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A members-only haven at West Hollywood's Petit Ermitage Hotel

The rooftop club and Butterfly Bar's quiet, European setting is a welcome break from L.A.'s crowded night life, so long as you're on the guest list...



The rooftop at Petit Ermitage has long been a favorite hangout for those in the know, and now the hotel has stepped up to make it like a mini-Soho House.

By Charlie Amter, Special to the Los Angeles Times

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For some Angelenos over 30, finding a place to go out on a weekend without dealing with loud, crowded clubs and tacky bars has become nothing less than night life's holy grail. Increasingly, many are even willing to pay annual dues for the privilege of a semi-private experience via members clubs such as Soho House. But lately, Soho House has become too busy and loud for a certain swath of drinkers, leaving precious few options for Westside socialites.

Enter the bohemian private rooftop club and Butterfly Bar at West Hollywood's Petit Ermitage Hotel. Call it the anti-Soho House. Fashioned after private European salons, the nearly 6,000-square-foot deck of the small boutique hotel tucked on a side street off San Vicente Boulevard has been reimagined as a members club since late 2009, slowly gaining a reputation locally as a smart, quiet surrogate for analogous scenes at Chateau Marmont and Soho House. Perfect for warm summer nights.

Last month, as thousands jammed Sunset Boulevard bars for the annual Sunset Strip Music Festival, all was quiet on the roof of the hotel just blocks away from the concert, with a Serge Gainsbourg song softly playing in the background as around two dozen members sipped wine and cocktails on faux fox rugs in front of a gas fireplace.

"This is specifically an anti-scene," said Petit Ermitage co-owner Stefan Ashkenazy from the deck.

"Any place that is 'the place' will soon not be anyplace," the Los Angeles native added. Still, the rooftop club, like Soho House, does try to build rapport with guests around curated events. Every Sunday is movie night, for example, and chefs cook special dinners for members every Thursday poolside.

Ashkenazy has gone to great lengths not to advertise or publicize the Butterfly Bar and poolside deck. Last year, the elevator went under key card lockdown so that only hotel guests and members are able to enjoy the views. The only way to get in is to book a room at the hotel, be a member or be a friend of a member. "If you're with good company, there's surprisingly few places in Los Angeles to actually enjoy that company in a quiet place," he explained.

Members such as photographer Philippe Bialobos can't imagine hanging out anywhere else in L.A. "There's some kind of status quo here where it doesn't really matter who you are or what you do ... it's more how you exchange with others that matters," he said. "It reminds me of the South of France." "There's no judgments here," said Rachel Deadman, a Swiss national who says she was offered a membership at Soho House yet chose Petite Ermitage instead. "It's not like 'what can you do for me' here. Everyone's just relaxed."

Design elements on the roof come from all over the world—wooden doors are from Egypt, art is from France (Erté greets those just off the elevator) and tiles are from Holland. Vogue Italia has shot editorials on the roof. The rest of the club follows suit: The garden brims with night-blooming jasmine, a salt water pool, custom cabanas with cloth canopies for privacy.

"Traditionally, hotels in European cities were the center of life," Ashkenazy said. The hotelier, whose father built many of West Hollywood's best-known properties (the Bel Age, L'Ermitage Beverly Hills, etc.) in the 1990s, has gone to great lengths to ensure members and hotel guests can enjoy a memorable, European-style evenings well into the night (though the deck closes earlier on some weeknights). "We cater to a creative, relatively youthful, well-traveled set," he said. "This is a great place to have chance encounters with interesting strangers."