

# State of Origin

THE TREND OF TRANSFORMING DORMANT GOVERNMENTAL BUILDINGS INTO HOTELS IS A WIN-WIN, DELIVERING FUNDS TO RESTORE ARCHITECTURAL ICONS AND SHOWSTOPPING SPACES IN WHICH VISITORS CAN STAY AND PLAY, WRITES **ANDREA BLACK**.

**G**overnment buildings reimagined as luxury hotels is a proven formula. Not only do heritage buildings possess enduring and unique architectural and cultural qualities, but the most sustainable building is the one that already exists. There's much to gain from adaptive reuse of historic buildings; it bypasses the wasteful process of demolition and redevelopment, and the valued heritage structure provides a rich experience with a vital link to our collective past. It's a way to make a local architectural icon, often long abandoned, newly accessible. Here are some of the world's best examples, both recently opened and soon to open.



STINE CHRISTIANSEN



From top: Villa Copenhagen's Earth Suite features sustainable elements from bricks to bedlinen; Courtyard Bar, designed by Shamballa Jewels. Opposite: the heritage post office facade.



## Villa Copenhagen

London-based Universal Design Studio and interior design house Goddard Littlefair were tasked with remodelling Copenhagen's former Central Post & Telegraph head office — located right next to the capital's Central Station and Tivoli Gardens — into 390 hotel rooms and suites known as Villa Copenhagen. The brief was to reimagine this 1912 neo-Baroque landmark as a grand Danish townhouse with colours inspired by the paintings of 19th-century master Vilhelm Hammershøi. Period photographs of the former sorting room situated alongside the railway tracks where the city's mail arrived inspired the whole design process. The sorting room now houses the hotel's breakfast space and bakery, and retains its archways, reeded wall panelling and glazed brickwork. Original windows have been carefully restored throughout. The entire building was formerly nicknamed T37, a shortened version of the address, Tietgensgade 37. In tribute, on site is the T37 bar featuring restored timber panelling, marble columns and the period decorative entrance.

Opened in July, Villa Copenhagen has a fresh take on sustainability: what it calls "conscious luxury". The 25-metre outdoor swimming pool is warmed using excess heat from the building's cooling system and there's an Earth Suite, designed by Danish architect Eva Harlou, showcasing innovative sustainable design. The hotel also has a large art collection, valued at nearly \$3 million, curated by the artist, curator and critic Sune Nordgren. [villacopenhagen.com](http://villacopenhagen.com)



## Capella Sydney

The transformation of the heritage-listed Department of Education Building into Capella Sydney by Make Architects is now in its final stages. Come March 2023, the sandstone landmark, which occupies an entire city block near Circular Quay, will start to welcome guests. The building was originally constructed in two phases. From 1912 to 1915, the government architect (and designer of the QVB) George McRae designed the Bridge Street side before, 15 years later, John Reid & Son completed the second half, which became home to the Department of Agriculture. This legacy is honoured with the McRae Bar and signature restaurant Brasserie 1930, which both feature Victorian-era and Art Deco design. The grand marble-clad lobby has soaring ceilings and the central atrium provides the perfect space for a bespoke art installation titled “Meadow” by Amsterdam-based Studio Drift.

The hotel’s 192 guest rooms range in size from 50 square metres to 235 square metres and feature high ceilings, abundant natural light and deep standalone bathtubs. Muted tones in the interiors complement the original oak floors and arched windows. The Auriga Spa includes a 20-metre swimming pool positioned under heritage copper-lined “sky lanterns”, the natural light from which once illuminated the Department of Education’s informal art gallery. It will be Capella Hotels & Resorts’ first foray into Australia and a much-anticipated project having been in the works for seven years. [capellahotels.com/en/capella-sydney](http://capellahotels.com/en/capella-sydney).



Above: Capella Sydney spans a city block. Left: its public Living Room will showcase artefacts and art. Opposite: the iconic facade of the Old War Office.



COURTESY OF RAFFLES LONDON AT THE OWO. OPPOSITE, FROM TOP: TIMOTHY KAYE; RENDERING COURTESY OF CAPELLA HOTELS & RESORTS

## Raffles London at The OWO

Housed in the former Old War Office building and set to open in the northern spring 2023, Raffles London at The OWO will be the renowned hotel brand’s first property in the British capital. The Edwardian-era Whitehall landmark was completed in 1906 and overlooks Horse Guards Parade, St James’s Park and, if you’re so inclined to look in that direction, 10 Downing Street. Utilised from 1857 to 1964, this was where Winston Churchill issued commands and the creator of James Bond, Ian Fleming, spent time as a naval intelligence officer. Indeed, many Bond movie scenes were filmed in the building; its domed turrets can be admired in 2012’s “Skyfall”.

