

THE TOAST OF TEL AVIV

We look beyond the lobby of The Jaffa, a groundbreaking hotel in Israel created by British architect John Pawson

PICTURE: AMIT GERON

Featuring recessed stained glass windows, arched ceilings and ornate plasterwork, the painstakingly restored chapel at Tel Aviv's The Jaffa now serves as the hotel's bar ➤



LOCATION Amid the cobbled streets, bustling markets and wonderful artists' studios in the heart of the 4,000-year-old port city of Jaffa – around which modern Tel Aviv has risen – is The Jaffa, a new hotel with residences overlooking the historic port and Mediterranean Sea. Co-owned by The Luxury Collection by Marriott and the US-based property developer and contemporary art collector Aby Rosen (also behind The Seagram Building and Gramercy Park Hotel), the property, once a 19th-century French hospital, is now an elegant and subtly luxurious escape, created by minimalist British architect John Pawson. Along with local architect Ramy Gill, Pawson has restored the u-shaped venue, carefully adding a recessed penthouse storey, as well as a new adjacent building in which the residences, car park and subterranean spa are now housed.

ARCHITECTURE As one might expect with a design by Pawson, The Jaffa's success lies as much in what the architect has left untouched as in what he's constructed. This was a painstaking, but purposely imperfect restoration, which unearthed a 13th-century wall from the time of the Crusades running right through the hotel's lobby, as well as Roman-style arched foundations, which, having been exposed during a five-metre dig, now form a magical central courtyard. On the first floor, a deconsecrated chapel now houses a nightclub, with refurbished stained glass windows.

'We wanted to restore the old Napoleonic hospital, then add a wing that respected the view but was completely modern,' explains Pawson, who has worked on the project since 2006. 'It's a resort more than a hotel – there's a pool and a courtyard, two restaurants and the spa. One of the reasons it took so long was because of the ancient artefacts we unearthed – archaeologists were called in.'

'John and I wrote the narrative for the space before we placed one brick,' recalls Gill. 'We asked ourselves how we could blend old and new. The 19th-century part was returned to its former grandeur, then we created a romance between the two centuries.'

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INTERIOR The bedrooms, also designed by Pawson, are another satisfying mix of old and new. The proportions remain grand, but have been humanised by the use of a 'wet capsule' – a central glass box which houses the bathroom. Constructed by B&B Italia, the furniture – which includes a bed, upholstered chairs and a chrome minibar – was also designed by Pawson, as were many of the soft furnishings, realised in a palette of pale, sun-faded tones.

'It's unlike any other hotel in terms of its design and fittings,' says Pawson. 'A huge amount of energy has gone into creating custom pieces to ensure it has a different feel.' The lobby, too, is a visual treat. Travertine tiled floors throughout the hotel offer a perfect backdrop for co-owner Rosen's own Damien Hirst *Spin Paintings* and a minimalist marble reception desk designed by Pawson. Furniture by Shiro Kuramata, Pierre Paulin, Preben Fabricius and Jørgen Kastholm is more decorative than one might expect from the British designer, but works perfectly in the serene surroundings.

'There's so much to see,' enthuses Pawson. 'Some will recognise certain pieces or be intrigued by others. Architects don't always have the chance to also do the interiors, but it's great to work on both. It's a fun place.' From £475 per night (thejaffahotel.com). **ED**

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