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The Place Firenze is the place to be in beautiful Florence

By Daven Wu



'Slow and steady' seems to be the motto of the Babini family, whose hotel arm, The Hospitality Experience, acquired its first property, the Londra Palace in Venice, in 1938, and its second, JK Place in Florence, in 2003. The latter has just emerged from a three-year tip-to-toe spruce-up and a barely noticeable rebrand involving the loss of the 'JK' – it's now called The Place Firenze – ahead of the summer 2024 opening of a third property, Borgo Dei Conti in Umbria.

The Place Firenze faces Florence's Piazza Santa Maria Novella



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For The Place Firenze, the Babinis' brief to Florentine studio Luigi Fragola Architects was a little counterintuitive – to transform the hotel from an international property to a local one. But in a world where even new hotel lobbies and guest rooms are beginning to look and feel a little homogenised, there is something to be said for the Babinis' approach of introducing a touch of Florentine history and flavour to create a distinct sense of place.



For Fragola and his team, this meant taking inspiration from the geometric-patterned façade and colours of the ancient Santa Maria Novella church, which anchors the lovely pedestrianised square where the hotel sits.

'Where possible, we used local artisans and materials, such as marbles and bespoke Rubelli fabric,' he says. 'We had a local artist re-create some fresco details, which you find in the church's cloister, and we mixed antique Tuscan furnishings with modern glass pieces and paintings to create a contemporary yet classic look.'



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The result is a thoroughly refreshed hotel that is awash with natural light, its 20 suites and guest rooms, and public spaces handsomely dressed in olive green and creamy hues, with the best rooms in the house facing the church.

And despite being in the heart of Florence and all its dining options, it is a little tempting to indulge in house chef Asso Migliore's seasonal menu, which currently features Calvana beef tartare tossed with a salty sabayon, Sanbudello sausages paired with polenta and smoked provola, and ox cheeks braised in Chianti and Jamaican pepper. Adjourn to the ground floor bar for a post-prandial treat of no fewer than seven different Negronis.



Should you manage to tear yourself away, all of Florence lies within easy reach, not least the fabled Santa Maria Novella pharmacy, the Uffizi, and the storied retail strip via Tornabuoni.

Particularly worth a closer look is The Place of Wonders, the Babinis' foundation devoted to protecting and sustaining traditional Italian creativity and craftsmanship. With little prompting, the hotel will organise visits to six workshops specialising in everything from cashmere production and silverware to glass etching and scagliola, the dying art of fine plastering.

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