

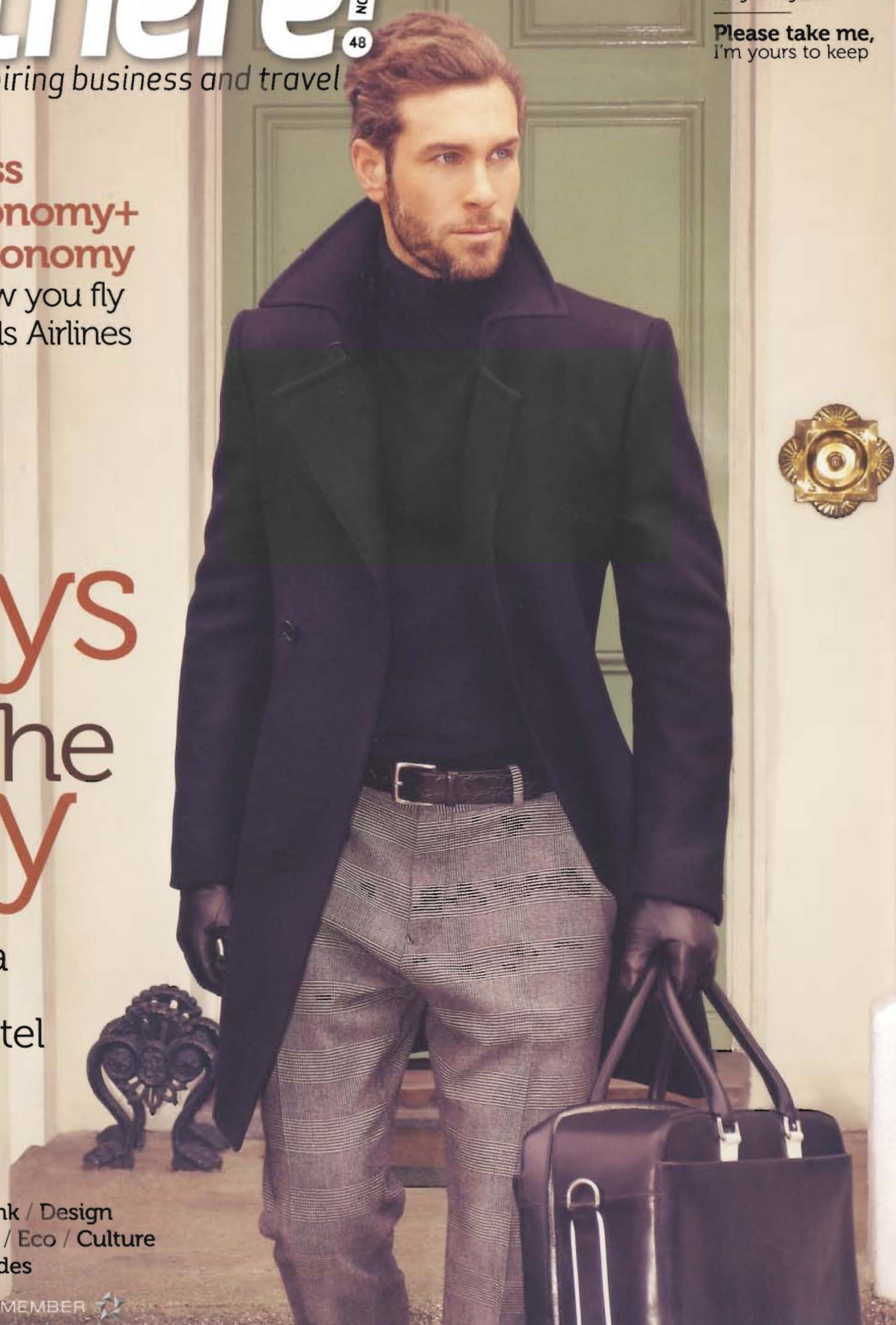
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Aloft Brussels Schuman BRUSSELS

