



Reopened in November following a six-month refit, The Strand now has a fresh, sophisticated aesthetic to match its old-world charm. Much of the makeover involved things you won't necessarily see: new air-conditioning, wiring, lighting, plumbing. But you'll certainly appreciate them, as you will the sympathetic revamp of guest rooms and public spaces by Bangkok design firm P49 Deesign, which handled the recent refurb of the Mandarin Oriental Bangkok's oldest wings.

Murraybrown declines to tell me how much was spent on the project, presumably because the hotel is half-owned by the government. But it must have been considerable. Beyond the thick new mattresses, silver-framed flat-screen TVs, handsomely reupholstered sofas, and well-placed *objets d'art*, every inch of marble and teak has been refinished, including the parquet flooring in the grand staircase, each piece taken out individually and sanded by hand. The lobby has been similarly updated—the lamp bases made from chromed offering bowls are a particularly nice touch—as has the hotel's venerable wood-paneled bar. Rechristened the Sarkies Bar, it now sports a clubby sophistication and an impeccable cocktail list.

And at The Strand Restaurant, all taupe and soft grays under starburst chandeliers and vaulted ceilings, chef Christian Martena has crafted a menu of modern Mediterranean dishes like pigeon breast with foie gras and pan-fried turbot with smoked potato and black truffle. One suspects the Sarkies brothers would have approved. ☉

hotelthestrang.com; doubles from US\$334



RIVERSIDE REDUX

Fresh from a major refit, Myanmar's legendary grand dame is looking better than ever. BY CHRISTOPHER P. HILL

Few hotels in Southeast Asia are as storied as The Strand. Set on Yangon's riverfront boulevard, it was opened in 1901 by hoteliers *du jour* Aviet and Tigran Sarkies—Persian-born Armenians who, along with two other well-mustachioed brothers, were also behind the Eastern & Oriental in Penang and Singapore's Raffles. Back then, the city was called Rangoon, a booming if scruffy colonial port of 250,000 people. The Strand became a beacon of luxury and modernity. A whopping three stories tall and

crowned by a grand pediment, it was the first building in town with electricity, not to mention 60 resplendent rooms that would host the likes of Noël Coward and Somerset Maugham.

But with Burmese independence, the property began a slow decline that only picked up speed after the military coup of 1962, when it was nationalized. By the '70s, The Strand was rundown and rat-infested. Then came Aman founder Adrian Zecha, who restored and reopened it in 1993 as a 31-suite hotel. The Strand had returned to its former glory.

That, however, was almost a quarter of a century ago. By the time its current managers, GCP Hospitality, took over in 2013, the place was looking tired again, and in dire need of a technological upgrade.

"A major renovation was overdue to usher the hotel into the 21st century," says Mark Murraybrown, the hotel's operations manager.

Clockwise from above: The Strand's neoclassical facade; inside a renovated suite; a hotel doorman; the Sarkies Bar has a new name and a new look.