

# NOMADE

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By PASCAL LAUBER | Wednesday, February 24, 2021

## THE 3-YEAR JOURNEY BRINGING PARAGON 700 BOUTIQUE HOTEL & SPA TO LIFE

EUROPE, HOTELS, HOTELS & RESORTS



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### The 3-year journey bringing Paragon 700 Boutique Hotel & Spa to life

Owners and designers Pascal Lauber and Ulrike Baumhake share their journey on bringing a luxury boutique hotel in Ostuni, Puglia in Italy to life through an extensive restoration of a historic building.

It took three years to completely and meticulously restore every inch of Paragon 700 Boutique Hotel & Spa, which was once a striking red palace in the heart of Puglia's White City, Ostuni. We started the project on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2017 and we finally opened the doors to the hotel on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2020 after what was quite a journey!

#### The initial visit to Palazzo Rosso

We first visited the enchanting Palazzo Rosso in 2016 at the invitation of an Ostunian friend. Our time in Puglia was only ever intended for pleasure, not business. And yet, amidst the food, wine, culture, sea and countryside, a passion project was discovered. We were curious to admire the architecture of the historic building and peek beyond the elusive red carriage doors. As soon as they opened, it was love at first sight. The potential of the centuries-old gem was both alluring and undeniable...we knew instantly that we would not be able to resist. The height of its ceilings alone was tempting, then came the vaults, frescoes, striking red stone and huge private garden. For us, it was unthinkable not to make it a hotel and share its beauty with the public; it really is just too beautiful to stay hidden!



Owners and designers Pascal Lauber & Ulrike Baumhake

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Throughout the restoration, the main goal for us was to bring the building back to its former glory. We wanted to use traditional handcrafted techniques where possible, but also inject a splash of contemporary flair. You can imagine this was quite a challenge given the age and many layers of the building, but we loved it. We worked with conservator Maria Buongiorno to uncover the Palazzo's multi-secular mysteries, each day we welcomed more discoveries, uncovering tales of times gone by, right back to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. For us this was a process of pure fascination and continuous joy as we revelled in new details and hidden treasures, never knowing what would come next. Surprises included a wooden door with peepholes typical of 17<sup>th</sup>-century cloisters that suggest that the Palazzo once housed a convent. Also, the beautiful original majolica tiles, which have been a new life in *Bar 700*. On the back of some of the tiles, we found an *M* stamp, the brand of a famous workshop owned by the three Massa brothers, ceramics masters of early 18<sup>th</sup> century Naples, suggesting the building was once in Neapolitan hands. We also vividly remember peeling back several layers of green and brown paint to uncover beautiful neo-classical frescoes of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, which were unforgettable moments. It was a boutique hotelier's playground, with no stone left unturned; the palace's former water chamber transformed into a bijou spa and the old olive oil chamber became our wine cellar.



Of course, like any project with ancient restoration involved, there were challenges, but throughout the process, we chose to view these as artistic and design opportunities where we could. The creative association of old and new art, objects and furnishings in a head-spinning and yet personal mix is my (Pascal's) trademark so the beautiful and multi-layered building was an ideal backdrop for me.

The real challenge was bringing my unique vision into a tangible reality. It was imperative that our work paid homage to the building that had inspired us so deeply. It was a labour of love, with hands-on involvement from both of us imperative to the project's ultimate success. We were determined the finished building, hotel and full guest experience should be vivacious and authentic in equal measure; it was an intense but rewarding time.

### The interior design and décor

Once the structure of the building was completed the fun could really begin with the interior design and the décor. We love to source eclectic items from antique fairs, shops and markets around the world, so we had the perfect excuse to get shopping and travelling! Guests will find some treasures that we picked up locally and they may be happy to hear that some pieces are for sale for them to take home. In true Pascale style, the décor is cosmopolitan, with unique features down to the smallest detail, from South African light switches, sofas and headboards, gazebos from India turned into bathtubs, unconventional sculptures and gorgeous paintings by the London artists Adrian Bowell and Suzanne Lipsey, Israeli Michal Cole or Italian born Giuseppe Ciraci. We wouldn't have it any other way.



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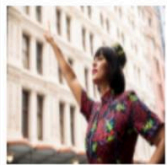
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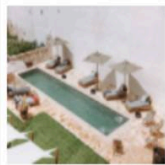
the opening of the hotel. The timing could not have been worse and like everyone in the hospitality and travel industry, we have been badly affected. However, we've been lucky as it seemed that everybody wanted to come to Puglia when we finally managed to open our doors to Paragon 700 Boutique Hotel & Spa and welcome guests throughout the summer months. With only 11 rooms and suites, an outdoor swimming pool and a secluded garden that one makes me feel like they are in the countryside, the hotel is actually ideal for safe travel in these times. We are lucky in that respect and health and wellbeing of our guests and team is paramount to us. We have been blown away with the glowing feedback from our guests and if we can make a success of a hotel opening during a global pandemic, we can do anything! For all the ups and downs, we wouldn't change the journey of the past few years at all, it has been a true life experience.

<https://www.paragon700.com>

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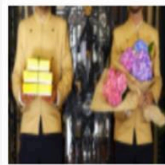
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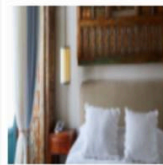
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(IMAGE 3 OF 3)