

Bed wars have broken out as hotels battle to give guests the perfect night's sleep, says **Fiona Duncan**

Under cover action

In 1999, a ferocious international conflict broke out that has been raging ever since. You may not be aware of it, but you have almost certainly benefited from it: the battle between hotels that came to be known as the Bed Wars.

Do you remember the days when your hotel bed was just that – a bed, low and skimpy in a modest establishment, passably comfortable in an upscale one, with unembellished mattress, sheets, blankets and two pillows each if you were lucky? Feather and down – forget it; polyester and foam – much more likely. No one complained. It was just accepted that any hotel bed was unlikely to be as comfortable as your own.

In the UK, only the Savoy stood out as the legendary provider of the finest hotel bed: handmade since 1905. Then, in 1999, along came Westin Hotels and Resorts with its specially designed, all-white Heavenly Bed. A brilliant marketing coup, it brought Westin a higher

profile, an increase in bookings, and a deluge of requests to buy the bed from well-rested guests. Rival hotel groups were forced to respond.

And so the Bed Wars began, with skirmishes counted in tog values, box springs, shock absorbers, pillow menus, feather toppers, thread counts and baffle-box stitching. A good night's sleep became a "super-premium sleep experience", and thousands of new beds were rolled out to hotels across the globe.

These days, it seems, you can't hold your head up as a respectable hotel group unless you can offer a bed that sounds more complicated than the inner workings of a nuclear reactor. Along with Hilton's Serenity bed and Marriott's new Revive bedding, there's Sofitel's Mybed and Four Seasons's highly regarded Sealy Posturelux 4000 bed, with added pillow-top unique to the company.

With the playing ground level, hotel chains are left



Pillow fight The introduction of an all-white Heavenly Bed by Westin Hotels set off night-time skirmishes between hotel groups

with a problem – how to convince people that they are the quickest at rendering guests unconscious? It's easier for individual hotels to stand out. For example, the Principe di Savoia (0039 02 62301; www.hotelprincipedi-savoia.com; doubles from £236), in Milan, has recently introduced wonderfully soft cashmere sheets with a thermo-regulative effect that makes them ideal in summer or winter, while the Cotswold House Hotel (01386 840330; www.cotswoldhouse.com; room

16 costs £350 per night, including breakfast) in Chipping Camden, has equipped one of its rooms (No 16) with a bed costing £14,000. The Ammique King dispenses with a mattress, but instead consists of 10,000 plastic-capped vertical rods, covered by padded sheets, that contour to your body as you shift even the slightest degree.

Chain hotels can't beat that, but they'll come up with something. A free bottle of Mogadon in each room perhaps?

» ESSENTIALS

You can enjoy some of the aforementioned beds in the comfort of your own home: The Savoy No 2 bed from Savoie Beds costs from £4,794 and is available to order at www.savoirbeds.co.uk. The Heavenly Bed from Westin Hotels and Resorts can be shipped from the US and costs £3,310 for a king-size bed and bedding (visit www.europe.westin-hotelsathome.com and click on Westin Store). The

Sweet Sleeper from Sheraton can be shipped from the US and costs £1,887 for a king-size bed and bedding (www.sheraton-hotelsathome.com). The king-size Sealy Posturelux with pillow top from Four Seasons costs £1,940. To buy contact any Four Seasons hotel (www.fourseasons.com). The Mybed from Sofitel costs from £960 for a king-size bed (visit www.sofitel.com and click on SoBoutique).