



Kimpton Bem

BUDAPEST

Marcel Wanders crafts a whimsical design scheme inspired by Hungarian folklore for Kimpton's debut in Budapest.

Words: Cara Rogers

Photography: Courtesy of Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants

The Hungarian legend of the Wondrous Stag speaks of two young royals who, as part of a hunting trip beyond their homeland, came across a white stag. In pursuing the animal, the brothers set off a chain of events that led to the founding of the Hungarian empire, so the story goes. It's no surprise, then, that a large bronze depiction of the majestic animal takes centre stage in the lobby at the newly opened Kimpton Bem Budapest.

The stag forms part of a wider mythology-inspired design scheme by Marcel Wanders, who opted to honour national folklore for Kimpton's debut in Budapest. "Hungary is not only a country, it's a culture," says Wanders, speaking on the eve of the hotel's launch party. "Its people have their own style of storytelling, which can be felt in the design."

Wanders was initially approached by Market Asset Management (MAM) about his potential involvement in the project. With longstanding personal ties to Budapest, and a portfolio that did not yet include a hotel project in the city, it was an appealing venture. Once officially on board, he set about immersing himself further into the Budapest way of life – speaking with locals, hearing stories, visiting libraries and reading works by Hungarian poets. The result, he says, is a design language that "goes beyond the cliché".

"The city itself is a fusion of old-world charm and modern innovation, and Wanders was able to reflect this duality in his design," says Henry Reeve, Director of Interior Design for IHG Hotels & Resorts, on the designer's creative vision. "His whimsical, often theatrical style introduces a sense of



Marcel Wanders has introduced a sense of fantasy to the hotel's interiors, drawing on local motifs and craftsmanship

fantasy and luxury to the interiors. Elements of Hungarian craftsmanship and local motifs are intertwined with his signature aesthetic, creating plenty of details for the curious guest to discover."

These motifs are noticeable even from the hotel's exterior. Entry to the 127-key property is through a grand wrought iron gate inspired by Budapest's Art Nouveau period, adorned with ornamentation depicting foliage and animals.

Inside, the lobby sits beneath ornate coffered ceilings – the statue of the stag standing proud within a central glass atrium. True to Wanders' signature style, an assortment of bold colours and patterns feature throughout the space – green furniture sits alongside bold yellow accents, and striped ombré rugs have been layered atop parquet flooring. Framing relaxed seating arrangements are sweeping arched niches, backed by dreamscapes of mountains, soaring hot air balloons and mystical allusions to astrology and the stars.

Two reception desks are equally striking, their

curved forms mirroring the coffered ceilings to soften the space. Each piece – custom-made by Sicis, whose pixel mosaics can also be seen in the public bathrooms – is clad in a charming floral mosaic of green, turquoise and purple.

Across public areas, the scheme takes guests on a fanciful journey characterised by Wanders' trademark eccentricity. "I want guests feel different things in different spaces," says the designer. "You have to surprise people." Bar Huso, for example, is a stark contrast to the lobby; its interiors are inspired by the Danube – which flows just over the road from the hotel – with dark blue panelling that extends overhead, shimmering fish scale-style ceramic tiles lining the bar, and glass domes depicting aquatic scenes adorning the walls.

The bar is one of three F&B venues at the hotel, which also include signature restaurant Agos, located on the ground floor and spilling out onto the street. A bright space with an open kitchen and a long communal table at its centre, the Mediterranean-Hungarian dining



spot features punchy design details, including towering mosaic-clad sculptural columns.

Up above is Fennen, a rooftop destination where a greenhouse-style bar features alongside relaxed outdoor seating. In keeping with planning regulations, the venue is concealed from sight when viewed from street level, ensuring the 19th-century mansion's façade remains as intended.

The building's transformation, led by 3H Architects, had long been a talking point in the local community. Originally built by the Hapsburgs in the late 1800s, its long life has seen it function as a military hospital during World War One, Gestapo headquarters throughout World War Two, and later a primary school. Given its chequered history and significance to the local community, careful handling of the site was paramount. The façade facing the historic Bem Square was listed and therefore had to be preserved, while everything behind was demolished – five floors were added above ground, and three below. The process



was further complicated by the irregularity of a building constructed in a bygone era, with variations such as the thickness of walls across the property making it difficult to accurately measure corridors and rooms.

The result was the creation of around 40 different floorplans, characterised by varied colour palettes of either green or blue, and furniture pieces from Moooi, which Wanders co-founded in 2001. Standout details in guestrooms include headboards and wallpaper depicting lush foliage and blooming plants in the green rooms, and lively waters and exotic sea creatures in the blue. Bathrooms remain on-theme, mirroring the same hues as the bedroom; each is kitted out with shapely sanitaryware from Laufen, designed in collaboration with Wanders.

While some guestrooms have views out to the Danube, inward-facing options look onto a tranquil courtyard. Here, balconies – furnished with Piapolo stools by Fermob – feature gold-toned balustrades with intricate cut-out illustrations inspired by Hungarian Art

Nouveau. The landscaped setting has been filled with greenery, a gazebo and a large statue of the Turul bird, a sacral creature of Hungarian mythology. It's from this space that gentle piano music plays in the morning, serving as a harmonious start to the day.

“Like every Kimpton, the property is wholly unique. Wanders’ playful style has introduced a layer that is the perfect addition to our brand signatures,” concludes IHG’s Reeve, referring to the likes of an evening social hour, as well as a handy ‘Forget It? We’ve Got It!’ programme that ensures guests are kitted out with everything they need for the duration of their stay.

Other amenities take the form of a range of events spaces, including a ballroom accommodating up to 120 guests, and a bold all-red meeting room. Wellness spaces meanwhile include a fitness centre, as well as a hot tub and steam room, where mosaics resemble those of the city’s Király thermal baths. Perfect for a hotel where the smallest of details pay homage to its location.



EXPRESS CHECK-OUT

Owner: MAM Buda Project

Operator: IHG Hotels & Resorts

Architecture: 3H Architects

Interior Design: Marcel Wanders

Main Contractor: Market Építő

Project Manager: NSN Mérnökiroda

Visual Identity: & Smith, Marcel Wanders

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