

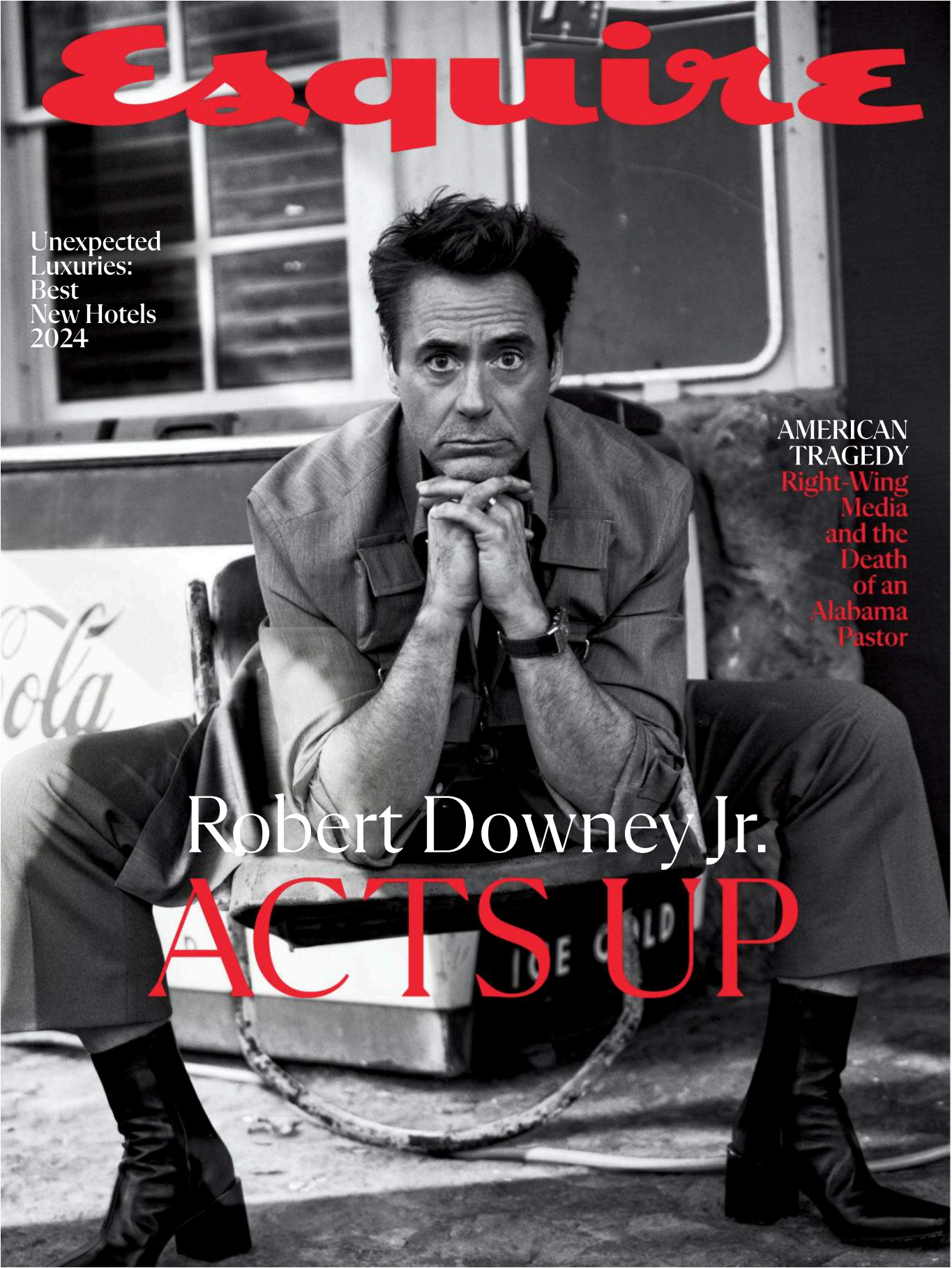
Esquire

Unexpected
Luxuries:
Best
New Hotels
2024

AMERICAN
TRAGEDY
Right-Wing
Media
and the
Death
of an
Alabama
Pastor

Robert Downey Jr.

