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DESTINATIONS

ROMA

AFTER 2,774 YEARS,
SHE'S STILL HERE
TO WELCOME YOU

BY SHARRI WHITING DE MASI



THE HASSLER ROMA, a member of The Leading Hotels of the World, is located in the heart of Rome's City Center, peering down at the Spanish Steps.

As the world steps out after more than a year at home, dedicated travelers are yearning to recapture the pleasures of their first — or 10th — trip to Rome, where perspective is everything. After 2,774 years, the Eternal City has learned to shake off turmoil, never losing her special ambiance.

Recently, we welcomed the re-opening of two of our favorite Grand Dame hotels, which are ready for guests: the inestimable **Hassler Roma** and the newly renovated **Sofitel Rome Villa Borghese**. What better way to enjoy the splendor of the city than from the roofs of these two high altitude properties?

The Hassler Roma, a member of The Leading Hotels of the World, has been peering down at the Spanish Steps for almost a century and a half. Silver-haired Roberto Wirth, scion of two European hotel families, is sole owner and GM. Over the last 40 years, he's managed to juggle the tasks of keeping up-to-date, protecting the heritage of Rome's most venerable hotel, and welcoming Audrey, Ingrid and Princess Di, among many others.

With 87 rooms and suites, renovation is an on-going pursuit at the Hassler. The most famous is Suite 610, the Presidential Suite San Pietro. The warm wood paneling was a favorite of Audrey Hepburn, who stayed there during the filming of "Roman Holiday" and many times after that. There is a huge bathroom flooded with light, a panoramic terrace, half bath and dining and living rooms. This sixth-floor suite can be connected to a Grand Deluxe Double room.

Writer Ken Follett, a man dedicated to history, has stayed in the Penthouse Villa Medici Suite. This suite has one full and one half bath, one bedroom, dining and living rooms, and an expansive (1,300 square feet) terrace overlooking the city.

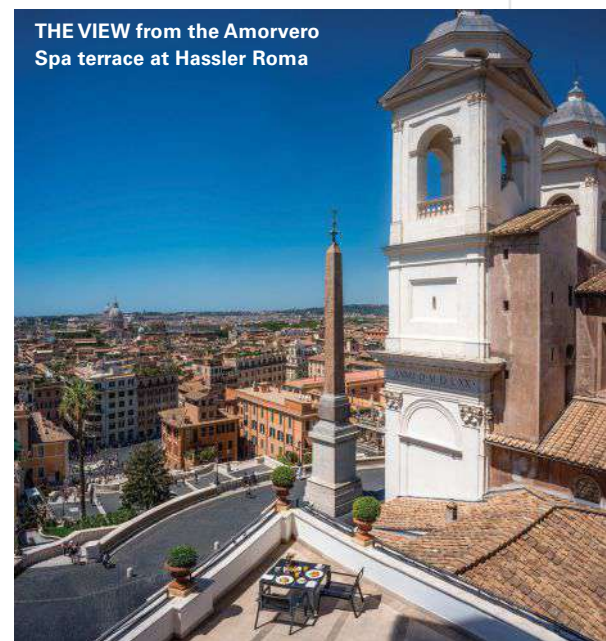
Room 405 is a Grand Deluxe Double. Like most rooms here, it has a walk-in wardrobe and large bathroom with separate tub and shower. There is a view over the Spanish steps. Like many rooms and junior suites, there are many decorative mirrors in Room 405, reflecting the magical light of the city.

Room 403 is the only corner Junior Suite, with three large windows overlooking Roma and containing a spacious sitting area. Note: About 80 percent of the rooms are stocked with coffee machines. For

the others, machines are available upon request. It's an electricity/old building thing. Of course, room service is 24 hours.

Even those who aren't guests at the hotel may aspire to a meal at Imagó, where the views of Roma are as superb as the food. Roberto Wirth took a chance on a very young chef, Andrea Antonini, and the results have been a Michelin star and a devoted following. The menu is described as "unconventional Italian," defined as familiar fresh, seasonal ingredients used in imaginative ways.

There is a private terrace for guests only on the seventh floor, which service drinks and light meals. Downstairs, there is the intimate Hassler Bar, the Hassler Bistrot, and the light-filled Palm Court. Keep in mind that Imagó is closed Sundays and Mondays, while the others are open seven days.



THE VIEW from the Amorvero Spa terrace at Hassler Roma

For those wishing to use the Spa or beauty salon, it's a good idea to check in advance of arrival. Depending upon the situation, there may be limited appointments available. Go to hotelhasslerroma.com and click on beauty & wellness. For special requests or plans, contact Chiara Zaccaria (c.zaccaria@hotelhassler.it; 011-393-929-586-965), senior sales manager of the Hassler.

