



Palazzina Grassi *Venice*

Words: Guy Dittrich Photography: © Davide Maestri

Hotelier Emanuele Garosci has created a boutique property in Venice designed by Philippe Starck.

Behind a classical 16th century façade, where generations of noble and haute-bourgeois Venetian families once lived, Palazzina Grassi's owner and developer Emanuele Garosci has worked with designer Philippe Starck to create a truly memorable hotel.

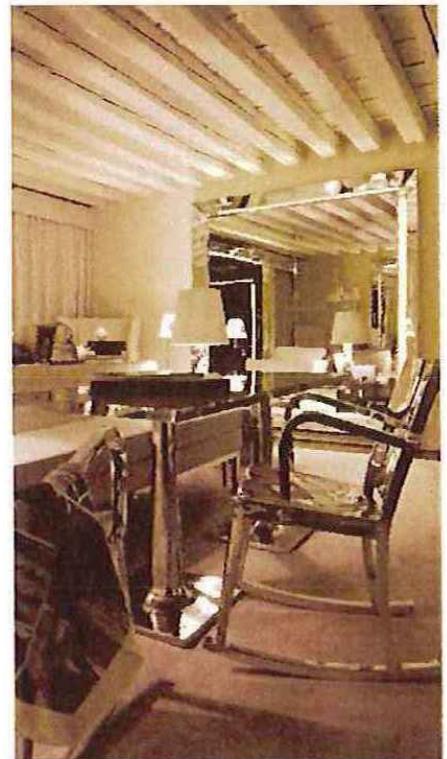
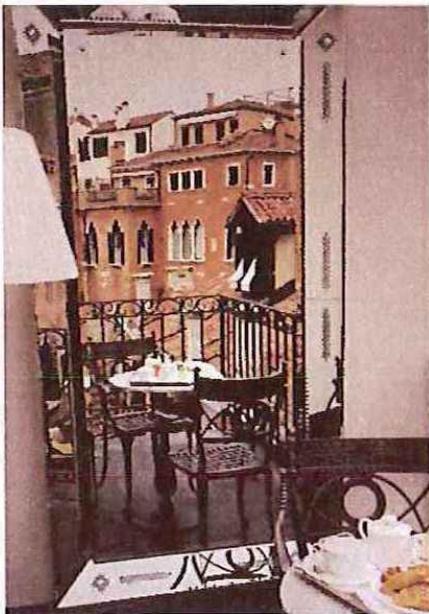
The term 'boutique hotel' is a much abused one, and some of the worst excesses committed in its name have been associated with Philippe Starck. But here, the outrageous

and outlandish impracticality of some of Starck's early hotel projects has been replaced with a playful sense of luxury and comfort.

This hotel fits the boutique label better than most. It is small, with just 25 rooms. It is discrete – no external signage is visible on either the private pier on the Grand Canal, metres from the Ponte dell'Academia, nor the Calle Grassi, the narrow alleyway that runs off the square, Campo Santo Stefano. And it offers personalised, anticipatory service at its very best.

Hailing originally from Turin, Garosci evidently loves Venice, and Starck has four houses across the archipelago. Together they make a good team. "I really wanted to work with [Starck]," explains Garosci. "It was tough and we had to put up with many arguments but the results are worth it."

Many Starck hallmarks are in evidence.



THIS PAGE (ABOVE): Guestrooms are designed in delicate, feminine style with angled silver mirrors, polished chrome furniture and lamps decorated with Venetian style masque motifs OPPOSITE PAGE: PGs Restaurant features glass sculptures and chandeliers by Aristide Najean

The clever use of perspective and long runs of white curtain will be familiar to visitors to any of his previous hotels, as will the impractical hand basins. Water from the Duravit by Starck mixer beats down onto a slab of Corian. There's no plug and the water goes everywhere. The philosophy, according to Garosci, being that as Starck doesn't shave, so why would anyone else want to.

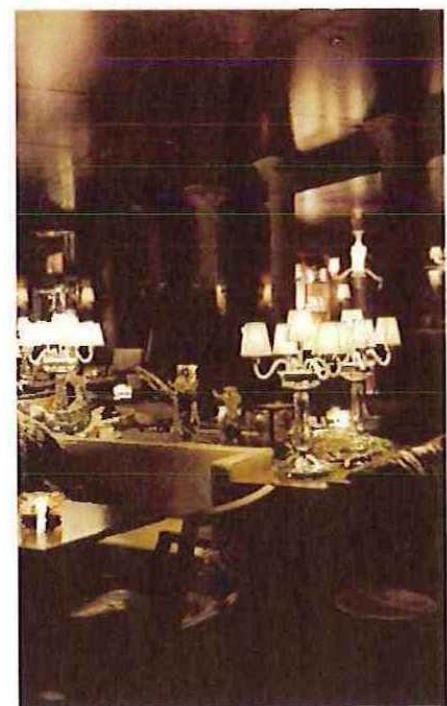
Yet elsewhere, Starck has delivered a design that makes an emotional connection with its guests, creating an authenticity that has appealed to a new generation of local Venetians in need of new stimulation in this increasingly fossilised city, as well as to tourists visiting the historic city.

The heart of the hotel is PG's Restaurant and Bar, a clubby area of low leather seating beneath a mahogany wood-panelled ceiling. This area sits within a columnar framework of original stone pillars, their rough finish a contrast to the many reflective surfaces. On either side are two long, glass-topped counters – one is the bar, the other the show kitchen.

