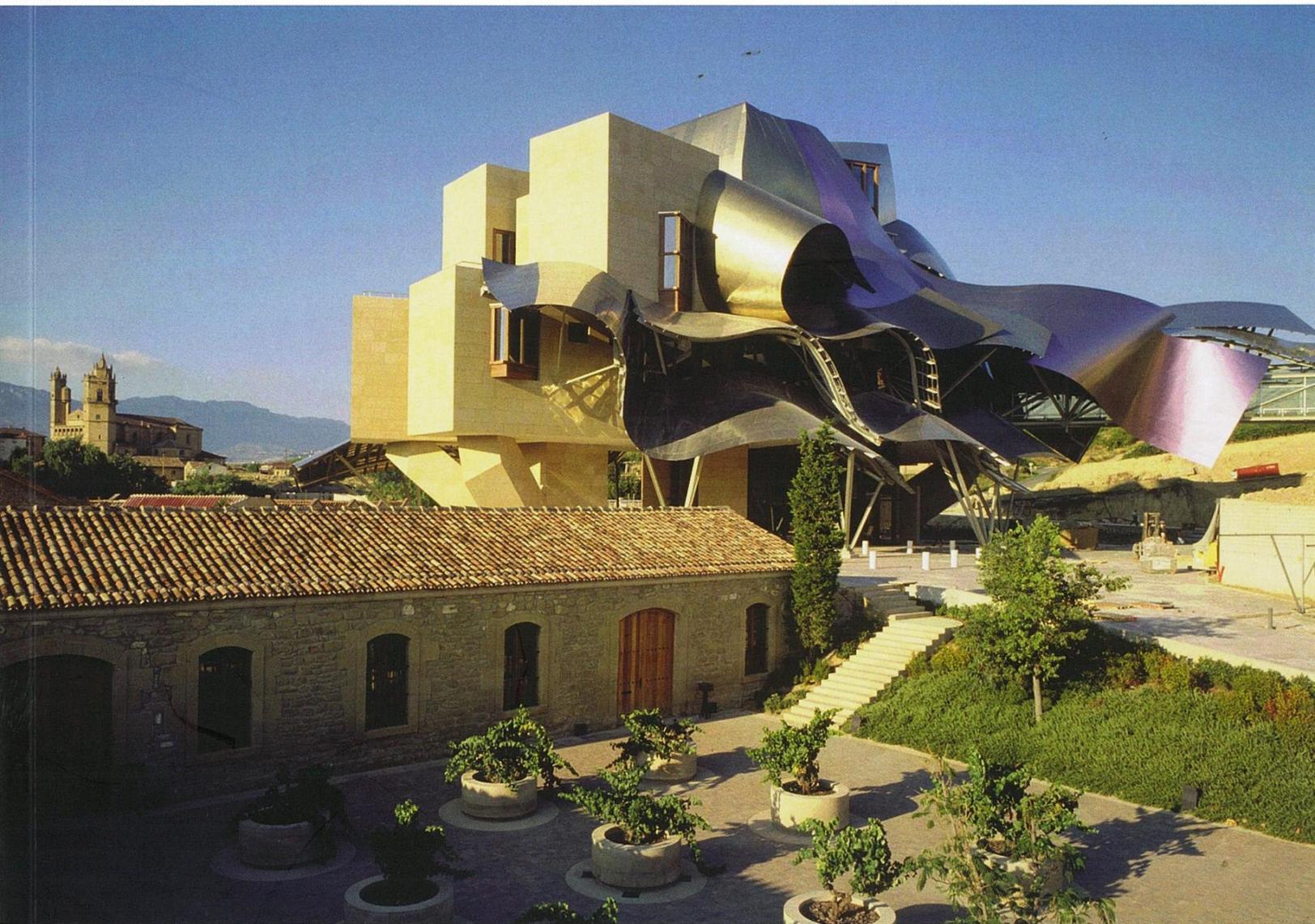


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HOTEL DESIGN, DEVELOPMENT & ARCHITECTURE

