The Gold Standard
Our all-time favourite hotels, restaurants, cocktail bars and beach clubs

What's Hot for 2015
The destinations, people & trends causing a buzz this year
THE GOLD STANDARD 2015

OUR ALL-TIME FAVOURITE HOTELS, RESTAURANTS, COCKTAIL AND BEACH BARS

Song Saa Private Island, Cambodia
THE JANE ANTPWER

Sergio Herman closed his three-Michelin-starred Oud Sluis restaurant in the Netherlands in 2013, deciding it had reached its peak. Holland's loss is Belgium's gain: his reincarnated cooking at The Jane, alongside one-to-watch chef Nick Bul, is phenomenal - and has just been awarded a Michelin star of its own. This is the coolest new space in Antwerp, built in the chapel of an old military hospital, with quirky stained-glass windows and a luminous skull hanging in the apse. Choose how many starters you'd like (three is a delightful, seven sublime, but the rest is out of your hands). Oysters with verbena and Champagne granita, raw and swills of samphire are served with the artistry of a Die Beers necklace. Forks clash over sharing plates of harissa-spiced lamb and pumpkin with rose oil sous vide. All this, and there's an ace little bar upstairs too. +32 3 808 4465; www. thejaneantwerp.com. About £85 for two

FOREST AVENUE DUBLIN

This is a cool-looking restaurant, with Scandi-white walls and dark-wood tables laid with soft leather pouches to hold the chunky cutlery. But the food is what makes it Dublin's most exciting foodie destination. Tattooed chef John Wyer creates surprisingly delicate dishes, like abstract paintings on a plate: a smear of tapenade; a slick of beetroot, a daube of truffled ricotta. Standouts include venison with tea-soaked prunes and a finger-licking-good chicken-skin sauce. Service, led by Wyer's New Yorker wife Sandy, is slick but super-friendly and the small open kitchen - where the chef's team seem to have as much fun as the diners – adds to the upbeat atmosphere. Sometimes the delicious petits fours are even delivered by the beaming man himself. +353 1 667 8337; www.forestavenuedublin.ie. About £75 for two

LASAI RIO DE JANEIRO

Head to Rio's organic market and you'll find chef Rafa Costa e Silva browsing the boxes of fresh produce to supplement his own kitchen garden for Lasai's daily-changing nine- and 12-course tasting menus. As far removed from kitchen divas as they come, the former head chef of Michelín-starred Mugartiz transforms classic Brazilian flavours into innovative parades of joy (sous-vide egg with coconut cream; oxtail tapioca and sauerkraut), paired with Brazilian wines and artisanal beers. The dinner-party vibe kicks off with cocktails and canapés at the roof-tower terrace overlooking Christ the Redeemer, before heading down to the rustic-minimalist dining room, with its exposed-brick walls and radiants peeking out of bell jars. While switched-on waiters request guests' preferences, there's no ordering off a menu - and the thrill of surprise from a culinary master has the acclaimed wooden tables booked out weeks in advance. +55 21 3449 1834; www.lasai.com.br. About £90 for two

MARGAUX NEW YORK

Like many of the best places, or at any rate the most diverting ones, there's no sign on the door of this restaurant at the Marlton Hotel in Greenwich Village by Sean McPherson (best known for the Waverly Inn and who's just opened The Ludlow hotel), but New York's fashion crowd have found it all the same. Through the lounge you go, past the clubby bar, and there at the end is open-all-day Margaux, a Paris brasserie in miniature, with a conservatory at the back that's cozy even in winter. It's buzzy, but with nice acoustics (especially in the booths), and the food is retro-1990s yet somehow not remotely ironic. Crudités have been revamped – dips including labne, tahini and bagna cauda, for instance – and the farmer's board of tabbouleh, spicy sweet potato and beans is terrific. Ottolevghi goes to Mexico by way of the Great Plains. It's all served on mismatched china with bags of charm by young, clued-in staff. +1 212 321 0111; www.mhargaunyc.com. About £50 for two

MINI BAR LISBON

Foodie Lisbon just gets better and better. Much of the credit should go to José Avillez, whose culinary talent has spiced up so many corners of the city's cobbled streets. His latest venture is in a 19th-century theatre in the chic Chiado district. Inside, the dramatic theme plays out with bare light bulbs spilling out Mini Bar, menus that resemble terrorist tickets and tapas-style dishes divided into Acts. Centre stage is a team of friendly staff who create a fun atmosphere that has made this the place to hang out, especially at weekends when there's live music. It's very much finger food, but everything that is served – from the Caiquinha (with an explosive twist) to the crêche of juicy prawns on a slab of lime – deserves a standing ovation. +351 2113 05393; www.joseavillez.pt. About £35 for two

ROTH BAR & GRILL SOMERSET

Uniting the twin joys of food and art is not a novel idea. But the Roth Bar & Grill, at Somerset's much-talked-about Hauser & Wirth gallery, does it with aplomb. The old farm buildings have been tarted up to create a formal dining room alongside a laid-back café and courtyard, all doubling as art galleries. The name comes from the bar, a behemoth welded by Bjørn and Oddur Roth (progeny of the great Dieter) out of found agricultural objects. It forms a rough-and-ready backdrop for the simple menus: coffee with hunks of lemon drizzle cake, breakfast of compote and granola. There are the cows in the field next door and vegetables from the allotments over the road on the lunch menu as burgers and colourful salads, and the commitment to local suppliers anchors the whole thing pleasingly to its rural West Country roots, despite being a world-class creative venue. +44 1749 814700; www.rothbarandgrill.co.uk. About £45 for two

RESTAURANT JAN NICE

This stylish new spot, opposite, in a former motorcycle repair shop behind the Old Port is pulling in crowds thanks to the sensational food from young South African chef Jan Hendrik. Beyond the romantic, boudoir interiors – petrol-blue walls, 18th-century antiques, crystal chandeliers – his dazzling sense of whimsy overrides any hint of formality. This is healthy modern cooking that's both gorgeous to behold and haute comfort food at its best. The copious menu, inspired by Hendrik's grandmother, includes slow-cooked lamb shank simmered in coffee andPinotage, and traditional South African malva pudding topped with mouth-watering salted caramel and Madagascar-vanilla ice cream. +33 497 193 223; www.restaurant jan.com. About £80 for two

LYLE'S LONDON

A gastronomic beacon between the wispy trends of Dalston and the West End's glam status quo, Lyle's is much more than a sequel to St John Bread and Wine, where chef James Lowe and co-owner John Ogier first joined forces. Rather, it's a London counterpart to international young talents like Sydney-based Pasi Petanen and Relae's Christian Puglisi in Copenhagen: well-travelled people whose menus are rooted in home soil. A winter à la carte lunch menu might offer bitter leaves with pear and Berkswell cheese, followed by partridge, saddle and quince. Chefs work in full view at a charcoal grill; the space is harmonious, but with no art, no music – just the joyful hum of people being well looked after. +44 20 3011 5911; www.lyleslondon.com. About £80 for two