests who don't like champagne," she explains. There are three rooms to each floor, with earthy brown and deep red upholstery in tweeds and velvets against silvery flowered wallpaper. All the windows open and there are views of Knightsbridge's Victorian mews. Downstairs, the Levin's brasserie restaurant Le Metro serves seasonal dishes with Levin Loire Valley wines. "But if the weather's nice, we can provide a picnic hamper to take to Hyde Park or Kensington Gardens," revealed Melanie. Or for a really romantic outing, the hotel provides horse, carriage, butler and luxury hamper.

Next door, [The Capital](#) celebrates its 40th birthday. I'm greeted by Clive, the smiling concierge who will go jogging in Hyde Park with me, if I don't want to go alone. The Levins really do think of everything. The foyer here is in peach pink and has an open fire for chilly days. "We wanted a country house atmosphere," says Kate, David Levin's friendly daughter and hotel manager. "My father says that guests want three things: a big smile at the door, comfy beds and fluffy towels. People feel so relaxed, one guest even leaves his washbag here! My godparents started off as guests who kept returning." They've certainly got it right, the hotel has won two prestigious awards and the restaurant has two Michelin stars.




Remodelled from mostly Edwardian beginnings, each floor has different décor in warm colours with antique-style furniture. But The Capital also has a secret. During rebuilding, David Levin discovered an early Victorian set of rooms round a circular hall, complete with domed ceiling and columns, tucked away inside. "We've been told it was once a small hotel," said Kate Levin. Now listed and perfectly restored, these are now Deluxe Rooms. I loved the blue and white decor against antique furniture, oil paintings and prints.

But you couldn't come to The Capital



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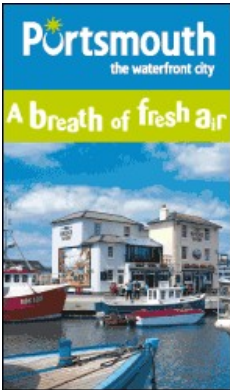
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without trying the restaurant, now under the care of top chef, Dieppe-born Jérôme Ponchelle – previously with Wilton’s restaurant. My friend and I enjoy barman Cesar’s famous Bellini in the comfy bar and then move into the peaceful dining room. Decor is relaxing: soft blue curtains, grey carpet. There are fresh roses on our table.



We begin with an appetizer of light chestnut foam and then I choose an inspired smoke haddock Carpaccio – thinnest slices served with a tiny boiled egg, rosti and frisee salad. My companion has delicious terrine of duck, pork and foie gras. Next come roast partridge with Savoy cabbage and grilled wild turbot with sauce Bearnaise, both served with baby vegetables. Charles, our knowledgeable sommelier looks after us, suggesting citrusy Puligny Montrachet, and a fruity red Ampelida, from Pays de la Vienne. Our waiter Alesso spoils us with six different cheeses, including the more-ish Fleur de Maquis from Corsica. But dessert is sheer indulgence. We couldn’t miss the prune tart *soufflé* with Armagnac ice cream or the Poached Pear with *crème brulee* and *pain d’epice*. A tiny glass of Pacherenc du Vic Bilh rounds off a truly memorable – and pampering – meal!



The Capital (5-star), tel: (020) 7589 5171. The Levin (4-star), tel: (020) 7589 6286. Basil Street, London SW3. Report by Pat Moore.



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