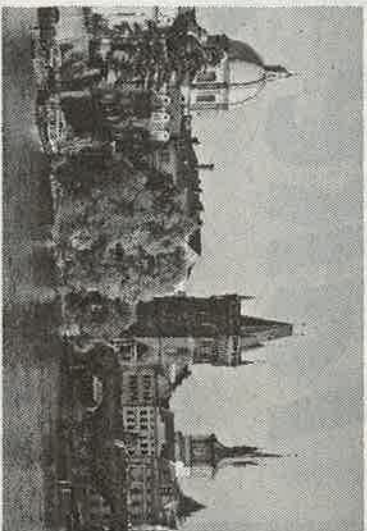


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AN INSPECTOR CALLS
His mission: To test hotel hospitality to the limit



HERE aren't many things more frustrating than driving around Leeds if you don't know where you're going. The one-way system sucks you in, then spits you out down a blind alley or on a bank by the canal. Even the nice Irish lady on my satnav falls silent, utterly bemused by the senseless brutality of the town planners. 'Turn around,' she says, finally. 'What she means is: 'Get the hell out of here.'



Strong stuff: The New Ellington bar has 17 different gins

Eventually, I phone The New Ellington and a bright young man talks me home down some pleasant Georgian streets. The hotel, almost opposite what used to be Hepper & Sons' Horse and Carriage Repository, is near the station in the financial district. It's new — in the sense that it was closed for 18 months while a different management team was put in place after it became part of the growing Bespoke Hotels group. There are 35 rooms. Jazz is the theme, based around Duke Ellington, who played at the Leeds music festival in 1958. Beds are big, with sumptuous Egyptian linen. There are over-the-top beaded lampshades, Nespresso machines and sliding shutters, rather than regular curtains. My room has a trouser press

(decided, but they do the job) and in the bathroom there's a framed music sheet of 'I Ain't Necessarily So,' by George Gershwin. Only one complaint: there's a strange clicking sound coming from the air-conditioning or the plumbing. The lobby is the bar — or the bar is the lobby. It's a riot of colour, with plenty of moody places to sit and ponder. It helps if you like gin. There are 17 different types, most of which I have never heard of. One is called 'Death's Door,' which comes from Wisconsin. The cocktail menu is impressive, featuring many lesser-known concoctions, including the Mary Pickford, named after the silent movie star. It comprises rum, marshmello liqueur

Deals of the week...

FROM FALMOUTH FAYRE £180pp
MAKE tracks for the Falmouth Oyster Festival, October 13 to 16. After you've watched celebrity chefs shuck, and tried every imaginable delicacy, retreat to The Luggier, idyllically situated on the water's edge in Portloe. Two nights cost from £180pp, 01872 501322, luggierhotel.com.

MAGICAL MALDIVES £175pp
AVOID the chill of autumn at the luxurious Huvaafen Fushi, Maldives. Seasons is offering seven nights for the price of six with complimentary

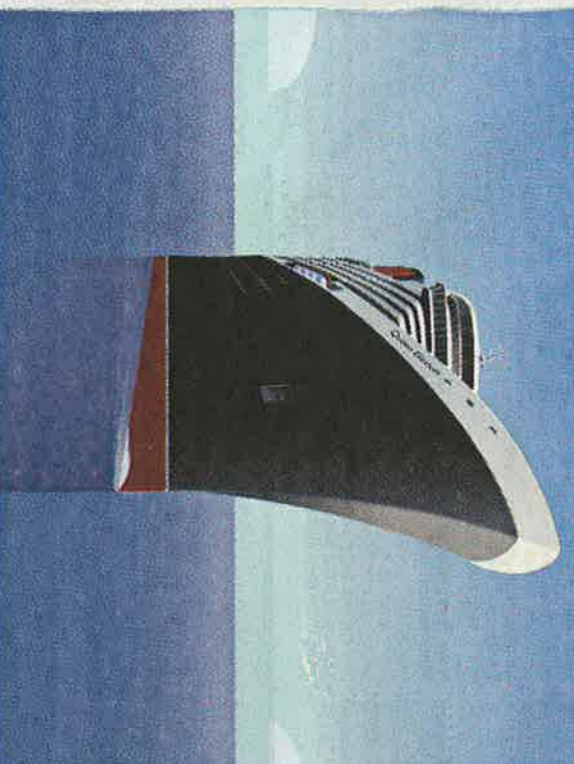


upgrade to half-board, saving £2,450 per couple. Price is based on two sharing a Lagoon bungalow with plunge pool. Includes flights and private transfers. Costs from £2,995 pp. Book by September 16. Valid for travel October 1 to December 23, 01244 202 082, seasons.co.uk.

WE HAVE posh burgers with upmarket chips and a fruity bottle of cabernet sauvignon. Basement restaurants can work at night, but they're almost always grim the next day for breakfast. This is no exception. In fact, the decor looks downright tacky in the cold light of day. A bit of kitsch here, some faux luxury there. Worst of all is Radio 2 blaring so loudly that Mr Boston can't hear me calling him when he passes. Jauntily Chris Evans is getting thoroughly over-excited — and so am I.

'Could you please turn down the radio?'
'You've got it,' he says. 'Especially because you're the only one here.'
I wonder why. In fact, I wonder if the sinky bar should be downstairs and the restaurant moved up a level. Perhaps that would make the jazzed-up New Ellington hit all the right notes.
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