The open-air rooftop terrace at the **Sofitel Rome Villa Borghese** is a favored spot in town to enjoy an aperitivo while watching starlings soar across sunset-pink skies. The view includes the forested Villa

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Medici, plus the tiled rooftops, cupolas and monuments of the city. Dinner (and breakfast) is inside the glass-walled Settimo restaurant, which features Roman and international cuisine. Executive Chef is Giuseppe D'Alessio.

The hotel, in the heart of the '60s La Dolce Vita neighborhood, was completely

renovated just before the pandemic and is much lighter and more comfortable than when we visited a decade ago. GM Edoardo Giuntoli says the atmosphere is a combination of Roman and French sensibilities. The Sofitel has 71 rooms and seven suites. It's within easy walking distance of the Spanish Steps and Via Condotti in one direction and the American Embassy and Via Veneto in the other.

Room 509 reminded us of the Flatiron

building in New York — it is on the leading edge of the property and has three floor-to-ceiling windows, one of which affords complete privacy from city neighbors. The bathroom has a walk-in double shower.

Upstairs, Suite 609 replicates the windows and adds a small Juliet balcony. There is a large separate sitting room, 1.5 baths, and walk-in shower in the main bath. It's possible to add double rooms 611 and/or

THE HASSLER ROMA's Presidential Suite San Pietro, here, has wood paneling, an 18th-century desk, a showcase with original antique Roman artifacts, as well as modern amenities. Room 403, below, is the only corner Junior Suite, with three large windows overlooking Rome.



608 and close off the complex. The president of Argentina found this possibility suitable for his stay at the Sofitel.

Suite 703 is smaller than 609, but offers a spacious terrace. There are 1.5 baths, walk-in shower, and the guest bath has a small balcony. The large window coverings are operated with remote control, as they are in many of the rooms.

Manuela Rampado (manuela.rampado@sofitel.com) is the sales and marketing manager at the Sofitel. Guest Relations is managed by Maria Teresa Sosto (mariateresa.sosto@sofitel.com).

Our third hotel, **The Glam**, is not a Grand Dame, but is part of an emerging collection of hotels owned by the AG Group. This summer, the company will open its first five-star hotel in Florence.

The Rome group currently consists of 11 four-star properties (The Glam reminded us of some Aloft hotels we've seen, minus the "named" amenities). A hospitality industry stalwart in Rome, Maria Chiara Picardi (mariachiarapicardi@aggroupitaly.it) is director of sales, marketing and PR. Contact her for all AG properties. Valerio Acerbo (valerioacerbo@aghotels.it) works reception at The Glam.

