

ESCAPES

Square Nine's sleek facade stands out in Belgrade's Stari Grad neighborhood, while its rooms (below) balance the cozy and the austere.



Square Nine, Belgrade

The surprise of walking into a sumptuously designed Belgrade hotel is rivaled only by discovering that its lobby bar, manned by white-jacketed staff, turns out a perfect—ice-cold, dry as dust—martini. You could look long and hard to find another in Serbia. And even then you wouldn't sip it on a green leather stool copied from a rare Deco original by Arne Vodder, with cool '60s jazz playing in the background.

The new benchmark in a city experiencing a vibrant, postwar design boom, Square Nine features an array of Danish modern. The lobby, immediately adopted by locals as a chic watering hole, is decorated with pieces by Arne Jacobsen protégé Hans Wegner and Dunbar furnishings by Edward Wormley. Twenty-two containers of wood were shipped here from Brazil, and the rosewood that ultimately lined the lobby took roughly six months to install and polish. Topped with a 1,200-square-foot presidential suite (not including the 1,000-square-foot terrace that encompasses it), the hotel's 45 rooms balance sleek Cumaru wood and Portuguese limestone with cozy touches like handwoven Turkish rugs, vintage chairs, and cashmere blankets. Each room is peppered with posh accessories, including Pratesi linens and Hermès toiletries; even the wastebaskets are crafted of stamped Felisi leather.



Square Nine maintains the same two-staff-per-room ratio that Four Seasons is noted for, and butler service, collection from the airport in a chauffeur-driven Mercedes Viano, and packing-unpacking are all available on request. It is the exacting vision of an urbane proprietor who likes everything just so.

"Belgrade was always an avant-garde city, a cool place compared to other cities in Eastern Europe," says the hotel's Swiss- and London-educated, thirtysomething co-owner, Nebo Kostic. "They like their fashion; they make an event of going out. The city has a long history of creativity and design."

The hotel's team includes a chef, sous chef, and bar manager all poached from Claridge's. Importing a raft of otherwise unavailable international items from Richard Hennessy cognac to '99 Bollinger, the restaurant also produces its own line of gourmet goodies.

"We partner in an organic vineyard that makes our private label olive oil, grappa, and wine, and we make our own honey," says Kostic, handing me a tiny pot of Square Nine Lavender Honey over brunch, where an à la carte breakfast (classic English to scrambled eggs with smoked salmon) comes with endless cappuccinos and a breadbasket that would impress a Parisian. As a counterpoint to the 60-person, white-linen dining room off the lobby, Kostic is adding a 50-person rooftop bar-restaurant for summer 2012. "Sushi—but beautifully done, pure Japanese, very authentic sushi." Just so. —VIA BEAUMANIS

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