



Clockwise from left: At Dubai's new 25hours Hotel One Central; turquoise rawasheen, or wooden balconies, in Jeddah's historic AlBalad district; behind the scenes with photographer Ingrid Rasmussen at our cover shoot at the Four Seasons Resort Dubai at Jumeirah Beach



There was a fleeting moment, as I settled in on my balcony at the Four Seasons Resort at Jumeirah Beach on a breezy December afternoon, that I lost track of where I was. It's an ephemeral sensation I've experienced on a handful of occasions in the past, during the more furiously paced travels that were a hallmark of my pre-2020 lifestyle: after running a frenzied gauntlet of flights, trains and hotels, everything would begin to blur together until, for just a brief second, I'd wonder: "Where am I, again?"

But this time, it was bliss, not stress, that left me disoriented in the most delightful way: birds sang throatily around me, waves sparkled in the distance and the sun anointed the resort's creamy expanse and lush gardens with a lustrous sheen. Lulled into a dreamlike trance, I forgot I was staycationing in Dubai, with the Burj Khalifa glinting in the sun somewhere behind me.

This feeling of transcendence, this spark of wonder, is what makes a place Gold List-worthy. I've felt it at Grootbos in South Africa, inhaling the salubrious fynbos-scented air as I watched the waves pummel the cliffs below me; at Conrad Makkah, where I'd wake up each morning and throw open my curtains to marvel at the Grand Mosque just metres away; and at New York's Carlyle, where walking the storied halls makes me feel like I'm a part of its legacy alongside Jackie Onassis, Frank Sinatra, Andy Warhol and Princess Diana.

Whether it's a standout location, charmed atmosphere, corridors steeped in lore or sublime service, a Gold List destination is simply a classic.

"What's your favourite place?" is a question *Condé Nast Traveller* editors get asked often, but it's one most of us struggle to answer. Every single *CNT* editor has a personal archive of beloved hotels and locales around the world that keep beckoning us to return. Working together across time zones with our offices from New York to Beijing to compile this year's Gold List was no easy feat – read on to discover the singular hideaways and timeless destinations we managed to agree on.

One place that's particularly close to my heart is Jeddah, where I grew up; my parents still have in their living room in Massachusetts a petite porcelain model of a whitewashed villa with mahogany rawasheen balconies from the historic AlBalad district. Those very rawasheen come to life on these pages as we take you to meet the people paving the way for the neighbourhood's revitalisation. The vibrant city of Amman, the idyllic villages of Goa and the mountains of Oman – this issue is brimming with so many of my favourite places. Perhaps you'll find your own classics among them.

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PHOTOGRAPHS: INGRID RASMUSSEN (EDITOR'S PHOTO); NICOLA CHILTON (JEDDAH)

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