



HOLIDAY romances

A novel breed of hotel is ruffling the waters in the Eternal City. Here, five avant-garde stays to win the hearts of design lovers.

Words CARLI PHILIPS



A new crop of anti-establishment hotels in Rome is giving the grandes dames a run for their money, breaking new ground with smaller, independent offerings. Enthusiastic entrepreneurs are challenging the status quo, breathing new life into the historic mansions, palazzos, palaces and villas of the Eternal City. It's adaptive re-use at its best, with risky looks trumping the traditional paradigm. Smaller operations and out-of-the-box designs championed on boutique websites such as Mr and Mrs Smith or – as all the best things are – circulated by word of mouth.

G-ROUGH

The exasperated “*Questa casa non è un albergo!*” (this house is not a hotel) is a reprimand echoed by Italian mothers since the dawn of time. Determined to prove this wrong, seventh-generation Roman Gabriele Salini transformed his 17th-century apartment building, tucked away in the city's sweet Piazza Pasquino, into 10 G-Rough suites.

The first step was a “demolition party” complete with an all-night DJ and open bar on each floor. Philosophically, Gabriele says the event was also “about a state of mind that likes to demolish any preconceived and conventional ideas”. Indeed, G-Rough doesn't ascribe to the model of a traditional hotel and there's no apology for the rickety elevator, stripped patina and one-woman breakfast show, proudly served in the *salotto*. “I was, and still am, confident that Rome is ready for new things,” he says.

Covered in mirrored Seletti tiles, the bar doubles as reception where Stefano will show you to your room. Each one is named in honour of an influential Italian modernist designer with keyrings featuring portrait illustrations by artist Marco Raparelli. Furniture has been carefully sourced and original pieces range from green wardrobes by Ico Parisi to beds by Guglielmo Ulrich and, in the Tobia (Scarpa) Suite, lights by Stilnovo. New works feature too: photos by Massimo Vitali and wallpaper by emerging designer Pietro Ruffo. Exposed beams are offset by custom sofas in blackberry and moss velvet, interspersed with Gabriele's own possessions.

“G-Rough is, in terms of architecture and design, the perfect compromise between old and new, because I am nostalgic enough to admire our glorious past but also ambitious to be able to ... overcome it,” says Gabriele who wants guests to feel they are “visiting a friend's house [yet] with friendly staff that offers a five-star hotel service”. mrandmrsmith.com/luxury-hotels/g-rough

In the neighbourhood

ROSCIOLI
Deli-rich cheeses and meats.

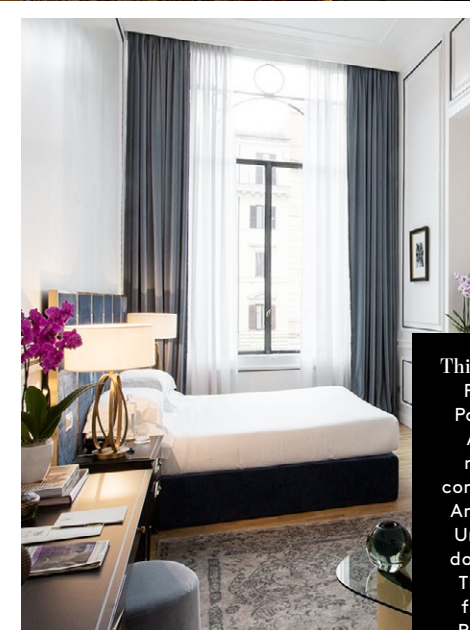
DELFINA DELETTREZ
Modern jewellery, ancient techniques.

BAFETTO
Best pizza in town.

SOCIETY LIMONTA
Heaven for linen lovers.

This page, clockwise from top left Every G-Rough suite is different and named after a significant Italian designer. Distressed walls are a backdrop to a mix of vintage mid-century furniture. All bathrooms feature mirrored Seletti tiles. The sofas are custom made in an assortment of colours and designs. Opposite page The exterior of Palazzo Dama with one of the few private pools in Rome.





