

By Harry McKinley
Photography by Amit Geron and Assaf Pinchuk



OLD IS NEW AGAIN

Past and present meet in Tel Aviv



From the Arabesque architecture of historic Jaffa to the elegant Bauhaus lines of the White City, Tel Aviv is famed for the vibrant eclecticism of its neighborhoods and its compelling mix of cultural influences. A vast urban sprawl embracing Mediterranean beaches, it's been called the Miami of the Middle East, and now boasts a dizzyingly progressive hospitality scene that not just the locals are savvy to. In the first half of 2018, a record number of visitors descended upon Israel—2.1 million in six months—with occupancy rates in the city hovering in the high 70s, according to the Israel Ministry of Tourism. In addition, Tel Aviv is expected to see 1,500 rooms come online in the next two years.

Of course, in a city with such a defined sense of style, well-conceived design is not just

an advantage, but a necessity. Whether a small-scale project in an up-and-coming part of town, or the renovation of a historically significant building, hotel designers are fusing Tel Aviv's heritage with its modern-day energy to tell the tale of a city in ascendance.

The Jaffa

Located in Tel Aviv's oldest district—after which the hotel is named—the Jaffa, a Luxury Collection Hotel (from noted hotelier Aby Rosen, owner and cofounder of New York-based real estate company RFR Holding) is one of the most architecturally complex and culturally significant new hotel projects in the city. Blending a renovated 19th-century, neo-Roman former hospital with an expansive new build, it features 120 guestrooms and suites, 32 residential apartments, and an impressive roster of F&B venues, including two restaurants from New York's Major Food Group.

To transform the building into "Tel Aviv's best designed new hotel," as Rosen puts it, he brought on renowned British designer John

Pawson to oversee the property's slick interiors while juxtaposing his signature minimalist style with classic references. In the lobby, a 13th-century Crusader bastion wall (uncovered during excavation) is offset with midcentury furnishings and modern art from Damien Hirst. "I wanted to create a powerful new spatial narrative charged with atmosphere and a seamless sense of place," Pawson explains. His subtle odes to the locale are also seen in the Middle Eastern motifs and patterns used to delineate spaces, while handpicked photography from Israeli artist Tal Shochat is featured in the guestrooms.

Local conservationist architect Ramy Gill partnered with Pawson and a team of experts on a painstaking decade-long restoration effort

1. The Jaffa's chapel has been transformed into a stylish bar and lounge while maintaining its Corinthian cornices and original stained glass windows.



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2. The Jaffa's 19th-century original structure with arched windows juxtaposes an adjoining new building framed by sharp, angular lines.

3. In the Jaffa's former chapel, Roman columns give way to contemporary yet austere furnishings, honoring Tel Aviv's past-meets-present style.

that aimed to bring a contemporary vision to the original structure. Plastered walls were scraped down to reveal generations of patina, while outdoor corridors and arched colonnades have been incorporated into the completed scheme. The historic building and modern construction now piece together to form an enclosed courtyard enveloped by trees for an intimate outdoor space.

The Vera

For the Vera's owner and manager, Danny Tamari, it was vital that his first solo hotel project speak to the character and creativity of Tel Aviv. With 39 rooms, it also embodies the city's propensity for boutiques, located off the main drag of Rothschild Boulevard and close to the affluently bohemian Neve Tzedek and hip-but-scruffy Florentin neighborhoods. As with many new hotel developments in a city tight for space, the Vera is a renovation project of a former 1950s



4. Crowning the Vera, the radiant two-level rooftop drips with greenery along its wood-covered exterior, which offers views of the city's constantly changing skyline.

5. Intricate ceiling trellises mark the Drisco's lobby for a modern take on traditional grandeur.

6. The Drisco's guestrooms are a lesson in restraint, outfitted with oriental-patterned ceramic tiles, evocative wall lamps, and Carrara marble.



office building. Design lead Yaron Tal, owner of local eponymous Studio Yaron Tal, was keen that the façade remain as authentic as possible, adding only wooden shutters and bijou balconies.

Inside, the popular Tel Aviv post-industrialist style is interpreted in a way that affords comfort and warmth. The open lobby features a jazz wall of burnished brass created by local artist and designer Ohad Benit, and refined chairs and tables from highly regarded local architect and furniture designer Tomer Nachshon. A handsome wooden handrail emblazoned with a quote from writer Charles Bukowski completes the stairwell. For Tamari and Tal, the most important consideration was that the design forgo the artifice of typical new projects. "In the Vera, you won't see any clean finishes," notes Tal. "We wanted the design to look used and reflect the atmosphere of older buildings in the area."

The Drisco

In many ways, the Drisco is a rebirth of Tel Aviv's first days of hospitality. The building was constructed in the late 1800s as American settlers, the Evangelist pilgrims John and George Drisco, set out to open the first luxury hotel in the region. It was subsequently sold to a Templar hotelier and, for almost a century, became one of the most prestigious locations in the region, hosting such household names as Mark Twain. After the 1940s, the structure was left abandoned, languishing in disrepair until 2006 when interior designer and architect Ari Shaltiel led the charge in restoring it to its former glory.

Its recent opening marks a noteworthy moment in Tel Aviv's hotel history. Original murals have been preserved and interiors are intended to evoke the novel Ottoman design that once defined the property. A muted palette of gray and taupe play second fiddle to an aesthetic primarily invested in pattern and form. Dramatically printed rugs fill the lobby and bar area, while guestrooms feature oriental tiles, Carrara marble, and ornate lighting fixtures. Intricate ceiling trellises frame high ceilings in the Drisco's public spaces and suggest a present take on traditional grandeur. "The style creates an exciting experience," suggests Shaltiel, "and for me, it was important to equate the hotel with the glory and luxury of its past." **hd**