ACTS UP



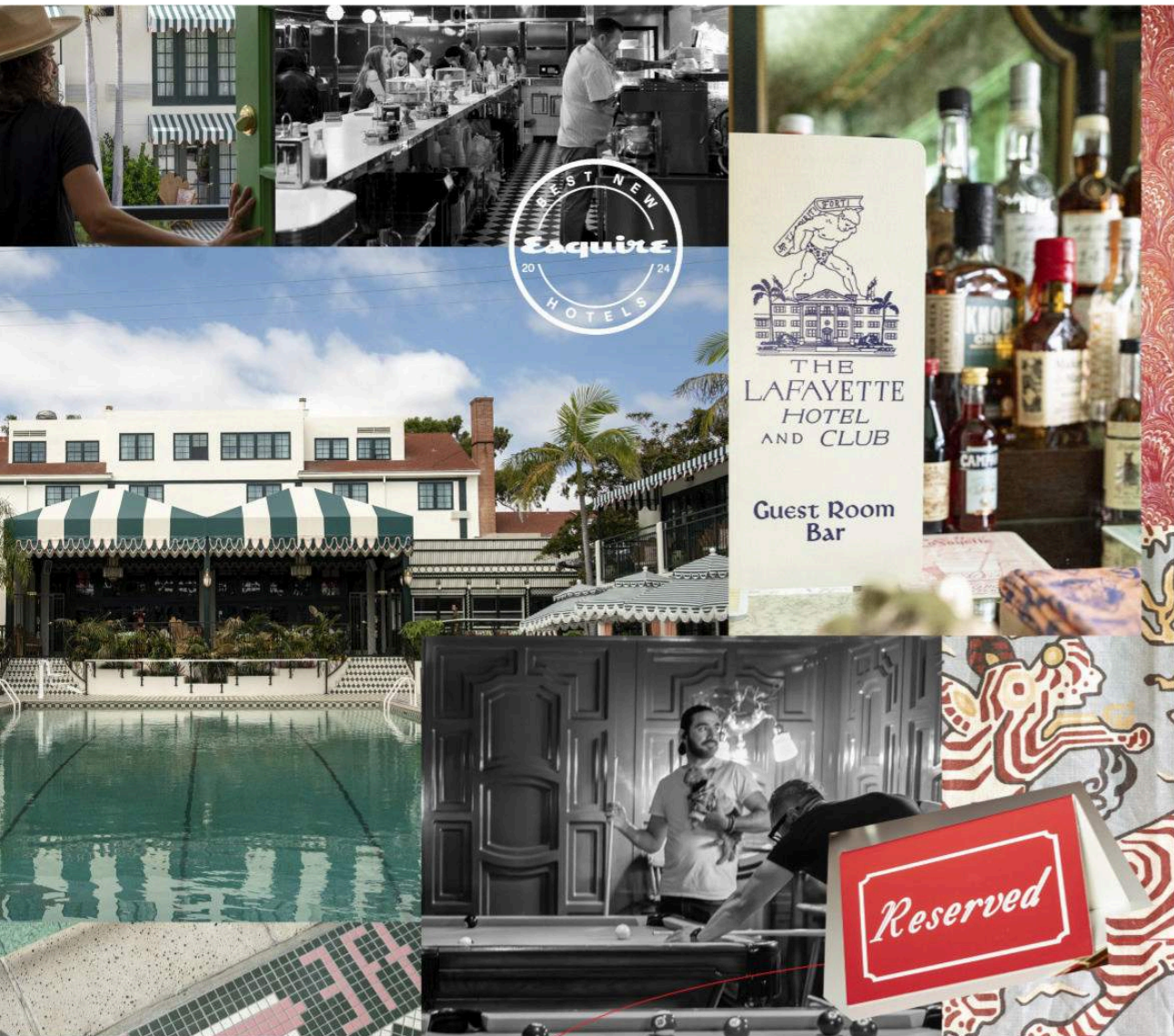


the BEST new HO

A TRULY GREAT HOTEL CAN'T BE MEASURED SOLELY BY THE FANCY SOAP IN THE MARBLE bath, the plushness of the bed, or the quality of the chocolate provided with turndown service. We all love these little touches of luxury, of course. But they've become standardized—a way of offering the predictability that many travelers crave. Forgive us, but that's not a very exciting way to explore the world. The most memorable travel experiences are the ones we didn't expect and can't replicate anywhere else.

The properties on this year's Best New Hotels list, our third, prove that a hotel that goes against the grain of ho-hum luxury can change the vibrations of its neighborhood and its city. More importantly, it can change the way you see a place. At Kona Village, a Rosewood Resort on Hawaii's Big Island, we fished in the same ponds as people did centuries ago and

drank at the same bar as Jim Morrison did in the sixties. The hotel is located on a calm beach with warm, clear water. You could put pretty much any kind of property there and it would be successful. But it's the respect for how this land was used long ago as well as how it will be used in the future—it operates completely on solar energy—that connects with us on a deeper level. Staying at the Sea Ranch Lodge in California will give you an appreciation for how modernist design can meld with



TELS 2024

nature. And Rome's Bulgari Hotel helps to redefine what Italian opulence means. Perhaps no property we visited will change the way you think about a city more than our Hotel of the Year: The Lafayette serves as an ambassador to the richness of San Diego's culture. And it does so with a range of nonstop hospitality options that include incredible cocktails, a vibrant pool scene, a twenty-four-hour diner, and even bowling.

