

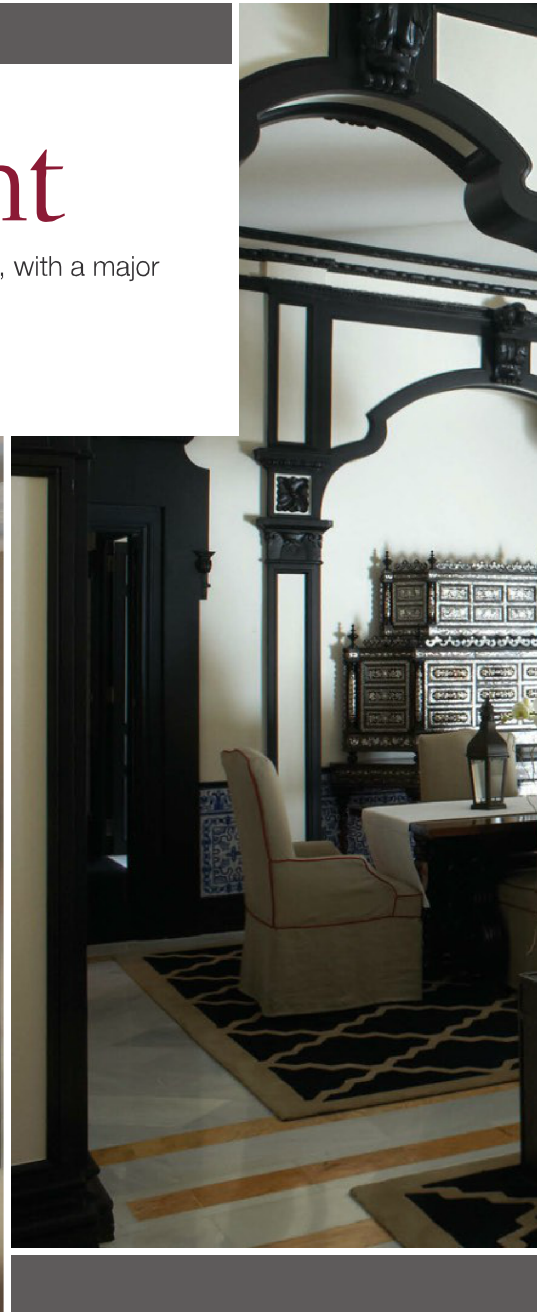
# Royal Treatment

Designers from HBA update the Hotel Alfonso XIII in Seville, Spain, with a major infusion of local flavor and a nod to its colorful past.

BY MATTHEW HALL



References to the flick of a flamenco skirt abound in the hotel's Andalusian-themed suites.



Spain's storied Hotel Alfonso XIII was ripe for some "R&R"—restoration and reinvention, that is. Hired by owner Starwood Hotels & Resorts to oversee that process was the design team at the London office of HBA/Hirsch Bedner Associates.

The Alfonso hotel, which is a member of Starwood's Luxury Collection, first opened in 1929 and was last renovated



The Royal Suite houses numerous artifacts collected by the hotel's namesake, Spain's King Alfonso XIII.

in 1990. "That most recent update was in a pan-European style, with little reference to local culture," says HBA associate Bethany Gale. "The hotel had lost a sense of belonging to its fabulous location, and there was a disconnect between the grandiose architecture of the public spaces and the ordinary feel of the guest rooms."

To overcome those drawbacks, designers set about putting the 151-key

property through an update that "would sensitively build on its fascinating heritage," says Gale. Indeed, this is a hotel with quite a past. According to historical accounts, Spain's King Alfonso XIII conceived the hotel to be the grandest of its time in Europe, as it was constructed to house international dignitaries for the Ibero-American Exhibition that was held in Seville. Over the intervening years, the



Bethany Gale, HBA

Tim Beddow (Hotel Alfonso XIII); Courtesy of HBA (Gale)





Tiled columns set off the hotel's courtyard dining area, which features floor-to-ceiling windows that allow in abundant natural light.

hotel's ornate architecture and sumptuous interiors played host to a wide variety of high-profile guests, ranging from European royalty to A-list Hollywood actors.

But as any designer knows, working on such buildings is both a blessing and a curse. For example, because the Alfonso hotel has been designated as a historic site, designers were prohibited from adding electrical power outlets in places where it would interfere with the building's original

tile work. "That meant in the lobby, where the majority of the walls are tiled, we had to think very carefully about orienting the furniture layouts to best capture the sunlight and work with the existing outlets," Gale explains.

