

# The art of hospitality



The Conrad London St James is offering a vintage menu to celebrate its owner Hilton's centenary this year. Our writer checks in

BY ANTONIA WINDSOR



Left: The striking hotel lobby; right-hand page: PM Boris Johnson by Gerald Scarfe and *The House Always Wins* by artist duo Evil Robots  
Above: trifle forms part of the hotel's new vintage menu



**M**y plate of smoked salmon arrives strewn with brown shrimp and gherkins and a little rack of brown toast – just as it might have done in 1919. I know this because I’ve ordered off the vintage menu at the Blue Boar, the destination restaurant of the Conrad London St James.

At just five years old, the Conrad is one of the area’s newer hotels, but as a Hilton hotel it is celebrating the company’s centenary this year. The vintage menu is just one of several initiatives to mark 100 years since Conrad Hilton opened his first hotel in Cisco, Texas.

### **POLITICAL LINKS**

Throughout the hotel you’ll find playful works of art, with many of them nodding to the location so near to the Houses of Parliament. *The House Always Wins*, by artist duo Evil Robots is a centrepiece in the lobby. It brings together elements of film, comic art and popular culture in an intricate reconstruction of the House of Commons, where the Speaker is surrounded on all sides by a cast of more than 150 characters. You might spot Guy Fawkes, Captain Hook or some of Hasbro’s Transformers, but will you notice the elephant in the room?

Move into the Blue Boar bar, which is a favourite haunt of Westminster politicians, and

you’ll find one wall lined with satirical cartoons penned by Gerald Scarfe and another featuring 3D statuettes of British politicians by the artist Simon Bingle. You can even order a “political cocktail”; perhaps your vote will go to Corbyn’s Reign (gin, strawberry, raspberry, campari, lime, elderflower and ginger beer), or will you plump for Theresa’s Kitten Heel Fizz (Absolut Citron vodka, blue curaçao, lime and prosecco). At the request of regular quaffing MPs a division bell has been put in the bar, which sounds whenever there is a vote in the House of Commons – giving them eight minutes to drink up and scurry back to cast their ballot.

### **BACK IN TIME**

If a dinner of suet pudding and spotted dick doesn’t quite get you in the Edwardian mood, then perhaps a jaunt down the river will. Guests booking the hotel’s “back in time” experience get picked up in a classic Rolls-Royce and whisked off to explore the Oxfordshire countryside. On the banks of the river Thames they are met by the captain of a vintage boat ready to travel down the river through the green and glorious countryside. A spot of lunch on board will still leave room for the sumptuous afternoon tea that awaits at Cliveden House, that grand dame of hotels so loved by the royal family.

### **ROOMS**

If you don’t have a vote beckoning you away from your gin then you may well get sucked into the evening. So it’s a good job that there’s 256 rooms on the floors above, offering a comfy bed for the night if you just don’t feel like making it home. All rooms have digital newspapers and you’ll even get a free sleepcast podcast from Headspace if you need a little help winding down. Now that’s something guests would not have imagined in 1919.

22-28 Broadway