



THE ART OF ORIGINALITY

Comedian and writer **Tony Hawks** embarks on a Grand Tour to discover a few of the country's most innovative experiences, and chooses an equally groundbreaking car in which to travel.

Photography: Andy Paradise

My Grand Tour begins with Berlin. It's my first time in the city and I'm excited. For me, the wonder of travel is in how it makes me curious to learn about the culture and history of a new place. On this trip, The Wall dominates my thoughts, not least because I am visiting an extraordinary hotel that used to form part of The Wall itself until that sordid monument to injustice and intolerance was torn down 20 years ago.

I am the guest of Mike Buller, who is showing me his brainchild – a first of its kind – a hotel that has had each room decorated by an individual artist. As we climb the stairs to

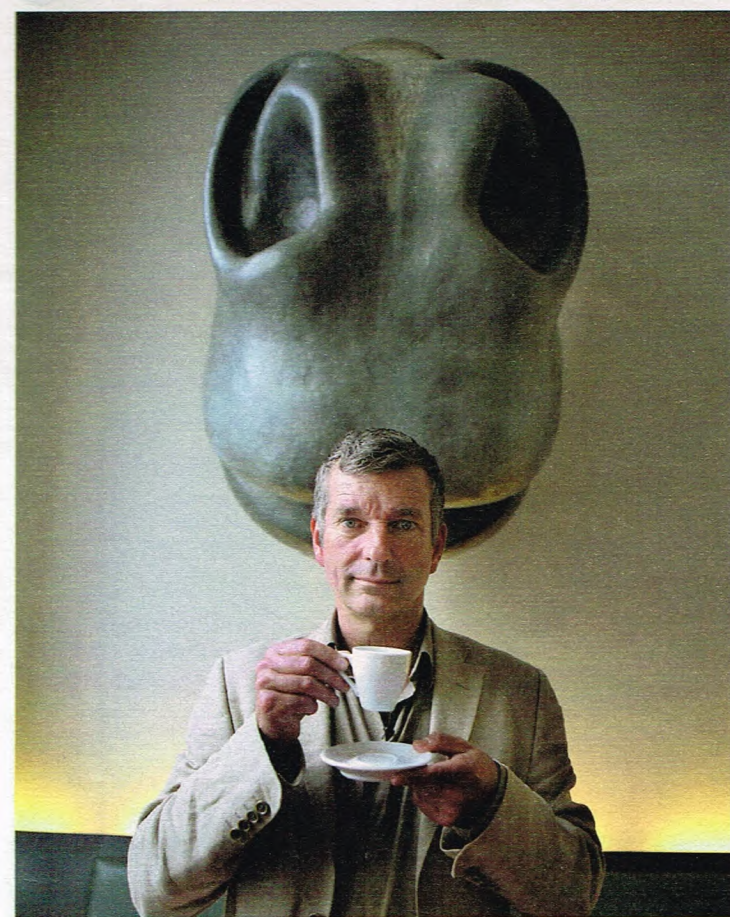
the first floor of the Arte Luise Kunsthotel, he tells me of the concept that lies behind it.

'Each artist designed the room according to their own vision, right down to the furniture – and in return for doing this, they or their family and friends can stay at the hotel for nothing for 14 nights a year. Also, they receive a royalty of the room charge. It is good for us and good for them. A win-win situation.'

It makes total sense. If only there were more 'win-win' situations in modern life. The trouble is that far too often one party ends up with a better deal than the other. It's a point that

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 also reminds of the philosophy behind the car I'm driving to visit some of Europe's more innovative experiences. The BMW 5 Series Gran Turismo is itself the first of a kind, a vehicle that's sleeker and more distinctive than an estate car but has SUV flexibility and the comfort of a luxury saloon.

At the Arte Luise Kunsthôtel, the first room that Mike shows me has been designed by an artist called Dieter Mammel, and I love it. It's dominated by a vast bed, littered with pillows. On the wall I read a notice that explains the idea behind the design. Mammel wanted to rekindle memories of when, as a little boy, he

tribute to Benny Hill, with that classic tune blasting from the speakers. I show some self control, though. I don't want Mike to think that I'm odd or he won't show me the next room.

