

CENTURION

— BLACKBOOK THE GETAWAY —

PERSONAL SPACE

...

The world of travel is embracing home sharing as never before – and the options for desirable, exotic and rare accommodations are expanding exponentially. By **John McNamara**



The remarkable Wing House in Malibu, made of cement, steel, glass and full-sized Boeing jet wings, available to rent from Ind Flower.



Clockwise from above, left: the infinity pool at an ocean-side villa in Phuket, available through Airbnb; a sophisticated Parisian apartment on Avenue Emile Deschanel; and an airy townhouse on Barrow Street, New York, both from One Fine Stay

PHOTOS FROM TOP: © DAVID HEITZ, © AIRBNB; © SONE FINE STAY/2

For all the exemplary service of hotels, boutique and grand alike, there can still be an air of the impersonal. Sure, these properties offer an impeccable range of unsurpassed accoutrements, but they are not what you'd call private dwellings. Now, however, a movement towards more personal accommodation – true homes from home – is advancing across the globe, and thanks to a selection of forward-thinking companies, it's not just for backpackers or penny pinchers.

The concept of home sharing – where people with free rooms, or increasingly entire residences, offer them up for rent – is reshaping the face of luxe accommodation. One pioneer was **Airbnb** (airbnb.com), formed in 2008 in San Francisco when a couple of cash-strapped friends hosted three travellers desperate for a place to stay. The idea remains as simple today, but the statistics are staggering: more than a million rooms around the world are available to rent in 192 countries, including 23,000 in London alone, where such is the demand for the company's

services that UK law has been rewritten to make this type of property sharing easier. Yet for all the quantity, it is the burgeoning quality that appeals: a famed 510sq m seven-bedroom Frank Lloyd Wright-designed mansion in Paradise, Arizona; the restored 12th-century Dairies Castle in Scotland; beautifully sited villas in Phuket, Bodrum, Marrakech and beyond – all of which are now enticing elite sceptics to not only give them a try but also, perhaps, to list one of their own residences.

This is where another firm, launched in 2010, comes in. London-based **One Fine Stay** (onefinestay.com) features elegant townhouses, chic appartements and quirky *piets-à-terre* lovingly curated by their owners in hot spots like Los Angeles, New York and Paris. The firm, which emphasises the exclusive nature of its homes under the "unhotel" banner, offers a more hands-on service, with personalised, face-to-face greetings on arrival and smartphones with advice on the local area provided.

A third way comes courtesy of **3rd Home** (3rdhome.com). Also founded in

2010, its club-like structure is designed to allow members, who all have a property of their own to rent out, to "deposit" weeks available to stay at their place into an account to accumulate "keys" used to reserve accommodation in any of the remarkable homes available – among them architectural oddities such as the Malibu Wing House, made in part from a Boeing 747, or a revamped six-bedroom Umbrian farmhouse. These residences come with the added peace of mind of knowing that both the homeowner and the guest have opened up their abodes, ensuring mutual respect.

As with any new platform, there are drawbacks to the system: when your dream holiday house is someone's home for most of the year, its availability is going to be limited. But as more people take to the idea, the market is sure to expand – witness niche company **Behom** (behom.com), which has set up an invitation-only property-sharing marketplace intended purely for designers and visual artists. It's just the latest purveyor to diversify a concept only in its chrysalis phases. ●