

NOTA BENE | destination review SPECIAL EDITION

NB | Revisited

NB | Rome

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The search is still on for a valid alternative to the increasingly expensive Hotel de Russie (+39 06 32 8881), but neither the Aleph (+39 06 422 901) or the Exedra (+39 06 48 9381) – twin scions of the rampant new Boscolo Group – quite cut the mustard. Both fall down on service. But we do like the new executive suite number 341 at the Exedra, which was inaugurated in May 2004 (the first occupant was Giorgio Armani): it's cool and spacious, with a Bond-ish sixties retro touch.

The Eternal City's new design behemoth is the Radisson SAS hotel (+39 06 44 48 41). Formerly called the es.hotel, this recently entered into management agreement with Swedish hotel group Radisson involves "a comprehensive brand review and refurbishment project". Quite what this will entail for the hotel is uncertain. If the rebranding improves the service (the es had some of the most shambolic greeters in Rome) it cannot be a bad thing.

When it opened last year, new centro storico restaurant Trattoria (+39 06 6830 1427) was stronger on design (cool Nordic, softened by an abundance of natural materials including string, copper, and leaves) than cuisine. That all changed in spring 2004 when brilliant Sicilian chef Filippo La Mantia was brought in. La Mantia takes Sicilian standards and gives

them his own creative twist; the results vary from intriguing to delicious.

Baby, the new restaurant of the Aldrovandi Palace hotel (+39 06 322 3993) is the first away-from-home venture of Alfonso Laccarino, whose Amalfi Coast restaurant Don Alfonso 1890 has been attracting gourmet plaudits for over a decade. Baby's design is sober and contemporary, with tasty Mediterranean dishes based on fresh ingredients obsessively sourced from small producers. In summer the restaurant spills out onto the terrace overlooking the pool, which is delightful.

Obikà (+39 06 683 2630), Rome's first "mozzarella bar," is one of those places where the waiters are so busy checking their reflections in the mirror that they tend to forget one's order. It's okay if you stick to the mozzarella, but otherwise disappointing. The salads are nothing special and the wine list unoriginal. A more successful novelty is L'Arcangelo (+39 06 321 0992), a restaurant in the Prati area near the Vatican which feels like it's been around for years. The ambience is classy neighbourhood osteria, but not many local trats have a separate foie gras menu!

The sumptuous Residenza Napoleon III (+39 347 733 7098) in Palazzo Ruspoli – still the city's top luxury apartment rental – has a two-berth baby sister, the Roof Garden Suite.

