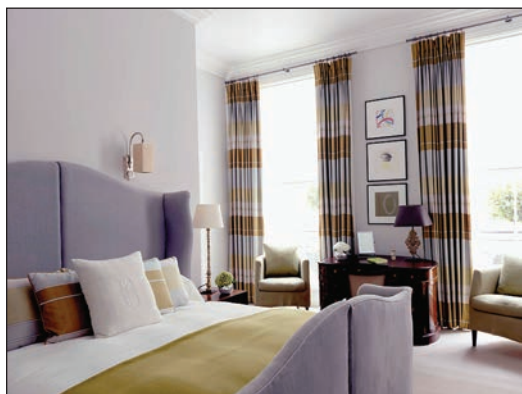


## A Hint of the Unexpected

An Interview with **Stuart P. Johnson**,  
General Manager, **Rocco Forte's Brown's Hotel**



*Dover Suite bedroom (left); HIX Mayfair Restaurant (above)*

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Stuart Johnson was appointed General Manager of Brown's Hotel in London in January 2005. Earlier, he served as Publishing Director at Condé Nast Jobansens. Before this, he was Director and General Manager of Cliveden from 1994 through 1999, and previously held the position of Resident Manager between 1986 and 1990. Between those two posts, at the age of 32, Johnson was the youngest ever Hotel Manager at The Savoy in London, a position he held for four years. He originally made his mark with The Savoy Hotel Group as Personnel and Purchasing Manager at The Connaught and as Assistant Banqueting Manager of Claridge's, having started his career as a management trainee. In 2012, Stuart Johnson was named Hotelier of the Year by Caterer and Hotelkeeper. In 2013, he was named Hotelier of the Year at The European Hospitality Awards.*



*Stuart P. Johnson*

Rocco Forte hotels as a brand, is that each hotel reflects the city in which it sits. Brown's is quintessentially British but it has a hint of the unexpected – it's edgy. You never know when you walk through the door what you'll find.

We have HIX as a restaurant, which has British cuisine; we have the piano room and the library, and effectively an all-day dining experience, afternoon tea, and evening drinks in The Donovan Bar are a destination.

We are continually praised for our level of service and the preemptive service that the team provides.

Time and again, it's a natural way of delivering service – always being there when we're wanted and knowing when we're not wanted and how to approach that.

I work to engage with my staff and empower my team. I believe in being consistent and I always want to do something better. I keep working on at a particular thing until we get it absolutely right, and my team knows what to expect.

**Is there consistency throughout Rocco Forte Hotels that sets the properties apart?**

Design. They are iconic buildings, always in excellent locations. They are iconic because all but two of the 10 we have currently, 11 when we opened Jeddah in June of 2015, are historic buildings. Munich is a brand new building but it's an iconic building right on the side of the botanic gardens – it's an architecturally interesting building.

Olga Polizzi, Sir Rocco's sister, is the design director, giving that common thread – a consistency with paint colors, fabrics etc.

Over the past year, we have refurbished the restaurant, the long room, the piano room, and the library; we've also done soft furnishings in the bar. We are 10 years old, so although we have continually upgraded and refreshed, we are now bringing new energy into the interior design through a brightness in color. We recently replaced all the carpets in the guest hallways, and now we are approaching the rooms with regard to soft furnishings. We are creating a new Kipling Suite that will be 500 square feet and have two bedrooms, on the first floor of the house.

The hotel was created as 11 town houses, so in the Edwardian days when the

houses were built, the grand rooms were on the first floor of the hotel. Kipling has the most amazing sitting room but we're creating a new entrance with a lobby, a really opulent bathroom with a double shower, double wash hand basins, and an oversized bath, passing into a fabulous bedroom with an enormous walk-in wardrobe. The work started on that in November and it will be open in time for Valentine's Day.

In the hallway opposite this, there are two further rooms – a studio room and executive room that will make it up to 900 square feet. We are starting by upgrading the soft furnishings in the suites, as well as the in-room technology, and the whole of our television system and audio system will be upgraded by March.

We're going to create four more studio suites this year and we're also looking to turn eight rooms into four Brown's suites that will have two bathrooms, a good sized bedroom, and a lovely sitting room with a sofa bed in it. These will be fantastic for three adults or for a family with two children; it will be a full suite.

One of the services added as a matter of course is that everybody in any room has the availability of an unpacking service.

**Will the bright colors be carried throughout all the accommodations?**

Absolutely. We created a new studio suite in December of 2014, which has one-and-a-half bathrooms. It has a full bathroom with a shower or a bath and we made a second bathroom with a shower room only, and a fabulous dressing room. It's quite an exceptional studio suite situated on the fifth floor of the hotel.

Brown's is quintessentially English. The Dover Suite is a true mix of traditional and contemporary with a fabulous ornate ceiling, Goya prints, wooden floor, and energetic pastel colors. Olga Polizzi has the most amazing touch in interior design.

**What do you think of as a true luxury experience today?**

I've always determined luxury as not the gimmicks or gadgets – it is the service level, knowing that one's room preference is there for them, and their arrival and departure are seamless, and that the team recognizes the guest.

The best hotel in the world is the one at which you are known. ●

**PROPERTY BRIEF** *Rocco Forte's Brown's Hotel London, in the heart of Mayfair, is situated within walking distance of key shopping areas such as Bond Street and Regent Street, in addition to major theaters, art galleries, and all key central London landmarks. The hotel has hosted many distinguished guests since it opened as London's first hotel in 1837. Each room and suite is individually decorated, and many feature contemporary artworks. The Donovan Bar and HIX Mayfair celebrate British art and cuisine and The English Tea Room offers the award-winning afternoon tea, while an indulgent spa and state-of-the-art gymnasium offer guests a discreet sanctuary. Brown's Hotel (roccofortehotels.com) is also home to six unique private dining rooms for intimate meetings or extravagant celebrations. The property is comprised of 11 Georgian town houses offering 117 bedrooms, including 29 luxurious suites.*

**What is the state of the London market and what do you feel sets it apart?**

The state of the London market is buoyant. We have recovered from the 2008 world dip and the post-Olympics decline.

The markets that are important to London remain – the U.S. the biggest of all, as are emerging markets, the Far East, and China in particular. What sets Brown's apart, let alone