

Miriam Donohoe opts for the five-star comforts of a sumptuous hotel in the city

'I still miss the bath with the telly overhead'

I AM A country-house-hotel type of girl myself. My ideal weekend away involves a roaring log fire, antique-filled rooms, a four-poster bed and rambling walks. Maybe my age is beginning to tell, but nothing loud or in-your-face for me these days, thank you very much. So when I was invited to spend a weekend at the G Hotel in Galway I accepted with a mixture of trepidation and curiosity.

All I knew about the five-star G, which has been the talk of Ireland since it opened, in 2006, is that it was designed by the milliner to the stars, Philip Treacy, is the ultimate in cool and has been named one of the top three hotels in the world for ambience and design by *Condé Nast Traveller* magazine.

But this was enough to suggest that the G might be a far cry from my preferred weekend break. More niggling doubts arose when a friend advised me to bring my sunglasses. "What? Sunglasses? Surely you mean my coat and umbrella?" I asked, having checked the weather forecast in advance. "Oh, you will see what I mean when you get there," she smirked.

We arrived at the G on a busy Friday evening. Confusion about parking added to the end-of-week crankiness that set in on the long drive from Dublin. The G loomed on the right on the old Dublin road into Galway. It wasn't made clear that we could have driven to the entrance and have the car parked for us; we eventually found the underground car park behind the hotel, which is part of the Wellpark retail area. (It is located beside the award-winning Eye cinema complex.)



Pretty in pink: inside the Philip Treacy-designed G Hotel

But a saving grace was that the front of the hotel overlooks Lough Atalia and spectacular Galway Bay.

A tank of Connemara-bred seahorses greeted us in the black marble lobby, which was dark and dimly lit. Staff were warm and friendly, and we were checked in in no time.

We were then treated to the flamboyance for which the G is renowned. Three themed lounges on the ground floor all led into each other,

linked by a raspberry-coloured carpet. The Grand Salon was the most subtle, with white and taupe colours, and masses of huge glass baubles hanging from the ceiling. Hmm . . . This isn't so loud . . . I could cope with this, I thought.

This lounge led to the Pink Salon, and then it clicked why the sunglasses would come in handy. It shouted disco chic, with purple sofas, psychedelic pink chairs and a swirling white-and-black carpet.

The third adjoining salon was the Blue Lounge – a bit more sombre and male – leading into the wine bar, where we had some lovely pre-dinner cocktails later on in the evening.

Feeling a little dizzy after our introduction to the ultimate in cool and chic, I looked forward to seeing our room.

We weren't disappointed. Our junior suite was sensational, and a complete contrast from the funky ground floor. A haven. Oh, yes, this was more my type of place.

The room was decorated in soothing cream and coffee. The gigantic bed had crisp linens. And the bathroom, with its free-standing tub in the centre, built-in flat-screen TV in the wall, and showers built for two.

Treacy's special touches were evident everywhere in the hotel, from the bespoke concierge wall in the lobby to the artwork in every room. Wallpaper and lighting and art are all inspired by the landscapes and heritage of Co Galway, yet it managed to be contemporary.

People-watching is fun in the G, and we decided to brave the Pink Room for a drink before joining friends in the wine bar before dinner. Warning: dress up when you are having a drink in the G, as it seemed that all of Ireland's bright and beautiful young things were collected here.

The approach to design in the restaurant was carried through with banquettes in deep-purple velvet.

It offered a contemporary menu under the stewardship of award-winning chef Stefan Matz. We couldn't fault the meal.

The real highlight of the

weekend was the spa, set in a zen garden with several treatment rooms, beauty suites and a therapeutic black-stone tranquillity pool. One massage and facial later and I was transformed.

The G is clearly a popular destination for young couples. At the height of the boom, it is quite likely that the corridors and lounges were full of people who were doing all right. As recession bites, the challenge for the hotel is to present itself as somewhere that you can still afford to go to for a bit of indulgence and spoiling without breaking the bank.

So what does the G Hotel experience amount to? It's not your average city hotel, for sure, and the decor takes a bit of getting used to. It's vibrant and energetic – the service is top notch, and there can be no complaint with the food.

By Sunday I was won over by the G Hotel chic and no longer hankered after country-house-style drawing rooms. The colours that had caused such a shock to the system on arrival on the Friday evening had mellowed. Sitting in the Grand Salon over a coffee and a newspaper before departure, I thought to myself, I could get used to this. I even felt like one of the cool people. And I still miss the bath with the telly overhead.

■ G Hotel, Wellpark, Galway, 091-865200, www.theghotel.ie. The G has a three-night deal costing €340 per couple, including breakfast, until June 30th. It also offers packages for the Volvo Ocean Race. Between May 22nd and June 6th, two nights' B&B, a three-course dinner in the Matz and a visit to the spa costs €445