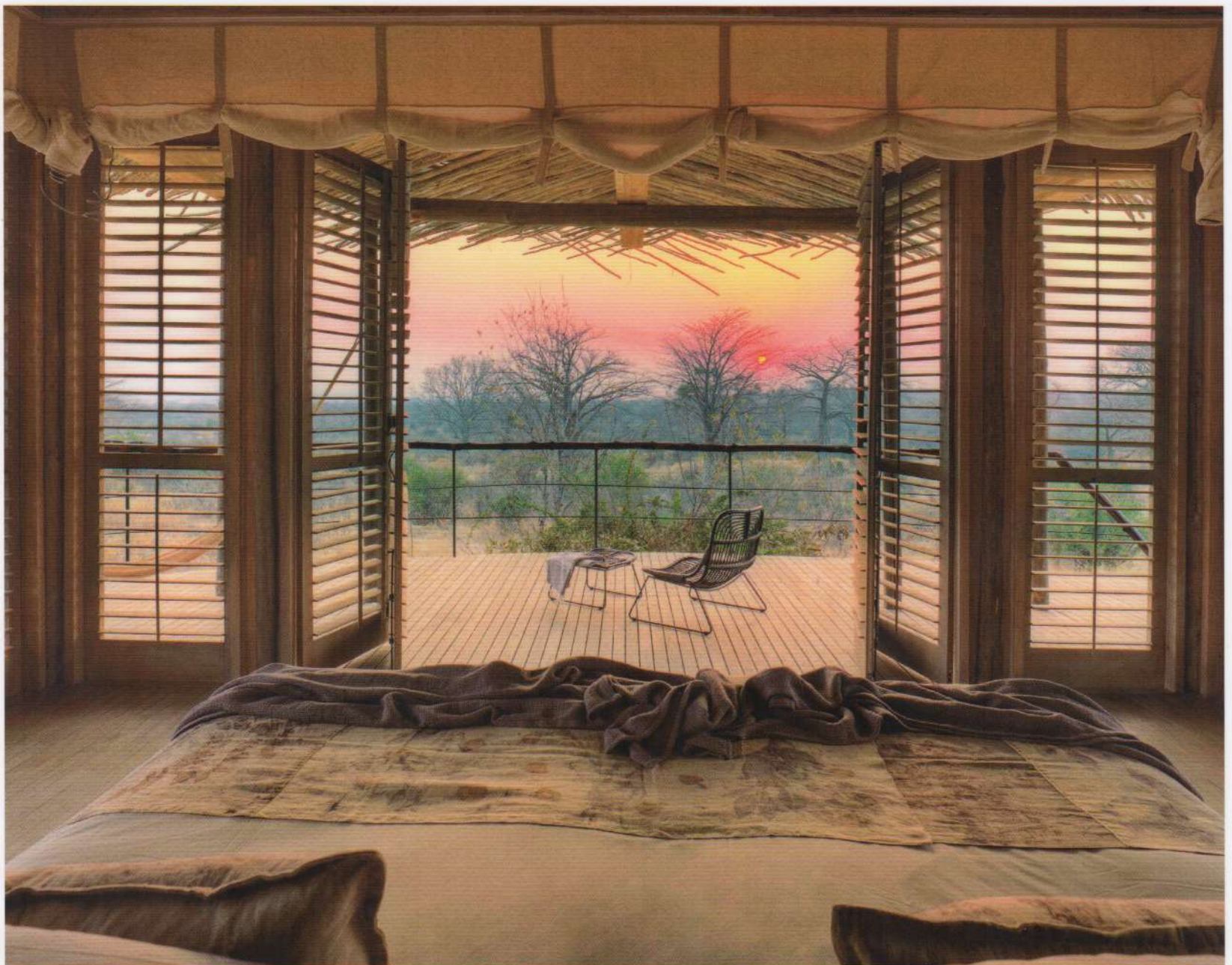


SLEEPER

GLOBAL HOTEL DESIGN

JULY | AUGUST 2018



Jabali Ridge

Asilia Africa ventures to the heart of Tanzania's Ruaha National Park with its new safari lodge

Como Uma Canggu

Como's third hotel in Bali takes on the laidback vibe of its surfside location

Rosewood Luang Prabang

Bill Bensley turns storyteller, archivist and treasure hunter at Rosewood's latest outpost in Laos





HOTEL



Gran Hotel Inglés

MADRID

Restoring Madrid's oldest hotel to former glories, Rockwell Group's Madrid studio channels a storied history through a luxuriously contemporary lens.

