



# Hotel Motto

## VIENNA

Twenties Vienna meets Twenties Paris at restaurateur Bernd Schlacher's new hotel in the Austrian capital.

Words: Rick Jordan  
Photography: Courtesy of Motto Group

First-time visitors navigating the landmarks of Vienna's central Ringstrasse could be forgiven for thinking the city's architectural heritage begins and ends with the Austro-Hungarian Empire – all those glacial big-hitters brocaded in imperial Baroque and Neoclassicism. But Vienna has always embraced a rich variety of ideas, and any architectural tour worth its salt would surely include Hans Hollein's mid-1980s Haas Haus, an audacious postmodernist turret of mirrored glass that reflects the medieval skyscraper of St Stephen's Cathedral opposite, and the blank-faced Goldman & Salatsch building by Adolf Loos on Michaelerplatz. Loos was a key figure in European Modernism, stripping away exterior decoration and introducing interlocking interior design with a passion for sumptuous materials. He designed – but never built – a house for Jazz Age icon Josephine Baker and wrote essays on 'Why a Man Should be Well Dressed', arguing that the English tailored suit was the most versatile, unfussy clothing for a modern man.

There's something of Loos in almost every contemporary building in the world, really, and while the Neoclassical statues on the exterior of Hotel Motto would make him queasy, he would certainly approve of the sheer quality of materials. A suit tailored in grey Prince of Wales check – pink pocket square neatly folded in breast pocket – would go rather nicely in the lobby, where murals of pink-uniformed bellboys and affable cheetahs roam the walls, a little like characters from Kay Thompson's Eloise books, but actually painted by Rome-based studio Chez Dade, also behind the decor at San Pietro in Positano and Hotel de Ricci in the Italian capital.

Hotel Motto opened in late 2021 after five years of design, renovation and construction, delayed by the pandemic. It's the first hotel from Bernd Schlacher, a man known in Vienna as a successful restaurateur, whose sleek, white Motto am Fluss appeared on the southern bank of the Donaukanal in 2010. Schlacher says the Fluss design was a modern homage to





The fabric used to cover headboards and wardrobe doors is a Motto signature, picked out by Vienna-based fashion designer Lena Hoschek

Venice's canalside Hotel Bauer, but turned to Paris for inspiration at Motto, in particular a favourite hangout in Le Marais, the Christian Lacroix-designed Hôtel du Petit Moulin. "I wanted to create a bubble where Twenties Vienna meets Twenties Paris," he explains. "That period between the wars when everyone wanted to party." Schlacher bid for a few Art Deco chandeliers from The Ritz Paris at auction, which he had reproduced, along with the sofa in the lobby, the lights in the lift and a couple of wall lights, but the rest of the hotel's design is a celebration of Austrian craftsmanship. "The design attends to every detail, right down to the ventilation grill. The goal was to build a bridge between the 1920s and the 2020s, using Austrian artisanry in the same way it was 100 years ago when that still meant something, in the process supporting local metal workers, locksmiths, upholsterers and carpenters."

There's been a hotel on this corner of Mariahilfer Strasse – now the city's main shopping street – since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which by 1872 had become the Hotel Kummer, and in 1904 was more or less rebuilt while keeping its slanted and oversized corners. Josef

Strauss, son of waltz composer Johann, was born here in 1827, and the property later became a popular café and society hangout for painters, writers and actors. As Hotel Kummer, it was the inspiration for the setting in *The Hotel New Hampshire*, the bestselling 1981 novel by John Irving, who had studied in Vienna in the early 1960s under Günter Grass and often returned to the city in his fiction.

