

Two giant new luxury hotels are aiming to dominate the Olympic city. Are they up to it? Stephen Bleach reports

There's an almighty hotel scrap brewing in London, with 13 five-star places due to open between now and the Olympics next July. The two biggest hitters, though, have entered the ring early. W London, the first UK branch of the trendier-than-thou American chain, went live in Leicester Square last month; and St Pancras Renaissance, a rebirth of Giles Gilbert Scott's gothic landmark, the Midland Grand, started sneaking in a few favoured guests last Monday, ahead of the official launch on May 5. It's a classic heavyweight battle: the young upstart versus a veteran on the comeback trail. Last week, I stayed at both — so how do they stack up?

ROUND 1: LOCATION

W: it has one foot in the tackiness of Leicester Square (litter, drunken tourists), but the other in the engaging vigour of Chinatown, with all Soho's theatres, restaurants and clubs a step beyond. There's so much fun to be had round here, it's a shame to sleep.

St Pancras: if you're taking the Eurostar, couldn't be better (it overlooks the platform). Otherwise... well, the gentrification of the King's Cross area is still a

TAKING OVER LONDON?



Staff outside St Pancras Renaissance; the bar and a bedroom in W London