This page, clockwise from top left Palazzo Dama's restaurant Pacifico features a Peruvian-Asian menu. The old noble residence has been given a contemporary look by architect Antonio Girardi. The Elizabeth Unique Hotel's Junior Suite is done out in its signature blue. The Dama is a stone's throw from the famous Piazza del Popolo and is accessed via a discreet but glamorous door.



PALAZZO DAMA

If only Anna Maria Malaspina could see herself now. The aristocratic Marquise's posh 18th-century look has been re-imagined in a witty visual identity by design firm Karla Otto for the 29-room hotel, her regal profile accessorised with sunglasses and tattoos. It's the Dama personified: whimsical, noble, playful, refined and exuberant. Totally *la dolce vita*.

It's a new era for the Malaspina's 19th-century family palazzo near the Tiber River refurbished by young architect Antonio Girardi who juxtaposed original features such as the grand staircase and rich panelling with maximalist rock 'n' roll spirit. There's original mosaic flooring, friezes and neon-pink signage alongside oil paintings, chandeliers and palm trees. It's where the ghosts of diplomats and aristocrats past now mingle with rock stars, Hollywood actors and luxury brands such as Valentino and Bulgari who have shot campaigns there.

Stylish young Italians hang out at the fabulously decadent red velvet-lined Raspoutine basement bar and in the summer, reprieve comes by way of a dip in one of the few privately owned outdoor pools in Rome (surrounded by olive and lemon trees). The in-house Peruvian-Asian restaurant, Pacifico, may be a novelty for locals but it's a surprising choice for guests who might expect a classic Italian meal. For that, best venture out. mrandmrsmith.com/luxury-hotels/palazzo-dama

In the neighbourhood

SARTORIA RIPENSE
Bespoke tailoring Italian style.

DAL BOLOGNESE
Famous classic Italian fare.

BORSALINO
Handcrafted hatmakers since the 1800s.

NEVE DI LATTE
Natural, artisanal gelato.

ELIZABETH UNIQUE HOTEL

First-time hoteliers the Curatella family christened their Roman bolthole Elizabeth, a tribute to family matriarch Mrs Elisabetta. Set within the walls of the 17th-century palazzo Pulieri Ginetti, it accommodates 33 rooms and is shared with private residents and stores. Occupying prime position in the city centre between via del Corso and via della Freggia, local designers Studio Marincola have reinterpreted the building's neo-classical elements for a contemporary environment, with slimline canopy beds, arched panelling and wallpaper etchings of 19th-century landscapes.

Each room is different, a clash of past and present, minimalism and maximalist, soft hues and vibrant palettes, contemporary installations and precious tapestries. The hotel's chief inspiring officer Giuseppe Falconieri, insists the time of big-time hospitality operators is over. "We undertake to offer an alternative to the existing globalised and standardised system and to value what is rarest, more authentic, more precious and moving ... we shun industrial production, which would spoil the balance between innovation and authenticity." ebrome.com

In the neighbourhood

CLOTILDE
Roman cuisine in sophisticated surrounds.

BATTISTONI
One of the oldest tailors in Rome.

PASTIFICIO GUERRA
Get in line for 4-Euro pasta to go.

LE JARDIN DE RUSSIE
Visit the hotel's garden diner.

ROOMS OF ROME

The Rooms of Rome at the experimental Palazzo Rhinoceros is the cultural imagining of Alda Fendi (she of the famous fashion family) who is revered for her philanthropy and city-wide support of the arts. Housing 24 apartments and a series of exhibition spaces for installation and mixed-media works, the ambitious project was a collaborative one, with the Fondazione Alda Fendi - Esperimenti engaging revered French architect Jean Nouvel for the cutting-edge fit-out.

Each room is unique, sleek steel boxes contrasting the exposed, ageing walls "so that the strongest possible contrast is set up between these objects of modern living and what remains of the ancient world now accommodating them", says the architect. "It's also a meeting between two worlds, between the traces of the noblest and most sacred architectural monuments of antiquity and these model domestic buildings that remind us that they are still alive and vibrant." theroomsofrome.com

HOTEL VILÒN

Hotel Vilòn may be one of Rome's newest kids on the block, but the converted mansion has a storied past. Annexed to the Palazzo Borghese in the 16th century when it was rented out, the property was a one-time First School for Poor Girls and entrusted to French nuns until recently.

