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Hotel face off: Rome

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By Andrew Sessa



Ori Kafri.

The D.O.M (left) is set in a 17th-century former convent designed by architect and owner Antonio Girardi, while the J.K. Place Roma (right) reflects the equally fine eye of owner

Two new chic boutiques offer stylish contrasts in the Eternal City.

J.K. PLACE ROMA



Teak and marble fill the bathrooms at J.K. Place Roma.

The lure: This beloved modern-classic boutique brand's third outing joins sister properties in Florence and Capri, where the hotels' fashionable followings and cool caché know no bounds. Now in the Eternal City, J.K.'s Florentine owner and mastermind Ori Kafri has done it again, opening a stylish, sophisticated and entirely unfussy new flagship.

The look: For the conversion of this 19th-century former architectural academy, Kafri once again turned to Florence-based hotel-design guru Michele Bönan, who here combined La Dolce Vita glam with the masculine, mid-century style of Tom Ford's "A Single Man," creating spaces that feel as luxe and plush as they do welcoming and residential.

The location: A quiet corner in the middle of the historic center, just removed from the storied, high-fashion shops of via Condotti.

The layout: J.K.'s 30 light-filled rooms and suites, no two of which are the same, are arranged around a central courtyard, perched above a living room-like lobby, book-lined library, rosewood bar and bistro-ish restaurant on the ground floor. An alfresco rooftop lounge will open with a subterranean spa and gym planned for 2015.

Breakfast, lunch, dinner? The area offers way too much good grub for guests to stay in for dinner, but the hotel's Italian bistro stands poised to be a power-lunching haute table, just steps from Parliament and the city's other halls of power. (No less than Matteo Renzi, the mayor of Florence who was named Italy's new Prime Minister in February, stayed at the hotel while making his play for the head office.)

The luxe factor: With teak-and-marble bathrooms and velvet, rosewood and bronze everywhere you look, there's no end to the luxury here. (Even the elevator is outfitted with a low-slung, velvet-upholstered banquette, in case you get tired while heading to your room.) Anything that Bönan didn't design from scratch, he sourced himself, including scads of original art and one-of-a-kind antiques from galleries around the world.

The letdown: The aperitivo cocktail scene. We couldn't think of a better spot to spend our time before heading to dinner, but the drinks and snacks are a bit too meager and not quite as top-of-game as they should be, given the price.

The lowdown: Between its style and its substance — Kafri has perfectly trained his attractive staff in his your-wish-is-my-command service philosophy — the J.K. has quickly become a choice hangout for the well-mannered and the moneyed, the chic and the cultured. From \$750; jkroma.com

D.O.M Hotel



The rooftop terrace is where D.O.M guests take breakfast, light lunches or cocktails.

The lure: Not only is the D.O.M the first luxury stay to open on via Giulia — for centuries Rome's poshest of posh addresses — it's also one of few hotels here to embrace that sexy, boudoir-noir aesthetic pioneered by the Hotel Costes in Paris. (It doesn't hurt that its owner and designer, architect Antonio Girardi, seems to be best friends with all the city's most beautiful people.)

The look: Art Deco upstairs, with noir-ish Hollywood flourishes in its silvery beveled Venetian mirrors, champagne-colored walls and silk rugs and matte-black wooden floors, doors and streamlined paneling. The ground-floor restaurant and bar are all platinum, black and white, with more Old World details like crystal chandeliers and richly carved wood moldings.

The location: A block off the Tiber River on the western side of the historic center, right in the middle of via Giulia's grand, centuries-old (and still privately owned) aristocratic palazzos, many of which have antiques dealers, fine boutiques and scene-y restaurants filling their street-level spaces — and all less than a 10-minute walk to Piazza Navona and Campo d'Fiori.

The layout: In some ways, the place still feels like the 17th-century former convent it occupies, with wide, cross-vaulted, stone-lined corridors connecting its 24 rooms and suites, and engraved marble plaques embedded in hallway walls. The accommodations' large windows make them seem anything but cell-like, however, and the sexy design scheme — not to mention the rooftop terrace for breakfast, light lunch and cocktails — goes a long way to banishing all thoughts of chaste living.

Breakfast, lunch, dinner? Come for drinks, stay for supper. The black-and-platinum speakeasy-style bar boasts a mixologist, Michele Garofalo, who honed his skills at the Bulgari Hotel London, and the casual, lounge-cum-restaurant, overseen by celeb TV chef Max Mariola, does creative seasonal plates both Italian (a respin of vitello tonnato, say, or mozzarella-stuffed ravioli) and otherwise (hotel-requisite club sandwiches and burgers) that help you stay reasonably sober even as you enjoy the bartending acumen.

The luxe factor: There's a triptych of original Andy Warhol silk-screened portraits in the restaurant, and Frette robes and towels in the rooms, but the real pièce de(luxe) résistance is the Dom Pérignon-affiliated private dining room, where special menus pair with rare Champagne vintages.

The letdown: Given that this is a freshly launched, independently owned and operated hotel, things are running relatively smoothly, but service is still being perfected. The recently hired resident manager comes from the city's iconic Hotel Hassler Roma, which bodes well for the future.

The lowdown: The first hotel with any real style on the west side of the historic center, the D.O.M has the sort of sexy sensibility and come-hither character that's otherwise sorely lacking this close to the Vatican. And, for that, we'll genuflect in gratitude. From \$560; domhotelroma.com