

HOTEL CENTRAL



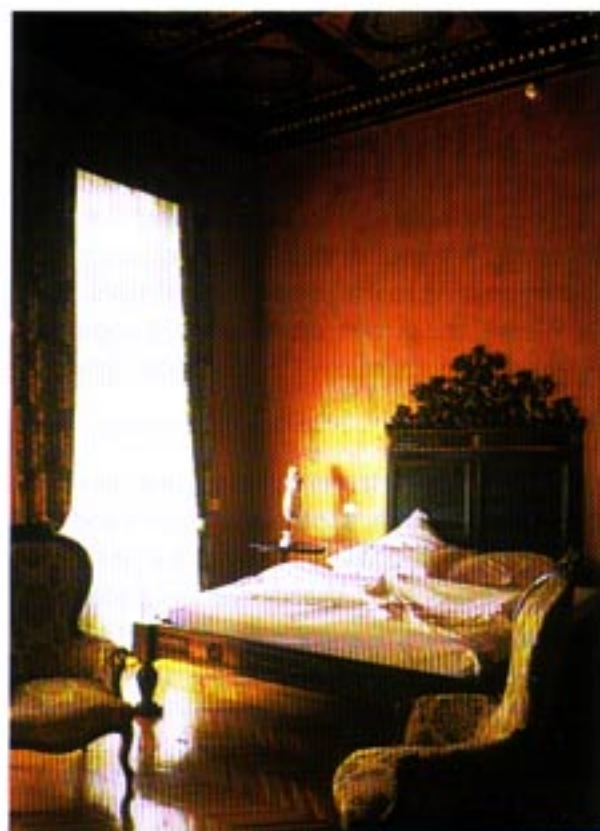
Rome Redesigns with Gusto

New and classic stays in the Eternal City. By DANIELLE PERGAMENT

Say what you will about its gladiators and ruins, but Rome is positioning itself as a metropolis of the future. The first clue was Renzo Piano's massive lead tortoises at the Auditorium Parco della Musica, followed last spring by Richard Meier's glass-box Ara Pacis Museum, one of the first modern buildings built inside the city's historic center in 70 years. Then came the city's two most important modern art museums: Zaha Hadid's eagerly awaited Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI Secolo (MAXXI) and the refurbishment of the Museo D'Arte Contemporanea Roma (MACRO).

And suddenly you get the idea that Rome, the place where Michelangelo created City Hall, is becoming a capital of design. Taking a page out of the museum handbook, Rome's hotels have turned sleek and arty. Turns out the Eternal City is living up to its moniker.

The swanky shopping district of the Piazza di Spagna is giving rise to some of the city's most design-heavy digs. The cashmere-and-caviar set can now stay at the **Lungarno Hotels Portrait Suites** (from \$390; www.lungarnohotels.com), the newest outpost of the Ferragamo family. The 14 rooms and public areas are stocked with modern amenities (Wi-Fi and, in two cases, in-room saunas), while still channeling old-school charm with designers' sketches, classic Hollywood film noir portraits,



and pop icon items, like a shoe receipt of Marilyn Monroe's. Just a cobblestone's throw away is the **Intown Luxury House** (from \$290; www.intownluxuryhouse.hotelinroma.com), a sleek town house in the heart of the shopping-friendly Spanish Steps area. Rooms aren't very large—as is often the case with prime real estate in a big city—but clever designs, such as a dark wood half-wall in the middle of the room, give the illusion of separate living and sleeping areas. Rome's top hotel remains the **Hotel Hassler** (from \$567; www.hotelhassler.com) which is at the head of the Spanish Steps—close enough to see the action but not be overwhelmed by it. The Hassler has undergone a smattering of mini-facelifts in recent years to modernize the Old World interior. Most notably, the restaurant, which opened in 1947 and is located on the sixth floor, has just been redone and boasts the best indoor panoramic view of the city. The food, Italian by way of haute cuisine, is a perfect way to enjoy the hotel without enjoying the hefty room prices.