For his reimagined retreat, Schlacher turned to Vienna-based architect Arkan Zeytinoglu to realise his vision. Zeytinoglu has worked with Sir Terence Conran on *The Guesthouse*, also in the capital, and on the Austrian pavilion for Shanghai Expo 2010. For Motto, he restored the exterior with its Neoclassical statues and columns, while completely gutting and replacing the interior, adding an extra floor and a two-storey barrel-vaulted roof with dormer windows. Zeytinoglu also reorganised the main staircase so the lobby can be reached from both Mariahilfer Strasse and Schadekgasse, while a piano nobile on the first floor acts as a Wiener Salon for private dinners and events. Certainly the most striking feature is the diamond-shaped white lattice grid that fronts the top-





Guestrooms channel a sense of lyrical Romanticism, bringing together tasselled floor lights, cocktail stands and Deco-style mirrored tables



floor restaurant and bar, Chez Bernard, which brims with green foliage and Mid-Century seating such as Thonet chairs. On the floor, solid oak parquet was laid in a star shape to reflect the dome overhead, while steps lead up to the rooftop bar – the final piece of the hotel to open in Spring 2022 – with a sweeping zinc countertop and cityscape views.

“The inspiration here is a historical one,” says Zeytinoglu. “As there was an exchange of ideas between late 19<sup>th</sup> century Vienna and Paris of the same era, many elements can still be traced today. In this context, history, tradition and handcraft were revived. That was the motivation for us to create all the furniture from scratch, along with the fabrics, textiles, patterns, doorknobs and ceramics – we wanted to preserve its authenticity.”

That authenticity can be found in the spiralling oak bannister that curves down the seven-floor stairwell, atop paperclip-like metal rails and terrazzo tiles, and in the brass arrow above the elevator, pointing to floor numbers but also to a lyrical Romanticism found throughout the 83 guestrooms and eight suites with their parquet





floors, pull-chain toilets and tasselled floor lights. Showers are encased in industrial-chic frames of steel and glass, and there are angular brass reading lights, marble-topped consoles, cocktail stands and Deco-style mirrored tables. Along with the showpiece staircase, most original pieces were designed by Zeytinoglu himself, working with small, often family-run artisanal firms. Gander, for example, from East Tyrol, created much of the furniture and fabrics, drawing on historic prints for inspiration, while South Tyrol's Small Lichtstudio Eisenkeil made the bespoke designs for the 1920s-style bedroom lights. The shower tiles – a brown and white geometric pattern, also found in the lobby – came from Spanish manufacturer Cevica.

Meanwhile, the fabric used to cover the headboards and wardrobe doors is a Motto signature, which guests will spot being worn by staff around the hotel. It's a vintage print on dark grey silk with lush tropical flowering trees and birds, and was picked out by Vienna-based fashion designer Lena Hoschek, who used it on Hawaiian shirts, skirts and dresses combined with Carhartt trousers and Air Jordans. Hoschek, who

interned with Vivienne Westwood, mixes traditional forms such as the dirndl with a rock'n'roll sensibility – her designs have been worn by celebrities like Katy Perry, Lana Del Rey and Dita von Teese. "Vienna is a city very much influenced by the Art Nouveau era," she explains. "Art Nouveau drew a line over every object, from street lamps to tableware, so I thought it would be good to dress the staff in the interior prints. I didn't want them to look too formal because while Motto is a marvellously sophisticated hotel, there's no stiffness."

While lockdown delayed the opening, it also gave the team breathing space to consider different approaches. Schlacher had the brainwave to launch a standalone Motto Brot patisserie and café on the Mariahilfer Strasse side – something of a novelty for a sweet-toothed city yet to embrace the hipster coffee shop – selling sourdough croissants and baguettes as well as upcycling unsold bread into the hotel's signature beer. With global hospitality names lining up to open in Vienna – both Rosewood and Mandarin Oriental arrive this summer – Hotel Motto represents a homegrown design ethos that should be cherished. Here, at least, it's possible to have your cake and eat it.



#### EXPRESS CHECK-OUT

Owner: Bernd Schlacher

Operator: Motto Group

Architecture: Arkan Zeytinoglu

Interior Design: Bernd Schlacher

[www.hotelmotto.at](http://www.hotelmotto.at)