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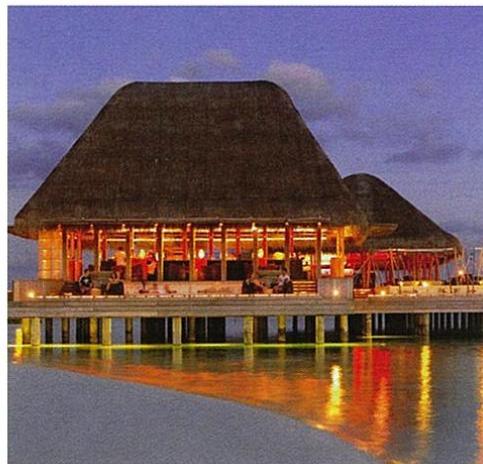
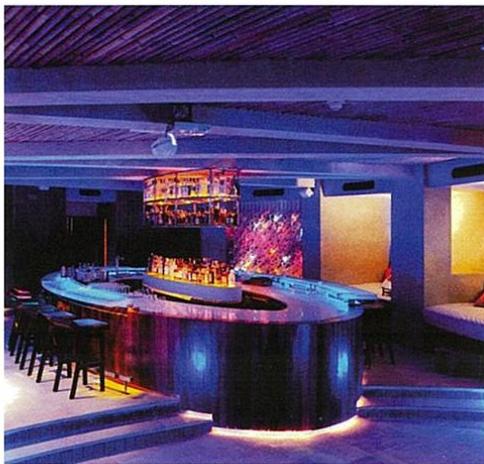
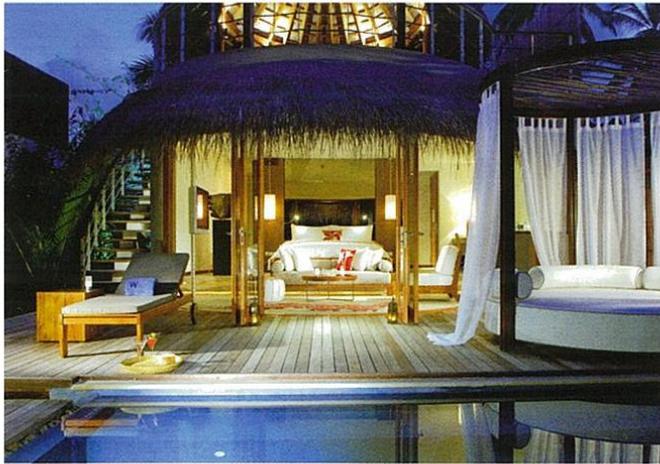
GRAMERCY PARK

SCHRAGER & SCHNABEL
BRING BOHEMIA TO NYC

ASIAN TIGERS

NEW HOTELS IN THAILAND,
SINGAPORE AND MALAYSIA

MALMAISON LIVERPOOL / LIGHTING IN HOTELS / W MALDIVES / ARTESIAN / VALLEY HO / HOLIDAY INN



ABOVELEFT: One of the resort's 78 private villas. ABOVE: The Sip sunset bar. FAR LEFT: Fifteen Below is the only nightclub in the Maldives

Wet, the Retreat's pool bar, offers guests the opportunity to swim up to the bar and order from a menu of island concoctions. The W Kitchen is orientated towards the sunset view with daybeds on a dining deck, Indian inspired sculpted columns holding up a draped canopy providing shade.

In terms of materials and finishes Ecoid have played with balance and contrast using natural rustic materials to create a space sympathetic to its environment. Interior finishes include slate tiles contrasted with sleeker finishes such as walnut veneer and oxidised brass. "As a tropical resort it is necessary to use natural materials such as coconut thatch, timber and ceramic pool tiles to bring forth the resort

concept" say Ecoid. "The twist comes in the way we apply colour and texture in the villa interior". You can come here to be pampered in the gorgeous spa, made of fluttering Teflon tensile roofs floating over the water. For those of a more active bent, there is the 'Wave' water sports centre, an 'Energy' activity area offering aqua aerobics, pool and beach games, and circuit training and even the ominously titled 'Sweat' gym for those with the impetus to leave their sun loungers. W also has the only nightclub in the Maldives – Fifteen Below, a subterranean grotto dug out fifteen feet below the island's surface. In making the resort debut for their 'lifestyle' brand, Starwood really have thought of everything.

EXPRESS CHECKOUT

W Retreat & Spa
Fesdu Island
North Ari Atoll
Maldives
Tel: (960) 666 - 2222
www.starwoodhotels.com

- 78 private villas
- Fire, Fish, W Kitchen, Wet
- Sip, 15 Below
- 'Away' Spa
- 'Energy' activity centre, 'Wave' watersports centre, 'Sweat' gym

