A SLEW OF NEW ROOMS IN REPURPOSED HERITAGE HOTELS, BLOCKBUSTER BRANDS AND BABY BOUTIQUES OFFERS EXCITING REASONS TO HIGH TAIL IT TO SYDNEY RIGHT NOW. RON GLUCKMAN BEDS DOWN IN THE BEST AND THE BRIGHTEST.
the scene. Sydney claimed an astonishing 17 openings last year, and global hospitality consulting brand Horwath HTL predicts another 4,600 rooms will be added in the next four years. It seemed time to check into some of the latest Sydney properties.

First stop is Surry Hills, a leafy backwater that was the center of Sydney’s rag trade, and also Australia’s own mini-Hollywood. Paramount Pictures and 20th Century Fox had offices here, and many historic buildings survive. Gentrification began in the early 2000s, and Surry has some of Sydney’s most celebrated restaurants. And now, a hip heritage hotel to match.

**Paramount House Hotel** opened in April, in the World War II–era Paramount building, which has been buzzing for years. The former film screening room in the basement is the art house Golden Age Cinema. On the main floor is the always-packed Paramount Coffee Project, which is run by partners with more than two decades each in the coffee trade who set out four years ago to expand and restore the old film company’s office into a movie-themed hotel.

Their delightfully funky boutique inn reimagines Sydney’s cinematic heyday. Over a cup of his celebrated java, co-owner Mark Dundon explained that much of the hotel is in a new addition above the old Paramount warehouse. Designers had to be as inventive as filmmakers creating sets. Hence, the lovely exterior copper cladding and companion piece in the lobby are new, but look convincing as relics from a Hollywood epic. The 29 rooms feature a variety of layouts, including lofts. Best are Sunny rooms, with lots of greenery and big windows opening out onto one of the hottest Sydney neighborhoods. As befits a first-time hotel launch, there are hits and misses. The metal tub in the center of the room seems clumsy, overly zen for the cinematic concept. But I’m bowled over by the exquisite fabrics sourced by these well-traveled coffee traders, and comfy beds with mounds of pillows.

Food options were boosted when Ester, the heralded Chippendale restaurant, opened a wine bar and eatery in the building, Poly (get it: Poly-Ester). Just outside are two of the country’s hottest Asian eateries, Chin Chin and Longrain. Don’t miss visiting gorgeous Golden Age’s bar, with vintage wraparound seating and brown leather...
The design here is light and airy, walls filled with art, venues bright. Signature restaurant Atelier boasts a big open kitchen and stacks of glassware, but sitting areas sport a backdrop of light wood that matches the floor, with a nice, natural feel. Suites and luxury club rooms include access to Club Millesime, 35 floors up with sweeping harbor views on three sides.

Properties by Ovolo, a quirky, fast-expanding brand, mixes zippy design with Pop art, Modern furniture, and bargained for bales over brews. Opened in 2015, this one is a hip lad’s retreat in the image of CEO Girish Jhunjhnuwala, an unabashed 1980s British pop fan who confides that he personally programs all the music himself: Radio Ovolo.

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Ovolo 1888 is just a short walk from Darling Harbour, but a complete departure. Set inside a 19th-century Victorian warehouse, the rustic design emphasizes its heritage as one of Sydney’s old wool stores. Crisscrossing corridors and open beams make it easy to visualize how sheep were moved around and sheered, and the free happy hour allows guest to mingle in a rough-hewn lobby bar where buyers long ago bargained for bales over brews.

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Part of the Unlisted Collection, a lively set of properties from imaginative Singaporean Peng Loh, the property matches preservation with modern design. The original brewery’s brick walls and creaky wooden floors in rooms above the pub maintain the flavor of the traditional Australian roadhouse. The décor is fun, risqué, often delightfully goofy. Loh straddles the line between cool and kitch; every nook offers something like oddball dentist chairs, vintage safes hauled from the basement, and custom lighting.

The original dive bar is now hipster nirvana, with mixologists center stage in circular station with bright yellow and orange panels. Customers choose from retro bar stools or a wide array of tables, chairs and couches, all mix-matched with antique fans and stand-up lamps.

In a city basking in sunshine, Sydney has inexplicably lacked knockout hotel pools. The Old Clare’s long rooftop pool has a wide wooden deck perfect for grills and parties. Renowned for award-winning eateries, Unlisted went all-out at The Old Clare, perhaps too much, launching three signature restaurants. Silver Eye has since closed, but scrumptious options remain with Automata by Clayton Wells decked out in scrapyard parts, and Kensington Street Social from Michelin-star chef Jason Atherton.

