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Design destinations: Royal Mansour Marrakech

An ambitious, artistic and enchanting dream has been realised in the creation of this Moroccan hotel

Added 14:26 | December 15, 2014



Every detail of the Royal Mansour Marrakech has been carefully researched and brought to life with architectural accuracy and painstaking attention to detail.

Like a tale from One Thousand and One Nights, the story of Royal Mansour Marrakech is almost as enchanting as the hotel itself. In 2004, His Royal Highness King Mohammed VI of Morocco had a vision of creating a palace that would exemplify his country's splendour, reflecting its rich and colourful past while showcasing its affinity for art, design, hospitality and cuisine. Sparing no cost, he enlisted the help of a team of internationally renowned specialists and local designers to achieve his dream property and, after a lengthy design and building process, the Royal Mansour Marrakech hotel was opened in late 2010.

Creating a concept that felt ages old and steeped in history while ensuring it offered a five-star hotel experience was the brief given to French agency 3BIS, the creative force behind Although agency owners Fabrice Bourg and Nicola Papamiltiades were well versed in constructing interiors for landmark properties (including Le Meurice in Paris, The Willard hotel, Washington and Le Grand Hotel Cannes), the Royal Mansour Marrakech project was unique as it involved creating the concept from scratch – from the layout to the decoration and furnishing, right down to the bathroom fittings. The approach taken by Bourg and Papamiltiades was to immerse themselves in Moroccan culture and travel the country in search of design elements that exemplified the Moroccan spirit, which they would bring together under one roof.

Concealed behind a set of enormous sculpted wooden doors similar to those that guard Marrakesh's 13th-century medina, Royal Mansour Marrakech today evokes an ancient Moroccan city – albeit one where everything is breathtakingly beautiful and wonderfully fragrant. Set within a 3.5-hectare oasis, 53 private riads are interlinked by a series of marble pathways that gently meander through lemon and olive groves, past lily ponds and beneath date palms. Each residence is spread across three floors, and although these mini palaces range from one to four bedrooms, they are all intended to reflect the local way of life, with a private central courtyard, rooftop terrace and abundance of cool corners offering respite from the midday sun.

An artisan celebration

Capturing the frenetic, colourful nature of Morocco's souqs, the hotel's colour scheme is riotous, ranging from ochre to vert anis and silver. The gold-leaf inlaid bar leads to a celestial library in creamy tones, which in turn leads through to a green onyx dining room – yet somehow everything remains harmonious. The riads are no less vibrant, with each one featuring an abundance of silk, velvet, leather and suede in rich colours, together with tapestries made using time-honoured techniques passed down through generations.

In answer to the king's request that the hotel be the ultimate example of Moroccan skill and craftsmanship, over 1,200 artisans were involved in elements of the hotel's design. From the intricate zellige tiles covering the floors to the mother-of-pearl and sycamore mosaics in the cigar bar and the ornate mashrabiya screens in each of the riad's bathrooms, displays of Moroccan artistry are visible from almost every angle.

Rumour has it that the King personally oversaw each and every aspect of his hotel, from the size of the entrance gate to the colour of the riads' walls. Royal Mansour Marrakech may have taken a while to come together, but it is testament to the adage that good things come to those who wait.

A marriage of old and new



By following local architectural principles, the design team behind Royal Mansour Marrakech have ensured that the property feels more like a home than a hotel. It has also allowed them to introduce modern elements, such as retractable roofs in the library and riads, and the latest technology in each of the rooms, without infringing on a sense of authenticity. Nowhere is this fusion of traditional Moroccan design and state-of-the-art equipment more obvious than in the hotel's spa, which is a temple to wellness. Housed within a white, lace-like structure that allows light and shade to interplay, it is a design marvel in itself.