WORDS BY RICHARD BENCE PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF STARWOOD HOTELS & RESORTS

W RETREAT & SPA

MALDIVES



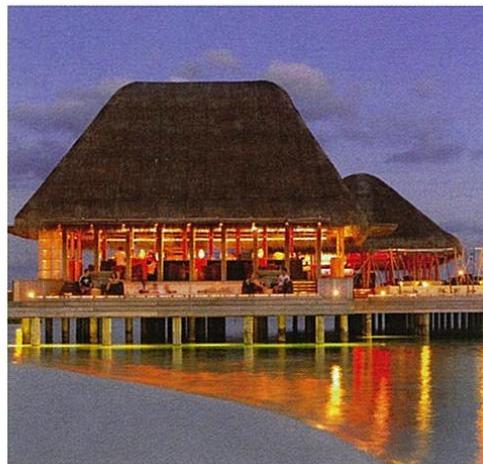
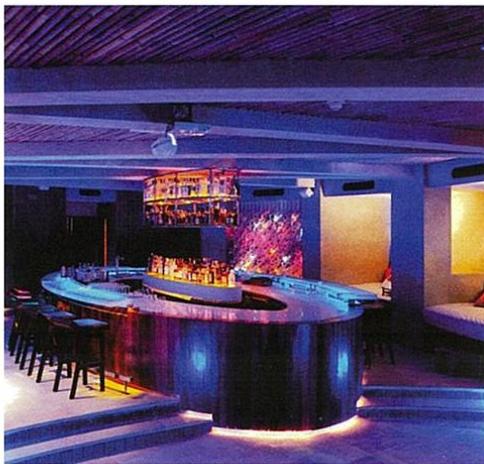
Singaporean architects Ecoid have conceived a resort hotel with a contemporary twist for the first 'Retreat & Spa' offering from Starwood's W brand.

Until now the Maldives has been heavy on smooching couples. Not so any more with the opening of the W Retreat and Spa which brings a friskier and funkier clientele more comfortable travelling with a bunch of pals. The hip W chain has always been city focussed so this is something new for them and the results are spectacular. Fabulously cool and as close to Ibiza as you're going to get in this area of the world, long catwalk like wooden decked runways connect the floating ocean villas where you can splash about in your own private pool or clamber down the ladder into the bath-warm sea for a spot of snorkelling with the tropical fish (W's reef is one of the best and most

alive of all the resorts as El Nino did its worst a few years back killing off some of the coral). Daniel Craig and Kate Moss types strut their stuff to an ambient chill out soundtrack supplied by the ubiquitous Bose speakers.

The team responsible for the design are Singapore-based architects Ecoid. The challenge for them was to design something unconventional and different to the other Maldivian resorts. "We wanted to redefine luxurious resort living as ultra tropical chic" say Ecoid. Nestled in the middle of Ari Atoll on the exotic island of Fesdu, the beautiful turquoise lagoon, breathtaking reefs and white sand beaches are Robinson Crusoe type stuff and the design embraces these natural

elements. There is a split between land and sea in terms of what type of accommodation you choose. There are over-water "Ocean Oasis" retreats, perched above the lagoon with glass floors for underwater voyeurism; 28 duplex "Beach Oasis" retreats with unobstructed views of the Indian Ocean; three luxurious two-bedroom "Seascape Escape" retreats with oversized infinity plunge pools; and a lavish, two-bedroom "Ocean Haven" retreat with an oversized infinity-edge plunge pool, wraparound sundeck, and panoramic views of the Indian Ocean. Dripping with opulence and style each retreat features lush outdoor lounging areas with private decks for basking in the sun, endless ocean views, individual barbeque stations



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for private dining, circular custom-made daybeds for island lounging, outdoor tropical showers, spacious indoor living areas, W signature beds, deluxe Bose sound systems, 42 inch plasma televisions, and wine refrigerators to chill the bubbly. So the basic level of luxury is much higher here than at other resorts, lending a more democratic ethos to the resort. In other words, everyone is A-list here.

The shape of the land villa was inspired by a coconut with the curved walls and radiating full height timber doors that swing out to the beach. "What is unusual about the land villa is the outdoor living lounge on the roof terrace offering an elevated view of the horizon" say Ecoid. Each villa comes with its

own plunge pool Jacuzzi, circular daybed and garden bathroom. The base of the pool is installed with fibre optics (de rigueur as a design flourish in this part of the world) creating an illusion of swimming amongst the stars when night falls. Inside the villa, contemporary tropical style furniture sets the laid back ambience with the bed elevated two steps higher to accentuate the beach view.

As impressive as the land villas are, it seems ludicrous that everyone doesn't fight for one of the water villas because they are quite remarkable. Made up of a single storey with an extended 2-tiered deck that hovers over the water you are separated from your neighbours by a trellis screen as you bob up and down

in your private plunge pool or lounge about on your white circular day bed. Inside, glass ocular windows in the floor allow a glimpse of the swimming fish in the lagoon below (again, flood lit at night).

All that slopping about in the sun can make one terribly hungry, and there are six restaurants here for after-dark escapades. The big white sofas at Sip bar offers big whiet sofas for Ibiza-style sundowner cocktails. Fire, the Retreat's outdoor jungle barbeque restaurant where guests dine in the outdoors under the trees and around a bonfire, offers a bare-feet-in-the-sand casual mood for beachfront dining. Fish as you'd expect offers freshly caught seafood, prepared with an Asian twist.