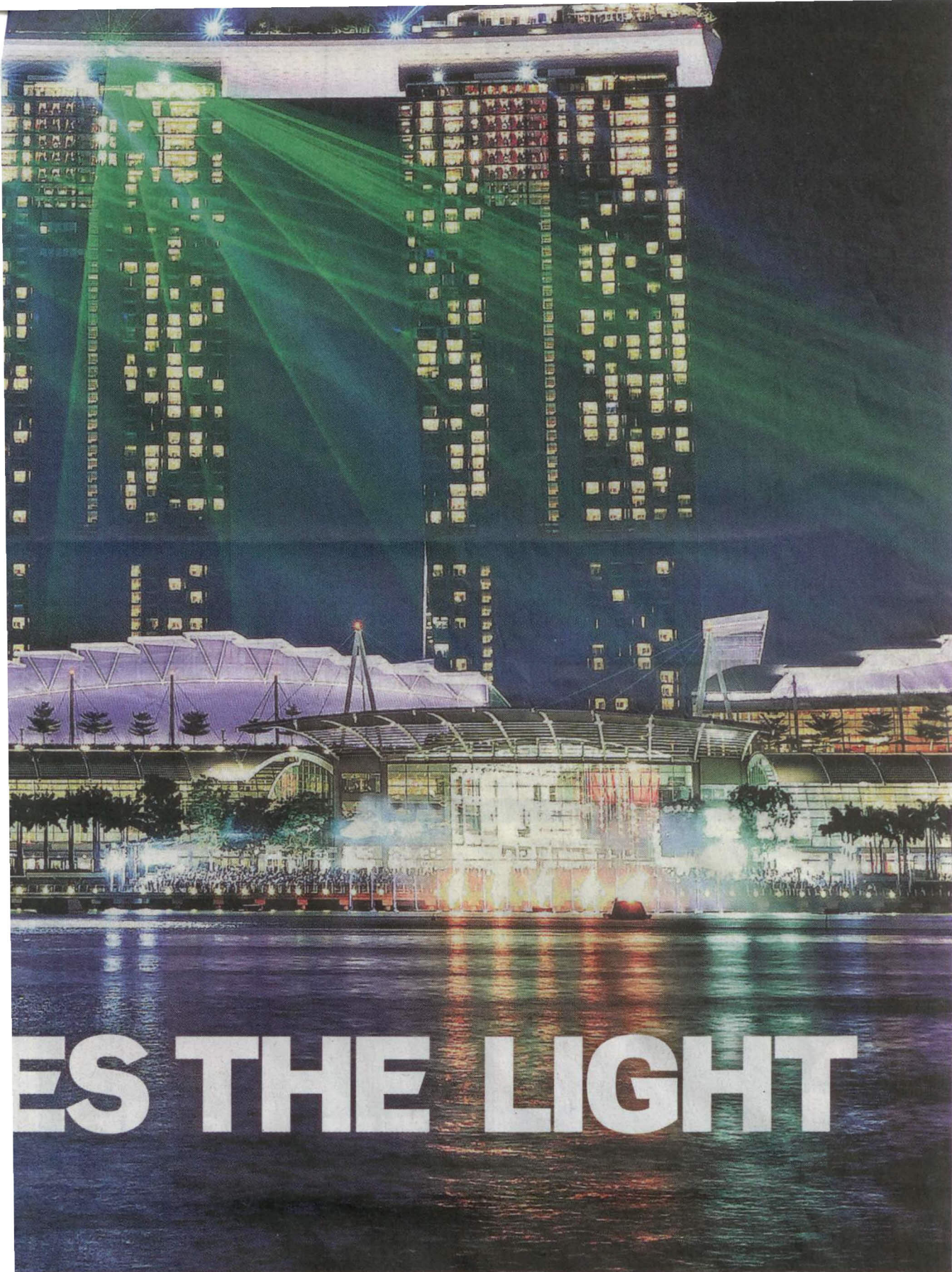


MIRANDA SEE

BERNARD SCHMID/ADORNERS IMAGES; SAMIR HUSSEIN/GETTY IMAGES

In Singapore, **Miranda Hart** embraces modernity in the shape of gleaming skyscrapers and singing 'supertrees' – but finds she prefers the city-state's older, gentler side





