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# A Very French Affair

Vienna's Hotel Motto offers a potent dose of Parisian romance.

WORDS BY CHRISTOPHER BOLLEN, PHOTOGRAPHY BY NATASHA STANGLMAYR



**THE CULTURAL CONNECTION** between the cities of Vienna and Paris looms surprisingly large. One need only mention the name Marie Antoinette, that doomed style icon of pre-revolutionary France, who was born in the palaces of Vienna as an archduchess of Austria, before marrying Louis XVI and becoming

the queen of France. Today, in the center of Vienna, a statue to her mother, Empress Maria Theresa, adorns her own namesake square. Inside the adjoining Kunsthistorisches Museum hangs the lavish large-scale portrait of the homegrown queen of France, painted by court favorite Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun. It's hard to top this Parisian pedigree at the heart of another major European capital. However, when the highly successful Viennese restaurateur Bernd Schlacher embarked on a lifelong dream of opening his own boutique hotel in the city, he looked to the Paris of a different era for inspiration. "Paris is the city of love," Schlacher explains of his infatuation. "I love the lifestyle of Paris." It was the festive, art-fueled, bohemian spirit of 1920s Paris that Schlacher harnessed for his elegant, bespoke hotel called Motto, which opened at the beginning of the year.

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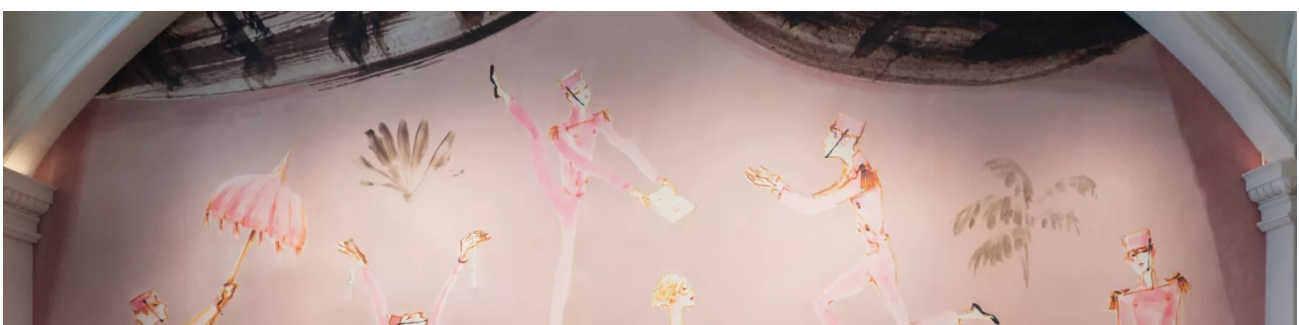






The hotel's ground-floor French boulangerie, Motto Brot, with a large selection of delicacies.

Schlacher is well regarded in the Austrian capital for a series of fashionable restaurants that almost single-handedly rejiggered the local social scene. In the early 1990s, he helmed a chic eatery humbly dubbed Motto that quickly became a hotbed of the city's who's who. In 2010, he launched the popular late-night restaurant Motto am Fluss, located on a pier on the Danube River and often mistaken for a docked cruise line. The Motto empire has grown to include a number of pop-up concept cafes across the city and a thriving catering company. But a full-service hotel is an entirely different enterprise, one that largely derives from Schlacher's desire to be the consummate host. "With my restaurants I always had to say bye to the guests after the meal and with the hotel I can now have them with me 24 hours and longer," he says. Schlacher and his team have pointedly shifted the focus away from business travelers or bulk vacation packages. The result is an idyllic retreat that seems engineered for lovers and leisure seekers, the perfect Viennese backdrop for a passionate French affair ("Je veux" [I want] reads the complimentary condom in the bathroom; "Je ne regrette rien" [I have no regrets] reads the inscription on the nightstand pencil.) As if to counter the stereotype of austere Austrian tastes, the whole hotel seems maximized for enjoyment and pleasure.





A mural of dancing bellhops hangs in reception, and sofas sourced from the Paris Ritz Hotel feature in the lounge area.

The city of Vienna, like Paris, is designed like a snail, with each numbered district (or *arrondissement*) spiraling out from the center. Hotel Motto is located in the busy shopping district of the 6th, a 10-minute walk from the cluster of museums and concert halls that receive most of the city's tourism. The hotel's ornate, pie-shaped corner building has lived many lives: it served as a pub in the seventeenth century, playing host to the city's ragtag composers, actors, writers, and creative class, before transforming into a long-running budget hotel called Kummer. This hotel served as the home of French refugees after World War II, and was later memorialized as the inspiration for one of the three hotels that comprise John Irving's 1981 coming-of-age novel, "The Hotel New Hampshire." A decade ago, the congested artery of its main street, Mariahilfer Strasse, which connects the Summer and Winter palaces, was turned into a pedestrian walkway, easing the traffic and creating an outdoor shopping mall sprinkled with bakeries and cafes. Seven years ago, Schlacher swooped in and began a massive renovation to the building, shifting the entrance and reception area to the quieter, car-accessible side street and constructing from scratch the sensuous, oval-shaped grand central staircase, which swirls up eight floors to a brand-new terrace roof-deck and bar. (The top two floors themselves are fresh additions to the original structure.)

