



USA

EL REY COURT, SANTA FE

The historic roadside motel is a particularly definitive piece of Americana, a challenging romantic notion to mess with. Take the modern makeover too far, and you lose the impromptu, drive-up magic of a time when maps – and arguments in the car – unfolded like cosy blankets for weary navigators. Not enough, and there's the risk of it bordering on seedy. Motels are having a massive moment right now, and El Rey is the gold standard for how to do them right. Here, Santa Fe lands an 86-room update to the Thirties El Rey Inn on Route 66 that's true to its one-of-a-kind kiva fireplace and pine-scented sense of place. Like the sun-dried mud and straw architecture under the whitewashed walls, Santa Fe-style earthiness underlines everything here. For their redesign, Jay and Alison Carroll spent a year collecting pieces reflecting the elemental, tactile aesthetic of a prehistoric desert landscape that inspired modernists such as Georgia O'Keeffe and Alexander Girard. The New Mexico palette plays out in organic and geometric forms: ceramic lamps by Wannamaker Pottery in Arroyo Seco; hand-woven tapestry headboards by Centinela Traditional Arts in Chimayo. It says a lot that the revamped El Rey also attracts locals – and at night, in a town where most food and drink is scarce after 8pm. This motor lodge is a thoughtful reimagining of classic American cool, in a South-western city, that should never only be seen as a drive-through. **FLASH POINT** The new La Reina mezcal and tequila bar is the place to gather around the fire every night of the week. +1 505 982 1931; elreycourt.com. Doubles from about £85

UK

THE FIFE ARMS, SCOTLAND

Plenty of pubs in Scotland have names like the Flying Stag. The one in the new Fife Arms hotel in the Highland village of Braemar, however, actually has a taxidermied stag, with added swan's wings, poised not so much in mid-leap as in mid-launch over the bar, like an antlered space shuttle. The sense of energy here is irresistible. Same goes for the place as a whole, down to the shocking-pink cocktail spot, Elsa's, named after Italian Elsa Schiaparelli (turns out the designer adored the Highlands). The 46-room Fife Arms takes a familiar tartan-clad template and – with love and respect and even a kind of delicacy – blows it to smithereens. Braemar hasn't seen the like since Victoria and Albert built the castle at nearby Balmoral. Its owners, Swiss art dealers Manuela and Iwan Wirth, previously hit the bull's-eye with their gallery-restaurant-hotel in Bruton, Somerset, which has mobilised hundreds of thousands of art lovers since 2009 and transformed the community. The Fife Arms is different, in that it's primarily a hotel, not an exhibition space – though, bedecked as it is in works by Picasso, Freud, Richter and so forth, you could be forgiven for thinking of it as one. Even the rooms, from designer Russell Sage, which range in size and budget and bear grand names such as the Duke of Fife Suite, are a mastery of textile and layering. His sense of humour, more blatantly on display at London's Zetter Townhouse, shines through – and its impact could well be as dramatic. **FLASH POINT** Ask for a room on the river side and fall asleep to the murmur of the fast-flowing Clunie Water. +44 1339 720200; thefifearms.com. Doubles from £250

