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## The Place Firenze, Italy, Reopens After An Exquisite Redesign

By Roger Sands



Under the ownership and personal care of the Babini Family and hotel General Manager Claudio Meli, **THE PLACE Firenze**, a beloved boutique hotel in Florence, Italy, has reopened after an extensive redesign by **Luigi Fragola Architects**.

The reimagined property encompasses 20 rooms and suites and a variety of common areas that will provide guests with the full flavor of the local Florentine community. Utilizing a blend of modern and historical design elements, steeped in the art of Italian hospitality, THE PLACE Firenze mirrors the ageless charm and excitement of Florence, ideal for discerning clientele and guests.



Accented by a soothing color scheme of greens and creams alongside tactile materials and custom furnishings, The Fireplace, Studiolo and Glass Yard serve as public spaces for guests to relax, dine and reflect, evoking a serene ambiance. Occupying center stage, the Glass Yard features a pitched atrium that conjures a greenhouse and provides an abundance of natural light in order to elevate the mood. Foliage compositions and wild plants are strategic in placement, set alongside works of Florentine artists. Tucked away, the Studiolo room pays homage to small artistic studios inspired by the modern “Studioli.”

Acclaimed Chef Asso Migliore creates culinary delights that are derived from the region’s rich, rustic gastronomy, each deeply rooted in Tuscan tradition. Using locally sourced ingredients and traditional Italian

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cooking techniques, menu highlights include the Il Filetto (filet of free range Calvana beef paired with mashed truffled potatoes and bok choy) and Il Pescato (fish of the day with potatoes, taggiasca olives, capers & tomatoes). The restaurant also offers a unique Flambé dining experience that features an eclectic four-course menu prepared tableside, providing a modern rendition of a storied hospitality tradition. A mixology program by Food & Beverage Manager Zaccaria Media complements each meal.



Central to the hotel's ethos and THE is its philanthropic foundation, a project dedicated to the protection, sustainment and promotion of centuries-old traditions of Italian creativity and artistic craftsmanship. Designed to keep these traditions alive, the property's cultural programming allows guests, through a donation, to participate in exclusive on-site visits to artisanal practices that focus on various creative forms specific to the region including weaving, scagliola and goldsmithery. In partnership with LAO, a Florentine goldsmith school, young artisans participating in **The Place of Wonders** are eligible to receive support through scholarships, which directly assists in continuing local customs and traditions. The newest partner, **Pampaloni**, is a fourth-generation family-owned silversmith that has been serving the region since 1902.

THE PLACE Firenze is part of **The Hospitality Experience** (a.k.a THE) – a new collection of luxury Italian properties owned and operated by the Babini Family that features three hotels in its current portfolio: THE PLACE Firenze (Florence), Londra Palace (Venice) and the upcoming Borgo Dei Conti Resort (Umbria) set to debut summer of 2024.

Carlo and Michela Babini, along with Claudio Meli, recently offered several insights into THE PLACE.

## 1) Describe the history of THE PLACE Firenze.

THE PLACE Firenze was formerly JK Place Firenze, and acquired right at the beginning of its life only a few months after its opening and has been under our management ever since, with Claudio Meli from day one. Back then it was decided to keep the previous name of the property, as no other hotel under the same brand existed. In 2019, we decided to rebrand and renovate. The Hospitality Experience is the new brand group that we decided to create in 2022 to strengthen our collection and prepare to build for our future. Our collection started with the Londra Palace Venezia in 1938 and got bigger in 2003 with Florence and in 2009 in Perugia. - Carlo Babini, CEO, of The Hospitality Experience (owners)

The actual location of THE PLACE Firenze, in the Santa Maria Novella piazza, is where Florence formerly had its walls surrounding the city. This was during the Medieval ages when the Church of Santa Maria Novella featured a beautiful vineyard, which has now been replaced by a rose garden that sits directly in front of the property. When the team opened the hotel building, they found condos on the ground floor, which have now been transformed into the hotel's magnificent Glass Yard, which in the 60s was a fantastic

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flower shop. What adds to the causality and romance of the is that the shop was managed by the father of our actual florist. — Claudio Meli, General Manager of THE PLACE Firenze



## 2) How does the renovation capture the local Florentine community?

THE PLACE is filled with Florentine artisanal touches from our craftsmen partners at The Place Of Wonders foundation, who created amazing, custom pieces for us. Guests will be able to spot pieces around the hotel like a treasure hunt — in their rooms, in the restaurant, and in all our cozy living rooms. The sense of place is a pillar for us at THE PLACE, here you really feel Florence in every single detail. — Claudio Meli



## 3) What is the mission of The Place of Wonders?

The Place Of Wonders' mission is to champion and promote the human heritage of Italian craftsmanship. Its impact is twofold. On one hand, the foundation invests in the next generation by funding scholarships at schools and training institutes for aspiring young talent to become the next generation of artisans, while simultaneously enhancing guest experiences through interactive and educational visits to this exclusive group of artisans, and fostering an appreciation for the artistic and artisanal marvels that enrich our cities, through the invaluable contributions of General Manager Claudio Meli. This initiative promotes the concept of conscious travel, connecting guests with the cultural heritage that makes each location unique. - Michela Babini, Director of The Place of Wonders foundation