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A place of pure theatre

La Residenza Napoleone III captures the essence of Rome for Jeroen Bergmans

Although I've seen literally hundreds of hotel rooms over a decade of travel writing (and been very impressed by many), it's rare that I'm truly bowled over by the swankiest of suites.

Even if mini-bars are stocked with my favourite champagne, the sheets are Frette linen and the plasma screen spans half a wall, luxury hotel rooms are often a tick-box affair whereby the most fashionable amenities of the moment adorn a generous space. They rarely nail that elusive "home from home" essence that is the holy grail of high-end hospitality. Neither do they attain the other mantra that has become so fashionable of late, "a sense of place". La Residenza Napoleone III at the end of legendary shopping street Via Condotti, however, captures the very essence of Rome and goes well beyond ticking all the boxes that define luxury hotel rooms these days.

Now, my choice of "Best Hotel Room in the World Ever" has a lot to do with where I learned about luxury travel. Working under the watchful eye of

designer-hotelier Anouska Hempel when I was fresh out of university, I got a taste early on for opulent interiors. Rooms at Blakes, and its minimalist cousin, the Hempel, were an immaculate symphony of colour, rich textiles, exquisitely-sourced original artwork, fresh flowers and stacks of cushions at every turn.

La Residenza has the same extraordinary attention to detail, as owner Princess Letizia Ruspoli's taste is impeccable. Its palatial proportions are not unlike the sumptuous rooms in *The Talented Mr Ripley* and *Roman Holiday*. Spanning two floors of the powerful Ruspoli family's 16th-century palazzo, it has a cosy, garret-style hideaway with a roof terrace on the top floor, and a small twin room for children. But this decadent *pied à terre* is really all about the master bedroom and its two adjoining salons - a suite worthy of its most famous resident, Emperor Napoleon III.

There's no posy lobby culture at La Residenza. In fact, there's no lobby at all. Nevertheless, checking in there is

pure theatre. The 8ft, 16th-century wooden doors open on to a typical Roman residential courtyard and a maid is there to take up your luggage in a rickety lift, leaving you to scale the steps of a massive marble staircase, hewn from ancient Roman columns, which is studied by art historians as one of the *meraviglie di Roma* (wonders of Rome). The floors are tiled with the Ruspoli family crest featuring five pillars of salt, which you can spot above the gateway to the Piazza del Popolo, and the corridors and stairwells are lined with the marble busts of emperors and statesmen.

La Residenza's small front door opens on to the dining room bedecked with solid silver antique candelabras and museum-quality oil paintings by contemporaries of Canaletto. The adjoining drawing room is equally lavish but the antiques have been cleverly kitted out for the contemporary traveller. A portrait opens to reveal a flat-screen TV and a walnut desk houses a fax machine and internet connection.

But most impressive of all is the

bedroom itself. Hand-painted, beamed ceilings and window shutters have been meticulously restored to their original splendour. Two sections of silk-lined wall open up to reveal a bijou, pink marble bathroom and a kitchenette. Six huge oil paintings of



Luxury Bed and unique headboard

bucolic country scenes line the walls and one of them forms the headboard of the bed. And this is a bed of princess and the pea proportions. Beneath silk valances and stacks of antique, embroidered cushions, the enormous mattress is enveloped with thick, linen sheets monogrammed with the initials of Princess Letizia. A canopy of antique silks conceals a projector that shows films and satellite TV programmes on a screen that descends from the ceiling.

The two bedside tables and the antique writing desk across the room are crammed with pads of embossed paper, Mont Blanc pens, scented candles and ceramic pots of fresh posies of cyclamen and jasmine. Instead of a printed pillow menu, you get a stack of them in assorted shapes and sizes.

There's no restaurant at La Residenza but a chef is available to prepare a gourmet feast if you ever want to entertain in the stately dining room. Princess Letizia also acts as concierge-in-absentia as she leaves guests a list of her favourite dining

places in Rome.

A bottle of excellent Chianti from vineyard in Tuscany is a fine tute for the standard mini-bar. you crave a stronger drink, the maid, dressed in *Gosford Park* white French frills and bonnet, always on call.

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Details

The suite at La Residenza Napoleone costs €1,400 per night
tel: +39 347-733 7098;
www.residenza-napoleone.com
Jeroen Bergmans was a guest of La Residenza Napoleone.
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