

## The Library Bar

### The Norman, Tel Aviv

Words: Harry McKinley

**T**el Aviv's Nachmani Street is undoubtedly one of the city's most charming. Bauhaus buildings in pastel shades sit resolute behind lilting trees as the usually frenetic pace of 'The Party City' slows to a gentle stroll. This isn't the modern Tel Aviv of glass and steel, but the Tel Aviv of old with its white verandas and creeping vines. It is the spirit of this era that The Norman's Library Bar seeks to rekindle.

David d'Almada of Sagrada was responsible for overseeing the design, which artfully nods to the 1920s without tipping the line into imitation. The floors - inlaid with an Art Nouveau floral pattern - flickering curtains and wooden ceiling fans evoke a Mediterranean atmosphere, albeit through the lens of nostalgia.

"Before working on The Norman, I hadn't been to Tel Aviv," d'Almada tells us. "But I sat in the square opposite, looking at the building and trying to engage with its vernacular - to think about an approach that wouldn't be too of-the-moment, but instead respectful."

The hotel as a whole reflects this sensitive drawing on the past and yet The Library Bar sits apart. The influences and references remain but the impact is more forceful, the design more distilled. It is, as d'Almada explains, a "destination" in its own right - a space that a global

traveller can identify with, where a hotel guest can feel at home and where locals can assemble to meet over cocktails and lively Tel Avivi chatter.

The project began as an homage to Norman Lourie, the father of the hotel's discreet owner and its namesake. Lourie founded the first luxury hotel in Israel, which was subsequently frequented by the country's first three presidents, as well as Sophia Loren, Paul Newman and the cast of cinematic classic Exodus. "So there was a personal aspect. The bar had to connect to that legacy and that history but I also wanted it to evoke a feeling of the grand hotels of the period," d'Almada says, "especially those in Egypt, which were frequented by the British."

If you're not propping up the bar - a theatrical combination of shiny surfaces, tastefully discordant glassware and vintage Boston shakers - The Library Bar feels like a comfortable sitting room or member's club. Relaxed armchairs and sofas huddle around low tables. Despite a feeling of both age and timelessness, the furniture is bespoke and is a mix of pieces crafted locally in Israel and designs made in Portugal. Not limited by decade, they are intended to reflect a sense of eclecticism that spans the 1920s to 1950s.

As the name suggests, The Library Bar features a



Photography: Sivan Askayo





smattering of hefty coffee table books, placed to ensnare guests. Sagrada worked with a local book supplier to ensure a mix that felt relevant but surprising in places. That combination of familiar and unexpected is much like the bar itself, which seems to straddle modernity and the whimsy of the bygone. Grand statement light pieces from British producer Collier Webb cast ambient,

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curving shadows across the ceiling. From the uniform design to the bar's scent, "no stone was left unturned" by Sagrada in creating a holistic and immersive guest experience. D'Almada turned to a friend from London's The Arts Club when it came to the sourcing of vintage glassware, much of which is openly on display.

This focus on the details means that The

Library Bar feels like a fully realised concept. One so complete it hardly registers, which is ultimately the sign of success. Indeed, at a time when many hoteliers and designers are getting to grips with all-day operations, The Library Bar's easy energy makes the notion seem simple. The morning sees guests thumbing through papers, the smell of coffee lingering in the air and the early sun rippling in through

the palms outside. As the day progresses the mood changes, the volume rises and the cocktails flow. This isn't a hotel bar that struggles to attract a crowd.

Many of the ingredients used in the cocktails are grown in the hotel's garden and the menu channels a taste of old world Europe. The bar's signature mix, The Lord Byron, features home made chamomile liqueur, fresh lime and

Tezon Reposado tequila – a wink towards the colonial and literary themes. Knowledgeable bartenders are quick to strike up chat with guests on everything from the cocktails to the day's news, passing the time it takes them to whip up the beverage and then some. The Balfour Mule – a mix of Mount Gay XO rum, Fernet-Branca, fresh lime, vanilla and topped with ginger beer – is named after Lord Arthur Balfour who presented the 1917 Balfour Declaration, one of the first documents that lead to the country's independence. The Alena – a bellini made with Campari, fresh grapefruit, lemon juice and topped with prosecco – was devised in the winter as a means to use up the many grapefruits produced in the gardens. The sense of narrative that flows through the design and drinks offering is part of what makes The Library Bar a rich and intentioned experience. As d'Almada says, "It's somewhere that has a carefully crafted feeling but doesn't stick too rigidly to any one idea. It's a space for everyone."

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