

Tatler



Dato' Sheila Majid is a legend in her own time. And after 40 years in the spotlight, she's still shining bright

TIME AFTER TIME

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PART OF THE CLUB

How hotel brands are building cult-like loyalty through refreshed branding and a more relatable visual identity *By Coco Marett*

I read somewhere that “The best brands don’t sell; they make you want to join the club.” Hotel brands are increasingly subscribing to that idea and very cleverly building cult-like loyalty through creative direction, cultural programming and even merchandise.

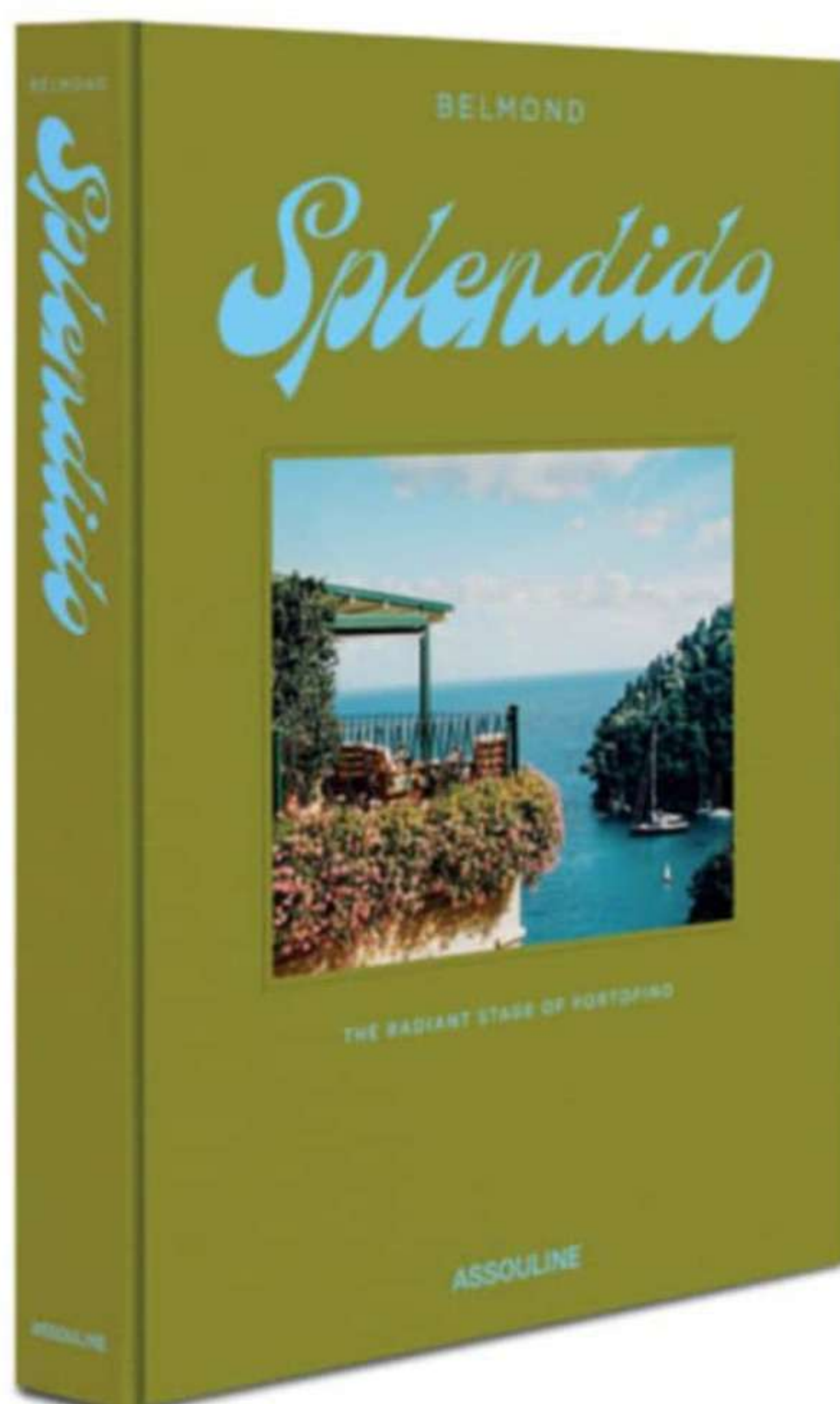
It’s not necessarily a new approach—think Aman’s fiercely loyal fandom, otherwise known as Aman Junkies, or Mandarin Oriental’s “I’m a Fan” campaign—but more hotel brands are adopting this as a strategy, and more travellers are willing to spend on hotel brands that they feel align with their values, style