Designers faced a challenge of a different sort in the guest rooms: acoustical problems. "The rooms have stone floors which act as conductors of sound," Gale says. "We were able to install new, more soundproof

doors to help contain the noise within the suites, and also installed plush wool area rugs to muffle the echo of footsteps."

To reinvigorate the guest rooms' nondescript decor, designers decided the best course was to go local. "We themed each of the rooms into one of three styles—Moorish, Andalusian and Castilian—all of which are major historical/cultural influences in Seville," Gale explains.

The Moorish rooms feature elaborately carved canopies on their headboard walls and bold touches of red, while the Andalusian spaces include sculptural, swish-shaped millwork trim that conjures up the image of the flick of a flamenco skirt. The Castilian rooms, by contrast, sport a ruggedly masculine feel inspired by the matador, with dark-timber panel ceilings and a deep ochre palette.

Not surprisingly, the hotel's 3,000-sq.-ft. Royal Suite got some special attention from HBA. "We imagined the suite to be the luxury residence where King Alfonso XIII himself would have stayed, and endowed it



The ornate hotel opened in 1929.





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The hotel's Moorish rooms are home to elaborately carved canopies on their headboard walls.

with portraits and artifacts from his frequent travels that have been curated from the hotel's private collection," says Gale.

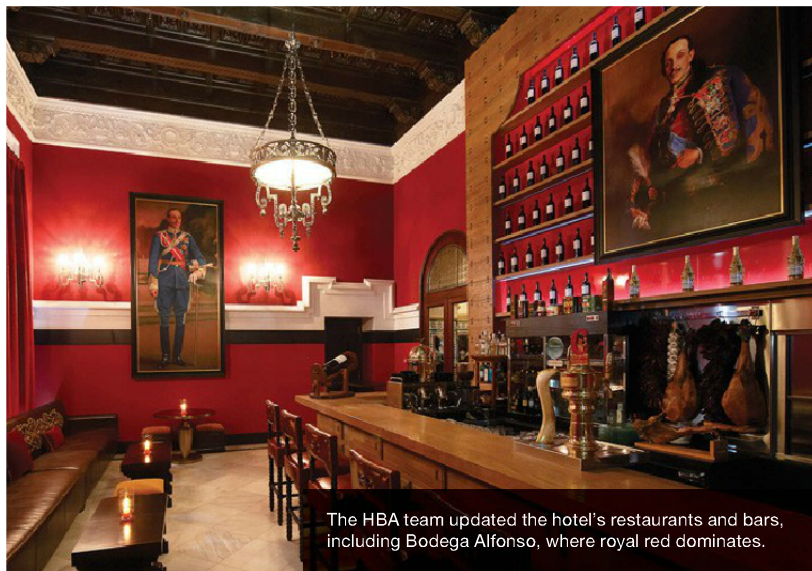
The room is also populated with sumptuous new furnishings, such as TV cabinets sheathed in hand-gilded leather. And, to make the suite feel more like a luxury home

than a hotel, designers transformed a corridor wardrobe area into a full dressing room.

Gale notes that the Alfonso property is one of several historic hotels that her HBA office is currently working on. (Others include Oberoi Hotels & Resorts' Mena House in Cairo, Egypt, and the Hotel Maria

Cristina in San Sebastian, Spain, another member of Starwood's Luxury Collection.)

"Our design team has a real passion for grand hotels like these," says Gale, "and we view it as our mission to ready them for the next chapter in their lives by weaving some of their glorious past into their futures." **BD**



The HBA team updated the hotel's restaurants and bars, including Bodega Alfonso, where royal red dominates.

## PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

<b>OWNER/OPERATOR</b> The Luxury Collection, Starwood Hotels & Resorts	<b>CASE GOODS</b> Corral y Couto
<b>DESIGN</b> HBA/Hirsch Bedner Associates, London office	<b>FABRIC</b> Gancedo Moore & Giles Perennials
<b>ARCHITECT</b> Demopolis	<b>FLOOR TILES</b> Mosaic del Sur
<b>PURCHASING AGENT</b> DPI	<b>FURNITURE/MIRRORS/ SEATING/TABLES</b> Interdecor
<b>GENERAL CONTRACTOR</b> Aldessa	<b>LIGHTING</b> Brass & Crystal Cleaner Lamp
<b>SPECIALTY DESIGN CONSULTANTS</b> MBLD (lighting)	<b>WALL COVERINGS AND MATERIALS</b> Vescom
<b>ART</b> Artefact	
<b>BATH FIXTURES</b> Cifial	
<b>CARPET</b> Ice	

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