

SPEND IT

Tea Elixir Skin Resilience Activating Serum by Fresh is now at Sephora stores in Australia. After 15 years of research and utilising the brand's patented "adaptive phytochemicals technology" extraction process, hardy tea plants from Mauritius have been used to create this age-defying serum to smooth skin, minimise lines, add glow and rejuvenate the complexion. Fresh's co-founder and product development manager Lev Glazman describes the scent as evoking ozone and ocean. The brand, with a philosophy of harnessing "the power of nature", also offers a compatible cleanser, essence and moisturiser. 30ml, \$122; 50ml, \$170.



fresh.com/au  
sephora.com.au  
SUSAN KUROSAWA

Japan has fully reopened to tourists, just in time for the launch of Ghibli Park. The name will be familiar to fans of Japanese animated films such as Princess Mononoke and Spirited Away, which were produced by Tokyo's Studio Ghibli.

The park celebrates these and other films created over the studio's nearly 40-year history and loved by all ages around the world.

This week, three of five planned themed areas opened at the former 2005 World Expo site (about 50 minutes by train from central Nagoya). Dondoko Forest includes a replica of the house in 1988's My Neighbour Totoro, which was among the Expo's main attractions. The other areas are Ghibli's Grand Warehouse, which showcases animated icons made real, including Totoro's "catbus" (pictured) and Hill of Youth, where visitors can enjoy views across the park and browse the antiques shop from 1995's Whisper of the Heart.

Although it's a theme park there are no rides. Ghibli Park is designed for exploration and wonder, including of the natural world,



which often plays an important role in the studio's films. The Valley of Witches, due to open during next year's northern autumn, will feature the titular Howl's Moving Castle. Mononoke Village is expected to open in March 2024.

Tickets through January are available but in high demand. Online bookings are currently offered only in Japanese but will become more accessible for English speakers in future.

ghibli-park.jp/en  
PATRICIA MAUNDER

THE TWENTY TWO  
Mayfair, London

With a private members club and lavish but relaxed interiors that feel more Paris than London, The Twenty Two is becoming a go-to bolthole for the cool international set and well-heeled creative types.

Occupying an imposing Portland stone Edwardian mansion overlooking Mayfair's Grosvenor Square, one of London's priciest addresses, the hotel has just 31 jewel-like guestrooms and suites, including a standalone mews house with private entrance.

Developed by hotelier and tech investor Navid Mirtorabi (who brought the famous Anouska Hempel-designed Blakes Hotel back to life before selling the property), The Twenty Two opened six months ago and is the first hotel project for Mexican-born designer Natalia Miyar.

Together, they looked to 18th and 19th-century France (including Josephine Bonaparte's Chateau de Malmaison) to decorate this former family home on the posh, if not stuffy, square. Despite the historic design influences, Mirtorabi's aim is to inject new life into this corner of West London.

Guestrooms are decorated in rich velvet and silk with oodles of fringing and piping, playful Pierre Frey wallpapers and classic black and white Cabochon marble bathrooms. Parquet floors are complemented by Paris flea-market finds and custom furniture, including four poster and canopy beds, billowing drapes and an upscale minibar featuring house spirits.

The clubby mood is set in the marble floored and richly panelled lobby, with young staff decked out in smart suits by London menswear designer Charlie Casely-Hayford.

The beautiful all-day dining restaurant offers seasonal Mediterranean-inspired British fare such as Devonshire crab salad, sea bass crudo and salt-baked Cornish chicken courtesy of executive chef Alan Christie.

Hotel guests also have access to the members' living room and library and sexy base-



Guestroom, exterior and lobby of The Twenty Two hotel



ment music room with flame-red walls, mirrored tables and resident DJ.

