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Hollywood Nights: 7 Theatrical Hotels to Book Now



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For all the talk lately about hotels that feel like home, some of us think that's not the point. We want artful artifice. "I think of hotels like theatrical design. The point of going into a hotel room is stepping into a fantasy life," said one of my favorite hoteliers a few years ago.

More recently, her business partner explained that rooms with decent square footage, comfy beds and hot strong showers are commodities. There's no reason to pay \$800 for those basics when you can get the same for \$200. And at the best level of independent hotels, what the proprietors are selling is not a commodity but an experience.

And who better to script, set-dress and costume-design that experience than professionals who came into hotels from the world of Broadway, of Hollywood or even of public television? Many of my most beloved hotels were conceived by people whose commitment to entertainment was as strong as their commitment to hospitality—and stronger than their commitment to the bottom line. (Disclosure: I stayed at several of these as their guest.) Here are seven of the greats.



Hotel Esencia
Hotel Esencia

Esencia, Riviera Maya

Entrepreneur Kevin Wendle began his entertainment career as a teenager, as a producer of ABC's *Eyewitness News*. He was one of six original members to create and launch the Fox Broadcasting Company, where he developed shows like *The Simpsons*, *Married... with Children* and *Beverly Hills 90210*. Later he executive produced *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*. After dipping deep into fashion and tech, he expanded into hotels in 2014, when he bought the Hotel Esencia in Xpu-Ha, Mexico after searching the world for what he calls the "perfect stretch of beach." The 50-acre estate was built as the private hideaway home of an Italian duchess, and he was determined to bring the hotel back to its original glory, embarking upon a two year renovation of the 29 bedrooms and adding new 11 beach and jungle suites this season.