ES THE LIGHT

Modern? Me? Well, I like to think I keep up and plant at least one foot in the ever-changing camp of modernity. Being of a certain age, this does not necessarily come naturally. I was born in the early Seventies, which means I didn't get a mobile until I was 23 and then it was a large Nokia with an aerial and there was no such thing as texting (I know, kids, imagine). When I worked in an office years ago, I remember the excitement of getting a memo saying

something called "internal email" was to be installed; and when I first moved to London its skyline was without a Shard or a Gherkin, to name but two. I think I preferred it that way.

So being confronted with Singapore's new Millenia development at Marina Bay was going to be a test of my acceptance of all things modern and my general up-to-date-ness. I was staying at the Conrad Centennial Singapore hotel, a 31-storey wall of modernity opposite the Suntec City shopping centre, which boasts 1,000 shops.

It wasn't a place I would normally be drawn to for a city break, but come on, I can do modern. Perhaps I would even get to enjoy a shopping mall for the first time – normally I am scared of the packs of feral teenagers, the decisions, the fitting rooms (trying on and taking off clothes is a workout after the age of 36).

The hotel's lobby was large and impressive, with a marble floor so dazzlingly clean I'd happily have eaten a breakfast pancake off it. Everything

Continued on Page 2

The floor was so clean

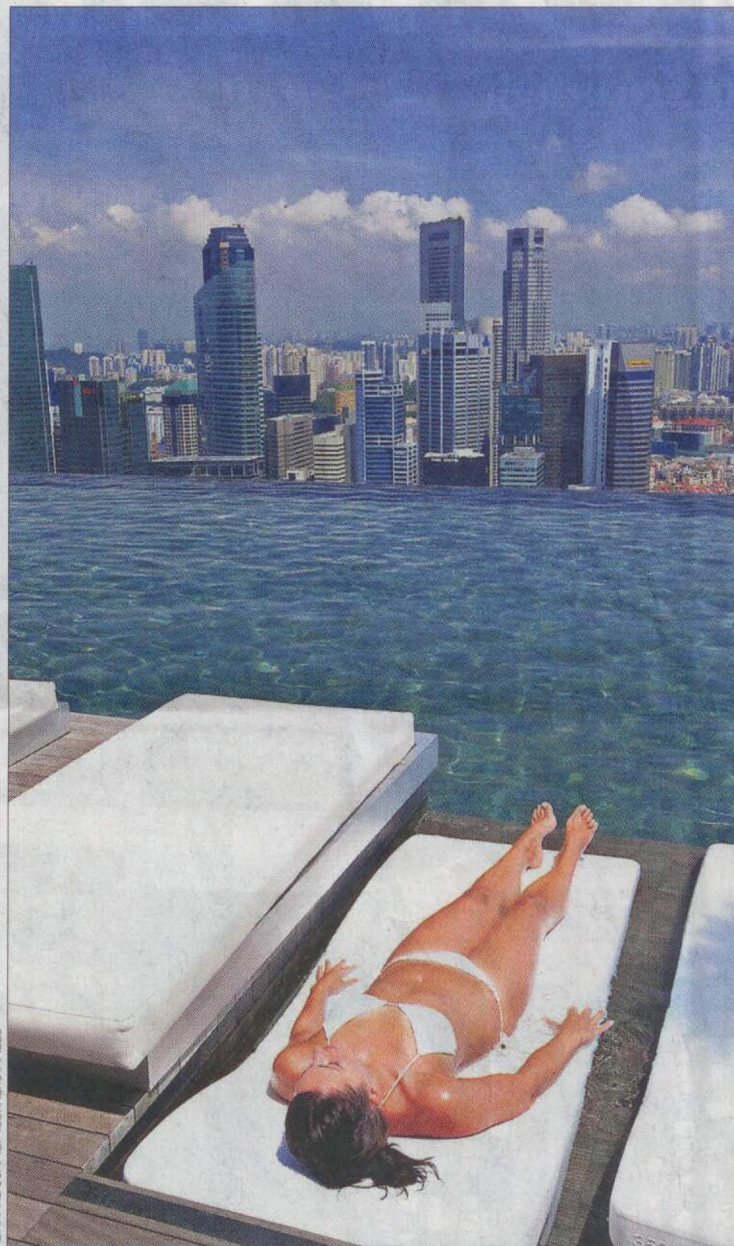
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was slickly efficient, from the staff and the spacious, speedy lifts to the technology in my room, including a massive plasma screen – and tick, yes, I could work that. Well done, contemporary me. Thrillingly, the wall sockets were fitted with UK plug adaptors. Every time I go away, I forget to bring my adaptor and have to buy a new one at the airport. I have 27 of them at home in a cupboard. But Conrad, thank you; I had no need of one. So far, this modern shizzle is, like, totes good.

