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A Balearic balancing act

Palma's hotel scene is enriched by the addition of the romantic and refined Can Bordoy

Swedish investor Mikael Hall is well versed in buying and selling property. Extensively renovating a property and then turning it into a business has been a lesser-trodden path. So too is creating a high-end hotel on the Balearic island of Mallorca, but that's just what he's done in the heart of the island's capital Palma.

Arguably more often associated with its noisy bars and pizza joints, the city is five or six years into a process of regeneration. Not far from the newly developed neighbourhoods full of hipster coffee shops and independent design stores is Hall's recently opened 24-suite luxury hotel, Can Bordoy Grand House & Garden, discretely tucked away on a quiet, narrow street in the charming Old Quarter.

Hall understands good design, which is why he recruited the husband-and-wife architects Jaime Oliver and Paloma Hernaiz of Palma-based Ohlab to renovate, restore and then decorate the building. The hotel had previously been a private family home, as well as more recently during the 1970s and 1980s, a school run by nuns. For Hernaiz and Oliver, who had previously worked for Rem Koolhaas' OMA practice in New York and China before setting up their own studio in 2009, this was their first complete hotel project.

Hall's purist vision is what first enticed Ohlab to get involved. It was clear that Hall as looking for something luxurious, but mostly he wanted a place that was authentic and respectful of the building's layered history. With the help of historians and archaeologists, Oliver and Hernaiz got to work and uncovered remnants of a 12th-century facade, plus a storey that

was probably built during the 16th or 17th centuries followed by 19th- and 20th-century additions. Their aim was to restore what they could of the typically Mallorcan house – four wings that make up a square, based around an entrance courtyard – without eradicating the centuries of life. The finished result, a three-storey building with a basement spa and 750 sqm garden, is delightful.

“There had been a lot of intervention and additions and some of it was really unfortunate, invaded by lots of construction,” describes Hernaiz. “Our goal was not to restore the house to a previous state that never was; we purposely didn't want to make it a fake old house. It was important for the decay and romanticism of the building that it was still crumbling a little.”

However, the building needed a lot of work. Floors and windows were replaced where they couldn't be restored, while modern additions such as the rooftop deck with a glass-bottomed plunge pool and the basement spa with an oculus flooding light down from the stairwell, were clever interventions. An air-conditioning system built into the mouldings with no visible grills also works cleverly.

“As we were planning to add our own layers too, such as a new staircase at the top of the building, instead of trying to replicate what was there, we created something totally different in oak and mirror to make sure you knew it was contemporary,” says Hernaiz. The same goes for the ground floor common areas. Rather than a traditional reception, there's a home-style lobby entrance that connects a long stone bar under a mirrored ceiling to the informal

Words

Becky
Sunshine

Images

Art Sanchez

Facing page
Clockwise from
top left: the
facade of the
old Mallorcan
mansion, hidden
down a side
street in Palma's
Old Quarter;
the theatrically
curtained bar; the
secluded entrance
courtyard, featuring
Husk
seating by Moroso



restaurant at the back. The architects have also wisely added glazing from the front courtyard straight through an elegant drawing room, into another dining room, next to a compact library and straight to the garden and pool area. All of it feels connected by trailing faux vines through the rooms – a lovely touch.

In fact, lovely touches are evident absolutely everywhere. “The mix of old and new is what interests us,” says Oliver of the rich paint colours, timber floors and lighting from Tom Dixon, Bocci, Flos and Artemide. “We wanted the rooms to feel cinematic, with velvet curtains, the bathrooms like a stage to your partner in the bed. The elliptical mirror in the hotel’s entrance, which also hides the new stair structure, is like marking your entry point

before the drama begins.” Furniture has been thoughtfully placed, from the drama of Gebrüder Thonet Vienna armchairs in the lobby, to pieces from Moroso, Baxter, Fredericia and Ligne Roset found around the building. Highlights designed by Ohlab for the project include oversized beds with walnut and velvet headboards and freestanding cocktail bars with integrated stereos, which all go towards making this place feel special.

Hernaiz sums up. “When we started to buy furniture two years ago we thought, what do you do in your own house? You pick up things from different places. So we wanted to have a mix of things that you might find in a Mallorcan house but also things from Europe, China, Scandinavia.” And it works perfectly.

Above
Moroso’s Banjooli chairs add a jolt of colour to the otherwise peacefully neutral pool area

Facing page
Left to right: the top-lit staircase leading to the spa; Bodystuhl chairs by Gebrüder Thonet Vienna in the lobby

“It was important for the decay and romanticism of the building that it was still crumbling a little”





Facing page
Velvet curtains divide the bedrooms from the bathing area. “We wanted the rooms to feel cinematic,” says Ohlab’s Jaime Oliver

Above
Custom-designed walnut and velvet headboards mix with contemporary furniture, including Norr11’s deeply quilted Mammoth armchairs