A premium is placed on all things design- and tech-oriented across town at the 235-room glass tower **Radisson SAS Es. Hotel** (from \$209; www.radissonsas.com). Smack in the heart of Esquilino, Rome's bustling multi-ethnic neighborhood, the Radisson SAS feels like something that descended from outer space, with all the trappings of a place the fashion crowd would flock to. Receptionists stand at funky, pod-like desks, guest room beds and showers sit on wooden platforms, and the bar and rooftop pool have become a destination for jet-setters and locals alike.

For the willing, there are places in the heavily populated Piazza Navona that the tour groups haven't overrun yet. Namely, the **Raphael** (from \$395; www.raphaehotel.com). Ivy cascades generously down the hotel's exterior. Inside this centuries-old palazzo, the paint is barely dry since American architect Richard Meier redesigned the third floor into beautifully spare guest rooms of blond wood and glass. The bathrooms feature double-headed showers.

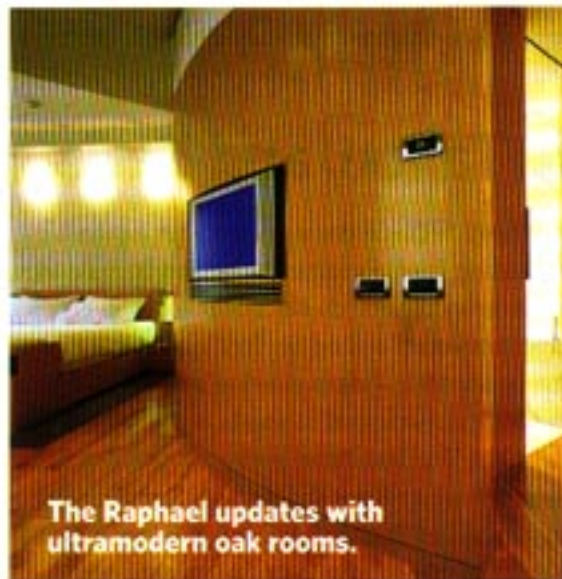
Hotel Locarno (from \$290; www.hotellocarno.com) harks back to a time when Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck were in town. The nicest rooms, which are in the original, older

The Hassler, just to the right of the Trinita dei Monti church above the Spanish Steps (top), served as the Rome headquarters for the U.S. Army Air Forces during WWII. The Locarno's elegant rooms (left) are classic Italian.

section of the hotel as opposed to the recently acquired palazzo across the courtyard, look like they were lifted out of Versailles—gilded mirrors, pale blue walls, ornate detailing right down to the antique chandeliers and door knockers. The bar areas, both the cozy inside bar and the neighboring outdoor patio, are among the preferred places for Romans to relax with a Negroni and appetizers after work.

Also on the small side is the sweetly quaint **Daphne Veneto** (from \$105; www.daphne-rome.com), named for Bernini's sculpture of Daphne and Apollo just around the corner at the Galleria Borghese, the Renaissance palazzo that was transformed into one of the city's best museums. The hotel, occupying three floors of a centuries-old residential apartment building, is akin to staying in a really nice flat with rooms that could have been decorated by Ian Schrager. On arrival, the proprietor gives you a loaner cell phone and tips on the best restaurants and shops in Rome that your guidebook didn't mention.

Unless you're looking for it, you'll walk right by the **Villa della Fonte** (from \$118; www.villafonte.com), which is just the idea. This *piccolo* hotel is tucked in a quiet pocket of cobblestone and ivy-draped charm, marked only by a small sign at the front door. Inside, the five rooms are spartan and offer just the essentials, and include windows overlooking the street. In the morning, the innkeeper's mother, an elderly Italian woman who speaks no English but is always smiling, knocks on your door with a fresh *cornetto* (an Italian croissant) and steamy cappuccino.



The Raphael updates with ultramodern oak rooms.

Grand Hotel del Gianicolo (from \$158; www.grandhotelgianicolo.it) is worthwhile for its location atop Janiculum Hill, whose jaw-dropping views of the city are visible each time you walk to and from the hotel. The other top amenity is the pool—one of the few outdoor pools in the city. Take a swim, walk to the crest of Janiculum, watch the city unfold from the Vatican to the Vittoriano, and appreciate what Rome is famous for—the feeling of total world domination that comes with views like this.

