

DESIGN

ITALIANATE UPDATE

TWO NEW FORTE HOTELS
BURNISH GILDED AGE DESIGN.

Contributed by **DEBBIE CARLSON**





Exterior of the bar at Masseria Torre Maizza

MASSERIA TORRE MAIZZA, PUGLIA



Bar interior

“The eye of the owner is very important”: It’s a translated Italian saying that Sir Rocco Forte refers to when discussing what sets London-based Rocco Forte Hotels apart from other luxury brands.

The London-based hotel company is focusing on growth, with about a dozen properties open and a few more teed up, including hotels in Sicily and Shanghai. Forte says with his Italian origins and business relationships, he continues to look for opportunities in that country.

Being a family-run group brings a special atmosphere to their lodgings, and Forte credits the vision of Olga Polizzi, the group’s design director and his sister, to both differentiate their brand and attract clientele. When designing a hotel, Polizzi hand-picks local artwork and carefully considers location and history to center each hotel in place, “which is different from the average corporate style of hotel,” Forte says.

In May, London-based Rocco Forte Hotels opened two new hotels in Italy: Hotel de la Ville in Rome and Masseria Torre Maizza in Puglia. They expand the group’s Italian footprint to five, with another set to open in 2020.

Their primary market is Americans, representing about 45% of their customers across the board, Forte says. Their aim is to create an attractive, comfortable feel that resonates with singles, couples and family groups of all ages, he says.

MASSERIA TORRE MAIZZA, PUGLIA

Located in Puglia’s Savellettri di Fasano, just minutes from the Adriatic Sea, is Masseria Torre Maizza, a renovated 16th-century farmhouse. Inspired by property’s orchards and 1,000-year-old olive trees, Polizzi created a rustic design using natural materials to evoke a laid-back, peaceful feeling.

Guest room windows are covered by shutters and linen panels embroidered with the initials TM. Rather than using bright colors on the wall, Polizzi chose statement headboards for beds and cushions decorated with birds and flowers. Working with local artisans, she added oversized ceramic plates to hang over the beds and sofas, and added books of poetry and short



Deluxe junior suite sitting area

MASSERIA TORRE



Deluxe junior suite bath

MAIZZA, PUGLIA

stories highlighting local writers. “I’m very interested in having books in the rooms, so people can pick up something and read for a half hour and put it down again,” she says.

There are 28 guest rooms and 12 suites, including the Torre Suite, a two-bedroom, 860-square-foot space whose private, panoramic terrace overlooks the Adriatic. All rooms have private gardens, and deluxe rooms have plunge pools, too.

There is a main swimming pool and a private beach club, with Irene Forte, the groups wellness director, overseeing the spa.

The existing restaurant, now called Carosello, had a “rather nice black and white floor,” Polizzi says, that inspired the rest of the space, using black and white fabrics and patterns. Local artists made six metal chandeliers for the restaurant, which serves traditional Apulian cuisine, using an amber-glass olive leaf motif.

Franco Girasoli, guest experience manager, says Carmelo, the masseria’s 16th-century barn-turned-bar, is a guest favorite for its daily live music and entertainment for the aperitivo. (Private dinners can also be organized in the orchard.) Other F&B highlights include the Sunset Terrace, featuring a panoramic roof bar serving cocktails and Italian wine, while the pool bar/restaurant serves drinks and light bites, including pizza served from the onsite wooden pizza oven.

The average room rate is €670, plus VAT.



Junior suite



Junior suite bedroom

HOTEL DE LA VILLE, ROME

Polizzi worked with interior designer and architect Tommaso Ziffer to give Hotel de la Ville, set at the top of Rome's famous Spanish steps, a different feel from their minimalist-designed Hotel de Russie (at the bottom of the Spanish steps, coincidentally, also designed with Ziffer). "We thought, well, why not the Grand Tour, and do something rather different than what we've done before," Polizzi says.

They mixed traditional Italian artifacts like statues and columns that might have been purchased by a Gilded Age traveler on a European tour, but gave spaces a modern feel using bright colors, sometimes clashing, and prints on colorful wallpaper.

"Some of the rooms have bright greens and blues, not what you would have thought of in the 18th and 19th century, but the furniture is traditional," Polizzi says. Many rooms have private terraces adding to the sense of place. "The feel is very Roman, yet there is this hint of the English gentleman," she says.

Prior to the renovation, the hotel had 190 rooms, but changes lowered room count considerably, opening up the space and bringing in light, Forte says. The hotel has 89 guest rooms, plus 15 suites, including the presidential suite with a terrace overlooking the city.

Irene Forte, the group's wellness director and Forte's daughter, oversees the spa. Inspired by



Sitting room of the Suite De La Ville

DESIGN



Bathroom of the Panoramic Suite



Panoramic Suite bedroom



Dining room of the Suite De La Ville

HOTEL DE LA VILLE, ROME

Sicily, there are six treatment rooms and is said to be the most technically advance spa in Rome.

Francesco Roccatò, the Hotel de la Ville's general manager, says guests are drawn to the spa and the rooftop bar, Cielo, located on the sixth and seventh (and top) floor, with its sunset DJ sessions. The Julep Herbal & Vermouth Bar, inspired by the spice route, is also popular. "You don't pick cocktails from a menu, but the menu is a box with spices sachets (to make drinks)," Roccatò says.

The hotel has two other restaurants, one on the ground floor and one on the second floor that opens onto a courtyard hidden from the street, which Polizzi says is very quiet despite being in the middle of Rome.

The average room rate is €525, plus VAT.