The thing is: You need to have your mind open to change. If all you really want are fancy soaps and soft sheets, that's all you'll get out of an experience. A hotel can only do so much. But when you change your receptors to a more receiving frequency and visit a place vibrating on a different level, that's when travel magic happens. Sometimes a great hotel can change the way you see yourself in the world. —Kevin Sintumuang

Above: Scenes from our Hotel of the Year, the Lafayette in San Diego, including Beginner's Diner, a twenty-four-hour spot for your patty melt and milkshake needs; the Gutter, a bar that doubles as a game room and bowling alley; a pool (and bar) that nods back to the fifties; maximalist wallpaper; and the best in-room bar you'll find anywhere.

ICONS RETURNED



The best *kauhale* have their own private pools.

KONA VILLAGE, A ROSEWOOD RESORT

KAILUA-KONA, HAWAII

This magical stretch of black-sand beach was a fishing village in the year 1000. In the early 1960s, it became Kona Village and felt less like a hotel than a community of *kauhale* (Hawaiian for “houses”), where a coconut outside your door was your DO NOT DISTURB sign and a wrecked boat was turned into a makeshift bar. This bohemian yet exclusive getaway gained a loyal clientele—Jim Morrison drank here, and it was one of Steve Jobs’s hideouts—before it was damaged by a tsunami in 2011.

Last year, it was resurrected by Rosewood Hotels & Resorts with the guidance of a cultural committee made up of descendants of the original inhabitants. The result is the kind of place where ancient sites feel incorporated into how this land is used today. It is a Rosewood, however. A gorgeous spa overlooks the lava fields; each guest gets their own bike; a large infinity pool awaits. But there’s still the shipwreck bar and, of course, the DO NOT DISTURB coconuts. **Rooms from \$1,800**—K. S.



Sixties vibes on the northern Cali coast.

The Sea Ranch Lodge

SEA RANCH, CALIFORNIA

As you arrive at the very northern reaches of the Sonoma coast, you’ll start to see the timber-frame structures that make up Sea Ranch, a sixties modernist utopia. Its heart is the recently renovated Sea Ranch Lodge, that rare place that blends nature, modern architecture, and design—each inspirational in its own right and downright spiritual when combined. You leave with an appreciation for fonts and graphics, for the smell of fresh cedar, for sea foam. **Rooms from \$500**—K. S.

THE BEST REASON TO VISIT VEGAS

Fontainebleau

LAS VEGAS

At the fifty-five-thousand-square-foot Lapis spa, in the sixty-seven-story Fontainebleau (the tallest hotel on the Strip), there is a large co-ed sauna where a dancer moves heat and aromas around the room to the sounds of new-age music and meditative scenes projected onto a screen. I could have spent my entire day at this spa, going from cold plunge pool to salt cave to herbal inhalation room, but I also wanted to put in some time at the gym, one of the swankiest I’d ever set foot in—with a room dedicated to stretching and an area for flipping tractor tires—and at the restaurants and bars, of course. There will be thirty-six in total (I’ll need to come back to try more), but the current highlights include pasta maestro Evan Funke’s Mother Wolf and the discreet lobby bar Collins. You can reach the rooms, many with soaking tubs and views of the Sphere, without stepping into the casino, which has natural light and soaring, curving ceilings. A rarity in Vegas. All of this feels like a rarity in Vegas. **Rooms from \$300**—K. S.



Bleau Bar, in the center of the Fontainebleau.

NEW- AND OLD-SCHOOL LUXE IN EUROPE

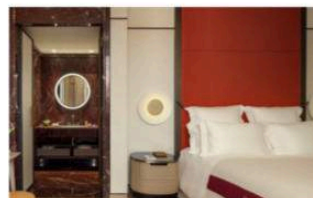
Bulgari Hotel Roma

ROME

Opulent doesn’t even come close. The marble bathrooms. The plush linens. The floral-patterned breakfast china. Proudly occupying a corner of the

Piazza Augusto Imperatore, it’s just steps from everywhere you’ll want to be. The newest Bulgari hotel—the brand’s ninth, with 114 rooms and suites right in the luxury house’s hometown—doesn’t miss. It’s flush with modern amenities (like WhatsApp-supported butler service), but its design (think heavy stones and earthy tones) seeks to blend in with the icons of its sur-

roundings. It works: Spend more than a few hours on-site and suddenly it’s amazing to think it wasn’t always here. What’s more, for all its gilded trappings, Bulgari Hotel Roma is remarkably comfortable. It’s nearly impossible to leave. But of course you must; Rome itself beckons. Then again, the Eternal City isn’t going anywhere. **Rooms from \$1,750**—*Madison Vain*



Modern Roman design at the Bulgari.

MARK MEDIANA/DREX AGENCY (FONTAINEBLEAU); COURTESY HOTELS (REMAINING).