



## VERTICAL THINKING

Roger Wheeler moves up in the world... to Battersea

Battersea, south west London (or south Chelsea as it used to be known), famous for a dogs home, an iconic but disused power station, a park with a pagoda and not a lot else. Why then would anyone spend £10 million+ on a five star luxury hotel there? A good question. There are a large number of modern apartment buildings along this part of the South Bank of the River Thames, some of them unoccupied. Von Essen Aviation bought the Battersea Heliport (now renamed **London's Vertical Gateway**) in 2007 with part of the deal being that the empty building next door should be turned into a hotel, the stunning **Hotel Verta** built in 2010.



Externally it's not much to look at, being identical to all the other new buildings along what the Borough of Wandsworth calls **Bridges Wharf**. We visited just a few months after opening, and due to the lack of road signs, found the hotel almost impossible to find. Even London taxi drivers don't know where it is and the sat-nav was useless, so logically we headed to the heliport and there it was. Since opening there have been rave reviews and without a doubt the interior fixtures and fittings are of the highest possible quality.

However, not everything went to plan. A mix up over our reservation was sorted out quite quickly, and after several other misunderstandings we were eventually shown to our room. It was quite lovely, somewhat like living inside a Prada handbag (I had never seen so much brown leather and beige silk). There were a few problems with the air

conditioning and the heated towel rails and we were moved to a 'junior suite', which was in fact just a slightly smaller room with a larger bathroom.

Surprisingly this 'suite' was slightly less luxurious than our previous superior 'room', being more Gucci than Prada. Still, it was exceptionally lovely but why so many cushions on the bed? In most boutique hotels there seems to be a fashion to cover the bed with dozens of beautiful silk cushions.

Attention to detail is amazing, but then you would get that in most of London's five star hotels, with all the little items, tissue holders etc covered in beautiful calf skin making them very attractive to the light fingered, which means there is a price list if you really fancy a souvenir.

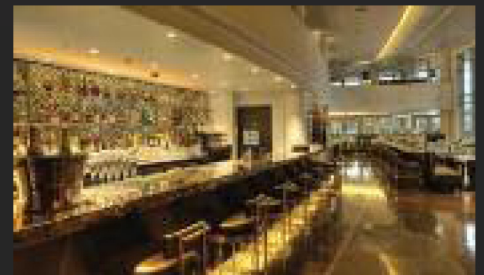
There was a very big HD TV, though no free wi-fi - no excuse for that in a five star hotel. The bed was huge and blissfully comfortable and the bathroom vast, there was even a TV at the end of the bath. Great tea and Espresso coffee facilities (no instant coffee here) were available, and a very extensive and expensive mini bar, though surely no one actually uses hotel mini bars? From the, what appeared to be bullet proof, windows there were terrific views of the Thames, but they didn't open. The aircon worked and the heavy silk curtains meant that we slept in total peace and darkness.

Hotel Verta seemingly attempts to recreate a feeling of the glamour days of aviation in the 1930s. Though it's an interesting theme, I

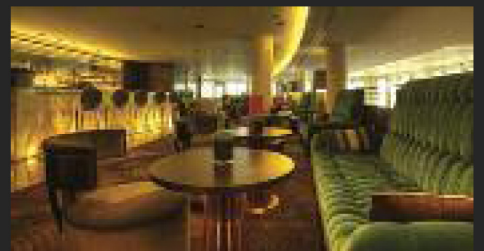


don't think there was much glamour back then as it was the peak of the depression and Croydon Aerodrome was the UK's only airport.

The Verta is without doubt an ultra-modern exclusive hotel. There is a beautiful spa offering all the usual treatments and a pool; but by far the best feature is the restaurant, called the **Patrisey** (the Anglo-Saxon for Battersea we were told). It's a really great place to eat, very assured cooking and immaculate service would make it worth the trip alone. Indeed, one would almost think it was the West End not Battersea. It's unfortunate then that I'd recommend against leaving the hotel on foot after dark. We took an evening stroll to see what the locality had to offer and within a few minutes were targeted by a couple of young men, who seeing that we had emerged from a luxury hotel made towards us. Thankfully more people appeared in the opposite direction and they vanished. It was a quite unnerving experience, and although I am a Londoner I've never been to this part of Battersea. I now know why!



Nevertheless, Battersea High Street has some good restaurants and pubs and once there we felt quite safe. To travel further there are buses to Victoria, and Clapham Junction Station, mainline not tube, is a ten minute walk. The heliport next door provided some interesting moments and the Thames Path runs along the towpath. This quiet and unused backwater is a very odd place for a luxury hotel but once you're inside, it's fine and very good value.



There should be some good deals on offer as the Verta, along with all the other hotels in the failed Von Essen Group, is in administration. This doesn't affect the running of the hotel, and can be yours for around £20 million. The general manager, Andrew Thomason, formerly at Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons, stays in post. He also lives in Brighton so obviously has exceptionally good taste in his choice of home and work.

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