I did briefly let myself down searching high and low for a “do not disturb” sign for the room door, eventually realising there was a privacy button on a hi-tech console at the side of my bed. If pressed, it would show a red light outside my door saying I did not want to be bothered. I couldn’t trust it, so I had to open the door to check it was on every time I pressed it. I was missing my trusted piece of card with its hang-me neck.

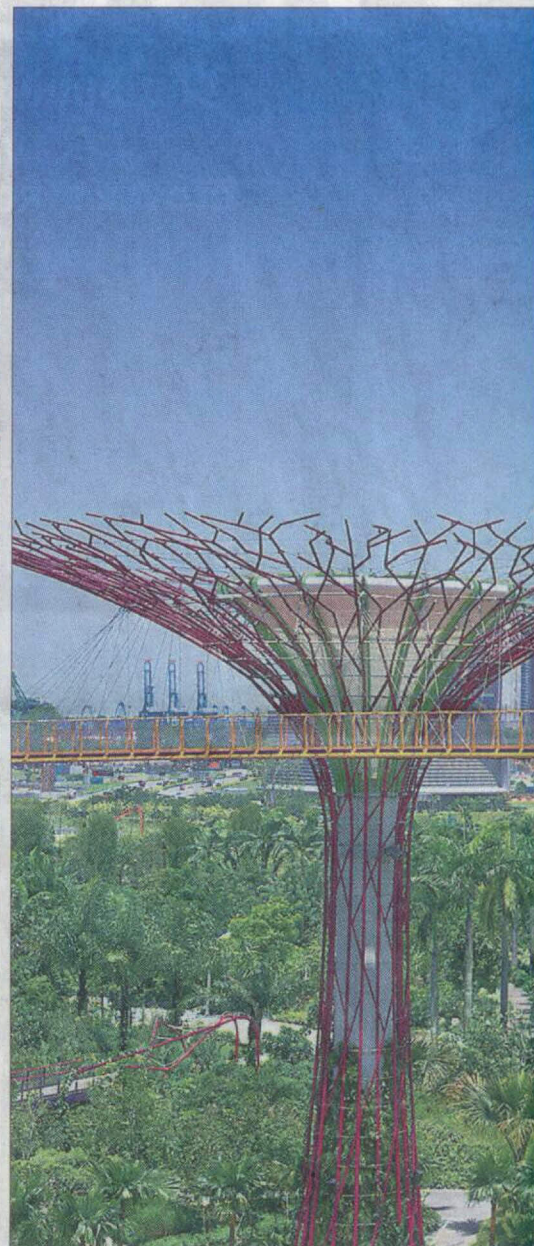
But I must stay on track. I saw that I had automatic membership of an executive club lounge on the 31st floor – but I am not an executive, in case you hadn’t noticed. Booking the hotel boardroom for a PowerPoint presentation isn’t top of my things-to-do list and, to be honest, it would be all I could do to stop myself drawing a pair of boobs on a whiteboard. Meetings for me are in cafés, still dressed in my pyjamas, moaning to other writers about how no one really understands us. Undeterred nevertheless, I headed to the 31st floor. The executive club turned out to be a great bar with amazing views over the central business district, and there was certainly a feeling of excitement about the high-rises, the cleanliness, the shiny shops, the fact that everything works. And we made it, we clever humans. We conquered this humid, inhospitable tropic by inventing something called air con.

