

THE LEISURE HOTEL

WORDS MICHEL CRUZ

Think of Nice and you picture the classic French Riviera; palm trees swaying in the breeze by the seaside promenade that separates the trendy beach clubs from such icons of luxury as the famous Hotel Negresco. Further in, pretty boutiques and quaint bistros in shaded streets. True, this is still how it can be, but for young, trendy and environmentally conscious visitors to this Mediterranean city there is also another way to enjoy the Riviera experience.

Two hundred metres inland from the sea there is a hotel that redefines the established concept of the boutique hotel, as developed by Philippe Starck in the 80s and 90s. The Hi Hotel qualifies as a boutique hotel because it is so clearly built around a design concept, but the décor that evolves from it is rather more counter-culture and youthful than many of the simply luxuriant and opulent hotels that would normally populate the pages of a boutique hotel guide.

Having said that, the style, comfort and avant-garde design are certainly of a high standard, but for Matali Crasset, creator of the hotel and one of the leading new designers in France, the emphasis was not on producing yet another temple to superlative luxury but rather somewhere that makes a bold statement in its own right. You can find that kind of opulence across the length and breadth of the Côte d'Azur, but in bringing the young urban vibe to Nice she wanted to mix professional design with quirky exuberance.

As a result, each of the 38 rooms in this hotel is individually styled, configured and fitted, yet all are colourful. You can go for the almost spa-like relaxation of the Indoor Terrasse, the serenity of White & White, get quirky in blue or pink, or simply clean and fresh in ferron yellow. The public areas are similarly youthful, urban and fitted for the technology generation. Whacky chairs, tables and wall mountings from the hand of Matali dress the reception and lounge areas in a way that refreshingly doesn't take itself too seriously and challenges visitors to do the same.

Matali and co-founders of the Hi-Group, Patrick Elouarghi and Philippe Chapelet, surely cannot be accused of a lack of daring, for they have boldly created a setting that is not only left of field in its design concept, but also has

Hi Hotel, Nice MODERN BY IDENTITY



a touch of counter-culture about it that will tickle many a fancy. What's more, they haven't done it in Paris, Lille or Lyon, where such a venue would blend into the modern urban landscape, but have singled out Nice for a touch of 21st century eclecticism.

In so doing the team have created not so much a boutique hotel, but what she calls a design and urban hotel. The emphasis is that this is very much a 21st century interpretation of the frame, albeit a peripheral one. Naturally, in the classic confrontation between form and function the designer has had to marry her concept to all the services, facilities and practical functioning of a hotel, but perhaps not surprisingly has managed wonderfully well.

Altogether it may be, but the Hi Hotel is still in Nice, so it has to be seductive enough to lure clients away from the conventional temples of luxury. As a result there is the Hi Beach private beach club, Hi Body spa and the Happy Bar, which updates little translations. From the modern clubs and trendy usual touches of the late night Happy Bar to the relaxing bath and beauty treatments

of the spa and the languid trendiness of the beach club, Hi offers classic ingredients reworked to a made du siècle 21.

Add the uniquely fresh and colourful environment of the Hi Business seminar spaces and the Hi Sushi bar, which naturally offers organic produce only, and you have a very complete package. And indeed, a 21st century concept of this kind would not be complete if it did not make an effort to be environmentally sound. As such they can't come much kinder, for the hotel proudly lists its award-winning environmental credentials, which include the use of mineral organic rather than chemical paint, recycled materials, vegetable based toiletries, waste separation, ecological cleaning products, low-efficient designs and equipment, non-chemical garden fertilisers and a bicycle rental service. What's more, the hotel puts its money where its mouth is and deals with organic supplies, instead of cheaper mass-produced alternatives – making this the ultimate bed-good destination for a repose on the white sands of the Côte d'Azur. ☉