After a painstaking restoration process, the hotel debuted with interiors by Roman interior designer and scenographer Paolo Bonfini who applied art-deco accents, chesterfield chaises and cornflower-blue velvets alongside a peppering of mid-century furniture. In-room gallery walls are perfectly mismatched (but carefully curated), with striking works by modern artists alongside botanical paintings.

It's a charming oasis, accessible by a tiny street leading to the Tiber river and the best rooms have sneaky views into the private gardens of the palazzo. While Rome's Campo Marzio neighbourhood calls just outside, dining alfresco on the leafy balcony is perfect for some time out. hotelvilon.com

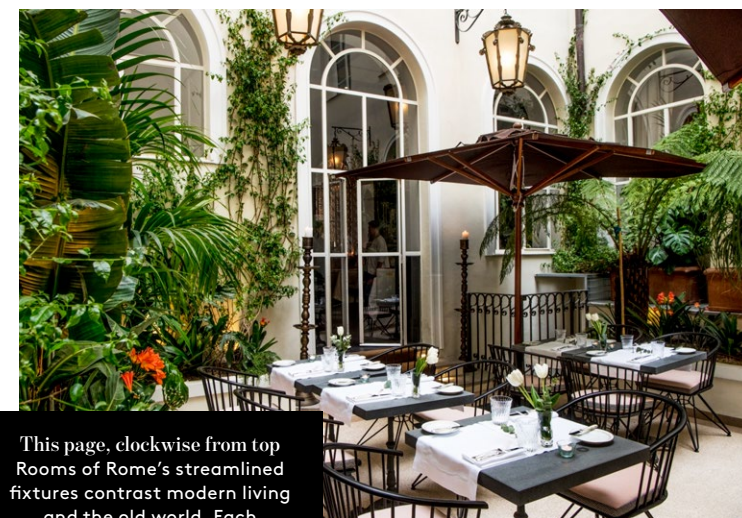
In the neighbourhood

'GUSTO
Quick bite industrial-style market emporium.

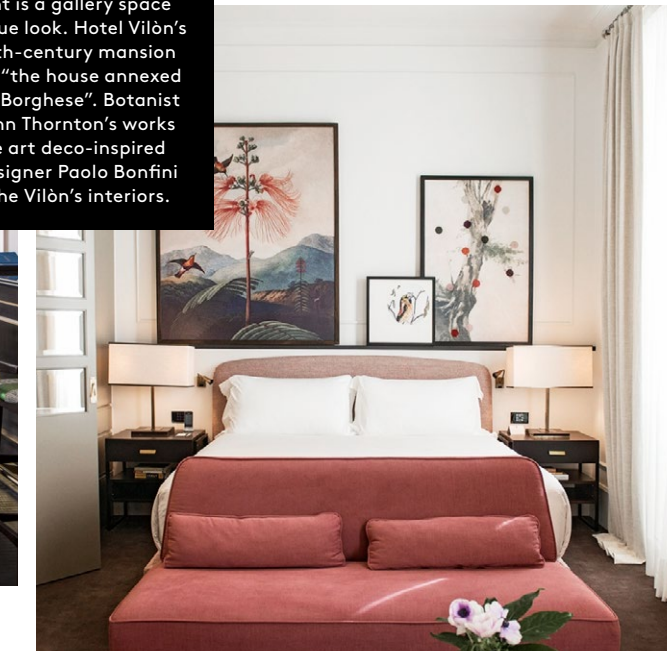
SALOTTO42
Trendy bar spilling into a piazza.

CIAMPINI
Stellar sandwiches.

CAMPOMARZIO70
Exclusive, family-owned apothecary.



This page, clockwise from top Rooms of Rome's streamlined fixtures contrast modern living and the old world. Each apartment is a gallery space with a unique look. Hotel Vilòn's revived 16th-century mansion was called "the house annexed to Palazzo Borghese". Botanist Robert John Thornton's works grace the art deco-inspired rooms. Designer Paolo Bonfini curated the Vilòn's interiors.



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