

# LEADING LIGHTS

WE CHECK IN TO THE BEST NEW HOTELS IN PARIS, FROM PRESIDENTIAL CRASHPADS TO POST-OFFICE CONVERSIONS.  
INTRODUCTION BY STEVE KING





#### BEST FOR COMMUNITY SPIRIT

### BABEL

Stepping away from the bustling boulevard de Belleville in the 20th arrondissement and into this 31-bedroom hotel feels almost like walking into a souk in Marrakech, with glass lanterns, *tomette* tiles and tapestry-covered armchairs. Owner Joris Bruneel's dream was to honour the neighbourhood's rich multiculturalism. He employed prolific boutique-hotel designer Daphné Desjeux to take inspiration from the locale, as well as the Silk Road and the eponymous biblical fable in her rich aesthetic. He also wanted to involve the community – such as local street artist 13 Bis who did the clever Adam and Eve bathroom murals, while Franco-Afghan chef Clarie Feral Akram serves pesto bakba topped with tahini in the excellent restaurant. Not only that, but the hotel works with the nearby town hall to help those in need of emergency housing for a few nights and, in a collaboration with the Refugee Food Festival, provides nine-month internships to chefs from war-torn countries. Saturday lunches, however, are all about the *mamans du quartier*, who come in to cook their own cuisine, be it Algerian couscous or Damascus *muhammara*. In the minimalist rooms, thoughtful details make up for missing mainstays such as robes and TVs. There are jars filled with tea or ground coffee from local roastery La Brûlerie de Jourdain. But the most clever touch is the framed photographs on the walls. "We asked all our friends to send us the best pictures from their travels," says Bruneel. There's one of his friend's kids in Kabul, and another featuring the manager's girlfriend in Bolivia's salt marshes. Babel is a rare thing – a new hotel with a tangible soul. SL Doubles from about £100; babel-belleville.com

PHOTOGRAPHS: JEROME GALLAND; BENOIT LINERO

