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THE WORLD OF INTERIORS



REIMAGINING THE RAJ

Jaipur cocktail bar - with a twist



A FINE BALANCE

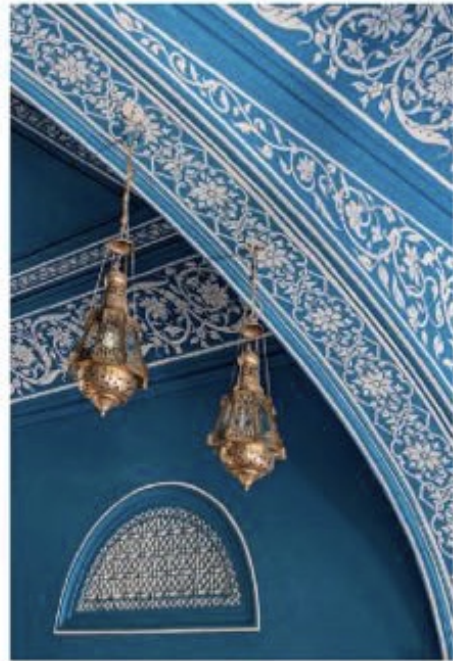
Conceived by two European expats in India, Jaipur's writing and dining spot Bar Palladio has an international air. Set as Indian textiles, irreverently updated in flashing neon, find parity with Empire furniture, while Gothic doors and a

in the grounds of an Edwardian Rajput palace, it strikes a clever equilibrium between East and West. Checkered floor make graceful counterpoints to its Mogul-style motifs. Text and photography: Henry Wilson



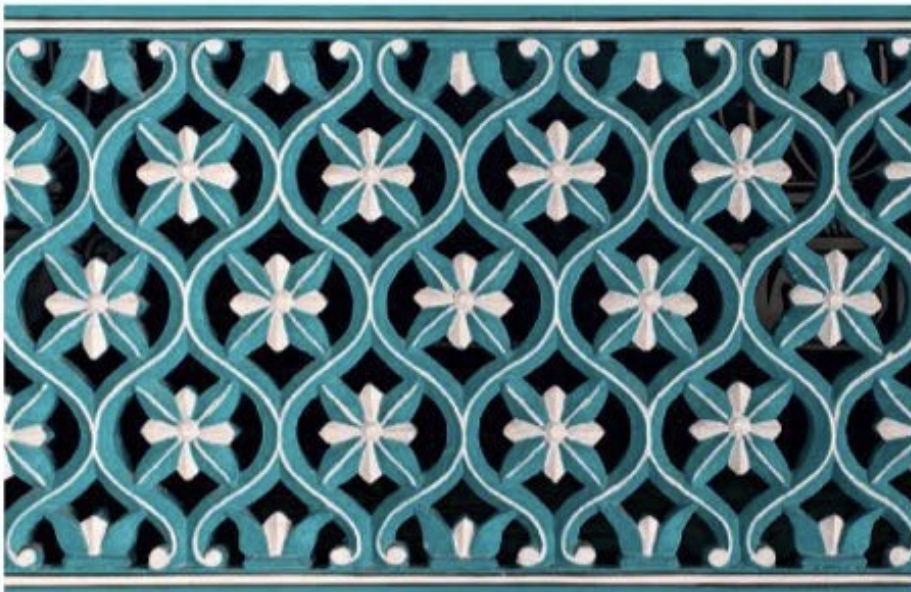
Previous pages: the *jali* lamps hanging in the main bar are replicas of those in the Jama mosque of Fatehpur Sikri.

This page, clockwise from top: Empire-style chairs and a black-and-white floor preserve the building's European style; this marble planter, carved with rams' heads and acanthus leaves, was the springboard for Barbara Miolino's vision for the bar; grand details – a stone balustrade, carved elephants' heads and solid buttresses – lend the diminutive bungalow's façade a heightened sense of grandeur, which is amplified by a scallop-edged awning referencing the decorative tenting used in traditional palaces; a sofa in the conservatory is covered with fabric block-printed to resemble ticking



This page, clockwise from top: impost blocks mounted on the walls support a proscenium-like arch in the main bar. The painted white patterning, executed by Vikas Soni of Jeypur Arts, is customary in northwestern India; above the doors fanlights fitted with pierced *jali* screens allow air to circulate throughout the bar and contribute to the décor; a detail of the fabric used on the bar's ottomans, which is block-printed by hand. While its small and compact floral designs are traditional, the neon colour scheme is not; the main bar has doorways leading off it on all four walls, allowing for through-views from every vantage point, an effect further enhanced by the mirrors hung in between them





This page, top: symmetry plays an important part in Rajput and Mogul architecture, as is evident in the salon. Middle left: stairs lead to a shallow balcony, designed more for decorative effect than practicality. In front hangs a lantern, its bowl collared with brass. Known in India as *kundi*, these lights were popular in the Georgian period and became highly fashionable in the British Raj. Middle right: a spectacular (and symmetrical) fountain of flowers and leaves adorns the centre of the back wall. To its right, infinite reflections give the illusion of the coach-like room being wider than it is. Bottom: a detail of the *jali* balustrade. Opposite: the tented ceiling nods to the nomadic Rajput lifestyle



THERE'S A REGULAR

hullabaloo beyond the seclusion of the Narain Niwas Palace compound in Jaipur. Modernity is relentlessly on the rise around its boundary wall, and brash glass-fronted multistorey shopping complexes and offices tower over an oasis of greenery. The palace, built in 1928 by General Amar Singh as his country retreat, retains a quality of the past that is in fast retreat across many parts of the city. Tranquillity seems a spurious notion now that this location has become the heart of the new city. Narain Niwas has, at its centre, the palace and an assortment of bungalows. These outbuildings are dispersed among beautiful mature trees in which cavalcades of peacocks and hens still roost at night. Their gorgeous plaintive chorus reverberates at twilight through the umbrella of trees.

