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5 minutes with: The hotel designers behind Ostuni's new boutique jewel

Pascale Lauber & Ulrike Bauschke, owners and hotel designers of [Paragon 700 Boutique Hotel & Spa](#), have not had the smoothest ride to open their labour of love. *Hotel Designs'* [Hamish Kilburn](#) catches up with the duo as they prepare to welcome the world to their dream boutique hotel...



Back in early 2020, before [Covid-19](#) had become the distraction of the year, *Hotel Designs* was packing its bags ready to check in to a [new boutique hotel](#) that had made it onto the editorial team's radar. [Paragon 700 Boutique Hotel & Spa](#) is situated in the heart of Puglia's White City of Ostuni – on the heel of Italy – and is elegantly sheltered inside a restored red palace.

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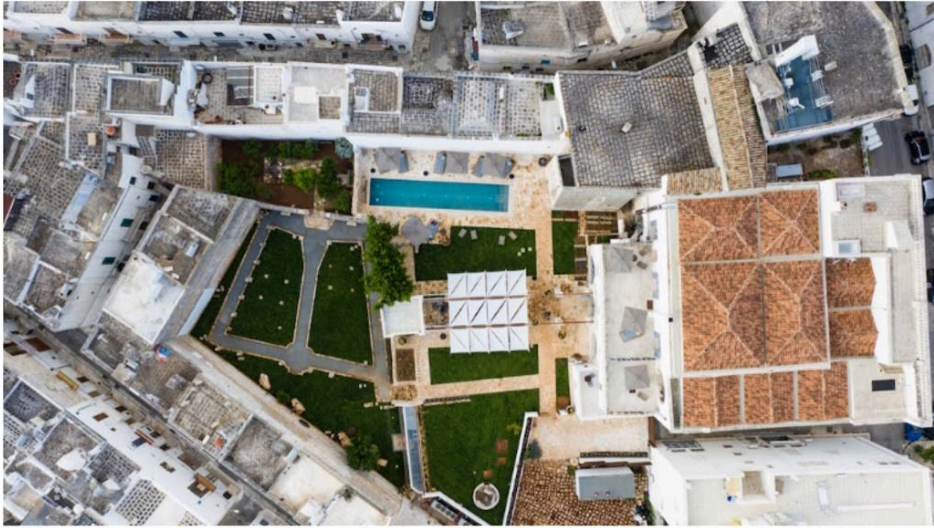


Image credit: 700 Boutique Hotel & Spa

The team were particularly impressed by the story of Pascale Lauber and Ulrike Bauschke, owners of the property, who painstakingly restored every inch of the former Italian palace using traditional handcrafted techniques, while injecting a splash of modern flair.



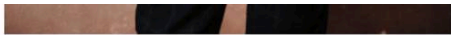


Image caption: Ulrike Bauschke | Image credit: Katja Brinkmann



Image caption: Pascale Lauber | Image credit: Katja

Unfortunately, days before our scheduled trip to review the new 11-key hotel that stands in stark contrast to the whitewashed buildings of the city around it, the spread of [Covid-19](#) put a major halt on plans to visit the naturally stunning destination.

Almost one year later, plans to review the luxury lair are unsurprisingly still on hold. While we wait patiently, though, it felt fitting to catch up with Lauber and Bauschke in order to understand the context and challenges that come with such a magnificent project.



Image credit: Paragon 700 Boutique Hotel & Spa

Hamish Kilburn: How did you come to take on the restoration project?

Pascale Lauber: It was in 2016. We were actually in Puglia to recharge and had no intention of taking on a new project at all. An Ostunian friend invited us to visit the Palazzo Rosso and we agreed, simply to admire the architecture of such a historic building. However, as soon as the red carriage door opened it was love at first sight and we knew instantly that we would not be able to resist. We were immediately drawn to the potential of the centuries-old gem. The height of its ceilings, its vaults, its frescoes, its red-stone.

HK: Did you always know that you wanted the building to be transformed into a hotel?

Ulrike Bauschke: For us, it was unthinkable not to make the building a hotel and accessible to the public, it really is just too beautiful to stay hidden! We have shaken up the rules of real estate and interior design in projects all over the world, from Romont, Lausanne and Verbier, Switzerland; to Paris, New York and Cape Town and knew instantly that we could do the same here.

“Several smaller details and treasures were also discovered, such as a wooden door with peepholes typical of 17th century cloisters” – Ulrike Bauschke.



Image credit: Paragon 700 Boutique Hotel & Spa

HK: What discoveries did you make during the restoration?

UK: We worked with conservator Maria Buongiorno to uncover the mysteries of the multi-secular Palazzo, which has so many stories to tell from the 17th Century to present day. The most ancient parts of the building from the 1700s including fireplaces, stone vaults and also frescoes, like the magnificent “Jesus and the Samaritan” were significant discoveries. Several smaller details and treasures were also discovered, such as a wooden door with peepholes typical of 17th century cloisters that suggests that the Palazzo once housed a convent.

UK: Finally, the beautiful stained-glass ceiling after which Paragon 700 Boutique Hotel & Spa is named.

PL: Equally, the beautiful original majolica tiles, which have been brought to new life in *Bar 700*. On the back of some of those tiles, we found an *M* stamp, the brand of a famous workshop owned by the three Massa brothers, ceramics masters of early 18th century Naples, suggesting the building was once in Neapolitan hands.



