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BY OLIVER BULLOUGH

# EXTRAORDINARY TRAVEL

YOUR MANUAL FOR A STYLISH LIFE LESS ORDINARY

## LUXURY'S DISCERNING NOMAD

Arnaud Zannier's unique hotels are going against the tide of travel giants

Words by BILL PRINCE

It's easy to imagine that luxury hotels might soon be swept away on a tide of Airbnb bookings, but for those in thrall to the different, the unique and the homely there's a new travel partner in the shape of 42-year-old Arnaud Zannier.

Founded nine years ago, Zannier Hotels is the hospitality arm of Group Zannier, a European retail conglomerate responsible for kitting out the young and youthful for generations – thanks to its licensing of such cult brands as Chipie and Kickers. Now Arnaud has set aside his own fashion business to launch a group of smaller than average hotels that telegraph a new kind of luxury, one he describes as “understated” and others might consider belated.

Its first property, a 12-room chalet in the French skiing capital of Megève, sets the tone: bare wood and open fires match the friendly, informal yet intuitively intelligent service. Design is its strength rather than its calling card: distancing it from the run of boutique hotels that flag up yet routinely flout genuine taste and style. (Does anyone really want a “bottle aged” – ie ready-mixed – cocktail left beside an empty ice bucket?)

In September, its sister property Phum Baitang – (it means “green village”) opened in Cambodia close to the ancient sites of Angkor Wat, it's larger scale overwritten by its sense of place, consideration for local customs and cuisine, and the suggestion that rather than simply taking up position next to a world heritage site, its guests can find refuge from the large multinational chains that have already moved into the area.

Next up is a property over the border in Vietnam, another refuge again benefitting from the attentions of Zannier and his small



Sitting pretty: The appeal of Zannier's (above) accommodations is their appreciation of their surroundings

*'THE YOUNGER GENERATION IS LOOKING FOR SOMETHING DIFFERENT. FOR US LUXURY ISN'T ABOUT GOLD TAPS'*

team. An architect in Paris has been appointed, but otherwise these and future projects (there are plans to open in Menorca) are under the control of their owner. It's a leap from cookie-cutter hotel-keeping, and one that Zannier himself feels is indicative of the new generation of lotus eaters out there:

“The initial idea was to create something that was missing in the market,” he says. “Because the older customer is looking for a

different kind of luxury, very materialist. But the younger generation is looking for something different because for us luxury isn't about gold taps in the bathroom. And you can have that sort of atmosphere if you go into a small, independent guesthouse, but you never find those values in big international chains. We want to be recognised as being original, fresh, and an alternative to other brands.” [zannier.com](http://zannier.com)