As we walk along the corridor, I ask my host how he found life before The Wall came down. After all, he lived on what was considered to be the 'wrong' side – the East.

'For me, it wasn't so bad,' he explains. 'I was a manager of a band and times were good. People did not have to worry so much about money as they do now.'

One can forget how the Western way – the one to which we have become used – serves the able and

'I circle the vast bed, perhaps like an East German soldier at the Berlin Wall'

used to visit his grandparents in the country. Their big oak bed dwarfed him and he wanted to recreate that feeling for the adult hotel guest.

He has succeeded. Unlike normal beds, this one sits in the middle of the room. I immediately circle it, like a guard – perhaps even like an East German soldier from years ago, patrolling The Wall. There I go again, I can't get that out of my head.

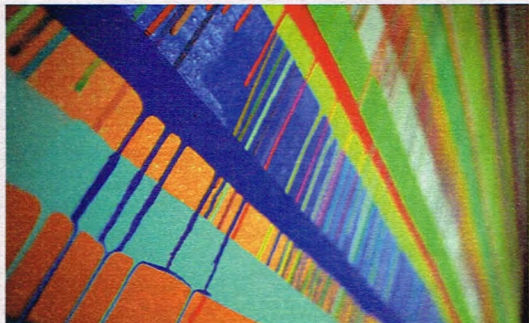
Suddenly I find myself wanting to run around the bed, pretending I'm chasing a dishy blonde in hotpants in

intelligent, but can make life a struggle for those who aren't gifted with unique talents, sparky initiative or a good family background. It's interesting to hear, first hand, that life behind The Wall wasn't the nightmare that I had suspected it might have been. At least for some.

'I will take you to room 105,' says Mike. 'It was designed by Jordan.'

I stop in my tracks. Surely not? I know that Jordan has made the effortless leap from topless model to bestselling author, but surely she's





not now dabbling in the art world? 'Oliver Jordan,' continues Mike, 'is a friend of the hotel!'

As I sigh with relief, Mike opens the door to reveal a room adorned with portraits by an artist who has left topless modelling to others.

The portraits are stunning. German poet and playwright Bertolt Brecht looks down on me, along with many distinguished countrymen. Jordan has captured his subjects' essence in a style of broad strokes of thick paint.

This room is darker than Dieter Mammel's, but that is how the artist wanted it. This room is as different from any other room 105 you'll find anywhere in Europe.

And that's why I take my hat off to Mike and his hotel. At a time when much of what we experience is the

same throughout the world, here is a place that understands the value of originality. Just as there's no law saying that you can't have a saloon car, an estate car and an SUV in one, who decided that what a guest needs from a hotel is uniformity?

Certainly not Wolfgang Petrick, designer of the next room I'm shown. He has created a kind of three-dimensional installation at the foot of the bed. It's intriguing, challenging. A little like Berlin itself which, if you'll excuse me, I now need to explore...

I think I'll start with a visit to the remains of The Wall near the Nordbahnhof. Did I mention how that interests me?

■ *Arte Luise Kunsthotel*: 0049 30 284 480; www.luise-berlin.com

Look out for more of Tony's European discoveries over the next few weeks and watch him at telegraph.co.uk/5GTfirsts

WIN A TWO-NIGHT STAY AT THE ARTE LUISE KUNSTHOTEL

You and a friend could enjoy a two-night stay in a room with a view at the Arte Luise Kunsthotel in Berlin, including economy class flights, £500 spending money and the option of a BMW 5 Series Gran Turismo to drive around in. Simply go to telegraph.co.uk/5GTfirsts and enter your details, by August 11, for a chance to win.

Terms and conditions: competition open to residents of the UK, Isle of Man, Channel Islands and ROI aged over 18. Closing date for entries is August 11, 2009. Travel dates and prizes are subject to availability. Prize includes £500 spending money but does not cover UK transfers to and from the airport and the winner's home. See full terms and conditions at telegraph.co.uk/5GTfirsts