and personality. When it comes to choosing a hotel, storytelling and emotional connection to a brand is more important than it’s ever been.

A group that’s been leading this charge is Belmond. Once a quiet portfolio of boutique hotels, the brand has exploded in popularity since it was acquired by LVMH in 2019, with a new creative direction that gives its properties distinct personalities—not unlike fashion brands. Girly girls wear Chloe and stay at Hotel Cipriani in Venice; the jet-set fashion crowd wear Gucci and take the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express sleeper train from Paris to the Amalfi Coast; and the playfully confident wear Miu Miu and stay at Maroma on Mexico’s Riviera Maya.

Speaking of the fashion-hotel axis, hotel merch has in recent years become quite the fashion flex.

Potato Head in Bali’s collection combines eco-conscious Balinese craftsmanship with a modern style, featuring nods to the music and culture of the island, and dropping new collections regularly to eagerly awaiting fans. An incredibly successful line of hotel merchandise has been Rosewood Hotels’ collaboration with high-end



athleisure label Sporty & Rich. Preppy caps and crewnecks bear the labels of some of their most famous hotels—such as The Carlyle in New York or Le Bristol in Paris—are worn with the same pride and gusto as one might wear their team colours.

In October, Rosewood debuted a chic refresh of its branding and overall visual identity, tapping into a global community of creative minds to produce artful photos, graphics and short films by the likes of photographer Sarah van Rij and videographer Conner Griffith. The goal? To take travellers’ association with the Rosewood name from a series of luxury properties to a brand



Above, from left: Jacquetta Wheeler, Henry Golding, Tim Easton and Oli Green in the new Raffles campaign. **Opposite page, from left:** *Splendido*, a Belmond book published by Assouline; Rosewood's *The World of Rosewood*

with something to say; with its finger on the pulse when it comes to art and creative talent.

Even the prestigious Raffles is working on shedding its stuffy reputation in a cheeky way, launching a Wes Anderson-esque campaign last year titled *The Butler Did It*. Its debut, shot at Raffles Singapore, features actor Waris Ahluwalia, fashion icon Robert Rabensteiner and model May Siu in a series of photos and videos shot by fashion photographer Dylan Don and directed by Trey Laird, the founder, chief executive and chief creative officer of creative agency Laird+Partners. The second instalment dropped in September this year, and features *Crazy Rich Asians* actor Henry Golding, alongside up-and-coming stars such

as Parisian model Amalie Gassmann and British actor Oli Green, causing a bit of chaos within the walls of Raffles London at the OWO, housed in the city's Old War Office.

Slowly but surely, the typical, painfully perfect press images of hotels are being replaced by something more candid: photos shot on film of a spilled martini at the hotel bar, a tray of room service on an unmade bed. And it's working because people want something real, to see themselves in it—not be intimidated by it.

In October, Rosewood published *The World of Rosewood*, a coffee table book edited by *Monocle* featuring images and stories of its properties around the world. Meanwhile last month, Belmond launched its *Legendary Destinations* series of

coffee table books with Assouline. The first two books in the series are *Splendido* and *Peru*—the former marking a new era for its legendary Portofino property, following a stunning renovation by Martin Brudnizki, while the latter brings together Belmond's properties and trains in Peru into one tactile print experience. But these aren't glorified brochures; while the hotels are featured, the books serve more as love letters to the heritage, community and culture of their respective destinations.

All this is to say, hotels are no longer positioning themselves as just hotels any more. They're the lens through which travellers experience a destination, and a base for exploration—albeit a very fancy one.