Words: Kristofer Thomas | Photography: © Eric Laignel

Madrid: 1886. It is summer in the Spanish capital and Don Agustín Ibarra – a popular local entrepreneur and proprietor of the communal Café Inglés – has purchased a large stone-front house under construction in the city's literary quarter, Barrio de las Letras, with the intention of not only establishing Madrid's first hotel, but a new kind of accommodation offer altogether. It will encapsulate an era of immense change; the first to feature a restaurant within its walls, set upon the first street in the city to receive electric lights.

As a spiritual successor to Café Inglés, then a central hub for Madrid's creative community, Gran Hotel Inglés sought to combine the aesthetics and comforts of a broadening luxury class with emergent technologies, offering guests the exoticism of lifts, steam-powered heating and a bathroom on each floor along with furnishings Ibarra spared no sacrifice in acquiring from London.

Through the 20th century, the oldest hotel in Madrid welcomed politicians, writers and artists of Woolf and Matisse's calibre, instilling the capital with its own Gatsby-esque rival to Paris' burgeoning café scene. Surviving the era's political and social



Above: Featuring contemporary twists on historical details, guestrooms are imbued with a residential feel by way of a cool white palette and bespoke furnishings

turbulence, the hotel at 10 Calle de Lobo eventually began to show its age, and natural entropy saw it fall slowly into disrepair. Through two wars – civil and global – the building served as a hospital, with a 1964 refurbishment tidying the scheme and adding bathrooms to each suite, halving the hotel’s key count from 110 to 58 in the process.

The offer was more exclusive, and more in line with the luxury tastes of the time, but the hotel was no longer the unique asset it once was – historic but unremarkable for much of the late-1900s, as the world around caught up and standards of luxury began to accelerate.

But what was once Calle de Lobo is now the bustling Calle Echegaray; and what were once 58 keys are now 48; and where previously stood Agustín Ibarra’s landmark, Gran Hotel Inglés now stands a project with its glories restored through the lens of modernity. Closing its doors in 2012, the property has spent the better part of a decade in a state of chrysalis, undergoing a Rockwell Group-designed reimagining that would see it re-emerge as something new but familiar, indebted to the past but seeking out ideas and aesthetic notes rooted firmly in the present.

“We were in the unique position to tell this story through the design,” explains Eva Longoria, Studio Leader, Rockwell Group Madrid. “Our goal was to celebrate the hotel’s past in a contemporary and luxurious setting that meets the needs of today’s modern traveller. It was really exciting to provide a fresh point of view for the property

that still animates the hotel’s original splendour and celebrates its history as a cultural icon.”

Located on a street that cuts through Madrid’s cultural heart – a short walk from no less than three high-profile museums and galleries – the project assimilates a wealth of local history, art and refinement, drawing ideas both from the tangible city and its aspirational counterpart as imagined by the discerning traveller. Guarded away from the bustle of footsteps and traffic at either end, the first telling gold notes of a luxury hotel present themselves beyond the retained façade, where the vast open-plan lobby celebrates a combination of elegant architecture and affluent splendour.

Encompassing a check-in and concierge desk alongside a central lobby bar and cocktail lounge, the space channels historical notions of luxury through English manor-style chandeliers, accents of gold climbing original heritage columns, and floor-to-ceiling bookshelves in a nod to the hotel’s intellectual past.