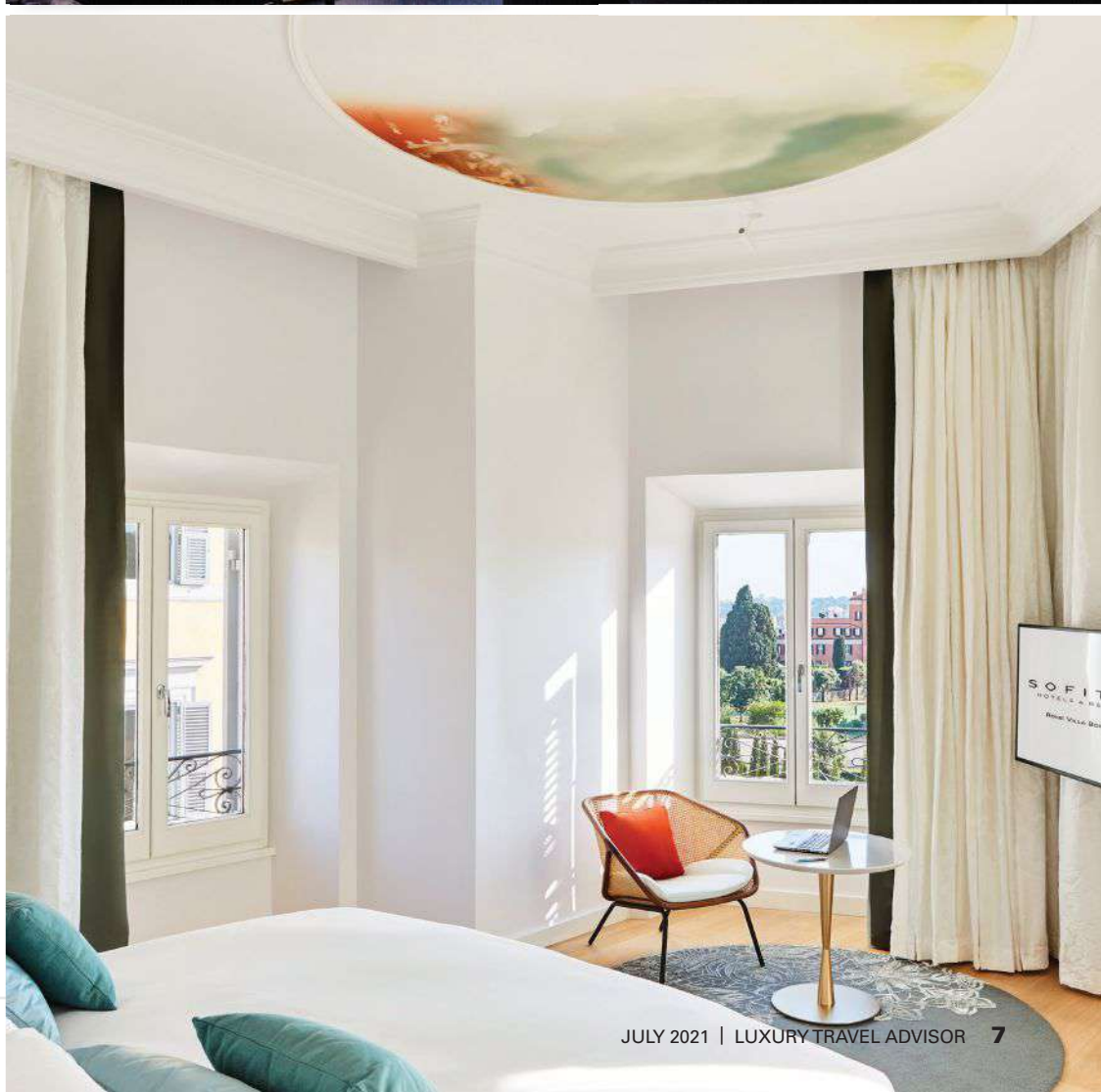
What's important is that The Glam is in Rione Monti, the eclectic (some say hipster) area beloved by both visitors and locals who enjoy nightlife, trattorias, and easy access to the Coliseum, Forum, Palatine Hill and Termini station. (Note: Rione means neighborhood).

The 54-room hotel is midway down Via Nazionale, which runs between Piazza Venezia and Piazza della Repubblica and sits across from the Palazzo delle Esposizioni. The Glam has a large, open rooftop terrace for meals and cocktails —the Terrazza Monti. (There is also indoor dining). The Jacuzzi and solarium are also located on the roof. There is only a tiny lobby on the ground floor, so guests are encouraged to enjoy the rooftop facilities.

The décor is not fussy, but is well done with clean modern lines and no tchotchkes littering the tabletops. The family rooms are large. Room 401 came with two double beds and a trundle sleeper sofa. The bathroom was up-to-date and spacious. We were thinking about young families or even a group of gap-year travelers who may not require the same



THE SETTIMO ROOFTOP RESTAURANT at Sofitel Rome Villa Borghese offers panoramic views of the city. Shown below is Room 509, which is on the leading edge of the property and has three floor-to-ceiling windows.



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level of luxury their parents enjoy. We also saw room 405, a classic double, and superior double room 407.

Bottom Line: We think AG has hit a good target with their four-star group and we're eager to see the new luxury five-star. We'll report back.

Valerio from The Glam filled us in on some of his favorite spots in Monti. For fish, he likes Rinaldi Al Quirinale; for pizza there is La Strega on Via Andrea Argoli; and Ristorante La Cabana has everything. Ai Tre Scalini in Via Panisperna 251 is an ancient winery and is near Blackmarket Hall, which combines food, drink, music and antiques at Via de Ciancaleoni 31.

Away from Monti is another good *ristorante*, Armando al Pantheon, off the Pantheon piazza. The menu contains lots of favorite Roman specialties, including some ancient and offbeat choices for the adventurous diner.

On July 1, the airlines are dispensing with COVID-free flights and travelers from the U.S. to Europe may travel as they did pre-pandemic. Check the U.S. Embassy or airline websites for details. What we know for certain is that Rome is waiting to soothe the stresses of the last year and help us all get back to the deliciousness of normal. ■



THE GLAM in Rione Monti is a 54-room hotel. Shown on top, is the Hall at the hotel. Above, the large, open rooftop terrace, which serves meals and cocktails. Shown here is a Family Suite at the hotel.