From left: Courtesy of InterContinental Sydney Doubletree, Ovolo 1888, the Old Clare.
West Hotel is further up the harbor by Barangaroo, another urban redevelopment scheme radically reshaping Sydney. On a previous visit, officials had toured me around cranes at the old docks, and businesses already springing up around the 22-hectare site with big parkland. Now, the waterfront is buzzing with bistro and pubs and, as of a year ago, this chic hotel.

Part of the Curio Collection by Hilton, West features an eye-catching exterior design of giant black panels shaped like faceted edges of a jewel. The striking, dark design extends inside with black glass walls overlooking a vast atrium filled with greenery, a cool nature theme that unfortunately doesn’t carry into the rooms. These are ultra-modern, with blue-black carpet and dark panels. But rooms seem small and cramped, especially in contrast with that airy atrium.

Best to hang at elegant Solander, the fashionable all-day eatery slash lobby bar. Named for botanist and early explorer Daniel Solander, it offers botanical-inspired cocktails, and a dark-side vibe whether in the blue or purple lounge chairs, or black stools in that cool atrium.

westhotel.com.au; doubles from A$238.

Even amid all the heritage buildings in the business district, Primus Hotel stands out. Set inside the one-time headquarters of the Sydney Water Board, the redesign showcases the Art-Deco glamour of the 1930s building. The reddish-pink columns in the lobby might not appeal to every taste, but I adore how the vibrant shades contrast with the darker-hued Wilmot, the adjacent old-world dining hall. And besides, these original columns were the work of the prolific Melocco brothers, Italian craftsmen credited with 90 percent of the marble, scagliola and terrazzo work across Sydney from 1910 to 1965.

Rooms are big and luxurious, from the fluffy bed to thick rug, which stuns in a rich blue-and-gold pattern. The décor seems distinctively masculine, like a men’s club from another century. Back in the day, the rooftop actually featured a shooting range, a good-old-boys’ perk for Water Board employees.

If it looks familiar, you may remember the building from Angelina Jolie’s Unbroken. In 1939, it was the tallest building in Sydney—which might make you feel retroactively safer about all those bullets flying around.

primushotelsydney.com; doubles from A$300.

New-world chic in West Hotel’s Solander Bar.
Potts Point overlooks the sea east of Sydney, but has too often gotten lumped in the backpacker sprawl of nefarious King’s Cross (itself a neighborhood on the ascendant). Yet it’s quieter, and the large collection of historical homes and cafés have earned more than a few references to Paris. In July, a trio of old Victorians reopened as the utterly charming Spicers Potts Point.

Inside three wonderfully frilly townhouses dating to 1880, the 20 rooms provide an oasis from another age. Guests sip tea or fruit-flavored water in the library, or sit in the leafy garden. Rooms feature big beds with down pillows, white walls and light décor. Entry-level rooms are small; it is definitely worth upgrading to the spacious suites, some with a private terrace or fireplace.

The atmosphere is friendly, with snacks in the room, and cocktail hours with canapés nightly.

spicersretreats.com; doubles from A$439.

Ovolo Woollahroo is a total oddity, not only for the tongue-twisting name. It seems far from everything, but is really an easy 15-minute walk to museums or Circular Quay. It looks more like an airplane hanger than hip hotel fronting a high-end residential project for yachty and celebs like Russell Crowe. Called Finger Wharf when it was built a century ago, it laid claim then to being the world’s largest timbered-piled wharf.

Another distinguishing quality: the sprawling site never made sense as a hotel. After boats moved to other piers in the 80s, the plan was to demolish the wharf and replace it with a high-end marina. Protests saved the structure, which was renovated into a 100-room hotel. It launched as W Sydney Woollahroo, the first W outside the U.S. Later it became Blue Hotel, managed by Taj. “It really should have been called Yellow,” joked my taxi driver, as we pulled up to the cavernous property. “Because it’s always been a lemon.”

No longer. After Ovolo took over and reopened the property at the end of 2015, it’s become a trendy address, with a buzzing bar and popular events space. The waterside location is a pull, but hardly anyone comes here to chill. Ovolo is known for its buoyant blend of art, fashion and music, and Woollahroo has taken the experimentation—and fun—to a new level.

Check-in is quick and seamless, but pause to survey the art. Over the front desk is a jumble of figures moving relentlessly, an A$300,000 kinetic clock. In the ceiling nest metallic eggs. Hallways are packed with visuals. If it sounds busy, that’s another odd anomaly: it all works.

ovolohotels.com; doubles from A$350.