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# Due South

TRAVEL AND ADVENTURE FOR THE SOUTHERN SOUL



**CHECKING BACK IN** The St. Anthony Hotel doorman Tony Mayonal; breakfast in bed in the Dandelion Suite at the Dwell Hotel.

## Old-Fashioned Hospitality

Across the South, historic hotels are regaining their former grandeur

by JENNIFER V. COLE

★ WEEKENDS / OUR KIND of PLACE p. 181 / FORK in the ROAD p. 187 / THE SOUTHERN AGENDA p. 205



IN CITIES ACROSS THE SOUTH, THE hotel business is booming, and it's not all hypermodern boutiques or big-box chains. Thoughtful hoteliers are turning their attention to reviving the region's century-old grande dames and midcentury marvels, transforming onetime bellwethers of luxury into some of the most transporting stays in the country. These seven stunners prove that what's old is new again—and better than ever.



## The Cloister at Sea Island

Sea Island, GA

Long favored for its privacy and its gorgeous wetland setting, the Mediterranean-style Cloister at Sea Island opened in 1928, designed by the architect Addison Mizner, the driving force behind Palm Beach's red-roofed icons of the twenties. Following a total overhaul in 2006 that replaced the original building with a sprawling new structure built in similar architectural style, last year the grand hotel underwent another \$40 million expansion, adding



**CURVE APPEAL** This page, clockwise from above: The Watergate Hotel's midcentury facade; the original lobby staircase inside the Dwell Hotel; the oak-shaded St. Charles Avenue entrance to the Pontchartrain Hotel; a bartender at work inside the refurbished St. Anthony Club. Opposite, from top: Local artist Ashley Longshore's portrait of the rapper Lil' Wayne outside the Pontchartrain's Caribbean Room; a very Texas breakfast at the St. Anthony.

the Garden Wing and a palm-shaded pool overlooking the marsh along the Black Banks River. In the new wing, you'll find sixty-three guest rooms with plank oak floors, beamed ceilings, hand-woven Turkish rugs, and Carrara marble baths. And to go along with the resort's other amenities, Broadfield Sporting Club—carved from the grounds of one of the South's oldest hunt clubs—reopened its lodge in 2015, with access to top-notch sporting clays, continental pheasant shoots, half-day quail hunts, and some of the best falconry in the country. It's not

everywhere you can pull on brush pants in the morning and then indulge in a hot stone massage or go deep into white burgundy pairings in the afternoon. [seaisland.com](#)

## The Dwell Hotel

Chattanooga, TN

The hotelier and designer Seija Ojanpera—who spent several years in Italy before moving to Chattanooga to open the Dwell—grew



Clockwise from top: Ron Blunt; Kathryn McCrory; Christian Horan; Molly Winters



up fascinated by hotels and the way the worlds of art, design, and travel collided within their walls. As a young girl, she even sketched one much like the colorful ode to 1950s design that now sits at the center of her adopted city's downtown. The onetime Civil War fort has been a hotel in some form since 1909, and now, under Ojanpera's direction, the modern sixteen-room iteration blends Southern hospitality with Old Hollywood glamour and a bit of South Beach flair. Designed around different wallpapers in bright, bold prints, the gallery-like rooms are accented with vintage art and reclaimed midcentury furniture. Welcome cocktails in antique green-stemmed coupes greet guests upon check-in, while in-room treats as bright as the decor—such as rosy beet sugar cookies with pomegranate icing—



Top: Christian Horan

arrive daily to sweeten the deal. And because all would-be Eloises know the service is as important as the style, the hotel's concierge team prides itself on arranging everything from massages to picnics at nearby waterfalls. [thedwellhotel.com](#)

## The Pontchartrain Hotel

New Orleans, LA

Even in a city steeped in tradition and grand flourishes, the newly reopened Pontchartrain stands out. Since its debut in 1927, the New Orleans mainstay has hosted everyone from Tennessee Williams (who worked on *A Streetcar Named Desire* there) to Rita Hayworth to the Doors, and Crescent City residents fond-

ly recall lavish meals of Crabmeat Remick, Shrimp Saki, and the hotel's signature Mile High Pie in the jackets-required Caribbean Room. The carefully redesigned modern experience has plenty of nostalgic touches. At check-in, you're given a hefty metal key (the desk will hold it as you explore the city). The colorful rooms come with vintage Garden District-inspired decor (bamboo desks, jewel-toned upholstery), and the old baby-grand piano is back at the clubby Bayou Bar. But it's not entirely a throwback. While the rooftop Hot Tin bar plays up 1940s glam, it opens up with sweeping views of a very contemporary downtown. And in the new John Besh—run Caribbean Room, awash in emerald greens and muted pink velvet, you can still order the tricolor Mile High Pie, but in a cheeky nod, you'll find a portrait of New Orleans native Lil' Wayne grinning over a slice in the adjacent lounge. Jackets, however, still required. [thepontchartrainhotel.com](#)

## The Redmont Hotel

Birmingham, AL

Talk to anyone in Birmingham today and you'll hear about the urban revitalization that has taken downtown by storm. Once known as a land of empty storefronts, it's now home to a new crop of thriving restaurants, bars, and shops that are bringing the former steel city's center back to life. An anchor to that renewal is the fourteen-story Redmont Hotel. When this art deco masterpiece opened in