But then I took a modernity stumble. One helpful member of staff asked, “Would you like to download the hotel’s Concierge app?”



Sounding not unlike Miss Marple, I replied: “Would I like to what the what, dear?” On further explanation, the Concierge app sounded great – with it, you can service your every need before arrival: check in, order newspapers, request bespoke bath amenities, choose from the Conrad pillow menu. Yes, a pillow menu, if you please. Then you can continue to use it throughout your stay, organising taxis, meals and so on. However, there was a problem: I had never downloaded an app in my life. I’d had a brief dalliance with a calorie counter once,

Past and present: clockwise from above, a pool atop Marina Bay Sands (also previous page); ‘supertrees’ at the Gardens by the Bay; Raffles Hotel; and the Botanic Gardens

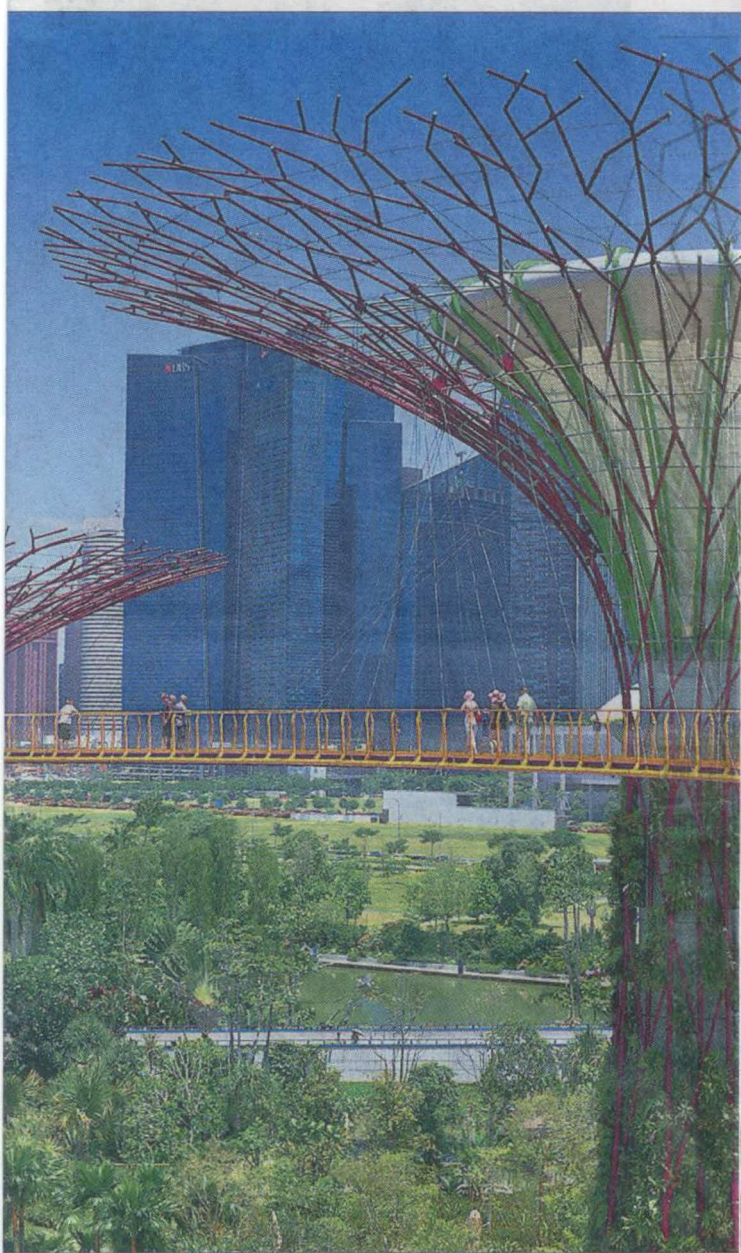


but it buffered and I took it as a sign that counting calories was the devil’s work. Buffering and evil are surely synonymous. Also, to be frank, I prefer to talk to a person. I like to ask questions and see things before deciding. I can’t make a decision about a pillow before knowing what a medium, a soft or a “light plump” actually is.