The flavor of Paris (quite literally) is in full force even before you enter the hotel. That's due to Motto's very own in-house French boulangerie tucked into a ground-floor storefront, peddling some of the city's most delicious breads and pastries (on weekends, locals line up to buy their rations of pricey baguettes). Around the corner, in the small but spacious lobby, the fabric-covered walls are





An afternoon shot of the bar.

decorated in whimsical murals of dancing pink-suited bellhops, and even one well-behaved leopard, all converging around the arriving hotel guest, as if the star of a musical film. More straight-from-the-Rive-Droite accents can be seen upon entry: Schlacher purchased five crystal chandeliers and two sofas from Paris' Ritz Hotel at auction. But the soft, powder-pink velveteen interior, full of bordello tassels and lace, isn't entirely under the sway of Paris. The recent addition of a giant pink-headed sculpture by the late Austrian artist Franz West hints at the homeland pride that runs through Motto. In point of fact, the color palette for the grand staircase's pistachio-green terrazzo steps set against plain stucco walls is reminiscent of the green-and-tan fresco ceiling in the

nearby baroque Catholic church on Mariahilfer Strasse. Markedly, the design team went to great lengths to incorporate Austrian artisans and designers in the myriad intricate details that inform the plush backdrop, from hand-hewn chrome handles and frames forged in the South Tyrol mountains to the patterns of the floor tiles and rugs based on classic antique designs by the famed Austrian textile company Backhausen.

Flora- and fauna-patterned fabrics invade the walls of 91 guest rooms, which range in size and scale from petite single rooms to balconied junior suites. These rooms, caught beautifully between fin-de-siècle Marais and Vienna circa right now, manage a sensual, opulent comfort — never an easy balance — with their velvet sofas, flatscreen televisions hidden behind antique mirrors, and sweeping parquet floors that shimmer in the generous Austrian light streaming in. Yet the multipatterned decor never feels overwrought or claustrophobic, never a stage

set, even if Schlacher seems to want his guests to feel taken up in a tryst worthy of a young Alain Delon and Romy Schneider.

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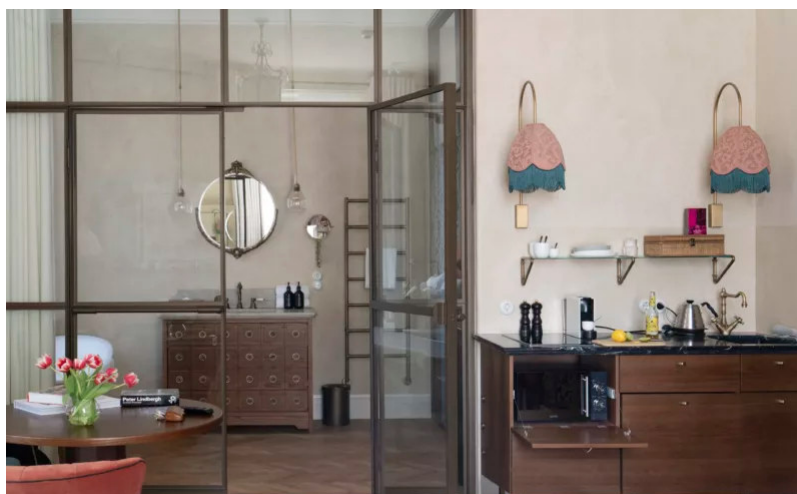




Some details within one of the hotel's largest accommodations.



A detail of a fabric-covered headboard patterned with an animal motif.







A view of the kitchenette and bathroom in the junior suite.



The exterior of the hotel at dusk. Its signage, "Je ne regrette rien," roughly translates to "I have no regrets."

Fittingly for such a gifted restaurateur, the jewel of the hotel is the buzzy top-floor French restaurant, Chez Bernard. Cascades of potted plants (there are some 1,500 houseplants in the hotel) hang above the sleek oval bar, while the same floral fabric that decorated the guest rooms has been reworked into the waitresses' uniforms (the waiters wear crisp white jackets and black pants). The restaurant is filled with floor-to-ceiling windows around the bar, which boast gorgeous views of the skyline at sunset. Schlacher doubles down on his French accent with the menu, offering Parisian favorites and reworked Austrian staples with Francophone twists. Chez Bernard has become such a hit among locals that it's often difficult for guests to secure a table for dinner. One local even maintained



that the convivial, sceney vibe of the restaurant reminded her not of Paris but of downtown Manhattan. This summer, the hotel has plans to bring the party up to the rooftop with DJs and special theme nights.

Vienna is a metropolis known for its immense artistic heritage — it's hard to walk a block in the city without hearing live music or seeing a rendition of a Gustav Klimt painting. But it's the city's smart, polished, eclectic hotels following the mold of Motto that will bring a new generation of travelers to its gilded gates. And hotels aren't purely for the two-day visitor anymore. Schlacher understands the importance of enticing locals as well as guests. "Our concept should be a 'bubble' in itself," he explains. "A little Vienna for the international guests and a little Paris for the Viennese." ●

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## Christopher Bollen Writer

Christopher Bollen is a writer and editor in New York City. He is the author of four novels, including his latest, "A Beautiful Crime," a literary thriller set in Venice. He is currently the editor at large of Interview magazine and a contributing editor at Vanity Fair.

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## Natasha Stanglmayr Photographer

Natasha Stanglmayr is a New York-based photographer. Her work has a documentary approach to travel and portraiture, with natural light as her driving force. She was born in Beirut, raised in Vienna, and spent her summers in Honduras with family. Her global upbringing and extensive travels have made her comfortable in a wide variety of cultures and locations. She brings an unfiltered, authentic, and unscripted point of view to her audience.