



Images courtesy of Town House Galleria, Milan

BENTLEYS AND BUTLERS THE TOWN HOUSE GALLERIA, MILAN

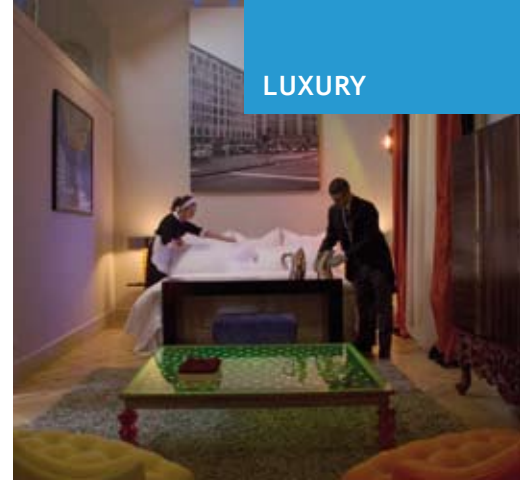
In a luxury market that seems to know no boundaries in terms of setting new standards in product and service, the recently opened Town House Galleria in Milan has wasted no time in propelling itself to the top of the pile under the mantle of being Europe's first seven-star hotel. It is not, of course, the first property in the world to lay claim to such extravagant status – the Burj Al Arab in Dubai and Emirates Palace in Abu Dhabi have seen to that – but it is the first to seriously pursue official seven-star accreditation. The Galleria asked SGS, a leading Swiss

testing and certification company, to create a voluntary seven-star hotel classification that the hotel could then be tested against. So what does a hotel have to do to be two stars above what we had previously considered to be unassailable?

At first glance, the Town House Galleria is indistinct from many other five-star properties. It is magnificently situated in the city's Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II shopping centre, the 24 suites are appointed with the finest furnishings and modern conveniences and the restaurant provides excellent cuisine

– but these features are now considered standard in any of the world's finest properties and, shock horror, there isn't even a spa!

What distinguishes the Town House Galleria from its five-star competitors and, indeed, the material extravagances of the Burj Al Arab and Emirates Palace, is its focus on providing an exquisitely personalised service. Before arrival, guests are contacted to ensure that their requirements are met to the finest detail – the temperature of the room, cotton or linen bed sheets, the music in the stereo, the type of pillow, and so on.



LUXURY



Upon arrival, this service is taken to a whole new level, and, if the Bentley limousine isn't enough to project the Galleria beyond meagre five-star status, then the private butler surely is. This service is on hand to ensure that the visitor experience is as seamless as possible and enables guests to defer those more stressful routines – finding availability at the best restaurants, booking premium seats at a show, ironing shirts, shining shoes, arranging tours, even finding souvenirs – to a willing, and very able, third party.

Naturally, this new precedent in personalised luxury comes at a cost – at least €800 a night to be precise. However, there is no doubt that the market for such a product exists in increasing abundance, and we can expect demand for the Galleria to be huge. Given the speed with which the luxury travel industry is developing, one cannot help but think that Milan's new jewel has signalled a taste of things to come and that sooner, rather than later, seven-star hotels will be a common component of many more cities.