Place Jean Rey, tel. +32 (0)2 800 0888, aloftbrussels.com

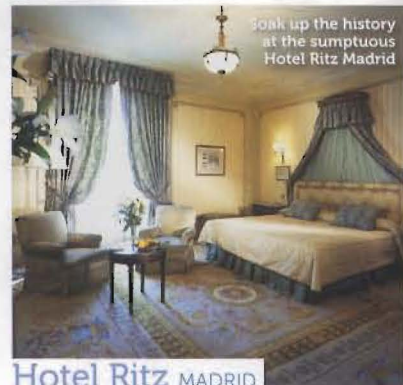
The Aloft brings a fresh feel to the EU Quarter

The Aloft Brussels Schuman brings a revitalising burst of energy to the rather dull hotel selection in the EU Quarter of town. Its 150 rooms are well proportioned, with high ceilings, large windows and designer furniture in keeping with the brand's 'lofty' ambitions. Bold colour schemes are linked by stripy patterns throughout across the hotel. The 42in flatscreen TVs with plug-and-play connectivity are an added attraction, although the DJ nights and pool table in the open lobby (which includes the Wxyz bar and the Re:fuel snack bar, open 24 hours) may prove more of a draw.

This is the first European opening for the brand, part of Starwood Hotels & Resorts. Aloft is effectively a diffusion line of W Hotels, reflecting some of the attributes of its big sister at a lower price point. It has a modern design aesthetic in common, with plenty of raw concrete and exposed ceiling ducts in the lobby-lounge that's sure to polarise opinion: industrial chic for some is unfinished for others. The large walk-in showers in the guestrooms could be straight out of a W hotel; the Bliss Spa toiletries

actually are. The 'Aloha' greeting, potentially grating on a wet Wednesday in February, neatly pitches the more relaxed service ethos, with staff dressed in polo shirts. There's no restaurant, reflecting the values of a brand that offers free Wi-Fi, automated check in/out and fridges in rooms.

The imposing façade of the Aloft Brussels Schuman overlooks Place Jean Rey, the leafy gardens of Leopold Park and the European Parliament buildings. On the right side of town for a quick journey to the airport, the hotel is also only a 15-minute walk to the tourist enclave of the Museums Quarter and other city attractions. Doubles from €89. **Guy Dittrich**



Soak up the history at the sumptuous Hotel Ritz Madrid

Hotel Ritz MADRID

5 Plaza de la Lealtad, tel. +34 917 016767, ritzmadrid.com

We can but aspire to age as gracefully as Madrid's Hotel Ritz. This *grande dame* may have celebrated its centenary last month, but it remains as fresh and elegant as the day it opened. On first impression, you could be forgiven for thinking that not much has changed in 100 years – the opulent interiors remain very much in the Belle Époque style, and both the discreet service and civilised ambience seem of another era – but tradition now comes hand-in-hand with the technology expected from a modern five-star hotel.

No two rooms are alike, though all 167 feature embroidered sheets, hand-woven carpets and sumptuous soft furnishings, with spacious marble bathrooms. Downstairs, the lounges and restaurant are awash with art and chandeliers, while outside there's a large terrace and shaded garden (a rarity in Madrid). Beyond lies what's become known as the Paseo del Arte, where the Prado, Thyssen-Bornemisza and Reina Sofia Museums all lie within a few minutes' stroll.

The Ritz Madrid's visual grandeur and refined gentility make for a decadent city escape. And better yet, the centennial celebrations are set to continue for a full year, with a highlight being a discounted rate (when booked as part of a three-night stay) of yes, you guessed it, €100. Regular rates from €535. **James Litston**

///NEWS Vienna's newest five-star hotel is set to open its doors on 15 November. Designed by French architect Jean Nouvel in striking glass and steel, the Sofitel Vienna Stephansdom will offer a top-floor glass-fronted restaurant with stunning views over the city, as well as a stylish bar (sofitel.com)