



MYSTERY GUEST AVIATOR, FARNBOROUGH

IN THESE days of eco-friendliness, carbon consciousness and widespread green-washing, it makes a refreshing change to find a place devoted to perhaps the biggest eco-target of them all: aircraft.

The Aviator — the name is a bit of a giveaway — is unabashedly in love with all things that fly. To start with, the building is shaped like a giant propeller. Overlooking Farnborough's airfield, it stretches for more than 100m along Farnborough Road, looking silvery, sleek and propeller-like. Next door is a museum with disused military aircraft standing outside.

I was met by two burly doormen wearing grey outfits who showed me through automatic doors to a staircase. This led through a circular central atrium with white-hoop balconies tapering upwards, candles on coffee tables, purple velvet seats in alcoves, great bunches of dried red roses in giant vases, and the Skybar, which had views of Farnborough's runway.

Next to reception was a small lounge with more plush chairs, flowers and a stack of books that included *An Illustrated Dictionary of Aviation*, *Luxury Airline Design* and *McQueen's Machines: The Cars and Bikes of the Hollywood Legend*. On the wall were several arty, close-up photographs of what looked like washers (as in washers that might be used with nuts and bolts in an engine).

The atmosphere was dark and somewhat gloomy. Candles flickered. An airline pilot, three gold stripes on one sleeve, strode towards the chrome lifts.

My room was slick in a bachelor-pad kind of way, with a cream leather chaise longue, a small desk, a slate-grey bathroom with a shower (difficult to work), flat-screen TV,



Aviator's exterior is shaped like a propeller; inside it resembles an exclusive airport lounge

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spotlights and two black and white pictures of propellers placed above the bed. Through slats, I could see Farnborough Road and a dull row of houses, but not the airfield.

I met a friend in the Skybar and ordered a Death in the Afternoon cocktail, even though it was evening. This had absinthe in it — and a strong kick. Purple chiffon curtains blocked off neighbouring squadrons of squeaky black-leather armchairs.

A group near by was cheerfully putting away icy emerald drinks. We wondered whether they were about to take off in private jets. Farnborough is big on private jets... and the Aviator has the feel of an extremely exclusive airport lounge.

Dinner in the brasserie was slightly disappointing, and service could have been quicker. Smoked salmon and oyster starters were followed by cod

and steak main courses. The food was OK, but nothing special.

Aviator is owned by TAG Aviation and created by Ken McCulloch, the man behind Malmaison hotels. A place for plane-spotters and pilots — but perhaps not tree-huggers.

Bottom line Mystery Guest paid £185 for a double

Sampling the fare £45pp for three courses with wine

Best thing Hula hoop atrium

Worst thing Restaurant

Need to know Aviator (01252 555890, www.aviatorfarnborough.co.uk), Farnborough Road, Hampshire GU14 6EL

Room 7 out of 10

Food 6.5 out of 10

Service 6 out of 10

Value 5 out of 10

Score 6.13