I can’t blame the year of my birth for this. There are many people my age – and older – who are modern, techno and happily “keeping up”. But as I wandered around the marina in Singapore and saw

the extraordinary Marina Bay Sands – three skyscrapers with another building, in the shape of a massive ship, placed on top and straddling them – it didn’t feel right. Apparently, it’s a two-acre sky garden – but it made me feel depressed. It was omnipresent over the bay, shouting, “Look at me, aren’t I a freakishly clever structure? You can’t get away from me.” When I went to Gardens by the Bay and saw a grove of man-made “supertrees” come alive with a light and music show, I couldn’t help but think I would rather see fairy lights

I'd happily

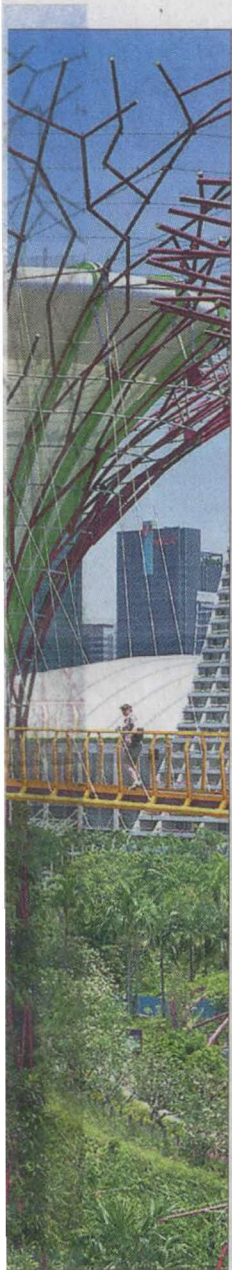


in a birch. On a visit to the cleanest and newest shopping mall (where you could step aboard a gondola and glide up a "river" for just 50yd – why, why?), I wondered whether anyone was actually enjoying themselves, grabbing at the latest piece of status-symbol jewellery or clothing. There was no sense of peace or relaxation anywhere. There was just a sense of bustle. Yes, we are getting cleverer and cleverer – architecturally, technically – but is it feeding our souls? As we shuffle about, supposedly having a day out but firing off emails as we walk, have

we once stopped to consider that all this stuff, all these inventions, new buildings and new crazes, aren't necessarily the most brilliant thing ever?

Singapore is amazing and interesting, and the Conrad Centennial is a great base – but I was not feeling myself. I was feeling a sense of how proud we have got about our conquering and achieving, and how in control we are. Then I found myself in Club Street – famous for its bars and restaurants – and felt my shoulders drop. Finally, I was relaxed. Why? Simple – the buildings were older, with pretty shuttered windows

have eaten a b



and balconies. They had been built by someone, before air con, humbly fighting the elements, at one with nature, not conquering it but appreciating it. I had a meal and knew what I had to do. Sorry, people, I abandoned modern.

I headed to the Botanic Gardens for a little potter – lovely. And then I made a beeline for Raffles. I'd avoided it initially for the tourist trap it has now become... but oh, the lovely white colonial building, the courtyard with lush plants and a water feature, the wooden-slatted windows, the

clink of cocktail glasses in the Long Bar.

"The greatest luxury is the luxury of being yourself," the Conrad literature read. What a great ethos. So, all you executives and glamorous-nesses, enjoy the Conrad Centennial and its smooth service – but if you want to meet me for a cup of Earl Grey, I will be in the gardens of my old-fashioned, nay, quaint b&b (if there is such a thing in Singapore). I will probably be sporting a linen trouser and playing cards. We shall laugh and commune – and smartphones will be placed in a bin upon entry.

◆ Cleveland Collection (020 7843 3531) offers a three-night stay at the Conrad Centennial Singapore from £1,115 per person (sharing). Includes BA flights, private transfers, accommodation in a Classic room and breakfasts. All customisable through Conrad Concierge, the new app technology from Conrad Hotels & Resorts (conradhotels.com).

YOUR SAY

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