## MOTORING BACK

A fresh take on three iconic motels

■ **AUSTIN MOTEL** ➔ [Austin, TX](#) Texas hotel impresario Liz Lambert, the design mind behind Marfa's El Cosmico and several other distinctive properties, lends her Midas touch to this 1938 fixture on South Congress. In typical Lambert style, the motel's new look, debuting this spring, will include funky touches—such as a new bar adjacent to the fifties-style kidney-shaped pool and old-school music posters—that stay true to the neighborhood's art-house vibe. [austinmotel.com](#) ■ **BELMONT HOTEL** ➔ [Dallas, TX](#) Prized for its art moderne architecture and views of the skyline, this 1946 motor lodge had fallen into disrepair before it was rescued and renovated in 2005. The stucco favorite recently changed hands again, and a major face-lift to all sixty-eight rooms and public spaces will roll out all year long, ensuring that this ultrahip space stays modern until the next midcentury. [belmonthoteldallas.com](#) ■ **HOTEL CLERMONT** ➔ [Atlanta, GA](#) This circa-1924 motel, better known for the much-beloved (and nudity-friendly) basement lounge, is scheduled to reopen this fall as a ninety-four-room boutique hotel with an upscale restaurant and a hundred-seat rooftop deck. But don't worry: Blondie and the other ladies downstairs aren't going anywhere. Welcome to perhaps the first boutique hotel-strip club combo. Don't forget your tip money. [hotelclermont.com](#)—J.V.C.

Bottom: photograph by MOLLY WINTERS





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## ★ WEEKENDS



### HAPPY HOUR

Cocktails at the Pontchartrain's rooftop bar, Hot Tin; the St. Anthony's 1924 Steinway piano once again entertains guests inside Peacock Alley.



1925, it was billed as the city's most modern hotel, touting amenities such as private baths in every room. For years it attracted notable guests such as Hank Williams, who spent one of his final nights there before his death on January 1, 1953. These days, the restored 120-room property, which reopened last year, maintains its 1920s splendor with a marble-bedecked lobby highlighted by a ten-foot-tall crystal chandelier and a sweeping staircase with its original iron handrail. Meanwhile, fresh touches—from local H.C. Valentine coffee in the 2101 Café to a new penthouse-level bar to the oversize black-and-white photographs of downtown that punctuate the hallways and rooms—remind guests that the hotel is very much a part of the Magic City's modern makeover. [redmontbirmingham.com](http://redmontbirmingham.com)

## The St. Anthony Hotel

San Antonio, TX

Over the years, the storied St. Anthony, just blocks from the Alamo and the River Walk, has seen haphazard renovations as wild as the West in which it opened in 1909, leaving the property with a Frankenstein's monster feel. But a three-year overhaul has smoothed

out those rough edges, restoring a sense of grandeur more in line with what cattlemen Augustus H. Jones and B. L. Naylor envisioned as their "Waldorf on the Prairie." Known now for its omnipresent parrot-green hue, pulled from china that the famed designer Dorothy Draper custom created for the hotel in 1959, the sprawling 277-room landmark stuns with over-the-top opulence. In the lobby, carved columns and Calacatta marble floors set off the belting leather—ensconced reception desk. Crystal chandeliers dangle over emerald carpets in the light-drenched Peacock Alley salon, where guests linger in gilded Empire chairs arranged near the restored 1924 Steinway piano. The rooftop pool has been updated to reveal original 1940s tile work. And the once-private St. Anthony Club, with its wood-paneled walls and velvet-covered banquettes, got a refresh, too. This time everyone is welcome. [thestanthonyhotel.com](http://thestanthonyhotel.com)

## The Watergate Hotel

Washington, DC

Originally designed to look like a sail by the Italian architect Luigi Moretti—one of the forerunners of postmodern architecture—

Right: photograph by MOLLY WINTERS





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## ★ WEEKENDS

this sprawling compound on the banks of the Potomac River was the height of midcentury glamour when it opened in 1967, before the final syllable of its name became an obligatory add-on for nefarious acts worldwide. After a nearly decade-long closure, the newly opened 336-room property champions retro style. The Emmy-winning *Mad Men* costume designer Janie Bryant dreamed up the staff uniforms, and no doubt America's favorite adman would appreciate the undulating lobby-level whiskey bar with its impressive collection of bourbons and Scotches and a rotating selection of cigars. The current owners also fully lean into the building's scandalous past. You'll find pens inscribed with I STOLE THIS FROM THE WATERGATE HOTEL and room keys that read, NO NEED TO BREAK IN, and the voice of former president Richard M. Nixon greets callers on hold. Even the hotel phone number (617-1972) is a direct nod to the day five men broke into the Democratic National Committee headquarters—June 17, 1972. [thewatergatehotel.com](http://thewatergatehotel.com)

Coming Soon:

## The Cavalier

Virginia Beach, VA

Modeled after Jefferson's Monticello, this brick-and-stone tower opened in 1927 as a neoclassical playground for the rich and famous, catering to everyone from Bing Crosby to Elizabeth Taylor to Washington power players. Railways deposited guests just feet from the hotel, where amenities included tubs with an extra spigot to draw saltwater baths and a broker on-site with a live ticker tape from the New York Stock Exchange. Its heyday ended during World War II, when the navy took over the hotel for radar training. But this summer, the regal Cavalier is scheduled to ride again after a \$75 million restoration, with special attention paid to preserving the original design elements (exterior pedestals and finials, portico columns, terrazzo floors, painted ceilings). Not to be outdone by its former fancy self, the new digs will also feature such perks as a swank lounge outfitted with billiards tables and drink carts, and a gin and vodka distillery and tasting room where guests can even commission their own barrels. [cavalierhotel.com](http://cavalierhotel.com)



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