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HOTEL DESIGN, DEVELOPMENT & ARCHITECTURE

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ANDAZ
MARCEL WANDERS'
BOOKISH BOUTIQUE

QT - SYDNEY
A DEPARTMENT STORE
DOWN UNDER CONVERTED

DAS STUE
BERLIN'S DANISH
EMBASSY REINVENTED

BALI LOCATION REPORT • TOKYO STATION HOTEL • THE ORCHARD • VANDER - LJUBLJANA

A variety of designers – including German architects Axthelm-Rolvien, Spanish firm LVG Arquitectura and celebrated designer Patricia Urquiola – have been involved in the conversion of Berlin’s former Danish embassy to a luxury hotel.

Das Stue Berlin

Words: Gay Dittrich Photography: www.rzsh.de

Hotel interior design projects are often organised around a central idea that holds the whole concept together. Das Stue, an 80-room hotel in resurgent western Berlin adjacent to the city’s world-renowned zoo, succeeds for the most part in overcoming the lack of such a single concept. Nevertheless the work of many different hands is evident in distinct areas of the hotel.

Firstly, take the involvement of Potsdam-based architects Axthelm-Rolvien who were originally appointed to complete all the architectural work and the interior design. This included dealing with the complicated permissions required to renovate the curving arc of the historic element of the former Danish Embassy, designed by Emil Schaudt in 1958. Columns had to be strengthened to accept the additional load of two new floors of guestrooms. The repair of the damage to the travertine-clad staircase either side of the

entrance required careful matching. A notable success in the heritage battle was the insertion of a cut-through into the entrance hall wall to connect it with the grander staircase behind.

More striking however is the cubic geometry of their modern insertion embraced by the curved arms of the old building. “It was our intention to contradict the old architecture, so our addition had to be strong,” explains partner Hanner Rolvien. Linked to the historic building by a single-floor extension housing the majority of the hotel’s public spaces, their sculptural trapezoidal tower includes a remarkable cantilevered section. The cantilever “preserved the view of the zoo from the historic building behind,” continues Rolvien, also allowing for the maximisation of the square metres permitted on the plot. Part of this new volume is occupied by the angular yet calming whiteness of a spa with three treatment rooms. A walkway across the small pool leads to ▶





OPPOSITE PAGE: The staircase and surrounding landings have been converted to a three-storey library where elegant original parquet floors, French doors, and restored hardware are contrasted with Patricia Urquiola's eye-catching, comfortable seating arrangements. Guests can read an array of books from Taschen Verlag on the topics of art, architecture, creative culture and zoology

► a sauna suspended above the water and disguised as a staircase.

Axthelm-Rolvien's treatment of the façade of this powerful new architecture was originally to be used as a device to link both buildings. White concrete panels covering the extension have been etched by specialists, Hering Bau, with the crisp detail of a textile-like pattern. This pattern was to be repeated in guestrooms. However towards the end of a lengthy construction process, the owners decided on different interior designers. The guestroom fit out became the responsibility of a second party, Spanish company LNG Arquitectura. They used the cocooning 'canopy' arrangement proposed by Axthelm-Rolvien but replaced the floral pattern from the façade with wood veneer and the link with the modern annex was lost.

Irregular floorplans for rooms in both buildings create a sense of intrigue. Exploration is encouraged. Suites on the Bell façade of the original building are vast, with five-metre high ceilings. The pared-down luxury of guestrooms is paired with modern technology such as automated blinds for the floor-to-ceiling windows, and Apple technology played through huge, flatscreen TVs in junior suites. Other positive aspects include the fabulous views, with fully opening French doors, and task seating from B&B Italia.

In places, the furnishings and finishes are not of such high quality and there are areas where functionality has not been fully thought through. For example, an under-basin cupboard door flaps down directly into hanging hand towels. The surfeit of patterns (organic shapes in rugs, striped bolsters, diamond patterned bed throws) can be a little overwhelming.

Public areas are more consistently realised, thanks to the guiding hand of Patricia Urquiola, again a late appointment. She adds a different strand to the design story ►





► with deft touches in the hotel's public spaces. Her interiors are at once engagingly comfortable and yet sophisticated. Bright splashes of coloured carpet and upholstery enliven a neutral background of the original stone and wood. Many of the furnishings are Urquiola's own designs. Other objects, like leather animals in the shape of rhinos, hippos and buffalos that reference the neighbouring zoo, were curated by her.

Copper is also used as a signature material throughout the public areas. The hotel's bar is copper-clad, signage is on copper sheet and the main decorative element of the fine dining restaurant, Cinco, is a ceiling display of 'zasapiama' copper pots and pans interspersed with Tom Dixon copper shade lamps. The use of verdigris within the hotel's collateral is evidence this copper theme has been well thought through. The pale green colour decorates the pages of menus that are attached to simple wooden boards by similarly coloured elastic. Other neat design details in the restaurant include an angled mirror above a bright yellow preparation table in Cinco, allowing diners to see the action. CCTV cameras in the rest of the kitchen allow acclaimed Catalan chef Paco Perez to keep an eye on things when he is not in residence.

Das Stue is the first project outside Spain for Michelin-starred Perez, who also oversees The Casual – a sharply triangular space, where started walls and skylights frame a

tapas-oriented, all-day-dining experience.

To the rear of the hotel, a more formally appointed private dining room faces the zoo. Opened in February, the Del Esage meeting space of four adjoining suites can be connected for an array of private or public uses.

A bronze crocodile sculpture by Paris-based artist Quentin Garel, its jaws gaping beneath a wave-like lighting installation of small globes in the entrance hall, is an odd welcome to any hotel but striking nonetheless. Urquiola's cosy 'libraries' on the landings of the grand staircase are perfect for private meetings or as quiet spots where guests can cosy up with a book from the Taschen-stocked shelves. Urquiola also helped to curate the original black and white fashion portrait photography, from the private collection of one of the owners, that adds yet another different layer within the hotel.

Das Stue translates directly from the Danish for 'living room' although the owners have interpreted this less literally as a 'Drawing Room' – "the space in any well-appointed house where people relax, socialise, entertain, and discuss." The result is a sophisticated hotel in tune with its surroundings in Berlin's Embassy Quarter. As with many a diplomatic negotiation, the various design perspectives at play in Das Stue may not be entirely resolved, but they agree to differ in a quiet, grown-up manner. ■

LEFT: Guestrooms features bedside table lamps by Metalarte, ESP task seating by Kai Design Ltd, Scantling Standing lamps by Mathis Huber for Moroso, and bedside tables by May (OPPOSITE) (TOP LEFT) The bar and lounge area include many of Patricia Urquiola's own designs for Italian companies such as Moroso as well as those of others (TOP RIGHT) Whimsical animal sculptures in wire and leather reference the zoo next door to the hotel (BOTTOM) Cinco restaurant features a dramatic overhead display of copper pots and pans paired with copper lamps by Tom Dixon. Elsewhere small dot-like tables by Dutch design firm Polk Pottius continue the copper theme.



EXPRESS CHECKOUT

Das Stue Hotel
Dankelstrasse 7, 10787 Berlin
Germany
Tel: +49 30 311 722-0
www.das-stue.com

◀ 80 guestrooms and suites
 ✎ Cacao (fine dining) The Casual (all-day dining)
 T Bar, Lounge
 ♻ Spa & Swimming Pool
 + Del Esage meeting area (4 suites)

Owner / Operator: Hotel Development Betriebsgesellschaft mbH
 Architect: Architekturbüro von Arntzen
 Interior Design (guestrooms): LVC Architecture Interior Design (public areas): Patricia Urquiola