

# NEXT

CHECKING IN

## 25 Best New Hotels in Italy

From the top of the boot to the toe, the Italian hotel scene is booming. Here, our favorite places, whether urban style setters or idyllic country retreats. **BY VALERIE WATERHOUSE**

**W**HEN ALAIN DUCASSE, France's most treasured chef, heads to Italy, one of his country's culinary rivals, to build a Tuscan inn, L'Andana, something is up. Based on the flurry of recent openings, it seems that owning an Italian hotel is the status symbol du jour. And it's not only Ducasse. Elite families are converting their estates into resorts, and entrepreneurs are opening their doors, to make guests feel right at home. »



The 12th-century Castello di Vicarello, overlooking the Tuscan countryside in Poggi del Sassò.

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The industrial lobby of Milan's Hotel Straf. Right: A guest room.



3 Florence Designed by Michele Bonan (the talent behind many of Florence's Ferragamo-owned hotels), the 20 sleek rooms

#### CITY SLICKERS

**1** Milan With its cement walls, slate floors, and scratched mirrors, the **Hotel Straf**—right by the duomo—resembles a building site more than a luxury hotel. In fact, rumor has it that one guest woke up screaming, after a trapped-in-a-bunker nightmare (she took refuge in her bathroom in the middle of the night). But that hasn't deterred guests like John Malkovich and young designers who showcase their collections in the sprawling suites during fashion week. Obviously, word has spread: Ristorante Straf is packed with photographers and bleached-blond Asian shoppers, just waiting for a celebrity sighting. 3 Via San Raffaele; 800/337-4685 or 39-02/805-081; www.straf.it; doubles from \$185.

**2** Never mind the buzzing bar scene, the top-notch service, the sleek architecture by Ed Tuttle, of Amanhotels. The 117-room **Park Hyatt Milan's** claim to fame is that it has the largest bathrooms of any hotel in Milan. Occupying 45 percent of each guest room, the travertine spaces are equipped with glass-walled showers, massive sunken tubs, double washbasins, walk-in closets, and scads of mirrors. Downstairs, hotel treatments at the small-but-satisfying spa beckon after a stroll in the neighboring Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II shopping arcade. 1 Via Tommaso Grossi; 800/778-7477 or 39-02/805-1234; www.milan.park.hyatt.com; doubles from \$557.

at **J.K. Place** mix wenge wood fittings, pleated sconces, and soothing shades of cream, gray, and brown. But the best thing is the hotel's friendly service. Sabrina, the bookings manager, greets you at the door; the staff will gladly supply tips on where to eat and shop. The homey atmosphere continues in the glass-ceilinged dining room, where guests chat around the communal breakfast table and arrange to meet for drinks on the bi-jou roof terrace, with views of Florence's Santa Maria Novella church. 7 Piazza Santa Maria Novella; 800/525-4800 or 39-055/264-5181; www.jkplace.com; doubles from \$390.

**4** Visitors to the 84-room **UNA Hotel Vittoria** from wonder-boy architect Fabio Novembre, just might think they've stumbled into a disco. Guests cozy up on a giant spiral seat designed by Novembre for Cappellini. A swirling, floor-to-ceiling floral mosaic encompasses the reception desk. Rooms are outfitted with black-leather walls and fiber-optic lights. Bathrooms—located right by the doorway—are encased in crystal, providing little privacy (make sure your partner doesn't call room service while you're in the shower). But it's not all glitz. Novembre pays homage to the hotel's historic San Frediano neighborhood: the doors of each room are painted with portraits of Renaissance Tuscan nobles. 59 Via Pisana; 39-055/22771; www.unahotels.it; doubles from \$278. »

**WHO STAYS WHERE?** **5** Musicians Classical pianist Vladimir Ashkenazy and orchestra director Zubin Mehta check into suite 211 at Hotel Greif (Piazza Walther; 39-0471/318-000; www.greif.it; doubles from \$196), in Bolzano, near the Dolomites; it's furnished with a grand piano. **6** Fashionistas Model Eva Herzigova and photographer David LaChapelle are just two of the boldfaced guests at Milan's 3 Rooms (10 Corso Como; 39-02/626-163; www.3rooms-10corsocomo.com; doubles from \$364), attached to the 10 Corso Como boutique. **7** VIPS In out-of-the-way Padua, the Methis Hotel (70 Riviera Paleocapa; 39-049/872-5555; www.methishotel.com; doubles from \$211) is a hideaway for Italian dignitaries like Susanna Agnelli and Giorgio Armani. **8** Movie Stars Al Pacino and Joseph Fiennes have stayed at Venice's Hotel Al Ponte Antico (Calle dell'Aseo, Cannaregio; 39-041/241-1944; www.alponteantico.com; doubles from \$223).