

Fashion forward
Maison Moschino,
a stone's throw
from Milan's Corso
Como boutiques,
merges fairytale
and fashion.

SLEEPING BEAUTIES

Fashion and fairytales inform the aesthetic of two of Italy's hottest new hotels – Milan's Maison Moschino and Palazzina Grassi on Venice's Grand Canal – where designer décor and dream settings are the perfect combination.

Words **Josephine McKenna** Photography **Tara Fisher**



In a city that prides itself on **INNOVATION**, Maison Moschino combines theatricality with **FANTASY**.



Bedtime stories
Clockwise from top left: Maison Moschino's Clandestino restaurant; room service delivered with fashionable flourish; rooms have whimsical themes such as The Forest and Sleeping in a Ball Gown; lobster, carrot and savoy cabbage with pumpkin and baby fennel.



Maison Moschino, Milan

As soon as you cross the threshold of the Maison Moschino hotel, there can be no doubt that you've landed in the heart of Italy's fashion capital. Origami lights, shaped like fluffy white clouds, float above your head and three mannequins have stepped off the factory floor and are poised like sentries by the front door. In a city that prides itself on innovation, Maison Moschino combines the theatricality of one of the country's more eccentric fashion labels with the fantasy of a childhood fairytale.

A former 19th-century neoclassical railway station and now a stone's throw from the boutiques of Milan's

Corso Como, the hotel is the brainchild of Stefano Ugolini and his sister Barbara. Stefano has been running hotels in his Hotel Philosophy group throughout Italy for more than 20 years. Barbara, the hotel's general manager, felt Moschino's sense of adventure would match her own. "We thought of creating something with a fashion label and we wanted to do something which was different to the others," she says. "We thought of Moschino because it embraces the concepts of fantasy and irony."

Moschino's creative director Rossella Jardini, who took over the company after the death of designer Franco Moschino, jumped at the opportunity to produce a "surreal adventure" of 16 different design themes. Upstairs, sleek grey corridors, aptly lined with tiny keys, lead to 65 rooms and suites of different shapes, sizes and quiriness – as in the Sleeping in a Ball Gown room where the bedhead is a stunning oversized red velvet dress that matches the bedcover.

The fairytale theme continues in the Sweet Room, which channels Hansel and Gretel with the bed and light fitting covered in colourful cakes and biscotti, while in The Forest you might expect to run into Little Red Riding Hood. Decorated in subtle green and beige, it's a tranquil space with timber floors and a stunning four-poster bed of trees and aluminium foliage.

A hotel like this deserves a restaurant that pushes a few boundaries of its own. The Ugolinis approached renowned chef Moreno Cedroni from the Madonnina del Pescatore restaurant on the Adriatic coast. Cedroni's food at Clandestino, the culinary centrepiece of Maison Moschino, is given the same twist as the rooms upstairs, whether it's polenta with raw and cooked shellfish or sea bass brodetto with baby crabs and sushi rice.>



THE FINE PRINT

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Getting there

Emirates offers 70 flights per week to Rome, Milan and Venice via Dubai. Economy return fares from Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane to all Italian cities start at \$2278. Fares from Perth start at \$2050. 1300 303 777, emirates.com/au

Connect between Milan and Venice by train. **Rail Europe** offers Italy rail passes from \$292. raileurope.com.au

Maison Moschino

Doubles from \$430 (see website for special rates). Viale Monte Grappa 12, Milan, +39 02 29009858, designhotels.com/maison_moschino

Palazzina Grassi

Doubles from \$460 (see website for special rates). San Marco 3247, Venice, +39 041 5284644, designhotels.com/palazzina_grassi

The dégustation menu, meanwhile, is a rainbow of courses named by colour, with the "fuchsia" dish featuring fresh tuna, beetroot and pomegranate, and – for the fashion set – a "black" course of scallops, black bean, black sesame and ash.

After a blissful night's sleep beneath the ball gown, breakfast offers another treat called the Mos Kit – a daily selection of four, six or eight tasting plates, which might include a bacon and egg panino, a slice of buffalo mozzarella, a selection of pastries and jams, and fresh fruit. Like an Italian version of the bento box, it's all served in – what else? – a glossy white shoe box.

Palazzina Grassi, Venice

Venice could have been custom-built for Philippe Starck's peculiar brand of whimsy, so it's surprising to learn that the newly opened Palazzina Grassi on the Grand Canal is the French designer's first foray into the city – and indeed into Italy.

The Grassi sits beside the museum of the same name – you know, the one that flaunts its avant-garde artworks at its dowdy neighbours across the water. But the tiny 26-room hotel displays none of the museum's brashness. In fact, the Grassi is so discreet that there is no sign on the door to even identify it. In keeping with Venice's aura of mystery, this hotel prides itself on keeping a few secrets of its own.

Hotel developer Emanuele Garosci invited Starck to transform the 16th-century palace, blending traditional Venetian décor (heavy on mirrors and mahogany) and contemporary design from top Italian craftsmen. Two large mirrors covered in extraordinary glass sculptures by French artist Aristide Najean set the scene at the dimly lit entrance. There's no reception desk – you can check in upstairs or downstairs, order breakfast 24 hours a day, or ask the staff to book you an aperitivo in a private palace complete with medieval masterpiece.

Rooms and suites are in stark contrast to the intimate reception area, filled with natural light and the sleek minimalism that has become the trademark of Starck's hotels from Los Angeles to London. Walls are covered in vast back-lit mirrors reinterpreting classic Venetian designs. Soft grey furnishings easily blend with white leather sofas. Commedia masks adorn the bedside lamps and each room has WiFi and a LCD television embedded in the wall.

The central feature of the hotel is the downstairs dining area, a plush salon supported by 20 classical columns and lined with mahogany and more of those spectacular glass masterpieces by Najean, who has made his home in Murano. Here, you can take cocktails



The Grassi blends **TRADITIONAL** Venetian décor, heavy on mirrors and mahogany, with **CONTEMPORARY** design.

at the sleek glass-topped bar or watch chef Roberto Di Benedetto and his team at work behind a matching glass-topped bar lit by three industrial lamps that clearly define the work space.

A Champagne and crab zabaglione is followed by spicy prawns with baby tomatoes and broccoletti on a bed of polenta. Risotto is served with sausage and parmesan or a smattering of clams. The Veneto may have once been known for its poor fishermen, but at this Venetian osteria you can dine like a king on local crab, baccalà and squid. The wine list is unabashedly parochial but has plenty of depth, with wines from the Veneto and Trentino-Alto Adige regions, including that local treasure, the Amarone.

After dinner, the salon, with its soft lighting, leather lounges, Hermès trunks and Tom Waits growling in the background, becomes the perfect spot for a nightcap before heading back to your luxurious – and fashionable – bed.*

Starck contrasts Palazzina Grassi, Philippe Starck's first hotel in Italy, mixes Venetian aesthetic and tradition with the best of contemporary Italian design, from the opulent restaurant (opposite) and its open kitchen (top left), which produces fine dishes such as the eggplant soufflé (above), to the more minimalist suites (above left).