Rooms are from £465 (\$840), including breakfast.

the22.london  
CHRISTINE McCABE

FOLLOW THE READER

Uplifting  
experience

DI AVERIS  
KINGSFORD, SA

Our arrival in Bhutan coincided with Tshechu, the annual Buddhist festival when young and old don national dress and flock to the capital, Thimpu, to receive blessings and wash away sins. For hours, masked dancers dipped and swirled to beating drums and strident horns, interpreting Buddhist history from previous centuries.

We felt we had popped our heads through Enid Blyton's Magic Faraway Tree and emerged in a land of wonder.

But the 21st century was never far away, even during our mountain trek, when the dining tent was lit each night by a portable solar panel, erected earlier in the day by a party who preceded us on horseback. Surrounded by exquisite butterflies, we walked past fluttering prayer flags and village roofs dotted with chillies drying in preparation for ema datshi, Bhutan's spicy and cheesy national dish.

Puffing up to Tiger's Nest monastery, which clings limpet-like to the mountainside 3000m above sea level, was indeed satisfying but the most memorable experience was yet to come. We approached Chime Lhakhang, the temple of fertility, through the village

nestled in its shadows. Framing the front doors of houses were large and colourful painted phalluses, a Bhutanese custom to encourage fertility and deter evil spirits. At the temple we were summoned forward urgently by a monk presiding over a ceremony involving two westerners, whose hands were joined with the emblematic white silk scarf. As we were hustled forward, I noticed a camera had been set up filming the

event. A wedding? A fertility blessing? Did the monk think we were the tardy parents?

The young couple looked astonished by our presence and the ceremony continued with chanting and swirling of incense. Eventually we were each tapped on the head by the monk wielding a large wooden phallus. So we bowed in farewell and beat a hasty retreat. We still wonder what tale accompanied the couple's video for their folks back home.



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BOOK CLUB

THE TOWER  
Carol Lefevre

To be widowed after a long marriage means a beginning, not an end, for Dorelia. The key character of this interrelated series of a dozen stories succumbs not to a new lover but the romance of a tower house set amid treetops, a symbol of elevation above the humdrum of daily life and the messiness of family business. The top room almost floats over its staircase, windows "filled with drifting clouds". Here in this eyrie, Dorelia plans to recollect, dream and, most of all, read and write. She would take with her very little of previous times. Just a few "cherished belongings" and a "ruthlessly reduced collection of books". The tower house would gather her in with a strong and welcoming embrace. Perhaps predictably, her children deem her, at 75, insane for buying such an unsuitable place to reside. Surely, she's ready, as those of a certain age are customarily deemed to be, for a retirement village or sheltered housing.

And so emerges Dorelia's idea to "rewrite the stories that put old women in a poor light", perhaps starting with the redemption of Rapunzel's witch. Her long-time friend and conspirator, artist Elizabeth ("Bunty") Bunting, snorts with laughter at the notion but Dorelia is not to be deterred. And so write she does, covering her younger life and years at art school, painting holidays and lovers shared with Bunty in France, all interwoven with stories of other women, young and old, and their dreams and dramas. The narrative threads, crossing over sometimes intricately but also as briefer strands, evoke the narrow worlds of country Australian settlements; those "huddled houses" and "heat-beaten streets" and the "inescapable filaments of duty" that tie residents to a town. The keen longing for escape comes through, as does the harsh beauty and rough red landscapes of NSW's far west. What life choices did women have in eras past. Was a determination to succeed really just about proving their parents wrong or escaping the stigma of childlessness. Or did true ambitions fuel their longings for escape.

Adelaide author Carol Lefevre is not as well-known as many of her peers and surely lacks the wider recognition she deserves. Her recent novella Murmurations was short-listed for the 2021 Christina Stead Prize for Fiction in the NSW Premier's Literary Awards and the Fiction Prize in the 2022 SA Festival Awards for Literature. And now The Tower emerges without fanfare as a quiet, intricately layered masterpiece of dazzling prose and compassion that gleams with a radiant sense of the nourishing beauty of abiding female friendships.

The Tower (Spinifex Press) is now on sale.  
SUSAN KUROSAWA