Image credit: Paragon 700 Boutique Hotel & Spa

HK: You both worked on the project together, who does what and are you always in agreement on the design details?

UK: We have opened and renovated restaurants, boutique hotels and apartments all over the world together and we make a complimentary pair, each with our own, very distinct strengths.

PL: I'm an instinctive designer, something that runs through my veins and guides everything I do, so the architecture and interiors were very much my vision. I took the lead with the renovation, but the way I work is with few words and thousands of images in my head. Sometimes I wish one could invent a copy machine to print all my ideas that are spinning in my head 24 hours a day... I couldn't have brought it to life exactly how I wanted it without the help of Ulrike, who as a passionate traveller as well knows exactly what makes an outstanding hotel.

UK: Yes so we are pretty much in agreement and the only challenge was to show and create understanding of what Pascale's vision was. She had it all in her head so between us bringing it to life

understanding of what Pascale's vision was. She had it all in her head so between us bringing it to life exactly as she envisioned it was the biggest challenge.



Image credit: Paragon 700 Boutique Hotel & Spa

HK: Let's address the elephant in the room... You opened the hotel in the middle of Covid-19, how was this?

UK: The timing could not have been worse for us 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 and welcome guests throughout the summer months. With only 11 rooms and plenty of beautiful outdoor space, the hotel is actually ideal for safe travel in these times so we are lucky in that respect as well and have always made sure the health and wellbeing of our guests and team is paramount. 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!

HK: Pascale, can you explain your personal design ethos and would you say Paragon 700 Boutique Hotel embodies this?

PL: Each project I do is so different and distinct, but the creative association of old and new art, objects and furnishings in a head-spinning and yet personal mix is my trademark and signature design style. I have a vision that is multicultural and original down to the smallest detail and this creates a unique

have a vision that is multicultural and original down to the smallest detail and this creates a unique result that is coherent, deeply modern and stimulating. I would say that Paragon 700 Boutique Hotel & Spa embodies my design ethos. The heart of the hotel's design and what I really set out to achieve was creating exquisite design in every detail with beautiful energy while also preserving and celebrating the history of the building.

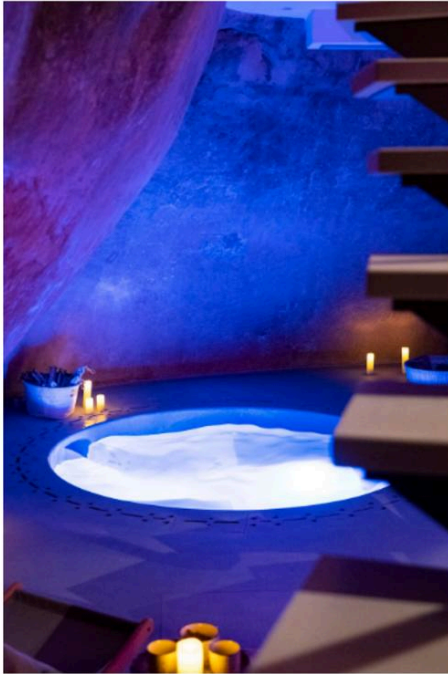


Image credit: Paragon 700 Boutique Hotel & Spa



Image credit: Paragon 700 Boutique Hotel & Spa

HK: Where do you look to for inspiration?

UK: We love travelling and have been lucky to live around the world, providing a fantastic source of inspiration. Visiting countless international art and trade shows, but also local flea-markets, is always inspiring and for this particular project the architecture and heritage of Puglia was certainly an influence.

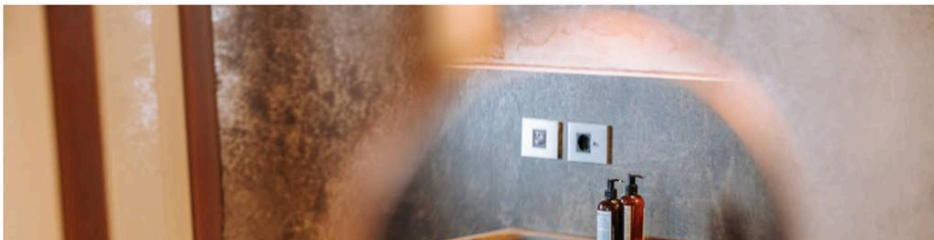




Image credit: Paragon 700 Boutique Hotel & Spa

HK: If (or should I say 'when'!) I can come and visit the hotel, what should I do first?

UK: If you can, request to stay in the room called Onyx. Every one of our guest rooms and suites is different, but Onyx, which is black, is a firm favourite. Once you have checked it out, head to the pool, which is the only one in the city, for a refreshing swim followed by some time unwinding in the garden and of course an aperitivo at Bar 700. The next day you will be ready to enjoy beautiful Puglia- the food, culture, people, history, landscapes, countryside and sea!



Image credit: Paragon 700 Boutique Hotel & Spa

PL: With only 11 guest rooms, our friendly team are able to offer an insider experience so be sure to ask them for their personal tips and recommendations and also enjoy some of our bespoke experiences, from burrata making to motorbike tours or trips out on our boat, a former carabinieri boat transformed into a private yacht, Dragonfly.

Main image credit: Paragon 700 Boutique Hotel & Spa

Hamish Kilburn / 04.02.2021

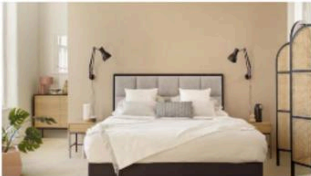
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