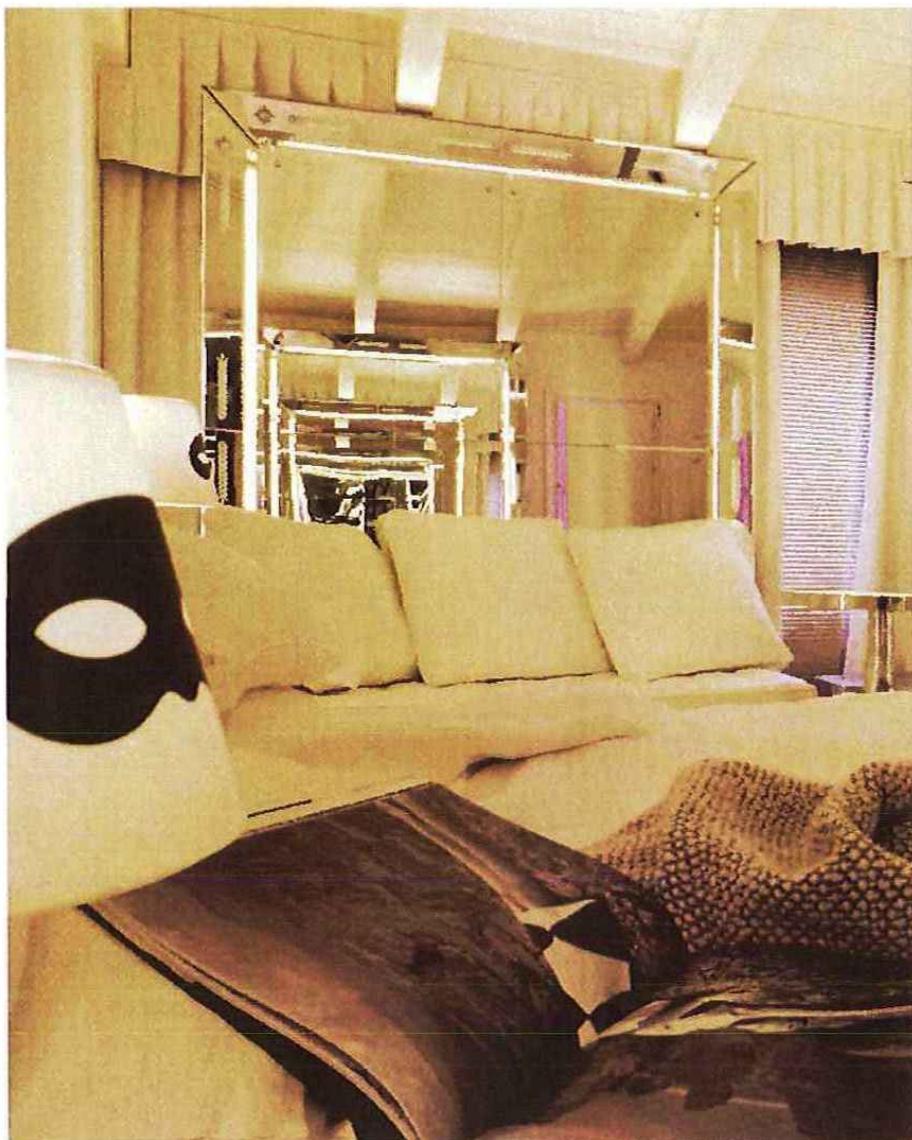
Cashmere shawls are draped on cow-hide upholstered sofas. Delicate wooden framed rocking chairs sit on customised rugs by Carpet Reloaded of Milan, alongside artistic glass sculptures and chandeliers by local artist Aristide Najean. Witty touches include the cheerful little deep red crabs that peer up here and there. Walls lined with slim, reclaimed Venetian bricks lead to a further lounge and bar area, the Krug Lounge.

The lightness and femininity of the guestrooms provides a contrast to the dark, atmospheric public areas. Certainly they are a huge step away from the usual brocades and damasks that would be expected in Venice. A backlit mirror with an etched- and cut-offset frame is held within a chrome surround on every wall. Made by Fratelli Barbini from Murano, there are 289 of these unique pieces in total, all using a new technology, developed in partnership with Politecnico di Torino and Delta Impianti, that allows the LED backlighting to be dimmed.

Other Venetian design details include ▶



HOTEL REVIEW



LEFT: The F Suite with its wood beamed sloping roof shows the hotel's marriage of ancient and contemporary, romantic design
ABOVE: Palazzina Grassi is housed in two adjoining historical buildings, one dating back to the 16th century

► the all-white terrazzo flooring with hand-selected pebbles laid by one of the few remaining tradesmen skilled in this time-honoured technique. Bedside lampshades are decorated with an eye mask design typical of Venice. There is a delicacy to the design, seen in mirrored or transparent wardrobes, the underlit moonstone onyx tables, the Fornasetti chairs and the bathroom amenities perfectly packaged in a custom-designed box.

The walls of the public areas have the beautiful lustre of Stucco Veneziano plaster in three colours for the corridors leading to different room types. Deep red for suites;

mauve for junior suites; citron for superior rooms.

Work on the two adjoining historical buildings, one dating back to the 16th century, was completed in just seven and a half months, a remarkable feat for Venice, due in the most part to the fact that the building was already structurally sound. Although Classical references abound in the hotel's public spaces, the interior is otherwise geometrically designed. Venice has never been seen through such a highly modern prism. ■

EXPRESS CHECKOUT

Palazzina Grassi
San Marco 3247
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www.palazzinagrasi.com

→ 25 guestrooms
☎ PGs Restaurant
☪ Krug Bar & Terrace

Owner / Operator: Emanuele Garosci
Design & Architecture: Philippe Starck
Contractor: General Building SAS Turin