With 120 rooms and suites, the hotel, along with 85 Raffles-branded residential apartments, has been designed by UK-based EPR Architects, with interiors by New York-based designer Thierry Despont. The high ceilings of the Old War Office will imbue the space with grandeur, as will the original wood panelling, mosaic floors and intricately carved marble fireplaces. There will be nine restaurants and bars on site including Paper Moon London, which will serve seasonal dishes that encompass the restaurant’s Milanese roots, as well as a three-storey champagne bar overlooking a courtyard. The discreet “spies’ entrance” at the rear of the building remains. [raffles.com](http://raffles.com)





### Ace Hotel Kyoto

Designed by modernist master Tetsuro Yoshida in 1926, the former Kyoto Central Telephone Office has been converted by the starchitect Kengo Kuma together with LA-based Commune Design into Asia's first Ace Hotel. Respect for original craftsmanship is paramount in any adaptive reuse of buildings, and at the Ace the preserved intricate brickwork, high ceilings, and arched windows integrate sympathetically with the new. Materials including copper sulphide plate, cedar and concrete mixed with ink were chosen based on the texture of existing bricks. Indeed, the hotel, which is surrounded by verdant gardens, stands as an homage to the city itself by virtue of regional materials and art and crafts mostly by local artists, from the in-room artworks by Samiro Yunoki to the massive textile piece hanging in the lobby by the Kagoshima-based Shobu Gakuen artist community.

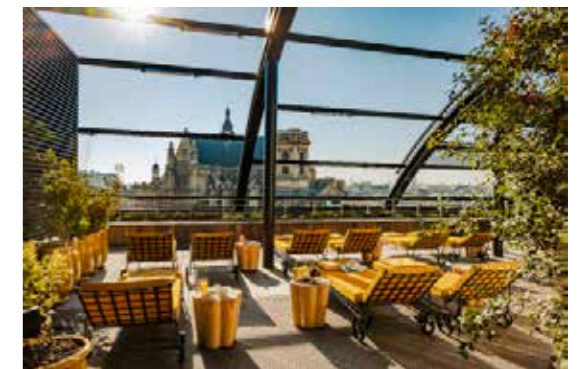
The furniture in the guest rooms is influenced by the French architect Charlotte Perriand's work while she was in Japan during World War II, with inlaid laminate tops and unexpected shelving to store records and barware. There are three restaurants on site, as well as the first Stumptown Coffee Roasters cafe in Japan. It was recently announced that René Redzepi will bring his famed Copenhagen restaurant, Noma, to Ace Hotel Kyoto early next year; the chef and his team will be in residence for 10 weeks from March 15. [acehotel.com/kyoto](http://acehotel.com/kyoto)

Ace Hotel Kyoto's Tatami Suite blends traditional Japanese features with modern touches like a turntable. Opposite, clockwise from far left: The Living, a library area at Pillows Maurits at the Park; Hôtel Madame Rêve Café; and the rooftop solarium.

### Pillows Maurits at the Park, Amsterdam

In the heart of the Dutch capital, a former university building has found new life as a place to stay courtesy of Pillows Hotels. Dutch architecture practice Office Winhov oversaw the renovation of the 1908 building, taking advantage of its position within the leafy Oosterpark; by removing existing fences and partitions, the project has returned more than 4,000 square metres of green space to the public.

The brick building has a formal facade on the street side and three wings facing the park. The walls of glazed brick in the corridors remain, as do the vaulted ceilings of the former museum hall, now home to VanOost Restaurant. Interiors courtesy of Studio Linse feature a warm, earthy palette. The 1920s-inspired Fitz's Bar features leather, timber, felt and velour, while The Living, a private lounge exclusive to guests, offers an impressive library and calming garden views. [pillowshotels.com/amsterdam-mauritskade](http://pillowshotels.com/amsterdam-mauritskade)



### Hôtel Madame Rêve, Paris

After almost a decade of renovation, the former Louvre Post Office on rue du Louvre in Paris's First Arrondissement has been reborn as the five-star Hôtel Madame Rêve. Dominique Perrault Architecture conjured unique concepts within the 19th-century building including banks of skylights that grant guests in the top floor suites panoramic views of the city, including the Eiffel Tower and the Pompidou (the Louvre Museum is a short stroll away). Applying adaptive reuse, the practice has turned what was once France's largest post office into a mixed-use municipal and commercial facility incorporating the hotel, a streamlined post office, a police station and offices.

Madame Rêve founder Laurent Taïeb oversaw the opulent interiors. Evoking the 1890s, the cafe features rows of chandeliers suspended from the eight-metre-high ceilings and retains the pillars of the old post office's dispatch room. Restaurant La Plume serves Japanese-influenced cuisine with sweeping views, while a rooftop bar boasts a hanging garden. Elegant marbled and warm golden-brown tones soften the 82 rooms and suites, many of which have terraces, and walls throughout are adorned with works by leading French artists and designers. [madamereve.com](http://madamereve.com)



COURTESY OF ACE HOTEL. OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: COURTESY OF PILLOWS HOTELS; JÉRÔME GALLAND (X2)