“We researched original newspaper clippings and advertisements from the time of the hotel’s opening, and looked to cultural figures that passed through the hotel for inspiration,” Longoria explains in reference to the wealth of ideas that moulded the studio’s design. “The lounge on the west side of the lobby, for example, has antique bronze mirrors with faded historic images of long-ago guests and famous visitors.”





Left: The geometry of the original mouldings has been deconstructed and extended across walls and ceilings **Previous Page:** Chevron flooring supplied by Surco, area rugs and English manor-style chandeliers contribute a sense of historical luxury

The furnishings that punctuate the Surco-manufactured chevron-floor and continue throughout, were designed bespoke by Rockwell Group, ensuring that even the most inconspicuous pieces tie in to the closely considered theme.

“Furnishings and materials were inspired by the luxury and sophistication of the present with nods to the 1920s,” Longoria notes. “The bar dye features a custom black, gold and calacata tiled pattern inspired by Art Deco geometric motifs; seating is comprised of varying sumptuous materials like velvet and leather – creating a series of relaxed social spaces – whilst chevron wood flooring and custom, hand-tufted wool and silk area rugs add to the sense of comfort. We designed this open layout with multiple groupings for people to convene, have a drink, mingle with locals, or work. It’s a meeting point that offers multiple experiences, from day to night.”

At the lobby’s edge, steps lead up to the restaurant, Lobo 8, which occupies the space where one of the first instances of a hotel restaurant once unfolded. Headed up by acclaimed local chef Willy Mora, the menu reinterprets traditional Spanish dishes including Iberian pork cheeks, roasted pigeon, and gazpacho in the context of contemporary fine dining, with Rockwell deploying tables and booths amidst a setting again inspired by



Above: Designed to host groups, the Royal suite features amenities such as an antique bar and drinks trolley

English country estates and exclusive members' clubs. The LobByto bar, meanwhile, offers bite-sized takes and cocktails.

“Every single detail, from the feeling of the space to the level of service, has been designed to deliver an individualised and memorable experience,” Longoria muses. “Gran Hotel Inglés has a fascinating heritage and troves of built-in stories. We pored over the rich history of the hotel’s location – and of the iconic hotel itself – to weave allusions to the past into our design concept with clever details.”

Five guestroom configurations – deluxe, grand deluxe, superior, executive and premium – line the floors above, wherein the thematic core is expanded upon by way of these clever details and accents. Original decorative mouldings have been reassembled to climb walls and spread across ceilings, as if escaping their own era to remind guests of their presence, whilst a palette of pure white with touches of gold and navy blue creates an elegant feel.

Freestanding bathtubs, all-marble showers and Gessi fittings contribute to spacious, lavish bathrooms, with select configurations allowing guests to throw windows open for views of the skyline or a hidden stone courtyard, whilst, topping the hotel, the majestic

Presidential and Royal suites – 93m² and 125m² respectively – have been designed to host groups, with additional bedrooms and living areas, kitted out with antique bars and drinks trolleys.

“Guestrooms imbue a sense of residential comfort with a contemporary twist on historic detailing,” Longoria reflects. “We emphasised characteristic features of 19th century Madrilenian architecture in a modern way, playing with the classic geometry of the moulding by deconstructing it and extending it across the ceiling.”

For a hotel so clearly indebted to its past, great effort has nonetheless been taken in updating the inner workings to satisfy keen historians and wide-eyed travellers alike. The local expertise of Rockwell Group’s Madrid studio and their commitment to authenticity ensures that the spirit of the building’s past is revealed to guests if they seek it, but is rarely forced upon them, the scheme opting for the fascination of detail as opposed to grand statements.

Restoring a cultural icon takes confidence and skill in equal measure, but is a feat handled deftly at Gran Hotel Inglés; tethered to a past which defines it, but looking far ahead when it matters, just as Don Ibarra did, all those years ago.

EXPRESS CHECKOUT: 48 guestrooms | 1 restaurant | 1 bar | 2 meeting rooms | Spa | Library | www.granhotelingles.com
Owner / Operator: Hidden Away Hotels | **Architecture and Interior Design:** Rockwell Group Madrid