Italian expat Barbara Miolini is based in Jaipur, where she runs a thriving business supplying the commercial fashion industry in Europe. She designed Bar Palladio as somewhere she could take her friends and clients for lunch or dinner. A dream encouraged her to ask the current incumbent of Narain Niwas Palace if she could take one of the bungalows. Having begun her career in hospitality, Barbara had gained experience in various five-star establishments across Switzerland. 'I wanted to bring my culinary heritage in a pure form to Jaipur,' she says.

Having acquired one of the bungalows, with its mix of Edwardian and Rajput architectural elements, to create a social and food hub for both locals and visiting foreigners, Barbara approached fellow European expatriate Marie-Anne Oudejans, an international jewellery designer who works closely with Jaipur's renowned Gem Palace company, to be her interior designer. 'The project was a pleasure from the start,' says Marie-Anne. 'Barbara gave me carte blanche, and I was comfortable with her concept for the bar.' Barbara had a definite idea of the ambience she wanted for the interior: 'a gentleman's club with clear references to Rajasthan's royal past, the regal era of the maharaja'. The words 'grand' and 'masculine' were both key. Furthermore, Barbara expands, 'Marie-Anne and I agreed that the interior must be decorative and reflect Rajasthan's wall-painting heritage. The interior would have a dual purpose, to serve as a reminder of the rich cultural language of the royal state, and to be enchanting.'

The huge marble planter on a table in the light-flooded entrance, spotted in a marble workshop in the city, was a prime inspiration, says Barbara. Its grand scale lends the space gravitas, and the rams' heads and acanthus leaves radiate Classical grandeur. Clearly the building already featured strong European architectural elements, such as the balustrade, which marches along the roof at the front of the building. Additionally, the façade is made up of Gothic-flavoured glass-panelled doors crowned with dramatic fanlights. To bolster the European look Marie-Anne introduced the chic floors of black-and-white-marble chequerboard, a nod to Palladio. She also commissioned local carvers of that material to produce the dramatic panel of tigers, plantain trees

and a fountain that decorates the bar counter. The piece enhances the air of masculinity as well as reminding visitors of that most royal of Indian pastimes, the great tiger hunt.

So much for the European influences. The Rajputs of Rajasthan, together with the Moguls, who originated from Turkic lands, had a passion for floral decorative motifs. Their love of miniature painting, particularly botanical studies, extended to the walls of their palaces. So Marie-Anne commissioned local artist Vikas Soni to paint the interiors with florals. He has been artful in avoiding pastiche, however, giving the motifs that adorn the building's interior – the arches, cornices and columns – a contemporary feel. Soni's curling arabesques and lively fountains of flowering shrubs are exuberant. Rather than using the traditional polychrome palette, they have gone for an austere and graphic two-colour finish. The consistent use of white on blue and blue on white harmonises the whole interior and ensures a cool, refreshing mood to step into from the heat.

Each area of Bar Palladio has an accent of its own. A spangled constellation of brass *jali* lamps with perforated shades enlivens the main area. The salon, a train-carriage-like room with a tented ceiling, acknowledges the historically nomadic lifestyle of the Rajputs. Another room features a wall that cascades with blooming shrubs in bright blue on white, a clear reference to the Mogul tradition of floral patterning that emanated from the royal court at Agra. The coup de maître, however, is Marie-Anne's daring idea to commission botanical oil-painted canvases like those by Audubon. They add to the masculine aura that Barbara had envisaged for the bar; undeniably quirky, they are an unlikely pairing of the cerebral and the exotic. The fluorescent cushions were another masterstroke of counterintuitive inspiration. These neon flashes brilliantly reinvigorate the floral block-printing



tradition Jaipur has been famed for over the centuries. This irreverence is grounded by a counterpoint of functional blue-and-white ticking upholstery. For the hand-blocked fabrics Marie-Anne commissioned the renowned Jaipur printer Gito, who is, apparently, 'meticulous in every way'.

'I never intended to come to India and stay,' explains Barbara, 'but I fell in love with the country, particularly Rajasthan. It's an intangible calling... Although I have no wish to push a feminist agenda, you do have to be courageous to build a business in India, especially as a woman and a foreigner.' An infectious enthusiasm masks her steely determination. We must be grateful that India, as only India can do, adopted her, and that she returned to her roots in hospitality; she is soon to establish another Jaipur watering hole too: a café, due to open in July. Bar Palladio, meanwhile, is proving hugely successful for her and Marie-Anne Oudejans – an exuberantly contemporary celebration of tradition ■

Bar Palladio, Narain Niwas Palace Hotel, Kanota Bagh, Narain Singh Rd, Jaipur, RJ 302004, India (00 91 141 256 5556; bar-palladio.com). 'The Floral Patterns of India', by Henry Wilson, is published by Thames & Hudson



An anteroom is decorated with a blue-on-white colour scheme, in contrast to the rest of the interiors. The riotous walls, reflected in a mirror (opposite), are painted in a traditional Mogul style. Similar, more colourful examples can be seen in the royal court at the Red Fort in Agra